

## **Beyond the Lenses of the ‘Model’ Minority Myth: A Descriptive Portrait of Asian Gang Members**

by

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### **Abstract**

*When viewed under the lenses of the ‘model’ minority myth, Asian youths are often portrayed as academic ‘overachievers’ who strictly adhere to the norms and values of society. Although empirically inaccurate and racially stereotypic, the ‘model’ minority discourse serves to mask the incredible diversity that exists within the Asian American community. With this in mind, the present paper utilizes survey data to provide a descriptive portrait of Asian gang members in Southern California, paying close attention to their overall attitudes and beliefs about gang life— an area of research that has often been neglected. At the same time, the current study also examines similarities and differences between self-admitted Asian gang members (n = 128) and non-Asian gang members (n = 157) in relation to such topics as school experiences, peer and family relationships, perceived life opportunities, and delinquent attitudes and behaviors.*

For decades, Asian Americans have been portrayed in the popular press as being a “model” minority. When viewed under the lenses of this empirically inaccurate portrait, Asian Americans, as a whole, are believed to experience exceptional successes in education, occupational mobility, and economic status. Unfortunately, however, as has been consistently documented, the “model” minority discourse tends to mask the incredible diversity that exists within the Asian American community (e.g., Cheng and Yang 2000; Osajima 2000). Often lost in this ideological image is the sheer fact that as a group, Asian Americans consist of numerous ethnicities, speak

a variety of languages, and celebrate many diverse cultures. Moreover, individuals of Asian descent also possess varying levels of education, salable skills, and income.

Contrary to the proclamations of the 'model' minority thesis, a significant number of Asian Americans are not living 'the American Dream.' For example, in 1998, approximately 1.4 million Asians and Pacific Islanders (about 13 percent) were identified as living below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). During that same year, about 18% of Asian Americans under the age of 18 were poor, compared with 11% of white children (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). It has also been estimated that for every Asian American family with an annual household income of \$75,000 or more, there is another Asian family that earns less than \$10,000 a year (Schaefer 2004).

Besides masking diversity, the 'model' minority myth also draws attention away from various social problems that exist within the Asian American community (Cheng and Yang 2000). For example, the popular image of Asians rapidly ascending America's economic and social ladder has led many people to believe that unlike other racial minorities, Asian Americans, are less prone to negative outcomes, such as mental illness and criminal behavior (Osajima 2000). However, as research documents, this is not the case. Many studies repeatedly show that a significant number of Asians, in particular Southeast Asian refugees, suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (Beiser et al. 1989; Kinzie et al. 1990; Kroll et al., 1989). Likewise, when it comes to criminal behavior, many Asian American youth routinely engage in crime and delinquency. For example, in 1997, Asian youth were involved in a larger proportion of juvenile arrests (as a percent of total arrests) for murder, aggravated assault, robbery, burglary, larceny-theft, forgery/counterfeiting, and vandalism, than were their white, black, and Native American counterparts (Federal Bureau of Investigation 1999; Synder and Sickmund 1999). In addition, in 1999, Asian juvenile arrest rates (per 100,000) for property and violent crimes had reached some of their highest levels, 515 and 75, respectively (Federal Bureau of Investigations 1999).

Over the years, social scientists—albeit a relatively small number—have gradually turned their attention to the topic of Asian gangs—a phenomenon that seemingly flies in the face of the 'model' minority myth. Although gang research has been steadily increasing during the past couple of decades, surprisingly few studies to date have simultaneously compared self-admitted gang members to non-gang members in regards to their attitudes and beliefs about their family life, school experiences, perceived opportunities, relationship with peers, and other important life issues. For the

most part, existing gang studies tend to focus primarily on a small, ethnically homogeneous group of gang members (e.g., Hunt et al. 1997; Toy 1992; Vigil and Yun 1990). For instance, Vigil and Yun (1990) interviewed approximately 17 Vietnamese youth detained at the California Youth Authority (CYA). The researchers found that ‘multiple marginality’ (i.e., interrelated stresses and pressures caused by low socioeconomic status, dual culture conflict, governmental neglect, and racism and discrimination) led to gang involvement. According to Vigil and Yun, negative stressors act to block social and economic opportunities, thus prompting some youths to view gang involvement as being a viable coping strategy (see Vigil and Yun 1990 for detailed discussion). However, by not incorporating a comparison group into their analysis, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine to what degree, if any, multiple marginality impacts non-gang members. Without a reference or comparison group, interesting questions will continue to go unanswered. For instance, exactly how different are Asian gang members from non-gang members when it comes to their perceptions about their life chances, friendships, and society in general? Do Asian gang members view their school experiences differently than their non-gang counterparts? Who is more likely to wish that their parents were more ‘Americanized,’ gang members or non-gang members? It is plausible that the lack of relevant studies may be due in part to an underlying belief or idea that gang members are merely the opposite of non-gang members in terms of their overall attitudes, values, and beliefs. However, more research is needed to substantiate such a notion.

The present paper addresses this empirical gap by comparing survey responses of self-admitted gang members ( $n = 128$ ) to non-gang members ( $n = 157$ ). In the process, the current study will provide readers with a detailed description of Asian gang members, paying close attention to their overall attitudes and beliefs about gang life— an area of research that has been neglected. As will be discussed in greater detail, approximately 285 participants were surveyed from various sites located throughout the San Gabriel Valley region— an area comprising 33 contiguous cities in Los Angeles County.

It is important to point out that the existing body of literature on Asian gangs remains relatively underdeveloped. Accordingly, descriptive studies, such as the present analysis, continue to serve as important building blocks for future work. Furthermore, unlike more advanced parametric procedures or techniques, descriptive analyses, in most instances, tend to provide readers with richer background information on the study population itself. Valuable information that may be overlooked or understudied in multivariate analyses

can be highlighted in descriptive analyses, thus providing a meaningful social context for understanding gang involvement. With this in mind, the current analysis examines over 60 variables that are routinely associated with gang affiliation, such as perceived blocked opportunities, relationships with delinquent or deviant peers, acculturation issues, and negative school experiences.

### *Data Collection and Sample*

Data for the current study were collected from five sites located in the San Gabriel Valley during a four month period, from November 2001 to February 2002. The survey sites included: (1) the Los Angeles County Probation Department / Asian Unit; (2) a private high school; (3) a residential treatment facility; (4) a community youth center; and (5) an adult continuation school.

A total of 285 completed surveys were returned from all surveyed sites. The largest number of returned surveys (approximately 44% /  $n = 126$ ) were from youth who were currently under the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles County Probation Department Asian Unit (LACPDAU). Probationers from the LACPDAU were asked by survey administrators to voluntarily complete a seven page questionnaire during one of their monthly scheduled appointments with their probation officer. All potential respondents were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that there would be no penalties or consequences for not participating. Furthermore, every individual was reassured that their respective probation officer would not have access to their completed surveys. To ensure anonymity, the survey instrument did not ask the respondent for any identifying information. To help put them at ease, probationers completed the survey in a vacant cubicle or office without their probation officer present. In addition, all participants were provided with a large clasp envelope to put their completed surveys in. On the last page of the questionnaire, respondents were encouraged to seal the envelope shut before returning the survey to the designated person.

The second largest number of participants were from a private parochial high school located in Los Angeles County (35% /  $n = 101$ ). This school was purposively selected since Asians comprise almost 80% of the total student body. Moreover, by including a parochial school in the analysis, the likelihood for obtaining a sizable comparison group of non-gang members was significantly enhanced. During the fall 2001 semester, the survey was administered to students enrolled in two social science courses. On the survey administration day, Asian students in attendance were asked to volunteer to participate in the study during the class period.

The sample also included 46 Asian youth (16%) who were participating in a violence prevention program at a non-profit Asian community-based organization in Los Angeles County. The majority of the respondents were referred to the after-school program by their respective probation officers, school counselors, and parents. During one of their group sessions, program participants were asked to voluntarily complete the seven page survey.

In the fourth spot, roughly 3% of the sample ( $n = 7$ ) were Asian minors who had been committed by the juvenile court judge to a residential treatment facility. During an arranged scheduled visit to the facility, research staff administered surveys to all consenting participants. None of seven Asian detainees refused to participate. Like their counterparts in the probation department, respondents from the residential treatment program were instructed to put their completed surveys in large clasp envelope. Finally, approximately five Asian students (2%) from a local area adult continuation school volunteered to participate in the study. Except for the private high school, all respondents were compensated with gift certificates to local department stores and restaurants.

## **Analysis**

### ***Socio-demographic Characteristics***

As mentioned, participants were asked to complete a seven page survey that tapped into various aspects of their lives, from family relationships, to their willingness to commit criminal acts. In order to compare the responses of gang members to non-gang members, the present analysis used a filter question that asked respondents if they have ever been in a gang. Of the 285 participants, approximately 128 (45%) admitted that they had some involvement with gangs. More specifically, forty-eight respondents indicated that they were former gang members while 38 individuals claimed that they had regular contact with their respective gangs. As expected, the majority of gang members were male with a mean age of approximately 19 years of age (range: 13 years old to 28). Twenty-eight different gangs were represented in the sample, including: Asian Boyz, Wah Ching, United Bankoc, White Dragon, Vietnamese Boyz, Black Dragon, and Oriental Boyz. Moreover, an interesting, yet unexpected finding was that a number of gangs had individual members from different ethnicities. For example, Asian Boyz and Wah Ching had gang members who were Chinese, Japanese, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Filipino. Although not explored in the present study, future research should examine the issue of racial and

ethnic identity among pan ethnic gangs.

The ethnic diversity of Asian gang members represented in the sample was quite remarkable. In many respects, the sample provides a good snapshot of the incredible diversity that exists in the San Gabriel Valley. Among the gang members, approximately eight different ethnic backgrounds were represented, with Chinese youth constituting the largest group (33.6%), followed closely by Cambodians (34%), and then by Vietnamese (15.6%). More than 56% of the self-admitted gang members were U.S. citizens. Most non U.S. citizens were primarily from Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The mean age for entering the U.S. was roughly six years of age. The majority of gang members were also enrolled in school, with the greatest percentage in high school (72%). Interestingly, almost 15% of gang members indicated that they were currently attending college—a finding that may lead some people to believe that even Asian gang members have some vestiges or qualities of the model minority.

In regards to annual family income for gang members and non-gang members, the findings reveal that the income distributions for gang and non-gang members were very similar. It is interesting to point out that contrary to the general perception that gang members tend to be from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, over 24% of gang members reported that their annual family income was more than \$50,000. In addition, 7% of Asians in gangs stated that their family made over \$100,000 per year. Further analysis revealed that the majority of these individuals were from more established Asian ethnic groups (e.g., Chinese and Koreans). Conversely, as anticipated, there were twice as many gang members ( $n = 40$ ) than non-gang members ( $n = 18$ ) who reported that they lived below the poverty line. More than 50% of impoverished gang members had identified themselves as being Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Laotians.

### ***Gang Involvement***

The majority of gang members (96%) first became affiliated with their respective gangs around 16 years of age or younger. When asked to describe their level of gang involvement, the largest segment of the gang sample ( $n = 48 / 39\%$ ) reported that they were former gang members. Further analysis revealed that 81% of these individuals were surveyed at the LACPDAU. It is important to note that there exists the possibility that social desirability on the part of the respondents (albeit unknown) may have led some gang members to minimize or underestimate their true level of involvement. However, it is also important to point out that 32 respondents from the LACPDAU reported varying levels of gang involvement, ranging

from 'loosely connected' to 'active members.' Approximately 31% of self-admitted gang members from all survey sites indicated that they had stable connections with their respective gangs. In addition, more than half of the gang members reported having long term ties with their particular gangs. For example, over 50% ( $n = 61$ ) of gang members indicated that they have been in their gang for more than two years. Roughly 27% ( $n = 31$ ) mentioned that their involvement with their gang spanned more than four years. When asked if they planned to be in their gang for life, two-thirds of the sample said 'no.' On the other hand, six percent ( $n = 7$ ) of gang members stated that they would be 'lifers.'

In regards to criminal behavior, only 9% of gang members stated that they would commit a criminal act only if it were approved by their gang. Conversely, and more telling, roughly 70% disagreed with this statement. When cross-checked with other crime-related questions (to be discussed later), it was very clear that these particular individuals were not hesitant or reserved about engaging in crime and delinquency without approval from their gang. This finding has significant implications on crime reporting. Because there are no national standards for determining whether a crime is gang-related, the number of Asian gang crimes in Los Angeles County, California may be routinely overestimated. The Los Angeles Police and Sheriff's Departments designate crime, in particular, homicides, as 'gang-related' if either the assailant or victim is a gang member (Klein and Maxson 1989). Other departments, such as the Chicago Police Department use a more restrictive criterion that requires evidence to show that crimes were sanctioned by the gang (Curry and Spergel 1988). Hence, by utilizing a less restrictive standard, criminal acts committed by gang members in the present sample would be deemed 'gang-related' by the local police, despite the fact that many of the respondents indicated they would commit crimes independent of their respective gang's opinion.

A gang-related topic that has garnered important research attention is the perceived relationship between tongs/triads and youth gangs. As mentioned, the findings, for the most part, have been mixed. For example, Joe (1994) found minimal and insignificant interactions between the two groups. On the other hand, Chin (1996) argued that regular exposure to tongs and triads prompted disenchanting Chinese youths to organize into street gangs. Despite their different conclusions, the two noted studies focused on traditional Chinatowns that were both geographically concentrated, and ethnically homogeneous. The present study, however, examined a sprawling suburban area comprising 33 contiguous cities, where Asians are just one of many racial and ethnic groups that reside in the area. Because of its recent

history and diverse qualities, it was anticipated that tongs and triads would not exert influence on gang formation in the San Gabriel Valley. As expected, when asked if their gangs have ties to the tongs, almost 90% (n = 104) stated 'no' or that they 'didn't know.' Interestingly, the twelve individuals who stated that their gangs did have ties to the tongs (mostly associated with the Chinese community) were from various ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Cambodian, Japanese, and Vietnamese). Likewise, roughly 23% (n = 27) indicated that they follow triad rules. More than 55% (n = 66) of gang members noted that they knew the history of their gang.

Within the survey, gang members were given the opportunity to briefly explain why they had joined a gang. Approximately 101 gang members provided various reasons for their gang involvement. The most frequent responses included: (1) friends were in a gang [e.g., "I joined a gang because my good friends were joining. I wanted to stay with the friends"]; (2) fun and excitement [e.g. "The reason why I joined my gang was because that's where I thought all the fun was. They had females, always throwing parties and it seemed fun"]; and (3) protection and support [e.g., "I join a gang before because I always get pick on when I was a little Asian kid in school by Mexicans so I got in much of it so I join so I don't get pick on by Mexican [*sic*]"]. Interestingly, however, few, if any of the reason listed, identified any culturally unique reason(s) for joining a gang.

### ***Blocked Opportunities***

Research has continually shown that failure to achieve positively valued goals or not being treated in a fair or just manner can lead to negative outcomes or behaviors (Agnew 1992; 2001; Capowich et al. 2001). As argued by Agnew (1992: 53), people "enter interactions expecting that certain distributive justice rules will be followed, rules specifying how resources should be allocated." When individuals find themselves in inequitable relationships, they may experience such emotions as anger, rage, or resentment. This negative affect may in turn lead to crime (Agnew 1995). To date, however, no research has explored the effects of perceived blocked opportunities on gang involvement.

As Table 1 shows, the response patterns between gang members and non-gang members were consistently different for the five questions. As expected, unlike non-gang members, gang members expressed that they were not being treated in a fair or just manner. For example, when asked if they felt society was against them, 42% (n = 54) of gang members agreed as opposed to only 16% (n = 25) of non-gang members. Moreover, when asked if they felt that they would have to work harder to earn a good living even if they had



a good education, more than half of gang members ( $n = 78$ ) agreed, whereas only 31% ( $n = 48$ ) of non-gang members felt this to be true. The average percent difference between the two groups for the five questions on the category, 'agree,' was approximately 23.5%. Further analysis revealed that each of the five measures for blocked opportunities also had a significant positive association with gang involvement. As Table 1 shows, the chi-square values reached statistical significance for each measure.

### ***Relationship with Peers***

Research consistently supports the notion that “birds of the same feather tend to flock together.” Past studies have shown that having friends who engage in criminal behavior is significantly related to becoming a gang member (Bjerregaard and Lizotte 1995; Esbensen et al. 1993; Winfree et al. 1994). For example, Curry and Spergel (1992) found that associating with friends who are gang members increases the risk for gang membership. When asked if respondents associate with delinquent peers or friends, non-gang members, as expected, indicated that they have few friends who were in a gang, or who have been picked up by the police. For example, approximately 32% ( $n = 51$ ) of non-gang members reported having friends who were arrested, compared to roughly 58% ( $n = 84$ ) of gang members. Not surprisingly, gang members also had more friends who were also gang members than did non-gang members (66% to 30%, respectively). In regards to engaging in delinquent behaviors with their peers, surprisingly, a greater percentage of gang members than non-gang members disclosed that they would not do drugs with their friends (43.3% to 33.1%, respectively).

Another interesting but unexpected finding concerns the degree to which gang members value their parents. When asked if the respondents felt that their peers were more important than their parents, overwhelmingly, 80% ( $n = 103$ ) of gang members disagreed, whereas only 64% ( $n = 98$ ) of non-gang members disagreed. Only six percent of gang members viewed their friends as being more important than their parents. As will be discussed in greater detail later, in terms of familial relationships, gang members and non-gang members do not differ significantly from one another; both groups tend to be satisfied with their parental relationships. Finally, chi-square tests were performed on each delinquent peer measure with gang involvement as the dependent variable. As Table 1 reveals, all five relationships were significant. The results substantiate the belief that there is a significant association between having delinquent friends or peers and gang membership.

### ***Relationship with Parents***

Most research on gangs suggests that gang involvement often stems from poor affective relationships between parents and their children (Campbell 1990; Moore 1991), inappropriate parental discipline (Winfree et al. 1994), minimal family involvement (Friedman et al. 1975), and low parental control or monitoring (Bowker and Klein, 1983; Campbell 1990). In order to explore the relationship between family risk factors and gang involvement, the present paper utilized nine relevant Likert type questions. As Table 1 reveals, for the most part, the response patterns between gang members and non-gang members were very similar. For example, in regards to parental discipline, the majority of respondents indicated that their parents tend to nag and yell at them, but do not threaten to slap them. A large number of youth (N = 129) also indicated that they thought their parents were too strict. Interestingly, however, when asked if they would like to have different parents, more than two-thirds of gang members said 'no,' as opposed to only 55% of non-gang members. Most respondents agreed with the statement that their parents were concerned about their future (N = 269 / 95%). However, a slightly smaller number of respondents felt that they could count on their parents if they had a problem (N = 173 / 61.3%). Chi-square tests revealed that eight of the nine measures were not significantly associated with gang involvement.

### ***Acculturation Issues***

Many Asian youth must often navigate between two seemingly bipolar cultures, one that promotes individuality, while the other one stresses familial piety. In many instances, this challenging endeavor can often result in inter-generational conflict between parents and their children (Song et al. 1992). Parents may feel that their children are becoming too 'Americanized,' forgetting values of the old culture, while youth argue that their parents are not 'Americanized' enough, and still act as if they have just got 'off the boat.' This intergenerational acculturation conflict may lead some youth to seek out alternative support networks, possibly gangs. The present analysis used two measures to explore this particular issue surrounding identity conflict.

The results revealed that the response patterns for gang members and non-gang members were very similar. For instance, more than 40% from both groups stated that they did not wish that their parents were more Americanized. At the same time, a little more than one-third of the respondents, both gang members and non-gang members, felt that their parents thought they were too "Americanized." Not surprisingly, further analysis revealed that roughly 40% of this particular group consisted of

participants who were identified as being second generation Asian Americans. Chi-square tests revealed that neither measure had a significant relationship to gang involvement.

### *School Experiences*

For many youth, negative school experiences can represent highly stressful events or conditions (Agnew 2001). As minors, their legal status essentially prevents them from dropping out of school. Consequently, many youth may feel trapped in what they perceive to be negative situations or conditions. For some youth, engaging in delinquent behavior may help to reduce or alleviate their strain or stress. As studies continually document, negative school experiences such as poor relationships with teachers and peers can generate high levels of stress, which may lead to delinquency or gang involvement (Agnew 2001; Curry and Spergel 1992; Sampson and Laub 1993). Nine survey items were used to explore the school experiences of gang members and non-gang members. The first four items assess school attachment, commitment, and involvement. The two remaining measures focus on school-related problem behaviors.

In regards to school attachment, the finding seemingly suggest that a majority of gang members, like non-gang members, feel as if they belong in school (52.3%), and many have no intention of quitting school (60.2%). A slight majority from both groups care about what their teachers think about them (57% and 55%, respectively). At the same time, less than one-third of gang members (27%) feel as if their teachers are not interested in them. Chi-square results reveal that measures for school attachment were not significantly correlated with gang affiliation.

For the most part, gang members also reported studying less than their non-gang counterparts. For example, 46% (n = 70) of non-gang members indicated that they study a great deal, as opposed to only 23% of gang members. Consequently, 31% of non-gang members stated that they mostly receive A's on their report card compared to just 9% of gang members. Roughly 10% of gang members reported receiving mostly D's and F's for grades. Unlike non-gang members (56%), roughly 70% of gang members mentioned that they do not actively participate in extracurricular activities such as clubs.

Research repeatedly shows that adolescents who are involved in delinquent or problem behaviors are more likely to be associated with gangs than youths who are not involved in those behaviors (Curry and Spergel 1992; Thornberry 1998). In the present sample, over 50.8% of gang members (n = 65) admitted skipping school at least once during the previous year.

Approximately 34 gang members (26.6%) stated that they skipped school four or more times. Similarly, more than one third of gang members were suspended from school. Fifteen gang members were suspended over four times during a single academic year. As expected, non-gang members had lower percentages for suspensions and skipping school (at least one time during the past year), 11.6% ( $n = 18$ ) and 29.8% ( $n = 46$ ), respectively. Chi-square values revealed that school involvement (e.g., participating in clubs) and commitment (e.g., suspension, skipping school, time spent studying, and GPA) had a significant association on gang involvement.

### *Criminality*

One of the most robust and consistent findings in gang research is the observation that gang members are more likely to engage in crime and delinquency than their non-gang counterparts (Thornberry 1998). Similarly, there is also a general consensus among gang researchers that gang members tend to be more extensively involved in serious and violent offenses (Fagan 1989, 1990; Fagan et. al 1986; Huff 1996). Within the questionnaire, respondents were asked ten questions that measured their propensity for engaging in crime and delinquency. The first four questions explored pro-crime attitudes or beliefs (e.g., vengeful thoughts or frustration) that may facilitate criminal behavior. The six remaining questions assessed the likelihood of engaging in various criminal activities, from carrying a hidden weapon to assaulting someone.

In regards to pro-crime attitudes and beliefs, the results suggest that on the whole, a significant percentage of both gang members and non-gang members believe that 'suckers' should not be taken advantage of (58% and 67%, respectively), you should not do deviant things to get ahead (43% and 53%, respectively), and it's not alright to get around the law if you can get away with it (41% and 41%, respectively). Although the response patterns were quite similar, it varied slightly for the question that asked if they routinely get into trouble. One fourth of the gang sample ( $n = 33$ ) indicated that they get into trouble no matter how hard they try not to, as oppose to 11% of non-gang members ( $n = 17$ ). Of the four measures that examined pro-crime attitudes and beliefs, only the last measure (i.e., routinely get into trouble) had a significant association with gang involvement.

As Table 1 reveals, if given the opportunity, a larger percentage of gang members would engage in crime and delinquency than would non-gang members. For example, approximately one-fourth of gang members stated that they would get into a fight with the intent to hurt the other person, as opposed to only 12% of non-gang members. Although a larger number of

gang members reported that they were more at risk for engaging in crime, it is important to point out, however, that like non-gang members, the majority of gang members indicated that they would probably not engage in criminal activities. For instance, more than 70% of gang members reported that the chances for destroying property were slim to none. With the exception of destroying property, chi-square values revealed that there was a significant association between criminal intentions and gang involvement.

### **Summary Remarks**

The present paper provided a descriptive portrait of Asian gang members in the San Gabriel Valley. In the process, the study also compared survey responses of self-admitted gang members to non-gang members in regards to perceived blocked opportunities, relationships with peers and parents, acculturation issues, school experiences, and criminality. For the most part, the results seemingly support existing research conclusions about Asian gangs. Most gang members were adolescents or young adults who felt that they were not being treated in a fair or just manner. For instance, a significant number of gang members believed that society was against them, or that they would have to work harder than other people to make a good living.

Consistent with past research, many gang members also mentioned that they joined their gang because their close friends were already members. Moreover, unlike their non-gang member counterparts, gang members were more likely to admit prior problem behaviors (e.g., getting suspended, skipping school). In addition, although the majority of gang members stated that they would not partake in various criminal activities, they still, however, were more likely to engage in crime and delinquency than their non-gang counterpart.

At the same time, however, the current analysis also revealed intriguing findings that may serve as a springboard for subsequent research. For example, the results showed that a significant number of gang members were college students whose family earned over \$60,000 per year. Future research should examine if the 'model' minority myth discourse has any impact on gang involvement. If so, it would be interesting to understand how these particular gang members balance two seemingly antithetical identities (i.e., college student versus gang member).

The findings also revealed that many Asian gangs consisted of members who were multi-ethnic and multi-generational. Subsequent studies should explore the commonalities among gang members of different ethnic generational backgrounds. For example, what type of values and beliefs do

panethnic gangs espouse? In terms of leadership, do first generation members take the lead? Moreover, do first generation gang members act as mentors to immigrant gang members?

Although it was beyond the present study to incorporate respondents from different racial backgrounds, future studies should simultaneously sample African Americans and Hispanics. By doing so, subsequent research will add important data to the ongoing debate as to whether Asian gang are qualitatively different from other racial gangs in regards to etiology. Resolving this issue will enable researchers to develop appropriate Asian gang prevention and intervention strategies.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables and Impact on Gang Involvement

<u>Respondents</u>		<u>Gang Members</u>		<u>Non-Gang Members</u>		<u>All</u>	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Chi-Square	df						
<b><i><u>Blocked Opportunities</u></i></b>							
<b>Unfair Laws</b>							
9.204**	Agree	35	27.3%	20	13.0%	55	19.3%
	Don't Know	42	32.8%	62	40.3%	104	36.5%
	Disagree	51	39.8%	72	46.8%	126	44.2%
<b>Unfair Job Prospects</b>							
10.831**	Agree	60	46.9%	43	27.9%	104	36.5%
	Don't Know	35	27.3%	57	37.0%	93	32.6%
	Disagree	33	25.8%	54	35.1%	88	30.9%
<b>Society is Against me</b>							
23.658***	Agree	54	42.2%	25	16.4%	79	27.9%
		2					

Don't Know	38	29.7%	56	36.8%	96	33.9%
Disagree	36	28.1%	71	46.7%	108	38.2%

Unequal Opportunities

Agree	43	33.6%	26	17.0%	69	24.3%
10.385**	2					
Don't Know	32	25.0%	49	32.0%	81	28.5%
Disagree	53	41.4%	78	51.0%	134	47.2%

Work Harder

Agree	78	60.9%	48	31.2%	128	45.1%
24.646***	2					
Don't Know	22	17.2%	45	29.4%	67	23.6%
Disagree	28	21.9%	60	39.2%	89	31.3%

***Relationship with Peers***

Friends in a Gang

None of Them	28	22.0%	82	53.6%	110	39.3%
51.826***	5					
A Few of Them	46	36.2%	38	24.8%	84	30.0%
Half of Them	13	10.2%	7	4.6%	20	7.1%
Most of Them	17	13.4%	1	.7%	18	6.4%

All of Them	8	6.3%	0		8	2.9%
Don't Know	15	11.8%	25	16.3%	40	14.3%
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Peers Picked up by						
Police						
None	15	11.8%	72	46.8%	87	31.0%
62.302***	5					
One Friend	8	6.3%	19	12.3%	27	9.6%
Two Friends	13	10.2%	11	7.1%	24	8.5%
Three or More	49	38.6%	23	14.9%	72	25.6%
Don't Know	42	33.1%	29	18.8%	71	25.3%

Table 1. (cont.) Descriptive Statistics of Variables and Impact on Gang Involvement

		<u>Gang Members</u>		<u>Non-Gang Members</u>		<u>All</u>	
<u>Respondents</u>		N	%	N	%	N	%
Chi-Square	df						
Friends Arrested							
None of Them		15	11.8%	74	48.1%	89	31.7%
51.645***		4					
A Few of Them		43	33.9%	44	28.6%	87	31.0%
Half of Them		10	7.9%	2	1.3%	12	4.3%
Most of Them		21	16.5%	5	3.2%	26	9.3%

All of Them	10	7.9%	0		10	3.6%
Don't Know	28	22.0%	29	18.8%	57	20.3%

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Do Drugs with Friends

Definitely	13	10.2%	4	2.6%	17	6.0%
16.730***	3					
Probably	37	29.1%	45	29.2%	83	29.4%
Definitely Not	55	43.3%	51	33.1%	106	37.6%

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Peers Don't Do

Drugs	22	17.3%	54	35.1%	76	27.0%
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Peers More Important

Than Parents

Agree	8	6.3%	19	12.4%	27	9.6%
9.266**	2					
Don't Know	17	13.3%	36	23.5%	53	18.9%
Disagree	103	80.5%	98	64.1%	201	71.5%

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***Relationship with Parents***

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Wish for Different

Parents

Agree	17	13.3%	42	27.3%	59	21.4%
12.399**	2					
Don't Know	15	11.7%	27	17.5%	42	14.7%

	Disagree	96	75.0%	85	55.2%	181	63.9%
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Parents are too Strict							
<hr/>							
.366	Agree	56	44.1%	73	47.4%	129	45.8%
	Don't Know	25	19.7%	27	17.5%	52	18.7%
	Disagree	46	36.2%	54	35.1%	100	35.6%
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Parents Threaten to Slap me							
<hr/>							
.052	Agree	21	16.4%	24	15.6%	46	16.5%
	Don't Know	15	11.7%	19	12.3%	34	11.9%
	Disagree	92	71.9%	111	72.1%	203	71.6%
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Parents often Yell at me							
<hr/>							
.406	Agree	56	43.8%	65	42.2%	121	43.2%
	Don't Know	15	11.7%	22	14.3%	37	13.0%
	Disagree	57	44.5%	67	43.5%	124	43.9%
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Table 1. (cont.) Descriptive Statistics of Variables and Impact on Gang Involvement

<u>Respondents</u>	<u>Gang Members</u>	<u>Non-Gang Members</u>	<u>All</u>
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Chi-Square	df	N	%	N	%	N	%
<hr/>							
Parents are Concerned about my Future							
3.598	Agree	119	93.0%	149	96.8%	269	95.1%
	Don't Know	2					
	Disagree	8	6.3%	3	1.9%	11	3.9%
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Disagree							
<hr/>							
Feel Like an Outsider							
.309	Agree	27	21.1%	33	21.6%	60	21.5%
	Don't Know	2					
	Disagree	17	13.3%	17	11.1%	34	12.3%
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Disagree							
<hr/>							
Can Count on Parents							
1.134	Agree	80	62.5%	93	60.4%	173	61.3%
	Don't Know	2					
	Disagree	21	16.4%	33	21.4%	54	19.0%
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Disagree							
<hr/>							
Parents take Privileges Away							
3.318	Agree	33	25.8%	55	35.7%	91	31.6%
	Don't Know	2					
	Disagree	20	15.6%	19	12.3%	39	13.7%
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	Disagree	75	58.6%	80	51.9%	155	54.7%
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Parents Always Nag							
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.910	Agree	75	58.6%	94	61.0%	169	60.0%
		2					
	Don't Know	20	15.6%	22	14.3%	42	15.1%
<hr/> <hr/>							
	Disagree	33	25.8%	38	24.7%	71	24.9%
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<b><i>Acculturation Issues</i></b>							
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Wish Parents were							
More 'Americanized'							
<hr/> <hr/>							
.102	Agree	49	38.3%	56	36.6%	105	37.3%
		2					
	Don't Know	26	20.3%	31	20.3%	57	20.1%
<hr/> <hr/>							
	Disagree	53	41.4%	66	43.1%	119	42.6%
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Parents Think I am too							
'Americanized'							
<hr/> <hr/>							
1.862	Agree	44	34.4%	58	37.7%	102	36.1%
		2					
	Don't Know	48	37.5%	46	29.9%	94	33.7%
<hr/> <hr/>							
	Disagree	36	28.1%	50	32.5%	86	30.2%
<hr/> <hr/>							

Table 1. (cont.) Descriptive Statistics of Variables and Impact on Gang Involvement



<u>Respondents</u>		<u>Gang Members</u>		<u>Non-Gang Members</u>		<u>All</u>	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Chi-Square	df						
<hr/>							
Active in Clubs							
20.030***	Very Active	15 3	11.7%	24	15.6%	39	13.7%
	Fairly Active	27	21.1%	62	40.3%	91	32.0%
	Not Very Active	36	28.1%	40	26.0%	76	26.8%
	Do Not Participate	50	39.1%	28	18.2%	78	27.5%
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Suspension							
51.953***	Never	63 4	49.2%	133	86.4%	196	69.8%
	1 Time	21	16.4%	9	5.8%	30	10.5%
	2 or 3 Times	10	7.8%	8	5.2%	18	6.3%
	4 or More	15	11.7%	1	.6%	16	5.6%
	Don't Know	19	14.8%	3	1.9%	21	7.7%
<hr/>							
Skip School							
50.905***	Never	27 4	21.1%	95	61.7%	122	43.9%
	1 Time	6	4.7%	7	4.5%	13	4.6%

2 or 3 Times	25	19.5%	17	11.0%	42	14.7%
4 or More	34	26.6%	22	14.3%	56	19.6%
Don't Know	36	28.1%	13	8.4%	49	17.2%

### Delinquency

Do Some Things that are not Right							
2.782	Agree	36 2	28.1%	36	23.5%	72	25.6%
	Don't Know	37	28.9%	36	23.5%	73	26.0%
	Disagree	55	43.0%	81	52.9%	136	48.4%

Can't Stay out of Trouble							
10.283**	Agree	33 2	25.8%	17	11.1%	50	17.8%
	Don't Know	24	18.8%	33	21.6%	57	20.3%
	Disagree	71	55.5%	103	67.3%	174	61.9%

Suckers Deserve to be Taken Advantage of							
.201	Agree	23 2	18.1%	26	17.0%	49	17.5%
	Don't Know	31	24.4%	35	22.9%	66	23.6%

Disagree	73	57.5%	92	60.1%	165	58.9%
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Table 1. (cont.) Descriptive Statistics of Variables and Impact on Gang Involvement

<u>Respondents</u>		<u>Gang Members</u>		<u>Non-Gang Members</u>		<u>All</u>	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Chi-Square	df						
<u>Break into a House</u>							
		66	51.6%	96	62.7%	162	57.7%
10.972**	3						
		28	21.9%	39	25.5%	67	23.8%
		20	15.6%	13	8.5%	33	11.7%
		14	10.9%	5	3.3%	19	6.8%
<u>Steal Something</u>							
		47	36.7%	54	35.3%	101	35.9%
11.967**	3						
		32	25.0%	64	41.8%	96	34.2%

	50-50 Chance	28	21.9%	23	15.0%	51	18.1%
	High Chance	21	16.4%	12	7.8%	33	11.7%
<hr/>							
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Destroy Property							
	No Chance	60	47.2%	78	51.0%	138	49.3%
3.569		3					
	Low Chance	32	25.2%	45	29.4%	77	27.5%
	50-50 Chance	19	15.0%	20	13.1%	39	13.9%
	High Chance	16	12.6%	10	6.6%	26	9.3%
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Take Car Without Permission							
	No Chance	67	52.3%	95	62.5%	162	57.9%
7.563*		3					
	Low Chance	28	21.9%	33	21.7%	61	21.8%
	50-50 Chance	13	10.2%	15	9.9%	28	10.0%
	High Chance	20	15.6%	9	5.9%	29	10.4%
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Get into a Fight to Hurt the Other Person							
	No Chance	40	31.3%	57	37.3%	97	34.5%
16.982***		3					
	Low Chance	25	19.5%	55	35.9%	80	28.5%
	50-50 Chance	31	24.2%	22	14.4%	53	18.9%

	High Chance	32	25.0%	19	12.4%	51	18.1%
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Carry a Hidden Weapon							
<hr/> <hr/>							
	No Chance	68	53.1%	96	62.7%	164	58.4%
8,653*		3					
	Low Chance	22	17.2%	31	20.3%	53	18.9%
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	50-50 Chance	16	12.5%	16	10.5%	32	11.4%
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	High Chance	22	17.2%	10	6.5%	32	11.4%
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### About the Author

Glenn Tsunokai is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Western Washington University. His research interests include disentangling the effects of individual SES, community effects, and race/ethnicity on various outcomes such as crime and delinquency, drug abuse, and medical treatment disparities. Recent works have appeared in Race and Society, Race, Gender and Class, Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice, and Crime, Law, and Social Change.