GANG INVOLVEMENT AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN, LATINO, AND WHITE YOUTH: THE CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CONCENTRATED NEIGHBORHOOD DISADVANTAGE

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Classic and contemporary research on gang formation indicates that neighborhood characteristics matter (Andresen 2006; Tita, Cohen, and Engberg 2005; Cahill and Mulligan 2003). Youth living in neighborhoods characterized by concentrated disadvantage, including deep impoverishment, intergenerational reliance on public assistance, obstinate unemployment, and disproportionately high rates of female-headed households, are more likely to be involved in gang activity. In these communities, often referred to as underclass neighborhoods (Wilson 1987; 1996), social disorganization and economic deprivation make it more difficult to exert formal and informal social control over youth. Therefore, without normative mechanisms (e.g., quality schooling, employment opportunities, and appropriate adult supervision) needed to transition into productive adults, many young people in these underclass neighborhoods turn to gangs as a means of social engagement and economic gain. Recent spikes in gang involvement are especially pronounced among racial and ethnic minorities, who join these groups at rates higher than their white counterparts (Adamson 2000; Hughes and Short 2005; Klein 1995; Malec 2004; Miller 2001; Peterson, Taylor and Esbensen 2004). The National Gang Center (2007) reports that gang membership in the U.S. is made up predominately of Latinos (49%) and African Americans (35%), with whites (9%) and youth of other ethnicities (7%) reporting significantly less participation in gangs (see also U.S. Department of Justice 2011). Not surprisingly, the vast majority of gang members hail from extremely disadvantaged neighborhoods, often in the core of large urban areas. Therefore, understanding the relationship between race-ethnicity and gang membership is further confounded given that the most disadvantaged neighborhoods are also heavily populated by minority residents.

In this paper, I revisit the relationships among neighborhood disadvantage, race-ethnicity, and gang involvement. The aim of this paper is not to challenge that neighborhood disadvantage is related to gang formation or that African Americans and Latinos residing in disadvantaged communities are disproportionately represented among the ranks of gang members. These relationships have been firmly and convincingly established in the research literature. Rather, this investigation seeks to further parse apart these relationships. While is it fairly straightforward to conclude that the most advantaged communities (e.g., with quality schools, low crime, and plentiful employment) versus underclass neighborhoods will have lower rates of gang involvement, fewer studies have paid attention to communities that fall between this dichotomy of desirable and disadvantaged areas. Neighborhoods can be placed on a continuum from the lowest disadvantage (i.e., the most affluent communities) to the highest concentrated disadvantage (i.e., underclass communities). To illustrate, stable working class neighborhoods, for instance, may have much higher employment, better home values, lower crime rates, and more mechanisms of social control for youth, compared to highly disadvantages communities. Still, such neighborhoods may be less desirable than the most affluent communities, where work opportunities may approach full employment; home values are even higher; and crime rates are near zero. These communities along the middle of the continuum also may have features that overlap with both affluent and poorer neighborhoods. Depending on proximity, these neighborhoods may share city and/or county services (e.g., school systems, sanitation, or law enforcement), have parallel crime patterns, or even display similar rates of gang involvement with other less or more prosperous neighborhoods. Consequently, my first goal for this exploration is to determine how communities placed on a continuum (e.g., divided into high, medium, and low levels of disadvantage) are related to the probability that youth will join gangs. My second goal for this study is to understand whether neighborhood disadvantage mediates the relationship between race-ethnicity and gang membership. For example, are the higher rates at which Latino and African American youth join gangs, compared to whites, explained by concentrated

neighborhood disadvantage? Moreover, do African Americans, Latinos, and whites who are similarly situated in terms of levels of neighborhood disadvantage have comparable gang involvement?

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND

National statistics indicate that gang membership significantly grew from approximately 750,000 members in 2000 to more than one million members in 2010 (U.S. Department of Justice 2011). While there has been debate about how to adequately define these groups (see e.g., Ball and Curry 1995), gangs can generally be defined as three or more people who engage in delinquent, antisocial or criminal activity and identify themselves with a common name or sign (Hagedorn 2008; Sánchez-Jankowski 1991, 2008). These groups meet with regularity and have group-determined leadership and rules of membership (Moore 1991). Gangs often have well-defined territories within neighborhoods that they may defend through intimidation or violence from other gangs (Pyrooz, Fox, and Decker 2010, Venkatesh 1997). As Moore (1991) pointed out, the individuals who comprise gangs are unsupervised peer groups who have been socialized by the demands of survival and the "street" rather than by conventional institutions. Gang membership is made up primarily of males (Chesney-Lind and Brown 1996; Deschenes and Esbensen 1999), although female recruits are increasing with some estimates placing female members as high as 15 percent (U.S. Department of Justice 2011). Moreover, with an average age of around 20 years old, about two-thirds of gang members are adults over 18 years old (U.S. Department of Justice 2011).

Gangs are a recognized social problem and detrimental to the safety of the communities in which they form because of involvement in delinquent and criminal acts. In a recent report, the U.S. Department of Justice (2009) estimated, based on law enforcement reports, that in some communities gang activity is directly and indirectly responsible for as much as 80 percent of all crimes. A plethora of research has demonstrated that gang members are involved in higher rates of crime and delinquency than their non-gang peers (see e.g., Delisi et al. 2009). For example,

gang members are often more involved in drug- and alcohol-related activities as well as violent behavior (e.g., assault and homicide), compared to their non-gang peers (Butters et al. 2009; Bullock and Tilley 2008; Craig et al. 2002; Decker and Curry 2002; Deuchar and Holligan 2010; Hughes and Short 2005; Wright and Fitzpatrick 2006; Zhang et al. 1999). Additionally, gang members are also at greater risk of using deadly weapons in disputes and to be victimized by violence than their non-gang peers (Miller 2001; Peterson, Taylor, and Esbensen 2004; Vigil 2003).

To understand racial variation in the distribution of gang membership across levels of neighborhood disadvantage, this research is guided by social disorganization theory (Andresen 2006; Tita, Cohen, and Engberg 2005; Cahill and Mulligan 2003; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997; Sampson and Groves 1989; Shaw and Mckay [1942] 1969; Thrasher [1927] 1963). This framework is an ecological approach to studying delinquent behavior and crime which emphasizes kinds of *places* that influence crime rates rather than kinds of *people* who become involved in delinquent behavior or commit crimes (Stark 1987; Silver 2000). Social disorganization can be defined as a community's inability to maintain effective social controls and to meet the basic needs of its residents (Breetzke 2010; Sampson and Groves 1989). While a wide array of influences contribute to social disorganization in a community, economic deprivation which spawns high rates of joblessness, racial segregation, physical decay (e.g., run-down, abandoned buildings), and crime is principal among such factors (Christie-Mizell and Erickson 2007; Vigil 2002; Sánchez-Jankowski 1991; Skogan 1990; Wilson 1987, 1996). In a climate of economic decline, neighborhoods quickly experience social decay, which includes a lack of social cohesion and mutual mistrust. Among the first to systematically link these conditions of economic and social disorder to the formation of gangs were Shaw and Mckay ([1942] 1969). These researchers mapped incidents of delinquency and violence among youth and tied them to social disorganization in Chicago neighborhoods. As the theory outlines, communities that experience high levels of social disorganization become ineffectual in

monitoring or controlling groups of adolescents and young adults (e.g., gangs), who are engaging in untoward behavior (Tita, Cohen, and Engberg 2005).

Gang Membership, Concentrated Neighborhood Disadvantage and Race-Ethnicity

The proliferation of gangs can be found in most every city in the United States and in nonmetropolitan areas as well (Wells and Weisheit 2001). However, underclass neighborhoods are unique in the production of gang membership because of the highly concentrated disadvantage experienced by residents and the degree of social isolation from mainstream mechanisms (e.g., education, employment) that many Americans rely on to improve their plight. For example, while the main focus of Wilson's (1996; 2002) well-known scholarship on neighborhood decline is on demographic shifts and declining economic opportunities in poor neighborhoods, he also acknowledges that the reality of daily life becomes different for the occupants of these community and may lead to decisions (e.g., gang membership) that appear antithetical to improving individual circumstances or neighborhood conditions. That is, neighborhood disorganization not only structures community members' access to such resources as employment, education, social networks, and safety (Booth and Crouter 2001; Brooks Gunn et al. 1993; Furstenberg et al.1993; Wilson 1996), but also diminishes the ability to meet developmental milestones (e.g., gainful employment in the transition to adulthood) and to meet personal role obligations such as contributing to the well-being of one's family members (Christie-Mizell and Erickson 2007; Christie-Mizell, Steelman, and Stewart 2003). That is, over time, failure to meet normative expectations leads to high rates of involvement in delinquent behavior that inhibits individual future productive behavior and may further increase the social disorganization of the neighborhood.

I argue that the status of individuals living in underclass neighborhoods is indeed distinct from those living in other areas. Groups and individuals that reside in the most highly concentrated disadvantage locales experience a form of absolute deprivation. In underclass

neighborhoods, where the majority of adults are unemployed and abject poverty is a fact of life, I contend that this situation differs dramatically from other settings and accounts for why gang membership is higher. To be sure, residents in neighborhoods experiencing rapid decline (e.g., those comprised of the working poor), and therefore relative deprivation, may tend toward gang membership because of the strain inherent in the weakening of social organization and control. However, despite the structural constraints associated with decline, there is still more economic opportunity, compared to underclass communities. This difference may explain why the tendency toward gang membership may be higher in underclass neighborhoods than in declining communities.

Social disorganization in communities is multifaceted and may rob residents of more than social control. Some research suggests that the fulfillment of social roles, safety, and economic gain may be additional reasons that are associated with why gangs thrive in neighborhoods with high levels of concentrated disadvantage. Social connections are important in even the most impoverished locales. Beyond involvement in gang activity, gang members are also members of the larger community and these roles of relative (e.g., brother, son, cousin) and friendship often supplant the role of gang member (Patillo-McCoy 1999; Venkatesh 1997; Sánchez-Jankowski 1991). Furthermore, gang members regularly stand-in for other forms of institutional control by providing some necessary services to the community. For example, in her study of gangs in Chicago, Patillo-McCoy (1999) reported that residents recalled many instances of when gangs provided food for block parties, kept sections of parks free from graffiti and fighting, and even coordinated with church leaders to close down an unwanted liquor store. Economic gain is also a principal off-shoot of many gang activities (e.g., drug dealing and theft). While there are certainly opportunity costs (e.g., jail time or bodily injury) associated with criminal behavior, Sullivan (1989) points out that gang members weigh these costs and economic gain in light of the absence of other opportunities. Moreover, Sánchez-Jankowski (2008) points out that gang activity often becomes the economic engine of disadvantaged neighborhoods, serving as a surrogate

employer for residents. Without the usual mechanisms (e.g., employment and effective law enforcement) in place, residents in poor neighborhoods may allow or even welcome gang intervention that meets some of their daily needs (cf. Black 1989).

Racial-Ethnic Variation in Gang Membership. In this study, I investigate racial-ethnic differences in how concentrated neighborhood disadvantage shapes gang membership among African American, Latino and white youth. Cultural norms and expectations about quality of life may vary by race-ethnicity in ways that diminish or heighten the impact of the neighborhood disadvantage on gang involvement. An emphasis on racial and ethnic patterns in gang formation is not new and was a central component in the early work of the prominent Chicago School of research (e.g., Shaw and McKay [1942] 1969; Thrasher [1927] 1963; Burgess 1925). For instance, Thrasher ([1927] 1963) highlighted ethnic heterogeneity and proposed that neighborhoods experiencing transitions in racial-ethnic composition were more likely to experience social disorganization as well as gang formation and higher rates of crime. In other words, the tension and uncertainty associated with racial transition often signaled decline for particular neighborhoods as wealthier residence left and less economically advantaged minorities moved into the area. The result was inter-ethnic rivalries or gangs that formed for protective purposes and economic gain. Contemporary research continues to show that racial transitioning, where racial and ethnic minorities come to occupy locations where there has been white flight, is related to neighborhood social disorganization and increases in gang involvement (see e.g., Melde, Taylor, and Esbensen 2009 or Thornberry et al. 2003). By the time that neighborhoods reach tipping points (i.e., the minority population becomes the majority), the social disorganization of the area is ripe for the production of gang activity.

As a group, whites tend to be somewhat shielded from the conditions that influence the likelihood of gang membership, because they tend to live in more affluent neighborhoods compared to racial minorities (Miller 2001; Massey and Denton, 1993). Predominately white neighborhoods are linked to higher educational levels, stable employment, intact families, and

social cohesion (Aneshensel and Sucoff 1996; Crane 1991; Hwang and Murdock 1998; Jencks and Mayer 1990; Rosenbaum 1996; Wilson 1996, 2002). In addition to neighborhood stability and socioeconomic concerns, other research indicates that racial minorities more likely to experience a sense of social isolation as a result of the neighborhood context (Massey and Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1987; 1996). Social isolation arising from neighborhood disadvantage contributes profoundly to all sorts of social pathologies, including the propensity to engage in delinquent behavior and gang activity. The isolation experienced by African American and Latino individuals and families may very well be one of the antecedents of gang membership (Sánchez-Jankowski 1991, 2008). In fact, even when African Americans and Latinos live in relatively affluent neighborhoods, research shows that they are more likely to endure lower socioeconomic status, including less stable employment and lower education, and social isolation from their neighbors (Oliver and Shapiro [1995] 2006; Feagin and McKinney 2003). In the current study, I argue that the higher probability of African Americans and Latinos to join gains will be explain by concentrated neighborhood disadvantage – that is, the higher levels of social disorganization and social isolation that these groups endure.

Gang Membership and Interpersonal Resources

Social disorganization theory as an ecological framework pinpoints "place" (i.e., neighborhoods in this case) rather than individual characteristics or failings as being causally related to gang membership. Nevertheless, social scientists have long recognized even within such a framework that structural positioning (e.g., in highly disorganized environs) also impacts social interaction at the micro level by way of shaping individual behaviors, attitudes, and the development of self. To that end, I focus on five interpersonal or psychosocial resources that have received abundant attention in research on crime and delinquency as protective factors: religiosity, self-esteem, sense of control, social support, and social integration (Aneshensel 1992; Christie-Mizell and Erickson 2007; Pearlin 1989, 1999; Pearlin et al. 1981; Teasdale and Silver

2009; Turner and Roszell 1994). *Religiosity* may discourage youth from gang membership in at least two ways. First, the delinquent and criminal activities of gangs may be counter to a belief system that demands honesty and promises punishment for misdeeds in the afterlife (Baier and Wright 2001; Bock, Cochran, and Beeghley 1987; Ellis and Thompson 1989; Heaton 2006; Hirschi and Stark 1969). Second, to the extent that social roles are associated with religion and are important for maintaining a positive view of self, youth may avoid delinquent behaviors (Cochran, and Beeghley 1987; Ellis and Thompson 1989; Pearlin 1999). For example, if a young person is a member of a church choir or a youth leader for his church, the constraints placed on his time as well as maintaining relationships with other members of his congregation will shape his behavior outside church.

Self-esteem is an evaluative feeling toward self and represents feelings of global self-worth (Gecas and Burke 1995; Rosenberg 1979) and the *sense of control* is an individual's perception that she has control over the forces that shape her life. These two concepts are positively associated, but represent separate dimensions of self (Pearlin 1999). Research shows that higher self-esteem and sense of control are related to a multitude of positive outcomes, including higher socioeconomic attainment and the lower probability of being involved in delinquent or criminal behavior (Donnellan et al. 2005; Mizell 1999; Murray 2005; Trzesniwski et al. 2006; Rosenberg 1979). Self-esteem and the sense of control may be beneficial in discouraging deviant behavior (including gang activity), because individuals with higher self-esteem and sense of control cope well with stressful circumstances and are less likely to feel defeated by challenges. Both self-esteem and the sense of control are associated with socioeconomic attainment, being male, older age, and greater involvement in religious activity (Hughes and Demo 1989; Phinney, Cantu, and Kurtz 1997; Thompson and Keith 2001; Turner and Roszell 1994; Verkuyten 1998). With respect to race-ethnicity, African Americans tend to have higher or equal self-esteem compared to their white peers, while Latinos have lower self-

esteem. However, whites have higher sense of control, compared to both African Americans and Latinos (Christie-Mizell and Erickson 2007; Hughes and Demo 1989).

Social support refers to resources that are drawn from one's social network and is positively associated with both self-esteem and mastery (Pearlin 1989). In this study, I concentrate on social support from family members, friends and important adults in the youth's life. Social support is positively associated with being female, education, religiosity, self-esteem and the sense of control (Chatters et al. 2002; Pearlin 1999; Strogatz et al. 1997; Thoits 1984). Similarly, *social integration* or the extent to which youth have helpful social ties in the community may also be related to lower levels of delinquent behavior (Swartz, Reyns, Henson, and Wilcox 2011). Teasdale and Silver (2009) show that social integration is positively related to being female, socioeconomic status, Latino ethnicity, and optimistic views of self, but negatively related to being African American and neighborhood disadvantage. Individuals who have achieved social integration in their communities are less likely to be fearful and be able to gain assistance from neighbors when they need help. Therefore, social support and social integration may diminish the probability of gang membership by satisfying an individual's need for nurturance, affiliation, respect, and social recognition (Cullen 1994; Donnellan et al. 2005).

Summary and Hypotheses

In this paper, I reexamine the relationships among concentrated neighborhood disadvantage, race-ethnicity, and the probability of gang membership among a nationally representative sample of African American, Latino, and white youth. One of the principle aims of this research is to determine how communities placed on a continuum (e.g., divided into high, medium, and low levels of disadvantage) are related to the probability that youth will join gangs. A second aim is to investigate whether neighborhood disadvantage mediates the relationship between race-ethnicity and gang membership. In the context of social disorganization theory, I developed three hypotheses:

H1: Concentrated neighborhood disadvantage will be significantly related to an increased probability of gang membership.

H2a-b: Concentrated neighborhood disadvantage is more related to the probability of gang membership in underclass neighborhoods (i.e., highest levels of disadvantage), compared to a) affluent (lowest levels of disadvantage) and b) middle/working class (medium levels of disadvantage) neighborhoods.

H3a-b: Concentrated neighborhood disadvantage will mediate the effects of being a) African American and b) Latino on the probability of gang membership.

CHAPTER III

DATA AND MEASURES

The data analyzed for this study are derived from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health; Harris et al. 2003; Harris 2009), a nationally representative study of youth in grades 7 through 12. Data for the Add Health study were collected at four points in time: between 1994 and 1995 (Wave I), 1996 (Wave II), between 2001 and 2002 (Wave III), and from 2007 to 2008 (Wave IV), and included reports from adolescents in schools, parents or primary caregivers, and school administrators. Additionally, the individual-level data are linked to objective, contextual files that come from U.S. Census data. Because questions about gang membership are only asked in Waves II and III, I am restricted to Waves I-III for this project.

A stratified cluster sample was drawn from U.S. schools which had an eleventh grade and a total enrollment exceeding 30 students. Students in the study are nested within 80 high schools and 145 middle schools and the study design incorporates oversamples for underrepresented groups including disabled respondents, highly educated African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Chinese, and Cubans. In Wave I, 90,000 students were interviewed in their schools, with approximately 20,000 of those students doing in-home interviews as well. For Waves II and III, 14,738 and 15,170 were re-interviewed, respectively.

I utilized in-home interviews with adolescents in Waves I, II and III, interviews with parents in Wave I, and the 1990 U.S. Census data. For the most part, I utilize covariates from Wave I to predict the probability of gang membership in Waves II and III. One exception is that the interpersonal resources variables (see *Control Variables* below) are available from Wave II. The total N for this study is 6,991, and the sample is limited to African American (1,567), Latino (698), and white (4,627) respondents who answered the survey questions about gang membership. All descriptives for the study can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Means, Percents and Standard Deviations (SD) for All Study Variables. National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health.

	Total Sample (N=6,991)		African Americans (N=1,567)		Latinos (N=698)		Whites (N=4,726)	
Variables	Mean/ Percent	SD	Mean/ Percent	SD	Mean/ Percent	SD	Mean/ Percent	SD
Gang Membership and Neighborhood Disadvantage								
Gang Membership (1=yes)	17.82 %	———	20.49 % [B]	———	23.78 % [C]	———	16.06 % [B,C]	———
Concentrated Neighborhood Disadvantage[a]	.09	.07	.16 [A,B]	.10	.11 [A,C]	.07	.07 [B,C]	.05
Demographics								
African American (1=yes)	22.43 %	———	———	———	———	———	———	———
Latino (1=yes)	9.92 %	———	———	———	———	———	———	———
White (1=yes)	67.65 %	———	———	———	———	———	———	———
Male (1=yes)	46.89 %	———	45.05 %	———	46.56 %	———	47.53 %	———
Age (years)	16.09	1.63	16.12 [A,B]	1.64	16.49 [A,C]	1.61	16.01 [B,C]	1.62
Family Socioeconomic Status								
Household Income (thousands of dollars)	41.30	23.92	32.35 [B]	23.00	33.15 [C]	20.00	45.45 [B,C]	23.63
Parents' Education: 1 (< high school) to 5 (> college)	2.72	1.07	2.68 [A,B]	1.10	1.92 [A,C]	1.01	2.85 [B,C]	1.02
Parents' Full-time Employment (1=yes)	62.30 %	———	55.46 % [B]	———	57.81 % [C]	———	65.24 % [B,C]	———
Interpersonal Resources								
Religious Attendance: 1 (low) to 4 (high)	2.73	1.21	3.13 [A,B]	1.96	2.74 [A,C]	1.17	2.60 [B,C]	1.22
Self-esteem: 1 (low) to 5 (high)	4.21	.58	4.33 [A,B]	.53	4.06 [A,C]	.61	4.19 [B,C]	.58
Sense of Control: 1 (low) to 5 (high)	4.07	.87	4.05	.96	4.05	.89	4.08	.83
Social Support: 1 (low) to 5 (high)	4.05	.60	4.07 [A]	.63	4.01 [A]	.64	4.05	.58
Social Integration: 0 (low) to 3 (high)	2.24	.98	2.31 [A,B]	.91	2.06 [A,C]	1.04	2.24 [B,C]	1.00

[a]Concentrated neighborhood disadvantages ranges for 0 (lower disadvantage) to .61 (higher disadvantage).

Note: A (African Americans v. Latinos), B (African American v. Whites), and C (Latinos v. Whites) denote significant raiale/ethnic differences at *p < .05 (two-tailed tests).

Measures

Dependent Variable. The dependent variable in my analyses is gang membership. In Wave II, respondents were asked whether they had ever been initiated into a named gang (4%), and in Wave III, they were asked if they had ever belonged to a gang (17.82%). The Wave II measure captures more traditional characteristics of gang membership (e.g., initiation rituals and gang name) and the Wave III measure is more general. However, while these measures are not perfectly parallel, they are both dichotomous variables which allow adolescents to self-identify as a gang member. Respondents were coded 1 for gang membership if they responded affirmatively to either measure. In my sample, African Americans (20.49%) and Latinos (23.78%) reported significantly higher rates of gang membership than whites (16.06%).

Independent and Mediator Variables. My main independent variables of interest are *race-ethnicity* and *concentrated neighborhood disadvantage*. Dummy variables were coded to distinguish among black or African American, Latino/Hispanic ethnicity, and white based on the respondent's primary racial identification to capture race-ethnicity. Concentrated neighborhood disadvantage is created by linking 1990 U.S. Census data to the respondent's place of residence. The four facets incorporated in this index are: 1) the proportion of persons in living below the poverty line in 1989, 2) the proportion of households with public assistance income, 3) the unemployment rate, and 4) the percentage of female-headed households in the neighborhood. This operationalization parallels typical conceptions of neighborhoods in the research literature (see e.g., Ross 2000 or Teasdale and Silver 2009) and comes from information at the census block level. The block level is the smallest unit available from the U.S. Census (approximately 400 housing units per census block) and is determined by physical boundaries such as major roads, railroad tracks, and streams. This index is scaled so that higher scores indicate higher levels of neighborhood disadvantage and ranges from 0 to .61 (α=.88). The same scale based on the census tract yielded the same substantive results as those reported below. On average, African Americans (.16) reside in neighborhoods with higher levels of concentrated disadvantage than

Latinos (.11) and whites (.07). Moreover, compared to whites, the communities that Latinos live in have more disadvantage.

To test the contention that the probability of gang membership varies significantly in underclass neighborhoods compared to other locales, I divide the concentrated neighborhood disadvantage index into quintiles. Similar to the continuous version of the index, these quintiles are scored such that the first quintile represents the most affluent communities and the fifth quintile represents the most disadvantaged neighborhoods. In preliminary sensitivity analyses, I calculated a number of variations on this division of quintiles (e.g., thirds and quartiles). No matter the division the findings presented below are substantively the same. However, one advantage of quintiles is that this operationalization not only allows concentrated neighborhood disadvantage to be partitioned into low (1^{st} quintile), medium (2^{nd} – 4^{th} quintiles), and high (5^{th} quintile), but also permits the medium disadvantage category (middle and working class neighborhoods) to be further divisible in to low (2^{nd} quintile), medium (3^{rd}), and high (4^{th}) disadvantage.

Control Variables. The models developed below control for *sex* and *age*. Males in the sample are coded 1 and compared to females, while age is measured in years. The age range for the current sample is 13 to 21 years old. The mean age for Latinos (16.49 years) differed significantly from African Americans (16.12 years) and whites (16.01 years). Also, the age difference between African Americans and whites varied significantly. This study also includes three measures of family socioeconomic status from parent interviews. *Household income* is measured in dollars. On average, white families made approximately $45,000, while African American and Latino families earned about $32,000 and $33,000, respectively. Whites grossed significantly more than African Americans and Latinos, while there was no difference between the latter two groups. *Parents' education* represents the average of the respondent's mother and father's schooling, where educational attainment ranges from 1(less than high school) to 5 (more than college). If mothers or fathers were missing on this measure, then the parents' education

measure was equal to the non-missing parent's score. If no score was reported for either parent, then the respondent was missing on this measure. Similarly, respondents are coded 1 for *full-time parental employment* if either or both parents reported full-time employment. White parents reported higher education (2.85) and rates of employment (65.24%) than either African Americans or Latinos. Moreover, African American parents reported more education (2.68) than their Latino counterparts (1.92). However, there was no difference in African American (55.46%) and Latino (57.81%) rates of employment.

The interpersonal resources variables were taken from Wave II in which this entire group of variables is available. *Religiosity* is measured as attendance and is coded to range from 1 (never) to 4 (once a week or more). African Americans (3.13) reported higher levels of religious attendance, compared to Latinos (2.74) and whites (2.60). Furthermore, Latinos in this sample have higher rates of religious attendance than do whites. The *self-esteem* measure is similar to Rosenberg's well-known and valid scale (Rosenberg 1989; also see Longmore et al. 2004). This six-item scale asked the respondent the degree to which s/he agreed with the following statements: 1) You have a lot of good qualities, 2) You have a lot to be proud of; 3) You like yourself just the way you are; 4) You feel like you are doing everything just about right; 5) You feel socially accepted; and 6) You feel loved and wanted. All six items were averaged and coded to range from 1 (lower self-esteem) to 5 (higher self-esteem). The alpha reliability is .86. The mean level of self –esteem for African Americans was 4.33, which was significantly higher than the means reported for whites (4.19) and Latinos (4.06). However, whites espoused higher self-esteem than Latinos. *Sense of control* is a one item indicator, which queried the respondent for the degree to which s/he agreed with the statement: When you get what you want, it's usually because you worked hard for it. The measure ranges from 1 (lower control) to 5 (higher control) (cf. Pearson 2006). On average, African Americans and Latinos had a sense of control of 4.05, while whites reported a mean of 4.08. These average scores did not differ across race-ethnicity.

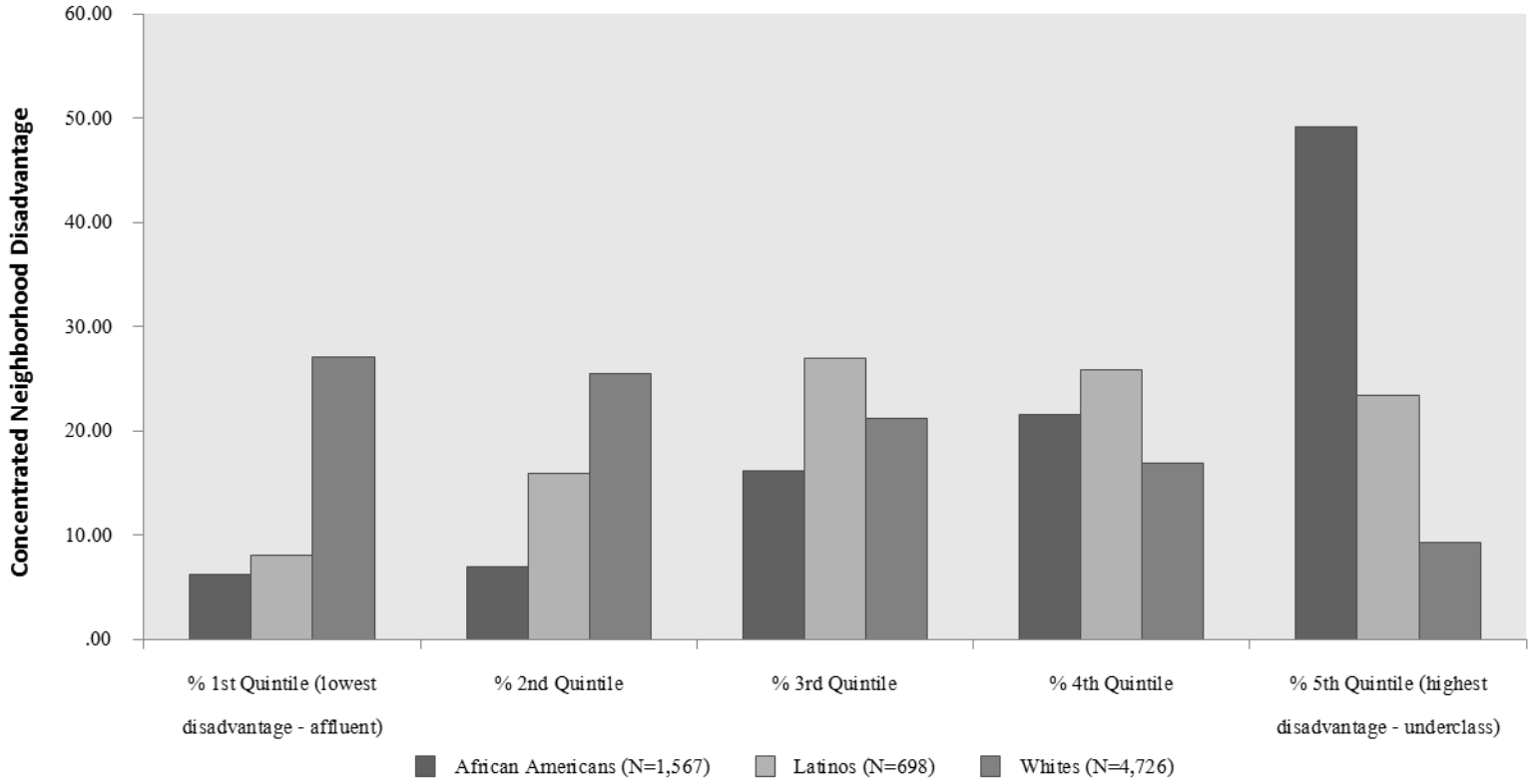
The Add Health data include seven questions intended to gauge respondents' perceived level of *social support*. The first four questions asked how much 1) parents, 2) other important adults, 3) teachers, and 4) friends care about them. Questions five and six inquired: How much do people in their family 5) understand them and 6) pay attention to them. The seventh question asked the extent to which each respondent felt that they have fun together with their family. With an alpha reliability of .78, all seven indicators were combined and scored so that the measure of social support ranges from 1 (lower social support) to 5 (higher social support) (cf. Nooney 2005). African Americans (4.07) reported higher social support than Latinos (4.01), but not whites (4.05). Scores on social support did not differ significantly between African Americans and whites. Finally, the measure for *social integration* required respondents to respond to three true-false statements: 1) You know most people in this neighborhood; 2) In the past month, you have stopped on the street to chat; and 3) People in this neighborhood look out for one another. Each of these indicators was coded 1 for true and added together to create a count, ranging from 0 (absence of social integration) to 3 (high levels of social integration). The level of social integration was 2.31 for African Americans, 2.06 for Latinos, and 2.24 for whites. The mean level was significantly higher for African Americans than either Latinos or whites. In turn, the social integration score for whites was significantly higher than for Latinos.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

I proceed with the analysis for this paper in two steps. First, because one of the major goals of this research is to examine racial variation within levels of concentrated neighborhood disadvantage, descriptive information is presented from the data that helps establish the distribution of race-ethnicity and gang membership across various neighborhood types. Further, I show how study characteristics differ for underclass neighborhoods versus more affluent communities. Second, I estimate a logistic regression for gang membership, composed of five equations. The first equation includes demographic variables only. Equations two and three add in two blocks of variables – family socioeconomic status and interpersonal resources, respectively. Structuring the analysis in this manner enables me to assess the impact of race-ethnicity on gang membership with and without other important covariates in the model. In equation four, I add the continuous measure of concentrated neighborhood disadvantage to the model. However, in equation five, I remove the continuous version of neighborhood disadvantage and replace it with a series of dummy variables that help distinguish the impact of underclass neighborhoods versus more affluent locales on gang membership. These final two equations help test the notion that concentrated neighborhood disadvantage mediates the effects of race-ethnicity on gang membership. Also, the model that includes the series of dummy variables allows for a closer look at how differently or similarly low, medium, and high levels of disadvantage are related to gang membership. The regression analysis is weighted for representativeness and to correct for the complex sampling design in the Add Health data.

Figure 1. Race/Ethnicity by Qunitiles of Concentrated Neighborhood Disadvantage



CHAPTER V

RESULTS

The distribution of race-ethnicity across concentrated neighborhood disadvantage is not uniform. African Americans and Latinos withstand higher levels of concentrated disadvantage than their white counterparts. Figure 1 shows that about half (49.20%) of African Americans live in underclass neighborhoods, compared to significantly lower proportions of Latinos (23.35%) and whites (9.31%). The fewest numbers of African Americans and Latinos reside in the most affluent neighborhoods, the 1st quintile, at 6.19% and 8.02% respectively. Furthermore, the proportions for these two groups, African Americans and Latinos, grow dramatically as concentrated neighborhood disadvantage increases. The result is that the greatest percentages of African Americans and Latinos are in the two highest disadvantaged quintiles – 70.77% of African Americans and 49.14% of Latino. Conversely, among white youth in the sample, more than half (52.57%) of the respondents reside in the most advantaged neighborhoods, the 1st and 2nd quintiles.

The information provided in Figure 2 overlays gang membership with race-ethnicity and concentrated neighborhood disadvantage. The pattern for the total sample and whites shows that those in the most advantaged neighborhoods (1st quintile) are less likely to be involved in gangs compared to those in underclass neighborhoods (5th quintile). However, there is little variation for the total sample and whites in the 2nd through the 3rd quintiles, which represent medium levels of concentrated neighborhood disadvantage. For African Americans and Latinos, there is even less variation across the full range of concentrated neighborhood disadvantage. Regardless of differing levels of disadvantage, the percentage of youth who reported gang membership hovers around 20% for African Americans. The configuration is similar for Latinos. That is, despite

Figure 2. Percent Gang Membership by Race/Ethnicity and Qunitiles of Concentrated Neighborhood Disadvantage.

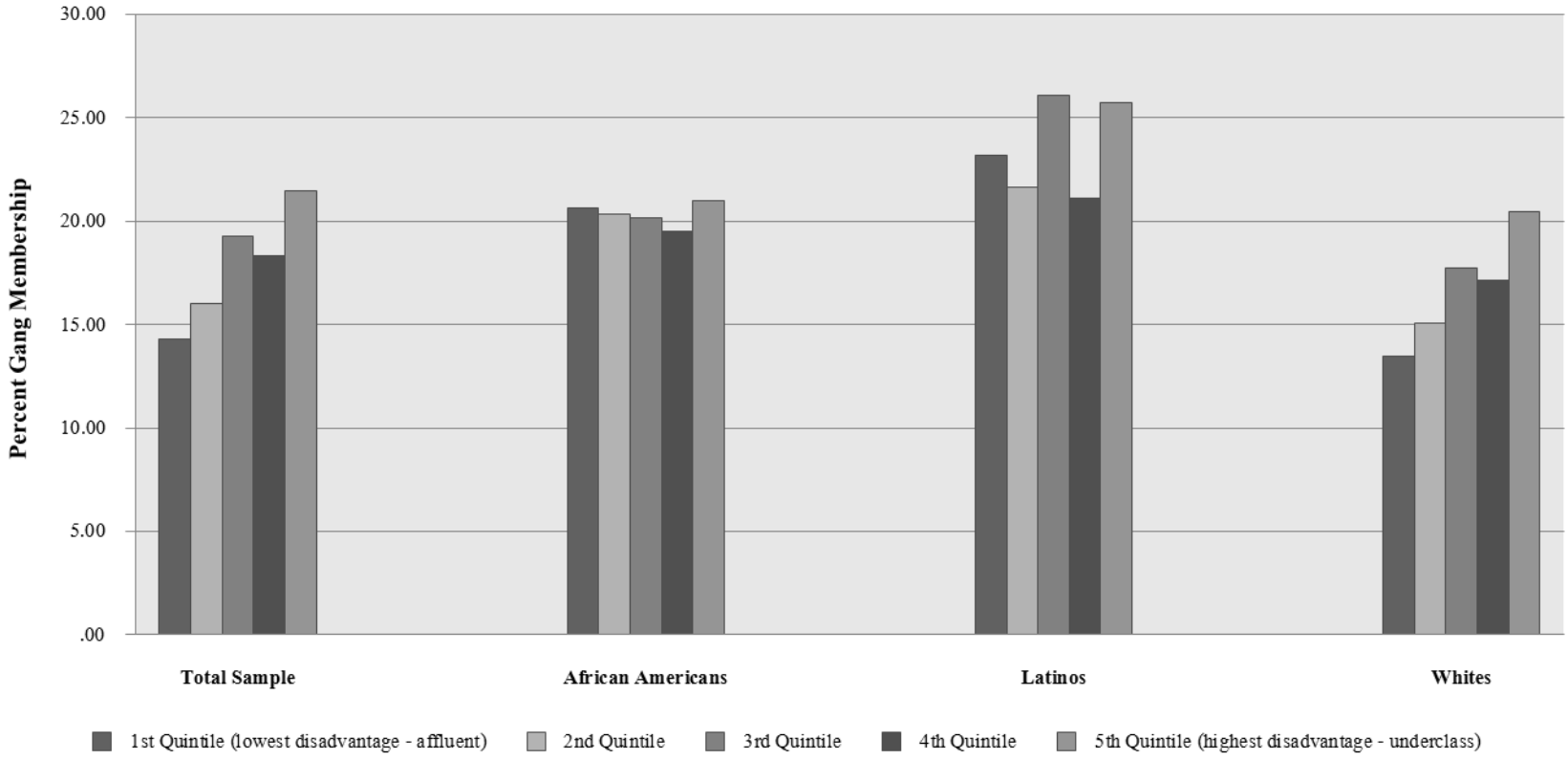


Table 2. Within Quintile Comparison of Sex, Age, Family SES, and Interpersonal Resources. National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health.

	Lowest Disadvantage			Medium Disadvantage									Highest Disadvantage	
	Affluent Neighborhoods												Underclass Neighborhoods	
	1st Quintile			2nd Quintile			3rd Quintile			4th Quintile			5th Quintile	
Variables	Mean/ Percent	SD		Mean/ Percent	SD		Mean/ Percent	SD		Mean/ Percent	SD		Mean/ Percent	SD
Sex and Age														
Male (1=yes)	46.75 %	—		48.21 %	—	**	49.00 %		**	47.08 %	—	*	43.20 %	—
Age (years)	15.98	1.59		16.05	1.63		16.21	1.59	*	16.13	1.67		16.06	1.68
Family Socioeconomic Status														
Household Income (thousands of dollars)	54.39	23.03	***	49.04	22.91	***	40.64	22.15	***	34.81	21.10	***	26.50	19.33
Parents' Education: 1 (< high school) to 5 (> college)	3.20	1.02	***	2.93	.99	***	2.65	1.02	***	2.48	1.06	***	2.29	1.03
Parents' Full-time Employment (1=yes)	68.59 %	—	***	67.97 %	—	***	64.35 %		***	59.72 %	—	***	50.22 %	—
Interpersonal Resources														
Religious Attendance: 1 (low) to 4 (high)	2.65	1.19	***	2.65	1.21	***	2.72	1.21	*	2.81	1.21		2.83	1.21
Self-esteem: 1 (low) to 5 (high)	4.21	.58	**	4.19	.55	***	4.18	.60	***	4.20	.59	**	4.28	.55
Sense of Control: 1 (low) to 5 (high)	4.12	.78		4.08	.83		4.06	.89		4.03	.92		4.07	.92
Social Support: 1 (low) to 5 (high)	4.05	.56		4.05	.57		4.02	.60	*	4.06	.63		4.07	.63
Social Integration: 0 (low) to 3 (high)	2.19	1.02	***	2.21	.98	***	2.20	1.00	***	2.26	.99		2.33	.93

[a]Concentrated neighborhood disadvantages ranges for 0 (lower disadvantage) to .61 (higher disadvantage).

Note: Asterisks denote differences between the 5th quintile (highest disadvantage) and quintiles 1st through 4th.

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

percentages of a high of a little more than 25% in the 3rd quintile and a low of 20% in the 4th quintile, there are no significant differences for Latinos in gang membership across all five quintiles. In short, at the bivariate level, African Americans and Latinos are more likely to be gang members regardless of neighborhood disadvantage.

Table 2 reveals other differences among all five quintiles of concentrated neighborhood disadvantage. The 5th quintile, underclass neighborhoods, is the comparison group. In terms of sex and age, there are more males in neighborhoods that experience medium levels of disadvantage, and the youth in the 3rd quintile are older than those in the 5th quintile. As might be expected, compared to all other communities, underclass neighborhoods have lower family socioeconomic status across household income, parents' education, and parents' full-time employment. Moreover, some interesting differences emerge with respect to the interpersonal resources. Youth in underclass neighborhoods reported higher levels of religious attendance compared to all other groups, with the exception of the 4th quintile (the second most disadvantaged neighborhoods). Also, levels of self-esteem are lower in the 1st through 4th quintiles, compared to underclass locales in the 5th quintile. Finally, excluding the 4th quintile, underclass youth reported higher levels of social integration in their neighborhoods, compared to all others.

Logistic regression analysis. The results presented in Table 3, equation 1 show that the probability of gang membership is influenced by race-ethnicity and sex. For African Americans compared to whites, the odds of gang membership is increased by 41% [($e^{.35}$ - 1) X 100], while the odds for Latinos is twice as large at 84%. Compared to their female counterparts, males in the sample are 25% [($e^{.23}$ - 1) X 100] more likely to report gang involvement. In Table 3, equation 2, I add family socioeconomic status and find that parents' education is a buffer against gang membership. Higher education nets reduced odds of 9% for youth being connected to a gang. In this equation, the positive odds of gang membership for African Americans and Latinos are

Table 3. Logistic Regression Models Predicting Gang Membership. National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (N=6,991).

	1		2		3		4		5[b]	
Variables	***b*** **(se)**	**Odds**	***b*** **(se)**	**Odds Ratio**	***b*** **(se)**	**Odds Ratio**	***b*** **(se)**	**Odds Ratio**	***b*** **(se)**	**Odds Ratio**
Demographics										
African American (1=yes)	.35	1.41 ***	.27	1.31 **	.32	1.37 **	.16	1.17	.17	1.18
	(.10)		(.10)		(.10)		(.11)		(.11)	
Latino (1=yes)	.61	1.84 ***	.49	1.63 **	.52	1.68 ***	.47	1.59 **	.46	1.58 **
	(.16)		(.15)		(.15)		(.15)		(.15)	
Male (1=yes)	.23	1.25 ***	.23	1.26 **	.20	1.22 *	.21	1.24 **	.21	1.24 **
	(.08)		(.08)		(.08)		(.08)		(.08)	
Age (years)	- .01	.99	- .01	.99	- .02	.99	- .02	.98	- .02	.98
	(.03)		(.03)		(.03)		(.03)		(.03)	
Family Socioeconomic Status										
Household Income (thousands of dollars)			- .00	1.00	- .00	1.00	- .00	1.00	- .00	1.00
			(.00)		(.00)		(.00)		(.00)	
Parents' Education: 1 (< high school) to 5 (> college)			- .10	.91 *	- .08	.93	- .06	.95	- .05	.95
			(.05)		(.05)		(.05)		(.05)	
Parents' Full-time Employment (1=yes)			.02	1.03	.04	1.05	.08	1.08	.07	1.07
			(.14)		(.14)		(.14)		(.14)	
Interpersonal Resources										
Religious Attendance: 1 (low) to 4 (high)					- .07	.93 *	- .07	.93 *	- .07	.93 *
					(.03)		(.03)		(.03)	
Self-esteem: 1 (low) to 5 (high)					- .04	.96	- .05	.95	- .06	.95
					(.08)		(.08)		(.08)	
Sense of Control: 1 (low) to 5 (high)					- .01	.99	- .01	.99	- .01	1.00
					(.05)		(.05)		(.05)	
Social Support: 1 (low) to 5 (high)					- .21	.81 **	- .22	.81 **	- .22	.81 **
					(.08)		(.08)		(.08)	
Social Integration: 0 (low) to 3 (high)					.07	1.08	.07	1.08	.07	1.08
					(.05)		(.05)		(.05)	
Concentrated Neighborhood Disadvantage										
Concentrated Neighborhood Disadvantage[a]							1 .99	7.29 **	———	———
							(.64)		———	———
1st Quntile (lowest disadvantage - Affluent Neighborhoods)									- .49	.61 **
									(.16)	
2nd Quintile									- .32	.73 *
									(.16)	
3rd Quintile									- .37	.69 *
									(.15)	
4th Quintile									- .30	.74 *
									(.13)	
5th Quintile (highest disadvantage - Underclass Neighborhoods)									———	———
									———	———

[a]Concentrated neighborhood disadvantages ranges for 0 (lower disadvantage) to .61 (higher disadvantage).

[b]For Equation 5, the omitted category is the 5th quintile of concentrated neighborhood disadvantage, the highest level of disadvantage.

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

reduced to 31% and 63%, respectively. The impact of sex on gang membership remains essentially unchanged with positive odds of 26%.

Interpersonal resources are incorporated into the model in Table 3, equation 3. Among these variables, religious attendance decreases the odds of gang membership by 7% and social support reduces the odds by 19%. African Americans, Latinos, and males continue to have increased odds at 37%, 68%, and 22%, correspondingly. Conversely, parents' education is reduced to non-significant in this model. In Equations 4 and 5, I test whether concentrated neighborhood disadvantage mediates the impact of race-ethnicity on gang membership. Equation 4 includes the continuous version of the measure, and equation 5 adds a series of dummy variables that allow me to detect whether there are significant differences between underclass neighborhoods (i.e., the 5th quintile) and more advantaged communities (i.e., the 1st through the 4th quintiles). Equation 4 shows that concentrated neighborhood disadvantage increases the odds of gang membership by a remarkable 629% percent. Further, the impact of being African American, compared to being white, is mediated, and the Latino effect is reduced to increased odds of 59%. The effect of being male (24% increased odds), religious attendance (7% decreased odds), and social support (19% decreased odds) remain largely unchanged.

In Table 3, equation 5, compared to underclass neighborhoods (i.e., the 5th quintile), residence in all other neighborhoods reduce the probability of gang membership. The most affluent neighborhoods in the 1st quintile reduce the odds of gang involvement by 39%, and those communities in the 2nd quintile decrease the odds by 27%. Further, living in neighborhoods that fall within the 3rd quintile shrinks the odds of gang membership by 31% and those areas associated with the 4th quintile reduce the odds by 26%. In supplementary analyses, not shown for the sake of brevity, I further tested whether there were other differences among these quintiles. For instance, I estimated whether the 2nd through the 4th quintiles differ significantly from the most affluent neighborhoods (the 1st quintile). I found no differences among the first four quintiles, even if 5th quintile neighborhoods were pruned from the models. Moreover, there is

no intra-ethnic variation in the probability of gang membership by quintile, excluding underclass neighborhoods. To illustrate, in the full model, Latinos living in the 2nd quintile neighborhoods are no more likely to join gangs than those living in the 1st, or 3rd, or 4th quintiles. Any of these auxiliary analyses are available upon request.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the relationships among neighborhood disadvantage, race-ethnicity, and gang membership. Utilizing a social disorganization framework, two primary aims were addressed. First, this study aimed to verify a positive relationship between gang membership and concentrated neighborhood disadvantage (hypothesis 1) and to test whether concentrated neighborhood disadvantage is more related to the probability of gang membership in underclass neighborhoods than in affluent (lowest disadvantage; hypothesis 2a) and middle/working class (medium disadvantage; hypothesis 2b) neighborhoods. I find support for hypothesis 1. Concentrated neighborhood disadvantage was one of the most robust predictors of gang membership in the models generated for the study. Further, hypothesis 2 was fully supported such that underclass neighborhoods are much more likely to produce gang membership than any other type of neighborhood. Moreover, the influence of low versus medium disadvantaged neighborhoods on gang membership did not vary. Second, this study aimed to test whether the effect of concentrated neighborhood disadvantage mediates the impact of race-ethnicity on gang involvement for African American (hypothesis 3a) and Latino (hypothesis 3b) youth. I find support for hypothesis 3a. The African American influence on gang membership is mediated by concentrated neighborhood disadvantage, closing the black-white gap in gang involvement. With respect to hypothesis 3b, there was no support. While the odds of Latino youth joining gangs is diminished by concentrated neighborhood disadvantage, the effect was not fully mediated.

In terms of disentangling disadvantage, race-ethnicity, and gang membership, this study was fruitful in two ways. To start with, the influence of concentrated disadvantage in underclass neighborhoods drives gang membership In fact, had I not tested for variation within the continuum of neighborhood disadvantage, I might have concluded that the impact on youth

involvement with gangs is incremental. Instead, the results of this study reveal that the influence of concentrated disadvantage is dichotomous – i.e., underclass areas versus all others. This finding is not wholly surprising, given the historical and contemporary emphasis on the ills of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods (see e.g., Thrasher [1927] 1963; Shaw and McKay [1942] 1969; Wilson 1996, 2002). As spelled out in much of the extant literature, underclass neighborhoods are dramatically different from other locales because of social disorganization and social isolation. While other studies show that the impact of community disadvantage has stepwise effects, where each unit of disadvantage equals an increase in poor outcomes (e.g., more violence or more homicides; see Fox, Lane, and Akers 2010), this pattern is not the case for the youth in this sample. That is, even youth in neighborhoods with medium levels of disadvantage did not risk higher rates of gang membership just because they live in areas that may be transitioning into instability. The suggestion here is not that scholars should ignore the outcomes of youth in declining neighborhoods, but rather these results provide evidence of the increasing importance of carefully considering the life chances of youth in the poorest neighborhoods – at least in terms of understanding the upward spike in gang membership.

Another important facet of this study is the clarification it offers on how race-ethnicity is differentially related to gang membership. The results of this study suggest that, even though African Americans are more disadvantaged in terms of family socioeconomic status and neighborhood location, concentrated neighborhood disadvantage explains divergent patterns of gang involvement compared to whites. In other words, if it were not for the social disorganization that accompanies high levels of concentrated disadvantage, the proportion of African Americans joining gangs would be comparable to the rates for whites. Interestingly, the same is not true for Latinos. Even when holding constant concentrated neighborhood disadvantage, Latinos are more likely than African Americans and whites to report gang membership. That is, although African Americans and Latinos share minority status in the U.S., the process shaping the probability of gang membership is different and only partially explained in the social disorganization inherent in

concentrated neighborhood disadvantage. However, the minority experience of Latino youth may vary in at least one that may demarcate them from their African American counterparts.

In addition to economic stressors (e.g., neighborhood disadvantage and low family socioeconomic status) which may be encountered by youth regardless of race-ethnicity, Latinos must also struggle with identity in American society. Calabrese and Noboa (1995) found that Latino high school students who feel caught between their status as Americans and their Hispanic ethnicity are more likely to join gangs to gain a sense of community and to clarify issues of identity. In a recent representative survey, the Pew Hispanic Research Center (2010) reported that nearly two-thirds of all Latinos reported that they feel they are discriminated against because of their ethnicity. Latinos also reported fears of widespread targeting by law enforcement, given the growing debates around the country about illegal immigration and the perceived view that Latinos are not Americans but rather interlopers with the attached stereotype of dangerous and criminal. Therefore, if Latino youth are more likely than most to experience concentrated neighborhood disadvantage compounded by having to deal with issues of identity not heaped on others, the complexities and pressures associated with everyday life for Latinos may in some way be connected to the greater likelihood of gang membership. This line of reasoning is not meant to dismiss the struggles of African Americans or low income whites; instead, the purpose is to point out that the Latino experience may simply differ in ways that net higher rates of gang membership.

Notwithstanding the strengths of this study, the results are limited in a few respects. First, while the rates of gang involvement in these data are similar to the rates reported in other national data (see e.g., U.S. Justice Department 2011), little else is known about each respondent's level of involvement (e.g., gang leader or peripheral member) or the type of gang (e.g., localized neighborhood gang or one with national or regional reach). Such distinctions may be important because other research in this area has indicated that various community attributes (e.g., smaller geographic spaces) are more important for the development of violent youth gangs

versus other types of gangs (cf. Tita, Cohen, and Engberg 2005). Second and related to the first point, we cannot overlook that decisions to join gangs may be somewhat more multifaceted than our models indicate. Our general measure of gang membership tells us little about the decision-process that youth encountered in making the decision to join a gang. While no dataset or study can cover every possibility, measures that capture family histories of gang involvement, pressure from peers to join a gang, and perceived benefits of gang membership may have further illuminated the findings in this study.

Third, similar to other studies, I defined the neighborhood by census blocks (see e.g., Teasdale and Silver 2009). While this type of measurement is more specific than census tracts or county level data, other research indicates that individual perceptions in addition to objective location have important implications for attitudes and behaviors (cf. Christie-Mizell and Erickson 2007). Other studies should incorporate individuals' views of neighborhood functioning to see whether such views either have main effects or moderate the influence of concentrated neighborhood disadvantage on gang membership. For instance, encapsulated in social disorganization theory is that there is not enough supervision for youth to prevent delinquent acts and gang formation. Such a measure that queries whether there is enough adult supervision in the neighborhood might have important implications for the current study.

In conclusion, prior research has established that concentrated neighborhood disadvantage and the resulting social disorganization are related to gang membership (Andresen 2006; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997; Sampson and Groves 1989). This work both confirms and extends existing research by examining how the relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and gang involvement varies by race-ethnicity. The findings show that the difference in rates of gang membership between African Americans and whites is explained by concentrated neighborhood disadvantage. The Latino-white gap is only partially explained by neighborhood conditions. Finally, the results also show that life in underclass neighborhoods predict gang membership more so than other types of communities. Future work in this area

should continue to assess how various neighborhood conditions impact residents' involvement in gangs. Further, while I purposely restricted this study to the three largest racial-ethnic groups in the U.S. – African Americans, Latinos, and whites – other research should expand the current focus to incorporate other groups (e.g., Native Americans and Asians) as well as intra-ethnic differences. Work of this nature is important not only because it elucidates the processes that shape gang membership, but also because of its implications for the larger body of work which seeks to understand how social disorganization differentially shapes the life chances for entire communities and groups.

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