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**CRIME, CRIMINALITY, AND GANGS**

by

Trina Louise Hope

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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GRADUATE COLLEGE

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## ABSTRACT

This project attempts to clarify the relationships between gang membership, crime, and criminality. It begins by introducing the distinction between crime and criminality, and analyzing criminological theory using this distinction. Next, it describes how these same theories view the role of social institutions like family, school, and peers. It also explores more substantive/methodological questions concerning gang membership. Using survey data obtained from gang and non-gang youth, the characteristics that distinguish gang from non-gang youth are discovered, along with the theoretical and policy implications of these distinctions. Measures of crime and criminality, as well as variables relating to family, school, and peers will be used to discover which traits distinguish gang from non-gang youth. Finally, a methodological concern is addressed when the reliability and validity of data provided by gang youth is compared to that provided by non-gang youth.

## CHAPTER 1

### The Nature of Crime, Criminality, and Gangs

In recent years, the topic of gangs and their relationship to crime has been of major interest to the public and the media, as well as to researchers in the field of criminology. Gangs provide researchers with a unique combination of important issues: the nature of crime, the nature of offenders, the relationship between crime and criminality, and the divergent ways various criminological theories view crime and criminality. Many current criminological theories were derived from gang research. Miller and Cohen argue:

Subculture, strain, opportunity, and conflict theories of crime and delinquency are supported, to differing bounds, by gang derived data. Some of criminology's central theorems are gleaned from these theories: *delinquency is learned through interactions with others and most often occurs in group context.* (1996:4)

This project attempts to clarify the relationships between gang membership, crime, and criminality, and to systematically explore the assumption that "delinquency is learned through interactions with others". I will begin by introducing the distinction between crime and criminality, and analyzing criminological theory using this distinction. Next, I will describe how these same criminological theories view the role of social institutions like family, school, and peer groups. How does each theory view these institutions with regard to their impact on crime, criminality, and gang membership? I will also explore more substantive/methodological questions concerning gang membership. Using survey data obtained from gang and non-gang youth, what characteristics

distinguish gang from non-gang youth, and what are the theoretical and policy-related implications of these distinctions? Measures of crime and criminality, as well as variables relating to family, schools, and peers will be used to discover which traits distinguish gang from non-gang youth. Finally, I will address a methodological concern: does research with gang members present a methodological challenge to reliability/validity? Does the reliability/validity of data provided by gang members differ from the reliability/validity of data provided by non-gang youth?

The theoretical analyses begin with the distinction between crime and criminality, and introduce a criminological theory that explicitly makes this distinction—self-control theory.

#### CRIME AND CRIMINALITY:

#### THE GANG FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SELF-CONTROL THEORY

Traditionally, the study of gangs has been the study of delinquency. “Delinquency” has typically included both delinquent or criminal acts and the tendencies of individuals to engage in such behavior. In 1983, Hirschi and Gottfredson suggested that age has a direct effect on crime—one that is invariant across time, culture, sex, race, and various criminal acts. In a follow-up piece, Hirschi and Gottfredson (1986) introduced the distinction between crime and criminality as a way of solving some of the problems introduced by their age-crime argument. Here they noted that the tendency to engage in crime remains stable, even though criminal behavior follows the age-crime curve. This

distinction between crime (behavior) and criminality (tendency) is important in understanding the relationship between gang membership and delinquency. Does the gang influence its members' tendencies to engage in crime, their actual criminal behavior, both, or neither? First, I will define crime and criminality, then explore in more detail the tenets of control theory and how it can contribute to the discussion of gangs.

Crimes are acts or events involving situations, people, and opportunity. Crimes are defined as acts of force or fraud undertaken in the pursuit of self-interest (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). By exploring what we know about crime; what crimes are most common, who engage in crimes, and how crimes occur, we can better understand how gangs may influence them.

We can begin by looking at the most common crimes experienced. A good source for discovering the most common crimes is the National Crime Victimization Survey (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1994), a nationally representative, yearly survey of American households asking each member twelve and older what crimes they have experienced in the last year. Crimes in this survey are limited to personal and household crimes. Personal crimes include crimes of violence such as rape, robbery, and assault; and crimes of theft such as larceny with contact, and larceny without contact. Household crimes include burglary, household larceny, and motor vehicle theft. From the numbers of annual victimizations in each of these categories, one obvious pattern emerges: the most common crimes experienced by Americans are

property crimes. Within the personal sector, 65% of all crimes are crimes of theft, compared to the 35% described as violent crimes. In terms of overall victimizations, violent crimes account for only 20%. Within the violent crime category, attempted crimes outnumber completed crimes 1.7 to 1.

When examining the risk of victimization, the rates per 1,000 persons age 12 and older are: 32 for violent crimes, 59 for crimes of theft, and 152 for household crimes. These data again show that most victimizations are property crime rather than violent crime, and that most crime does not involve contact with the offender. Another important point worth noting—victimization surveys only include crimes where someone was a victim. If we look at arrests, the pattern mentioned above becomes even more dramatic. In 1990, for instance, there were nine million arrests. Of these, 80 percent were for crimes other than the eight index crimes (which are homicide, rape, aggravated assault, robbery, burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, and arson). More than one million were for driving under the influence, and 1.5 million were for drunkenness, disorderly conduct, and liquor law violations (Felson 1994).

Another important characteristic of most crime is its simple nature. Crimes do not require skill, planning, or intelligence. Almost anyone can figure out how to steal something from a self-serve store, to go into a home through an unlocked door or window, to drive off in an unlocked car with the keys left inside, or to steal money from a cash register (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Felson

1994). The idea that crime requires little skill or planning will be important when we talk about the characteristics of the typical offender.

One researcher who has studied crime as an event is Felson. He points out that for a predatory crime to occur, three elements must converge in time and space: a likely offender, someone with little to lose by engaging in crime; a suitable target, be it a wallet, a car, or someone's money; and the absence of capable guardians, anyone who discourages offenders (Felson 1994:31). When these three elements come together, a crime is likely to occur. When any one of these elements is missing, a crime is unlikely to occur. Felson's analyses remind us of the opportunistic nature of crime, that it tends to be behavior of the moment. This idea of opportunity is also important when looking at the likely victims of crime.

Because crime tends to be opportunistic activity, people generally victimize those they come into contact with in their normal routines. A large portion of violent crime particularly is between people who know one another. Rape, assault, and murder occur often between intimates—husbands, wives, girlfriends, or boyfriends. Routines, combined with characteristics of persons or settings, produce greater or lesser risk for crime. Thus activities that involve young men and alcohol are particularly risky. Engaging in delinquent behavior also puts one at risk for crime. Offenders are actually victimized at significantly higher rates than are non-offenders (Lauritsen et al. 1991).

If crimes are events, criminality is a characteristic of people. Gottfredson and Hirschi refer to criminality as the stable differences across individuals in the propensity to commit criminal acts: "Criminality may be defined as the tendency of the actor to seek short-term, immediate pleasure without regard for long-term consequences. From this definition it follows that crimes are activities contrary to law that satisfy this tendency" (1986:58). Two other concepts are important when describing criminality: stability and versatility.

The propensity to engage in criminal behavior is stable throughout the life course. Longitudinal research consistently shows a strong relationship between antisocial behavior at young ages and delinquency and criminality at later ages. In their reanalysis of the Glueck's data, Sampson and Laub (1993) show that tantrum-throwing three year olds were significantly more likely to be arrested as teens and adults than were their more good-natured counterparts. Many researchers have found evidence of the stability of deviant behavior over time (Loeber 1982; Huesmann et al. 1984; Caspi et al. 1989; Farrington 1989; Mischel et al. 1989; White et al. 1990). It is also important to note that antisocial tendencies in children are significantly predicted by such parental qualities as monitoring, discipline, and attachment (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Sampson and Laub 1993).

Not only is criminality a stable trait, it tends to be exhibited in versatility within individual offenders. We often label offenders by the most serious crime they have committed—we call them burglars, rapists, or murderers. Empirical

research, however, has not found evidence of specialization. Most offenders engage in a variety of offenses, taking advantage of the criminal opportunities present in the environment (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Britt 1994). Not only are individuals versatile in their offending patterns, those who engage in crime tend also to engage in other behavior sharing traits with crime—behavior that is rewarding in the short term, but costly over time. Examples of such behavior include smoking, drinking, drug use, gambling, having children out of wedlock, and engaging in illicit sex (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990:98). Those with criminal propensities tend to be unsuccessful at endeavors that involve long-term commitments, such as marriage, parenthood, and careers.

Recognizing the nature of crime and criminality, along with stability and versatility, we can apply Gottfredson and Hirschi's concept of criminality to gangs. Gottfredson and Hirschi define criminality by low self-control, the differential tendency of people to avoid criminal acts whatever the circumstances in which they find themselves. Because crimes are simple, easy, and require little skill or planning, all humans are equally capable of seeing the benefits of crime without being taught. Not everyone, however, is capable of seeing the costs of criminal behavior, which tend to be more long-term. Nor does everyone have the forethought to see the long-term benefits of a conventional career compared to a life of crime.

Because law abiding behavior is taught by parents at early ages, peers should not play a major role in the causation of criminality. Instead, individuals

will choose friends that they resemble. For instance, individuals with low self-control will avoid situations that constrain behavior—school, work, and home usually entail supervision and discipline. So, those with low self-control go places where constraints on behavior are minimal, such as the streets. There they find others like themselves, individuals who are not particularly reliable, trustworthy, or thoughtful, but who are "more risk-taking, adventuresome, and reckless" (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990:157). Here peers are viewed as potential facilitators of criminal acts, not of the tendency to engage in crime.

Because self-control is dependent on child-rearing practices, and can be recognized before children are exposed to peer influences, it is doubtful that gangs influence the criminality of their members. And, if the gang exerts influence over the crime of its members, is this influence so different than that exerted by peer groups in general? Large numbers of boys are not particularly conducive to crime. What is the use of having a gang of 100 members when only five can fit into a car? More than a small group of gang members walking down the street will attract attention from both citizens and police, and a large number of individuals is not the ideal combination for crimes such as robbery, burglary, or drive-by shootings.

Control theory would not predict that peers will have no effect on crime. The presence of others changes the features of events, making certain behavior more likely to occur—behavior such as crime. Groups imply immunity from sanction; they diffuse and confuse responsibility for the act, and they shelter the

perpetrator from immediate identification and from the long-term risk of retribution (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990:209). Peers do not, however, create low self-control in one another, nor are they generally capable of teaching self-control to those who do not possess it.

Coming from the self-control perspective, we would predict that the gang will select its members from already delinquent youth (those with low self-control), that it may increase levels of delinquency, but that it will have little effect on criminality (the stable trait that existed before the gang, and persists after the gang has been left behind).

Peers and/or gangs do not play a major role in the causation of criminality (low self-control) in control theory. The family, however, plays an important role in both the level of self-control and the criminal behavior of its members.

According to control theories, socialization is not constant. Families differ in the amount of socialization they give to their children, and are given the most important role in criminality and crime. Crime does not need to be taught because everyone has the ability to see its benefits. What needs to be taught is an understanding of the costs associated with crime. When parents take the time to socialize their children, it is socialization that teaches them not to engage in antisocial behaviors. Parents who punish their children when they talk back, throw tantrums, and hit are less likely to have delinquent teenagers. Parents who do not socialize their children are more likely to have bratty toddlers, obnoxious elementary school children, and delinquent teenagers. Control

theorists also recognize the importance of variables such as attachment, supervision, and discipline for the prediction of criminality and crime.

Because it recognizes the importance of the family in criminality and crime, control theory does not face a major problem faced by strain and cultural deviance theories: the stability factor. If crime is caused by a recognition of one's position in the economic world (strain theory), or by the active socialization to delinquency by peers (cultural deviance theory), why do enduring differences in criminal tendencies appear before children understand their class position or before they interact with peers?

Control theory sees potential gang members as youth who have been raised in families that, for whatever reason, have not taught them to conform. They have not been taught to delay immediate rewards for more long term ones. They have not been taught to recognize the long-term costs of criminal behavior. Their low self-control behavior has been evident from an early age, and remains with them when they begin to choose their friends. They therefore choose to spend time with peers who are like them, other youth whose socialization has been ineffective. When they are together, the group dynamic creates opportunity for crime, and crime may occur. The motivation behind crime, however, is not group conformity, but immediate, simple, short-term gratification of desires.

Control theory also gives the school an important role in the prediction of crime and criminality. Before children start school, they already have tendencies

that predict success. School performance and school attachment are merely reflections of the stable underlying trait of self-control. Schools do not create criminality, nor can they really instill self-control in children who lack it. Without the cooperation of parents, it is difficult for schools to instill self-control, particularly when the children most in need of self-control are least likely to have parents who back up the school's teachings (Hirschi 1995). Given a choice between crime (rewarding immediately) and school success (rewarding only in the long-term), those with "here-and-now" orientations will choose crime

Those with low self-control will therefore be less likely to succeed in school, to like school, or to be interested in pursuing school past what is mandatory. The behavioral requirements of school are unlikely to appeal to them. Control theorists' views on the connection between schools, crime, and criminality will be further discussed later, when we review research exploring the connections between these three concepts.

Recognizing the distinction between crime and criminality is an important first step in understanding the effect that gang membership has on the behavior and tendencies of its members. Theories about gangs and their influence on behavior illustrate not only the importance of distinguishing between crime and criminality, but also shed light on a debate concerning crime—is it invented or is it acquired? Depending on how one views crime, the gang will play a very different role with regards to its potential effects on its members. In a discussion of the importance of the family and its relationship to crime, Hirschi (1995)

discusses this acquired-invented debate. On the one hand, if crime is invented, the gang will not play a major role in its causation:

If crime is invented, it is a device available to children as soon as they are capable of anticipating the immediate consequences of their acts...children (all children) enter the world capable of crime. They do not inherit crime...Nor need they learn crime. Crime presupposes no knowledge or skill that is not routinely available to all (1995:121-122).

What children do need to learn, according to Hirschi, is self-control—how to avoid the temptations associated with crime. Because self-control is learned (or not learned) at early ages, the family rather than the gang is the key for determining one's tendency and opportunity to engage in crime.

If, on the other hand, crime is learned, the family becomes "either irrelevant to crime or a force positively producing it. Academic versions of learning theory lean toward the idea that the family is basically neutral with respect to crime. Differences in criminality are a consequence of inadvertent differences in exposure to criminal influences outside the family (to gangs, peer groups, or the justice system)" (Hirschi 1995:122). From this perspective, the focus shifts away from families and toward the peer group, especially the gang. Those children unfortunate enough to fall in with the wrong kind of peer group are socialized to delinquent values and expectations. The gang provides both the tendency to engage in crime (by providing the motives) and the opportunity to engage in crime (by providing the techniques).

The implications of this debate concerning crime are especially salient when discussing gangs. Is the gang a socializing agent (the acquired argument)

or merely a context for behavior (the invention argument)? If crime is invented, we would expect gang members to influence each other's crime more than each other's criminality. But if crime is acquired, gang membership should influence both crime and criminality. The empirical analyses of this project will attempt to shed light on this debate using measures of gang membership, crime, and criminality. Before we begin these analyses, however, we need to return to the discussion of criminological theories. I have discussed control theory—its explicit distinction between crime and criminality, and how it views the social institutions of family, school, and peers. Next I will review other criminological theories to discover how gangs are described, how the crime/criminality distinction is dealt with, and how institutions are viewed.

#### THE GANG IN CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY

If the United States is a nation of immigrants, American cities are doubly so, repeatedly absorbing waves of settlers from rural areas as well as people altogether new to the country. This repeated mixing, which continues to the present day, raises questions about the basis of community and its ability to control and socialize its children. Three theoretical perspectives have grown up around these issues—social disorganization, cultural deviance, and strain theories. These theories vary dramatically in how they portray the gang's ability to influence criminal events and the tendency of individuals to engage in crime. They also describe and account for gangs and the behavior of their members in different ways. Establishing these differences is an important step in exploring

empirically these relationships. Additionally, an examination of how these three theories describe gangs—and the relationships between gangs, crime, and criminality—will give the reader a glimpse into the manner in which gangs have been described in both past and present research. The review will also give direction to the empirical analyses to come—i.e., which descriptions of gangs, crime, and criminality, as well as their relationships to family, school, and peers will be supported by the empirical analyses of this project? Like many discussions of gangs, we will begin with the work of Frederic Thrasher, and the social disorganization tradition.

### Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theories are generally neighborhood-level explanations of crime, theories describing neighborhoods that are conducive to gang formation. They begin with elements of control theory at the ecological level (some add concepts from cultural deviance theory as well). Thrasher (1927) argues that gangs emerge in impoverished communities characterized by physical deterioration, high mobility of residents, and disorganization. These characteristics create weak social controls, which free youth from the normal constraints of childhood. The institutions of such communities are unable to meet basic human needs, and gangs form in an attempt to create social organization where there is little or none. Because breakdowns in social control characterize such communities, we should expect those least supervised in the community (adolescent boys) to engage in more delinquent behavior. Thrasher

describes those who join gangs as those most free from the constraining effects of social controls.

Other researchers in the disorganization tradition begin with the idea that disorganized communities produce an environment conducive to crime and gang formation. Yablonsky, for instance, points out that Puerto Rican boys have 20 times higher delinquency rates in New York than they do in Puerto Rico, suggesting that neighborhood characteristics explain the existence of gangs better than individual characteristics (1962:173).

But we are left with the question of why certain boys in these neighborhoods join gangs, while others do not. Here Yablonsky points to social-psychological conditions of the individual gang member, and argues that those who join gangs are the more sociopathic boys from these disorganized neighborhoods. The gang becomes a means of need gratification for those incapable of using normal social channels for achievement. In Yablonsky's conception, the disorganization of neighborhoods combined with individual pathologies explain gang membership and gang violence.

Klein, a contemporary gang researcher, also combines neighborhood characteristics with individual ones. He describes individual characteristics of gang members, beginning with the assertion that before joining the group, these youth are already delinquent, "...data clearly demonstrate that even before joining, gang members were already somewhat more criminal than were non-gang joiners" (1995:25). The offending pattern of gang members tends to be

what Klein calls "cafeteria style," including thefts, vandalism, status offending, and minor assaults. He argues that the pattern of offending for gang members is similar to non-gang law breakers, but the numbers are just higher. Klein (like Yablonsky) provides a "minimal list" of individual characteristics describing those most likely to join gangs, including: low self-concept, admitted involvement in violence, defiance of parents, deficits in adult contacts, social disabilities or deficits, deficient school performance (both academic and disciplinary), limited repertoire of skills and interests, poor impulse control, early conduct disorder, early onset of delinquency, and perceptions of barriers to jobs and other opportunities (1995:80).

Other researchers have combined ideas of neighborhood disorganization with ideas about culture. Shaw and McKay (1942) and Vigil (1993; Vigil and Yun 1996) describe disorganized neighborhoods where control over youth is low. Shaw and McKay add elements of culture in the form of delinquent traditions learned by individual gang members from one another. Those who join gangs encounter an organization and traditions that exert pressure on members to conform to group behavior. These delinquent traditions produce high rates of delinquency. Vigil (1988, 1993; Vigil and Long 1990) describes Mexican-American gangs in Los Angeles, and argues that gangs select youth free from the controlling influences of family and school. Once in the gang, these youth are socialized into the culture of the gang, which places high value on friendship and low value on school, careers, authority, and police. This subculture

replaces traditional markers of success with those that can be achieved.

Because the theories of both Shaw and McKay and Vigil are neighborhood-level explanations, they do not explicitly predict which members of these disorganized neighborhoods will join gangs, and which will not.

Jackson (1997) focuses on the effects of demographic and economic transition on the organization of communities, and finds that declines in economic prospects for unskilled workers and the size of the population aged 15-24 are significant predictors of neighborhood gang prevalence. She concludes: "Urban decline, with its associated economic stress and social disorganization, may weaken the social cohesion and social control processes of cities" (1997:95).

As this discussion illustrates, social disorganization theories place great emphasis upon the institutions of society. The term "social disorganization" refers to the strength (or lack of) of the institutions of society—families, schools, community. From the disorganization perspective, the institutions of society, when working properly, function to control the deviant behavior of their members. When these institutions break down, members of the community who are normally constrained in their behavior (adolescents) are free to engage in crime/delinquency.

In social disorganization theories, the family is generally used as a proxy for neighborhood organization. One of the distinguishing traits of disorganized neighborhoods is a breakdown in social control over young people. Families

represent the first and most effective controllers of children's behavior.

Thrasher, Shaw and McKay, and Klein all describe disorganized neighborhoods where families are unable to exert control over their children. Free from the controlling influence of families, youth spend more time on the street, and are more likely to join gangs and engage in delinquency. These disorganization theories, because they are neighborhood level explanations of crime, do not go into detail about the relationships between parents and children, and how these relationships affect crime. The important characteristic here is that families are not organized enough to control the criminal behavior of their members.

When discussing the importance of school, social disorganization theorists recognize that just as breakdowns in the family represent social disorganization, breakdowns in schools are another sign of this disorganization. If schools cannot control the behavior of their students, then both the school and the surrounding neighborhood are likely to experience more crime. The connection between families and schools is also worth noting because schools find it difficult to organize without the support of parents, and the disorganization of families predicts the criminality level of students entering schools. Generally neighborhoods with weak families have trouble maintaining strong schools. Although disorganization theories describe neighborhood characteristics of schools (i.e., disorganized), we can imagine that disorganized schools have more than their share of students who do not like school, do not do well in school, and who use school as another place to engage in crime. Similar to it's

view of families, disorganization theory sees the school as a conventional institution that when functioning properly helps to prevent crime.

In the social disorganization tradition, peers become important for the creation of crime after the social institutions of neighborhoods have failed. Children (boys particularly) who are free from the constraining effects of families, schools, and neighborhoods are also free to spend time on the streets and take up with delinquent peers. Shaw and McKay describe neighborhoods that experience this social disorganization, where adolescent boys are free to take up with delinquent peers, and where they are exposed to the tutelage of older boys who teach them the values and norms of the delinquent subculture. In this conception, peers are not the cause of crime, social disorganization is, but peers act as facilitators of criminal behavior through the delinquent subculture. Because social disorganization is an ecological level theory, it does not address the issue of criminality, which is a characteristic of individuals. It focuses primarily on the opportunities for crime opened up to members of communities when the controlling/socializing institutions of society are weakened. Yablonsky and Klein do include individual characteristics of gang members that can be viewed as "criminality", but without freedom from the constraints of social institutions created by social disorganization, such individual pathologies would be unlikely to result in gang formation.

Theorists like Thrasher, Yablonsky, Klein, Shaw and McKay, and Vigil all begin their descriptions of gangs by focusing on disorganization at the

neighborhood level. Some then go on to describe individual characteristics of gang members. In contrast, cultural deviance theorists do not concern themselves with the characteristics of neighborhoods, but with the content of culture.

### Cultural Deviance Theory

In disorganized areas, families, schools, churches, and neighborhoods are unable to command the allegiance or control the behavior of juveniles. Those who believe that human behavior, even criminal behavior, is primarily social are therefore forced to look elsewhere for the sources of the behavior of adolescents. It is thus no accident that they traditionally find these sources in the peer group or gang. The most influential theory of mid-century, Sutherland's (1947) theory of differential association, although not particular to gangs, is appropriate for our purposes because it gives the peer group the most important role in the creation of delinquent behavior. He describes criminal behavior as learned in interactions with intimate groups that provide the motivation and techniques for crime. If one's interactions with these small groups result in an excess of definitions favorable to law violation, then delinquency will occur. Because this theory relies on the notion that crime must be actively taught and learned rather than invented, it suggests that gangs will increase the tendency of individuals to engage in crime. According to such a model, crime is learned in precisely the same manner as any other skill, be it medicine, law, or teaching. Gang membership provides the necessary conditions for delinquency to occur,

and individual characteristics are not as important as group definitions.

Accordingly, Akers's (1973) version of learning theory predicts gang behavior to entail that which has been positively reinforced in the past, and focuses on differential associations, definitions, differential reinforcements, and imitation.

Overall, theories in this vein would predict that individuals with delinquent peers, be they gang members or not, will be at risk for delinquency. Additionally, if crime is learned, we would expect gang members to specialize (we all learn some skills better than we learn others), to continue to engage in the same types of crime or delinquency over time (why give up a good thing?), and to exhibit attitudes consistent with a delinquent belief system.

Accordingly, Horowitz (1983) argues that the Hispanic culture in Los Angeles is organized around two codes: the expressive code of personal and family honor and the instrumental code of the American Dream of success through hard work and education. Boys in lower-class Mexican-American neighborhoods sometimes defend their honor through violence: "This situation is particularly critical to men who do not have a history of personal accomplishments or who cannot draw on valued social roles to protect their self-esteem when they are confronted by an insulting action" (1983:81). So, in Horowitz's version of cultural deviance theory, the cultural frameworks of honor and manhood result in criminal and violent behavior, and we would expect those with the most deficiencies to respond to threats to honor with violence.

In the same vein, Jankowski (1991) argues that slum communities are marked by intense competition and conflict over scarce resources. Gang members are characterized by defiant individualism, which includes such traits as competitiveness, mistrust/wariness, self-reliance, social isolation, a survival instinct, a Social Darwinist world view, and a defiant air. Individuals with these traits make a rational decision based on their situation. If they see the gang as having potential benefits, they will join. Those who do not join are individuals who see no personal advantage in doing so, and those the gang does not want. Jankowski further describes gang members:

A great range of individuals are in gangs, but the vast majority are quite intelligent and are capable of developing and executing creative enterprises...The vast majority of gang members are quite energetic and eager to acquire many of the same things that most members of American society want: money, material possessions, power, and prestige (1991:312).

Other researchers have presented images of gangs as organized, entrepreneurial entities with heavy profit motives. Taylor (1989, 1990) discusses corporate gangs, whose primary goals are money-making, where promotion is based on merit, discipline is military-like, and organization is similar to that of a successful business enterprise. Taylor gives an example of such a Fortune 500-like gang, one where 30 of the 42 members were killed, maimed, or imprisoned—a fate not particularly familiar to Fortune 500 company employees (for more on gangs as organized enterprises, see also Padilla (1993)).

As this discussion illustrates, cultural deviance theorists do not explicitly distinguish between crime and criminality. The tendency to engage in crime and crime itself are both called “delinquency” and stem from a socialization process that provides youth with both the motivation and the means to engage in delinquent behavior. Learning theories become interested in youth only in the time period immediately preceding and during their “delinquent career”—largely ignoring the findings concerning stability. Because it is difficult to argue that three year old children can possess an “excess of definitions favorable to law violation”, learning theorists generally ignore research showing that stable differences between children can be detected at such young ages. Without a clear distinction between the tendency to engage in crime and the actual criminal act, one must ignore children before they reach the age at which they can fall in with delinquent peers—which also means ignoring important behavioral predictors of future crime at a time when intervention may not be too late.

Because theories in this perspective view crime and criminality as interchangeable and see crime as learned rather than invented, it is not surprising that the role played by the institutions of family, school, and peers differs from the role these same institutions play in self-control and social disorganization theories.

In cultural deviance theories, families are viewed differently depending on the specific theorist. In Miller’s (1958) depiction of lower-class families, parents

pass on the traditions of lower-class culture to their children. Miller argues that lower-class neighborhoods are not disorganized, they are merely organized around a different set of concerns than are middle-class neighborhoods. In this conception, parents actively teach their children (sons especially) to be delinquent through socialization to a value orientation unique to the lower-class. If Miller's descriptions are true, we would expect that parents of delinquents spend as much time and effort socializing their children as the parents of non-delinquents, but the content of that socialization will differ.

Sutherland's view gives families minimal responsibility for the delinquency of their members. Children may learn delinquent patterns of behavior from family members, but mostly his focus is on characteristics of families that push their children toward contact with delinquent values outside the home.

"...children of the same age and sex are more important than parents in presenting patterns of behavior, whether the patterns are delinquent or anti-delinquent" (Sutherland and Cressey 1960:225). When describing how youth become delinquents, Sutherland mentions contact with "intimate groups" who teach delinquent motives and techniques. These intimate groups are peers. Not much is said about what children's criminal tendencies are like before they come into contact with delinquent peers, or how they end up in conventional versus non-conventional peer groups.

Sutherland also describes families that are "neutral" toward delinquency. These families do not warn their children about the existence of delinquent

subcultures, and when they venture out into the world, they are unprepared to resist the socialization provided by peers. What Sutherland fails to recognize is that families are rarely "neutral" with regards to criminal behavior. By ignoring the similarity between delinquent behavior and such behavior as tantrum throwing, talking back, and grabbing toys from other children (as well as differing parental responses to such behavior), Sutherland fails to recognize the influence families have on the delinquent behavior of their children—behavioral patterns that can be recognized before children start school, and that remain throughout life. In differential association/learning theories, children are only interesting when they are old enough to have delinquent peers. Any learning that does or does not take place before then seems to be dismissed as inconsequential. Sutherland's descriptions remind one of a Charlie Brown cartoon: The voices of adults are garbled background noise, and the only important interactions are those that occur between peers.

Cultural deviance theorists also view schools differently from control theories. Recall our discussion of Miller's (1958) theory of lower-class culture. One of the lower-class culture's "focal concerns" that parents actively teach their children (boys), is the concept of "smartness". This smartness does not, however, refer to academic success, which is a pursuit of "suckers". Lower class boys learn to value street smartness, the ability to outwit and con others, and avoid being conned themselves. Part of lower-class culture, according to Miller, is a disinterest in and dismissal of academic success as a worthwhile goal.

Miller would predict that all delinquents, particularly lower-class delinquents, should show little or no respect for the middle-class goals of education. This would include, of course, gang members.

Sutherland's version of cultural deviance theory does not mention traits of individual youth that predict success in school, but sees the school as merely another facilitator of contacts with peers, and the delinquent subculture. In his conception, schools influence crime "through the effects which school activities have on the students' associations with delinquent and anti-delinquent patterns" (Sutherland and Cressey 1960:250). Children who live in high crime areas, where the delinquent subculture is alive and well, are sent to schools filled with potential socializers to these behavioral patterns. Sutherland also discusses the link between school failure and crime, but does not explain this connection by traits of the individual, but with traits of the delinquent subculture. Youth who learn delinquent patterns are more likely to drop out of school, which further exposes them to the delinquent subculture. Socialization to delinquent behavior patterns does not include socialization to success in school. School merely becomes a place where youth can fall in with delinquent peer groups and be taught the motives, techniques, and rationalizations necessary for becoming a delinquent. In Sutherland's conception of becoming a delinquent, we would not expect delinquent youth to be incapable of learning, since they have learned crime quite easily. Delinquents should be just as good at learning as youth who

do enjoy school. Learning abilities are the same, the content of what is learned differs.

In cultural deviance theories, the institutions of family and school do not play key roles in the delinquency of youth. The most important influence on the lives of children from this perspective is the peer group. In social disorganization and self-control theories, peers act as facilitators of crime, but not creators of criminality. In cultural deviance theories, peers actually create the motivation required for crime to occur.

The theory that gives peers the most important role in the creation of criminality and crime is Sutherland's differential association theory. Sutherland's view of human nature is that we are incapable of inventing crime, and must always be taught the motives, rationalizations, and techniques of crime. This teaching comes primarily from peers. As mentioned earlier, families and schools can have slight influences on criminality because they may provide the opportunity to fall in with delinquent peers, but the bulk of the "learning to be a delinquent" process comes from interactions with peers. Youth whose contacts with delinquent groups come earlier, and whose contacts are more frequent and intense are most likely to learn delinquent patterns of behavior. Whatever learning has gone on before children have delinquent peers is not of particular interest to this theory. Peers are capable of socialization that surpasses the ability of parents or schools. Peers create the tendency to engage in crime, and

influence the commission of criminal acts. Differential association theories give peers the primary role in the creation of criminality and crime.

Learning theories base the behavior of delinquents on their ideas about life and manhood, ideas passed from group to individual virtually regardless of the setting in which they are located. Another group of theories assumes that ideas cannot be so out of touch with reality, especially in the harsh economic reality of the immigrant slum.

### Strain Theory

When discussing gangs, strain theorists focus primarily on the delinquency of lower-class boys, arguing that everyone in America wants the same thing—material success. Not everyone in America, however, has equal access to this success. This gap between what we all desire and what we cannot all achieve results in strain. Cohen (1955) suggests that strain results from lower-class socialization, which predicts school failure, and frustration. Boys who fail in school respond by forming gangs organized around activities in which everyone can successfully participate—“nonutilitarian, malicious, and negativistic” (1955:25) crime.

Cloward and Ohlin (1960) focus on differential opportunity. Like their middle-class peers, lower-class boys have high aspirations, but see that their access to such goals is blocked. They feel strain as a sense of injustice and respond by forming specialized gangs. Depending on the type of community they live in and their individual abilities, they form criminal, conflict, or retreatist

gangs (for a similar analysis of gangs in different types of slum neighborhoods, see Spergel (1964)). In this conception, delinquent groups specialize in certain behaviors. Prescriptions, norms, and rules of conduct define the activities of full-fledged members. If this description is correct, we should be able to distinguish gang members from non-members by specialized behavior that is a requirement of membership. We should also be able to differentiate between members of the criminal gangs (rational, intelligent boys who focus exclusively on activities that make money), the conflict gangs (violent boys who are not smart enough for membership in the criminal gangs, but who gain status through fighting with other gangs), and retreatist gangs (boys who are neither smart nor tough, who gain status by successfully getting drunk or high).

Contemporary strain theorists (Moore 1993; Hagedorn 1994; Fagan 1996) provide descriptions of gangs that differ little from those of Cohen or Cloward and Ohlin. Their primary focus is on lower-class youth who form gangs (and sell drugs) as an adaptation to inequality and poverty.

Like cultural deviance theorists, strain theorists do not explicitly distinguish between crime and criminality. The phenomena of strain is the variable predicting who will or not be pushed into crime, so can be viewed as criminality. But because strain is a positivistic/deterministic theory, crime inevitably results from criminality. Those who experience strain will respond by engaging in crime. Self-control theory recognizes that individuals can have low self-control, but not engage in crime if external controls are in place or if the

offender simply decides not to engage in the crime. In cultural deviance and strain theories, criminal behavior is the inevitable result of criminality—whether criminality is conceptualized as attitudes favorable toward law violation or the feeling of strain. Like cultural deviance theories, strain theory also tends to ignore children before they reach school age. It is difficult to argue that pre-school children understand their place in the economic world, and they have not yet experienced the strain-producing school environment, so it becomes difficult to use strain to account for the stable differences that exist between children before they begin school. Again, if theories do not contain a concept of criminality, or have one that can only exist contemporary to delinquent behavior, they struggle to account for the early and varied manifestations of a general tendency toward deviant behavior.

Unlike social disorganization and control theories, strain theories do not focus on social institutions as barriers to gang membership or delinquency. In fact, social institutions are often described as pushing youth into crime. For example, in strain theory the importance of families comes through social class. The child's family determines his or her social class, which in turn produces strain, which produces delinquency. When families are mentioned, they are contributors to delinquency rather than barriers against it. Cohen (1955), for example, portrays lower-class parents as actively socializing their children to be lower-class (this is where we see strain theory mixed with elements of cultural deviance). Unlike middle-class families, who prepare their children for success

in school through their “rational, deliberate, and demanding” (1955:98) parenting style, lower-class parents are “easygoing and permissive” (p. 99-100), and do not teach their children to delay gratification in favor of long term goals. Lower class children, therefore, arrive in school already behind their middle-class peers. Failure in school leads to strain, which leads inevitably to gang membership and delinquency.

Both cultural deviance and strain theories assume that socialization is non-problematic. Both see socialization of children as constant across families, whether one is socialized by families or peers. The amount of socialization is the same, what differs is the content of the socialization. Rather than parents teaching their children not to be delinquent, peers teach one another how to be delinquent. Both cultural deviance and strain theories either implicate families in the active, purposeful creation of criminality, or leave them out of the picture entirely.

When it comes to schools, strain theorists argue that academic experiences actually contribute to the crime of lower-class youth. Cohen argues that lower-class youth are ill-prepared for school because they have parents who socialize them according to lower-class rather than middle-class standards. Because their parents have been lax and permissive, rather than rational and deliberate like middle-class parents, lower-class children arrive at school unable to compete:

Overall, the learning experience of lower-class males leaves them ill-prepared to compete in a world gauged by a *middle-class measuring rod*. Deficiencies are most noticeable in the classroom, where working-class youth are frequently overshadowed and belittled by their middle-class counterparts. Turning to membership in a delinquent gang is but a normal adaptation to status frustration resulting from clashing cultures (Miller and Cohen 1996:8).

Cloward and Ohlin (1960) also implicate the school in the creation of crime. In their conception, school success is held up as a legitimate avenue for upward mobility. Even if lower-class boys do well in school, as they have been initially socialized to do, they still realize that opportunities for upward mobility are not equally distributed. Blocked opportunities lead to strain (felt as a sense of injustice), which in turn leads to the formation of criminal, conflict, and retreatist gangs. The criminal gangs in particular are full of rational, intelligent young men who have ambitions to achieve middle-class success, but who are forced to pursue these goals through professional theft, number running, fencing, and bookmaking. According to strain theory, gang boys should therefore be highly ambitious youth who would like to achieve success legitimately, but recognize their position in the economic world, and therefore have low expectations to go along with their high aspirations. What was striven for but not attained through school (success, conformity), is sought through delinquency, particularly delinquency committed with the approval of fellow gang members.

In strain theory, class is the first and most important predictor of criminality and crime. Lower-class youth are exposed to the middle-class goals

of material success through education and hard work. They do not, however, have the ability to attain these goals through legitimate means. Due to their inability to compete in school (Cohen), or to differential opportunities (Cloward and Ohlin), lower-class boys are strained, and this strain pushes them into delinquent groups. Once in the groups, they learn the rules and behaviors required for group membership, whether it is malicious, nonutilitarian behavior; rational, deliberate money-making crime; fighting, or escape through drugs. Like social disorganization theories, in strain theory peers play a facilitating role in the creation of delinquency. Strain is the motivation behind crime (the cause of criminality), but peers facilitate criminal acts, and provide instruction, companionship, and understanding.

The distinction between crime and criminality is a helpful tool in thinking about gangs and their potential effects on their members, as well as providing a unique way of approaching criminological theories. Hopefully the analyses portion of this project will further our understanding of these issues. Before we begin discussing data, however, a review of present gang research is warranted. How have researchers approached the study of gangs, and what have they found?

## THE GANG IN DELINQUENCY RESEARCH

Gangs and their members have been a part of delinquency research for many years. The discussion below will describe the research efforts of various

theorists in their studies of gangs, beginning with social disorganization theorists.

Early social disorganization theorists, like Thrasher and Shaw and McKay, studied the characteristics of neighborhoods. Shaw and McKay used now-famous maps of various cities (beginning with Chicago) that showed concentric circles drawn out from the center of the city. They found that the neighborhoods closest to the industrial center of large cities experienced both the highest crime rates, and the most community disorganization. They used these data to describe neighborhood characteristics that are associated with crime and disorganization.

Klein, like others in the social disorganization tradition, uses neighborhood-level measures of crime and disorganization. He also includes individual characteristics, using data obtained from interviews with gang members, community members, and police (1995). Much of the data he used to describe gang members in the 1960's were collected by detached street workers, who were assigned to individual gangs (1971). Most of the work from the social disorganization perspective has been empirically based—using ecological or survey data.

In contrast to the research of social disorganization theorists, much of the gang research conducted by cultural deviance theorists has been ethnographic. For example, Horowitz (1983) spent time with one gang in the Chicano section of Chicago, collecting ethnographic data on the gang and its members. Jankowski

(1991) reports spending ten years hanging out with gangs in Los Angeles, New York, and Boston. He collected data through participant observation—even proving his loyalty to the gangs by fighting with the members to earn access into the group!

There has been some attempt at systematic comparison of gang and non-gang youth in the cultural deviance tradition. Short and Strodtbeck (1965) compared lower-class boys (both gang and non-gang) to middle-class boys in an attempt to test the assumptions of cultural deviance theory (they also searched for the specialized gangs referred to by Cloward and Ohlin, but were unable to find them). Short and Strodtbeck found that lower-class boys, both gang and non-gang, evaluated lower-class images higher than did middle-class boys. But they also found that all boys (black, white, lower-class, middle-class, gang, non-gang) evaluated images representing salient features of a middle-class lifestyle equally high. They found no evidence that gang boys or lower-class boys evaluated any of the lower-class images significantly higher than any of the middle-class images.

When examining work from the strain tradition, we find that neither Cohen (1955) nor Cloward and Ohlin (1960) provide any data to back up their descriptions of gangs and their members. Simons and Gray (1989), in a test of Cloward and Ohlin's opportunity theory, failed to find class or race differences with respect to perceived opportunity to achieve the job their 2,437 respondents desired.

Hagedorn, a contemporary strain theorist who studies gangs, has published research using interviews with 47 gang members in Milwaukee (1988). A 1993 article used data from interviews with 101 gang members. Moore, another contemporary gang researcher in the strain tradition, interviewed former gang members from two Los Angeles gangs (1991). As adults, these former members supplied Moore with data describing their experiences in gangs.

As this discussion has shown, there is still need for more systematic theory-driven research that further illuminates the nature of gangs and their members. There has, however, been some research attempting to systematically study gangs.

## THE NATURE OF GANGS

The first and most obvious characteristic of gangs is that they are groups. Definitions of gangs abound, from some police organizations who define a gang as three or more individuals coming together to commit an illegal act, to academics, who define gangs using all kinds of requirements. Some include delinquency in their definitions of gangs (Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Esbensen and Huizinga 1993; Klein 1995), while others argue that including delinquency in the definition does not allow exploration of the relationship between gang membership and delinquency (Morash 1983; Ball and Curry 1995, Winfree et al. 1997). A typical academic definition is provided by Klein, who defines gangs as groups possessing a criminal orientation, self-recognition ("...based principally, although not solely, on the group's collective criminal or delinquent orientation"

(1995:30)), and recognition by the community of the group as a gang. How the gang is defined often depends on the researcher's purpose: to merely describe gangs—their organization, cohesion, and activities; to compare gang to non-gang youth; or to try to wade through the actual relationships between gang membership, crime, and criminality. The operational definition of gang should reflect the goals of the research being conducted. We will return to this issue in detail in Chapter 2.

Various research agendas have taught us some things about gangs. They are groupings of individuals who define themselves as a distinct entity—often with a name. Gang members are mostly juveniles, and mostly male (Esbensen and Huizinga 1993; Winfree and Mays 1996; Winfree et al. 1997). Gangs are more likely to form in disorganized neighborhoods, poor areas experiencing breakdowns in the major institutions of the community (Shaw and McKay 1942; Klein 1995; Jackson 1997). Using the longitudinal Denver Youth Survey, Esbensen and Huizinga (1993), find that even in high-crime, disorganized neighborhoods, the majority of youth (about 93%) are not in gangs. Membership in the gang is short-lived, most are members for a year or less (the most common age of gang members in their data is 14). Some gang theorists have suggested that shifts in economic opportunities in inner cities have increased the length of time in the gang, and therefore increased the average age of gang members (i.e., lack of economic opportunities result in the failure of older members to mature out of the gang) (Rosenbaum 1983; Spergel 1983;

Hagedorn 1988; Klein and Maxson 1989; Leet et al. 1997). In his test of this theory, however, Lasley failed to find support for the “aging” of gang members. “Gang membership peaks between 16-17 and tends to decline monotonically thereafter—irrespective of class differences” (1997:107). He concludes, “Race and SES do not condition the length of time one spends in a street gang” (p. 109).

Esbensen and Huizinga also find that while in the gang, the delinquency of members increases. Gang members are, however, more delinquent than their non-gang peers before and after their time in the gang (see also Thornberry et al. 1993; and Winfree et al. 1994). Additionally, research comparing youth asked to join a gang to those not asked to join shows delinquency to be a major distinction (Johnstone et al. 1983). Reyes and Jason, in their comparison of succeeding and failing Hispanic students at an inner city high school, found the invitation for gang membership to be their most predictive variable distinguishing high- and low-risk categories of students (1993:68). In their profile of juvenile street gang members, Friedman et al. (1975) found that poor family relationships preceded and predisposed youth to gang affiliation and delinquency.

Although much research shows gang membership to predict high rates of crime/delinquency, it is not always a significant predictor of future misbehavior. Lattimore et al.’s (1995) research predicting re-arrest among a cohort of 1,949 youthful parolees did not find gang membership to be a significant predictor of

future arrest (the best predictor among their variables was level of institutional violence).

Perhaps gang membership better distinguishes criminal behavior when comparing gang to non-gang youth in the general population than when comparing gang to non-gang delinquents. Chesney-Lind et al. compared youth defined as gang members by police agencies to youth not defined as members—using arrest records. They first point out:

Law enforcement categories suggest that gang members are in a meaningful way distinct from other similar individuals engaged in criminal activities, and that gang members in turn share certain common characteristics. A similar premise underlies most social science research on the topic. A seeming consensus has existed that gang members are different; that gang members commit more crimes; and that their crimes are more serious, and more violent, than those of other offenders (1994:203).

The results of their research do not support the assumptions outlined above. When comparing the two groups, they found that non-gang youth were actually more (but not statistically significant) delinquent than youth identified by the police as gang members (measured by the number of property crime, violent crime, drug crime, and status offense arrests). Overall, self-identified gang members report committing more delinquent acts than delinquent non-gang youth, although there were many offenses where there were no differences. Chesney-Lind et al. conclude: "...the youth suspected of gang activity in Hawaii are not engaged in offenses that are stereotypically 'gang' offenses, namely the drug and weapons offenses—at least as far as arrests are concerned. Instead,

they appear to be chronic delinquent and criminal offenders; they are a concern, to be sure, but their existence should not occasion panic" (1994:222).

Membership in gangs tends to be blurry (Decker and Lauritsen 1996), initiation and dues are more the exception than the rule, and organization and cohesion are low (Klein 1995). Criminal activities include a wide range of behaviors, with little evidence that gang members specialize in specific crimes (Fagan 1989, 1996; Esbensen and Huizinga 1993; Klein 1995). When speaking of specialization, a popular notion is that gangs control, or specialize, in drug distribution—especially crack cocaine, and especially in response to economic strain. This relationship, however, is not found when the issue is systematically studied. Even using data obtained from police records, Klein et al. (1997) failed to find evidence of significant gang involvement in drug sales. "There is little evidence, certainly, that gang membership brings anything specific to the crack trade" (1997:284). They also examined gang, non-gang, and drug, non-drug homicides and conclude: "The drug-homicide connection, to judge from all four of the above comparisons, is not basically a gang phenomenon" (p. 296) (see also Fagan: "There is little evidence that gang members have become involved in drug selling more than non-gang adolescents" (1996:49); Block and Block 1993; Howell 1994). When they occur, drug sales by gang members are usually explained by economic strain—lower-class youth cannot find jobs and are pushed into drug sales by economic necessity. Another explanation, however, is

that crime and drug use/sales occur before, and interfere with, labor force entry and participation (Freeman 1992).

Winfree and Mays (1996) compared gang to non-gang youth, both institutionalized and free world. They found institutionalized gang members to be the most delinquent (whether measured by group context crime (gang fights, shootings), drug-related crimes, or general personal crimes), and free world non-gang youth to be the least delinquent. They found no significant differences between free world gang members and institutionalized non-gang youth for group context or drug-related crime, but did find differences for personal crimes (institutionalized non-gang youth had higher mean scores). They also found gang members (both institutionalized and free) to express more "pro-gang attitudes", measured by questions tapping approval/disapproval of a) having friends in gangs, b) being in a gang yourself, c) taking part in illegal gang activities like fights, and d) doing whatever gang leaders tell you. This relationship is not surprising, however, because a) and b) above are essentially proxies for gang membership itself. Winfree and Mays also found gang members to be primarily male, slightly older, and more likely to be Hispanic compared to non-gang youth.

In an earlier piece (1994), Winfree et al. used a variety of demographic and social learning variables to predict gang membership among a small sample of 9<sup>th</sup> graders in New Mexico. When all their variables are included in a regression model, having peers in a gang, and having "pro-gang attitudes"

(measured the same as above) are the only two significant predictors of gang membership. Again, results like these can be interpreted as support for learning theory (pro-gang attitudes predicting gang membership), or can be viewed merely as support for the idea that people tend to choose friends who are like them, and to exhibit attitudes consistent with their behavior (i.e., those who consider themselves gang members are likely to approve of gang membership for themselves and their friends).

In another study comparing gang to non-gang at risk youth (comparable on age, gender, race, educational attainment, work experience, and family status) Huff found gang members to be younger at the time of their first arrest and to have more arrests. They were also more likely to engage in deviant and non-supervised activities (hanging out, cruising, drug use, graffiti).

Other researchers who have compared gang to non-gang youth have found gang members to be at greater risk for violent victimization, and to have poor success in school (Sheldon et al. 1993). Gang members have also been found to have fewer prior court referrals, fewer drug referrals, fewer court appearances for property crimes and more appearances for fighting compared to matched non-gang youth (Zatz 1987). Fagan (1990) found the prevalence of self-reported delinquency higher among gang than non-gang youth, but when comparing incidence rates of gang compared to non-gang delinquents, found few differences for felony assault, minor assault, robbery, and extortion. He concludes: "The involvement of both gang and non-gang youths in serious

substance use and delinquency suggests that gangs are only one of several deviant peers groups in inner cities" (1990:209).

Research comparing gang to non-gang youth tends to show that gang members are more delinquent overall, but the magnitude and specifics of these differences varies considerably.

This discussion has shown that researchers use different techniques to study gangs. These different techniques seem to produce consistently different patterns in the findings of gang research. Those using ethnographic methods or informal face to face interviews portray gang members as spending much of their time engaging in violence. Decker, for instance, used a snowball sample of 99 active gang members in St. Louis, and concludes that gang members are highly violent individuals who are "beaten in" to the gang, and who fear for their lives if they attempt to leave: "The process of leaving the gang was also described in violent terms: by being 'beaten out', leaving through fear of violence, suffering serious injury, or death" (1996:252). One gang member provides this dramatic quote: "...in California you have to kill somebody to get out of the gang. You got to kill your mother or somebody like that to get out of it. I can't get out of it. I ain't killing my mother" (Decker and Lauritsen 1996:114). In a footnote, Decker gives us the real story: "Despite these claims, a sample of 24 ex-gang members gave little evidence that their exit was accompanied by violence" (1996:252). Decker asked gang members why the group they belong to can be described as a gang. A typical response of Decker's gang members was: "Violence I

guess...With a gang it's like fighting all the time, killing, shooting" (1996:253).

The stories gang members tell contradict what actually happens, even according to Decker. After supplying us with multiple quotes similar to the one above, with gang members describing their lives as one violent encounter after another, Decker says, "Such violent events are rare, but important in gang culture" (1996:256), and "Several gang members told us that attempts to paint over graffiti by rival gangs were met with a violent response, *but no gang members could recall a specific instance*" (italics mine, 1996:258). According to Decker's respondents, gang members seem to specialize in violence. Virtually all the responses given by gang members portray the activities of the gang as being organized around violence.

Studies using representative survey techniques tend to show gang members resembling non-gang offenders in their patterns of offending, even if their rates are higher. Esbensen and Huizinga note: "As reported by Fagan (1989), we found that all of the gangs were involved in what Klein (1984) has called 'cafeteria-style' delinquency" (1993:582). In contrast to Decker, who portrays gang membership as an intensely loyal, long-term commitment, Esbensen and Huizinga conclude:

Very few of the youths in the DYS survey reported being in a gang for more than one year. And, many of those youths in a gang indicated that they would like *not* to be a gang member and expected to leave the gang in the future. It appears that the majority of gang members are peripheral and transitory members who drift in and out of the gang (1993:582).

These differing results point to some key issues, one being representativeness. Interviews with gang members through contacts made on the street produce results quite different from those produced by systematically collected representative samples. How the information is collected also seems important. Informal interviews seem to produce results different from systematically administered surveys. It appears that the more systematically the data are collected, the less violent, specialized (and interesting) gang members become.

This lack of consensus concerning gangs is well illustrated in a recent book by Sheldon et al. (1997) called *Youth Gangs in American Society*. Intending to provide an overview of current knowledge about youth gangs, the authors present various theoretical perspectives on gangs, along with the results of research. Because they do not evaluate the theories or research they present, however, the information they provide is often contradictory. Gang membership is first attributed to the need for protection, then explained by learning theory (i.e., the reinforcement of violence), and then by the search for what gang members do not get at home—love, consistent rules, and sanctions. They conclude, “While the reasons for joining a gang may vary somewhat, one compelling factor appears to be universal—the sense of self-worth and belonging” (1997:124-125). When describing the behavior of gang members, Sheldon et al. first quote heavily from Jankowski, who argues that gang

members specialize in certain crimes, and then later state that gang members engage in “cafeteria-style” offending.

Another example of the problem with the quality of some gang “experts” is Leet et al.’s (1997) *Gangs, Graffiti, and Violence*, where the authors make statement after statement about the qualities of gangs and their members—with no data, and very few empirical cites to back up their assertions. The reference page of their 11 chapter book contains only 38 references, 26 of which are law enforcement publications (not to mention those from *The Los Angeles Times*). Apparently, one can be an “expert” on gangs without reading or citing any systematic scientific research on the topic.

## CONCLUSION

What are the implications of the issues covered in this chapter for the theories we have discussed? The fact that gang members do not specialize in certain activities poses serious problems for cultural deviance and strain theories. The overall instability of gang membership, and that fact that most gang members are in for only a year also contradict the predictions of cultural deviance and strain models (i.e., once deviant values and behavior are learned, why would one suddenly unlearn them during the peak of such a rewarding career?).

Consistent with the predictions of control theories, research suggests that gang membership appears to affect crime more than criminality. If gang members are more delinquent than their non-gang peers before they join and

after they leave the gang, criminality would seem to be unaffected by gang membership. These findings fit with what we know about the stability of criminality over the life course. If stable differences in criminality can be detected before children have been exposed to the delinquent subcultures of peers, or the strain-producing experience of school failure, how can peers, gangs, or schools cause criminality?

Additionally, our discussion of the nature of crime and criminality does not bode well for many of the descriptions of gangs and their members discussed above. If what we know empirically about crime shows that most is spontaneous, unplanned, and unskilled, how is it that gang members engage in crime that is carefully planned and executed? If systematic research describing criminality shows that offenders tend to lack intelligence, tenacity, and forethought, where are the offenders described by Cloward and Ohlin, Jankowski, and Taylor? These researchers describe crime and criminality in ways that do not fit with what we know empirically about these phenomena, and have data that are difficult to replicate or disprove—therefore, the validity of their conclusions, in this author's opinion, is questionable.

My approach thus far has been to better illuminate the relationships between crime, criminality, and gangs. I have argued that the nature of crime, criminality, and gangs leads logically to the conclusion that gang membership is a manifestation of criminality, and a correlate of crime. Gang membership does not create criminality, or push otherwise conventional youth into crime. The

gang can, however, influence crime through its effect on opportunity. A next logical step would be to think of analogs to crime, behaviors that like gang membership, reflect criminality, and correlate with crime—examples include suspension or expulsion from school, promiscuity, drug use, and arrest. All of these endeavors reflect an orientation that favors pursuit of immediate rewards in the face of long-term consequences. These behaviors, therefore, should be predicted by self-control, and be related to crime, just as gang membership should be predicted by self-control and related to crime.

Based on these conclusions, the analyses of this project will address the following broad questions: Does gang membership add to the ability of criminality, family, school, and peers to predict crime? We know from previous research that characteristics relating to criminality, families, school, and peers predict crime. Does gang membership improve these predictions? If yes, how? Does gang membership influence the level of crime through group dynamics, or is gang membership merely a label used by the respondent to summarize his or her criminal behavior, tendencies, or criminal justice system experiences? Once we establish differences between gang and non-gang youth, we can explore the reliability and validity of these findings—are responses provided by gang members as reliable and valid as responses provided by non-gang youth?

## CHAPTER 2

### The Sample and the Data

In Chapter 1, I argued that there is need for more systematic research on the topic of gangs. With this goal in mind, an appropriate data set was needed. The data set would ideally be large enough that statistical analyses could be performed. Additionally, an oversampling of potential gang members would be appropriate. Finally, a good data set would contain measures of gang membership, crime, and criminality, as well as items measuring contact with the criminal justice system, and family, school, and peer characteristics. With these needs in mind, the Seattle Youth Project was selected as the data set for this project.

The Seattle data were collected by Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis in the 1978-1979 academic year. Their purpose was to assess the reliability and validity of self-report measures of delinquency. To assess the effects on reliability and validity of various methods, data were collected using questionnaires and interviews, both anonymous and non-anonymous. The population of interest was black and white adolescents in Seattle, Washington. The sample was stratified by race, socioeconomic status, and sex. It was also stratified by official delinquency status, producing three populations: a non-delinquent population consisting of students enrolled in Seattle public schools in the 1977-1978 academic year (persons with an official record were excluded) (this group comprised 44 percent of the sample); an officially delinquent

population, which includes youth with a record of contact with the Seattle Police but with no juvenile court record (29 percent of the sample); and a population of youth who had been referred to the King County Division of Youth Services (27 percent of the sample). The total sample consisted of 1,612 15-18 year old youth (see Appendix A for the sample demographics). The aim of this sampling technique was to maximize variance on delinquency, and at the same time represent the general adolescent population of Seattle (Hindelang et al. 1981:31). To allow correction for the disproportionate sampling of boys, blacks, lower-class, and delinquents, Hindelang et al. provided estimates of the probability of selection for each group in the sample. This will allow use of weighted data representing the actual population of Seattle youth.

The results of Hindelang et al.'s research into the reliability and validity of self-report measures are relevant to the concerns of this project. The Seattle data show that self-report measures of delinquency are reliable, and are in fact more reliably measured than are many attitudinal dimensions measured in social science research.

Hindelang et al. also describe the validity of self-report measures. They begin with face validity, which refers to successfully creating questions on self-report measures that match official definitions: "...a measure of delinquency identical to the measure of delinquency in official definitions and implicit in official procedures, but without the omissions, mistakes, and biases of official measurement" (1981:88). Many self-report questionnaires provide results that

appear to measure up to face validity, but have problems. Much of the behavior youth report would be of little interest to the police, e.g., taking the family car for a ride without permission, or stealing fruit from an orchard. Because these measures do not distinguish between behavior described above and behavior that would interest police, "the line between nuisance (but tolerated) behavior and delinquent behavior becomes blurry" (1981:92). To address this problem in their instrument, Hindelang et al. included a variety of specifically described delinquent acts, including serious offenses such as aggravated assault and armed robbery.

Concurrent validity refers to self-report measures of delinquency that are consistent with "contemporary indicators of involvement in illegal activities" (1981:92). For self-report measures to be valid, those reporting the most delinquency should also be those most likely to have official records. Using their own results and those of other surveys, Hindelang and his colleagues show that measures of delinquency meet the criteria of concurrent validity. Incarcerated offenders are most likely to admit to serious and frequent delinquent acts. Those with court records report more acts than those with only arrest records, who in turn report more acts than non-delinquents (not surprisingly, the differences are greater between delinquents and non-delinquents than between "police" and "court" delinquents).

The third important test of validity Hindelang et al. explore is correlational validity. Those respondents who admit to the most delinquent acts should also

report the most official contacts with the justice system. All respondents who are officially delinquent should be identified as delinquent by the self-report measures. Self-report measures also perform well using this criterion of validity.

Overall, Hindelang et al. conclude that the links between self-reported delinquent behavior and official measures of delinquency, between self-reported delinquent behavior and self-reported official contacts, and between self-reported official contacts and official measures of delinquency have "mean gammas [that are] acceptably high, the self-report method appears to behave reasonably well when judged by standard criteria available to social scientists" (1981:114). Self-report measures are, however, more valid for some groups than they are for others. They are better for whites than for blacks, particularly the most serious black delinquents. The most delinquent respondents underreport delinquency and official contacts.

Self-report measures do allow us to accurately rank respondents on delinquency. Although we may not precisely know every criminal act that Joe has committed, we do know that Joe committed more than Fred, but less than Bob. These data show that there is an underlying dimension of criminality that is stable over time (the "have you ever" questions are more valid than the "in the last year" questions), and manifested in a variety of behaviors (all measures of delinquency are highly correlated).

The Seattle project was partially an atheoretical/methodological test of the validity and reliability of self-report measures. But it was also a replication of the

Richmond Youth Project (Hirschi 1969), so it contains items with a social control bent. The results of Hindelang et al.'s project not only answered the questions surrounding the reliability and validity of self-report measures, they set the stage for Gottfredson and Hirschi's self-control theory, where stability and versatility play a prominent role.

Many of the variables in the Seattle data are appropriate for the purposes of this project. Crimes are acts of force or fraud undertaken in the pursuit of self-interest, and are behavioral manifestations of the underlying trait of criminality. Other behaviors, although we may not think of them as "crimes", share traits with crime in that they are short-term rewarding but costly in the long-term (drinking, suspension from school, and sneaking out at night after parents say you cannot go out). For this project, "crime" is measured by a variety of self-reported delinquent behaviors contained in the Seattle survey. All of the delinquency items from the survey reflect the characteristics of crime described above, and all of the self-report delinquency items will at some point be used in the analyses.

The great variety of delinquent acts measured in the data will enable me to show the versatility of offenders, including gang members. From the numerous delinquency items contained in the Seattle survey, Hindelang et. al used cluster analyses to create four homogeneous subsets of variables—"homogeneous in that the individual variables falling within a subset order subjects similarly" (1981:54). Each question in the subsets asked if the

respondent had ever engaged in the act. The response categories were yes and no. Those answering yes to each question receive a 1, those answering no a 0. Responses are summed to produce an index score. These indexes enable us to further operationalize the concept of delinquency.

The serious crime index contains many of the more serious items from the instrument, including robbery, drug sales, burglary, and aggravated assault ( $\alpha=.84$ ). The general delinquency index includes a variety of juvenile offenses, including vandalism, theft, and minor assaults ( $\alpha=.81$ ). The drug index contains ten items tapping alcohol and drug use, along with drug sales ( $\alpha=.86$ ). The school and family index contains six items—running away from home and suspension from school for example ( $\alpha=.58$ ). An overall delinquency scale will also be used in many of the analyses ( $\alpha=.92$ ). It consists of all 63 delinquency items contained in the survey (see Appendix B for specific items making up each index).

These scales will enable me to test for versatility. For instance, the measures of criminality, institution variables, and gang membership should predict all the delinquency scales. Criminality should be manifested in a variety of delinquent acts, and gang members' behavior should also reflect versatility. Additionally, family, school, and peer variables should predict all types of delinquency.

Crime will be measured by a variety of self-report delinquent acts.

Measuring crime is not so hard. Measuring criminality is more difficult. In my analyses, I will use five scales (first described in Hindelang et al. 1981) to measure various dimensions of criminality. If criminality is defined by low self-control, even if we cannot directly measure it, we should be able to find attitudinal proxies for this trait, particularly if the attitudes being tapped are reflections of the respondent's behavior.

Considering what we know about those who fit the description of low self-control, we can use measures of specific characteristics that should be indicative of a general tendency. One characteristic of low self-control is insensitivity toward others; "...people with low self-control tend to be self-centered, indifferent, or insensitive to the needs of others" (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990:89). Two scales are used that tap this "unconcern over the rights and privileges of others" (Gough 1948:362): an amorality scale and a meanness scale (see Appendix C for items making up all the self-control scales). A second trait of low self-control is the tendency to resist authority. Those with low self-control respond to wants and needs in ways that take advantage of others. The last thing low self-control individuals want is someone telling them what to do or trying to control their behavior. Two scales measure these characteristics: the rebellion scale and the respect for the police scale. Some of the analyses will also use a global self-control scale, which combines all the items from the four scales described above.

For each of the self-control measures, the response categories of individual items were collapsed to: agree, undecided, and disagree, and recoded to reflect each scale. For instance, with the amorality scale, those answering agree to each question receive a three, those undecided a 2, and those disagreeing a 1. Because there are four questions, this scale can vary from 4 to 12. Those scoring high would be considered amoral/low self-control, those scoring low not amoral/high self-control. All the scales were scored this way—a high score reflecting the trait being measured. Because a high score on the delinquency scales reflects high delinquency, the amorality, meanness, and rebellion scales should be positively related to delinquency, and the respect for police and global self-control scales should be negatively related to delinquency.

The amorality, meanness, rebellion, and respect for police scales were used by Hindelang et. al in Measuring Delinquency, and perform well. They conclude, “These associations [between delinquency and the scales] show the extent to which the substantive results in the Seattle Data are similar to those of previous research, despite the mix of method conditions and other peculiarities in design, sampling, and procedures” (1981:129). Table 2.1 shows how crime and criminality are conceptualized and operationalized in the empirical analyses.

The last independent variables to be used in the analyses are those relating to the justice system, family, school, and peers. Items concerning the justice system include arrest, juvenile court appearances, probation, and being sentenced to an institution. Family variables include family form and function.

**TABLE 2.1**  
**The Conceptualization and Measurement of Crime and Criminality**

Conceptualized as:		Measured by:
Crime	Delinquency	Serious Delinquency Index General Delinquency Index Drug Index School/Family Index Overall Delinquency Index
Criminality	Self-Control	Amorality Scale Meanness Scale Rebellion Scale Respect for Police Scale Global Self-Control Scale

The school variables include school performance, educational expectations, and attachment to school and teachers. The peer variables include delinquency of peers as well as items asking about time spent with, and attachment to, peers. These items will be discussed in more detail as they appear in the analyses of subsequent chapters.

The last important variable to discuss is the main dependent variable, gang membership. Recall that in Chapter 1, I argued that the definition of gang membership should reflect the goals of the researcher. Because one of my main research questions concerns the relationship between gang membership and delinquency, I am not including delinquency as a requirement for gang

membership. The Seattle instrument contains an item asking: "Do you belong to what some people might call a youth gang?" Those who responded yes to this question are considered to be gang members (in all analyses, yes is coded as 1, no as 0, so gang membership should be positively related to crime and low self-control, and negatively related to high self-control).

The issue of how to define gangs, and how accurate these definitions are, has plagued gang researchers for many years. Ball and Curry wrote an entire piece outlining various ways of defining gangs, and encouraging researchers to think carefully about how they define gangs: "It is important that researchers and theorists become increasingly aware of the differences among their implicit methodological approaches to definitions so as to avoid at least the more obvious sources of confusion" (1995:241). The problem with defining gangs, however, is the nature of gangs themselves. Judging the "accuracy" of a definition presumes that accuracy can be verified. When we ask respondents if they have ever been arrested, we can use reverse record checks to verify their answer. Since gang membership is a fleeting, abstract "status", its definition cannot be judged on the basis of accuracy. So, rather than focusing on the accuracy of the question "do you belong to a youth gang?", this project will focus on the meaning this question has for those who respond to it. If we work on distinguishing those who answer yes from those who answer no, we can begin to understand the meaning the concept gang has for our respondents, and discover the effects, if any, gangs have on the behavior of those reporting

membership. What possible characteristics, histories, and relationships will be associated with youth identifying themselves as gang members?

Based on the review of what we know about gangs, delinquency, and self-control, I expect those who report gang membership will fall into one of two categories. The first way that gang membership, delinquency, and self-control can be related is through the effect that gang membership has on the behavior (delinquency) of its members. This hypothesis argues for the existence of gangs as organizations external to those reporting membership. It predicts that gang members will be those with nothing to lose by such an association. Most youth can see the benefits associated with joining a group that engages in fun activities such as delinquency, but those with ties to conventional peers, or to conventional institutions such as families and schools, will be less likely to see the benefits of gang membership. If research has shown us anything, it is that gang membership is associated with a short time period in one's teens. It seems reasonable that those who live for the moment are more likely to engage in behavior that is rewarding in the short-term (such as gang membership or delinquency), and less likely to engage in behavior that is rewarding in the long-term (such as obeying parents and getting good grades in school).

This explanation would predict that gang membership has an effect on delinquency that goes beyond the self-control of the individual members. Low self-control youth that associate with others like themselves will have an amplifying effect on one another's behavior (the "birds of a feather flock

together, and then influence each other's delinquency" theory). If this hypothesis is true, we should be able to distinguish gang members from their non-gang peers by the characteristics of their friends particularly—the activities and relationships between those reporting gang membership and their closest companions (who are presumably gang members as well). In this conception, gang membership is external to those reporting it, and the data should show this.

An alternative hypothesis to the one above is that those who report gang membership do so because they are delinquent, and have little concern for rewards beyond what are immediate. Gang membership is a way of describing their own behavior and experiences that has little to do with group membership, characteristics, or behavior. This hypothesis would predict that gang membership's relationship to delinquency is a product of the respondent's characteristics, not the gang's, and that not much will distinguish gang from non-gang youth beyond delinquent behavior. If there are important distinctions, they are less likely to represent characteristics of the peer group than characteristics of the individual. In this conception, gang membership is not external to those who report it, but is merely a way of describing one's own behavior.

Both of these explanations are consistent with control theory because neither give gang membership the power to create low self-control. The question that remains is whether gang membership has the power to increase delinquent behavior. The first hypothesis would say that it does, through the unique relationships between peers found among gang members. The second

would say that it does not, because gang membership is a reflection of the respondent's behavior, not the behavior or attitudes of peers.

Overall, the Seattle survey provides adequate data for the purposes of this project. One apparent disadvantage of the data is that they were collected almost twenty years ago. However, as the recent work of Sampson and Laub (1993) with the Gluecks' data has shown, within the field of criminology at least, old data are not necessarily bad data. Relationships between a variety of independent variables and delinquency found in older data are consistently found in newer data as well.

#### GANG MEMBERSHIP IN THE SEATTLE DATA

About 9 percent of Seattle youth consider themselves to be gang members. This number is a little higher than what other researchers using large data sets have found. Esbensen and Huizinga (1993), using a probability sample from three high crime, socially disorganized Denver neighborhoods, found 7 percent. Because I did not limit my definition of gang by delinquency, however, I expected the number to be a bit higher. Table 2.2 shows demographic characteristics of those reporting gang membership compared to those who do not report membership.

Chi-square analyses were performed to determine which characteristics were significant correlates of gang membership (all tests of significance are performed on unweighted data). A greater proportion of males than of females report gang membership. Eleven percent of males and 7 percent of females

**TABLE 2.2**  
**Demographic characteristics of gang and non-gang youth. Weighted data.**  
**Percent reporting gang membership by sex, race, and SES**

Male	Female
11 (7012)	7 (7101)
$p < .01$	
Black	White
8 (3107)	9 (11,005)
Low SES	High SES
9 (8800)	9 (5313)

report membership. Contrary to the predictions of strain and cultural deviance theories, those reporting membership are not disproportionately black or poor. Nine percent of white youth report gang membership compared to 8 percent of black youth. Nine percent of both low and high SES youth report gang membership. The only significant difference comes with sex.

Table 2.3 shows demographic characteristics of gang compared to non-gang youth among those with an official record (either an arrest or an arrest and contact with the juvenile court). Among the officially delinquent population, 12

percent identify themselves as gang members. Again, the only significant difference between those reporting gang membership and those not is sex.

**TABLE 2.3**  
Demographic characteristics of gang and non-gang youth,  
official delinquents only. Weighted data.  
Percent reporting gang membership by sex, race, and SES

Male	Female
14 (2276)	7 (941)
$p < .01$	
Black	White
8 (1134)	9 (2083)
Low SES	High SES
9 (2371)	9 (846)

Fourteen percent of male delinquents report gang membership, compared to 7 percent of females. Race and social class are not significantly different for gang and non-gang youth. Additionally, the gang/non-gang distributions of gender, race, and social class are almost identical in the population as a whole, and among those with an official contact with the justice system. For these simple comparisons, including delinquency in our definition of gangs does not produce

different findings. There does appear to be a relationship between delinquency and the reporting of gang membership, at least for males. When we limited our analysis to those with official records, the percent of boys who report gang membership went from 9 to 12 percent. The percent of girls who report gang membership, however, remained at 7 percent. Perhaps the connotation of “gang” is different for girls than for boys, and is not as closely tied to delinquency. We will explore this idea later.

The findings with regard to race and class deserve a bit more discussion as well. The stereotype of gang members is often “poor” and “black”. Yet these data do not show this to be true. The findings that class and race are unrelated to gang membership illustrate a key point about what is important for respondents when they answer this question: obviously structural variables such as class and race are not what matter when youth decide if they are gang members or not. This is contrary to the predictions of cultural deviance and strain theories, which give structural variables fundamental roles in the motivation of youth to form gangs. These theories describe gang members as primarily lower-class minority youth who form gangs in response to economic or racial oppression. Such oppression likely exists in Seattle, but does not differentiate those reporting gang membership from those not reporting membership.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has introduced the Seattle data, described how they were collected, and why they are appropriate for this project. I also discussed the relevant variables, describing how they were measured, and how they relate to the goals of this research. Next, I described the sex, race, and class of those reporting gang membership. Whether we look at the population as a whole, or limit our comparisons to officially delinquent youth, we find those reporting gang membership are more likely to be male, but are not disproportionately black or poor compared to those who do not report gang membership. We also found that those reporting gang membership comprise a larger proportion of officially delinquent youth than they do of the adolescent population as a whole. Our next step is to further explore the relationships between gang membership, delinquency, and self-control.

## CHAPTER 3

### Criminality and Crime

One of the goals of this project is to determine if gang membership adds to our ability to predict delinquency beyond what we already know. Previous research has supported the link between crime and criminality. Certainly self-control should predict gang membership and delinquency. The question then is whether gang membership maintains an independent effect on delinquency when self-control is held constant. If so, does gang membership account for the relationship between self-control and delinquency?

#### ANALYSIS

Using “are you a member of a youth gang?” as the measure of gang membership, various delinquency scales as measures of crime, and the amorality, meanness, rebellion, respect for the police, and global scales as attitudinal proxies for self-control, the analyses of this chapter will address the questions posed above.

Before examining the differences between those reporting gang membership and those not, we need to resolve questions concerning the relationship between gang membership and sex. Comparisons of gang and non-gang youth in Chapter 2 seemed to point to a relationship between delinquency and gang membership for boys, but not for girls. When I limited the analyses to those with an official record, the proportion reporting gang membership increased for boys, but remained the same for girls. Is delinquency as strongly

correlated to gang membership for girls as it is for boys? For boys, the correlation between gang membership and overall delinquency is .32, for girls it is .15. Both are significant, but overall delinquency explains only 2 percent of the variance in gang membership for girls, while explaining 10 percent for boys. In order to simplify the analyses, I will limit them to the boys in the sample.

I begin with simple comparisons of gang and non-gang youth on delinquency status, being sentenced to an institution, and prevalence rates for selected individual delinquent acts. Some of the tables present weighted data, which allow us to see the distribution of variables in the population of Seattle boys in general, rather than the distribution in the disproportionately black, low SES, delinquent sample (tests of significance, however, are based on unweighted data).

Table 3.1 shows gang membership by delinquency status and being sentenced to an institution. Those reporting gang membership are 11 percent of the male population, but comprise 9.5 percent of those with no official record, 13 percent of those with arrest records, and 16 percent of those with court records. Chi-square analysis show these differences to be significant. Also significant are differences between gang and non-gang youth when asked if they have ever been sentenced to an institution. Overall, only two percent of Seattle boys have been sentenced to an institution, and those reporting gang membership make up 28 percent. Obviously, part of the meaning gang membership has for boys who report it is a history of more contact with the criminal justice system. Do these

**TABLE 3.1**  
**Percent reporting gang membership by delinquency status**  
**and institutional status. Boys only. Weighted data.**

Delinquency Status		
None	Arrest	Court
9.5 (4736)	13 (1347)	16 (929)

  

Institutional Status	
Yes	No
28 (158)	11 (6842)

differences correspond to differing levels of self-reported delinquency?

Table 3.2 compares gang to non-gang youth on a variety of self-reported delinquent acts. Again, weighted data are presented to see the prevalence rates in the male population as a whole. The first and most obvious finding of this table is the higher prevalence rates among those reporting gang membership for 17 of the 18 acts. A higher percent of gang members admit to: theft from a store (worth \$10, and \$50 or more), burglary, using physical force to get money or goods, using a weapon to get money or goods, pulling a “weapon on someone to show you mean business”, aggravated assault, rape, jumping someone and beating them up, taking things from a wallet or purse, hitting a parent, vandalism,

TABLE 3.2  
Lifetime prevalence of self-reported delinquent acts by  
self-reported gang membership. Boys only. Weighted data.

Have you ever...

% answering yes.

Act	Gang	Nongang	N
Shoplift \$2	70	60	6978
Shoplift \$10	29***	11	6995
Shoplift \$50	17***	4	6980
Burglary	36***	14	6973
Use force for \$	14***	4	6989
Armed robbery	15***	3	6986
Pulled weapon	33***	11	6998
Aggravated assault	27***	10	6977
Rape	3**	4	6975
Jumped and beat	32***	10	6978
Larceny: Purse	27**	17	6980
Hit parents	16*	11	7001
Vandalism	9**	6	6997
Joy ride	22**	7	6997
Sell drugs	67***	35	6978
Suspension	62***	42	6988
Gone out	63***	47	7001
Run away	22***	15	7001

\* p < .05  
\*\* p < .01  
\*\*\* p < .001

joyriding, selling drugs, suspension from school, running away from home, and going out after parents said not to.

Boys who identify themselves as gang members have higher delinquency prevalence rates than those who do not identify themselves as members. There is not, however, evidence that the pattern of offending is different for gang

compared to non-gang youth. The four most common acts among non-gang youth are: theft of \$2, going out after being told not to, suspension from school, and selling drugs. For those who say they are gang members, the four most common behaviors are the same: \$2 theft from a store, selling drugs, going out after parents say no, and suspension from school. Although boys who report gang membership are more delinquent than those who do not report membership, the types of offenses they engage in are the same.

Additionally, the four most prevalent acts for those reporting membership are non-serious offenses, refuting the notion that gang members “specialize” in serious offenses. Neither group shows evidence of specialization in one type of offense. Those reporting gang membership are more likely to sell drugs and use weapons than are non-gang members (consistent with media depictions), but they are also more likely to run away from home, to be suspended from school, and to steal a \$10 item from a store (behavior that when engaged in by gang members does not receive much media attention). Because gang members, like offenders in general, engage in a variety of delinquent acts, and are more likely to engage in such behavior than are those who do not report gang membership, it appears that this question asking about gang membership is tapping a general tendency to engage in delinquent acts. When limiting analyses to those with contact with the criminal justice system (not shown in a table), these patterns remain. Within the officially delinquent population, those who report gang membership are more delinquent overall, but the most common acts for both

gang and non-gang "delinquents" are the most common among the male population as a whole. Limiting our comparisons to those who have had official contacts with the justice system does not produce different findings (other than higher delinquency rates).

These analyses show that those reporting gang membership are more likely to have an arrest or juvenile court record, to have been sentenced to an institution, and to have higher prevalence rates for a number of delinquent acts. Although their rates of delinquency are higher, those reporting gang membership do not show evidence of specialization, nor are their offending patterns different from youth who do not report gang membership. These findings from the Seattle data concerning the prevalence and patterns of delinquency among gang members are consistent with other survey research performed more recently (i.e., Esbensen and Huizinga 1993; Klein 1995). As least so far, it does not appear that the relationship between delinquency and gang membership has changed significantly in the last two decades.

Another way we can explore the relationship between gang membership and delinquency is to establish the correlation coefficients between gang membership and the delinquency scales. Self-reported gang membership is significantly ( $p < .001$ ) related to the general delinquency scale ( $r=.28$ ), the serious delinquency scale ( $r=.34$ ), the drug scale ( $r=.19$ ), the family-school delinquency scale ( $r=.20$ ), and the overall delinquency scale ( $r=.32$ ), again

showing the generality of the relationship between gang membership and delinquency.

I have introduced the distinction between crime and criminality, and suggested that measures of self-control (criminality) should predict delinquency (crime). If this is true, these data should show that those with low self-control (measured by the respect for police, meanness, rebellion, amorality, and global self-control scales), should manifest this tendency through crime (measured by the four delinquency scales). Additionally, measures of low self-control should predict delinquency however it is measured, because those with low self-control are more likely to engage in delinquency of all types.

First, we examine the relationships between the individual measures of self-control and the delinquency scales. Table 3.3 shows the correlation coefficients for these relationships. All the coefficients are significant at the .001 level, and three patterns emerge. First, self-control is correlated most strongly with the general and overall delinquency scales. Second, among the individual self-control scales, the respect for the police scale is most strongly correlated with the delinquency scales. Third, when the four self-control scales are summed to create a global self-control scale, the correlations with delinquency are strongest. These results support the assertions of control theory, which suggest that those who give little thought to the future consequences of their behavior are more likely not only to describe themselves as amoral, mean, and rebellious, but to engage in more delinquency as well. As mentioned earlier,

**TABLE 3.3**  
Correlations of self-control scales with delinquency scales

	<u>Delinquency</u>				
	family-school	drug	general	serious	overall
<u>Self-Control</u>					
amorality (N)	.29 (1500)	.25 (1487)	.36 (1478)	.32 (1479)	.36 (1047)
meanness (N)	.30 (1507)	.19 (1491)	.36 (1484)	.32 (1485)	.34 (1057)
rebellion (N)	.22 (1525)	.21 (1504)	.20 (1500)	.16 (1502)	.22 (1062)
respect for police (N)	-.36 (1517)	-.39 (1501)	-.39 (1493)	-.41 (1496)	-.45 (1057)
global self-control (N)	-.43 (1085)	-.39 (1073)	-.47 (1069)	-.43 (1069)	-.50 (1014)

good attitudinal measures of self-control should not just measure attitudes but should tap a general behavioral pattern. These scales appear to be tapping this pattern.

Tables 3.4 through 3.8 show regressions run separately on the general, serious, drug, school and family scales, and then the overall delinquency scale. When the measures of self-control are regressed together on the general and serious delinquency scales, all but rebellion are significant predictors. When the self-control scales are regressed on the drug and family-school indexes, the

TABLE 3.4  
OLS regression of general delinquency scale  
on attitudinal measures of self-control

	Beta	T-Ratio
respect for police	-.26***	10.18
meanness	.23***	9.30
rebellion	.04	1.66
amorality	.19***	7.34
R <sup>2</sup> =.26		*** p < .001

TABLE 3.5  
OLS regression of serious delinquency scale on  
attitudinal measures of self-control

	Beta	T-Ratio
respect for police	-.32***	12.35
meanness	.19***	7.69
rebellion	.01	.33
amorality	.15***	5.80
R <sup>2</sup> =.24		

TABLE 3.6  
OLS regression of drug scale on attitudinal measures of self-control

	Beta	T-Ratio
respect for police	-.31***	11.53
meanness	.07**	2.67
rebellion	.09***	3.66
amorality	.11***	4.06
R <sup>2</sup> =.18		

\*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001

**TABLE 3.7**  
**OLS regression of family-school delinquency scale**  
**on attitudinal measures of self-control**

	Beta	T-Ratio
respect for police	-.24***	9.27
meanness	.19***	7.53
rebellion	.09***	3.71
amorality	.13***	5.00
R <sup>2</sup> =.21		
*** p < .001		

results are similar, in that all the measures of self-control are significant. Last, the self-control scales were regressed on the overall delinquency scale. All are significant, and together explain 30 percent of the variance in overall delinquency. The regressions from these five tables were also run with race and class among the independent variables, and the relationships between self-control and delinquency did not change—these relationships are not class or race specific.

**TABLE 3.8**  
**OLS regression of overall delinquency scale**  
**on attitudinal measures of self-control**

	Beta	T-Ratio
respect for police	-.33***	11.42
meanness	.20***	6.84
rebellion	.06**	2.04
amorality	.18***	6.07
R <sup>2</sup> =.30		
** p > .01; *** p > .001		

The attitudinal measures of self-control perform well. Those who have less respect for the police, who are insensitive to the rights and feelings of others (amorality and meanness), and who resist authority are more likely to engage in a variety of delinquent acts, as would be predicted by a general tendency. These analyses have established the relationship between self-control and delinquency using attitudinal measures of self-control and various delinquency scales. Because gang members, like those with low self-control, exhibit delinquent behaviors consistent with the existence of a general tendency toward delinquency, the next logical step is to examine the relationship between measures of self-control and gang membership.

#### Self-Control and Gang Membership

If those with low self-control are more likely to report gang membership, then attitudinal measures of self-control should predict gang membership. Table 3.9 examines the relationship between gang membership and the four individual measures of self-control, along with the global self-control scale. All the self-control scales are significantly correlated with gang membership (rebellion less

TABLE 3.9  
Correlations of gang membership with attitudinal measures of self-control

	respect	meanness	rebellion	amorality	global s/c
gang membership (N)	-.16 (1134)	.14 (1133)	.08 (1142)	.16 (1121)	-.20 (1084)

than .01, and all others less than .001), and in the anticipated direction. Those reporting gang membership are more likely to be amoral, mean, and rebellious, and are less likely to respect the police. All these traits reflect a general tendency to ignore the future consequences of one's behavior. Those who view others as "suckers", who mistreat and take advantage of others, and who rebel against authority are unlikely to attain success in the conventional world. Gang membership shares these characteristics—it may be fun at the time but produces little rewards in the long run.

The analyses also show that the overall self-control scale is most strongly correlated with gang membership (those with high self-control are less likely to report gang membership), again showing the generality of the trait of self-control. Next we can see how the four individual self-control scales perform together when predicting gang membership.

Table 3.10 shows gang membership regressed on the self-control scales.

TABLE 3.10  
OLS regression of gang membership on  
attitudinal measures of self-control

	Beta	T-Ratio
respect for police	-.10**	3.16
meanness	.08**	2.60
rebellion	.03	.90
amorality	.08*	2.54
R <sup>2</sup> =.04		
* p < .05; ** p < .01		

The results do not differ significantly from the results of the correlations presented in Table 3.9. Among the scales, amorality, meanness, and respect for the police are significant predictors of gang membership. Consistent with the finding that gang members exhibit offending patterns that resemble a general trait, and with the findings showing self-control predicting delinquency, those with low self-control (as measured by three of the four scales) are more likely to identify themselves as gang members.

#### Delinquency, Self-Control, and Gang Membership

I have suggested that gang membership is another manifestation of low self-control, but that it may also have an independent effect on delinquency—through opportunity and diffusion of responsibility (a hypothesis consistent with the idea that low self-control peers come together and amplify one another's delinquency); or because gang membership is actually another measure of delinquency (a hypothesis consistent with the idea that some low self-control boys who engage in delinquency also identify themselves as gang members, regardless of actual group behavior). If gang membership has an independent effect on delinquency, it should improve the predictive power of the model shown on Table 3.8. Should gang membership be an independent predictor of delinquency, however, it should not account for the relationship between self-control and delinquency. Those with low self-control should report higher levels of delinquency, regardless of their gang status.

Table 3.11 shows the overall delinquency scale regressed on gang membership and the self-control scales (since I have established that the self-control scales and gang membership are related to all delinquent acts, I will use the overall delinquency scale in subsequent analyses). Delinquency is significantly predicted by gang membership, even controlling for the effects

TABLE 3.11  
OLS regression of overall delinquency scale on  
gang membership and attitudinal measures of self-control

	Beta	T-Ratio
gang membership	.21***	7.93
respect for police	-.31***	10.34
meanness	.18***	6.32
rebellion	.05*	1.98
amorality	.16***	5.50
R <sup>2</sup> = .34		
* p < .05; *** p < .001		

of self-control. Gang membership does not, however, account for the relationship between self-control and delinquency. When gang membership is added to the self-control scales, the R<sup>2</sup> for the overall delinquency scale goes from .30 (from Table 3.8) to .34. The results of these analyses are consistent with the hypothesis that gang membership has an effect on delinquency, even controlling for the effects of low self-control. But controlling for the effects of gang membership does not reduce the overall connection between measures of

self-control and delinquency, consistent with the predictions of control theory rather than with cultural deviance theory.

If gang membership were responsible for creating criminality, we would not expect self-control to remain a significant predictor of delinquency when gang membership is controlled. Gang membership is not self-control. But our measures of self-control do predict gang membership. How much of the relationship between self-control and gang membership is explained by the higher delinquency levels of those reporting gang membership?

Table 3.12 shows gang membership regressed on the self-control scales and the overall delinquency scale. Recall that the self-control scales accounted for 4 percent of the variance in gang membership, and all but the rebellion scale were significant. When we add delinquency to this same equation we explain more of the variance in gang membership, but none of the self-control scales are significant. When controlling for delinquency, gang members are not less likely to respect the police, and are not more likely to exhibit attitudes consistent with rebellion, meanness, or amorality. Apparently, gang membership does not affect the attitudes of those who report it when delinquency is controlled. This is an important finding, particularly in light of cultural deviance and strain theories, which suggest that the gang means more than delinquency to its members. Strain theorists focus on the attitudes or feelings associated with strain—conceptualized as frustration due to school failure (Cohen) or a sense of injustice (Cloward and Ohlin). Control theorists, however, focus on behaviors

**TABLE 3.12**  
**OLS regression of gang membership on overall delinquency scale**  
**and attitudinal measures of self-control**

	Beta	T-Ratio
delinquency	.28***	7.93
respect for police	-.01	.40
meanness	.03	.86
rebellion	.01	.38
amorality	.05	1.37
R <sup>2</sup> = .11		
*** p < .001		

exhibiting the tendency to weigh costs and benefits in the short run rather than the long run. Control theorists would therefore predict that gang membership should be more associated with behaviors—like delinquency—than with attitudes (especially if gang membership is merely a proxy for one's delinquent experiences). Consistent with control theory, the Seattle data show that gang membership is not associated with attitudes conforming to a criminal/delinquent orientation when we control for delinquent behavior.

We still have not found conclusive evidence to support one of our two hypotheses about the relationship between gang membership and delinquency. Do group dynamics affect individual behavior, or does gang membership merely reflect low self-control and delinquency? We cannot yet dismiss the first hypothesis, which suggests that gang members influence one another's delinquency—we still have more analyses ahead of us. But if we cannot find

differences between those who report gang membership and those who do not, other than delinquency, it would be hard to conclude that the gang as a group has an independent influence on the behavior of those who report membership. Assuming differences are found, unless they are directly related to peer relationships and activities, it would again be hard to conclude that the gang is responsible for these differences.

The second hypothesis assumes that gang membership is more about the characteristics of individual respondents than it is about group characteristics. Assuming this is true, we would not expect gang membership to predict undue attention from the criminal justice system beyond what would be explained by higher levels of delinquency. The analyses below explore this issue.

#### Gang Membership and the Criminal Justice System

Based on the analyses above, it would be logical to predict that gang members should have more contact with the police than non-gang youth. The analyses have shown that those reporting gang membership have higher delinquency rates, regardless of how delinquency is measured, and that higher self-reported delinquency predicts higher arrest rates. I do not expect, however, that gang members will have more contact with the justice system when controlling for delinquency. A common assumption is that gang members are frequently singled out by police because of their gang status. Because delinquency seems to be the main distinction between those reporting gang

membership and those not, it alone should predict more contacts with the justice system.

Table 3.13 shows correlation coefficients for contact with the justice system and gang membership. Gang membership is positively correlated with being picked up by the police, being put on probation, and being sentenced to

TABLE 3.13  
Correlations of gang membership with justice system contacts

	picked up	probation	institution
gang membership (N)	.09*** (1194)	.13*** (1182)	.13*** (1195)
*** p < .001			

an institution. When delinquency and gang membership are regressed on being picked up by the police and being put on probation (Table 3.14), delinquency is significant, but gang membership is not. Delinquency also predicts being sentenced to an institution, but gang membership remains significant as well. Gang membership does not predict arrest or probation when controlling for differences in delinquency. Gang members are more likely to be arrested and put on probation because they are more likely to engage in delinquency, not because they are gang members. Gang membership remains a significant predictor of being sentenced to an institution, however, even when controlling for delinquency. One explanation for this finding is that judges are more likely to sentence gang members to institutions, regardless of their records of

**TABLE 3.14**  
**OLS regressions of justice system contacts by**  
**gang membership and delinquency**

**Picked up by the police**

	Beta	T-Ratio
gang membership	-.04	-1.41
delinquency	.51***	18.20
R <sup>2</sup> =.25		

**Probation**

	Beta	T-Ratio
gang membership	-.04	-1.28
delinquency	.35***	11.65
R <sup>2</sup> =.12		

**Institutionalization**

	Beta	T-Ratio
gang membership	.07*	2.24
delinquency	.21***	6.63
R <sup>2</sup> =.06		

\* p < .05

\*\*\* p < .001

delinquency. Another explanation is that judges make decisions about what to do with offenders based on characteristics other than past and current offenses, such as home life, or school status.

## CONCLUSION

These analyses have examined the relationships between delinquency, self-control, and gang membership. Gang membership is related to higher rates of delinquency. Those reporting gang membership do not, however, specialize in certain offenses. Their offending patterns are virtually identical to those of non-gang youth. The concept of criminality was also introduced into the analyses by using attitudinal measures of self-control. These scales predict all types of delinquency, once again illustrating that low self-control manifests itself in a variety of delinquent acts. We also found that gang membership is more strongly predicted by delinquency than by self-control, which is consistent with our hypothesis that gang membership may merely be another proxy for delinquency.

Additionally, a model was proposed suggesting that low self-control and gang membership should independently predict delinquency. The data supported this model. We also found that the relationship between self-control and gang membership is accounted for by delinquency. Those who pay little attention to the long term consequences of their acts are more likely to engage in delinquency. Some of these delinquent boys also identify themselves as gang members. Other than their greater involvement in delinquency, however, gang members cannot be differentiated from non-gang youth using measures of self-control.

Finally, we examined the relationship between gang membership and contact with the criminal justice system. Those reporting gang membership are more likely to be picked up by the police, put on probation, and sentenced to an institution. When controlling for delinquency, however, gang members are not more likely to be picked up by police or put on probation, but are still more likely to be sentenced to an institution.

These findings do not bode well for cultural deviance or strain models. Among the population of Seattle youth, those who identify themselves as gang members are not more likely to be poor or black, contrary to the predictions of these two theories. They do not specialize in specific behaviors, as would be expected if crime were learned behavior, or if the criminal, conflict, and retreatist gangs described by Cloward and Ohlin existed. Our analyses of the relationships between delinquency, self-control, and gangs do support the principles of self-control theory, however. Gang membership is predicted by delinquency and self-control, does have an independent effect on delinquency, but does not explain away the relationship between self-control and delinquency. It appears that those who report gang membership may be using this definition to reflect their own behavior, and their experiences with the criminal justice system. Subsequent chapters will allow us to explore in more detail the hypothesis suggesting that gang membership actually influences individual behavior. Unless we find gang/non-gang differences that are related to the group, and survive controls for delinquency, we must conclude that gang

membership is a reflection of the individual's delinquent behavior rather than a creator of it.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Family

The first institution with which children have contact is, of course, the family. Some of the family's primary long-term functions are to maintain and socialize children—to teach them to avoid the temptations of crime, think of the future, and take their place in the world as responsible adults. The way families successfully socialize children is relatively simple. As Patterson (1980) has shown, the parents of non-delinquents are more likely than the parents of delinquents to: monitor their children's behavior, recognize deviant behavior when it occurs, and to punish the behavior. The role of the gang is in stark contrast to the role of the family. It does not maintain children, does not help them to avoid the temptations of illegal behavior, and certainly does not prepare them for success in the adult world. Nor do fellow gang members monitor, recognize, or punish one other's deviant behavior. The association of gang membership with delinquency leads to the logical conclusion that the weakness of the family (which is important for the prediction of crime) contributes to the power of the gang, whether the gang is real or imagined.

#### THE FAMILY IN GANG RESEARCH

Most gang researchers do not focus much attention on family characteristics—probably because many come from cultural deviance and/or strain perspectives, which do not give the family an important role in delinquency or gang membership. Researchers who do include the family in discussions of

gang membership generally describe poor family relationships as precursors to gang membership or as one characteristic distinguishing gang from non-gang youth. Vigil (Vigil 1988; Moore and Vigil 1989; Vigil 1990; Vigil and Long 1990; Vigil and Yun 1996) reports that Chicano gang members tend to be selected from what he calls "marginalized" youth, those who are free from the controlling influences of family and school. The interactions of gang members with their parents, he says, are often "emotionally unstable and stressful... Stressful parental relations [create] the preconditions that [make] the gang a source of identification" (Vigil 1988:425). He also notes that data from an ongoing study of families of gang members in an East Los Angeles public housing development finds that "these families were significantly more often headed by single females than a control sample of randomly selected households from the same project" (1996:150) (see also Moore 1991; Ianni 1989).

Klein (1971) compared gang to non-gang youth, and found that gang members are more likely to come from broken homes and to have criminal parents. Friedman et al. (1975), in their study of gang members in Philadelphia, found a number of family characteristics to be significantly related to gang membership, including poor mother-son relationships and defiance of parents (shouting, cursing, and striking of parents). They conclude, "the results of these studies support the explanation that poor family relationships preceded and predisposed youth to gang affiliation and delinquency" (1975:601). Johnstone (1983) explores the differences between boys "recruited" to youth gangs and

boys who are not recruited. His results show that gang members score lower on a parental support scale. Additionally, boys who have been asked to join gangs are less likely to have a father present in the home and more likely to be delinquent, showing that "gangs select new members from experienced rather than inexperienced law violators" (1983:294). He concludes: "The results offer strong support for Hirschi's proposition that boys who have weak attachments to conventional others and few stakes in a conventional future are more likely to become deviant" (p. 297).

In their comparison of gang and non-gang African-American males, Curry and Spergel (1992) report that "one of the most powerful exogenous variables in this model is the reported presence of a gang member in the youth's family. It is a significant estimator of both gang involvement and delinquency" (1992:283). Most research that both compares gang to non-gang youth and examines family differences does not control for delinquency. Perhaps gang members appear to have more family problems than non-gang youth not because of their gang membership, but because of their higher involvement in delinquency. This suggestion was supported by Lyon et al., who conclude: "Family problems are no more associated with gang membership than with serious antisocial behavior in general" (1992:447). Winfree and Mays, in their comparison of gang/non-gang, institutionalized/free-world youth, found free-world non-gang youth to be the "most law abiding and the most likely to have supportive and intact families"

(1996:52). With these findings in mind, we can proceed to our discussion of the role of the family in criminality and crime.

### **THE FAMILY, CRIMINALITY, AND CRIME**

Recall that those with low self-control are likely to behave in ways that bring quick, easy, and simple rewards. They are more likely to weigh the costs and benefits of potential lines of action with an eye toward the present than they are to weigh costs and benefits with an eye toward the future—even if the future is measured in minutes. This tendency toward impulsivity can be seen and measured among children long before we label their behavior “delinquent”. This tendency is stable over time, and when children are big enough and unsupervised enough, the tendency that used to manifest itself in tantrums, grabbing toys, and hitting other children now manifests itself in delinquency—incorrigibility, stealing, and assaults.

There is much research confirming both the fact that “antisocial” (low self-control) children are at greater risk for delinquency/crime as they age (Caspi et al. 1989; Mischel et al. 1989) and that parental behaviors are important predictors of such early childhood behaviors (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Sampson and Laub 1993; Junger 1994). Children whose parents monitor, recognize and punish their deviant behavior are less likely to be delinquent, and are more likely to be law-abiding, well-adjusted, and successful (Resnick and Burt 1996). Successful socialization manifests itself in a variety of behaviors. This process of socialization includes a variety of parental attitudes and

behaviors—and these attitudes and behaviors are not only important for a child's level of self-control, but are also key for a child's delinquent behavior.

### The Family and Crime: Individual Tendencies

Research exploring how family characteristics influence crime shows consistent results. Parents who monitor their children's behavior, recognize deviant behavior when it occurs, and punish such behavior are less likely to have children who engage in crime, and are more likely to have children who think about the future, and who weigh costs and benefits based on future, rather than immediate, rewards. One important predictor of parents' likelihood to monitor, recognize, and punish is the degree of attachment between parent(s) and child(ren).

Non-delinquent youth are more strongly attached to their parents than are delinquent youth. In their study of 500 delinquent and 500 matched non-delinquent boys, the Glueck's (1950) found that affection of the mother and father for their boy was one of the strongest predictors of delinquency. One of the central elements of Hirschi's (1969) social control theory is the concept of attachment. Children who care about the opinions/feelings of their parents are less likely to engage in acts that disappoint, hurt, or inconvenience them: "...the more strongly a child is attached to his parents, the more strongly he is bound to their expectations, and therefore the more strongly he is bound to conformity with the legal norms of the larger society" (1969:94). On the one hand, children who respect their parents, share thoughts and feelings with their parents, and

feel loved and wanted by them are less likely to be delinquent. On the other hand, delinquent youth are more likely to live in homes where communication and support is low (Hindelang 1973; Gove and Crutchfield 1982; Cernkovich and Giordano 1987; Rankin and Wells 1990); and where they feel unwanted by their parents (Pulkkinen 1982; McCord 1984). Delinquency is also more prevalent among youth who live in homes characterized by family tensions and parental discord (Rutter 1977), as well as quarrels and negligence (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986). Overall, strong emotional bonds between parent and child reduce the risk of delinquency.

Another characteristic of families is discipline, how parents react to their children's naughty behavior. As Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) point out, "... the person who cares for the child will watch his behavior, see him doing things he should not do, and correct him" (1990:97). The fact that parenting style predicts delinquency has been found by many researchers. Characteristics that are more likely to produce delinquency include lax and erratic discipline (Glueck and Glueck 1950; McCord et al. 1959), and overall inept parenting, including neglect, cruelty and conflict (Norland et al. 1979; Patterson 1980; Cernokovich and Giordano 1987; Van Voorhis et al. 1988; Wells and Rankin 1988; Larzelere and Patterson 1990; Rankin and Wells 1990; Simons et al. 1995). Poor parenting not only predicts more delinquency, but predicts negative outcomes for children generally:

Authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting have been associated with adolescents who are less competent socially, have lower self-esteem, and are more likely to exhibit negative behavior; conversely, parents who are authoritative and democratic tend to have adolescents who are more socially competent, responsible, mature, and independent (Resnick and Burt 1996:176).

Another relationship often found is that between abusive parenting and delinquency. This topic is worth exploring in detail, because it is often misunderstood and misrepresented.

Abused children are indeed at higher risk for delinquency than are non-abused children (Schmitt and Kempe 1975; Snyder and Patterson 1987). Social scientists often explain the relationship between abuse and delinquency by a "cycle of violence", suggesting that children who experience violence at the hands of their parents learn to be violent and are therefore more likely to use violence on others, or to equate love with violence. The idea that violence must be learned, however, does not hold up under more careful scrutiny. As Hirschi (1995) points out, the vast majority of delinquents live in homes characterized by indifference rather than by hostility or rejection. Additionally, as Widom (1989) found, of children who show up in juvenile court, many more come from neglectful than from abusive homes. More important, when comparing children from abusive homes to children from neglectful homes, each group is equally likely to engage in violent offenses. In other words, violence does not teach violence, but poor parenting increases delinquency, both violent and non-violent. The relationship between abuse and delinquency is merely a relationship

between crime and crime. Parents who are criminal (and whose criminal behavior sometimes includes child abuse) are more likely to have delinquent children (see also Simons et al. 1995).

This relationship between parental criminality and children's delinquency is also commonly found (West and Farrington 1977; Rutter and Giller 1984; Kandel et al. 1988; White et al. 1989). As with the relationship between abuse and delinquency, this relationship is often explained as a case of parents actively teaching their children criminal ideas, skills, and motives. Again, this does not fit with what we know about the nature of offenders. As Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) note, "criminality is not something that parents have to work to produce; on the contrary, it...is something they have to work to avoid" (p. 101). The force behind this relationship is better explained by the idea of low self-control. If parents do not think in the long term, how can they teach their children to think this way? Successful parenting requires attention to the future, a skill that offenders tend to lack. Consistent discipline requires patience, and the ability to follow through on threats. As Gottfredson and Hirschi recognize, punishment in homes of criminal parents tend to involve short-term, insensitive responses such as yelling and hitting. Finally, they remind us of the findings of Patterson (1980), which show that criminal parents are less likely to recognize their children's deviant behavior. "Obviously, parents who cannot see the misbehavior of their children are in no positions to correct it, even if they are inclined to do so" (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990:101). Parents who do not

recognize and respond to such behavior as tantrum throwing, talking back, and fighting are more likely to have children who grow up to steal from and assault others. And, such behavior is likely to continue. Lattimore et al. studied the predictors of rearrest among serious youthful offenders, and found that "even among a relatively homogeneous group of youthful offenders, the majority of whom had substantial criminal records, evidence of family violence, parental criminality, and parental neglect or poor supervision significantly increased parolees' risk of rearrest for violent crimes" (1995:76).

One last facet of family life that influences crime is family size.

Researchers have found a consistent relationship between family size and delinquency (Glueck and Glueck 1950; Hirschi 1969; Tygart 1991). Families who monitor, recognize, and punish deviant behavior are less likely to produce criminality in their members. The more children in a family, the harder it is to monitor each child, and even if deviance is recognized, the time and energy required to effectively punish make it much more difficult to punish many children than to punish few children. Children in larger families spend more time with other children, and less time with adults. Compared to adults, children rarely have the inclination or ability to monitor, recognize, and punish the deviant behavior of other children (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). As Hirschi (1995) notes, Sampson and Laub, in their reanalysis of the Glueck's data, found the effect of family size to be so strong that it survived statistical controls for family child-rearing processes. In his own research, Hirschi found the same: "In

addition to its effect on deviant behavior through verbal ability, supervision, and attachment, number of children in the family has an effect on delinquent behavior unexplained by the variables available in our analysis" (1991:62). Hirschi argues that number of children is itself a measure of parental low self-control—an inability to see, or disinterest in, long-term consequences. Having lots of children creates "...limited ability to provide for their maintenance, socialization, or placement...number of siblings or size of family is also an all-purpose indicator, predicting delinquency and drug-use as well as school performance and attachment" (1995:137).

As this discussion illustrates, family variables play a key role in the generation of criminality and crime. Additionally, all the variables discussed above are closely related to one another. Attachment, discipline, criminality of parents, and family size tend to predict one another as well as predicting crime. Many of these characteristics influence the opportunity to engage in crime as well as the individual tendency—through the main family variable that predicts opportunity, supervision.

### The Family and Crime: Supervision and Opportunity

The main family variable that influences the opportunity to engage in crime is supervision. We have established that more delinquents live in homes characterized by neglect and lax discipline than by harsh or abusive discipline, so we should not be surprised that supervision plays such an important role. As Hirschi (1995) points out: "The family may reduce the likelihood of delinquency

by restricting its children's activity, by maintaining actual physical surveillance of them, and by knowing their whereabouts when they are out of sight" (p. 128)

This conclusion is backed up by a large body of empirical research (Glueck and Glueck 1950; Hirschi 1969; West and Farrington 1977; McCord 1979; Patterson 1980; Wilson 1980; Gove and Crutchfield 1982; Fischer 1983; Patterson and Dishion 1985; Riley and Shaw 1985; Cernkovich and Giordano 1987; Smith and Paternoster 1987; Wilson 1987; Larzelere and Patterson 1990). Children are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior when they are under the watchful eyes of parents, or when they are aware that their parents know where they are, who they are with, and what they are doing.

Family characteristics like attachment, discipline, parental criminality, and family size influence crime. They can also influence opportunities for crime, however, if they affect supervision. Parents who are less attached to their children are less likely to supervise them. Lax discipline by definition involves a lack of supervision. Criminal parents are less likely to monitor their children's behavior. More children in a family makes supervision more difficult. Within families, the supervision and socialization of children are intertwined. Additionally, there are situations that make these important socialization functions more difficult to achieve. Single parents find it harder to monitor and discipline their children, and are less attached (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). The proportion of single-parent households in a community is a very strong

predictor of crime (Sampson 1987), and even accounts for the relationship between community poverty-level and crime (Smith and Jarjoura 1988).

This discussion of the family's effect on criminality and crime has illustrated that effective socialization of children appears to be the best protection against low self-control. A breakdown in socialization can occur in many ways—through broken homes, where one parent cannot monitor, recognize and punish as well as two; in large families where more children make this process more difficult; in homes where parents do not care about their children, do not recognize deviant behavior when it occurs, or do recognize it but engage in short-term responses such as yelling, slapping, or beating.

Another pertinent issue to note about the family's effect on crime is how it squares with the stability of differences in the tendency to commit criminal acts and the versatility of offenders. Criminal tendencies are stable over time. Differences in these tendencies can be detected early. Thus family characteristics are major predictors of criminality and must be important in its function because differences have been established before the school, peers, or gang have become significant factors in children's lives. The versatility of offenders fits with these findings as well. Parents do not actively teach their children to steal or to use violence, but poor parenting predicts delinquency in general. Violent parents are no more likely than the more commonplace permissive parents to produce delinquent children who engage in violence.

Family variables are major predictors of criminality and crime. The discussion of empirical evidence has shown this relationship. The stability of differences in criminality over time and the versatility of offenders show the key role families play in criminality and crime. Stability is important because it reminds us that differences in criminality can be detected early, before children have been exposed to the influences of schools or peers. Versatility reminds us that criminality is manifested through many behaviors, and that poor parenting (be it abusive or neglectful) increases the risk of all types of offending. The link between family variables and gang membership may really be the relationship between family variables and delinquency. We know that gang members are more delinquent than non-gang youth, so it comes as no surprise that research describing gang members reveals evidence of family problems. Such characteristics of gang members as single-parents, "marginalized youth", and family conflict may reflect previously established relationships between family characteristics and delinquency.

## ANALYSIS

The Seattle data contain numerous questions tapping family characteristics and relationships. Although the data do not contain measures of parental discipline or parental criminality, the other family variables discussed are in the survey. After establishing the links between family variables, self-control, and delinquency, the analyses that follow include gang membership and address the following questions: 1. Does gang membership add to the ability of

family characteristics to predict delinquency? If so, does gang membership account for the relationship between families and delinquency? 2. Do any family characteristics distinguish gang from non-gang youth? If so, do these differences remain when controlling for differences in delinquency? The last issue we will address is the relationship between being sentenced to an institution and gang membership. In Chapter 3 we found that even controlling for delinquency, gang members are more likely than non-gang boys to be sentenced to an institution. One possible explanation for this difference involves characteristics relating to the family. 4. Do family characteristics combined with delinquency account for gang members' greater chances of institutionalization?

All the analyses in this chapter will use unweighted data, and include only males, so the number of cases in each analysis will be about 1100 (sometimes less because missing data are excluded from all analyses). We begin by exploring the relationships between families, self-control, and delinquency.

#### Families, Self-Control, and Delinquency

Based on the review of past research, our exploration into the nature of the family/self-control/delinquency connection should find the following: First, if families are responsible for self-control, then self-control should be correlated with family characteristics. Families unsuccessful at socialization and supervision should be more likely to have children that exhibit attitudes consistent with low self-control. Second, if families also predict delinquency, family variables should predict the overall delinquency scale. Those who are

less supervised and less attached to their parents should engage in more delinquency than those who are well supervised and strongly attached.

To explore the relationship between family characteristics and self-control, I first ran correlations between all the family items in the Seattle instrument and the global self-control scale. The survey contains 19 items, measuring family structure (biological father/mother present in the home, family size, parents' educational level, and parents' work status), attachment to parents (sharing thoughts and feelings with parents, identifying with parents, respect for parents), and supervision (being free to come and go as one pleases, parents knowing where child is and what he is doing, staying out all night and not getting in trouble, and time spent in family activities). Table 4.1 shows the significant correlation coefficients. All the correlations are in the predicted direction, and show that overall, those with weaker families, and weaker ties to parents, are more likely to exhibit attitudes consistent with low self-control.

Although I suggested that supervision variables are more important for delinquency than self-control, these correlations show that attachment and supervision are both related to the self-control scale. As argued above, it is doubtful that parents who are not attached to their children spend much energy supervising them. These correlations have confirmed the connection between measures of self-control and family characteristics. If family characteristics are related to self-control, they should also be related to delinquency.

For these analyses, I first ran separate regressions for three family

**TABLE 4.1**  
**Correlations of global self-control scale with**  
**family characteristics. Significant coefficients only.**

	Global S/C
father at home	.09**
father's education	.10**
share thoughts with father	.16***
share thoughts with mother	.09**
identify with father	.23***
identify with mother	.16***
respect for father	.15***
respect for mother	.09**
father: free to come and go	.10**
mother: free to come and go	.15***
father know who with	.22***
mother know who with	.20***
family time	.18***
stay out overnight	-.19***

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

characteristics. One with all the items measuring family structure, one with the attachment items, and one with the supervision items. This allowed me to see the effects of individual items within categories of family traits. When the delinquency scale was regressed on the family structure items, only mother's education was significant (less education predicting more delinquency). When the overall delinquency scale was regressed on the attachment items, respect for mother, and identification with mother and father were significant. When the delinquency scale was regressed on the supervision items, time spent with family, staying out overnight, and father and mother knowing "where you are and who you are with" were significant. Table 4.2 shows each of the significant items

from the regressions discussed above in one regression equation. Taken together, only identification with mother is no longer significant, and these family items account for 15 percent of the variance in delinquency.

TABLE 4.2  
OLS regression of overall delinquency scale on family items

	Beta	T-Ratio
father know who with respect for mother	-.07*	2.10
mother's education	-.11***	3.36
stay out overnight	-.09**	2.73
family time	.12***	3.60
identify with mother	-.07*	2.11
identify with father	-.05	1.49
mother know who with	-.09**	2.60
	-.18***	4.85

$R^2 = .15$

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

Consistent with past research and the assumptions of control theory, the Seattle data confirm the connection between self-control and family characteristics, and between attachment and supervision and delinquency. With the exception of mother's education, the family structure variables were not strong predictors of delinquency. For instance, having a biological father at home is not a significant predictor of delinquency. But socialization variables such as father's supervision and attachment to father are significant predictors. It seems that just having a father in the house is not enough—he must actively participate in the socialization of his child to decrease the risk of delinquent

behavior. These findings are consistent with Sampson and Laub's (1993) discussion of structure and process in delinquency. They point out that research often focuses exclusively on structural variables (broken homes) or process variables (attachment or supervision), ignoring the fact that structural variables often have their influence through process variables. Broken homes may not strongly predict delinquency directly, but they influence the family's ability (especially the father's ability) to supervise and bond with its children, which in turn influences delinquency. We can now proceed to the questions posed concerning gang membership's role in the relationships between delinquency, self-control, and families.

### Gang Membership

The first question asks if gang membership improves the prediction of delinquency beyond what we found using family variables. If gang membership maintains an independent effect on delinquency, then it should predict even controlling for the effects of families. It should not, however, account for the relationship between family characteristics and delinquency. Table 4.3 shows the overall delinquency scale regressed on the significant family variables from Table 4.2, along with gang membership. As predicted, gang membership is a significant predictor of delinquency, even accounting for a variety of family characteristics. Adding gang membership to this equation improved the  $R^2$  from .15 to .22. The addition of gang membership did not, however, account for the relationship between these family variables and delinquency. All the family

items remain significant predictors of delinquency when controlling for gang membership.

**TABLE 4.3**  
OLS regression of overall delinquency scale on  
gang membership and family items

	Beta	T-Ratio
gang membership	.27***	8.85
father know who with	-.08*	2.36
respect for mother	-.10**	3.04
mother's education	-.08*	2.42
stay out overnight	.08**	2.68
family time	-.07*	2.06
identify with mother	-.07*	2.10
identify with father	-.08*	2.34
mother know who with	-.15***	4.35

R<sup>2</sup>=.22

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

Family characteristics such as attachment and supervision predict delinquency, and benefit from gang membership in this prediction. Do any of the family items predict gang membership? It would be logical to assume that weaker families are those most likely to have sons who will join gangs. Boys who do not care about their parents wishes, and who are not supervised by their parents, should be more likely to report gang membership. However, if gang membership is merely a reflection of one's own behavior, then gang members

may not come from families any different from boys who do not identify themselves as members when delinquency is controlled.

Of the family items, only three are significantly correlated with gang membership: respect for father ( $r = -.09$ ), supervision by mother (measured by the question, "When you're away from home, does your mother know where you are and who you are with?" ( $r = -.12$ )), and being able to stay out overnight without being asked about it ( $r = .09$ ). Boys who have less respect for their fathers, and who are less supervised are more likely to report gang membership. These three items were next run with gang membership in a regression (Table 4.4). The respect for father item is no longer significant, but the two supervision

TABLE 4.4  
OLS regression of gang membership on family items

	Beta	T-Ratio
stay out overnight	.08*	2.47
respect for father	-.06	1.91
mother know who with	-.10**	3.09
R <sup>2</sup> = .02		
* p < .05; ** p < .01		

items remain significant predictors of gang membership. We have discovered characteristics that seem to distinguish gang from non-gang youth. Those reporting gang membership are less supervised (particularly by their mothers) than those who do not identify themselves as gang members. Before we

conclude that those who are less supervised are free to run off and join gangs, however, we must answer one last question: do these differences remain when we control for delinquency?

Table 4.5 shows gang membership regressed on the overall delinquency scale, respect for father, staying out overnight, and mother's supervision. As occurred with the relationship between gang membership and measures of self-control (which initially distinguished gang from non-gang youth), when we account for delinquency, none of the family variables survive. Only delinquency remains significant, and the  $R^2$  is much improved—from .02 to .12. When comparing boys with similar levels of delinquency, family variables no longer distinguish those reporting gang membership from those not reporting membership.

TABLE 4.5  
OLS regression of gang membership on  
family items and overall delinquency scale

	Beta	T-Ratio
delinquency	.33***	9.95
stay out overnight	.05	1.57
respect for father	-.02	.60
mother know who with	-.02	.70
$R^2 = .12$		
*** $p < .001$		

The last issue we can address in this chapter is the finding that gang

members are more likely to be incarcerated than non-gang youth, even controlling for delinquency. I suggested that perhaps part of what judges use to decide who deserves institutionalization is the situation at home. Although family variables did not distinguish gang from non-gang youth when controlling for delinquency, do they account for gang members' greater risk of incarceration? Table 4.6 shows institutionalization regressed on gang membership, delinquency, and two scales. The parental attachment scale combines the six attachment items used above, and the supervision scale combines the six supervision items used above. Delinquency and parental attachment are both significant predictors of being sentenced to an institution. Gang membership and supervision are not. So, we again see that when other variables are controlled, gang membership does not seem to have concrete

TABLE 4.6  
OLS regression of institutional status on delinquency scale,  
attachment and supervision scales, and gang membership

	Beta	T-Ratio
delinquency	.18***	4.90
parental attachment	-.10**	3.00
parental supervision	.00	.14
gang membership	.05	1.55
R <sup>2</sup> =.06		
** p < .01; *** p < .001		

effects for those who report it. Boys who report gang membership are not more

likely to be sentenced to an institution than boys not reporting membership when we account for delinquency and parental attachment.

## CONCLUSION

The analyses in this chapter explored two broad topics: the relationships between families, delinquency, and self-control; and how gang membership influences these relationships. Overall, the analyses support the argument that family structure, parental attachment, and supervision are correlated with self-control, and that parental attachment and supervision predict delinquency, confirming the findings of previous research and supporting the assumptions of control theory. When gang membership is added to measures of family characteristics, it improves our predictions of delinquency, but does not account for the relationship between family variables and delinquency.

Our goal of finding characteristics (besides higher involvement in delinquency) distinguishing those who report gang membership from those who do not is not any closer. It appeared that those reporting gang membership were less attached to their fathers and less supervised by their mothers, but when delinquency was controlled, these relationships were no longer significant. It also appeared that gang membership had real consequences for harsher treatment by the juvenile court, but when controlling for parental attachment and delinquency, gang membership was no longer a significant predictor of being sentenced to an institution.

Apparently, researchers who describe the family life of gang members are really just describing the family life of delinquents. This is not surprising, however, when we recall the methodological approaches taken by many researchers. If they only spent time with gang members, and did not systematically compare them to non-gang youth, how would they know which characteristics are unique to gang members, and which are those shared by delinquents, gang or non-gang?

So far we have attempted to understand the meaning gang membership has for Seattle youth using variables relating to self-control, delinquency, families, and the justice system. The analyses so far do not allow us to say much about the characteristics that distinguish those reporting gang membership from those not, other than greater participation in a variety of delinquent acts. It does appear that gang membership may have a direct, unmediated effect on delinquency because it is actually another measure of crime. Chapter 5 will continue our search for characteristics that distinguish gang from non-gang youth using variables relating to school.

## CHAPTER 5

### The School

When children begin school, they bring with them tendencies that will predict their educational experiences—how well they will do, how much they will enjoy school, and how likely they will be to pursue school further. The first few years of their lives have been spent primarily with their families. These family experiences have either prepared them for the behavioral expectations of school, or they have not. The school experience is uniquely suited to discussions of crime and criminality. If criminality is defined by self-control, the differential tendencies of individuals to avoid crime in a variety of situations, then those with low self-control should exhibit this trait through such behaviors as crime/delinquency (which we have shown they do). If delinquency is a behavioral manifestation of low self-control, doing well in school is delinquency's polar opposite—a behavioral manifestation of high self-control. Where delinquency is short-term rewarding but costly in the long term, doing well in school is not particularly rewarding in the short-term, but its long range payoffs are considerable. What we know about those most likely to be delinquent also suggests that those same individuals will be least likely to succeed in school.

As is the case with family variables, when gang researchers mention school experiences and abilities, they tend to describe them as precursors to gang membership, or as distinguishing characteristics between gang and non-gang youth.

## THE SCHOOL IN GANG RESEARCH

We have seen that various criminological theories view the school in distinct ways. Cultural deviance theorists describe delinquents as dismissing school success in favor of success at delinquency. Strain theories implicate the school in the creation of criminal tendencies and behavior. Disorganization and control theories portray schools as conventional institutions functioning to control behavior, and see school success, attachment, and high expectations as polar opposites to delinquent behavior. If school success and delinquency are contradictory, then logic would predict that school variables should also be related to gang membership.

Vigil (1988) describes Hispanic gang members in Los Angeles as youth who are marginal to both family and school. Other researchers mention school variables as one of many traits describing gang members. Cartwright et al. describe gang members as, "...lack[ing] realism in their approach to the external world..." and possessing "strong tendencies toward short-run hedonism" (1980:20). Neither of these descriptions point to school success. Other researchers describe gang members using school-related characteristics, including: low IQ and lack of educational preparedness (Klein 1971, 1995), poor school performance (Morash 1983; Winfree and Mays 1996), low attachment to school (Curry and Spergel 1992), high truancy and drop-out rates (Horowitz 1983; Reyes and Jason 1993), and negative views of teachers and less time

spent on homework (Schwartz 1989). Winfree et al. (1997) found that gang-related crime was best understood by lower grades in school and being male.

Overall, few researchers have attempted to systematically explore the relationships between gang membership, criminality, crime, and school variables. The analyses in this chapter will attempt to clarify the nature of these relationships. Before we do this, however, a discussion of what is already known about the relationships between school variables, criminality, and crime is necessary.

#### THE SCHOOL, CRIMINALITY, AND CRIME

When discussing the relationship between criminality and school, we need only again think of the characteristics associated with low self-control individuals. Differing levels of self-control are obvious in children as young as three—some are good-natured, obedient, and patient; their parents have taught them that suppressing their naturally hedonistic natures is more rewarding in the long run than going for the immediate reward. Other children are cranky, disobedient and impatient—their natural tendencies toward short run hedonism have not been suppressed by parental socialization. It is easy to see that the former group of children can expect to succeed in school with much greater ease than the latter group of children. Success in school depends on delaying gratification—sharing with other children, following directions, sitting quietly, etc. A child's level of self-control will predict his or her academic experiences. Not

surprisingly, these various academic experiences correlate strongly with delinquency as well as self-control.

### The School and Crime: Individual Tendencies

IQ is a good predictor of delinquency. Offenders have IQ scores about ten points lower than the general population (Herrnstein 1995; Moffit and Silva 1988). Delinquency is not the only thing that IQ predicts. It is also the best predictor of GPA (Hirschi and Hindelang 1977; Jensen and Rojek 1992). Those with higher IQ's get better grades. GPA, in turn, is a strong predictor of delinquency.

Researchers have consistently found that youth who do well in school are much less likely to be criminal than youth who do poorly in school. The higher the GPA, the lower the level of delinquency (Hirschi 1969; Empey and Lubeck 1971; Polk and Schafer 1972; Frease 1973; Johnson 1979; Patterson and Dishion 1985; Feldman et al. 1987; Dryfoos 1990). This relationship between school performance and delinquency holds even controlling for class, race, and gender (Polk and Halferty 1966; Empey and Lubeck 1971; Rankin 1980; Wiatrowski et al. 1981). Lattimore et al. (1995) found dropping out of school to significantly increase youthful parolees' risk of rearrest for violent crimes.

Another aspect of school performance that predicts delinquency is homework. Students who do more homework engage in less crime, even controlling for GPA (Hirschi 1969). Homework is an example of the tension between long- and short-term rewards. It is much more rewarding in the short

term to go to the mall with friends than to stay home and do homework. But the next day when the homework is due, the choice to stay home and work on it ends up being the more rewarding one. Those who think in the short-term are less likely to do homework and more likely to engage in crime. Doing homework and doing well in school are generally associated with liking school. Attachment to school is another correlate of delinquency.

Whether attachment predicts performance, performance predicts attachment, or self-control predicts both, youth who like school are less likely to engage in delinquency. When asked if they like school, like their teachers, care what their teachers think, and if they respect their teachers, delinquents show less attachment to school and teachers than do non-delinquents (Hirschi 1969; Hindelang 1973; Jensen et al. 1978; Johnson 1979; Smith et al. 1995).

This negative relationship between school attachment and delinquency is not surprising based on what we know about the nature of most offenders:

"Socializing institutions [such as school] impose restraints; they do not allow unfettered pursuit of self-interest; they require accomplishment. Lack of self-control activates external controls, controls that are not applied to or felt by everyone, thus resulting in difference in attitudes towards the school"

(Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990:105). Those with low self-control do not like to be monitored, do not like to be told what to do, and are easily bored—therefore for them, school is a drag. Compared to their higher self-control peers, they do not enjoy or do well in school.

This leads to another important link between school and delinquency, educational expectations. Compared to their non-delinquent peers, delinquents are less ambitious, and less likely to picture themselves going to college (Polk and Halferty 1966; Hirschi 1969; Wiatrowski et al. 1982). In strain theory aspirations, rather than expectations, play the major role. Aspirations, however, are not always grounded in reality. Most youth like the idea of jobs that require a college education, but even delinquents realize that if they do not like school, and do not do well in school, they probably will not end up going to college. Expectations are measures of where youth picture themselves in the future, and are grounded in current behavior, not imagination. Because delinquent youth do not do well in school and do not like school, they do not imagine themselves staying in school longer than they have to.

These connections between school performance, attachment, expectations, and delinquency are sometimes causally linked. For example, some theories suggest that delinquency causes poor performance and lack of attachment. Or that poor performance causes low attachment, which leads to delinquency. Any explanation of how these variables relate to one another, however, must account for the stability of differences in criminal behavior over time. IQ scores at four predict delinquency in the teens (Lipsitt et al. 1990). Poorly behaved toddlers are at greater risk for future crime than their well-behaved contemporaries (Loeber 1982; Caspi et al. 1989; Mischel et al. 1989). So if IQ is stable from age four, and self-control is stable from even earlier in life,

these connections between school performance, attachment, expectations, and delinquency must all be manifestations of an underlying stable trait—self-control. And, since self-control exhibits itself in a variety of behaviors, we should not be surprised that school variables are yet another example of the versatility of offenders. If children come to school with already established, stable IQ's, and with differing levels of self-control, can the school influence levels of self-control?

Theoretically, schools are a perfect environment for teaching children self-control. As Gottfredson and Hirschi note, schools can more effectively monitor behavior than the family can, with one teacher overseeing many children at a time. Unlike many parents, teachers generally have no difficulty recognizing deviant or disruptive behavior in their students (see Bank et al. 1993). Schools have a clear interest in maintaining order and discipline, so they will do what they can to control disruptive behavior. Finally, schools, in theory, have the authority and means to punish lapses in self-control (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990:105). Put together, it would seem that the characteristics of school make it a perfect place for socializing children. However, one key variable helps the school to function the way it should: cooperative parents. If families do not support them, schools find it harder to control and sanction inappropriate behavior. And, the parents whose children are most in need of control and sanction are the parents who have already failed in the socialization of their children, and who are unlikely to cooperate with the school. Those who do not

like school, and have little invested in it, are most immune from its influences. "...those with little self-control will have difficulty satisfying the academic and department requirements of the school in return for its long-term benefits. The result, of course, is that delinquents will tend to avoid and eventually leave school in favor of less restrictive environments" (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990:162-163). Overall, however, Gottfredson and Hirschi conclude that even without parental support, the net effect of schools is positive, "As a result of the school experience, some students learn to better appreciate the advantages and opportunities associated with self-control and are thus effectively socialized regardless of their family experiences" (p. 106). As discussed above, homework is an exercise in thinking about tomorrow today, "homework thus indexes and perhaps contributes to socialization" (p. 106).

#### The School and Crime: Opportunity

Recall that crime is influenced by opportunity, situations, and the criminal tendencies of individuals. We have established that schools do not seem to have much influence on self-control, because these tendencies are present before a child begins school. Once children enter school, with their varying levels of self-control, how does the school experience influence the opportunity for crime?

The most obvious way that schools influence crime is through the presence of other students. Other students provide low self-control individuals with companions, making crime more likely. A low self-control individual is more

likely to engage in crime when in the company of others like himself than when he is alone (Felson 1994). School is an important place for all children to find companions, regardless of their criminal tendencies. Schools provide youthful offenders with potential accomplices, but they also provide suitable targets. Students have money, clothes, books, and other things that can be stolen. Other students provide someone to steal from, someone to harass, someone to beat up. Teachers also have things to steal, and school buildings are great places to smoke, drink, and use drugs. Although safer than many other neighborhood locations (McDermott 1983), like any place that brings together in time and space a large group of potential offenders, schools provide ample opportunity for crime (see Gold and Moles 1978).

The amount of crime in schools differs significantly from one school to another, and one of the predictors of crime is the amount of control schools exert over their students. As Toby (1995) points out, to suppress crime among their students, schools must do what parents must do to suppress crime among their children: monitor students' behavior, recognize deviant behavior when it occurs, and punish the behavior. Schools that do not effectively do these three things experience more crime. Poorly designed schools have lots of unsupervised spaces, where students rule and crime occurs. Disorganization in schools, like disorganization in neighborhoods and families, creates opportunities for crime, regardless of the criminality of the student body. As Menacker et al. (1990) point

out, socially disorganized, crime-ridden neighborhoods produce socially disorganized, crime-ridden schools.

## ANALYSIS

### School, Self-Control, and Delinquency

The Seattle instrument contains eleven items relating to school. These include measures of performance such as grades in school, amount of time spent doing homework, and reading ability ("I really have not learned to read very well"). Items measuring attachment to school include liking school, respect for and liking teachers, caring what teachers think, and being interested in books, school, and education. Items measuring a commitment to education include trying hard in school, educational expectations, and the importance of getting good grades.

Table 5.1 shows the relationship between these school items and self-control. The global self-control scale is significantly correlated with all 11 school items. Similar to the analyses with family variables, our measure of self-control is a good predictor of school experiences, again confirming the ability of self-control to predict a variety of behaviors and attitudes. Those who think little of the future consequences of their acts are likely to treat others poorly (meanness, amorality) and to resist/disrespect authority of all kinds (rebellion, respect for police and respect for teachers). This tendency toward the present also predicts poor school performance and a lack of concern for one's educational future. Again, the benefit of separating measures of criminality (self-control) from

**TABLE 5.1**  
**Correlations of global self control scale with**  
**school items. Significant coefficients only.**

	Global Self-Control
grades in school	.22***
like school	.28***
like teachers	.22***
care what teachers think	.29***
try hard in school	.16***
interest in books and school	.28***
educational expectations	.23***
respect for teachers	.28***
time spent on homework	.20***
importance of getting good grades	.14***
reading ability	.11***

\*\*\* p < .001

measures of crime is that we can see the characteristics of the general trait that predict more than just delinquency. Because the measures of school experiences, abilities, and attitudes are highly correlated with the measures of self-control, they should also predict delinquency.

To discover if school characteristics predict delinquency, the overall delinquency scale was regressed on all 11 school items to determine which are significant predictors. Five of the items were significant, and explained 18 percent of the variance in delinquency. Next the delinquency scale was regressed only on these five significant items. Table 5.2 shows this regression. Boys who think getting good grades is important, who spend more time on homework, who get better grades, who try hard in school, and who care what

**TABLE 5.2**  
**OLS regression of overall delinquency scale on school items**

	Beta	T-Ratio
importance of getting good grades	-.12***	4.19
time spent on homework	-.08**	2.75
try hard in school	-.15***	4.76
grades in school	-.17***	5.54
care what teachers think about you	-.12***	4.01

$R^2 = .17$

their teachers think of them are less likely to engage in delinquency. Items measuring school performance appear to be the best predictors of delinquency, at least when the other school items are taken into account. Again, this fits with control theory's focus on behaviors that share common characteristics. Delinquent acts are behaviors that produce quick and easy rewards in the short-term, but which also produce serious costs in the long-run. Four of the five school variables that significantly predict delinquency are directly related to behaviors that predict school success—and three of them are direct measures of behavior (time spent on homework, trying hard, and grades in school). Students with low self-control think and act in ways that do not predict school success, and those items measuring behavior surrounding school success are the best predictors of delinquency. Even the remaining variable (caring what teachers think) has implications for one's likelihood of engaging in delinquency. If one cares about what his teachers think of him, he is also likely to care what others in general think of him, and is therefore less likely to risk losing their good

opinion by engaging in delinquency. Now that we have confirmed in the Seattle data what past research has found, we can proceed to our questions about how gang membership fits into these relationships.

### School, Self-Control, Delinquency, and Gang Membership

These data have shown that attitudes toward school and school performance predict delinquency. Does gang membership allow us to improve this prediction? Table 5.3 shows the delinquency scale regressed on the significant school items from Table 5.2, along with gang membership. Gang membership improves our prediction of delinquency (the  $R^2$  improves from .17 to .24), but does not account for the relationship between the school items and delinquency—all the items remain significant. Those who do well in school and care what their teachers think are less likely to be delinquent, whether they

TABLE 5.3  
OLS regression of overall delinquency scale on  
gang membership and school items

	Beta	T-Ratio
gang membership	.26***	9.58
importance of getting good grades	-.12***	4.12
time spent on homework	-.08**	2.91
try hard in school	-.13***	4.25
grades in school	-.16***	5.41
care what teachers think about you	-.10***	3.56
R <sup>2</sup> =.24		
** p < .01; *** p < .001		

identify themselves as gang members or not. As it did with self-control and family characteristics, when added to items relating to school, gang membership improves our ability to predict delinquency. Do any of these school items distinguish between those reporting gang membership and those not reporting membership?

To determine if characteristics related to school are important to respondents when identifying themselves as gang members, gang membership was regressed on all the school items. Three were significant. Table 5.4 shows gang membership regressed on these three significant items. Those identifying themselves as gang members are more likely to admit that they do not read very well, are less likely to respect their teachers, and are less likely to try hard in school. Again, we have found characteristics that distinguish gang from non-gang youth. But before we conclude that boys who do not read well, who do not

TABLE 5.4  
OLS regression of gang membership on school items

	Beta	T-Ratio
reading ability	-.08**	2.84
respect for teachers	-.09**	2.80
try hard in school	-.09**	2.83
R <sup>2</sup> =.03		
** p < .01		

respect their teachers, and do not try hard in school run out and join gangs to feel better about themselves, we must make sure that these differences are not accounted for by delinquency.

Table 5.5 shows gang membership regressed on delinquency, reading ability, respect for teachers, and effort in school. Delinquency is of course significant, and adding it to the equation improves the  $R^2$  (from .03 to .11). Respect for teachers and effort in school are no longer significant when

TABLE 5.5  
OLS regression of gang membership on school items and overall delinquency

	Beta	T-Ratio
delinquency	.31***	9.91
reading ability	-.07**	2.61
respect for teachers	-.02	.72
try hard in school	-.03	.83
$R^2 = .11$		
** < .01; *** $p < .001$		

delinquency is added, but reading ability is. This is the first variable that has maintained a significant effect on gang membership when controlling for delinquency. None of the self-control measures survived, none of the family characteristics survived, and none of the other school-related items survived. Now we can say that those who identify themselves as gang members differ from those who do not in two ways: they are more involved in delinquent acts of all types, and they do not read as well.

This finding about reading ability is an important one. Recall that both strain and cultural deviance theories focus on explanations for crime and criminality that occur almost simultaneously with delinquency. A child cannot be strained until he realizes what his aspirations are and how his place in the economic world influences his chance of achieving those goals. In learning theories, delinquency cannot occur until the child is exposed to the tutelage of already delinquent youth who teach him the motives and techniques necessary for delinquency. Reading ability, however, comes long before we begin to recognize youth as "delinquent", is heavily influenced by IQ, and can be measured before a child is capable of understanding the disparity between his aspirations and expectations, or before he is exposed to delinquent peers. This finding fits much better with the distinction between crime and criminality presented by control theory than the predictions of strain or learning theories.

#### Strain, Gang Membership, and Delinquency

The last issue we can explore in this chapter is strain. Because schools play such an important role in the creation of crime and criminality in strain theories, it is appropriate to test strain's ability to predict gang membership and delinquency. The variable "strain" was created by assigning a value of 1 to each respondent whose educational aspirations exceeded his expectations, and a value of 0 to those whose expectations exceeded their aspirations, and those whose expectations and aspirations matched (which was the majority of the respondents). Using this definition of strain, 18 percent of the boys in the

sample are strained. Even if strain causes delinquency, it is not accounting for much of the delinquency, since 66 percent of the sample is officially delinquent, and only 18 percent are strained. If anything, we would expect less delinquency than strain, because perhaps not all strained boys respond with delinquency.

First we can explore the relationship between strain and gang membership and between strain and delinquency (Table 5.6). Strain is not correlated with gang membership, but is positively correlated with the delinquency scale. Remember that I argued earlier that aspirations are not really what is key in delinquency prediction, but expectations. Perhaps this relationship between strain and delinquency is a function not of high aspirations

TABLE 5.6  
Correlations of strain with gang membership and delinquency

	Gang Membership	Delinquency
Strain	.04	.07*

\*  $p < .05$

combined with low expectations, but simply low expectations. Table 5.7 shows the delinquency scale regressed on strain and educational expectations. When controlling for expectations, strain no longer significantly predicts delinquency (and in fact is negatively related to delinquency, although not significant). This equation explains 6 percent of the variance in delinquency.

Those who admit to more delinquent acts are not more likely to experience a disparity between what they would like to achieve and what they

**TABLE 5.7**  
**OLS regression of delinquency on strain and educational expectations**

	Beta	T-Ratio
educational expectations	-.27***	8.18
strain	-.06	1.66
R <sup>2</sup> = .06		
*** p < .001		

think they will achieve, but are merely more likely to expect less of themselves with regards to their futures. Strain is not related to gang membership and does not predict delinquency when educational expectations are controlled.

#### CONCLUSION

Like the conclusions of previous chapters, this chapter allows us to review what was and was not found with respect to the relationships between delinquency, self-control, and gang membership. Introducing variables relating to school allowed us to confirm that those with low self-control are less likely to do well in school, to like school or their teachers, or to expect to continue school beyond what is mandatory. This confirms my earlier assertion that school success behaves as low self-control's opposite. We also found that behaviors relating to school—grades, effort, and homework—are the best predictors of delinquency. Three of the school variables also significantly predicted gang membership (reading ability, respect for teachers, and effort). When introducing controls for delinquency, however, only reading ability maintained a significant

effect on gang membership. When comparing boys with similar levels of delinquency, gang members are more likely to admit that they do not read very well than are their non-gang counterparts. This finding also gives more credence to our earlier hypothesis that perhaps gang membership is more a reflection of the respondent's individual characteristics (delinquency, reading ability), than it is a reflection of the group's characteristics. Next we compare gang to non-gang youth using peer variables—will gang members' relationships with their peers distinguish them from non-gang youth?

## CHAPTER 6

### The Peer Group

It is generally thought that when children reach their teens, peers suddenly take on a different role than when these same children were younger. Many parents assume that their delinquent children would have never gotten into trouble if it were not for “peer pressure”. Interestingly enough, however, no one's child is ever the one doing the pressuring—it is always someone else's.

#### THE PEER GROUP, CRIMINALITY, AND CRIME

Researchers have found that children who exhibit low self-control at age three and four are at much greater risk for delinquency in their teens. Behavior that exhibits the pursuit of short-term rewards at the cost of long-term goals can be measured in three year-olds just as easily as it can in 13 year-olds. When research on young children includes peers, those children at most risk of future delinquency are those that do not get along with their peers. Children who physically attack, antagonize, and generally do not interact well with other children are more likely to be delinquent than children who get along well with their peers (Bank et al. 1983; Reiss and Roth 1993; Walker et al. 1993). Yet many sociological theories portray delinquent and gang youth as having close bonds with one another, and even intimate that delinquent youth are more loyal to one another than their non-delinquent contemporaries, and therefore make better friends. It seems unlikely that children who were unable to get along with their peers in elementary school will suddenly transform themselves into loyal,

steadfast friends in junior high and high school. Overall, the evidence that peers play a major role in the misbehavior of young children (misbehavior that endures throughout life) is scant. What does research show about the relationship between crime and peers?

The relationship between peers and delinquency is a favorite of differential association/learning theorists, because the relationship is always found. Those who have delinquent friends are more likely to be delinquent themselves (Hirschi 1969; Johnson 1979; Morash 1983; Gardner and Shoemaker 1989; Pabon et al. 1992; Thornberry et al. 1994; Towberman 1994). What these findings mean, however, is debated. Differential association theorists interpret these findings as support for their contention that peers cause criminality and crime. Control theorists argue these findings support the idea that "birds of a feather flock together".

Differential association theory suggests that delinquents should have bonds to one another that are as strong or stronger than the bonds between conventional youth. After all, for successful socialization to the delinquent subculture to occur, the relationships between those teaching and those learning must be strong. Some researchers have found this predicted relationship (Krohn and Massey 1980; Wiatrowski et al. 1981; Giordano et al. 1986), but others find the relationships between delinquent peers to be lacking in warmth, support, or respect (Matza 1964; Short and Strodtbeck 1965; Hirschi 1969). Gilmore et al.

(1992) found that youth are more attached to conventional peers than to delinquent ones, regardless of their own delinquency.

These issues are important for our purposes. Recall that we have two hypotheses, one suggesting that youth who report gang membership spend time with delinquent peers who increase their level of crime, and one suggesting that gang membership is merely a way that delinquent youth describe themselves, independent of the characteristics or activities of the peer group. Exploring the effects of the peer group will be our last chance to find support for the first hypothesis. If we can find differences between those identifying themselves as gang members and those who do not, differences that survive controls for delinquency, and point to group characteristics, we can conclude that gang membership does have to do with one's peers. If not, we will conclude that the label "gang member" is the result of certain individual characteristics and behavior, not the cause.

## ANALYSIS

The Seattle survey contains a number of items asking respondents about their peers and activities, including questions about the existence of friends (do you have lots of friends, how many do you have, do you have a best friend?), the characteristics of friends (are they boys or girls, do they like school, do teachers like them, have they been picked up by the police?), attachment to friends (respect for friends, identify with friends, share thoughts and feelings with friends?) and time spent with friends (how many hours a week spent with same-

sex peers, both sex peers?). As with our analyses in previous chapters, we will begin by confirming the relationship between self-control and peer variables, and the effects of peers on delinquency. Then we will determine whether: 1) gang membership adds to the ability of peer items to predict delinquency, and whether it accounts for the relationship between peers and delinquency; 2) any of the peer variables predict gang membership, and if they survive when we control for delinquency.

### Peers, Self-Control, and Delinquency

We begin by determining if peer characteristics are related to our measures of self-control. Those who exhibit attitudes consistent with low self-control should be more likely to have delinquent friends, friends who do not like school, and who teachers do not like. They should also spend more time with peers, because of a lack of supervision. Those with low self-control should also be less likely to have relationships with their peers that are characterized by warmth or respect. Table 6.1 shows significant coefficients from correlations of all the peer items with the global self-control scale. Those scoring higher on the self-control scale (high self-control) spend less time hanging out with friends, are less likely to have friends who have been picked up by the police, and are more likely to have friends who teachers like, who like school, and who they identify with and respect. Overall, these findings support the relationship between self-control and the characteristics of peers. Those with low-self control spend more time with friends, are more likely to have delinquent friends, and

**TABLE 6.1**  
**Correlations of global self-control scale with**  
**peer items. Significant coefficients only**

	Global S/C
time spent with same sex peers	-.14***
time spent with both sex peers	-.17***
time spent with best friend	-.13***
friends picked up by police	-.27***
best friend like school	.23***
respect for best friend	.11***
teachers like friends	.28***
best friend picked up by police	-.26***
identify with best friend	.08*

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

friends with low attachment to school, and are less likely to have friends that they respect and identify with. These findings fit well with earlier chapters, which showed that those with low self-control are more likely to be delinquent, unsupervised, and weakly attached to school. Low self-control youth seem to choose friends that greatly resemble themselves. Next we can confirm that the peer items are related to delinquency.

Initially, all the peer items were included in a regression with the overall delinquency scale. Six of the 14 were significant predictors of overall delinquency. Next, delinquency was regressed on these 6 significant items. Table 6.2 shows the results of this regression. All remain significant, and together account for 39 percent of the variance in the overall delinquency scale. Respondents who have more friends picked up by the police are more likely to

be delinquent, along with those spending more time with mixed sex peer groups, and those whose best friends do not like school. The item asking about sharing thoughts and feelings with best friend is also a significant predictor of delinquency. Those who share their thoughts and feelings with their best friend are actually more likely to be delinquent. They are not any more or less

TABLE 6.2  
OLS regression of overall delinquency scale on peer items

	Beta	T-Ratio
best friend like school	-.11***	3.45
share thoughts with best friend	.11***	3.89
teachers like friends	-.17***	5.30
friends picked up by the police	.43***	11.68
time spend with both sex peers	.06*	2.06
best friend picked up by police	.08*	2.30

R<sup>2</sup>=.39

\* p < .05; \*\*\* p < .001

likely, however, to respect or identify with their best friends. We have seen that the measures of self-control are related to peer characteristics, and that these characteristics predict delinquency. Does gang membership add to our ability to predict delinquency?

#### Peers, Self-Control, Delinquency, and Gang Membership

Table 6.3 shows the regression from Table 6.2, with gang membership added to the independent variables. Gang membership is significant, and all but two items remain significant. The R<sup>2</sup> is improved from .39 to .44. Gang

membership improves our ability to predict delinquency, but does not account for the relationship between peer characteristics and delinquency. Regardless of gang membership, youth with deviant friends (measured by arrest and low attachment to school/teachers) are more likely to engage in delinquency. As usual, gang membership improves predictions of delinquency. Next we can explore the ability of these peer characteristics to predict gang membership.

TABLE 6.3  
OLS regression of overall delinquency scale on  
gang membership and peer items

	Beta	T-Ratio
gang membership	.24***	8.66
best friend like school	-.10***	3.31
share thoughts with best friend	.10***	3.54
teachers like friends	-.15***	4.89
friends picked up by the police	.40***	11.26
time spend with both sex peers	.05	1.77
best friend picked up by police	.06	1.84
R <sup>2</sup> =.44		
*** p < .001		

First, gang membership was regressed on all the peer items. Three were significant. Gang membership was then regressed on these three items.

Table 6.4 shows the results of this regression. Number of friends is no longer significant, but friends picked up by the police and teachers' opinion of friends remain significant. Those who report gang membership are more likely to have friends who have been picked up by the police, and to have friends who

TABLE 6.4  
OLS regression of gang membership on peer items

	Beta	T-Ratio
number of friends	-.04	1.23
friends picked up by police	.18***	5.94
teachers like group of friends	-.10***	3.34
R <sup>2</sup> =.06		
*** p < .001		

teachers do not like. Do these characteristics remain significant predictors of gang membership when we add delinquency? Table 6.5 shows gang membership regressed on delinquency, number of friends, friends picked up by the police, and teachers' opinion of friends. Only delinquency is a significant predictor, and the R<sup>2</sup> improves from .06 to .12. Once again we are left with only delinquency predicting gang membership. The relationship between friends'

TABLE 6.5  
OLS regression of gang membership on  
peer items and overall delinquency scale

	Beta	T-Ratio
delinquency	.31***	8.54
number of friends	-.04	1.47
friends picked up by police	.04	.98
teachers like group of friends	-.03	1.01
R <sup>2</sup> =.12		
*** p < .001		

delinquency and gang membership, and between teachers' opinions of friends and gang membership are accounted for by the delinquency of the respondent. This finding is somewhat surprising, considering how much attention the influence of peers on gang members has been given in the literature. If gangs are organized around delinquency, and if gang members exert such great pressure upon their members, one would think that at least the delinquency of peers would remain a significant predictor of gang membership—even when the delinquency of the respondent is taken into account. Perhaps the delinquency of “fellow gang members” has been overstated in the literature. How delinquent are the peers of gang members compared to the peers of non-gang youth?

Table 6.6 shows gang membership by: “How many of your best friends have been picked up by the police?” and “Has your best friend been ever been picked up by the police?” The tables are percentaged both within gang/non-gang and within each category of friends' delinquency. As would be expected, gang members are under-represented among those who report none or one of their best friends have been arrested (6.8 and 9 percent), and are over-represented among those reporting that some, most, or all of their best friends have been picked up by the police. It is also interesting to note, however, that 42 percent of those reporting gang membership have none or only one best friend who has been picked up. And, when limiting the question to the respondent's best friend only, almost half of those reporting gang membership also report that their best friend has not been picked up by the police. Although

**TABLE 6.6**  
**Gang membership by delinquency of peers**

“How many of your best friends have been picked up by the police?”

	None	One	Some	Most	All	Totals
Non-Gang	52.6 93.2	18.5 91.0	16.9 83.0	6.1 74.0	5.9 72.6	88 (1041)
Gang	28.5 <u>6.8</u>	13.5 <u>9.0</u>	25.7 <u>17.0</u>	15.7 <u>25.9</u>	16.4 <u>27.4</u>	12 <u>(140)</u>
Totals	<u>50</u> (588)	<u>18</u> (212)	<u>18</u> (212)	<u>7</u> (85)	<u>7</u> (84)	<u>100</u> (1181)

$p < .001$

“Has your best friend ever been picked up by the police?”

	Yes	No	Totals
Non-Gang	25 79	75 91	88 (851)
Gang	48 <u>21</u>	52 <u>9.0</u>	12 <u>(117)</u>
Totals	<u>28</u> (270)	<u>72</u> (698)	<u>100</u> (968)

$p < .001$

being picked up by the police is not a perfect measure of delinquency, if gang membership is what most theorists describe it, one would expect the delinquency of fellow gang members to be significantly higher than these data show. Again, it does not appear that gang membership is as important as it relates to peers as it is important as it relates to the individual respondent. It

seems that both gang membership and the delinquency of peers are proxies for the delinquency of the respondent. When controlling for delinquency, the only item in all of the analyses that remained a significant predictor of gang membership is the statement "I never learned to read very well". Among youth with similar levels of delinquency, those who report gang membership do not differ from those who do not report membership on any family characteristics, or on any peer characteristics. Among the school characteristics, gang members differ from those not reporting membership in only one way—they are less likely to read well. And, because reading ability is generally something that can be detected at early ages, that is stable, and that is heavily influenced by IQ, it is doubtful that fellow gang members are responsible for this deficiency. Overall, the analyses of this project have been most interesting for what they did not find, rather than for what they did find.

Considering that the findings of the Seattle data show surprisingly little—other than delinquency—that distinguishes gang from non-gang youth, along with the fact that gang members admit to reading poorly, perhaps there are some measurement issues that need to be addressed concerning the reliability and validity of data provided by gang compared to non-gang youth. In *Measuring Delinquency*, Hindelang et al. found that data provided by the most delinquent demographic group in the sample (black males) to be the least valid. Because our data show gang members to be both more delinquent and less likely to read well compared to their non-gang peers, perhaps the reliability and validity of the

data provided by gang members is not as strong as that provided by non-gang respondents. McConnel, in her discussion of survey research and gang members, notes:

The difficulty for the gang member in being a cooperative research respondent is understandable because the survey collection process is contrary to the gang-life experiences of the gang member. The gang life is generally characterized by minimal structure and a lack of self-discipline... This is, based on interviews, what makes gang life so appealing (1994:259-260).

#### RELIABILITY/VALIDITY OF GANG MEMBER-PROVIDED DATA

In order to test the reliability of data provided by gang compared to non-gang youth, we can look to the various scales used throughout the analyses—the five delinquency scales and the five self-control scales. Table 6.7 shows the reliability coefficients for the sample as a whole, gang members, and non-gang respondents. No obvious pattern emerges with respect to the reliability of the self-control scales for the three groups. Compared to the total sample, the meanness and amorality scales are equally reliable for gang members, whereas the rebellion, respect for the police, and global scale are slightly less reliable for those who identify themselves as gang members. The drug and serious delinquency scales provide slightly lower alphas for gang members compared to the general sample, but with the exception of the drug scale, the alphas for the non-gang youth are lower than those for gang members. Overall there is no consistent pattern suggesting that the reliability of the answers given by gang members differs from those given by the sample as a whole or the non-gang

**TABLE 6.7**  
**Reliability coefficients for self-control and overall delinquency scales:**  
**total sample, gang only, non-gang only. Males only.**

	Total Sample ( $\alpha$ )	Gang ( $\alpha$ )	Non-Gang ( $\alpha$ )
<b>Self-control Scales</b>			
meanness	.39	.39	.38
rebellion	.51	.45	.51
amorality	.51	.51	.50
respect for police	.51	.51	.50
global self-control	.67	.63	.66
<b>Delinquency Scales</b>			
family/school	.58	.59	.55
drug	.86	.83	.86
general delinquency	.81	.81	.79
serious delinquency	.84	.82	.81
overall delinquency	.91	.92	.91

respondents.

In order to determine if the validity of the responses given by gang members differs from the validity of the responses given by non-gang youth, mean scores on the self-reported overall delinquency scale were compared for non-delinquents, police delinquents (those with an arrest), and court delinquents (those with an arrest and a juvenile court record). If respondents' reports of their own delinquency are valid (concurrent validity), then those reporting the least delinquency should be officially non-delinquent, those reporting the most should be court delinquents, with the police delinquents in between (but closer to the court than the non-delinquents).

Table 6.8 shows these comparisons, again broken down by the sample as a whole, just those reporting gang membership, and just those not reporting membership. For all three groups, the relationships are what would be expected—the non-delinquents report the lowest mean number of delinquent acts, followed by the police and then the court delinquents. The differences between the non-delinquents and delinquents are greater than the differences between the police and court delinquents, and the mean number of delinquent acts reported by officially non-delinquent gang members is higher than that of the police delinquents among the sample as a whole and among the non-gang respondents. All three models have significant overall F-Ratios and similar  $\eta^2$ . These comparisons confirm earlier findings showing that gang members are more delinquent than non-gang youth, but do not suggest that gang members' reports of their own delinquency are less valid than the reports of non-gang respondents.

The final way the validity of gang compared to non-gang respondents is measured is shown on Table 6.9. If respondents answers are valid (correlational validity), we should see a strong correlation between overall delinquency and official delinquency status as well as their answers to the question, "have you ever been picked up by the police?" For the sample as a whole, the relationship between overall delinquency and official delinquency is strong, as is the relationship between overall delinquency and being picked up by the police. The strength of these relationships goes down slightly among

**TABLE 6.8**  
**One-way analysis of official delinquency status for 63-item**  
**overall delinquency scale: total sample, gang only, non-gang only.**  
**Weighted data. Males only.**

**Total Sample**

<b>Delinquency Status</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>N</b>
Non-Delinquent	12.04	8.16	4425
Police Delinquent	19.80	9.63	1242
Court Delinquent	21.59	10.23	862
F-Ratio 682.96, $p < .001$ ETA <sup>2</sup> =.17			

**Gang Only**

<b>Delinquency Status</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>N</b>
Non-Delinquent	19.99	9.55	404
Police Delinquent	28.19	10.08	149
Court Delinquent	29.69	10.70	136
F-Ratio 68.58, $p < .001$ ETA <sup>2</sup> =.17			

**Non-Gang Only**

<b>Delinquency Status</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>N</b>
Non-Delinquent	11.23	7.51	3988
Police Delinquent	18.72	8.93	1080
Court Delinquent	19.89	9.20	719
F-Ratio 616.39, $p < .001$ ETA <sup>2</sup> =.18			

**TABLE 6.9**  
**Correlation coefficients for overall delinquency with**  
**official delinquency status and picked up by the police:**  
**total sample, gang only, non-gang only. Males only.**

	Delinquency Status	Picked up by Police
<b>Total Sample</b>		
overall delinquency	.42 (1111)	.50 (1100)
<b>Gang Only</b>		
overall delinquency	.38 (130)	.48 (128)
<b>Non-Gang Only</b>		
overall delinquency	.41 (972)	.49 (963)

gang members, but remains strong (all correlations on table are significant at  $p < .001$ ). Overall, these analyses do not suggest—in spite of their higher delinquency and lower reading abilities—that gang members provide data that is significantly less reliable and valid than data provided by non-gang youth. The findings from previous chapters that failed to discover characteristics distinguishing gang from non-gang youth (other than overall delinquency and reading ability) do not appear to be caused by differing reliability and validity of data provided by gang youth.

## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusion

This project began with relatively few goals—to understand the distinction between crime and criminality, to apply this distinction to criminological theories and to gangs, and to understand the roles played by social institutions like family, school, and peer groups. Along the way our findings have confirmed much of what previous research has found, but have also explored some issues and relationships not formerly addressed in gang research.

The Seattle data confirmed that measures of self-control—which attempt to tap the tendency of individuals to seek short-term gratification at the risk of long-term rewards—behave as control theory predicts. Our measures, particularly the global scale, were related in the anticipated directions to delinquency (however it is measured), as well as to items related to family, school, and peers. Those with low self-control are more likely to report delinquency, to come from families where attachment and supervision are weak, to perform poorly in and be weakly attached to school, and to have peers who are also unsupervised, weakly attached to school, and delinquent. Additionally, as past research has found, and control theory predicts, variables relating to family, school, and peers also predicted delinquency. The same relationships to these social institutions that were predicted by self-control are also predictors of delinquency. Self-control, family, school, and peer variables predict delinquency, even when controlling for the effects of gang membership. Gang

membership does not account for the relationship between family, school, peers, and delinquency.

Gang membership did perform as expected in the Seattle data. It significantly predicted delinquency, and remained significant when controlling for family, school, and peer variables. Our search for traits distinguishing gang from non-gang youth provided findings consistent with other research. Compared to their non-gang peers, gang members score lower on measures of self-control, are less attached to and supervised by their parents, do not perform as well in or exhibit as strong attachment to school, and are more likely to have friends who teachers do not like and who are delinquent. After establishing traits that distinguish gang from non-gang youth, it was logical to ask if these traits still distinguished when controlling for the delinquency of the respondent. After all, previous analyses had found many of these same characteristics to predict delinquency. The question was: do gang members differ from their non-gang peers other than their greater participation in delinquency? The only variable that survived these controls was reading ability. Even controlling for delinquency, those reporting gang membership were more likely to agree with the statement "I really have not learned to read very well."

This finding has important theoretical implications. Reading ability is heavily influenced by IQ, which is also an integral part of self-control (the ability to realize future outcomes of behavior and choose the most long-term rewarding path)—and is in place long before children can experience strain, and before

they come into contact with delinquent peers. The one variable distinguishing gang from non-gang youth—other than delinquency—has nothing at all to do with the gang. Just to be safe, however, we can look at one last set of analyses.

Table 7.1 shows gang membership regressed on all the variables found to be significant predictors in the analyses from previous chapters. The first model does not include delinquency and the second model does include it. Without delinquency, these variables together explain 9 percent of the variance

TABLE 7.1  
OLS regression of gang membership on self-control,  
family, school, and peer items: with and without delinquency

	Beta	T-Ratio	Beta	T-Ratio
stay out overnight	-.01	.42	-.02	.45
respect for father	-.05	1.31	-.05	1.34
mother know who with	-.03	.81	-.01	.18
respect for police	-.06	1.46	-.01	.23
meanness	.09*	2.37	.05	1.43
rebellion	.00	.01	-.02	.44
amorality	.06	1.48	.04	.97
reading ability	-.07	1.95	-.07*	1.99
respect for teachers	-.01	.22	.00	.11
try hard in school	-.06	1.73	-.04	1.02
number of friends	-.02	.71	-.03	.91
friends picked up by police	.11**	2.84	.01	.20
teachers like group of friends	-.05	1.40	-.03	.69
delinquency	—	—	.27***	5.76
R <sup>2</sup>	.09		.14	

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

in gang membership and only two are significant—meanness and friends picked up by the police (reading ability just misses statistical significance,  $p=.0511$ ). When taking into account measures of self-control, family, school, and peers, those reporting gang membership are more likely to describe themselves as mean, and to have delinquent friends. When delinquency is added to the model, we are back to our original findings—the  $R^2$  improves, and only overall delinquency and reading ability significantly predict gang membership. And, even though gang members are more delinquent and do not read as well as non-gang youth, comparisons of the reliability and validity of gang members' responses showed little differences. These findings are not a function of unreliable or invalid reporting by gang respondents.

The Seattle data confirm that many variables relating to self-control, family, school, and peers are important for predicting delinquency. Some of the delinquent respondents also identify themselves as gang members—but they are not distinguished from non-gang respondents by self-control, family, or peer variables. They are distinguished only by their lower reading abilities. It appears that our original hypothesis—suggesting that gang membership may have more to do with the characteristics, experiences, and behavior of the individual than those of the peer group—is the most supported.

These findings suggest that programs aimed specifically at gangs, and that assume that gang youth are somehow different from non-gang delinquent youth, may be misguided. Gang members deserve the attention of policy

makers because they are delinquent, but not because they are different from non-gang youth in any other way. These findings also suggest that policies aimed at improving the reading ability of children will have more success than those attempting to target the gang. And, because reading ability is so dependent on early childhood experiences and socialization, it seems that policies aimed at strengthening families and improving schools (especially elementary schools) will be much more fruitful than those aimed at children too old to benefit from our attention. Obviously, more research with newer data and better measures of self-control is warranted. But the stability of criminality over the lifecourse and the importance of early socialization are just as salient now as they were 20 years ago, so we may not find results that differ significantly from what has been found here.

**APPENDIX A****Seattle Youth Survey Demographics**

69.5% white  
30.5% black

75% male  
25% female

65% low SES  
35% high SES  
(SES measured by occupation of family's principal wage earner).

Age range of 15-18, with a mean age of 16.5.

44% non-delinquent  
29% with arrest records  
27% with juvenile court records

## APPENDIX B

### Delinquency Scales

#### Serious:

Have you ever

- ...broken into a house, store, school, or other building with the intention of breaking things up or causing other damage?
- ...sold illegal drugs such as heroin, marijuana, LSD, or cocaine?
- ...tried to get away from a police officer by fighting or struggling?
- ...taken things worth between \$10 and \$50 from a store without paying for them?
- ...taken things of large value (worth more than \$50) from a store without paying for them?
- ...broken into a house, store, school, or other building and taken money, stereo equipment, guns, or something else you wanted?
- ...taken a car belonging to someone you didn't know for a ride without the owner's permission?
- ...used physical force (twisting an arm or choking) to get money from another person?
- ...used a club, knife, or gun to get something from someone?
- ...beat somebody up so badly they probably needed a doctor?
- ...taken gasoline from a car without the owner's permission?
- ...taken hubcaps, wheels, the battery, or some other expensive part of a car without the owner's permission?
- ...taken a tape deck or CB radio from a car?
- ...threatened to beat someone up if they didn't give you money or something you wanted?
- ...broken into a locked car to get something from it?
- ...carried a razor, switchblade, or gun with the intention of using it in a fight?
- ...pulled a knife, a gun, or some other weapon on someone just to let them know you meant business?
- ...sold something you had stolen yourself?

#### General:

Have you ever

- ...taken little things (worth less than \$2) from a store without paying for them?
- ...jumped or helped jump somebody and then beat them up?
- ...purposely broken a car window?
- ...refused to tell the police or some other official what you knew about a crime?
- ...broken the windows of an empty house or other unoccupied building?

**APPENDIX B—continued**

- ...broken the windows of a school building?
- ...let the air out of car or truck tires?
- ...taken things that you weren't supposed to take from a desk or locker at school?
- ...used a slug or fake money in a candy, coke, coin, or stamp machine?
- ...helped break up chairs, tables, desks, or other furniture in a school, church, or other public building?
- ...slashed the seats in a bus, a movie house, or some other place?
- ...picked a fight with someone you didn't know just for the hell of it?
- ...cursed or threatened an adult in a loud and mean way just to let them know who was boss?
- ...punctured or slashed the tires of a car?
- ...bought something you knew had been stolen?
- ...pretended to be older than you were to buy beer and cigarettes?
- ...fired a BB gun at some other person, at passing cars, or at windows of buildings?
- ...taken material or equipment from a construction sight

**Drug:**

Have you ever

- ...sold illegal drugs such as heroin, marijuana, LSD, or cocaine?
- ...pretended to be older than you were to buy beer or cigarettes?
- ...drunk beer or wine?
- ...drunk whiskey, gin, vodka, or other "hard" liquor?
- ...smoked marijuana (grass, pot)?
- ...taken angel dust, LSD, or mescaline?
- ...taken barbiturates (downers) or methedrine ("speed" or other uppers) without a prescription?
- ...used cocaine?
- ...gone to school when you were drunk or high on some drugs?
- ...driven a car when you were drunk or high on some drugs?

**Family and School:**

Have you ever

- ...cursed or threatened an adult in a loud and mean way just to let them know who was boss?
- ...been suspended or expelled from school?
- ...run away from home and stayed away overnight?
- ...gone out at night when your parents told you that you couldn't go?
- ...been sent out of a classroom?
- ...stayed away from school when your parents thought you were there?

**APPENDIX B—continued**

**Overall delinquency scale: Serious + General + Drug + Family and School +  
Have you ever**

- ...forced someone to have sex relations with you when they did not want to?
- ...taken a bicycle belonging to someone you didn't know with no intention of returning it?
- ...broken into a parking meter or coin box of a pay phone?
- ...tried to pass a check by signing someone else's name?
- ...hit a teacher or some other school official?
- ...intentionally started a building on fire?
- ...broken into a parking meter or coin box of a pay phone?
- ...destroyed mailboxes?
- ...destroyed things at a construction sight?
- ...driven away from the scene of an accident that you were involved in without identifying yourself?
- ...kept money for yourself that you collected for a team, a charity (the March of Dimes), or someone else's paper route?
- ...taken mail from someone else's mailbox and opened it?
- ...used heroin (smack)?
- ...taken things from a wallet or purse (or the whole wallet or purse) while the owner wasn't around or wasn't looking?
- ...hit one of your parents?

## APPENDIX C

### Attitudinal Measures of Self-Control

**Amorality: (high=amoral)**

- \*It's all right to get around the law if you can get away with it.
- \*Suckers deserve what they get.
- \*Everyone steals something once in a while.
- \*To get ahead, you have to do some things that are not right.

**Meanness: (high=mean)**

- \*I'm a little bit tougher and meaner than most kids my age.
- \*I sometimes try to get even, rather than forgive and forget.
- \*I sometimes say mean things about people when they're not around.
- \*There are times when I get mean towards adults.

**Rebellion: (high=high rebellion)**

- \*I don't mind taking orders and being told what to do.
- \*I don't like anybody telling me what to do.
- \*I don't like adults telling me when I'm not doing something right.
- \*By the time a person reaches my age, he or she should be able to come and go pretty much as they please.

**Respect for police: (high=like cops)**

- \*I have a lot of respect for the Seattle Police.
- \*I get really mad when a cop tries to tell me what to do.

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