HOW STRUCTURAL DISADVANTAGE AFFECTS THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RACE AND GANG MEMBERSHIP

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Mary Therese Laske
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HOW STRUCTURAL DISADVANTAGE AFFECTS THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RACE AND GANG MEMBERSHIP

Mary Therese Laske

Thesis

Approved:  
Advisor  
Dr. Brent Teasdale

Committee Member  
Dr. Stacey Nofziger

Committee Member  
Dr. Robert Peralta

Accepted:  
Dean of the College  
Dr. Ronald F. Levant

Dean of the Graduate School  
Dr. George R. Newkome

Date

Department Chair  
Dr. John Zipp
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my advisor and thesis chair, Dr. Brent Teasdale and my thesis committee members, Dr. Stacey Nofziger and Dr. Robert Peralta. My thesis has undergone several changes in the last six months and I am truly proud of the end product thanks to the dedication and commitment of my thesis committee.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

According to recent research on juvenile delinquency, youth gangs are increasing in the United States (Hughes and Short 2005, Klein 1995, Malec 2004, Miller 2001, and Peterson, Taylor, and Esbensen 2004). Although there has been in-depth research on youth gang activities, the empirical explanations of how youth come to be involved in gangs have tended to be from a micro-perspective and based on small localized samples (See the following studies: Cloward & Ohlin 1960; Cohen 1955; Lahey et al. 1999; Miller 1958; Palmer & Tilley 1995; Short, Rivera, & Marshall 1964; Thrasher 1927). Furthermore, the structural forces that produce gangs are not being addressed in the empirical literature. A more comprehensive picture of the youth gang problem is warranted. This project fills the gap in the empirical literature by investigating macro-social processes that lead to gang formation as a compliment to the existing research on micro-social processes. Moreover, this study utilizes a nationally representative dataset that allows investigation of a large number of neighborhoods across the United States.

In order to understand the formation of youth gangs from a multi-level perspective, I will look at the structural effects on individual adolescents by examining the relationship between race and ethnicity, neighborhood context (hereafter termed "space") and gang membership. Questions about the relationship between race and space and their
effects have most often been studied in the areas of racial disparities in employment practices (Fernandez 1994), as well as in discrimination in bank lending (Howell 2006) and sports (Fusco, 2005). Because racial and ethnic minorities have increasingly been involved in gangs (Adamson 2000), applying the race and space approach to the formation of youth gangs will allow me to better understand the effects of the intersections of race and space on youth gang membership.

As recently as 2005, researchers have suggested that the relationship between environmental, structural forces and gang membership have not been well-studied. In fact, at the 2005 Annual Conference of the American Sociological Association in Philadelphia, PA, Papachristos and Kirk state, “Unfortunately, as applied to gangs, social disorganization theories have remained empirically untested—less because of theoretical rigor and more because of the lack of sound data.” Using a nationally representative sample of youth from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health; Harris et al. 2003), I will be able answer the call of Papachristos and Kirk (2005) and fill this gap in the literature by addressing the structural impacts on youth gang membership. Specifically, I will be able to test the relationship between race and ethnicity and gang membership as well as the relationship between neighborhood context and gang membership. I will further test interactions between race and ethnicity and the contextual measures to see if the neighborhood context affects gang membership differently depending on the race and ethnicity of the youth. The overarching research question posed here is “How do structural disadvantages influence the effect that ascribed/individual characteristics, such as race and ethnicity, have on gang membership?”
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To understand the structural influence on lived racial experiences and racialized space, it is important to clearly define what makes a group a “gang.” What makes the task of operationalizing “gang membership” or “gang behavior” difficult is that gang members, law enforcement officials and researchers use different criteria to define what constitutes a “gang.” Some researchers insist that the lack of a consistent definition not only makes it difficult to study gangs, but also increases the difficulty in recording the prevalence and incidence of gang activity in the United States (Ball & Curry 1995; Bjerregaard 2002).

For instance, scholars have identified an array of characteristics which define delinquent groups as “gangs.” Among these characteristics are; the use of firearms and threats (Decker & Curry 2002), drug use and other delinquency (Decker & Curry 2002; Hughes & Short 2005; Wright & Fitzpatrick 2006). It has further been suggested that the definition should include participation in physical violence (Decker & Curry 2002; Hughes & Short 2005; Wright & Fitzpatrick 2006), a formal leadership structure (Hughes & Short 2005), scheduled meetings (Bjerregaard 2002), and the protection of a certain territory (Bjerregaard 2002; Decker & Curry 2002). Palmer and Tilley (1995) discuss access to females sexually as a common aspect of male gangs. Venkatesh (1997) adds small-scale drug sales and larceny to the list.

One problem with these traditional definitions of gang membership is that they might be so vague that they apply to other groups, such as fraternities. Martin and Hummer’s (1989) description of fraternities, for example, includes many of the same criteria often used to define “gangs” such as that they involve many members, commit
deviant acts on consistent occasions, have a ritual ceremony of passage, protect their organization and their Brothers, and maintain the group’s secrets. Martin and Hummer (1989) also discuss the importance of masculinity among the members of fraternities, and how one way to express this masculinity is through exploitation and the victimization of women.

However, there are important differences between gangs and other groups such as fraternities. One difference between gangs and fraternities is that fraternities are recognized by and legitimated through their affiliation with universities. Gangs, on the other hand, are recognized as delinquent groups by the criminal justice system (Chambliss 1977). Another way to differentiate between gangs and fraternities is to compare societal reactions to the two groups. Fraternities are socially acceptable organizations, whereas gangs are highly stigmatized. These distinct differences are sure to make the experiences of the two groups different. For the purposes of my project, I will operationalize gang membership based on self-reported initiation into a named gang. I will further discuss this operationalization and its limitations in the Methods and Discussion sections.

Neighborhood and Social Disorganization.

One of the most widely used explanations of the relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and crime has been Shaw and McKay’s (1969) ecological model based on their social disorganization theory (Silver 2000). According to Shaw and McKay (1969), there are certain structural characteristics that inhibit the community from enforcing both formal and informal social controls on members of the community (see
also Silver 2000). A neighborhood characterized by social disorganization does not have the ability to regulate itself (Shaw & McKay 1969; see also Bursik 1988; Heitgerd & Bursik 1987). For example, there is less time to monitor children's behavior in disorganized communities and neighbors are less likely to watch over each other's children because they do not feel socially connected to each other. Because of the lack of formal and informal social control in such areas, gangs may be more likely to form in disorganized communities.

There are several characteristics that outline social disorganization theory. Probably the most notable is the economic status of the community. Shaw and McKay (1969) define economic status of the neighborhood by examining the percentage of families on relief and the proportion of community members that rent their living space versus the proportion that are home owners. Although economic status has been thought of as the most notable characteristic, Shaw and McKay (1969) did not specify a causal relationship such that poverty causes criminal behavior. They argued that other structural factors associated with poverty in the neighborhood weaken social ties in the community (Shaw & McKay 1969). Some of these other structural factors will be discussed below. Additionally, Shaw and McKay (1969) suggested that in neighborhoods marked by poverty, there can be more than one set of defined norms and morals as well as differing standards of behavior. They believed this confusion and lack of regulation led to a state of anomie (Shaw & McKay 1969).

Poverty is not the only characteristic used to define disorganized neighborhoods. The two other areas Shaw and McKay (1969) discussed include physical status and population composition. Physical status is used to describe such physical characteristics
of the neighborhood as mixed use land and “heavy industry and commerce” (Shaw & McKay 1969: 143; see also Sampson & Groves 1989). Mixed use land includes areas where businesses are located in close proximity to residential housing. Areas with such physical status are labeled disorganized because of the association between heavy commerce and condemned buildings. Especially in neighborhoods with mixed use land, abandoned buildings make convenient places for local youth to carry out delinquent behaviors.

Population composition includes the proportion of foreign-born and racial minorities, the proportion of female-headed households, density, and transience (Shaw & McKay 1969; see also Osgood & Chambers 2000; Sampson & Groves 1989; Stark 1987). Shaw and McKay (1969) suggested that in communities where there is little communication among members (either due to ethnic heterogeneity or transience) and there are greater percentages of disrupted families, there is less social control enforced on youth. For example, in communities with high ethnic heterogeneity, if neighbors do not speak the same first language, it may be more difficult for them to communicate with one another. Though they may share similar concerns or goals regarding the community, they may be unable to express their shared thoughts with one another.

It has been suggested that gangs may be disproportionately located in socially disorganized communities with these characteristics (Curry & Spergel 1988; Ebsensen & Huizinga 1993; Fagan 1996; Farnworth 1984; Lahey et al. 1999; McNulty & Bellair 2003; Ruble & Turner 2000). Stark argued that “there must be something about places as such that sustains crime” (1987: 893), emphasizing the notion that neighborhoods with high levels of delinquency and crime retain those levels even when there is a complete
turnover in the population. One explanation may be that disorganized neighborhoods are attractive places for gangs to form because of the social disconnectedness between neighbors (anomie). Because of the lack of social ties in the community, the inability to control local youth allows them to engage in more delinquent activities without getting caught. In addition to this explanation, I would argue that in areas of high density where there may be multiple people living in close quarters, adolescents may leave the home and go out into the community for unstructured socializing time with peers (Osgood et al. 1996; Sampson & Groves 1989).

As Shaw and McKay (1969) claimed, and in congruence with most criminological literature, delinquency is often committed in groups. Therefore, 1) if multiple youth are going outside the home for socializing time with peers, 2) the neighborhood is not enforcing strict rules or regulations, and 3) there are abandoned buildings available to congregate, a disorganized community makes for an attractive place for youth to organize as gangs and commit delinquent acts together. Classic explanations of gang membership have focused on lower class cultures (Cohen 1955; Miller 1958) or lack of legitimate resources to gain economic success (Cloward & Ohlin 1960). However, such work was based on qualitative observations and small, locally based samples. These observations have yet to be tested with quantitative data on a nationally representative sample of the U.S. adolescent population.

Race.

Recent research suggests that the numbers of racial and ethnic minority gangs have been increasing over the last several decades (Adamson 2000). There are three
potential reasons why this association between race and ethnicity and gang membership persists. The first explanation is based on racial socialization practices. Parents are seen as the first socializing agents in a child’s life (Hughes 2003). While children of all ethnic and racial backgrounds may be socialized to understand and take pride in their family background, there is evidence that suggests that racial socialization is of utmost importance to ethnic and racial minorities (Hughes 2003). In her study, Hughes (2003) compares two types of racial socialization among African American, Dominican, and Puerto Rican families. Cultural socialization is described as instilling in children ethnic pride and informing them of their ethnic history and heritage (Hughes 2003). On the other hand, preparation for bias is relaying information to children about discrimination and racial bias (Hughes 2003).

Hughes (2003) finds that the parents in her study were significantly more likely to engage their children in cultural socialization than in preparation for bias. Although she found that both types of socialization processes were being used by the parents in her sample, she explained that perhaps preparation for bias was less common because parents may fear this type of socialization could hurt their children’s self-esteem or make them ashamed of their race (2003). These findings imply that while racial and ethnic minorities may have strong ethnic pride instilled, they may not be well-prepared for the bias, discrimination, stereotypes and stigmatization they are likely to encounter in life, particularly in the American educational system (Barlow 2003; Cohen 1955; Walton & Cohen 2007).

The way racial and ethnic minority children are socialized affects how they experience lived race in everyday situations. It is in everyday life situations that racial
minorities become aware of their race and construct their identity. The way minority youth are socialized and perhaps their lack of preparation for bias may contribute to how aware racial and ethnic minorities may be of their race and when they are most aware of it. Therefore, an awareness of race and the racial identity will be discussed as the second explanation of why the relationship between race and gang membership persists. In their study on the effects of race on the working self-concept, Aries et al. (2001) found that race was more central to the identity of racial minorities than of Whites. Not only is race a more central aspect of identity for racial minorities, but racial minorities in this study were also more aware of their race across several social settings (Aries et al. 2001). For example, racial minorities were more aware than Whites of their race in public places, such as at school and at sporting events (Aries et al. 2001). In accordance with other research findings, Aries et al. concluded that in public places where there is an “audience,” attention is drawn to the “more public aspects of self,” such as race (2001: 286; see also Eagly 1987; Scheier & Carver 1981; Tajfel 1981).

The combination of awareness of race, self-concept, and less socialization geared toward preparation for bias leads to a third explanation as to why minority gang membership persists: covert racism and seclusion. Scholars have suggested that globalization (Barlow 2003) and immigration (Feagin & Cobas 2006) have created an environment where covert racism has replaced the overt racist tactics of the past. Feagin and Cobas (2006) suggest that rapid immigration has increased xenophobia among Whites. They argue that Whites’ fears of “Hispanization” or “Latinization” have therefore increased the seclusion of racial and ethnic minorities in public places (Feagin & Cobas 2006: 3).
Racial and ethnic minorities are secluded from a great deal of social space. Bonilla-Silva uses Bourdieu’s (1990/1986) framework to discuss how the seclusion of racial and ethnic minorities allows Whites to live in a “White habitus” (2001: 138) in which Whites can go about their daily lives without coming into contact with racial or ethnic minorities. Barlow (2003) claims the boundaries of seclusion are endless because White has become the norm in mass society, including the norm of mass institutions such as education and government and white-collar jobs.

The importance of race to my project can be understood by examining Walton and Cohen’s (2007) work on belonging uncertainty that coincides with this idea of seclusion. They argue that feeling socially connected to others “is a basic human motivation” (2007: 82; see also Baumeister & Leary 1995; MacDonald & Leary 2005). Furthermore, they argue that “belonging uncertainty... contributes to racial disparities in achievement” (2007: 82, italics in original). Specifically, racial minorities may be less likely to succeed in school without assimilating to the dominant culture (Barajas & Pierce 2001).

Racial and ethnic minorities are secluded from and discriminated against by an institutionally racist mass society (Barlow 2003) which thus inhibits social belonging. According to Walton and Cohen, this process makes it nearly impossible for racial and ethnic minorities to avoid internalizing the idea that “People like me do not belong here” (2007: 83). Furthermore, the overrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in gangs may be a direct result of racism. According to Spergel, “racism is claimed to be responsible for gang formation because it operates to restrain opportunities and fair treatment of minority youth in school and jobs” (1992: 131). If minorities are constantly
subjected to discrimination and institutional racism that excludes them as outsiders, where can they go? Where will racial minorities feel they belong? If racial minorities have belonging uncertainty which, according to Walton and Cohen (2007), negatively influences their reactions to authority figures (see also Tyler & Blader 2003; Baumesiter, Twenge & Nuss 2002), and they have a desire to belong in a group, gang membership is most certainly an attractive choice.

Race and Space.

Race and neighborhood do not necessarily operate separately. According to Wilson (1986), as the minority population increases in the inner-city, Whites flee to the suburbs. Declines in the White population are important because not only do people leave the inner-city, but jobs also move out of the city (Wilson 1986). The loss of White residents in neighborhoods that become largely occupied by minority residents takes away from the neighborhoods’ economic, social, and political resources. Wilson (1986) argues that such neighborhood problems as poverty and unemployment perpetuate the cycle of joblessness and neighborhood disorganization within inner-city neighborhoods.

Wilson (1986) suggests that there is a relationship between White flight and minority disadvantage and racial tensions. As joblessness increases in the inner-city, families that do not have access to social resources are held to the same standards in childcare and child rearing as those with access to social resources. Therefore, it is the “disappearance of work and the consequences of that disappearance” that lead to the “central problems in the inner-city ghetto” (Wilson 1986: xix). Wilson (1986) further states that the disappearance of work and the problems that come with that disappearance
increase racial segregation and racial tensions in urban areas (Wilson 1986). According to Wilson, in all forms of racial tensions, African Americans in particular are “burdened by racial injustice, [and Whites are] largely free of the effects of bigotry and hatred” (1986: xx).

The phenomenon that Wilson (1986) discusses has been referred to as racialized space (see also Barlow 2003; Bonilla-Silva 2001). Just as Feagin and Cobas (2006) discussed White spaces in the business world, and Bonilla-Silva (2001) explained the White habitus in which the majority group avoids racial minorities in their daily lives, racialized space affects residential segregation as well. Calmore captures the essence of racialized space by emphasizing the popular belief that “white space is not problematic and black space is somewhere else” (1995: 1234, emphasis added). Wilson (1987) suggests that if only racial minorities could move into the more advantaged White spaces, such as suburbs, they would not be disadvantaged at the rates that they are (see also Thomas and Ong 2006). However, institutionally racist housing markets keep them from moving into the suburbs, so they remain in the disadvantaged inner-city (Thomas and Ong 2006).

The racialized space discussed by Barlow (2003), Bonilla-Silva (2001), Calmore (1995) and Wilson (1986, 1987) is maintained on a daily basis in our society. Though some researchers show that White attitudes about neighborhood integration have become more positive (Farley, Steeh, Krysan, Jackson, & Reeves 1994), several studies have supported the argument that racial discrimination among real estate brokers has maintained racial residential segregation (Farley et al. 1994; Galster 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992; Galster & Kenney 1988; Jackson 1985; Pearce 1979; Yinger 1986). Not only do
real estate brokers discriminate against minorities due to their attitudes, but their actions hinder the desegregation process. For example, according to Farley et al.’s study, “White and Black home seekers are treated differently by real estate agents” and “mortgage funds are generally more available to Whites than to Blacks with comparable financial circumstances” (1994: 753). They add to this argument that “if residential segregation were a matter of income, rich Blacks would live with rich Whites and poor Blacks with poor Whites. This does not happen” (Farley et al. 1994: 751).

The connection between race and space has been examined in some areas of criminological research. Scholars have found that race and space have significant impacts on high crime rates (Kriivo and Peterson 1996), violent crime (Blau & Blau 1982; Harer & Steffensmeier 1992), and city-level homicide rates (Lee 2000; Kriivo & Peterson 2000). Given the relationship between race and social disorganization, it is imperative to look at the effects of both race and space on gang membership. In other words, there may be important interacting effects of race and space on gang membership because, due to racial residential segregation, neighborhood disadvantage may affect youth differently depending on their lived racial experiences.

Similar to Feagin and Cobas’ (2006) discussion of the seclusion of Latinos in public places, other scholars have emphasized the role of racialized space for Latinos. Malec (2004) specifically discusses gang membership and claims that Latinos have an unfair disadvantage in escaping gang membership. According to Malec (2004), the main risk factors affecting Latino youth include lack of meaningful education and employment opportunities, racial discrimination, broken families, and poverty. Latinos are living in a society that fails to meet their needs due to socially structured institutional racism (Malec
2004). Based on this discussion on race and space in the United States, I argue that the lived experience of race in racialized spaces may be a leading factor in gang membership.

CURRENT STUDY

This project will focus on combining the two ideas of race and social disorganization in order to understand the structural impacts on gang membership for different racial and ethnic groups. Just as other scholars have addressed structural and individual aspects in other criminological areas of study, applying this perspective to my project will contribute to the literature on gangs. It is important to continue studying gangs because of the serious individual and societal outcomes of gang membership which include violence, victimization, and incarceration. I argue that in order to really understand why some adolescents are more vulnerable to becoming gang members than others, we have to look at structural influences and individual characteristics together.

Using data from the Add Health dataset (Harris et al., 2003), I will be able to test the relationship between race and ethnicity and gang membership among a nationally representative sample of adolescents. Additionally, to answer the call of Papachristos and Kirk (2005), I will be able to test the relationship between concentrated disadvantage and gang membership. Finally, I will contribute to the gang literature by uncovering the effects of the combination of race and space on gang membership.

HYPOTHESES

I will be testing four hypotheses in my analyses. First, I hypothesize that race and ethnicity will be statistically significantly related to gang membership, such that racial
minorities will have greater odds of joining gangs than whites. My second hypothesis is that the lived racial experience will be significantly related to gang membership, such that the odds of gang membership will increase as perceived prejudice and the percentage of county residents whose race is not that of the respondent increases. My third hypothesis is that county disadvantage will be statistically significantly related to gang membership, such that adolescents in disadvantaged counties will have greater odds of joining gangs than adolescents in more advantaged neighborhoods. Finally, I hypothesize that there will be interacting effects between race and ethnicity and concentrated disadvantage on gang membership, such that concentrated disadvantage will moderate the relationship between race and ethnicity and gang membership.
CHAPTER II

METHODS

DATA

The data I will use in my analyses come from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health; Harris et al., 2003). This nationally representative study of adolescents in grades 7 through 12 includes surveys of school administrators, adolescents, and their parents, all recruited using a stratified clustered sampling technique. Approximately 90,000 adolescents were interviewed in schools across the U.S., approximately 20,000 of whom were also interviewed in their home (Harris et al., 2003). Eighty high schools and 145 middle schools were included in the sample. The sampling technique used to collect these data ensures that the schools included are representative of the United States with regards to region, urban make-up, school type, school size, and ethnicity (Harris et al., 2003).

Data were collected at three time periods between 1994 and 2002. In 1996 at Wave II, 14,738 of the adolescents from Wave I were re-interviewed, including school dropouts (Nelson and Gordon-Larsen, 2007). The variables I will use in my analysis are available in the in-home surveys in 1996 at Wave II and the contextual database drawn from the 1990 U.S. census. The in-home survey was completed in approximately 1 to 2 hours. Because the Add Health data are nationally representative, my findings can be
generalized to the U.S. adolescent population. In addition, data are available at both the individual and contextual levels, so I can test the race and space perspective.

MEASURES: DEPENDENT VARIABLE

The dependent variable in my analysis is gang membership, measured by the question, "Have you been initiated into a named gang?" Recent studies on youth gangs imply that the inconsistency in defining youth gangs not only makes it difficult to study gangs, but it also increases the difficulty in recording how much gang activity is really happening in the United States (Ball and Curry 1995; Bjerrgaard 2002). Therefore, the measurement I have chosen from the data is an appropriate measure of gang membership because it filters out delinquent youth who do not participate in gang activity by drawing attention to the specific rituals that characterize youth gangs.

According to both historical and recent research on gangs, two important characteristics of gangs are group identity, such as a name (Bjerrgaard 2002; Hughes and Short 2005; Thrasher 1927), and unique rituals (Bjerrgaard 2002; Hughes and Short 2005), such as initiation into the gang. Using the measure of gang membership I have chosen, approximately four percent of adolescents report being gang members (n = 513). (See Table 1 for descriptive statistics for all analytic variables.)

MEASURES: INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

The two main independent measures I am using are race and ethnicity and county disadvantage. As described below, there are three measures that capture race differences and one scaled measure of county disadvantage.
Race and Ethnicity.

Several studies on youth gangs have focused on the differences between the activities (Johnstone 1981; Short, Tennyson, & Howard 1963) and perceptions (Short, Rivera, and Tennyson 1965) of gangs of different races and ethnicity. Additionally, it is well-established in the gang literature that presently, racial minorities are overrepresented in the gang population in the United States (Esbensen & Huizinga 1993; Farnworth, 1984; McNulty & Bellair 2003; Ruble & Turner 2000). Therefore, although it is important to study the differences between gangs of different races and ethnicities as many researchers have done, it is equally important to understand the role race and ethnicity play in the formation of gangs.

In the Add Health interview, respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their race. If they responded “yes” to more than one race in the interview, they were then asked what they would consider their primary race to be. If respondents still identified themselves as biracial or multiracial, then the interviewer recorded the race the respondent appeared to be (n=70). Because the number of respondents whose race was recorded by the interviewer was small, I have deleted those cases from my analysis so as not to skew the results. Every respondent included in the analysis is either White (n=6976), Black (n=2795), Latino (2097), or Asian (120). These race and ethnicity categories are mutually exclusive. If respondents considered themselves to be biracial, they are coded as their primary racial identification. Therefore, all White respondents are not biracial and are non-Latino. I have chosen the labels “Black” and “Latino” rather than “African American” and “Hispanic” for two reasons. First, not all persons who are Black are of African descent, so labeling this group African American may be inaccurate.
Second, the labels Black and Latino are consistent with the recent literature (see Adamson 2000; Bajaras, Lasley & Pierce 2001; Bonilla-Silva 2001; Farley et al. 2004; Feagin & Cobas 2006).

In addition to measuring respondents’ race and ethnicity, I have included two other measures that capture the lived racial experience. The first measure is the percentage of county residents whose race is not the same as the respondent. For example, for Whites, this measure is calculated by subtracting the proportion of county residents who are not White from one and then multiplying by 100 to get a percentage. This item is drawn from the contextual database and is based on 1990 U.S. census data. This calculation is conducted the same way for each race/ethnic group so that the measure applies to each group. The second measure that captures the lived racial experience is prejudice experienced in school. This item is measured by the statement, “Students at my school are prejudiced.” This item is measured on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 represents that the respondent “strongly agrees” with this statement.

Concentrated Disadvantage.

The concentrated disadvantage measure is based on the 1990 census data at the county level. The scale created to measure concentrated disadvantage is based on Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush’s (2001) scale used in their study on neighborhoods and urban violence. Their scale was created by adding equally weighted z-scores for 1) the percentage of families below the poverty line, 2) percentage of families receiving public assistance, 3) percentage of unemployed individuals in the civilian labor force, 4) percentage of female-headed families with children, and 5)
percentage of residents who are Black, and dividing by the number of items in the scale (Morenoff et al. 2001). Because my analysis includes both race and the percentage of residents in the county that are not the same race as the respondent, my concentrated disadvantage scale does not include the percentage of residents who are Black, but mirrors the construction of the Morenoff et al. (2001) scale in all other regards.

MEASURES: CONTROLS

There are three variables included in my analysis that will be used as controls. These variables include the socio-economic status of respondents’ parents, and respondent age and sex.

SES.

In order to assess the relationship between gang membership and the measures of concentrated disadvantage, I will control for the socio-economic status of the individual respondents. The adolescents in the study are, for the most part, dependent on their parents: therefore, SES is measured by the educational attainment and the occupational prestige of the adolescents’ parents. Parents’ income was not included in the measure of SES due to the number of missing cases for that particular measure. Therefore, parents’ education and occupational prestige were standardized and the mean of the four items (two for adolescents with only one parent) was taken to create the SES score.
Age.

Research on gangs has been consistent in suggesting that gangs are a juvenile phenomenon. According to Short and Strodtbeck (1965), group delinquency is overwhelmingly committed by adolescents and rarely continues into adulthood (see also Yablonsky 1966). Several studies have suggested the age boundaries of gang membership range from 10 to 25 (Cooper 1967; Kantor & Bennett 1968). Therefore, I have included age in my analysis in order to control for the relationship between gang membership and age of respondents. The calculated ages of the whole sample of respondents range from 11 to 23, with 16 being the average age (see Table 1 for differences between gang and nongang members).

Sex.

Another factor consistently shown to relate to gang membership has been sex. Although female gang members have existed since the first gangs in the United States (Thrasher, 1927), and more recently female gangs have begun to be studied more (Campbell 1984; Chesney-Lind 2006; Chesney-Lind and Eliason [in press]; Sikes 1997), it has been illustrated over time that 1) males still make up the majority of gang members (Campbell, 1991; Chesney-Lind, 1993; Chesney-Lind & Brown, 1996; Deschenes & Esbensen 1999; Elliott, 1988; Esbensen & Winfree 1998) and 2) females’ avoidance of masculine roles in their gangs can lead them to being awarded less status in the gang (Miller, 1998). Therefore, I have included sex in my analysis in order to control for the relationship between gang membership and sex.
Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for all analysis variables (Total N = 11,959).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Gang Members (n=513)</th>
<th>NonGang Members (n=11,446)</th>
<th>T TEST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES (of parents)</td>
<td>-0.229</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>-1.80-1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of county whose race is “not like me”</td>
<td>50.73</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Disadvantage</td>
<td>0.115</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>-1.34-2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Students at my school are prejudiced (strongly agree=5)</td>
<td>15.87</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>12-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.289</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Variable                                                                 | Gang Members (n=513) | NonGang Members (n=11,446) | Chi-Square Test |
|                                                                         | %        | SD    | Range | %        | SD    | Range | χ-Sq. | p-value |
| Male                                                                    | 66.3     | 0.47  | 0-1   | 47.1     | 0.50  | 0-1   | 72.22 | <.001          |
| Latino                                                                  | 30       | 0.63  | 0-1   | 17       | 0.78  | 0-1   | 58.54 | <.001          |
| White                                                                   | 39       | 0.63  | 0-1   | 59.2     | 0.78  | 0-1   | 82.68 | <.001          |
| Black                                                                   | 30       | 0.63  | 0-1   | 23.1     | 0.78  | 0-1   | 13.78 | <.001          |
| Asian                                                                   | 2.0      | 0.14  | 0-1   | 1.0      | 0.10  | 0-1   | 4.89  | <.05           |

ANALYTIC SEQUENCE

The first step I took in my analysis was to assess whether there were significant differences between gang members and nongang members in regards to sex, age, SES, race, percentage of county residents whose race is different from the respondent’s race,
perceived prejudice in school, and concentrated disadvantage. Because there are
different distribution assumptions for continuous and categorical variables, I have
conducted T-Tests for the continuous variables and Pearson’s Chi-Square tests for the
categorical variables. (See Table 1)

To assess my first three hypotheses that race and ethnicity, lived racial
experience, and county disadvantage are independently, significantly related to gang
membership, I begin by regressing gang membership on race and ethnicity, percentage of
county residents whose race is different from the respondent’s race, “students at my
school are prejudiced,” and concentrated disadvantage while controlling for age, sex, and
SES in a Logistic regression (See Model 2 of Table 2). Next, to address my fourth
hypothesis that race and ethnicity and concentrated disadvantage have significant
interacting effects on gang membership, I create interaction terms for the cross-products
between the disadvantage scale and White, the disadvantage scale and Black, the
disadvantage scale and Latino, and the disadvantage scale and Asian. The cross-product
between disadvantage and White is excluded from the analysis as the reference category.
The same controls and main effects are included in this model (See Model 3 of Table 2).

The second half of my analysis takes place after I have found significant
interacting effects on gang membership between race and ethnicity and concentrated
disadvantage. In order to examine the effects of race and ethnicity and disadvantage on
gang membership, I split the models by race and ethnicity (See Table 3). I conduct a
logistic regression for each race and ethnicity category using the main effects of the lived
racial experience variables, concentrated disadvantage and the controls. This analysis
Table 2: Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Gang Membership (N = 11,959).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Exp (b)</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Exp (b)</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Exp (b)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES of parents</td>
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<td>.662</td>
<td>-.330***</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.719</td>
<td>-.331***</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.718</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.080**</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.923</td>
<td>-.104***</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.902</td>
<td>-.108***</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.898</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex (Male=1)</td>
<td>.840***</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>2.316</td>
<td>.847***</td>
<td>.092</td>
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<td>.092</td>
<td>2.338</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>.926</td>
<td>-0.038</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>.963</td>
<td>-0.066</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>1.039</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>1.080</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>1.039</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td>1.937</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>.616***</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>1.851</td>
<td>.661***</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td>1.937</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notlikeme</td>
<td>1.023***</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>2.783</td>
<td>1.044***</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>2.839</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudiced</td>
<td>.179***</td>
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<td>1.196</td>
<td>.176***</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>1.192</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantage</td>
<td>.157***</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>1.170</td>
<td>.159**</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>1.172</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bdisadvantage</td>
<td>-.140*</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.870</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ldisadvantage</td>
<td>.139*</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>1.149</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adisadvantage</td>
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<td>.249</td>
<td>1.284</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R2</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.059</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.060</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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</table>
Table 3: Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Gang Membership Split by Race (N = 11,959).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th>Latinos</th>
<th>Asians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Exp (b)</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>-.499***</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.607</td>
<td>-.256*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.146**</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.864</td>
<td>-.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex (Male=1)</td>
<td>.934***</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>2.545</td>
<td>1.034***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notlikeme</td>
<td>.199</td>
<td>.612</td>
<td>1.220</td>
<td>-.655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudiced</td>
<td>.195**</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>1.216</td>
<td>.178*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantage</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>1.181</td>
<td>-.315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R2</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td></td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
illustrates how members of different race and ethnicity categories are affected by concentrated disadvantage in regards to gang membership.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the sample. The sample is split by
gang members \((n=513)\) and nongang members \((n=11,446)\) in order to compare mean
differences between the two groups. I used a T-test to compare the mean differences of
SES, percentage of county whose race is different from the respondent’s race, county
disadvantage, age, and perceived prejudice for the two groups. I used Pearson’s Chi-
Square test to compare the differences of sex and race. The means of all the variables in
my analysis are statistically, significantly different between gang members and nongang
members. (See Table 1 for all descriptive statistics and mean differences)

As seen in Table 1, the SES of gang members’ parents is lower, on average, than
that of nongang members’ parents. Additionally, gang members reside, on average, in
areas with greater concentrated disadvantage than nongang members. The average age of
gang members is just under 16 while the average age of nongang members is just over 16
\((M=15.97\) and \(16.02\), respectively). Age ranges from 12 to 20 for gang members and
from 11 to 21 for nongang members. Both groups agree, on average, that students in
their schools are prejudiced. However, on average, gang members significantly agree
slightly more with this statement than nongang members \((M=3.289\) for gang members
and 3.112 for nongang members).
As expected, males are significantly overrepresented in gangs compared to females. While males make up only 47.1 percent of nongang members, they make up 66.3 percent of gang members (p<.001). Also, as expected, racial minorities are overrepresented in gangs compared to Whites. While Whites make up 59.2 percent of the nongang population, they only make up 39.0 percent of the gang population (p<.001). Similarly, Latinos and Blacks each make up 30.0 percent of gang members, but in the nongang population, Blacks only represent 23.1 percent of the population and Latinos represent a mere 17.0 percent of the population (p<.001 for both Blacks and Latinos). Though there are very few Asians in the sample, there is a significant difference between the nongang sample consisting of 1.0 percent of Asians and the gang sample that consists of 2.0 percent of Asians (p<.05).

Table 2 presents the results for the initial logistic regression analysis. The first model shows the relationship between the controls and gang membership. First, as SES increases, the odds of gang membership decrease (Exp[b]=.662, p<.001). Second, as suggested by past research, age is significantly related to gang membership. As adolescents get older, the odds of gang membership decrease (Exp[b]=.923, p<.01). Third, as expected and in support of other research findings, males have greater odds of joining gangs than females (Exp[b]= 2.316, p<.001).

The second model illustrates the results of the main effects of race, the lived racial experience, and county disadvantage on gang membership. While Blacks and Latinos do not have significantly different odds of joining gangs than Whites, Asians have significantly greater odds of joining gangs than Whites (Exp[b]= 1.851, p<.001). Although Blacks and Latinos are not significantly different from Whites in this regard,
the measures of the lived racial experience are significantly related to gang membership. As the percentage of county residents whose race is not like the respondent increases, the odds of gang membership for the respondent also increase (Exp[b] = 2.783, p<.001). Similarly, as perceived prejudice in school increases, the odds of gang membership increase (Exp[b] = 1.196, p<.001). At the bivariate level, my first hypothesis is supported. However, when included in the logistic regression with other variables, race is only significantly related to gang membership for Asians in comparison to Whites, which suggests that gang membership was mediated by one of the variables included in the logistic regression. My second hypothesis that the lived racial experience is significantly related to gang membership is also supported. Finally, concentrated disadvantage significantly increases the odds of gang membership (Exp[b] = 1.170, p<.001). Therefore, my third hypothesis is supported as well.

The third model includes the controls, the main effects, and the interaction terms of race and space. Holding all else in the model constant, the interaction between race and ethnicity and concentrated disadvantage is significantly related to gang membership for Blacks and Latinos compared to Whites. As concentrated disadvantage increases, the odds of gang membership for Blacks decrease compared to the odds of gang membership for Whites (Exp[b] = .870, p<.05). On the other hand, as concentrated disadvantage increases, the odds of gang membership for Latinos increase compared to the odds of gang membership for Whites (Exp[b] = 1.149, p<.05). Therefore, my fourth hypothesis that there will be interacting effects between race and ethnicity and county disadvantage on gang membership is supported. According to my results, concentrated disadvantage moderates the relationship between race and ethnicity and gang membership.
After finding significant interacting effects on gang membership between race and ethnicity and concentrated disadvantage, I split the cases by race and ethnicity and conducted logistic regressions with the controls and the main effects of the lived racial experience and concentrated disadvantage. The significant interaction effect for Blacks can be seen in Table 3, where the odds of gang membership for Whites in concentrated disadvantage are greater than the odds of gang membership for Blacks in similarly disadvantaged areas (Exp[b] = 1.181 for Whites and Exp[b] = .730 for Blacks). However, in Table 3, the odds of gang membership appear to be almost the same for Whites and Latinos in similarly disadvantaged areas (Exp[b] = 1.181 for Whites and Exp[b] = 1.180 for Latinos). This finding is not consistent with the Logistic regression results shown in Table 2 before I split the analyses by race and ethnicity. Additionally, disadvantage is not significant for any group when the models are split by race.

The Logistic regression findings from Tables 2 and 3 may be different because in Table 3, the sample is split by race, thereby decreasing the variance in the sub-samples. There is more statistical power in the pulled sample in Table 2. Therefore, though the interactions between race and space may be significantly different between groups (as seen in Table 2), disadvantage may not necessarily be significant for each group.
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

My findings support past research and also provide new information about gang formation. My findings support past findings that gang activity is more of a male youth phenomenon. I find that the odds of gang membership decrease as youth get older and that the odds of gang membership are greater for males than for females. Not surprisingly, I also find that youth whose parents have lower socio-economic status have greater odds of joining gangs.

It is clear in this study that racial and ethnic minorities are overrepresented in gangs compared to their White counterparts (Table 1). However, the odds of gang membership are not significantly greater for Blacks or Latinos than for Whites in the multivariate logistic regression model. It is possible that the effects of race were mediated by parent’s SES or by the lived racial experience variables included in Model 2 of Table 2. Only the odds of gang membership for Asians are significantly different from the odds for Whites. Interestingly enough, the two measures of lived racial experience are significantly related to gang membership. The odds of gang membership increase as the percentage of county residents whose race is not the same as the adolescent’s increases. This finding supports the idea that minority youth may feel secluded in their communities and turn to gangs to gain a sense of belonging. This finding further
suggests that White youth in predominantly racial minority neighborhoods have greater odds of joining gangs than Whites in predominantly White neighborhoods.

The correlation between the percentage of county residents whose race is not the same as the adolescent’s and the disadvantage scale is moderately low, but it is significant ($r=.205, p<.001$; see Appendix A for correlation matrix). Therefore, I would argue that it is likely that adolescents living in neighborhoods where they are the racial minority are living in areas of high concentrated disadvantage. Given that racial residential segregation filters racial minorities into disadvantaged areas, this finding would suggest that the significant increase in the odds of gang membership for adolescents who are the racial minority in their neighborhood may apply more to Whites than to Blacks or Latinos.

I also find that the more strongly youth agree with the statement that students at their school are prejudiced, their odds of gang membership increase, holding all else constant. This finding supports the idea that racial minorities feel secluded in such mass institutions as schools. This finding may also be in accordance with Cohen’s (1955) Working Class Boy and Middle Class Measuring Rod theory. For example, youth who do not measure-up to the White standards in schools may be ostracized by other students. Combine being ostracized with an awareness of race and a lack of preparation for bias and it makes sense that these youth feel students at their school are prejudiced. It also makes sense, then, why minority youth are overrepresented in gangs.

My findings support Shaw and McKay’s (1969) ecological model that links social disorganization to crime. Using a similar scale of disadvantage to that used by Morenoff et al. (2001), I find that adolescents living in areas of higher concentrated disadvantage
have greater odds of joining gangs regardless of their race and ethnicity or socio-economic status. This finding supports Shaw and McKay’s (1969) ideas that the social breakdown in the community alienates neighbors from one another and inhibits them from controlling youth behavior, both formally and informally. When families are living below the poverty line and receiving public assistance, unemployment rates are high, and single women are running households on their own, there is less time available to worry about where their youth are going, who they are spending time with and what they are doing, which creates an attractive setting for gang delinquency to occur. This is, to my knowledge, the first empirical test on a nationally representative sample of the effects of social disorganization on gang membership.

My final findings are what contribute to the race and space literature as it applies to gang formation. I find significant interactions between race and disadvantage for Blacks and Latinos compared to Whites. The effect is almost the same for Blacks and Latinos, but in different directions. Latinos in disadvantaged areas have greater odds of gang membership than Whites in similarly disadvantaged areas. However, Blacks in disadvantaged areas have lower odds of gang membership than Whites in similarly disadvantaged areas. Whereas the social disorganization of the neighborhood is facilitating gang membership for Latinos, it is acting as a protective factor against gang membership for Blacks.

This finding suggests that there is something more going on in these neighborhoods besides the structural disorganization. Though Shaw and McKay (1969) suggested that the purpose of their ecological model was to examine kinds of places and not kinds of people (see also Stark 1987), my analysis suggests that there may be some
type of interaction between the structural disorganization of the neighborhood and the cultural aspects of the individuals living in these communities. There must be something about the culture of the group that determines how they respond to the social disorganization of their neighborhood.

There are possible policy implications derived from my results as well. For example, the lived race variables are significantly related to the odds of gang membership in both Tables 2 and 3. This finding suggests that prejudice in school can have significant negative impacts on adolescents. Perhaps if there were a policy in place that called for teaching courses in discrimination in elementary schools, the students might project less, and therefore, experience less prejudice. I suggest this type of policy be directed at elementary schools because of the low entry age of gang members.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

This study yielded results consistent with Shaw and McKay’s (1969) social disorganization theory. This study also led me to some very interesting findings about the interactions between race and ethnicity and neighborhood disorganization. However, there are four important limitations to this study that should be addressed. First, as discussed, researchers have used several different measures of gang membership. While my measure of gang membership captures some important aspects of gangs, such as a group name and group rituals, there are many aspects of gang membership that have not been captured in the measure used in my analysis. Though self-identification may be an appropriate measure of gang membership, I may have been able to create a more accurate
measure of gang membership by creating a “gang scale” of behaviors plus the self-
identification of a gang member.

Another limitation to my study is the use of county-level contextual measures. Gangs usually protect a specific territory (Bjerregaard 2002; Decker & Curry 2002), more locally-based than a county. Though other researchers have used county and tract level data to study crime, block measures may be more accurate in studying gang behavior.

A third limitation to my study is that it is a cross-sectional analysis. Although I had the advantage of using longitudinal data, unfortunately the question regarding gang membership was not asked in the first wave of data. In future studies on gangs, longitudinal analyses would provide information on how structural forces affect the ongoing phenomenon of gang membership for individuals. In other words, using a change model, I could examine whether the social disorganization of the neighborhood affects gang membership over time or only affects the onset of gang membership.

The fourth limitation to my study is that I have grouped adolescents from very different Latino backgrounds and cultures into one group. Therefore, my findings are generalizeable to Latinos in general, but this does not apply to all groups of Latinos in the same way. A next step I would like to take in my research is to look at the differences in gang membership by neighborhood disadvantage between different Latino ethnicities. This step would therefore allow me to generalize my findings to specific Latino groups rather than making generalizations about different ethnic groups with different cultural backgrounds.
FUTURE RESEARCH

More criminological studies are turning to mixed-method approaches to studying crime and delinquency. My findings suggest that perhaps a mixed-methods approach is needed to study gang formation in disorganized neighborhoods. It would be beneficial to do a qualitative study on the cultural aspects of the racial and ethnic groups living in disorganized communities. The purpose of such a qualitative study would be to develop a ground theory based on the possible interacting effects between the structural disorganization and the group cultures of the individuals who live in disorganized communities. A quantitative analysis could then be conducted to support or fail to support such a theory.
References


## APPENDIX

Appendix: Correlations Matrix of all analytical variables. The Pearson Correlation coefficient appears above the 2-tailed significance level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>% residents race &quot;not like me&quot;</th>
<th>Students at school are prejudiced</th>
<th>Disadvantage</th>
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</thead>
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<td>.125</td>
<td>.042**</td>
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<td>.005**</td>
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<td>.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.074**</td>
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<td>.004</td>
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<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<td>-.19*</td>
<td>-.067**</td>
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<td>% residents race &quot;not like me&quot;</td>
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<td>.018*</td>
<td>.081**</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<td>.205**</td>
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<td>-.019*</td>
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<td>Disadvantage</td>
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