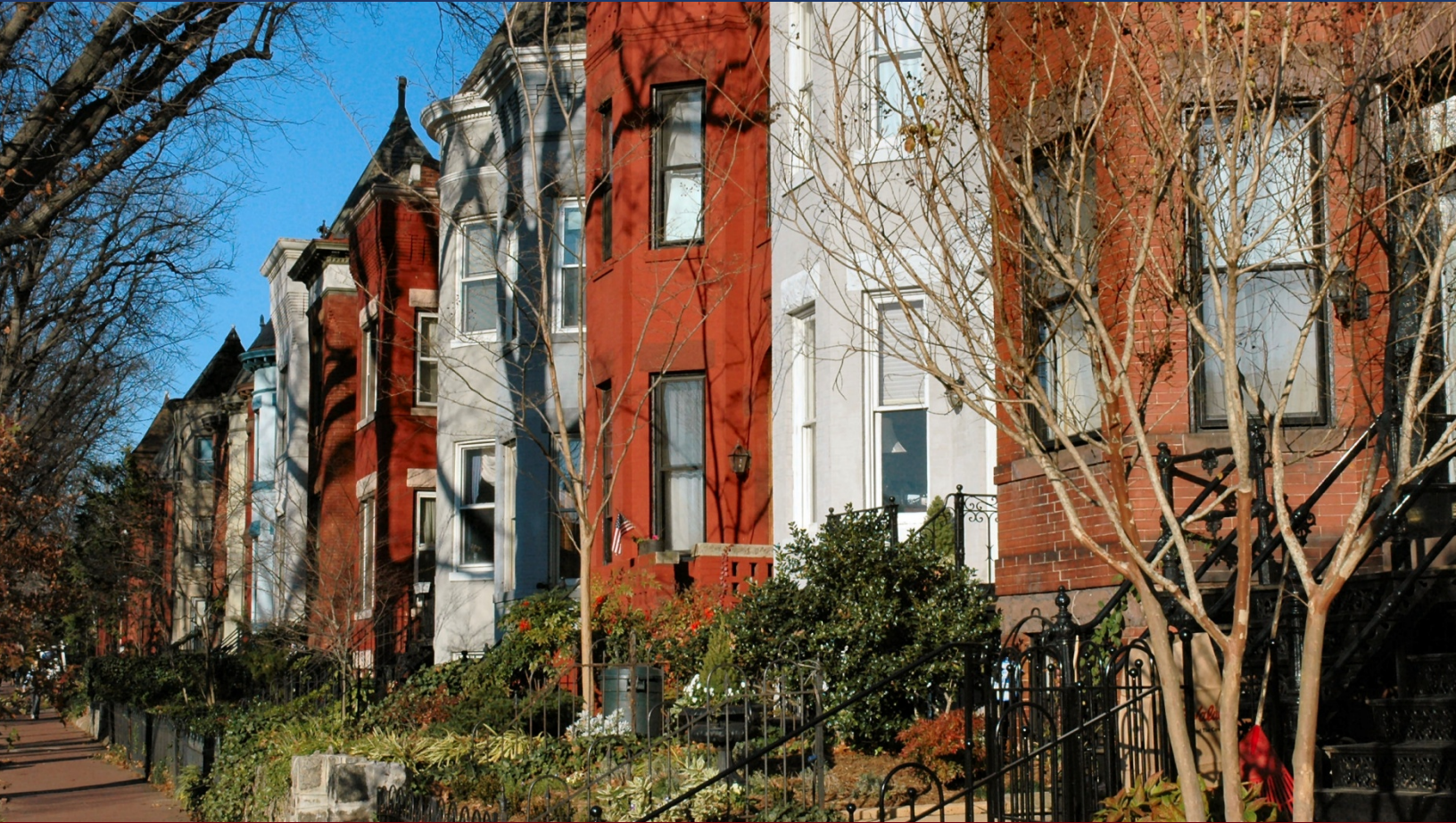


Social Networks and Behaviors of Youth in the District of Columbia: An Interim Research Report



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DCPI

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA CRIME POLICY INSTITUTE

 URBAN INSTITUTE

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Introduction

The District of Columbia Crime Policy Institute (DCPI) at the Urban Institute (UI), in partnership with Temple University and with funding from the Executive Office of the District of Columbia Mayor, is conducting a study on the behavior and social networks of youths between the ages of 14 and 21 in Washington, D.C. The study measures both positive activities (e.g., participation in sports, after-school programs) and delinquent behaviors (e.g., theft, violence) and uses data on social networks to understand how social relations influence behavior and, in turn, to provide insight on how to best prevent youth involvement in delinquent or violent activity.

This project builds on the project *The Influence of Social Networks on Delinquency and Gang Membership* that was begun in 2007 and was funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) at the U.S. Department of Justice, which was recently completed by the UI (Roman et al., forthcoming). In that study, we administered a social network survey to youths in a Montgomery County, Md., neighborhood composed of a large percentage of Latino residents. We found that having delinquent or criminal relationships appears to be a key factor in shaping an individual's likelihood of delinquency and gang membership. For instance, each additional delinquent individual in a youth's network increases his or her likelihood of selling drugs by 38 percent. Each additional youth in a person's network who had been in a gang fight increased whether that youth would be in a gang fight by 60 percent. Conversely, the Montgomery County neighborhood network study revealed that those with connections to multiple groups were *less* likely to be delinquent. Connecting youth with pro-social peers through neighborhood-based programs—instead of separating seriously at-risk or already delinquent youth from other peer groups—could be a successful way to combat delinquent peer influence.

Although past research has highlighted the influence of peers on delinquency, our research finds that nonpeer relationships (such as family, teachers, and mentors) may be just as important to consider when examining delinquency and violence. Our method of expanding data collection and analysis beyond simple peer networks to include immediate and extended family, teachers, mentors, and others, then, has yielded valuable findings that have important policy implications. Our research suggested, for instance, that connecting young men with older male role models could be an important way to prevent or reduce a boy's delinquent behavior, but that female role models are also important for all youths. Information on these relationships provide a more

nuanced understanding of influences on youth behavior—both positive and negative—than would simply considering a youth's friends.

Youth Social Networks in D.C.

The current study grew out of the previous OJJDP-funded social network study with the goal of examining similar aspects of youth behavior in a neighborhood composed of youths with different racial/ethnic backgrounds. Part of the analysis here entails a comparison of the data from both neighborhood surveys in an effort to find commonalities (and differences) among the many influences on (pro-social and delinquent) behavior of youths of different ethnicities or races.

The main tasks of the current study are to collect and analyze social network data from youths living in a small neighborhood in Washington, D.C. Social network data describe the contacts, ties, and attachments that one individual has to another. We sought to survey the entire youth population (boys and girls) between the ages of 14 and 21 who live within a small, targeted area (only a few city blocks). Respondents took computer-based surveys at a local community center in the Columbia Heights neighborhood.

The first research objective of the current study is to examine the influence of network structures and characteristics on delinquency and gang/crew membership at the *ego*, or respondent, level (see sidebar on page 3 for definitions of social network terminology). For example, we examine the influence of both nonpeer (everyone) and peer (friends only) relations on delinquency and gang/crew membership. The second revolves around the whole network, which overlaps each individual network into a single, connected web, and what properties and characteristics of that whole network relate to delinquency and gang/crew membership. Third, we address the mechanisms through which an individual's position and connectedness within the whole network relates to his or her propensity for being involved in delinquent behavior at the individual level.

The following research questions guided our data-collection efforts and are currently being used to guide our analyses of these network data as part of this study:

1. What types of relations (e.g., brother, friend, ex-offender) are present among youths and young adults affiliated with crews in D.C.? How strong are these relations? Which relations and networks influence behavior?

2. To what extent do specific group processes engender group-based (e.g., gang) violence? Does a member's network position influence behavior? What role does organization and structure (e.g., cohesiveness) play, if any?
3. To what extent do individual-level processes influence congregate activity/group-related violence? How do parental relationships influence group-based violent behavior?
4. Could messages of deterrence reach members of violent groups via extant group processes? If not, why? What types of messages or interventions would have the best chance of modifying group structure on a broad scale?
5. How do these processes operate differently (or similarly) to those in the previous sample of Latino youth in Montgomery County, Md. Do findings from the two different populations indicate the need for very specialized interventions dependent on context?

This research is important because it will help us to better understand youth behavior and what influences the likelihood of becoming delinquent. In addition, the structural characteristics will shed light on how law enforcement can best intervene and dissolve delinquent networks, such as gangs and crews in similar areas, or to work within the network structures to spread pro-social messages.

Methodology

Target Community

The project's goal was to survey all youths within the selected study community's boundaries; the target population for this project thus included all youths age 14 to 21 in the selected community. The boundaries were determined by the research team after consultation with a community partner and youths from the area regarding potential crew and gang territories and high-crime areas. Census data and crime maps confirmed that the selected area contained a high concentration of youths and crime, making it suitable for this study.

The target area is located in the center city area of Washington, D.C. The site is primarily residential and largely composed of apartment buildings and condominiums. Housing prices in the area vary, with a mixture of both low- and high-income properties. According to our community partner, the racial composition of the chosen area is predominantly African American. A high school, youth recreation center, and various small parks all border the target area. One major

street running north to south divides the community, connecting residents to stores and restaurants outside of the residential neighborhoods. Public transportation is easily accessible, with multiple bus stops within walking distance and two Metro stations located within a few blocks.

Community Partner and Survey Location

In addition to partnering with an expert consultant at Temple University, UI also collaborated with a nonprofit, community-based organization with previous experience working with at-risk youth in the target community. The primary role of the community partner was to assist with recruitment of survey participants and facilitate access to the community and residents.

The survey location was a recreation center within the community boundaries that was recently acquired by the community partner as a second recreation facility for youth activities. This location was ideal because it was a neutral and safe location for respondents: it was convenient (within walking distance) for youths who lived in the target area and it was a known location to residents. The survey building is located in the ground floor of one of the largest apartment complexes in the target community, providing easy access to the entire complex. The surveys were administered in one of the center's computer labs.

Survey Recruitment

The UI research team and community staff members were trained extensively on recruitment techniques, field safety, youth eligibility, and administering parental consent. Every member of the project team, from both UI and the community organization, signed a confidentiality pledge stating that she or he would not discuss information obtained for this project outside the research team and participant information was to be kept confidential.

The survey recruitment process involved several strategies. First, several outreach efforts were employed both prior to and throughout the survey period. Bilingual mailings were sent to all eligible households located within the target area boundaries; a toll-free number was designated for the study, where English- and Spanish-speaking project managers were available to answer questions from parents, youths, or other community members and to schedule survey appointments; and information about the study was circulated by word of mouth throughout the area.

Second, door-to-door recruitment took place starting in the last week of June through the first week of August, when area youths were not in school. Recruiters from the

community partner organization were young adults who lived in surrounding communities and who could closely

The Language of Social Network Analysis

Many of the terms (or jargon) used by researchers in the field of social network analysis are unique to the field and can be quite unfamiliar to those new to the methodology.

Ego refers to a person in the network. We use the term more specifically to refer to any person who took our survey, who reported on his or her own behavior and the behavior of members of his or her personal network. **Alter** is used to refer to individuals in an ego's personal network. One need not be *either* an alter or ego; an individual can be both at one time, depending on from whose perspective he or she is being considered.

Egocentric refers to anything concerning the individual level, where the unit of analysis is a person. An egocentric network contains the personal relationships between an ego and his or her alters. At the ego level, we use **peer** to refer to an ego's friends, regardless of the person's age. Peers are distinguished from family members, teachers, coaches, or other individuals not identified as friends; these are **nonpeers**.

Sociocentric refers to anything concerning the group level. A sociocentric (or "whole") network refers to any group of people who are connected in a number of different ways. This type of network could include relationships among residents of a neighborhood or students in a school, for example. We also use the term **whole network** to describe the overlapping personal networks that we combined to create a sociocentric network of youths for this study.

relate to the target population for the study. These youths were paired with UI research staff to canvass residences in the targeted neighborhood and speak with youths in the area about the survey. In addition to the age and organizational diversity of these research/community partner recruitment teams, the teams also varied by gender, race/ethnicity, and Spanish-speaking ability. Spanish-speaking recruiters were necessary, as several households had parents/guardians who spoke only Spanish. Most of the youths with whom the recruitment teams spoke, on the other hand, were proficient in English.

Project staff members were divided into pairs, with one member from each organization when possible, and each pair was given a specific set of addresses to target for canvassing. The address assignments were divided so that the teams covered the entire target area. When door-to-door recruitment began, recruitment periods were during the day (from noon to 5 p.m., because youths on summer break were expected to be easier to reach during the day), but recruitment hours were eventually moved

to later in the day (3 p.m. to 7 p.m.) at the end of the survey period. This change was made as the teams learned which times were the most successful for recruiting youths and to target youths who were not available during the day in the initial weeks. During the door-to-door efforts, bilingual flyers were distributed throughout the neighborhood to disseminate information about the study and to facilitate transmission of information from the youths to their parents/guardians. Another important outreach strategy involved calling youths with whom the recruitment teams had previously spoken to remind them about the survey and schedule a time to take the survey. The recruitment teams actively followed up with every youth for whom they had contact information until the youth took the survey or the survey period ended.

Recruitment teams documented the outcome or interaction at each household during every visit, and recorded the status of the address as one of the following: knock but no answer (KNA); no youths live at the address; appointment(s) made; request to return to the address to speak with parent/guardian or to schedule appointment(s); language barrier and additional team member needed in specified language; or refusal. Any relevant notes and phone contact information (when available) were also documented on the recruitment logs. To increase the likelihood of reaching all of the eligible youths in the neighborhood, recruitment teams would ask neighbors whether households not answering the door had eligible youths living there. Recruitment teams knocked on each nonanswering household door at least four times during the data-collection period (varying the day of week and time of day of the four knocks) before an address was considered "closed out."

An unexpected recruitment challenge in this community was gaining access to several locked buildings. Although many apartment buildings were open to the public, several in the target area were inaccessible. Project staff spoke with building managers and, ultimately, recruitment teams were able to gain access to most of the buildings, but a handful did not grant access. Some apartments also had callboxes that project staff used to contact residents; however, there were a few stand-alone condominiums and houses behind locked gates that the recruitment teams were unable to access entirely. After discussions with residents in the area, it was believed that most of the residents of these buildings were young professionals and few had children who would be eligible to participate.

The Survey Process

While teams were engaged in door-to-door recruitment, several research team members simultaneously conducted surveys in the local community recreation

center. When recruiting door-to-door, teams could direct youths to the community center throughout the day to immediately take the survey. When a potential survey participant arrived at the community center, a project manager first determined his or her eligibility based on home residence and date of birth. All eligible youths younger than 18 were also required to have parental consent before continuing, which was typically obtained during door-to-door outreach. If a parent/guardian was not present at the time of the visit, a form was left with the youth and the parent/guardian could bring the signed form to the community center to grant his or her child permission to participate. All youths were administered a youth consent as well. Both the youth and parental consent forms described the purpose of the project, the voluntary nature of the survey, the process for keeping all respondents and responses protected and confidential, the potential risks and benefits of their participation, the \$30 incentive each respondent received for taking the survey, and the time commitment involved in participating.

At the beginning of the data collection process, research staff encountered an issue with youths attempting to take the survey multiple times through several means, such as lying about their names, ages, and/or addresses or even having a parent/guardian lie about this information. For example, the project team suspected that some youths who were younger than our minimum eligible age had their parent/legal guardians sign the consent form stating that they were older. To avoid allowing one person to take the survey multiple times, the project team made two changes in the methodology. One, a research team member had to be present when the parent/guardian signed the form. Two, anyone older than 18 was required to present a driver's license or piece a mail showing their current address. After instituting these policies, instances of suspected lying declined dramatically. In addition, there were two staff members who managed the survey room nearly every day, and they recognized youths who had already taken the survey, which added an additional validation check and reduced the amount of duplicate data collected.

After a youth had consented and was ready to begin, a research staff member explained the program to the youth and sat with the youth as he or she completed two practice questions demonstrating the software. A staff member also explained at that time that there were several "checkpoints" that were used throughout the survey. From a research standpoint, these checkpoints were used for a few reasons: they masked which youths were asking sensitive questions about the survey by requiring all youths to raise their hands a minimum number of times throughout the survey; they allowed staff to make sure a valid response was provided for questions just before the checkpoint, which was placed

after questions with difficult instructions; and they facilitated a review of the alter names to ensure that the respondent had listed full and valid names of individuals he or she knew.

Other than at the checkpoints, youths were encouraged to ask staff at any point if they had questions or were confused by anything on the survey.

The Survey Instrument

The survey instrument covers a variety of topics, including self-reported delinquency, personal and community gang activity, and detailed information on 20 "alters," or people the youth knows and interacts with often. The survey is divided into two main sections: "ego" questions and "alter" questions. Ego questions ask about the respondent and include questions on demographics, background information, activities in which he or she is involved, and his or her personal attitudes and behaviors. Alter questions ask the respondent about his or her closest contacts (referred to as "alters") and form the basis for constructing the respondent's social network.

On the survey, respondents are asked to provide detailed information on each alter, including full name, demographic information, the alter's delinquent or criminal behavior in general, and the alter's co-offending behavior with the respondent. Respondents are advised that alters can be anyone—family, friends, neighbors, mentors, teachers, or classmates—who they hang out with or might see regularly in a typical day. Respondents are also instructed to think about people who are important to them or influential in their lives, but that they do not necessarily need to choose people who they like or get along with. They do not have to be name people who live within the community, just anyone they know, see, or communicate with regularly. During the survey, research staff reviewed the names entered, and if they noticed obviously fake (e.g., celebrity) names, they would ask the youth to replace that alter with someone he or she personally knew.

Many respondents—especially younger participants—had difficulty listing 20 people. When respondents struggled with completing the list or submitted partial names, research staff would brainstorm with the youth to think of additional people (reiterating that it was not limited to friends or peers) and encourage more complete names. For example, if a nickname was provided for a first name, staff would suggest the respondent wait to use this name later in the survey (where nicknames or alternate names were asked) and put the person's first name instead. Some respondents also left out last names when initially entering the alter list; when this occurred, staff would remind youths that the information was

confidential and that people outside of the research team would never have access to this list or their other responses. In some cases, youths could not remember or did not know last names; when this occurred, staff encouraged initials or partial last names (when possible) and detailed descriptions of the alter (e.g., tattoos, distinctive features, nicknames) to help link or identify the alter later when connecting networks across respondents.

The surveys were conducted on encrypted, password-protected laptops using the software program EgoNet. Youths were spread out in the room with the laptop screens positioned so they were not visible to other survey respondents in the room. The research team had approximately two dozen laptops available at one time for use each survey day. When possible, youths were assigned to computers away from friends who came to take the survey at the same time, to reduce the likelihood that they would share responses. Research staff did not experience any issues with youths looking at other respondents' surveys.

The survey took approximately 1.5 to 2.0 hours per respondent, although some respondents needed more time. All of the respondents took the survey in English, although Spanish was available.

As soon as a respondent completed the survey, he or she was provided with a \$30 Visa gift card, signed a receipt, and left the room. The respondent's survey was immediately copied onto an external drive and the survey file on the laptop was destroyed. The external drive was always kept on a lanyard with the research manager or secured in a locked file box; on transfer back to the evaluation team's office, the external drive was also kept in a locked cabinet in the research manager's office.

Preliminary Findings

As previously discussed, this study was aimed at all youths, both males and females, between the ages of 14 and 21, regardless of race, who reside in the designated target area. One hundred and sixty-one respondents took the survey. The series of tables below provide a description of those respondents, the characteristics of their personal networks, and initial comparisons between delinquent respondents and nondelinquent respondents. Refer to Appendix A for additional detail on the variables included in this report.

Demographics

Overall, the sample consisted primarily of youths who were black and younger than 18. As shown in table 1, the vast majority of respondents (74 percent) in our

sample were black/non-Hispanic, with an additional 24.8 percent of the respondents identifying as Hispanic/Latino(a). Although race and ethnicity were asked as two separate questions, nearly one-fifth of the youths identified their race as Hispanic (17.4 percent). The average age across the sample was 17 years and the sample was almost evenly split between males and females; only a small fraction more was female (+6.8 percent).

Table 1. Racial and Ethnic Demographics

Demographics	
Average age	16.9
Male	46.6%
Race/Ethnicity	
Black/non-Hispanic	73.9%
Black/Hispanic	6.2%
White/non-Hispanic	1.2%
White/Hispanic	1.2%
Hispanic/Latino(a) only	17.4%
Ethnic attachment scale (mean of possible 60)	46.7
Nationality	
Born abroad	8.1%
Either parent born abroad	16.8%
Lived abroad (not born abroad)	7.5%
Separation from U.S. scale (mean of possible 8)	1.3
Language	
Only Spanish	1.9%
Only English	65.8%
Spanish and English	26.7%
Multiple	3.7%
Other	1.9%

An ethnic identity scale (a 12-item additive measure) was used to determine how much each youth identified with his or her ethnic group and ethnic background, traditions, and customs. Respondents reported high levels of attachment to their ethnic identities, with a mean score on the ethnic identity scale of 46.7 of a possible 60 points. To put this in perspective, a similar sample with a primarily Latino population in a close Maryland neighborhood (in the D.C. metro area) averaged 45.6 on the same ethnic attachment scale (Roman, et al., forthcoming). Therefore, although the prevailing cultures in each neighborhood are very different, residents in both places report similar levels of attachment to their culture. In addition, nearly one-fifth of the sample had at least one parent born abroad in this study, whereas in the previous Latino sample one-third were foreign nationals.

With such a low percentage of youths born outside the United States in this sample (8.1 percent), we expected that the primary language for this sample would be English, and this was the case, with most youths speaking only English (65.8 percent). Although 27 percent of the sample was bilingual, the vast majority

was second generation (83 percent), and, overall, our sample had low levels of “separation from U.S. culture and nationality”¹ (mean of 1.3 of a possible 8). The “separation from U.S. culture and nationality scale” consisted of several acculturation questions about the country of origin of the respondent and his or her parents, time spent abroad, and language use. The respondents in the current survey, then, were highly integrated into U.S. culture. In contrast, the Latino sample primarily spoke both English and Spanish (69.4 percent) and their separation from the U.S. culture was much higher (mean of 4.2).

These findings will be further investigated as part of the full analysis but provide preliminary evidence that the youths in the current sample were born in the United States, are primarily English speaking, and have high levels of attachment to their ethnic identity; these characteristics are likely related to their strong integration into U.S. culture (i.e., high levels of acculturation). Among Latino respondents, stronger attachment to ethnic identity typically means lower levels of acculturation, but for U.S.-born blacks, because their ethnic (or racial) identity is tied to U.S. culture, strong ethnic identity does not necessarily indicate low levels of acculturation.

Education, Employment, and Parental Support

We also investigated respondents’ educational background, socioeconomic status, and religiosity. Table 2 reveals that a large percentage of respondents were in school, whether under age 18 or over (97.8 and 69.6 percent, respectively). In addition, the vast majority had an adult in the family graduate from high school (86 percent), leaving a small percentage of youth with the potential to be first-generation high school graduates. Compared with the previous Latino study, this percentage was quite high—nearly 30 percent of Latino youth did not have an adult family member who had graduated from high school. Given that truancy is an important predictor of the level of delinquency and a youth’s likelihood to graduate, we also asked about school attendance. Youths younger than 18 reported high levels of school attendance (97.8 percent) and youths older than 18 reported high levels of employment (66 percent).

With many parents/guardians in the area working multiple jobs and suffering from the effects of the current economic crisis, we expected that youth

¹ This scale was more relevant for the previous Latino sample of respondents; it measures acculturation (or lack thereof) to U.S. culture and is most relevant for recent immigrants or those with immigrant parents. Such respondents were uncommon in the current respondent pool.

employment may be higher in this sample than for the average youth in the United States to contribute to household income. One-third of the youths who were younger than 18 had a job at the time of the survey (33.3 percent) and more than two-thirds of the youths older than 18 also had jobs (66 percent). To get a better sense of the socioeconomic status of respondents, the survey asked whether the youth’s family owned a vehicle, if the youth had his or her own bedroom, if the youth’s family took a vacation, and if the youth’s family owned a computer. We also compared those who support themselves with those who do not, and found that more respondents who support themselves have a bedroom of their own (95 percent versus 58 percent) but fewer self-sufficient respondents have a family car/truck (32 percent versus 68 percent) or own a computer (68 percent versus 93 percent).

Table 2. Education, Socioeconomic Status, and Religiosity

School/Parental Status	
Currently living with parent(s)	67.7%
Currently in school (under 18)	97.8%
Currently in school (18 or over)	69.6%
Parent support in school	97.5%
Adult in family graduated high school	86.3%
Family cohesion scale (mean of possible 55)	46.2
Employment/socioeconomic status	
Currently have a job (under 18)	33.3%
Currently have a job (18 or over)	65.9%
Currently supports self	25.5%
Owns computer	68.3%
Bedroom for oneself	95.1%
Owns at least one car or truck	31.7%
Been on vacation over past 12 months	65.9%
Does not support self	74.5%
Family owns computer	93.3%
Bedroom for oneself	58.3%
Family owns at least one car or truck	68.3%
Been on vacation over past 12 months	67.5%
Religiosity	
Attends services	
At least once a month	55.8%
Never	31.1%
Religiosity scale (mean of possible 6)	2.4

Based on a previously validated family cohesion scale (Maxson, Whitlock, and Klein 1998), we asked 11 questions related to how close the youths were with family and whether their views and values were similar to those of their parents or guardians. Respondents reported high levels of family cohesion (mean of 46.2 of a possible 55.0), and almost the entire sample received emotional support for attending school from their parents or guardians (97.5 percent).

More than half of the sample attended religious services (56 percent), although the religiosity scale indicated a low attachment to religion overall (mean of 2.4 of a possible 6.0). The religiosity scale consists of three items: how often the respondent attends religious

services; whether he or she attended at least once in the past year; and how often he or she attends with parents, other relatives, and friends.

Group Activity and Delinquency

Before surveying youths, the targeted neighborhood was described by residents in general as being dangerous and having a high level of violence. Crime maps supported this perception and indicated that it was a prime location for delinquency, but the locations with the highest levels of crime for this D.C. neighborhood were closer to the Metro stops, in the immediate vicinity of the boundaries for the survey. Given this finding, we expected youth respondents to identify the neighborhood as a violent/high-crime area with a strong gang and crew presence.

Table 3. Group Activity and Delinquent Behavior

Group Activity	
Lots of gang/crew activity in neighborhood	34.8%
Approached to join gang/crew	13.0%
Thought about joining gang/crew	16.1%
Pressure to join a gang/crew	12.4%
Talk about gangs/crews in neighborhood	42.2%
In a group	57.8%
Thinks of group as gang	8.6%
Thinks of group as crew	20.4%
In a crew	16.8%
In a gang	5.6%
In a gang and in a crew	5.0%
In a gang fight	8.7%
In a gang fight but not in a gang or crew	4.5%
Delinquent Behavior	
Used alcohol in past six months	33.5%
Used drugs in past six months	15.5%
Sold drugs	6.8%
Sold drugs in past six months	69.2%
Stolen goods more than \$100	6.2%
Stolen goods +\$100 in past six months	80.0%
Carried gun	4.3%
Carried gun in past six months	90.7%
Attacked someone with intent to harm	10.6%
Attacked someone in past six months	70.6%

Based on the preliminary findings shown in table 3, however, we did not find overwhelming evidence that crime was occurring in the targeted neighborhood. One-third of the youths *did* indicate that there was a lot of gang and crew activity occurring in the neighborhood (34.8 percent). Even more agreed that there was talk about gangs and crews in their neighborhood (42.2 percent), and, in turn, many youths indicated that they had been approached to join gangs (13.0 percent) and felt pressured to do so (12.4 percent).

Although there were relatively low levels of delinquent activity in the neighborhood and self-reported delinquency, nearly one-fifth of respondents identified

as being in a crew (16.8 percent). Based on survey responses, crews were more prevalent in the area than gangs, with fewer than 10 percent of the youths reporting being in a gang (5.6 percent). Similarly, 5 percent of respondents were in both a crew and a gang; however, two of those respondents used the same name for their crew and gang, which might indicate a discrepancy in how that particular youth labels his or her group. In the previous survey of Latino youth, more than 10 percent of the sample reported being in a gang, and the levels of gang activity and the pressure to join a gang reported in the current neighborhood are quite similar to those reported in the Latino sample.

Delinquent behavior was captured by asking each respondent about his or her involvement in various delinquent behaviors. These questions increased in severity starting with alcohol and drug use and petty theft and progressing to questions about whether the youth had ever carried a weapon and the frequency of his or her weapon use. Although one-third of respondents reported using alcohol over the past six months (33.5 percent) and nearly one-fifth reported using illegal drugs over the past six months (15.5 percent), levels of reported *serious* delinquency were low across the sample. Although only 4.3 percent of the youths had ever carried a gun, the most common reported serious delinquent activity was attacking someone with the intent to harm the person (nearly 11% of the sample reported doing so). Interestingly, much of the self-reported delinquency appeared to be rather recent: the vast majority of respondents who reported some delinquent behavior also indicated that their delinquency occurred in the past six months.

In the previous study of Latino youth, a larger percentage of youths used drugs (26.5 percent) and far more youths carried a weapon (23.1 percent); however, the level of violence was nearly identical, at 10.2 percent.

Personal Networks

As previously described, this type of survey (i.e., one used to assess social networks) required each youth to name 20 people (referred to as “alters”) who the youth felt were important and a part of his or her daily life. The network of these associates creates the youth’s personal network (see figure 1 for a visual representation of a personal network). Initial examination of personal networks showed that the majority of the sample (61 percent) had a predominantly peer network. Given that the list solicits the names of *who* was important in the youth’s life, this provides some initial support for the finding in prior research that peers influence youth behavior.

Not surprisingly, more than half of the sample also reported liking most of their alters (52.8 percent) and indicated that they would go to most of them for advice (57.8 percent); fewer respondents reported spending a lot of time with most of their alters (21.7 percent) (table 4).

Table 4. Characteristics of Personal Networks

Respondents' Listing of Alters	
More than half of alters were friends	61.5%
Two or more alters were siblings	60.2%
At least one parent was an alter	47.2%
Respondent would go to at least half of alters for advice	57.8%
Respondent likes at least half of alters a lot	52.8%
Respondent spends a lot of time with at least half of alters	21.7%
At least half of alters live in the same neighborhood	32.3%

Thirty-two percent of respondents said that at least half of their alters lived in their neighborhood, supporting the study design, which aimed to survey all youths in a small geographic area, and lending weight to our hypothesis that youth networks are spatially concentrated. The geographic nature of the social networks will be further investigated once all personal networks are overlapped and grouped into a single network. More details about this process are included in the next section.

Table 5. Delinquency in Personal Networks

Respondents who...	
Co-offend with at least one alter	14.3%
Commit violence with at least one alter	9.3%
Have at least one alter in a gang	20.5%
Have at least one alter in a crew	22.4%
Have at least one alter who has been in a gang fight	11.8%
Have at least one alter who carries a gun	8.1%
Have at least one alter who sold drugs	15.5%
Have at least one alter who used drugs in past six months	18.6%
Have at least one alter who uses alcohol monthly	28.6%

Respondents reported relatively high levels of delinquent activity among members of their personal networks (table 5). For example, nearly 20 percent of youths had networks with at least one person who used drugs and 16 percent had connections with people who were drug dealers (active within the past six months). Only 16 percent of the respondents, however, had reported drug use themselves and very few (half of the percentage reported in the personal networks, 6.8 percent) were involved with drug selling.

Given this mix of drug users and dealers, as well as delinquent youth within personal networks, an important question is whether these youth are co-offending

together and what factors contribute to the likelihood of such behavior. Fourteen percent of respondents reported co-offending with at least one alter and 9 percent reported committing violent behaviors with at least one alter. In addition, approximately one-fifth of the surveyed youths had at least one alter who was in a gang (20.5 percent); slightly more had at least one alter who was in a crew (22.4 percent). This co-offending relationship and the connection between those youths who are in a gang and those who simply have gang friends will be further investigated for the final report. The findings surrounding this issue will be integral to understanding peer networks.

Comparison Between Groups

Several indicators of delinquency or risk factors for future delinquency were included in the survey. To investigate patterns among these factors, youths were grouped by such characteristics as gang membership, crew membership, and drug use and sales. The possible risk and protective factors were then contrasted between youth in each delinquent category and those who were not delinquent. This allowed us to explore what personal characteristics might vary in importance across different delinquency and crime outcomes. This report presents findings for overall delinquency only due to the low frequency of gang and crew membership and drug use and sales; further analysis of these variables will be included in the final report. For this report, overall delinquency activity was defined as whether the youth was in a gang, in a gang fight, sold drugs, carried a weapon, or attacked someone with the intent to harm.

In table 6, significant differences among respondents are shown by delinquent status. Statistically significant differences suggest potential variables of interest for future modeling to establish which factors might be influencing a youth's likelihood to commit a crime or join a gang or crew. The table thus reports, for example, the percentage of delinquent youths who are male and whether that is significantly different from the percentage of nondelinquent youths who are male.

Table 6. Overall Delinquency	% Delinquent (n = 56)	% Not Delinquent (n = 105)
Male	53.6	42.9
Born abroad*	0.0	12.4
Either parent born abroad*	3.6	23.8
Parent support in school*	100.0	96.2
Adult in family graduated	89.3	84.8
High Ranking on Scales		
Family cohesion	17.9	18.1
Ethnic attachment	19.6	17.1
Religiosity	8.9	9.5
Separation from U.S.*	7.1	20.0

The variables that were found to significantly differ between the two groups were *born abroad*, *either parent born abroad*, or the *separation from U.S. scale* (acculturation). These findings indicate that, among delinquent youth, significantly fewer were born abroad and significantly fewer had parents who were born abroad. All significant differences reported here are considered acculturation variables, which suggests that culture can play an influential role in delinquent behavior, although at this stage of the research, we cannot determine the reason for the influence of culture on delinquency or the mechanisms through which acculturation can lead to higher levels of delinquency. This is an important context for future modeling that will be included in the final report.

Next Steps

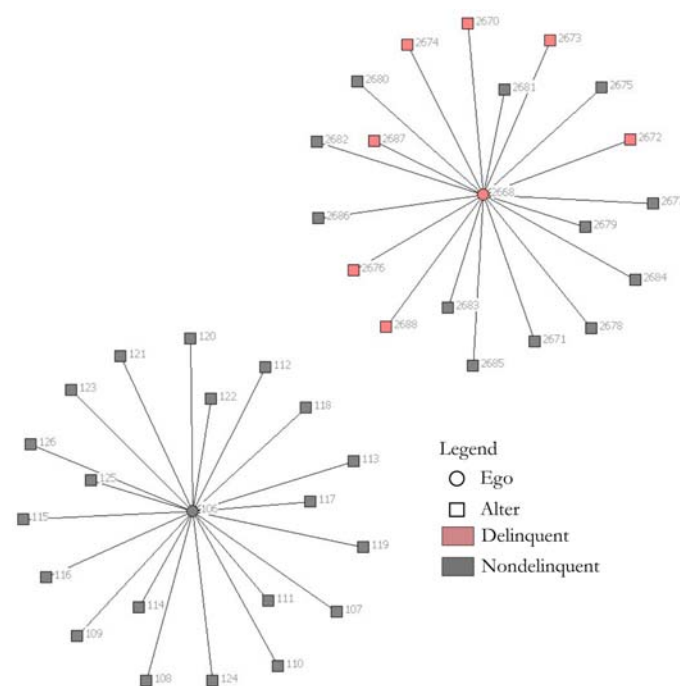
Egocentric Networks and Analysis

The preliminary findings are primarily based on personal networks and data gathered about the respondents. The unique part of this study is that we also have information about the 20 people who each respondent named. Several questions were asked about each of these 20 people, including delinquency and co-offending behavior, as well as whether each of the 20 people know one another independent of the respondent. This information allows us to determine which *alters* in each of the respondent's networks overlap with one another and create a single network across all respondents.

To demonstrate what is meant by a personal network, we provide the figure of two personal (or, ego) networks in figure 1. Figure 1 depicts two star-shaped networks, where the center circle represents the *ego* or respondent and each of the squares connected to the *ego* are the people named by the respondent in his or her survey. This way of displaying and analyzing data is also referred to as *egocentric* because the focus is on a single *ego* and his or her *alters*. The shading of the circles and squares ("nodes") relates to whether the respondent indicated that she or he participated in delinquent activity or if the person she or he named participated in delinquent activity. Each number represents a unique identifier assigned to each person in the network to show that they are in fact different people. The two personal networks displayed in figure 1 reveal the connection between network members and how delinquent individuals relate. In the top network, the respondent is delinquent and named seven delinquent people. In the bottom network, no delinquency is identified among any network members by the respondent. The roles each person plays in the network will become clearer once the entire network is drawn. Additional analysis will be

conducted on the egocentric networks to identify the significant predictors of different types and levels (i.e., seriousness) of youth behavior and delinquency.

Figure 1. Personal Networks of Two Respondents: Delinquency and Role in the Network



Whole Networks and Analysis

The next step in the analysis is to connect all of the personal networks into a single, connected web. To do this, individuals who appear in multiple personal networks (i.e., were named by more than one person) are identified and information is gathered on that person from a number of forms (e.g., consent forms, contact information form). For example, one respondent may have stated that James is 14 and another stated that he is 15, when in fact James is the same person and can have only one age. Each of the respondents and people who were named by the respondents are examined based on a number of indicators (i.e., age, gender, description, and likelihood that one person knows the other) to determine if they are the same people. If these indicators match, then the two people being compared are the same person and both are given the same unique identifier. Once each person is provided with an identifier and the overlapping *alters* are provided with the "true" values for their data, the entire network is connected. This process is completed in EgoNet, which creates a whole network diagram and provides summary network statistics for the whole network.

This step is currently under way and is being conducted in the same manner as was used in the previous study of the Latino population. In addition to the data that are provided by respondents, the research team also gathers additional information on respondents during the data collection process. For example, the consent forms contain parent/guardian names and the date of birth for the respondent. The contact forms contain information about an additional person who can be reached if we are unable to find the respondent, which in many cases is a peer or relative other than the parent/guardian. Notes are taken during the survey process about which respondents come in with each other and the type of contact and their interaction with one another in the room. Many of the youths talk with the survey administrators about their friends and family and all information is documented. When the youths are being recruited in the field, associations between them are included on the tracking logs. For example, if there are five youths playing video games in an apartment when a recruiter arrives, the name of each youth is documented as additional data to assist with the matching process. This becomes very helpful in situations where the name is not a perfect match and the data about the individual are contradictory. There were many cases where a nickname was provided by some youths and that nickname needed to be matched with the full name that was provided by others.

Given that the neighborhood was primarily of the same racial group, there were also situations where many of the *alters* had common names, such as Darrell, Kimberly, or Rashaun. This was also the case in the study with the Latino population, where some names appeared 90+ times in the data.

Figure 2 contains an example of what the whole network would look like, referred to as a *sociogram*. There are several variables displayed here. The numbers represent the unique identifier of the people in the diagram. The lines connect each shape, or node, based on whether the two people on either end of the line know each other (i.e., if they were identified as definitely knowing each other, then they were connected). The shape of the node is based on whether the person is delinquent or not, with delinquent actors represented as circles. The color of the node denotes the position of the actor in the network, with the more central players (as determined through a number of network statistics) labeled in green and the noncentral players in gray.

Sociograms like these provide a visual representation of the actual social network. In this figure, Actor 394, at the center of the sociogram, is the most central person in the network and appears to be linking several groups of people together (individuals in this position are commonly referred to as bridges). The delinquent individuals are scattered throughout the network and not

concentrated in a single group, but many of the delinquent people are connected to one another. The larger cluster of people at the top of the diagram has the highest levels of delinquency, but not all of the individuals in that group are delinquent.

Moving Beyond Network Visualization

Once the whole network is generated, we can construct network statistics to determine if, for example, a person's position in the network influences his or her likelihood of becoming delinquent. We will use several cohesion and centrality measures for this research. Some of these measures, like *density* (the number of actual ties between all members as a proportion of all possible ties) and *degree centrality* (the actual number of direct ties in a network), focus on direct ties between nodes in the network. Another measure of direct ties is what we call *isolates*, which identifies individuals not named by other egos and whose alters did not overlap with any other alters.

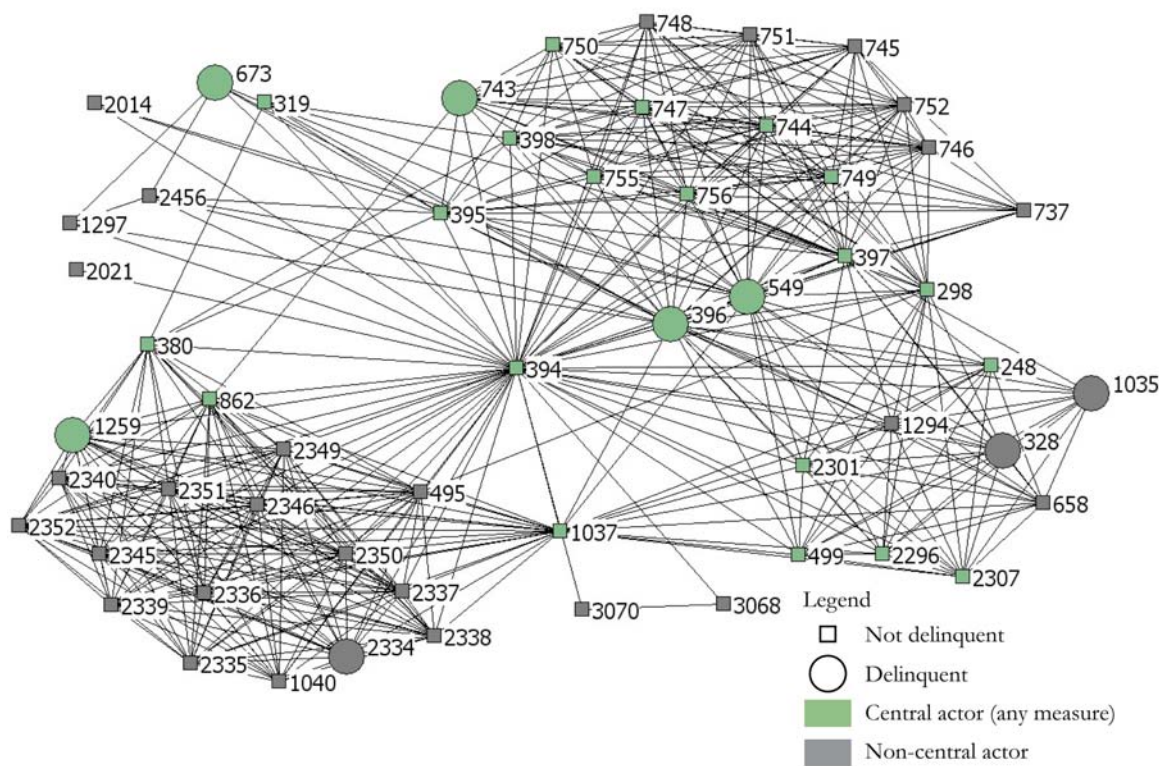
Other measures look at indirect ties—those that connect a pair of nodes via a third node—alone, or consider both direct and indirect connections together. *Betweenness centrality*, for instance, measures how many times an individual is a “go-between” or a connector for two or more other individuals. *Closeness centrality* measures how many steps it takes for each individual to be connected to each other network member; those with higher closeness measures can reach others in just a few steps. Finally, the *eigenvector centrality* of a network member is based on how central his or her neighbors are. These measures are described in detail in Appendix B.

These whole network measures, in addition to the others discussed previously, will be used in higher-level modeling to further refine what factors influence both individual- and group-level behavior (as described below). Previous studies have addressed the characteristics or behaviors influencing a person's propensity toward becoming delinquent, but this study adds another dimension by incorporating structural position within a network and other network-based measures into the investigation, to determine their impact on youth behavior.

Subgroups and Cluster Analysis

In addition to looking at the egocentric networks and the whole network, we will also assess subgroups and peer networks that exist in the network. To do this, we will statistically derive clusters of individuals that form a common group, also referred to as partitions or factions in the social network literature. In other words, groups of individuals will be generated and then those networks will be analyzed individually to expand upon knowledge

Figure 2. Whole Network Example: *Delinquency and Role in the Network*



Source: *The Influence of Social Networks on Delinquency and Gang Membership* (Roman et al., forthcoming)

of the characteristics on which youths in the whole network cluster. For example, what may occur, and what we did find in the Latino study, is that most egos have “nearby” delinquent influences—most youths have delinquent individuals in their personal networks, so delinquent individuals can have a direct influence on their behavior, instead of that influence being mediated through indirect connections. These clusters may be family networks or peer networks and the differences between them will be addressed in the full analysis.

Comparison with Latino Study

Given that the research team previously used the same methodology in a primarily Latino neighborhood, the data can be compared with the current sample. We will be able to look at cultural differences between Latino and black youths, as well as combine the two datasets to form one very large dataset to allow for better prediction across youths in terms of their behavior and delinquency.

Research Goals and Policy Implications

By examining the relationships and behaviors of youths in a neighborhood context, we can help inform the types of programs and services needed to reinforce positive or “pro-social” behavior.

The first goal of the study is to answer whether network variables are important predictors of delinquency and gang/crew membership at the ego level. For example, we will examine the influence of both nonpeer and peer relations on delinquency and gang/crew membership. The second goal revolves around the whole network and what properties and characteristics relate to delinquency and gang/crew membership. Third, we will address how an individual’s position and connectedness within the whole network relates to his or her propensity to be involved in delinquent behavior at the individual level.

Each of our research questions is important from a policy perspective. First, the comparison between the two studies, one in Maryland and the other in D.C., will help determine whether common gang interventions are appropriate in different neighborhoods and across different cultural contexts. These two study areas are home to very different groups of people in terms of their levels of delinquent behavior and the types of delinquent behaviors in which they participate. Juxtaposing the two will provide insight on the types of interventions that may be most appropriate given different cultural contexts. That is, do neighborhoods need interventions that are unique to the youth culture in that particular area or will a common program be effective for a variety of youth? And, does implementing geographically-based intervention programs make sense?

Second, we will learn more about delinquent peer groups (whether or not they are considered gangs or crews) in the District of Columbia. The popular belief in D.C. is that gangs are loosely structured, neighborhood-based groups of youths who grew up together and are not organized as strictly as more well-known national gangs. By connecting networks of potential gang members and their associates, we can better understand how gangs and crews are organized and what types of behaviors they are involved with.

Finally, we will explore how delinquent networks can be altered. We will use the social network methodologies designed to identify central players to understand the structure of groups and to determine how law enforcement or service providers might intervene. A network can be crippled in two ways: by removing people from the group or reaching out to specific people to spread a message (e.g., of nonviolence or desistance) through the network. Fragmenting a network into disconnected pieces via the removal of key players may in some cases disband a group, such as a gang or crew, but in other situations, those key players may simply be replaced, making the technique ineffective. The second option of reaching out to certain individuals revolves around the idea that a well-connected person can disseminate information, whether it is pro- or antisocial, across a variety of people or even a far-reaching network of people. Our analysis will allow us to begin identifying key players in different types of networks and explore how best to intervene in similar contexts. These findings can then be further tested outside of the current study.

These are key questions with relevance to mounting effective delinquency and gang prevention and intervention programs and are central to this study's contributions to the field.

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Appendix A. Description of Ego and Alter Measures

Variable Name	Definition	Variable Type
EgoDelinquencyScale	Delinquency additive scale: (ever in lifetime) sum of damaged property, stolen goods (four levels), been in a gang fight, sold drugs, used a weapon, attacked with intent to harm ($\alpha = 0.829$)	delinquency
Ego6mosDelinquencyScale	Delinquency additive scale for activity over past six months ($\alpha = 0.824$)	delinquency
EgoSeriousDelinquencyScale	Serious delinquency additive scale: (ever in lifetime) sum of two levels of stolen goods, been in gang fight, sold drugs, used a weapon, attacked with intent to harm ($\alpha = 0.770$)	delinquency
EgoDelinquency	Respondent is in a gang, has been in a gang fight, sold drugs, carried a weapon, or attacked someone with intent to harm	delinquency
EgoWeapon	Respondent has carried a weapon	delinquency
EgoSoldDrugs	Respondent has sold illegal drugs	delinquency
EgoAttackTimesBinary	Respondent has attacked someone with the intent to seriously harm	delinquency
EgoGangFight	Respondent has been in a gang fight	delinquency
EgoCrewTotal	Respondent identifies as ever being a member of a crew or as being part of a group that is a street crew	delinquency
EgoGangTotal	Respondent identifies as ever being a member of a gang or as being part of a group that is a street gang	delinquency
AlterDelinquency_Pct	Proportion of delinquent alters in the respondent's personal network (delinquent is defined as being a member of a street gang, being in a gang fight, selling illegal drugs, carrying a weapon, or using violence to get what he or she wants)	network compositional
AlterEgoLiveInNeighborhood_Pct	Proportion of alters in the respondent's personal network who live in the same neighborhood as the respondent	network compositional
AlterFriends_Pct	Proportion of alters in the respondent's personal network who are friends	network compositional
EthnicityIdentityScale	Additive measure of 12 items related to identification with ethnic group; ethnic background, traditions and customs; group membership (MEIM scale) ($\alpha = 0.897$)	ethnic attachment
SeparationScale	Additive scale of respondent being born abroad, respondent parents' being born abroad, percent of lifetime respondent lived abroad, respondent speaks non-English language, respondent speaks non-English language with friends, respondent speaks non-English language at home ($\alpha = 0.850$)	acculturation
AlterInvolved_Pct	Proportion of alters respondent spends a lot of time with	strength of ties
AlterLiked_Pct	Proportion of alters respondent likes a lot	strength of ties
AlterGoAdvice_Pct	Proportion of alters respondent would go to for advice	strength of ties
Homophily Index	Scale of # of respondents' alters who are born in the same country; # of respondents' alters who are of the same ethnicity; # of respondents' alters who are of the same age (+/- one year), # of respondents' alters who are of the same gender	strength of ties
FamilyScale	Additive measure of 11 items related to closeness of family; similarity of views and values (Maxson scale) ($\alpha = 0.884$)	controls
EgoParentSupport	Do respondent's parents or guardians support him/her in school?	controls
WorshipScale	Additive measure of three items: attends religious services; attends with parents; attends with school friends ($\alpha = 0.682$)	controls
EgoAge	Age of respondent	controls
EgoGender	Gender of respondent (male/female)	controls
EgoEthnicity	Ethnicity of respondent (Hispanic/not Hispanic)	controls
EgoTimeatAddress	Number of years respondent has lived at his/her current address	controls
EgoAdultGraduate	Has an adult in family/guardian graduated from high school	controls

Appendix B. Whole Network Measures

This appendix provides more detail on whole network measures that will be used as part of the full social network analysis that is planned for the current research.

Density represents the number of actual ties between all members as a proportion of all possible ties (if every node was connected to every other node). The measure provides insight into how tightly connected the individuals in the neighborhood (or network) are. Higher density values indicate a network in which nodes are closely connected and lower density values indicate that fewer ties are present between nodes.

Respondent as **isolate**. A dichotomous measure (isolate = 1) was created to represent whether the respondent was an isolate in the whole network. In our study, an isolate is a respondent who was not named as an alter by any other respondent and did not have any alters that were named by other egos.

Degree centrality is the most commonly used measure of centrality (Valente 2010), and represents the number of direct connections in a network. Although degree can be calculated based on ties received (“in-degree”) or ties sent (“out-degree”), our network data are nondirected, so we will simply use (nondirectional) degree centrality, counting all direct ties in the computation of degree. Network (or group) degree centralization is the network-level measure based on degree. It is similar to standard deviation measures from descriptive statistics (Knoke and Yang 2008).

Betweenness centrality is described by Valente (2010) as “akin to bridging and centrality combined” (p. 87), with an emphasis not on degree but on total distance between nodes—using both direct and indirect ties. Specifically, betweenness is “the frequency a node lies on the shortest path connecting other nodes in the network” (p. 87), or the number of geodesics (shortest paths) connecting two nodes on which a third node lies.

Closeness centrality measures the distance from each node to each other node in the network, based on both direct and indirect ties (Valente and Forman 1998). Higher closeness values indicate that a node is able to reach all other nodes over shorter distances. The closeness measure can be thought of as a sort of “degree of separation,” as it effectively counts, for each node to every other node in the network, the number of links with other nodes that are needed. The closeness measure does suffer from some complications regarding its calculation when isolates exist in the network (isolates cannot be reached by all other nodes, so the distance between them and other nodes is effectively ∞), and it is subsequently not as widely used as the first two centrality measures described. The network closeness centralization value is the average closeness value for all nodes (Borgatti, Everett, and Freeman 1999).

Eigenvector centrality for a node is based “on the centrality of its neighboring nodes” (Valente 2010, p. 87). This measure is useful in large network studies because it takes into account the overall structure of the network; it is not as susceptible to more “local” patterns, or patterns of closeness or centrality that may exist in small subgroups but may not have a strong role or effect in the larger network structure.

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