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DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT GANGS? AN ANALYSIS OF CAPITAL AMONG LATINO AND ASIAN GANG MEMBERS

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Abstract

Gang activity and membership were noted to be significantly related to financial rewards. As such, gang membership and gang activity should also be understood from an economic perspective. In this article, Pierre Bourdieu's framework of capital is used to analyze two separate samples of Latino and Asian gang members. Stark contrasts in socioeconomic backgrounds are recorded among the two samples of gang members, and gang membership and activities are also noticeably dissimilar. Accessibility to economic, cultural, and social capital is argued to affect gang membership and activities. The results suggest that the availability of legitimate and illegitimate capital greatly affects the trajectory and the length of gang involvement. Also, gangs provide significant material and social capital for the respondents of the study.

Keywords

gangs; Asian; Latino; Bourdieu; capital

Gang research has experienced notable advancement throughout the twentieth century. A great deal of understanding on gangs, gang members, and the favorable social conditions that generate gangs has been analyzed through a variety of theoretical assumptions and strategies: alienation and conflict with mainstream society (Lopez and O'Donnell Brummet 2003; Moore 1978, 1998; Thrasher 1963; Vigil and Yun 1996), status conflicts and adjustment problems (Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Cohen 1955), community problems (Spergel 1995), subcultures (W. B. Sanders 1994), structural disadvantages (Hagedorn 1988; Short 1997; Wilson 1987, 1996), and rebellion against growing up in normative society (Sanchez-Jankowski 1991; Willis 1981). However, a change in the character of gangs and gang activity has been observed in the last two decades in the twentieth century. Hagedorn (1988, 1998), Horowitz (1983), and Wilson (1987, 1996) noted that the nature of gang activity has evolved as a result of economic restructuring in urban areas, and gangs in many instances have subsequently turned into vehicles of individual economic gain. Gangs, in other words, have become primarily economic

entities in the illegitimate economy instead of strictly delinquent groups, and consequently, gang membership has also taken on an economic character. As such, gang membership cannot be solely analyzed as merely delinquent behavior, but instead, gang participation should be considered a form of economic action. Thus, an economic analysis of gangs, gang membership, and gang activity is necessary.

As shown in this article, gang participation also functions as an essential network for a broad variety of financial opportunities. An appropriate economic framework, thus, must also take into account the nonmaterial economic activities and properties of the gang. Our primary strategy is to use Bourdieu's conceptual framework of forms of capital (1986) and *habitus* (1977) to analyze the distinctions between the careers and tenure of two disparate groups of gang members. In particular, these two gang groups present stark contrasts in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic conditions. We compare Taiwanese gang members from Southern California to Latino gang members from Lawrence, Massachusetts, a small urban center forty-five miles north of Boston. While respondents from one sample of gang members come from upper middle-class neighborhoods and family backgrounds, the other sample represents gang members from low socioeconomic communities and families. We examine the trajectory and duration of their gang careers, and we argue that the different forms of capital available or deprived from these gang members significantly affect the duration of active gang involvement. Also, we recognize gang involvement and membership as providing individuals with capital outside of legitimate institutions. With capital in legitimate institutions unavailable or blocked, individuals' choices to advance economically through normative channels are greatly limited. In contrast, when individuals are presented with both legitimate and illegitimate capital, they are observed to select between legitimate and illegitimate capital to optimize their opportunities in both legitimate and illegitimate economies. Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) work on different forms of capital serves as the major conceptual framework in our examination of legitimate and illegitimate capital availability between the two samples, and we discuss legitimate and illegitimate capital availability in association with the level and form of gang involvement and ultimately the length of active membership.

Gangs, Drugs, and Money

The economic aspect of gang membership and its associated activities has received substantial attention. Greatly influenced by Thrasher's (1963) and Shaw and McKay's (1942) works, modern gang research strives to understand the interactions between the macrosocial and community environments and gangs. Specifically, an extensive effort has been invested into investigating the relationships between the macrosocioeconomic environment, gangs, gang membership, and illegitimate economic activities associated with gangs. Specifically, drug trafficking has been noted as the primary economic activity associated with gangs. However, despite the fruitfulness of modern gang research, the literature is still highly divided and unable to understand fully the very fundamental nature of economic activities of gangs.

Several studies indicate gangs and gang members as systematically controlling drug trafficking. In fact, these studies suggest gangs have evolved into corporate entities that have come to dominate narcotics trafficking. Padilla (1992) documents a street gang developing into an organized unit specializing in selling drugs. Jankowski (1991) concludes that gangs are increasingly organized and structured in drug trafficking, and ties to adult organizations are used for securing the supply. Moore (1990) also argues that gangs maintain firm control over the drug market, and they are heavily involved in the distribution and transporting of drugs from suppliers. Skolnick (1990) finds that gangs are central to drug trafficking and that gangs are becoming increasingly organized to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of trafficking. Skolnick further comments that African American gangs are more involved in trafficking than Latino gangs. He later noted the migration of Los Angeles African American Bloods and Crips

gangs into new territories in order to expand markets (Skolnick, Bluthenthal, and Correl 1993). Spergel (1995) reports a detectable relationship between gang membership and drug trafficking and the heavy involvement of African American gangs in drug trafficking.

Simultaneously, several other studies also show that drug trafficking involving gangs is not necessarily organized in nature. A lack of a definite causal relationship between gangs, gang membership, and drug trafficking has been generally concluded in several recent studies. Narcotics trafficking is argued to be individual efforts that involve other individuals in gangs. The findings suggest that gangs are not organized entities engaging in the drug trade as corporate actors. These researchers also agree that typically these efforts lack elaborate organizational features. In fact, these studies conclude that the structure of typical drug-dealing gangs is loose and lacks cohesion. Narcotics trafficking is a highly individualized activity, and researchers should reconsider characterizing gangs as organized entities (Fagan 1989, 1996; Klein and Maxson 1994; Klein, Maxson, and Cunningham 1991).

Klein (1995) argues that gangs could be generally categorized into street and drug gangs. The categorization is based on the degree of the gang's involvement in the distribution and retail of drugs. The organizational structure of a gang is affected primarily by the gang's necessity in engaging in drug distribution and retail. Drug gangs in general are more organized because it is necessary to maintain a hierarchical structure in the distribution and retail process. However, the scale and formality of gang structure should be considered with caution. Maxson (1995) finds a significant level of variation and fluidity in gang structure and positions. The structure within gangs is often ephemeral and ad hoc at best. Organizational features are typically primitive and lack stable administrative functions. Organizing efforts in gangs could therefore be better characterized as either power relations or coordination attempts instead of formal organizing. Howell and Gleason (1999) also point out that gangs lack the organizational capacity to engage in large-scale drug sales. In addition, Fagan (1989, 1996) confirms an absence of organizational structures among drug trafficking gangs; instead, gang members form loose connections within their gangs and sell drugs as individually based groups that do not necessarily overlap their respective gangs. Finally, Esbensen and Huizinga (1993) again detect no evidence in their sample to indicate that drug trafficking among gangs is organized.

The present article does not seek to resolve the issue of gangs, drug trafficking, and the level of organization. Rather, we focus on one issue that receives much support from the literature: Gangs are frequently associated with drug trafficking in that they facilitate individual gang members to engage in drug trafficking. As such, an economic perspective is necessary and central to examining gangs, gang membership, and illicit activities involving gangs. Several researchers indicate that gangs are vehicles for individual gang members to obtain tangible and intangible resources. Taylor (1990) argues that gangs provide connections to the drug market. Fagan (1989, 1996) denotes that the worsening social and economic environment in American inner-cities posed tremendous problems for residents, and subsequently, disenfranchised youth found gangs and drug trafficking as a viable means of financial gain. Several studies further focus on drug trafficking, gang organization, and gang membership in detail.

Hagedorn (1994, 1998) interviewed gang members in Milwaukee about their participation in drug trafficking. The results show a wide range in duration and consistency among drug-selling gang members. While some respondents sell drugs on a permanent basis, the majority of the respondents only sell drugs for either a short period of time or inconsistently at best. Also, a vast majority of his respondents hold regular jobs while they are selling drugs; some respondents state that drug selling is a supplementary income to their primary jobs. Hagedorn attributes the inconsistent pattern of gang drug trafficking to the effects of economic restructuring in inner-city America. With the unavailability of steady and well-paying jobs, respondents feel that they were under severe economic pressure. Illicit sources of income

become an attractive option, and drug trafficking is a prominent source of either primary or secondary income. Gang membership functions as a convenient and essential form of resource to gain access to the drug market. Hagedorn further concludes that drug selling and the level of involvement in the drug trade cannot be attributed solely to gang involvement. Instead, the macrosocioeconomic environment and individual factors such as addiction, financial and employment opportunities, attitudes, and values should be addressed.

Valdez and Sifaneck (2004) examine drug trafficking among American Mexican gang members in South Texas. Their findings also demonstrate a salient variability in drug selling among the gang members interviewed. The study focuses on the degree of an individual gang member's involvement in drug selling, its relationship to drug addiction, and the impact of drug trafficking on the gang's organizational features. Drug trafficking among the respondents is primarily an individual venture. Also, the level of involvement is heavily influenced by addiction and the individual's network ties external to the gangs for the supply of narcotics. While some respondents sell drugs to maintain their own habits, more serious individuals retail and distribute drugs because they have supply connections. The respondents' trafficking activities hinge on the existence of connections outside of their gangs to receive drugs. The gangs are viewed by the respondents as critical resources for protection from rival drug traffickers. Gang membership is a measure of minimizing risks associated with drug trafficking. Instead of the gangs engaging in drug trafficking as organized corporate actors, individual entrepreneurs depend on their gangs as connections and resources for protection. Therefore, while gangs and gang membership are essential to drug trafficking as an enterprise, these elements function as resources secondary to overall network ties in importance. As such, gangs and gang membership mainly serve an instrumental function to advance the financial interests of the traffickers. The study provides partial clues in answering the variability of drug selling within and between gangs. The level of involvement in selling drugs is greatly affected by an individual gang member's capacity to muster the necessary resources to sell drugs: connections to drug suppliers and the protection provided by gangs.

It appears, then, that the varying degrees of gang-involved drug trafficking is unlikely to be explained through one single variable. First, drug trafficking as an organized effort is contested among researchers, and several recent studies point to drug trafficking as a loose and scattered individual venture. Second, as the Valdez and Sifaneck (2004) study illustrates, even gangs and gang members within one single ethnic group display a considerable variation in their involvement in drug trafficking. In fact, a notable variability in overall gang activity and behavior has been observed among Asian gangs and gang members within a single ethnic group (Lopez 2006; Wang 2002). Like the socioeconomic diversity of the Asian population, gangs of various ethnic Asian subgroups also demonstrate a diverse pattern of activities and behavior. Hence, the previously discussed literature confirms intra-ethnic variability as more prominent than interethnic variability, and ethnicity does not provide an adequate explanation for the differentiation in gang economic activities. Variation in economic activities associated with gangs should not and cannot be reduced to differences in ethnicity. The answer must be sought elsewhere.

Lastly, gang membership, gang-associated activities, and behavior are typically conceptualized within the analytical context of gangs as collective units. The focus is typically placed on gangs as a determinant that defines interests and behavior, and the gang members as individual social actors is rendered a subsequent analytical consideration. Gang membership, gang activities, and gang involvement are frequently reduced to a single-dimensional social action. The actions and behavior of individuals are often understood to be those of gang members instead of individual social actors who are in gangs. In other words, gang membership is typically regarded as the point of departure in gang research, and the behavior and actions of gang members are analyzed through their membership in gangs. Analytically, the gang and gang

membership are overemphasized to become the origin of social action of gang members, and the analysis that follows understands behavior and action within the narrow conceptual confines of the gang and gang membership. We argue that gang activities should be understood as a form of social action that is no different from any ordinary social actions in nature. Actions and behavior of gang members can be better understood by centering on the impact of various structural and social forces on the individuals and gangs and gang membership as asserting additional effects on actions and behavior. Gang-associated illicit activities should be recognized as economic actions constrained or favored by the circumscribing socioeconomic environment of the individuals. Gangs and gang membership are argued to carry extra effects that are subsequent to the overall socioeconomic conditions of the actors. A novel analytical strategy is introduced in this article to further the current understanding of actions and behavior associated with gangs.

Our intent is to understand the behavior and actions of gang members as individuals who are in gangs. We attempt to understand the behavior and actions of these individuals as social actors within a complex and comprehensive social environment. Gang members and their behavior and actions are considered to be the result of a combination of factors that include gang- and non-gang-related socioeconomic environment. Bourdieu's capital (1986) and *habitus* (1977, 2000) provide a framework to explain the complex relationship between the socioeconomic environment of gang members and its relationship to gang membership, activities, and behavior. Bourdieu's formulation of capital is favored over Coleman's (1988) theorizing because of the analytical relationship between various forms of capital and the *habitus*. As noted in this section, gangs and gang activities are regarded to be closely related to macrosocioeconomic environments, so consideration of the gang members' habits is therefore necessary.

Pierre Bourdieu's Forms of Capital and Beyond

Capital is the expression of social forces present in the *habitus* of social actors (Bourdieu 1977). The *habitus* is the internalization of objective social and material conditions available in an individual's daily reality, and thus within the *habitus*, the individual manipulates and uses capital that enables the actor to carry out actions in the social world. Therefore, the relationship between objective structural conditions, the *habitus*, and action is not one that is deterministic in nature. Rather, the *habitus* predisposes individual actors to a general understanding of the immediate social universe and hence brings forth a propensity for a circumscribed range of actions within this social universe.

Capital, in Bourdieu's framework, is the sum of all resources available and known to both individual and corporate actors to facilitate action (Bourdieu 1986: 241). Resources, in various forms, motivate and allow actors to engage in decision making and actions that lead to specific interests and goals. However, capital also imposes constraints on actors in deriving and accomplishing goals. The unavailability or inaccessibility of capital often deters actors from the setting of specific goals and creates obdurate obstacles in pursuing goals. Hence, available and accessible capital in different forms allows goal setting and actions to take place, while the scarcity of capital deters certain goals and actions from being actualized. Also, different forms of capital are interconnected and are translatable into other forms. The possession of one form of capital facilitates and enhances the acquisition of other forms. Conversely, the deprivation of one form of capital could also lead to deficiency of other forms.

To further enhance the concept of capital in the analysis of social action, Bourdieu distinguishes three forms of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Economic capital is defined as any material resources available to actors (Bourdieu 1986: 243). Family income, individual income, financial assets, and other forms of material resources define economic

capital. Yet in Bourdieu's theorizing of the social universe, economic resource is only one form of capital for positively conditioning reward-generating actions.

Cultural capital refers to the totality of skills and knowledge possessed by the actor. Individual education and family education, vocational training, employment opportunities, and specific mental and physical skills demonstrate the significance of cultural capital. Bourdieu further specifies three forms of cultural capital: the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutionalized state (Bourdieu 1986: 247). In the embodied state, cultural capital refers to an actor's mental and physical abilities to take action. Motivation, attitude, culture, and individual cultivation are also considered an embodied state of cultural capital. *Habitus*, furthermore, encompasses the predisposition and transmission of embodied cultural capital. Cultural goods such as books, instruments, computers, tools, and so forth are recognized as capital in the objectified state. These objects facilitate individuals to manipulate their natural talents in engaging in reward-seeking actions. Finally, cultural capital in the institutionalized state applies to academic credentials and qualifications. Cultural capital in the institutionalized state is realized when economic capital and cultural capital in the embodied and objectified states are transmogrified into institutionalized and legitimate processes. This legitimate process in turn leads to further reward-seeking actions in other institutionalized processes (Bourdieu 1986: 248).

Social capital, as Bourdieu contends, is a much more abstract form of resource compared to economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986: 249). When contrasted to other forms of capital, social capital is not solely contained or possessed by the actor. Instead, social capital is embedded in the network of relations among actors. Social relationships that are contained within ethnic, family, friendship, and other durable networks become an important source of nonphysical capital to actors. The total amount of social capital available to an actor is determined by the forms and nature of the networks in which the actor is situated. It allows further actions and reward-seeking activities to take place. Its existence is unrelated to individual perceptions, interpretations, or even usage.

Social capital has been widely used to examine community dynamics (Putnam 1993, 2000), opportunities (Portes 1998; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Sanders, Nee, and Sernau 2002), education (Rury 2004), poverty (Wacquant and Wilson 1989), and crime (Sampson 2001; Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 1999), and yet, with the exception of Putnam (2000), the concept and the larger framework of capital are typically limited to legitimate capital and activities within the context of mainstream social institutions and processes (Field 2003). We contend that the analytical properties of capital should not be restricted to resources in legitimate institutions and lawful means. Resources beyond normative and legal avenues are also crucial when defining the action of actors in a complex social and economic environment. Putnam (2000) briefly discussed gangs as a form of social capital, but he left much room for further analytical development and empirical testing. In this analysis, we use the capital framework in its entirety to examine gangs and other collaborative criminal activities. As we scrutinize the motives, activities, careers, and involvement of our respondents, we realize that gangs provide alternative or additional forms of capital according to the availability of legitimate capital in normative institutions.

Research Question and Hypotheses

This article addresses the relationship between the availability and accessibility of various forms of legitimate and illegitimate capital and our respondents' illicit economic activities. We also examine the impact of availability and accessibility of capital on the duration of gang membership. Gangs and gang membership are postulated to function as networks in providing auxiliary but critical social capital for individuals in both legitimate and illegitimate economies.

Also, individuals with greater constraints in legitimate capital will be more likely to rely on illegitimate capital through extended gang involvement. We hypothesize that (1) the overall distribution of legitimate and illegitimate economic and social capital significantly affects the duration of gang membership and (2) gang membership is a significant source of economic and social capital.

METHODOLOGY

The current study is based on the comparison of data collected on two ethnically diverse samples of gang members from two previously published studies on the behavior of gang members (De la Rosa, Rugh, and Rojas 2005; Pih and Mao 2005). The first sample comprises Latino gang members, primarily of Puerto Rican and Dominican descent, in Lawrence, Massachusetts. The second sample includes Taiwanese gang members in the Southern Californian cities of Diamond Bar, Rowland Heights, and Hacienda Heights. These locations were chosen because of a high concentration of Latino and Asian American persons and reports of gang activities in the respective communities. The sociodemographic characteristics of the sample sites also create unique opportunities to dissect interesting analytical issues.

Sampling Site: Lawrence and the Southern California Cities

Examining city-level data provides a first glimpse into the noticeable similarities and distinctions of the macrosocial environment between our two samples. According to the 2000 U.S. Census data (U.S. Census Bureau 2005), an above average concentration of immigrant and second-generation Latinos and Asians are present in the locations of interest. However, noticeable dissimilarities emerge as soon as we take into account socioeconomic variables. In Lawrence, the median household income (\$31,809) is substantially lower than that of the national average (\$50,046). In the three Southern Californian cities, on the other hand, the exact opposite pattern emerged. The median household income of the three cities is at \$68,871, \$56,065, and \$62,827, all substantially above the national average. The percentage of families below the poverty line in Lawrence is 21.2 percent, again substantially higher than the U.S. national average of 9.2 percent. In the three Southern California cities, however, we observe 5.0 percent, 9.5 percent, and 7.3 percent. Poverty appears to be far more widespread in Lawrence than the three Southern California cities. Even more important, individuals with substantially higher education credentials and those employed in professional occupations are far more common in the Southern California cities than in Lawrence.

The data are summarized in Table 1. Based on these city-level data, we can first speculate on the macrolevel that the distribution of material and cultural capital is not equal among the populations in these cities. In the next section, we further examine individual-level capital availability and subsequent gang involvement and gang career.

Sample Characteristics: Recruitment and Interview

Survey sampling and data collection strategies are not suitable due to the nature of the study population. Thus, a qualitative strategy was employed in each of the two samples to optimize the effectiveness of the data collection process and analysis. Seventy-six active Latino gang members were interviewed in the Latino sample. Thirty-one respondents were Puerto Rican born, eight were born in the Dominican Republic, and thirty-six were Puerto Rican descendents born in the mainland United States. One person was born in Portugal, but he identified himself as Puerto Rican. The Taiwanese sample comprised twenty-two Taiwan-born gang members who currently reside in Southern California. Instead of relying on official records, gang membership in each of the two studies was primarily assessed by self-report. As discussed by Esbensen et al. (2001) and Bjerregaard (2002), self-nomination is a dependable measure for distinguishing gang members from non-members. To further ensure our respondents' gang

membership, we used additional criteria set forth by Klein (1971) and Esbensen et al. (2001). All respondents in our samples belong to distinct collectives in their respective neighborhoods. Their gang monikers were recognized by other individuals from other gangs. All our respondents reported heavy involvement in various forms of delinquency and crime as members of their respective gangs ranging from minor property crimes to serious violence. Our respondents also invested substantial time and energy into their gangs and shared close relationships with other members of their gangs. The gangs and gang membership of our Taiwanese respondents should not be overshadowed by their socioeconomic background. A detailed study that documents their gang activities has been published elsewhere (Pih and Mao 2005). While the Taiwanese gangs do not have gang tattoos, employ gang signs, or wear specific clothing associated with gangs, they clearly fit under the aforementioned criteria, and their socioeconomic backgrounds, participation in the legitimate institutions, academic achievements, and prospects are not necessarily related to their gang membership, activities, and behavior. Therefore, we are confident that gang membership is credible among our respondents.

Snowball sampling was preferred to recruit the maximum number of respondents in each of the studies. Initial contacts were developed based on personal relationships between researchers and the respondents, and additional community interviewers in Lawrence were hired to assist the recruitment of respondents. Furthermore, respondents in each of the two studies were then referred to and recruited by the initial contacts. To increase interest, we attempted to provide the financial compensation of \$50 to all participants in the two studies. The Latino respondents accepted the compensation, while all the Taiwanese respondents refused the reward due to what they considered as a small amount. The interviews were conducted individually in various locations due to the highly mobile lifestyle of the respondents. A variety of locations were chosen to conduct the interviews, both for safety and also convenience: a community field office, shopping centers, street locations, gas stations, cafes, and restaurants. The interviews were administered in English, Spanish, or Mandarin, according to the preference and comfort of the respondents. To increase the flexibility of the interviews and the richness of the data, the interviews were semistructured to address several major issues: personal and family background; relationships with families; communities, peers, and society at large; education; work and career; reasons to join gangs; degree of involvement in gang activities; substance use; and reasons to exit gangs. While the interviews with the Latino respondents were tape recorded and transcribed, all the Taiwanese respondents declined to be taped. They did, however, allow interviewers to take detailed field notes. All interviews lasted from forty minutes to four hours, depending on the willingness of the respondents to provide detailed information.

In the Latino study, the Atlas Ti program was used to aid with the coding of the textual data. In the Taiwanese study, qualitative interviews were conducted with the respondents. The field notes from the interviews were transcribed and subsequently used in the analysis. The results from the Taiwanese study were then compared and contrasted with the Latino study. The two samples were analyzed along several common themes: individual socioeconomic background, education experience, career development, and gang involvement, activities, and duration. The first stage of the analysis was to focus on individual variables, including family socioeconomic status, education, gang participation and activities, relationships with family, friends, and school. The second stage of the analysis involved the social organization of the gangs and drug trafficking.

As is common to gang studies with a smaller sample size, reliability and validity present some challenges to our study. Given that our respondents were recruited through personal relations and the strict protocol of confidentiality, we are convinced that our respondents had no reason to provide false information. In particular and as similar to Chin's (1990, 1996) studies, the

social status and the associated credibility of the researchers provided an additional advantage for eliciting candor from the Taiwanese respondents. Still, to scientifically overcome these problems, we pay special attention to the internal consistency of the interviews, and interviews were also cross-checked to ensure optimum validity and reliability. However, we are cognizant of the size of our sample and the sensitive nature of the subject matter in limiting the depth of our data. We are confident that the protocols and strategies employed are adequate to provide us with valid and reliable data. The sociodemographic characteristics of our samples are summarized in Table 2.

RESULTS

Both groups of respondents reported heavy involvement in gangs and gang-related crimes. All respondents said they spent substantial time with other members of the gang, and they claimed a high degree of loyalty, camaraderie, and friendship toward other members. Both groups of respondents also considered their gang involvement to be a major source of their identity. More importantly, all respondents were involved in some form of gang-related crime. The Latino gang members reported frequent gang fights, assaults, street-level drug sales, drug use, auto theft, robbery, and burglary. The Taiwanese gang members also reported gang fights, street-level drug sales, drug use, home invasion, extortion, robbery, burglary, credit card frauds, and the receiving and selling of stolen property.

As reported earlier, material and cultural resources are quite scarce in the Latino community in Lawrence. Individually, the Latino gang members in our sample had extremely limited economic, human, and social capital in the normative institutional processes. Overwhelmingly, our Latino respondents came from working- and lower-class backgrounds. Joblessness among fathers and economic hardship were frequently reported by the respondents. In fact, several respondents reported that their parents sold drugs due to either chronic unemployment or poverty. Alcoholism and heavy drug use among parents were also widespread. Domestic abuse was frequently attributed to alcoholism and drug use. Also, a substantial number of respondents reported their fathers leaving their families at an early age. One respondent told researchers that his father was evading the authorities for warrants on drug trafficking and sales at the time of the interview. Another respondent illustrated his family environment in the following words:

[My father] would come once in awhile beating [my mother], threatening to kill her, that he found out that she's been sleeping around with different men. . . . It was that my childhood was really bad, especially with my father, my stepfather, my mother. All my brothers and sisters, none of them really finished school.

Hence, it is already obvious that macro- and individual economic capital is scarce among our Latino respondents.

As such, the transmission and acquisition of cultural capital also proved extremely difficult for the Latino respondents. Among the seventy-six Latino respondents, only four individuals completed high school, received a GED, or sought higher education. The other respondents officially or unofficially dropped out from school at various ages, some as early as eleven. Parental involvement in our respondents' education was extremely low. Our respondents did not receive any form of support from parents in the pursuit of education. In fact, most respondents told us that their parents did not care about their education at all. Education overall was understood by the respondents as useless and time consuming. Interestingly, for several respondents, going to school carried an ulterior motive. One respondent disclosed, "The only reason I would go to school was to sell drugs to other kids in school." Attending school simply provided these respondents with a market and clientele for making money through drug sales. Education as an institutionalized capital was clearly unavailable to our respondents in pursuing further economic advancements.

Nevertheless, the discontinuation of education was not necessarily attributed to academic problems and poor performance. Thirty-three respondents claimed to have good grades before quitting school. They later dropped out either due to family problems, behavioral problems, problems with authorities, or drug problems. We asked the respondents with good grades why they ultimately dropped out from school. Money and economic hardship were mostly cited for dropping out of school. This is unsurprising given the overall disadvantaged backgrounds of our respondents. The Lawrence respondents realized at a rather early stage that education does not necessarily bring a promising financial future. Given both the limited financial opportunities a high school education can bring and the difficulty in obtaining a college education, illegitimate economic activity was the key to economy success:

The pressure. Just being . . . from hanging out. From seeing everybody wearing nice clothes, jewelry, things like that. I wanna have the same things. So I wanna have it quick and fast. So I decided fuck school. Let me just keep on dealing drugs and keep on doing whatever I had to do to get more clothes and forget about school.

Several respondents further stated that making quick and easy money from selling drugs was far more attractive than staying in school. As one respondent disclosed:

Yeah and it was hard for me 'cause the bills would be high and everything. I remember a friend of mine told me, yo, if you wanna sell drugs let me know. It's easy money.

Education was clearly rejected by the Latino respondents as useless for making money. Completing high school required too much time, while other people were making quick money from selling drugs. Acquiring and accumulating institutional cultural capital was rebuffed for its inaccessibility and impracticability, and an alternative means of obtaining resources was pursued.

This finding is especially relevant when considering Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital in the embodied state vis-à-vis other forms of capital. As almost half of the Latino respondents received a B average in school before dropping out, it is reasonable then to speculate that these individuals possessed sufficient cultural capital in the embodied state that would have positioned them to gain cultural capital in the institutionalized state. Instead, only four of the Latino respondents ultimately completed high school, and only one respondent pursued higher education. These results lead one to surmise that there are social and economic forces beyond an individual's natural intelligence and capacity, which further explains the failing and reluctance of the Latino gang members to secure institutionalized cultural capital through education and other normative means. Within our respondent's *habitus*, they understand education as not a desirable or effective strategy to seek financial reward.

In contrast, our Southern California Taiwanese gang respondents enjoyed affluence in economic and cultural capital. Their families were typically middle- to upper middle-class with professional or entrepreneurial backgrounds. In fact, in 2000, the median household income in the cities of Diamond Bar, Roland Heights, and Hacienda Heights far exceeded that of Lawrence at \$60,000 (U.S. Census 2005). They were able to selectively use their legitimate economic, cultural, and social capital to gain access to a higher and more professional education, thus transforming social capital into cultural capital in acquiring higher education and a professional career.

In our sample of twenty-two Taiwanese gang members, the vast majority of our respondents described their families as middle-class or above. Contrasting most previously published analyses on Asian gang members (Chin 1990, 1996; Joe 1994; Mark 1997; Vigil and Yun 1996; Wang 2002), our respondents are clearly financially privileged in their family backgrounds. Only two respondents reported financial problems at home. The majority of respondents described their parents as professionals or entrepreneurs in either Taiwan or the

United States. Several respondents reported their parents as high-level government officials in Taiwan, merchants, business owners, and other professionals. Our respondents said their parents expected them to pursue higher education because of their family backgrounds, and their parents made considerable efforts to ensure their matriculation. Several respondents completed their bachelor's degrees, and one respondent even received an advanced degree from a high-ranking university in Southern California. At the time of the interviews, several other respondents were attending either four-year universities or two-year institutions with intentions to transfer to four-year institutions. Other respondents were in high school with plans to pursue higher education. Our respondents also claimed that they maintained good academic records: They often described themselves as good students at school with good grades and as having good relationships with teachers, counselors, and their schools. Contrary to our Lawrence sample, these individuals were certain they would continue with their education. Overall, the Taiwanese respondents viewed higher education, and education in general, as an intractable part of their future.

The typical Taiwanese respondent was actively involved in gangs for approximately two to three years. This relatively short duration is discussed in another article (Pih and Mao 2005). The main reasons for quitting gangs include bringing shame to their family, the risks attached to gang involvement, and the possibility of jeopardizing future prospects. However, the processes of ceasing gang membership required more than family intervention and personal feelings. A close examination of their accounts yields further evidence of the significance of capital in affecting the successful departure from gang membership. Duration of Gang Involvement and Capital

Several Taiwanese respondents realized they did not want to jeopardize their futures in the legitimate economy and therefore needed to "move on." In fact, throughout our respondents' active gang involvement, they continued to attend school and maintain good grades. They stayed in school partly because of parental pressure, but also, they were always aware that financial success was attainable through primarily legitimate means. Attending a university and acquiring a bachelor's or advance degree was deemed necessary to our respondents even during active and serious gang involvement. Several respondents even claimed they could make more money through legitimate investments using their family's financial support. In fact, most of our respondents appeared to be extremely successful in managing these seemingly contradictory identities: being both gang members and good students. Again, our respondents' subjective understanding of the objective environment asserts significant impact on their actions and behavior. The differences in the actors' *habitus* are abundantly clear in affecting their duration of gang involvement.

Our Taiwanese respondents were able to eventually quit gangs successfully through disassociation from other gang members. Relocating to another neighborhood or city was the key to distancing themselves from other gang members. Several respondents withdrew from gangs when they began attending universities in other cities. The availability of financial resources was critical for relocating to another city or neighborhood, and our respondents received substantial assistance from their parents. Without moving to another location, our respondents claimed they would not have successfully distanced themselves from their gangs. Also, quitting the gang was considered taboo and was punishable by physical violence or even death. Our respondents felt that having moved to another neighborhood or city made them feel safe enough to gradually withdraw from their gangs.

For our Latino sample, none of the respondents formally ceased gang involvement. As noted by Fagan (1996), gang membership was observed to continue into adulthood. Economic restructuring and limited job opportunities in the inner-city areas were offered as the most prominent explanation for the extension of gang membership. Our respondents confirmed this

observation. As described in the previous section, most of our respondents received a limited education. Only four individuals completed high school or received a GED. Education was rejected by our respondents early on. To make matters worse, the limited job opportunities in inner-city areas exacerbated their options. With few prospects in the legitimate economy, illicit economic opportunities associated with gang membership were far more accessible to our respondents. Also, unlike our Taiwanese respondents, the Latino respondents were restricted in the inner-city. Our Taiwanese respondents were able to extract themselves from gang activities by moving to another neighborhood or city through financial support from their families, whereas our Latino respondents did not have such options.

The contrast in membership duration and its relationship to economic and cultural capital is apparent when the Latino respondents are compared with the Taiwanese respondents. The relatively brief gang membership among the Taiwanese respondents could be explained through the overall economic and cultural capital available to the respondents. They possessed the necessary cultural capital to realize the significance of pursuing education and legitimate means of attaining financial success, and economic capital allowed them to relocate away from their gangs and attend universities. Our Latino respondents presented the opposite. They understood the shortage of legitimate economic and cultural capital in their immediate socioeconomic environment, and they resorted to alternate means to acquire financial success. The strikingly different *habitus* led our respondents to gain a distinguishable understanding toward gang membership and their prospects in the legitimate financial future, which ultimately led to the explicit contrasts in the duration of their gang involvement.

Gangs as Social Capital

Given the stark dissimilarities between the Latino and Taiwanese respondents in their possession and acquisition of economic and cultural capital, this analysis then seeks to understand gang involvement and activity through social capital. In Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) theorizing, networks of specific social relationships carry social capital to permit or even engender further reward-seeking actions to take place. Putnam (2000) argues that gangs represent various forms of social capital. Our study supports Putnam's findings. Gang involvement serves as substantial but distinct forms of social capital to both groups of respondents. The Latino gangs in Lawrence and the Taiwanese gangs in Southern California are similar in that they operate primarily as additional networks of individuals providing resources and opportunities in illicit and licit economic actions. Consistent with Valdez and Sifaneck (2004), several respondents in the Latino sample related that their initial drug sources were either friends or family members. As Anderson (1994, 1998), Blumstein (1995), Fagan (1989, 1996), Hagedorn (1988, 1998), Fagan and Chin (1990), Venkatesh (1997), Wilson (1987, 1996), and others noted, in economically scarce communities where unemployment is high and access to legitimate economy is blocked, illicit economic activities such as drug sales and other crimes are the most immediate means for financial gain. Several characteristics of gangs should be noted: Gangs are significantly embedded in interpersonal and economic networks, and they are also a critical means for acquiring business and personal security in such a hazardous environment. As such, gangs, and gang involvement in general, provide individuals with a range of resources that are unique to their immediate social and economic environments. Further analysis reveals gangs to be social capital in a much more nuanced manner than the current literature suggests.

As we observed in both samples, gang membership was crucial in facilitating illegal economic activities. Gangs mainly function as protection and security and as networks in the illicit or even licit economy. It was frequently mentioned to us by respondents from both samples that illegitimate business opportunities were sourced from other gang members. While the entire gang did not necessarily participate in drug dealing, nevertheless many opportunities were

generated from their gang connections. In both samples, we have respondents giving us the exact same statement when describing their respective gangs and the role of drug sales in their gangs: "We are all about money." One Lawrence respondent told us:

Gangs? Since the age of seventeen when we all decided to start dealing drugs. And we called . . . we called ourselves TGP. That stands for Twelve Gauge Posse.

Some gangs were formed after the respondents started engaging in drug trafficking. Similar to the account in Valdez and Sifaneck (2004), a number of Lawrence respondents told us that they first received drugs from their friends who were selling. Two other respondents claimed that family members were their first suppliers. Therefore, existing friendships and interpersonal relationships were critical in initiating drug trafficking. Other individuals joined existing gangs after they started selling. One Lawrence respondent described to us how gang involvement was a necessary and critical resource to successfully and securely engage in the street-level drug trade:

I was 15. I was LTG. And then I got rid of that and then I didn't join a click 'til like when I turned 17 1/2. I didn't join a click [*sic*]. I joined this click [*sic*] named . . . what was the click [*sic*]? KS. Killer Soldiers. I entered KS. That shit was crazy. . . . Like on our block . . . we used to have our own block and we used to sell there. Boom! If he don't live there you gotta hit him cause that's your spot right there. That's taking money out of your deal. And that was what we was about. The money.

Another respondent confirmed the relationship between gang and drug selling:

Like when you sell. You can sell your corner. You can sell it. Like you could rent it out. Like if it's yours and somebody wants to pump there, you be like look here's the deal. How much you making in the day? You know what I'm saying? At the end of the week, that's a lot of dough right there. So we used to do that for awhile.

There is no indication of the gangs engaging in drug selling in an organized and structured manner. Instead, individual gang members used their gangs as an additional but necessary tool and resource to secure the location and the market for a stable drug trade. In fact, for several respondents, gang membership occurred only after initial involvement in drug selling.

As for the Taiwanese respondents, because of their access to legitimate institutions and their possession of legitimate cultural and economic capital, gang involvement and gangs offer mainly fascination, excitement, and a supplementary form of social capital. As already discussed in Pih and Mao (2005), for most Taiwanese respondents, initial gang involvement was heavily based on existing friendships, power and status, and sex appeal. They did not place great emphasis on the direct monetary gain from gang membership. Rather, they acknowledged that the future gains from the network connections established with other gang members and associates were significantly more important than the immediate gains from drug selling or participating in gang crimes. The line between legitimate and illegitimate business opportunities was occasionally blurred among our respondents. Friendships and other forms of interpersonal relationships generated from gangs could often turn into future business opportunities and venture capital in the legitimate economy. As one respondent told us, "My family is rich, I do not need money." Several respondents claimed their families were capable of offering them venture capital after they graduated from college. In addition to the venture capital, the connections also translated into favors in other areas, such as stock and real estate deals, merchandise supplies, and other business necessities. Therefore, gangs were a relevant source of auxiliary social capital among these Taiwanese gang members.

One Southern California respondent, upon graduating with an advanced degree from a major local university, worked as a financial consultant at a leading investment firm. The services he currently provides and his position in the investment firm are legitimate and legal. However,

a sizeable portion of his current clientele was based on interpersonal relationships established when he was a gang lieutenant. Another respondent also admitted that acquaintances and connections made in gangs were extremely important for his future business investments. The same respondent is currently operating a chain of legitimate small businesses in the aforementioned Southern California cities. He disclosed that several of his business partners and investors were either former or current gang members or elders. He admitted these connections were made during his active involvement in gangs. Even though he claimed he was no longer involved with his former gang, certain useful contacts and networks were maintained for business purposes. Friends, associates, and connections in gangs and the illegitimate economy constitute a vast network of potential business opportunities, partners, and even venture capital. The successful pursuit of both legitimate and illegitimate economic interests of these respondents are heavily rooted in the interpersonal relationships generated through gangs, again suggesting that a substantial amount of social capital is located and embedded in the gangs.

DISCUSSION

The interconnectedness of different forms of capital is demonstrated by the contrast between the Latino and Taiwanese respondents. Bourdieu (1977, 1986) argues that economic capital facilitates the acquisition of cultural and social capital, but at the same time, the deprivation of one form of capital could also lead to the deprivation of another form. The actual forms of social capital sourced from gangs vary greatly in the two groups. The overall endowment of capital from legitimate and illegitimate sources clearly affected our respondents' degree of using gangs as an additional form of social capital. Gangs, therefore, are viewed as additional networks that provide a potential supplementary social capital for individual gang members. Unavailability and inaccessibility to legitimate economic, cultural, and social capital left the Latino respondents little chance in advancing in normative institutions and processes. Illicit activities became an attractive, if not the only, option. Using social connections through kinship and friendship networks as primary sources for narcotics supplies, our Latino respondents proceeded to use their gangs as a supplementary form of social capital to ensure their ventures in the illicit economy. Social capital in the illicit economy and gangs as a form of social capital effectively enhanced and perpetuated gang membership and their involvement in illicit activities. On the other hand, the Taiwanese respondents had both legitimate and illegitimate capital at their disposal. With abundant legitimate economic capital and cultural capital from their families, the Taiwanese respondents selectively used their membership in gangs as additional social capital. These social connections established during gang involvement and other illicit activities extended and boosted their networks and contacts for future legitimate opportunities. For our Taiwanese respondents, gang involvement and membership did not directly lead to significant material resources in an illicit form. Instead, the implicit network, financial potential, and other legitimate financial opportunities that stemmed from gang involvement were far more important in the long run. In both cases, gang membership should be considered as instrumental in character. The *habitus* and the overall capital commanded by the individual greatly affect the degree to which the individual uses the gang as a form of illegitimate social capital.

Our findings, therefore, can be summarized as follows: (1) Both legitimate and illegitimate social capital should be considered as important factors of gang membership and duration: The *habitus* and the overall distribution of legitimate and illicit capital possessed by an individual gang member significantly affects the length of active participation in gangs and the illegitimate economy. With limited capital in legitimate social processes, our Latino respondents' gang involvement was significantly prolonged into adulthood. (2) Gangs and gang membership are a form of illicit but significant social capital.

Given that the application of social capital in understanding gang membership and activities is still in its nascent stage, we recognize several limitations in this analysis. While it is demonstrated that the overall endowment of capital significantly affects duration of gang membership, the results on gangs as social capital are tentative and should be treated with prudence. Future comparative studies will provide additional evidence. Also, as with most gang studies, all respondents in this study are males. The economic activities of female gangs and gang members have yet to be addressed. Furthermore, given that the entire Taiwanese sample and the majority of the Latino sample are foreign born, there is the potential that native-born status might have an independent effect on the acquisition of capital and gang involvement. Finally, we suggest an alternative strategy to understand and analyze gang involvement and behavior. While gang membership asserts potent effects on behavior, social actions carried out by gang members should not be understood as fundamentally different from any other social actions under normative settings. As demonstrated by this article, the availability or absence of macro- and individual-level capital greatly influences the trajectory of gang activity and duration of gang involvement. Hence, a conventional approach of gang membership and activity is inadequate to gaining a full understanding of the subject.

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TABLE 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Sample Sites

	Lawrence	Diamond Bar	Rowland Heights	Hacienda Heights	U.S. Average
Percent of the Latino population	59.7	N/A	N/A	N/A	12.5
Percent of Asian population	N/A	42.8	50.3	36.1	3.6
Percent of population who speaks a language other than English at home	61.7	53.9	71.3	61.7	17.9
Percent of foreign born	30.6	38.3	52.8	40.2	11.1
Median household income (in dollars)	31,809	68,871	56,065	62,827	50,046
Percent under poverty line	21.2	5	9.5	7.3	9.2
Percent of high school graduates	58.2	90.7	82.1	81.6	80.4
Percent of bachelor's degree	10	42.3	33.3	30.7	24.4

Source: 2000 U.S. Census.

TABLE 2

Characteristics of the Respondents

	<i>Lawrence (n = 76)</i>	<i>Southern California (n = 22)</i>
Average age	26.7	19.6
Average years of education (At the time of interview)	10	13.4
High school graduates or above (at the time of interview)	4 (5.26%)	18 (81.82%)
Postsecondary education (at the time of interview)	1 (1.32%)	14 (63.64%)