Chapter 6
Gang Organization, Offending, and Victimization: A Cross-National Analysis

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Identifying the influence of groups on human behavior is a central task of social scientists. For decades, researchers have sought to determine how groups affect individual behavior in various contexts, such as protest, riot, and crowd settings (Bohstedt 1994; McPhail 1991); hate, religious, and terrorist groups (Bjorgo 2005; Louis and Taylor 2002; Staub 2002); and—the focus of this study—gangs (Klein 1971, 2006; Short and Strodtbeck 1965; Thrasher 1927). Group processes unique to gangs have been touted as the mechanism rendering gangs "qualitatively different" from other criminal and delinquent groups (Klein 2006; Klein and Maxson 2006; see also Decker and Pyrooz 2011). The past two decades of empirical research have demonstrated that gang joining corresponds with an escalation of delinquent behavior for individuals (Krohn and Thornberry 2008). Less emphasis, however, has been placed on how this effect manifests conceptually and whether this effect is uniform across gangs and gang members.

Part of the problem is that scholars have devoted less attention to examining characteristics of gangs as groups (Maxson and Klein 1995; McGloin and Decker 2010), opting instead to focus on characteristics unique to individuals. A critical aspect of any group, whether formal or informal, conforming or deviant, is organization—the degree to which a group effectively and efficiently coordinates and carries out activities. Gang organization has received considerable attention in the context of drug selling. Here, researchers investigated and disputed the extent to which gangs dominated the rapidly developing and increasingly violent drug markets of the 1980s and 1990s (Decker and Van Winkle 1995; Decker et al. 1998; Hagedorn 1994). Because gang organizational structure influences the function and processes of the group, there is reason to believe that this influence should be observed across gang members as well. A handful of studies have demonstrated this influence, finding that greater gang organization is associated with increased

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delinquency and victimization of gang members (Bjerregaard 2002; Bouchard and Spindler 2010; Decker et al. 2008; Esbensen et al. 2001; Sheley et al. 1995). But as Decker et al. (2008, p. 167) observed, "gang research has provided more descriptive literature than analyses of the relationships between gang characteristics and behavior, a notable omission." That said, it is necessary to further understand the relationship that distinguishes gangs from other types of delinquent groups.

The present study extends the modest literature on gangs, organizational structure, and criminological outcomes. Using data gathered from three research projects—a juvenile arrestee sample from Arizona (ADAM), an urban school sample in Trinidad and Tobago (TTYS), and a multisite school sample in the USA. (GREAT)—this study examines the association between gang organizational structure and delinquency and victimization. The similar nature of the survey items permits an assessment of the aggregated construct and disaggregated indicators of gang organization. The key advantage in this study is that gang organizational structure can be examined comparatively across the three data sources that differ demographically and culturally, which is central to the objectives of the Eurogang research program (Klein 2005; Weerman et al. 2009). If gang organizational structure "matters" for explaining offending and victimization patterns of gang members, it should across all three research contexts.

6.1   Gangs, Groups, and Organization

Street gangs are street-oriented groups, generally comprised of youth, exhibiting persistence across time, and illegal activity constitutes a part of group identity (Klein and Maxson 2006). Thrasher's (1927, p. 5) statement that "no two gangs are alike" elicits the variability and complexity of gangs. Organization is a key feature that differentiates gangs from one another. Gang organization is the degree to which the group effectively and efficiently coordinates and carries out activities. There are various dimensions of organization, one of which is group structure (e.g., hierarchy, composition). The organizational structure of gangs matters to the extent that it influences the social processes (e.g., contagion, collective action) responsible for making gangs qualitatively distinct from other types of criminal and delinquent groups.

The degree to which gangs vary in their organizational capacities is disputed in the gang literature. It has been argued that gangs exhibit the characteristics of formal organizations, characteristics that are important for the efficient distribution of drugs, among other things. It has also been argued that despite heavy involvement in drug sales, gangs are not very well organized and thus not efficient structures for large-scale enterprises. The former view describes gangs as instrumental-rational (organized) and the latter as informal-diffuse (disorganized). These perspectives developed originally out of the debate surrounding the extent to which gangs controlled increasingly violent, rapidly expanding drug markets of the late 1980s/ early 1990s. For example, Hagedorn (1994) framed the argument around whether gangs were organized drug distributors or whether gang members were "freelance"

drug dealers. The research has since grown to examine areas such as the penetration of gangs into community organization (Venkatesh 1997) and the ability of gangs to organize homicide (Decker and Curry 2002).

The instrumental-rational perspective, as described by Decker and Curry (2000, p. 474), holds that gangs "have a vertical structure, enforce discipline among their members, and are quite successful in defining and achieving group values." Additional indications of an instrumental-rational gang include levels of membership, leadership roles, regularly attended meetings, coordinated drug sales, written rules and codes of conduct, expansion in legitimate business operations, and political influence (Decker et al. 1998). Examples of these descriptions can be found in the research of Decker et al. (1998), Mieczkowski (1986), Padilla (1992), Skolnick et al. (1990), Sanchez-Jankowski (1991), Taylor (1990), Venkatesh (1997), and Venkatesh and Levitt (2000). A stark example of an instrumental-rational gang can be found in research on a Chicago public housing development, where Venkatesh portrayed the "Black Kings" gang as possessing an inordinate degree of power to influence community affairs. The gang was able to negotiate with the neighborhood "council" (nominated leaders of buildings) to act as security for the housing projects, thereby bolstering drug distribution operations. In addition, the gang was organized such that each "constituent [gang] set was tied to the overall organization through trademark and fiduciary responsibilities" (Venkatesh and Levitt 2000, p. 428). Examples such as this support claims of "corporatization" (Taylor 1990)—that is, gangs oriented around economic rather than social purposes.

The informal-diffuse perspective, as described by Decker and Curry (2000, p. 474), holds that gangs "are diffuse, self-interested and self-motivated aggregations of individuals, most of whom sell drugs for themselves." Leadership is functional and situational, levels of membership are shifting, meetings are rare or informal, codes of conduct are limited to secrecy and loyalty, and, most importantly, gang members distribute drugs for individual as opposed to a collective purpose. Examples of these descriptions can be found in the research of Decker and Curry (2000, 2002), Decker et al. (2008), Decker and Van Winkle (1995), Fagan (1989), Fleisher (1995, 1998), Hagedorn (1994, 1998), Huff (1996), Klein et al. (1991), McGloin (2005), Moore (1978), and Waldorf (1996). For example, Decker et al. (1998, p. 413) found that only one—the Gangster Disciples—of four police/social service–defined most organized gangs in Chicago and San Diego could adequately fit the instrumental-rational description. Yet, their research also revealed that even in one of the most organized gangs in one of the cities with the most organized gangs, gang members rarely invested their drug profits in the gang's treasury. As a whole, the research indicates that it was far more common for gang members to "freelance" as drug dealers, and some members filled the role of drug suppliers (Decker et al. 1998; Hagedorn 1994; Valdez and Sifaneck 2004).

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Evidence in favor of the informal-diffuse perspective exceeds that of the instrumental-rational perspective. It is noteworthy that the evidence supporting the instrumental-rational perspective was found (1) only in ethnographic research settings and (2) only from research carried out in large cities, such as Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, and New York. That said, selection bias could be facilitating

the image of organized gangs in these studies, as researchers focus on atypical gangs in areas of traditional gang cities with an extended gang history (Coughlin and Venkatesh 2003). But as Thrasher (1927) asserted, and Klein and Maxson (2006) confirmed, gangs vary. So it is perhaps more useful to conceptualize gang organization along a continuum, with informal-diffuse at the lower end and instrumental-rational at the upper end. Understanding how gang organizational structure is associated with the behavior of individuals in the group (i.e., gang member) is important for understanding the relationship between gangs and their members' behavior.

6.2   Gang Organization, Delinquency, and Victimization

Malcolm Klein (2004, p. 14) stated that "[b]eing a gang member can be hazardous to your health." Nowhere is Klein's statement better demonstrated than in violence, where Decker and Pyrooz (2010) found that gang member homicide rates are approximately 100 times greater than that of the general public. The empirical literature examining gang membership and criminogenic outcomes consistently demonstrates this association (Krohn and Thornberry 2008). Less emphasis has been placed on examining how these effects differ across gangs and gang members. That is, does gang membership exert a global effect on delinquency and victimization, regardless of the type of gang someone joins? Or, does the effect of gang membership on delinquency/victimization vary according to the organizational structure of the gang? For example, it might be that gang members in instrumental-rational gangs have greater delinquency profiles than gang members in informal-diffuse gangs. In light of the robust effect of gang joining on delinquency and victimization, these are important empirical questions.

Five studies have examined the relationship between gang organization and delinquency, although the stated purpose of the research differed (Bjerregaard 2002; Bouchard and Spindler 2010; Decker et al. 2008; Esbensen et al. 2001; Sheley et al. 1995). Bjerregaard (2002) and Esbensen et al. (2001) reported on this relationship indirectly, concentrating on the definitional issues surrounding gang membership. Both studies used increasingly restrictive definitional parameters—organization being one criterion[1]—to examine how refining categories of gang membership affected outcomes such as theft, arrest, and firearms involvement (Bjerregaard 2002) and attitudinal and behavioral characteristics (Esbensen et al. 2001). As the definitional parameters increased in restrictiveness, so too did the seriousness of gang member attitudinal profiles and delinquency patterns. These findings suggest that organization was associated with criminogenic outcomes in deleterious ways.

Sheley et al. (1995) and Decker et al. (2008) carried out more direct tests of the link between gang organizational structure and gang member delinquency. Both of these studies excluded subjects without a history of gang membership, as nongang youth are devoid of the gang experience. These studies explored whether increases in gang organizational structure corresponded with increases in the offending profile of the gang and of the individual gang members. Sheley et al. surveyed 373 incarcerated youth in California, Illinois, Louisiana, and New Jersey. They found that subjects in

more structured gangs reported that their gang engaged in more drug sales, robberies, and gun carrying than unstructured gangs.[2] Further, subjects in structured gangs engaged in higher levels of gun carrying than those in unstructured gangs.[3] Decker et al. (2008) surveyed 241 recently arrested juveniles in Arizona correctional facilities.[4] They found that current and former gang members from more organized gangs were more likely to be violently victimized, as well as engage in more violent offending and drug selling. This led Decker et al. (2008, p. 169) to conclude that the "more organized the gang, even at low levels of organization, the more likely it is that members will be involved in violent offenses, drug sales, and violent victimizations."

Bouchard and Spindler (2010) examined whether group organization influenced drug dealing and violent and property offenses among self-reported delinquent youth in the Canadian province of Quebec.[5] Youth were subdivided into three categories: gang members, deviant group members, and nongroup members. Gang members and deviant group members were compared to determine if the organizational structure of the group was associated with increased delinquent activities. They found that group organization in general was associated with increases in drug dealing and violent offending, but not property offending. In addition, organization partially reduced the effect of gang membership on violent offending.

These five studies lead to the same conclusion: increases in gang organizational structure correspond to increases in delinquent offending. At first glance, one might suspect that the opposite relationship might emerge. That is, informal and diffuse gangs would maintain broader offending and victimization profiles since they are an aggregation of criminally inclined individuals. More organized gangs, alternatively, are better able to control and limit the excesses of gang member behavior that could attract attention from authorities, and in turn produce more calculated, specialized offending patterns. Decker (2001) argued that organization makes gangs more efficient in accomplishing collective goals and completing discrete tasks—the majority of which are criminally oriented. Thus, increases in organization exert pressure across gang members to pursue the collective goals of the group, which could range from simply attending meetings to executing premeditated violence. From this viewpoint, it is much less surprising that gangs and gang members have broader offending and victimization profiles, considering risks internal to the gang (e.g., punishments for rule breaking, increased offending expectations) are added to risks external to the gang (e.g., rivalries, turf battles, drug dealing) that bolster the criminogenic profile of gang members (see Melde et al. 2009; Short and Strodtbeck 1965). Given the modest state of the literature and the limited attention to victimization, it is worthwhile to further investigate how organizational structure impacts the offending and victimization patterns of individual gang members.

6.3 The Current Study

Understanding the social influence of groups such as gangs on individual behavior remains of considerable importance to criminologists. Little disagreement exists that gang membership produces higher levels of offending; however, questions

remain as to how this effect varies by the gang structure in which the gang member belongs. As Decker et al. (2008, p. 157) pointed out, "understanding gang structures and gang behavior without knowing their influence on [gang member] behavior and victimization falls short of providing an explanation of the influence of such characteristics." The existing body of literature on gang organizational structure fails to meet this critique in the following ways (1) only basic themes can be drawn from research on gang organizational structure due to variation in measurement and the lack of comparative analyses, which constrains the gang literature more broadly, (2) binary gang organization measures artificially restrict the variability to two categories instead of a continuous variable, (3) measurement properties of gang organizational structure remain unexplored, leaving questions about their dimensionality and validity unanswered, and (4) bivariate analyses do not rule out extraneous explanations. While these critiques do not apply equally to all of the studies that have examined gang organizational structure, none are immune to at least one of these limitations.

The present study extends the literature by examining the relationship between gang organizational structures and patterns of delinquency and victimization in the cross-national context. Since the structural characteristics of gang organization are measured systematically across demographically and culturally diverse research sites, it can be determined whether this relationship is robust and consistent across research studies. This approach effectively extends the modest knowledge base on gangs, organization, and criminological outcomes.

6.4   Methods

6.4.1   Data

Three data sources are used for the analysis: the evaluation of the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT), the Trinidad and Tobago Youth Survey (TTYS), and the Arizona Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) program. Across all three sources of data, only current gang members were included in the analysis.

Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT). GREAT data were collected as part of an evaluation of gang resistance education administered in middle schools by police officers (Esbensen 2003). GREAT includes both cross-sectional and longitudinal components. This study used the cross-sectional component because it contains data on nearly 6,000 eighth-grade students and allowed us to maximize the pool of gang youth ($N = 482$). The data were drawn from students in 315 classrooms from 42 public schools in 11 US cities, representing a diverse range of US communities.[6] The communities represented urban, suburban, rural, and both racially and ethnically homogenous and diverse areas. Surveys were administered in classroom settings. Participation rates varied for passive parental consent (from 98% to 100%) and active parental consent (from 53% to 75%) schools, but students were representative of the eighth graders in public schools in the communities (Esbensen et al.

2001). A more detailed discussion of the sampling procedures and completion rates is available elsewhere (Esbensen and Winfree 1999).

Trinidad and Tobago Youth Survey (TTYS). The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is a two-island nation located about 11 km off the northeastern coast of Venezuela, between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean. The Trinidad and Tobago Youth Survey (TTYS) was modeled after the survey instrument developed by the Social Development Research Group at the University of Washington, which contained measures validated by the international community (Beyers et al. 2004; Harachi et al. 2003). The instrument was slightly modified for use by Trinidad and Tobago youth.[7] The target population for the Trinidad and Tobago Youth Survey was defined as third and fifth form (roughly equivalent to 9th and 11th grades in the US educational system) students who attended high-risk urban public schools.[8] A total of 27 schools were approached, of which 22 (81.5%) agreed to participate in data collection efforts. The school level response rate was fairly typical by international standards (Gfroere et al. 1997; Prais 2003), but high when compared to other studies in some developing nations (Bulmer 2003). Between March and June 2006, the survey instrument was administered to 2,552 students during their homeroom period, of which, 93% adequately completed the survey ($N = 2,206$).[9] The current study uses those students who indicated they were members of a gang at the time of the survey ($N = 137$). See Katz and Fox (2010) for additional information on the TTYS.

Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM). ADAM is a project funded by the National Institute of Justice designed to monitor national trends in drug use and criminal behavior among the arrestee population, both adults and juveniles. Interview data were collected between 1999 and 2003, within 48 h of arrest, for all arrestees at 43 different sites that were a part of the program. In addition to the core questions, some sites administered addenda that were designed to collect more detailed information on a topic of interest. For this study, the Maricopa County site in Arizona implemented a gang addendum among the juvenile arrestees. Maricopa County includes the city of Phoenix, which is the sixth largest city in the USA. Maricopa County is diverse, particularly with regard to the Latino population. The 2000 US Census revealed that Latinos comprise 35% of Maricopa County's population. Some of the long-standing Latino neighborhoods, known as *barrios*, have spawned gangs for decades (Katz and Webb 2006; Zatz 1987). The ADAM addendum asked specific questions about the gang the youth were involved with, including specific questions on their gang's organization. Of the juveniles who were approached to participate in the interview, over 96% agreed. Juveniles were identified as gang members if they self-nominated to gang membership ($N = 156$).

6.4.2 Summary of Data Sources

Across all three of the studies, youth were asked if they were "currently a member of a gang?"[10] This, in combination with the organization measures described below, allowed us to draw comparative linkages across gang members in the three studies.

The benefit of this approach is that we can make comparisons between school (TTYS, GREAT) and arrestee (ADAM) samples, between the USA and Trinidad and Tobago, and between younger (GREAT) and older juveniles (TTYS). In summary, the similarities in the survey instruments between the studies allow us to assess the differences in gang membership and gang organizational structure between the studies.

6.4.3   Dependent Variables

The dependent variables are all individual-level offending and victimization. The three surveys were not identical, thus the delinquency and victimization variables were constructed so that the best available items were used to create the outcome variables within that dataset. A *delinquency* scale was constructed for the GREAT and TTYS datasets by summating several dichotomous variables. The GREAT delinquency scale included 11 items[11] related to participation in delinquent activities in the past 3 months, and the TTYS delinquency scale included 10 items related to their participation in delinquent activities in the past 12 months.[12] Subjects were assigned a "1" for each type of delinquent activity in which the subject participated at least once in the designated time period. The individually summed scores ranged from 0 to the maximum in both study sites. This type of outcome is commonly referred to as a variety score. A variety score does not censor the variation like prevalence scores nor is it likely to be dominated by less serious crimes or victimizations like frequency scores (Hindelang et al. 1981). Data on the types of delinquency behaviors were not collected in the ADAM data; for this reason, only a victimization outcome variable was constructed from these data.

Second, a binary *victimization* item was constructed across all three data sources. This study focused on violent victimization because general victimization items were limited making it difficult to compare across studies. The GREAT victimization scale included three items related to victimization experiences in the past 3 months,[13] the TTYS victimization scale included two items related to victimization experiences in the past 12 months,[14] and the ADAM victimization scale included seven items related to victimization experiences in the past 30 days.[15] Across all three data sources, youth that reported experiencing a victimization were coded "1" and the remaining subject were coded "0."

6.4.4   Independent Variables

The key independent variables are all indicators of gang organization used by gang researchers in the past (Decker et al. 2008; Peterson et al. 2001). Four questions about the structure and organization of a respondent's gang were available in all three data sources. Respondents were asked whether their gang had *leadership, regular*

Table 6.1 Summary statistics for study variables

	GREAT Mean or% (SD)	TTYS Mean or% (SD)	ADAM Mean or% (SD)
*Outcome variables**			
Delinquency	5.41 (3.32)	2.79 (2.68)	
Victimization	77	71	47
Gang organization variables			
Has a leader[a, b, c]	74	45	31
Regular meetings[b, c]	56	56	35
Gang has rules[a, b]	74	52	53
Insignia[a, c]	91	45	89
Summated organization scale[a, b]	2.87 (1.14)	1.99 (1.27)	2.11 (1.12)
Control variables			
White	23		21
Black[b]	32		15
Hispanic[b]	25		60
Other[b]	19		5
African		42	
East Indian		21	
Afro/Indian		11	
Other		26	
Age[a, b]	14.12 (0.73)	15.37 (1.05)	15.32 (1.45)
Age range	11–18	10–19	9–17
Male[b, c]	63	58	87
N	482	137	156

*Note that statistical significance was not assessed for the outcome variables because exposure time for offending and victimization differed across the samples
[a] Significant differences at $p < .05$ between GREAT and TTYS samples
[b] Significant differences at $p < .05$ between GREAT and ADAM samples
[c] Significant differences at $p < .05$ between TTYS and ADAM samples

meetings, rules that members had to follow, and whether or not the gang had *insignia* (i.e., special colors, symbols, signs, or clothes). All these variables were measured dichotomously, that is, whether or not their gang possessed the given organizational quality. Table 6.1 shows the descriptive statistics for the four gang organizational structure variables that were available across the three sources of data.

In addition, demographic characteristics—*age, gender*, and *race/ethnicity*—were entered as control variables in the multivariate models.[16]

6.5 Analytic Strategy

The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, the univariate statistics are presented (i.e., means, standard deviation). Second, bivariate correlations are reported for the organizational structure variables to evaluate dimensionality. All the organizational

variables are dichotomous, thus, polyserial correlation coefficients will be estimated. In order to obtain an unbiased estimate of the correlation between two dichotomous variables, tetrachoric correlations are estimated, which are a special case of polyserial correlations for dichotomous variables.[17] This analysis will aid in determining the relationship between different measures of gang organization. Third, multivariate ordinary least squares and logistic regressions are estimated using the aggregated construct and disaggregated indicators of gang organization on offending and victimization. All models were estimated in STATA 10.0 using robust standard errors, which better estimate errors in the face of suspect regression assumptions such as heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation. For the GREAT and TTYS data, clustering by school is accounted for, and clustering by residential zip code is accounted for in the ADAM data.[18]

6.6 Results

6.6.1 Summary Statistics

Table 6.1 provides summary statistics for the study variables. The respondents in each of the samples engaged in a variety of offending and experienced a high rate of victimization, which is consistent with the larger body of gang research (Krohn and Thornberry 2008). While there appears to be substantively significant differences in offending and victimization across the samples, it is important to recall that the exposure times for offending and victimization differ across samples, making comparisons inappropriate. GREAT respondents tended to be younger than respondents in the TTYS and ADAM. The racial and ethnic makeup differed across the studies, mostly due to demographic differences associated with the communities the youth were drawn from. In addition, there was a large gender difference between school and arrestee samples, where males comprised nearly 90% of ADAM respondents compared to approximately 60% of TTYS and GREAT respondents. This is likely a function of the nature of the samples, where there tends to be an inverse relationship between female composition and the criminogenic seriousness of the sample (see Klein and Maxson 2006, pp. 41–42).

Turning to the gang organization variables, most gang members conveyed that their gang contained a moderate degree of organizational structure. These results differed by study, however. Youth in the GREAT study, on average, reported that their gangs had three of the organizational structure characteristics, whereas ADAM and TTYS averaged nearly an entire unit lower. Indeed, the average across all four gang organizational structure items was higher for GREAT gang youth than the other two samples, especially for the leadership and rule items. In addition, insignia was half as likely to be reported among TTYS gang youth compared to gang youth in the US samples.

Table 6.2 Bivariate correlations of gang organization variables and outcomes

	GREAT (N=482)	X_1	X_2	X_3	X_4	X_5
Y_1	Delinquency	0.06	0.07	0.10	0.12	0.08
Y_2	Victimization	0.09	0.03	0.15	0.13	0.11
X_1	Has a leader	–				
X_2	Regular meetings	0.58	–			
X_3	Gang has rules	0.52	0.34	–		
X_4	Insignia	0.34	0.18	0.44	–	
X_5	Organization index	–	–	–	–	
	Mean inter-item r	0.40				
	TTYS (N=137)	X_1	X_2	X_3	X_4	X_5
Y_1	Delinquency	0.17	−0.09	0.15	0.20	0.16
Y_2	Victimization	0.13	0.12	0.25	−0.12	0.11
X_1	Has a leader	–				
X_2	Regular meetings	0.05	–			
X_3	Gang has rules	0.18	0.45	–		
X_4	Insignia	0.27	0.37	0.56	–	
X_5	Organization index	–	–	–	–	
	Mean inter-item r	0.32				
	ADAM (N = 156)	X_1	X_2	X_3	X_4	X_5
Y_1	Delinquency	–	–	–	–	–
Y_2	Victimization	0.03	0.29	0.22	0.13	0.20
X_1	Has a leader	–				
X_2	Regular meetings	0.35	–			
X_3	Gang has rules	0.24	0.40	–		
X_4	Insignia	0.30	0.35	0.48	–	
X_5	Organization index	–	–	–	–	
	Mean inter-item r	0.35				

6.6.2   Bivariate Associations

Table 6.2 displays the bivariate associations of the gang organization variables. Because all the gang organization variables were dichotomous, we obtained tetrachoric correlation coefficients that produce more accurate estimates of the magnitude of the relationship. Our goal was to assess the internal validity of commonly used gang organization items prior to condensing these items into a factor score or summating them into an index; examining correlation coefficients is the first step in this process. If gang organization can be conceived in terms of a continuum from informal-diffused (the least organized) to instrumental-rational (the most organized), it should be reflected by consistently large tetrachoric correlation coefficients.

The bivariate associations displayed in Table 6.2 do not display the degree of consistency one would expect if gang organization was indeed a latent factor. In fact, the correlation matrices are checkered with weak, modest, moderate, and strong

Table 6.3 Multivariate OLS regression predicting individual delinquency across the data sources

	Delinquency							
	GREAT				TTYS			
	b		b		b		b	
	B	(SE)	B	(SE)	B	(SE)	B	(SE)
Gang Organization Variables								
Has a leader	−.04	−.28			.09	.51		
		(.39)				(.55)		
Regular meetings	.02	.11			−.09	−.46		
		(.27)				(.49)		
Gang has rules	.09**	.69			.14	.73		
		(.34)				(.44)		
Insignia	.05	.56			.10	.56		
		(.43)				(.53)		
Gang organization index			.08**	.23			.17*	.35
				(.13)				(.14)
N	442		442		137		137	
R^2	.10		.09		.17		.11	

All standard errors are robust standard errors for clustering. Clustering by school is accounted for in the GREAT (41 clusters) and TTYS (21 clusters) data, and by residential zip code in the ADAM (57 clusters) data

Controls: Race/ethnicity, age, and gender of the respondent are controlled for in all models. Coefficients are not presented here, but are available upon request

$^*p<.05$; $^{**}p<.10$

coefficients, ranging from 0.05 to 0.58. There is some semblance of bivariate consistency across the studies for insignia/rules and rules/meetings. In addition, there is relative consistency in the mean inter-item correlations across the studies. But as a whole, the mean inter-item correlations across the studies are not as large as one would expect to inspire confidence in the latent construct of gang organizational structure. This leads us to believe that certain items may be more strongly related to the organization of the gang than others, making it difficult to determine whether items are differentially related to criminological outcomes. While there is evidence that gang organization increases offending, empirically, we do not know which characteristics of gang organization are driving that relationship. Thus, we will examine the effect of these organizational characteristics on delinquency and victimization independently and cumulatively.

6.6.3 Comparative Multivariate Regression Models

Table 6.3 displays the results of multivariate OLS regression models to examine which specific gang organization variables explain the variation in delinquency. Table 6.4 shows the results of the logistic regression models predicting victimization. All standard errors are robust standard errors adjusted for clustering. This is especially

Table 6.4 Multivariate logistic regression predicting individual victimization across the data sources

	GREAT						TTYS						ADAM					
Victimization	OR	b	(SE)	OR	b	(SE)	OR	b	(SE)	OR	b	(SE)	OR	b	(SE)	OR	b	(SE)
Gang organization variables																		
Has a leader	0.78	−.25	(.36)				1.49	.40	(.43)				0.63	−.46	(.39)			
Regular meetings	1.28	.25	(.24)				0.90	−.10	(.40)				2.77*	1.02	(.35)			
Gang has rules	1.16	.15	(.21)				3.35**	1.21	(.69)				1.45	.37	(.37)			
Insignia	2.91*	1.07	(.36)				0.27*	−1.31	(.53)				0.95	−.05	(.55)			
Gang organization index				1.17	.16	(.12)				1.01	.01	(.19)				1.34*	.29	(.14)
N	442			137			137			137			150			150		
R^2	.04			.11			.05			.05			.08			.08		

All standard errors are robust standard errors for clustering. Clustering by school is accounted for in the GREAT (41 clusters) and TTYS (21 clusters) data, and by residential zip code in the ADAM (57 clusters) data

Controls: Race/ethnicity, age, and gender of the respondent are controlled for in all models. Coefficients are not presented here, but are available upon request

*$p<.05$; **$p<.10$

important for the present study, where students were surveyed in schools in two of the samples, and in the third, they are the result of arrests. The standard errors are adjusted based on the presence of any clustering based on school (GREAT and TTYS) or residential zip code (ADAM). Additionally, each regression model in Tables 6.3 and 6.4 adjusts for race/ethnicity, age, and gender.

Table 6.3 displays four models predicting delinquency, two from the GREAT sample and two from the TTYS sample. For the GREAT sample, only one of the four measures of gang organization was even marginally statistically significant: individuals who indicated their gang had rules reported an increase in offending variety. In the TTYS sample, none of the four common gang organization variables were significant predictors of delinquency. It should be noted that the direction of all of the gang organization variables was not positive; this suggests that having that characteristic was not always related to more offending. Turning to the summated gang organization scales, as opposed to the individual measures, there is modest support in both the GREAT and TTYS samples for the positive relationship between gang organization and delinquency. This finding is consistent with the larger body of research on gang organization and delinquent offending.

Table 6.4 displays the logistic regression results of the common gang organization predictors on the likelihood of victimization. In the GREAT sample, insignia nearly tripled the odds of victimization among gang youth. Yet, in the TTYS sample, insignia was negatively associated with victimization. Alternatively, rules tripled the odds of victimization among Trinidadian gang youth. In the ADAM sample, only regular meetings were associated with victimization, nearly tripling the odds of its occurrence. In terms of the gang organization scale, increases in gang organization corresponded to statistically significant increases in victimization only among gang members in the ADAM sample. No relationship between the organization scale and victimization was observed in the GREAT and TTYS samples. In summary, the results of the organization-victimization analyses reveal that there is very little consistency across research contexts.

6.7   Discussion

The organizational features of youth gangs have not been the subject of a large body of research. The present study examined the relationship between gang organizational structure and delinquency and victimization using data from three research projects. The data were collected from school-based samples in the USA and Trinidad and Tobago, and a sample of juvenile arrestees in one US county. The goals of the current study included (1) examining gang organizational structure in a comparative context and (2) examining the relationship between gang organizational structure and delinquency and victimization. This study is unique in that it compares gang organizational structure across populations (i.e., school, arrestee) and settings (i.e., USA, Trinidad and Tobago). This section is guided by three key findings that merit further discussion.

First, our findings suggest that gangs might be more organized in the USA than in Trinidad. School-age youth in Trinidad and Tobago reported the lowest level of gang organizational structure when compared to both school-age youth and juvenile arrestees in the USA While there could be numerous explanations for this finding, it might suggest that the organizational processes within gangs are unique and subject to social, structural, or cultural factors, as well as time periods. A similar finding was observed when comparing gang youth in the USA to gang youth in the Netherlands (Esbensen and Weerman 2005). Another consideration is that gangs in Trinidad and Tobago are a relatively recent phenomenon, not emerging until the turn of the century (Katz and Fox 2010), whereas many of the youth participating in the GREAT project were from communities that had long-standing gang problems. Gangs in communities with long-standing gang problems might be more organizationally structured. This has been a consistent observation about English gangs when compared with those in the USA (Pitts 2007) and may reflect the history of gangs in the USA. With the above said, juvenile gang members from our arrestee sample belonged to less organized gangs than our respondents from the GREAT sample. This is contrary to what we expected; youth engaged in more serious forms of delinquency and involved in the criminal justice system (i.e., those found in an arrestee sample) would belong to more organizationally structured gangs. This may be a function of dramatic ethnic differences across the research contexts, although group processes within gangs tend to trump demographic differences across gangs (Klein and Maxson 2006).

Second, our analyses reveal mixed support for the relationship between gang organizational structure and offending and victimization. Contrary to our hypotheses and inconsistent with the extant literature, there was little to no evidence for this relationship, although nearly all of the coefficients were positive. At best, however, the results of this analysis provide only modest support that increased organizational structure is positively related to individual patterns of delinquency and victimization among gang members. Our aggregated gang organizational structure measure performed somewhat consistently with our hypotheses. Gang organizational structure was positively related to delinquency for both samples (GREAT and TTYS) and was positively related to victimization among one of three samples (ADAM). It should be noted, however, that the associations were modest and the level of variance explained was low.

When all of the common organizational structure predictors were examined individually, none performed consistently across the samples. Whether a gang had leaders was unrelated to offending and victimization in all settings. Whether a gang had regular meetings, rules, and insignia mattered differently for each of the outcomes in each of the settings. This introduces a problem for interpreting the meaning of these effects. For example, if rules were consistently related to offending and victimization across research contexts, this would make sense. The presence of rules, a measure of the ability of groups to discipline their members and structure behavior more formally, is a key component of formal organizations. Membership in gangs that contain rules may introduce the need to sanction rule-violating members for wayward behavior. The fact that rules mattered only for

victimization among gang youth in TTYS raises the question of whether certain characteristics of organizational structure might be unique to the research context. How structural and cultural factors interact to produce varying levels of gang organizational structure should be on the agenda of future empirical gang research.

Third, it is necessary to better understand empirically the organizational structure of gangs. To date, researchers have rarely examined the structural factors that may be related to offending and victimization, and when they have done so, they have tended to focus on a fairly limited number of structural attributes. Future research should explore different survey items and analytic strategies to better understand the organizational structure of gangs. A limitation of this line of research more generally is that is relies on several dichotomous variables for information on gang organizational structure. This constrains the variability in the construct of gang organizational structure, reducing the likelihood of identifying statistically significant findings or identifying a latent construct of gang organizational structure. We recommend that future survey development introduce ordinal variables to measure gang organizational structure. In the current study, for example, if Likert-scaled items for leaders, rules, meetings, and insignia were available for the present study, it would have increased the variability to 5 categories for individual measures and to 20 categories for the aggregate measure. This speaks to the larger subject discussed earlier in the framework of this chapter: gang organization should operate on a continuum ranging from informal-diffuse gangs to instrumental-rational gangs rather than as a dichotomy. Extant methods make it impossible to identify this construct. Another analytic strategy to consider is employing social network methodology; however, others have noted the challenges posed for collecting social network data (McGloin and Kirk 2010; Morselli 2008; Papachristos 2006).

Our findings affirm the value of more comparative research and provide support for the comparative methodological objectives of the Eurogang research program. There is limited work that compares the extent and nature of gang problems across nations—i.e., Italy and France (Blaya and Gatti 2010), Italy and Switzerland (Haymoz and Gatti 2010), the USA and the Netherlands (Esbensen and Weerman 2005), and the USA and Germany (Huizinga and Schumann 2001). Substantially, more work in this area of study is warranted to better understand the generalizability of gang research and, in turn, better understand the causal pathways toward gangs, gang membership, and gang violence. These issues should be on the agenda of future gang research.

6.8 Notes

1. Bjerregaard's (2002) study was based on a sample of 1,663 mostly black and Hispanic inner-city high school students (17% "current" gang prevalence) in California, Illinois, Louisiana, and New Jersey. Youth reported whether they were in a gang, then if that gang was "just a bunch of guys" or an "organized gang." From this, youth were placed in four categories (1) youth not in gangs, (2) youth not in gangs but hung around with "a bunch of guys," (3) youth

in gangs that were a "bunch of gangs" (i.e., not an organized gang), and (4) youth in gangs that were organized. These four categories were then compared independent of one another.

   Esbensen et al.'s (2001) study was based on a sample of 5,935 middle school students (17% "ever" gang prevalence) in 11 demographically diverse, urban, rural, and suburban cities. Their method of partitioning began by self-nominated gang membership, then diverged to the delinquency of the gang, the organization of the gang, and the individual centrality within the gang. This resulted in a total of six categories: (1) youth never in gangs, (2) youth ever in gangs, (3) youth currently in gangs, (4) youth in delinquent gangs, (5) youth in organized (initiations, leaders, and symbols/colors), delinquent gangs, and (6) youth with high centrality in organized, delinquent gangs.

2. Sheley et al. (1995) created a binary measure of organization that they labeled gang structure, as follows: the individual had to (1) self-nominate the gang as organized, (2) report that the gang was comprised of at least 50 members, and (3) indicate that the gang meets at least 3 of the criteria of organization—"an 'official' name, designated leadership, regular meetings, designated clothing, and a specified turf to be defended" (Sheley et al. 1995, p. 59). If the subjects' gangs did not meet the above criteria, then they were classified as being a member of an "unstructured" gang.

3. No statistically significant effects emerged for gang member drug sales or robbery, which were likely absorbed by including gang drug sales and robbery in the analytic model. In analyzing the effect of gang structure on gang member delinquency, Sheley et al. (1995) included the subjects' perceptions of their gang's drug sales, drug use, burglary, robbery, and gun carrying in the models predicting gang member drug sales, drug use, burglary, robbery, and gun carrying. This raises a question of whether gang structure could possibly exert an effect net of the egocentric measure of gang criminal activity—i.e., the statistical insignificance could be an artifact of the analytic approach.

4. Decker et al. created a summative index drawn from seven binary indicators of gang organization, including gang leadership, regular meetings, rules, punishments for rule breaking, unique insignia (e.g., colors, signs, symbols), member responsibilities, and shared money. Two models were estimated partitioning the sample by current and former gang membership, as recommended by prior research (see Katz et al. 2005, p. 83).

5. Bouchard and Spindler's (2010) original sample consisted of 1,166 respondents, but they excluded youth that did not self-report to engaging in delinquency, resulting in a final sample of 523 respondents. These respondents were then classified as "gang members" ($N=44$), "delinquent group members" ($N=171$), and "nongroup members" ($N=308$) based on their responses to whether they were (1) a member of a relatively organized gang, and if not, then (2) a member of a youth group involved in deviance of any sort. If respondents answered "no" to both of these questions, they were classified as nongroup members. Group organization was measured in a similar manner to Decker et al. (2008) and included nine binary items summated to create an organization scale. Empirical tests of the organization hypothesis were applied only to individuals that reported belonging to some type of group ($N=215$).

6. These cities include Kansas City, MO; Las Cruces, NM; Milwaukee, WI; Omaha, NE; Orlando, FL; Philadelphia, PA; Phoenix, AZ; Pocatello, ID; Providence, RI; Torrance, CA; and Will County, IL.

7. The instrument was provided to key stakeholders employed by the Ministry of Education to seek their advice on altering the instrument so that it reflected regional language and culture (i.e., monetary units, social activities, and organizations).

8. High-risk schools were defined as those that the Ministry of Education had identified as having a disproportionate number of students who either lived in high-crime communities or attended a school that recorded a high number of delinquent incidents. Urban was defined as any school that was located within one of five urban school districts. This eliminated schools from three school districts, including the school district of Tobago. Of the 67 public schools that were eligible for inclusion in the study, 27 were identified as being at "high risk."

9. All students attending school and present in their homeroom on the day the survey was administered were provided with a copy of the survey instrument. Students were informed that if they

did not wish to participate in the survey, they were to not fill out any questions and turn it in incomplete. Likewise, they were informed that if they did not want to answer a specific question, they were not to provide an answer to that question. As a consequence, our sample excludes those youth not enrolled in school, missing from school, or those youth in hospitals or committed to detention facilities. The Ministry of Education in Trinidad and Tobago stated to the researchers that the data on absenteeism and enrollment is not routinely collected and that the data that is available is not necessarily accurate. School officials estimate that about 5–10% of students are absent on a given day, leaving the participation rate at about 90%.

10. The exact language of this question varied slightly across the studies but collectively inquired into whether a respondent self-nominated to being a gang member.

11. (1) Attacked someone with a weapon, (2) hit someone, (3) used a weapon to rob someone, (4) went into (or tried to) a building to steal something, (5) stole or tried to steal a motor vehicle, (6) carried a hidden weapon, (7) purposely damaged or destroyed property, (8) spray painted, (9) stole something worth less than $50, (10) stole something worth more than $50, and (11) avoided paying for something.

12. (1) Attacked someone with a weapon, (2) attacked someone with the intention of seriously hurting them, (3) used a weapon to rob someone, (4) gone into or tried to go into a building to steal something, (5) carried a handgun, (6) taken a handgun to school, (7) stolen or tried to steal something worth more than $300 (TT) (equivalent to about $50 USD), (8) stolen or tried to steal something worth less than $300 (TT), (9) been drunk or high at school, and (10) got drunk or high.

13. (1) Hit by someone trying to hurt you, (2) someone used a weapon or force to get money or things from you, and (3) been attacked by someone with a weapon or by someone trying to seriously hurt or kill you.

14. (1) Someone threatened or injured you with a weapon such as a gun, knife, or small stick on school property, (2) you in a physical fight on school property.

15. Threatened with a gun, (2) shot at, (3) shot, (4) threatened with some other weapon, (5) injured with some other weapon, (6) jumped or beat up, (7) robbed.

16. Klein and Maxson (2006) have suggested that the age composition of a gang's members will contribute to gang behavior. Because our measure of age was truncated in our sample—juveniles—we were unable to assess this relationship.

17. These coefficients are estimated in order to obtain an unbiased estimate of the magnitude of the relationship between the organizational variables. Briefly, there are some assumptions one must make when estimating tetrachoric correlations. This involves the hypothesized existence of continuous latent variables underlying each dichotomous variable (X^*), and analyzing these rather than the measured binary variables. For each continuous latent variable, there is a latent threshold parameter (v) (Muthén 1993). The latent threshold is essentially the cut point at which the variable goes from 0 to 1 on the measured dichotomous variable. Thus, we assume $X=1$ if $X^*>v$ and $X=0$ if $X^*<v$. The resulting correlation coefficient is an unbiased estimate for the latent, normally distributed, continuous variables.

18. Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated that multicollinearity was not a problem in any of the multivariate models (i.e., no variance inflation factor exceeded 2).

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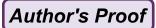Padilla F (1992) The gang as an American enterprise. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick

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