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Travel Beyond the Home Neighborhood for Delinquent Behaviors: Moderation of Home Neighborhood Influences

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Abstract

Neighborhood research indicates that adolescents are at higher risk for delinquency when they reside in neighborhoods low in collective efficacy, low in perceived prosocial norms and values, and high in availability of substances and firearms. However, as adolescents develop, they are more likely to independently travel during their day-to-day activities, and the effects of their home neighborhood may be weakened as they spend time in other communities. The current study surveyed 179 adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system in a small Midwestern city on their perceptions of their home neighborhood and self-reported delinquency. While perceptions of several home neighborhood characteristics significantly predicted severity of delinquency for all respondents, neighborhood effects were significantly weaker for those adolescents who tended to engage in illegal behaviors outside their home neighborhood. These findings suggest that future research and prevention efforts should include more attention to how adolescents may be influenced by multiple neighborhoods.

It is well-established that characteristics of some urban neighborhoods elevate risk for adolescent problem behaviors (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). In one review, Leventhal, Dupere, and Brooks-Gunn (2009) stated, "... neighborhoods appear to matter for adolescent development; however *how* [emphasis added] they matter is only beginning to be elucidated" (p. 437). One limitation of our current understanding of how neighborhoods shape adolescent problem behaviors is the lack of clarity in identifying the neighborhood of interest—whether the neighborhood of influence is the place where the child develops, or where the child engages in problem activities. As adolescents living in urban areas become increasingly mobile (O'Brien, Jones, Sloan, & Rustin, 2000), they are likely to cross neighborhood boundaries when engaging in problem behaviors, raising the question of how this travel might complicate or dilute the influence of their home neighborhood. The current study seeks to clarify our understanding of neighborhood influences on adolescent delinquent behaviors by examining both the frequency with which delinquent youth endorse engaging in illegal behaviors in

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neighborhoods besides their own, and exploring how this tendency to travel may moderate commonly established neighborhood-level risk factors.

Types of Neighborhood Influences

Some of the earliest work on neighborhood predictors of delinquency established the theory of “social disorganization,” which linked high rates of concentrated poverty, ethnic heterogeneity, and resident turnover to higher rates of delinquency (Shaw & McKay, 1942, 1969). These authors argued that structural characteristics of a neighborhood contributed to the ability of neighborhood residents to realize shared values. Building on this framework, Sampson and colleagues demonstrated that the effects of neighborhood structural characteristics on crime are mediated by the “collective efficacy” of residents (Sampson et al., 1997). Collective efficacy is comprised of two components: social cohesion, the positive bonds formed between residents of the same neighborhood, and informal social control, the ability or willingness of neighborhood residents to monitor and/or intervene in activities occurring within the neighborhood. These social characteristics of a neighborhood provide one mechanism by which structural characteristics lead to increased levels of crime, as economically or otherwise disadvantaged neighbors may be less equipped to informally control activities in their midst (Sampson et al., 1997). It is noteworthy that the construct of collective efficacy focuses on the ability of adult residents to control behaviors within the neighborhood, and does not directly address resident behaviors in other settings.

In addition to the effects of collective efficacy on the control of crime, the degree to which residents endorse prosocial (or, conversely, antisocial) values can be considered a potential influence on adolescent behaviors. Within the context of their Social Development Model, Hawkins and colleagues (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Hawkins, Catalano, & Arthur, 2002) posit that the opportunity to bond with prosocial individuals, along with exposure to prosocial community norms, can protect against the development of delinquency. Through a cascading effect, neighborhoods where adults express prosocial values can be expected to foster the development of these values in youth residents. In addition to measures of residents’ overt expression of prosocial values, Hawkins and colleagues suggest that the local availability of illegal substances and firearms can be an indicator of community norms (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992). Their research with the Communities that Care prevention program finds that when youth perceive more prosocial neighborhood adult values (such as, it is “wrong” to sell drugs), as well as perceive drugs and guns as less readily available, those youth are less likely to engage in substance abuse or delinquent behaviors (Arthur et al., 2007; Hawkins et al., 2002). In contrast to the original conceptualization of collective efficacy, the Social Development Model focuses on the shaping of stable norms which create “an informal control on future behavior” (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996, p. 156); through these internalized norms, the neighborhoods where youth reside should be expected to influence their behaviors across settings.

Identifying the Neighborhood of Interest

At the same time that different studies examine different aspects of neighborhoods, research varies with respect to the operationalization of the neighborhood of interest. The earliest

work on social disorganization focused on the neighborhood where youth *reside*, linking the occurrence of delinquency among adolescents with characteristics of their home neighborhoods (Shaw & McKay, 1942, 1969). By contrast, the seminal work showing the mediation of social disorganization by collective efficacy focused on the neighborhood as a location *where crime occurs* (Sampson et al., 1997). Researchers with a developmental focus demonstrate an interest in how characteristics of the neighborhood in which an adolescent resides may shape behavior through the influence on family processes or peers (Chung & Steinberg, 2006; Haynie, Silver, & Teasdale, 2006; Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2003), describing the home neighborhood as a context for development. Conversely, a neighborhood that an adolescent targets for illegal activity may promote problem behaviors by providing a conducive setting (Bernasco & Block, 2009). Many studies, however, are not explicit in whether the neighborhood is being considered as a context for development or a location of criminal activity (or both), and we know of no studies that contrast the respective influences of neighborhoods fulfilling these functions.

The lack of discussion of this distinction between types of neighborhoods may be due to an assumption that urban adolescents tend to engage in problem behaviors in the same neighborhoods where they reside. Although there is a significant body of literature on residential mobility, where youth and families move to a different home together, our understanding of adolescent travel within an urban space is less clear. Studies have shown that there are fewer parental restrictions on range of daily activities as children age, and in urban areas this may mean crossing neighborhood boundaries (O'Brien et al., 2000). At the same time, the geographic "journey to crime" literature indicates that mean distances traveled for crimes range from .5 to 1.5 miles; while on average adolescents tend to travel shorter distances to crimes than adults, they will still often cross Census tract boundaries (Bernasco & Block, 2009; Bichler, Christie-Merrall, & Sechrest, 2011; Townsley & Sidebottom, 2010). These findings suggest that for many adolescents, the neighborhoods where they live and those where they engage in illegal behaviors are distinct.

Implications of Multiple Neighborhoods of Influence

To better understand how neighborhoods influence problem behaviors, it is important to recognize that specific neighborhood variables may exert more or less influence depending on the function that the neighborhood serves to an adolescent. For some time, researchers have recognized that while neighborhood characteristics consistently demonstrate significant effects on adolescent behavior, the size of these effects tend to be small (Elliott et al., 1996; Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, & Elder, 2000); it seems possible that the power to detect neighborhood effects is weakened by poor precision in identifying the neighborhood of interest. A neighborhood's collective efficacy may be a strong influence on delinquent behavior taking place within the neighborhood itself (Sampson et al., 1997), but the collective efficacy of an adolescent's home neighborhood may become less salient as the adolescent travels to offend in other locations. Conversely, the Social Development Model suggests that children internalize the values and norms of the neighborhoods in which they reside, implying that neighborhood norms and values might be more important when examining the home neighborhood (Arthur et al., 2007; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996), regardless of where the adolescent engages in illegal activities.

For policy-makers and neighborhood residents interested in improving outcomes for urban adolescents, it is important to understand how travel may moderate the effects of neighborhood influences. Some community-based interventions such as block watches focus on the deterrence of crime within that neighborhood only, and to the extent that adolescents travel out of that neighborhood to commit crime may not reduce problem behaviors among neighborhood residents. Interventions based in schools or neighborhood organizations that focus on modifying adolescent norms and values may be more successful in deterring adolescent's problem behaviors across neighborhoods, if it is in fact the case that neighborhood influences on norms are not weakened when adolescents travel to other neighborhoods to engage in illegal activities.

Current Study

The current study aims to bridge several gaps in the neighborhood literature. First, we examine base rates of adolescents' own reports of their tendency to engage in delinquent behaviors in their own neighborhoods vs. traveling to other neighborhoods, to address the question of whether these neighborhoods are in fact distinct. Next, characteristics of the home neighborhood were examined as correlates of the tendency to travel to other neighborhoods when engaging in illegal activity. Finally, the primary goal of this study was to determine whether tendency to engage in illegal activity in other neighborhoods moderates the strength of the influences of the home neighborhood characteristics on delinquent behaviors. We expected that moderation would differ depending on the type of neighborhood characteristic examined. As the literature on collective efficacy has focused on the ability of neighborhoods to control criminal activity taking place within the neighborhood itself, we expected that the collective efficacy of the home neighborhood would be less influential for adolescents who do not tend to offend there. Conversely, as the Social Development Model suggests that adolescents internalize neighborhood norms and values, we expected that measures of neighborhood prosocial norms would be less likely to be moderated by tendency to offend outside of the home neighborhood—as internalized norms should be influential regardless of location of criminal activity.

Method

Participants

For the present study, 192 youth completed surveys administered by researchers from a mid-sized university in the Midwest. Six surveys were not included in analyses, as researchers felt the participants were not responding honestly. In addition, seven participants were removed from analyses because they did not endorse the item that asks where they commit crimes, for a final sample size of $N = 179$.

Participants were recruited from four settings within the juvenile justice system serving a mid-sized city in the Midwest (county population 400,000): a detention center (where youth are held while awaiting sentencing, 46%), a treatment center (where some youth are detained post-sentencing for up to six months, 23%), probation (29%), and diversion programming (2%). By recruiting adolescents across different programs, we hoped to obtain a sample with diverse experiences of delinquent behaviors. Participant age ranged from 12

to 18 ($M = 15.88$, $SD = 1.24$). Eighteen-year olds included in the study ($N = 7$) were still involved in the juvenile justice system because they had a recent birthday. The sample was comprised of 163 males and 16 females. Of those youth who indicated their race ($n = 178$), the majority identified as African American ($n = 117$, 65%), followed by White ($n = 27$, 15%), multiracial ($n = 22$, 12%), Hispanic/Latino ($n = 6$, 3%), “other” ($n = 4$, 2%), and Native American ($n = 2$, 1%).

Current home address was obtained and GeoLytics software (GeoLytics, Inc., U.S. Census 2000 version) was used to obtain the Census block groups. Participants represented 120 Census block groups. Block group median household income ranged from \$7,338–\$101,973 ($M = \$29,281$). Most of the respondents indicated that they have been living in their neighborhood for at least a year (90%), although a sizeable minority reported that they had been living in their neighborhood for less than 6 months (10%). All neighborhood questions were asked about the current neighborhood of residence.

Measures: Outcome variable

Self-Reported Delinquency—The Self-Reported Delinquency Scale (Elliott, 1976) assessed both the number and frequency of delinquent behaviors in which youth engaged within the past year. Items were rated on a 9-point scale ranging from 0=*never* to 8=2–3 *times a day*. The scale was then summed to create a composite score ranging from 0–162, with higher scores reflecting both greater variety and higher frequency of delinquent behaviors. This scale and its variants have been used extensively in research on delinquency (Elliott et al., 1996; Stouthamer-Loeber, Loeber, Wei, Farrington, & Wikstrom, 2002; Tolan et al., 2003). In the current sample, the scale had strong internal consistency, with $\alpha = .91$. To reduce skew, the scale was log-transformed before being used as an outcome variable in regression analyses.

Measures: Predictor variables

Collective Efficacy—The two subscales of collective efficacy, social cohesion and informal social control, were measured using the Collective Efficacy Scale developed by Sampson and colleagues (Sampson et al., 1997). Social cohesion was measured using five items, such as, “People in my neighborhood are willing to help their neighbors”. Items were answered on a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*, and the mean was used for the scale score. Informal social control was measured using five items, such as, “If some children were spray-painting graffiti on a local building, how likely is it that your neighbors would do something about it?” Respondents responded using a 5-point scale ranging from *Very Likely* to *Very Unlikely*, and the mean was used for the scale score. In the current sample, social cohesion demonstrated borderline internal consistency with $\alpha = .62$, and informal social control had a good internal consistency with $\alpha = .81$.

Perceived Adult Values and Norms—Five items from the Communities That Care Youth Survey (CTCYS; Arthur, Hawkins, Pollard, Catalano, & Baglioni, 2002) were used to assess adolescent perceptions of the values of adult residents regarding substance use and violence. A sample item includes, “How wrong would most adults in your neighborhood

think it was to sell drugs?” Items were reported on a 4-point scale ranging from *Not Wrong at All* to *Very Wrong*, and the mean was used for the scale score. Another measure of a neighborhood’s influence, and the underlying values of neighborhood residents, is the ease with which residents can obtain illegal drugs and firearms. This availability was assessed using five items from the CTCYS. One sample item is, “If you wanted to get some marijuana, how easy would it be for you to get some in your neighborhood?” Responses were reported on a 4-point scale ranging from *Very Hard* to *Very Easy*, and the mean was used for the scale score. In the current sample both subscales had good internal consistency, with prosocial adult values demonstrating $\alpha = .87$ and availability of drugs and firearms having $\alpha = .81$.

Measures: Moderator variable

Location of Illegal Activities—A single item was used to assess the tendency of the respondent to engage in delinquent behaviors within his/her home neighborhood. Participants were asked, “When you are doing things that are illegal or could get you in trouble, where are you most likely to be doing them?” Three response options were available: *In the neighborhood where I live*, *In a neighborhood where my friend(s) lives, but I don’t*, or *In a neighborhood where none of us live*.

Measures: Demographic variables

Respondents were asked to self-identify their age, race, and length of time they had resided in their current neighborhood. Length of residence in the current home neighborhood was operationalized as a 6-point scale, ranging from 0 = *less than 6 months*, to 4 = *5 or more years* and 5 = *as long as I can remember*.

Procedure

Parents were given a verbal description of the study, and were provided a cover letter summarizing the study along with a consent form. Parents and adolescents were reminded during the consent process and several times throughout the study that the researchers were not affiliated with the court, that participation would not affect the adolescent’s standing with the court, and that results would be kept confidential. After parental consents were obtained, research staff administered the survey to individual youth or when possible in small groups. The study was described in detail to the adolescent, and each participant completed an assent form. Adolescents who agreed to participate were read the survey, while the participants filled in answers. On average, interviews took thirty minutes to complete. Participation in this study was completely voluntary, and participants were not compensated. No court-affiliated staff members were present during the survey. The Human Subjects Review Board of the university conducting the study approved the project before recruitment began.

Results

Descriptive Analyses

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of predictor and outcome variables are presented in Table 1. Total delinquency correlated significantly with all neighborhood

characteristics. Age was not associated with delinquency, in contrast with significant literature indicating that delinquency increases across adolescence, but was significantly associated with some perceptions of neighborhood characteristics (Elliott, 1994; Farrington, 1986). Exploratory analyses of a quadratic term for age were also non-significant. The mean length of residence in the current neighborhood was 3.27 on a 6-point scale, representing a response of 2–4 years. Length of residence was associated with delinquency, with respondents who had lived in their neighborhood longer reporting higher levels of delinquency, and was associated with some perceptions of neighborhood characteristics.

Base rates and predictors of travel

Location where respondent reported being “most likely” to engage in illegal behaviors was initially reported on a three-point scale, with $N = 61$ (34%) reporting they were most likely to engage in illegal activities “*in the neighborhood where I live*”, $N = 23$ (13%) reporting “*in a neighborhood where my friend(s) lives, but I don’t*”, and $N = 95$ (53%) reporting “*in a neighborhood where none of us live*”. To simplify interpretation of moderation analyses, this variable was dichotomized into 0 = *home neighborhood* ($N = 61$, 34%) and 1 = *any other neighborhood* ($N = 118$, 66%). The high frequency of adolescents reporting that they tend to engage in illegal activities in a neighborhood other than their home neighborhood supports our conceptualization of the home neighborhood and the location of criminal activity as often being different neighborhoods. To address our research question regarding correlates of travel out of the home neighborhood when engaging in illegal activity, point-biserial correlations were examined for the location of illegal behavior variable with home neighborhood variables (Table 1). Social cohesion was the only characteristic of the home neighborhood associated with location of illegal activities, with youth who perceived their home neighborhood as being higher in social cohesion reporting a greater tendency to offend in a different neighborhood.

Regression analyses: moderation of home neighborhood effects

A series of separate multiple linear regression models were run with each neighborhood variable of interest (Table 2). This approach was used for two reasons; because the focus of this study is on exploring the possible moderating effect of travel out of the home neighborhood on a variety of neighborhood influences, not on testing the relative strength of different neighborhood predictors in each other’s presence, and due to sample size restrictions on testing multiple interaction terms simultaneously. When examined independently, higher perceived home neighborhood social cohesion predicted lower severity of delinquency, but the interaction between location of illegal activity and home neighborhood social cohesion was not significant, indicating that the strength of influence of social cohesion did not depend on location of illegal activity. Perceived informal social control also significantly predicted lower severity of delinquency. The significant interaction between social control and location of illegal activity indicates that the strength of home neighborhood social control depends on whether the adolescent tends to offend there or elsewhere. To explore the direction of moderation, we conducted post-hoc analyses using conditional moderators (Holmbeck, 2002). While all respondents demonstrate a significant positive association between home neighborhood perceived social control and delinquency,

this association is significantly stronger among adolescents who tend to offend in their home neighborhood (Figure 1).

Regressions examining perceptions of neighborhood values demonstrated patterns of effects similar to that of social control. Adolescents who perceived the adults in their home neighborhood as endorsing more prosocial values reported lower levels of delinquency. This effect was also moderated by location of illegal behaviors, with post-hoc analyses revealing that adolescents who offend in their home neighborhoods demonstrated a stronger association between home neighborhood prosocial values and delinquency (Figure 2). Perceived availability of drugs and guns in the home neighborhood also significantly predicted delinquency, with adolescents who perceived greater availability of drugs and guns in their home neighborhood reporting greater delinquency. This effect was also moderated by location of illegal behaviors, with post-hoc analyses revealing that adolescents who offend in their home neighborhoods demonstrated a stronger association for the availability of drugs and guns in their home neighborhoods with delinquency (Figure 3).

Discussion

The current study demonstrates the importance of the role of travel between neighborhoods in models of neighborhood influence on problem behaviors. Our results replicate existing findings that characteristics of the neighborhoods in which adolescents reside, including neighborhood social cohesion, informal social control, adult prosocial values, and availability of drugs and guns, are associated with adolescent problem behaviors. However, these home neighborhood influences are significantly weaker for those adolescents who travel outside of their home neighborhood to engage in problem behaviors. This moderation by travel could partially explain why historically researchers have found the strength of neighborhood effects on problem behaviors to be significant but weak (Elliott et al., 1996; Furstenberg et al., 2000), as combining adolescents who do and do not engage in problem behaviors within the neighborhood of interest into a single group may have weakened the overall effects of the neighborhood. To better understand the behaviors of the sizeable subgroup of adolescents who tend to leave their home neighborhoods to offend, it may be important to identify other predictors such as characteristics of the neighborhoods to which they travel.

Rates of Offending Outside the Home Neighborhood

Our findings do not support the implicit assumption in much of the literature on neighborhood effects, that adolescents tend to engage in illegal behaviors in their home neighborhoods. When asked about their perceptions of whether they tend to offend in their own neighborhood or another, nearly two-thirds of respondents indicated that they offend in a different neighborhood. This measure of neighborhood travel is quite simple, and does not indicate whether respondents have crossed Census tract lines or other objectively defined boundaries. However, this measure demonstrates that, from their own perspectives, many adolescents see the neighborhoods where they live and the neighborhoods where they engage in illegal behaviors as distinct. Perceived characteristics of the home neighborhood measured by this study do not shed much light on the motivations behind this travel;

perceived social cohesion of the home neighborhood was associated with greater likelihood of reporting a tendency to offend in other neighborhoods, but no other characteristics of the home neighborhood predicted tendency to travel. It seems likely that other variables, such as parental monitoring or other adult supervision in the home neighborhood, or location of peers and other frequently visited sites, might be more predictive of an adolescent's decision to leave the home neighborhood to engage in delinquent behaviors (Bernasco & Block, 2009; Lersch & Hart, 2011).

Moderation of Home Neighborhood Influences by Offending in Other Neighborhoods

Our findings supported our expectation that informal social control, as a measure of the ability of a neighborhood's residents to control behaviors in their midst, has less of a protective effect for youth who do not engage in illegal activities in the neighborhood measured. Conversely, we had expected that the positive effects of perceived norms of adult residents and the negative effects of availability of drugs and firearms in the home neighborhood would be not be influenced by location of illegal activity, as the Social Development Model positions these variables as influencing internalized norms (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Hawkins et al., 2002). Instead, our results suggest that, like informal social control, adolescents who engage in illegal activities in other locations are less influenced by the norms and values of their home neighborhoods. There are a number of possible explanations for this pattern. Perceived neighborhood values may act, similarly to informal social control, not by influencing the adolescent's own values but by influencing their perception of the risk of neighborhood residents intervening in activities in that neighborhood. Alternatively, adolescents may internalize the norms of their home neighborhoods, but these internalized norms may also be influenced by the norms of the other neighborhoods to which an adolescent travels—explaining why adolescents who tend to spend time outside their home neighborhood would show a weaker effect of the values of their home neighborhood. The current study does not include measures of the perceptions of characteristics of other neighborhoods encountered by participants, but future studies might use these perceptions to examine whether they are more closely associated with adolescent values and norms.

Perceived social cohesion of the home neighborhood was the one measured home neighborhood characteristic that was not moderated by location of illegal behaviors, but instead predicted the likelihood of offending outside the home neighborhood. It is possible that neighborhood social cohesion leads to more stable internal values affecting behavior across settings, but that youth who engage in more serious problem behaviors despite coming from cohesive neighborhoods are more likely to leave the home neighborhood to do so. Lower collective efficacy has been identified as an “attractive” characteristic of neighborhoods targeted for crime, but it is less clear why we found that social cohesion predicted travel when offending but informal social control did not (Bernasco & Block, 2009). It is possible that for delinquent adolescents, perceived social cohesion provides a more salient deterrent; however, this is an unexpected isolated finding in a cross-sectional study, and needs replication to aid further interpretation.

Implications for Research and Practice

Implications of this study for neighborhood research are clear: to best understand how a neighborhood influences the problem behaviors of adolescent residents, the travel of those residents out of the neighborhood should be taken into account. Future research on neighborhood influences on problem behavior should expand to contrast the influences of the home neighborhood and the neighborhoods to which an adolescent travels, and incorporate a focus on the role that travel between neighborhoods plays within nested contexts of neighborhoods, family, and peers. For example, while good parental monitoring has been associated with lower levels of adolescent problem behaviors, it has also been suggested that adolescents whose parents monitor them well may be more likely to leave the neighborhood when engaging in illegal activities (Bernasco & Block, 2009). Similarly, understanding how peer groups are nested not just within the home neighborhood, but may move between neighborhoods, could clarify the role of peers in transmitting neighborhood influences. Implications for policy and practice are more complex. More and more community-based prevention programs are being developed, including large-scale empirically supported programs such as Communities that Care (Hawkins et al., 2002). While there must be practical limits on the area that a community-based program can cover, our results suggest that the neighborhood where an adolescent resides is not likely to be the only important community influencing their behavior. By broadening the scope of these programs to include the neighborhoods to which adolescents travel when engaging in delinquent behaviors, or other neighborhoods through which adolescents move, the efficacy of prevention efforts may be further improved. Alternatively, in attending to the effects of a new policy or prevention program targeting reduction of crime in a neighborhood, it may be important to also assess crime committed by neighborhood residents in other areas of the same city.

Limitations of the Current Study

Some limitations of the current study need to be considered in interpreting the findings. The sample assessed was comprised entirely of adolescents who were already involved in the juvenile justice system. It is possible that neighborhood characteristics affect stable personal values regarding delinquency more by determining whether or not, rather than how often, youth engage in problem behaviors. However, the range of severity in our sample is broad and includes youth who engaged in delinquent behaviors quite rarely. In addition, our results may not be generalizable to youth living in suburban or rural areas, where adolescents may be less likely to travel to more distant neighborhoods, particularly in the absence of public transportation. Finally, all surveys were self-reported by adolescents. While significant research indicates that self-reports of delinquent behaviors can be reliable and valid (Thornberry & Krohn, 2000), additional studies incorporating official arrest records or multiple reporters would strengthen our confidence in our findings. At the same time, we are focusing solely on adolescent perceptions of neighborhood characteristics and boundaries. Although it is likely that we would gain a more nuanced picture of neighborhood characteristics by using multiple reporters, some evidence suggests adolescent perceptions are more proximal predictors of their own behaviors (Van Horn, Hawkins, Arthur, & Catalano, 2007).

Strengths of the Current Study

Despite these limitations, the current study has a number of strengths. Several influential studies of neighborhood influences have included only Census data or adult reports of neighborhood characteristics (Elliott et al., 1996; Haynie et al., 2006; Sampson et al., 1997). By asking youth residents about their perceptions of neighborhood variables the current study offers a perspective often lacking in the neighborhood literature. In addition, research has generally focused on Census tracts when defining neighborhoods (Chung & Steinberg, 2006; Elliott et al., 1996; Haynie et al., 2006; Tolan et al., 2003). While Census tracts are generally determined with attention to locally perceived neighborhoods, they are widely acknowledged to be an imperfect approximation of neighborhoods (Haynie et al., 2006). In contrast, by focusing on adolescent reports both of their perceptions of neighborhood boundaries and characteristics, the current study affords more insight into how adolescent perceptions of their neighborhoods may shape their behavior. Finally, using a sample comprised entirely of delinquent youth is relatively rare within the literature on neighborhood effects (Mulvey et al., 2010). Using a sample of delinquent youth provides a clearer picture of neighborhood influences on adolescents who are responsible for the majority of criminal activities, focusing on those youth who are most likely to be targeted for prevention or intervention efforts.

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Figure 1.
Effects of social control on delinquency moderated by location of illegal activity

Figure 2.
Effects of prosocial adult values on delinquency moderated by location of illegal activity

Figure 3.
Effects of availability of drugs and guns on delinquency moderated by location of illegal activity

Table 1

Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations of Predictors and Outcome

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Total delinquency	1							
2. Social cohesion	-.23**	1						
3. Social control	-.35**	.44**	1					
4. Adult prosocial values	-.21**	.24**	.60**	1				
5. Availability of drugs and guns	.40**	-.31**	-.48**	-.48**	1			
6. Location of illegal behavior (0= <i>home neighborhood</i> , 1= <i>other neighborhood</i>)	.09	.16*	.09	.05	-.05	1		
7. Age	.14	.13	-.16*	-.19*	.28**	.13	1	
8. How long reside in neighborhood (0= <i>less than 6 months</i> , 5= <i>as long as I can remember</i>)	.16*	.08	-.14	.22**	.16*	-.22**	.24**	1
Mean	30.14	2.01	1.98	1.50	2.15	.66	15.90	3.27(2–4 years)
Standard Deviation	26.28	.72	1.05	.87	.79	.48	1.22	1.67

Note.

* $p < .05$,

** $p < .01$

Table 2

Effects of Social Cohesion, Social Control, Adult Prosocial Values and Availability of Drugs and Guns on Delinquency: Moderation by Location of Illegal Behavior

	Model 1: Effects of social cohesion			Model 2: Effects of social control			Model 3: Effects of adult prosocial values			Model 4: Effects of availability of drugs and guns		
	β	R^2		β	R^2		β	R^2		β	R^2	
Step 1		.125	***		.125	***		.114	***		.224	***
Age	.13			.06			.08			-.01		
Length of residence	.16*			.10			.08			.10		
Where illegal behavior (0=home neighborhood, 1=other neighborhood)	.19*			.18*			.15*			.17*		
Neighborhood variable (social cohesion, social control, adult prosocial values, or availability of drugs and guns)	-.27***			-.35***			-.25**			.43***		
Step 2		.133	.007		.193	.022*		.148	.034*		.245	.021*
Age	.13			.05			.07			-.01		
Length of residence	.15			.10			.10			.10		
Where illegal behavior	.20*			.19*			.15*			.17*		
Neighborhood variable (social cohesion, social control, adult prosocial values, or availability of drugs and guns)	-.39**			-.55***			-.50***			.60***		
Neighborhood variable by where illegal behavior	.153			.25*			.31*			-.23*		

Note.

* $p < .05$,

** $p < .01$,

*** $p < .001$