

What's Sex (Composition) Got to Do with It?  
The Importance of Sex Composition of Gangs for Female and Male Members'  
Offending and Victimization

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**ABSTRACT**

Sex composition of groups has been theorized in organizational sociology and found in prior work to structure female and male members' behaviors and experiences. Peer group and gang literature similarly finds that the sex gap in offending varies across groups of differing sex ratios. Drawing on this and other research linking gang membership, offending, and victimization, we examine whether sex composition of gangs is linked to sex differences in offending in this sample, further assess whether sex composition similarly structures females' and males' victimization experiences, and if so, why. Self-report data from gang members in a multi-site, longitudinal study of 3,820 youths are employed. Results support previous findings about variations in member delinquency by both sex and sex composition of the gang and also indicate parallel variations in members' victimization. These results are further considered within the context of facilitating effects such as gender dynamics, gang characteristics, and normative orientation.

**KEYWORDS:** gangs, sex composition, sex ratio, gender dynamics, offending, violence, delinquency, victimization, victim-offender overlap

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## **Investigating Female and Male Gang Members' Victimization and Offending**

Criminal victimization of gang members has not been as popular an avenue of investigation as examining their criminal offending, but two recent reviews assert the importance of this line of inquiry (Decker, Melde, & Pyrooz, 2013; Fox, 2013).<sup>1</sup> Advancing knowledge about the interconnections of offending and victimization and the ways in which both sex (i.e., identifying as female or male) and gendered processes within gangs shape victimization risk can offer a more complete understanding of important prevention and intervention points for crime, victimization, and their collective aftereffects. For instance, given the retaliatory nature of gang violence (e.g., Papachristos, 2009), increases in positive attitudes about use of violence after violent victimization (e.g., Averdijk, Van Gelder, Eisner, & Ribeaud, 2016), and numbing effects of victimization-induced trauma (e.g., Kerig et al., 2013), addressing gang members' victimization has potential for reducing a host of societal and individual negative consequences. In this paper, we build on prior studies that demonstrated differences in females' and males' delinquency across and within gangs of differing sex composition, to determine the extent to which those findings are supported in our adolescent sample of self-identified gang members and further investigate whether female and male members in gangs of differing sex composition exhibit concurrent differences in victimization levels. Based on prior findings regarding variations in delinquency, we argue that gang members' victimization should similarly vary, though not solely due to the relationship between offending and victimization.

We draw on sociology of organization theories about gender dynamics within groups as well as peer group and gang literature, including applications of social identity theory, on group

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<sup>1</sup> Lauritsen & Laub (2007, p. 66) also assert that the study of victimization is often de-coupled from the study of offending because examining the victim-offender overlap contradicts conventional notions of victims as "good" and offenders as "bad"; this is likely, we argue, to be especially pertinent to the study of gang members as victims.

composition and processes. Generic approaches to understanding group gender dynamics, such as those offered by Blau (1977) and Kanter (1977a, 1977b), theorize that any group whose members constitute a numeric minority in a larger group will have similar experiences, whereby in skewed groups, the numeric minority group is highly visible, polarized, and stereotyped per prevailing notions. Increases in the smaller group's numbers produce more inter-group interactions, less type-scripting of the "lesser" group (Blau, 1977), and enhanced ability of the minority group to affect group culture (Kanter, 1977a). By contrast, institutional approaches (e.g., Blalock, 1967; Gutek, 1985) hypothesize that experiences of numeric minority subgroups differ according to the social significance of their particular characteristics. For instance, given their relative positions of privilege in U.S. society, white males as a numeric minority would have more favorable experiences than a numeric minority group of white females or black males. Institutional theories assume competition between majority and minority group members and suggest backlash effects result when minority group numbers increase: Perceiving the greater numbers as a threat, the majority group takes action to maintain their dominant position (Blalock, 1967). Much organizational research supports institutional over generic perspectives, asserting that it is not numbers, alone, that affect group members' experiences, but rather a combination of the number of each sex and factors such as group member status, gender stereotypes, and the group's normative orientation, goals, and activities (Fairhurst & Snavely, 1983; Gustafson, 2008; Gutek, 1985; Kern & Lundman, 2012; Konrad, Winter, & Gutek, 1992; Rabe-Hemp, 2009; South, Bonjean, Markham, & Corder, 1982; Williams, 1992; Yoder, 1991, 1994).

This theoretical and empirical work on organizations holds import for research on gender dynamics within gangs. In fact, several gang scholars have demonstrated that sex composition of the gang has important implications for the experiences of the gang's members, indicating, for

example, that involvement in delinquent activities varies not just by sex but also by sex composition of the group<sup>2</sup> (Bowker, Gross, & Klein, 1980; Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 1997; Miller, 2001; Miller & Brunson, 2000; Nurge, 2003; Peterson & Carson, 2012; Peterson, Miller, & Esbensen, 2001; Weerman, 2012). We suspect, given these differences, that gang members' victimization may be similarly conditioned by sex and by differences in group composition that facilitate differing group norms and processes. Yet, only a few qualitative, and no quantitative, studies have addressed this possibility (Hunt & Joe-Laidler, 2001; Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 1997; and to some extent Miller & Brunson, 2000), and those studies focus primarily on variations in female gang members' victimization across gangs of differing sex composition. Illuminating the context of these variations, should they exist, is essential in determining how to better target resources to reach specific young people in gangs, to reduce both offending and victimization.

### **Gang Membership, Offending, and Victimization**

The relationship between youths' involvement in gangs and in delinquency is well-established: youths who are gang members are responsible for a disproportionate share of adolescent crime, especially violence (Battin et al., 1998; Esbensen & Carson, 2012; Esbensen, Peterson, Taylor, & Freng, 2010; Thornberry et al., 2003). In fact, a number of scholars have argued that violence is a distinguishing and organizing feature of gangs (e.g., Decker, 1996; Klein, 1995) and that engaging in violence is part and parcel of being a gang member, from some gangs' initiation rites to defensive and/or retaliatory conflicts with other gangs (Decker, 1996; Hughes & Short, 2005; Miller & Decker, 2001; Papachristos, 2009; Vigil, 1996; Ward, 2013). Individual and group

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<sup>2</sup> An important parallel body of research also shows that composition (including sex ratio) and structure of adolescent friendship groups/networks are important for females' and males' deviance (Haynie, Steffensmeier, & Bell, 2007; Giordano, 1978; Giordano, Cernkovich & Pugh, 1986; Kreager, Rulison, & Moody, 2011; McCarthy, Felmlee, & Hagan, 2004; Schwartz et al., 2015; Steffensmeier, 1983; Warr, 2002; Weerman & Bijleveld, 2007).

status threats, including threats of or actual violence, are said to strengthen gang identity and cohesion, resulting in greater delinquency (Decker, 1996; Hennigan & Spanovic, 2012; Klein, 1971; Short & Stodtbeck, 1965). Gang life often involves a variety of delinquent behaviors, from theft of goods and motor vehicles to assaults, robberies, drug use and drug sales, and gang members have higher rates than non-gang or even other delinquent youth (Battin et al., 1998; Esbensen & Carson, 2012; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Esbensen et al., 2010; Fagan, 1990; Thornberry et al., 2003). These higher rates are not due to gangs being simply a collection of delinquent-prone youths; rather, there is a facilitating or enhancing effect of gang context and group process, by which youths' delinquency heightens upon joining the gang and decreases upon exit (Bendixen, Endresen, & Olweus, 2006; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Gatti, Tremblay, Vitaro, & McDuff, 2005; Gordon et al., 2004; Pyrooz et al., 2016; Thornberry et al., 2003).

Because both prevalence and frequency of crime involvement is higher among gang members, it is reasonable to suspect they will also be subject to greater crime victimization. Another line of research has established a link between offending and victimization, demonstrating that those more involved in criminal activity have higher prevalence and frequency of being victimized themselves (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1991; Lauritsen, Sampson, & Laub, 1991; Loeber, Kalb, & Huizinga, 2001; Shaffer & Ruback, 2002). Although causal ordering and mechanisms are yet under-examined (Averdijk et al., 2016; Berg, 2012), one possibility is that offenders increase their risk by exposing themselves to situations of heightened likelihood of victimization. That is, the same situations that are conducive to crime (e.g., the convergence of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and absence of guardians that form the basis of routine activities theory; see Cohen & Felson, 1979) are also likely to be conducive to victimization. Given the greater involvement of gang members in risky lifestyles and behavior

(e.g., Taylor, Freng, Esbensen, & Peterson, 2008), they may also be more likely to be victimized. Although many gang members, both female and male, report having joined their gangs for protection (e.g., Peterson, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2004; Thornberry et al., 2003), after joining, they find that while their fellow gang members protect them from some forms of victimization, such as bullying at school or violence at home, their status as gang members and involvement in the riskier lifestyle associated with gang membership put them at risk for other kinds of victimization, especially violent victimization<sup>3</sup> (DeLisi, Barnes, Beaver, & Gibson, 2009; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Katz, Webb, Fox, & Shaffer, 2011; Kubik et al., 2016; Melde, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2009; Miller, 2001; Miller & Decker, 2001; Nurge, 2003; Peterson et al., 2004; Pyrooz, Moule, & Decker, 2014; Spano, Freilich, & Bolland, 2008; Taylor et al., 2008; Thornberry et al., 2003; Wu & Pyrooz, 2016).

### **Importance of Sex and Sex Composition for Gang Member Offending and Victimization**

Comparisons of female and male gang members suggest differences in their type, prevalence, and frequency of offending and victimization. Although gang females' criminal involvement is lower than gang males', their offending rates are greater not only than non-gang females, but also non-gang males (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Esbensen & Carson, 2012; Esbensen, Deschenes, & Winfree, 1999; Miller, 2001; Haymoz & Gatti, 2010). While male gang members generally experience higher rates of "street violence" (e.g., assaults, robbery) (e.g., Esbensen et al., 2010; Haymoz & Gatti, 2010), female gang members are subject to types of violent

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<sup>3</sup> Some debate has been introduced by a few studies concluding that there is no *unique* contribution of gang membership to victimization (e.g., Gibson et al., 2009; Katz et al., 2011; Spano et al., 2008). Although questions have been raised about this work (see Ozer and Engel's 2011 critique of Gibson et al., 2009), we acknowledge this debate and note that our goal in this literature review and current study is *not* to assert a unique effect of gang membership on victimization, but to assert that gang members' patterns of involvement in risky and delinquent behavior may be related to differential patterns of victimization (by sex and gang composition). That is, we do not compare gang to non-gang members, but rather gang members in different gang types to each other.

victimization that males are not, such as aggressive verbal abuse, sexual harassment and assault (Fishman, 1999; Fleisher & Krienert, 2004; Hagedorn, 1998; Harris, 1994; Heinonen, 2011; Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 1997; Miller, 2001; Moore, 1991; Ward, 2013), perpetrated by rivals or even their fellow gang members (Hunt & Joe-Laidler, 2001; Valdez, 2007). Fleisher's (1998) work, in particular, highlights the verbal duels engaged in between and among the sexes, and females in Miller's (2001) study often denigrated each other in order to uphold the "patriarchal bargain" that required them to go along with the gender oppressions present in the gang context. These oppressions manifest frequently in sexual harassment, demonstrated by numerous studies in which males view and describe females in sexual terms (Eggleston, 1997; Fleury & Fernet, 2012; Miller & Brunson, 2000; Valdez, 2007). Females are not the only victims of harassment and bullying, however; males can be equally disparaging of each other, and in fact, "trash-talking" and otherwise disrespecting other males is a cornerstone of gaining and maintaining one's own respect (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Vigil, 1988).

However, simply comparing females and males overlooks important within- and between-gender variations and fails to fully inform intervention efforts. That is, involvement in delinquent activities (and, we argue, victimization) varies not only by sex, but also, for example, by the sex composition of youths' gangs, which has important implications for the experiences and activities of the group's members<sup>4</sup> (Bowker, Gross, & Klein, 1980; Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 1997; Miller, 2001; Miller & Brunson, 2000; Nurge, 2003; Peterson & Carson, 2012; Peterson et al., 2001; Weerman, 2012). Specifically, the ratio of males to females in gangs creates particular gender dynamics that result in differing levels of delinquent involvement among females and

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<sup>4</sup> In a unique contribution to gang composition studies, Panfil's (2017) research on gay gang-involved men revealed some differences in members' experiences and crime involvement depending on the sexual orientation composition of men's gangs, i.e., the ratio of gay to straight members in the gang.



males within and across different group types. Comparing males in different gang types to each other, for example, one study found males in sex-balanced gangs (i.e., approximately equal numbers of females and males) were more delinquent than their same-sex peers in majority-male gangs (Peterson & Carson, 2012).<sup>5</sup> This finding is in line with propositions drawn from institutional theories of group interaction that suggest males in sex-balanced gangs will engage more frequently in status-enhancing activities (such as violence) to maintain their dominant position in the gang in the face of “threat” posed by nearly equal numbers of females, a threat not felt by males in majority-male groups where females are “tokens” (i.e., few in number)<sup>6</sup> (Baird, 2015; Bowker et al., 1980; Miller, 2001; Miller & Brunson, 2000). Comparing females in different gang types to each other, Peterson et al. (2001) and Peterson and Carson (2012) found females in sex-balanced gangs are less delinquent than females in majority-male gangs, likely because in the former, females’ delinquency is suppressed by males, while in the latter, females are relatively free to engage in crime since their token status poses little threat to the male-dominated power structure. Studies of women in the male-dominated law enforcement profession reveal similar findings:

Male dominated occupations tend to offer higher pay and prestige than those dominated by females, so men have more to lose when significant numbers of women intrude upon their environment...[thus they] will respond to these threats with heightened levels of discriminatory behavior to limit the power gains of the growing minority through harassment, wage inequities, and blocking of opportunities for promotion (Gustafson, 2008, p. 4).

Kern and Lundman (2012, pp. 230-231, emphasis added) reported that the “impact of gender composition varies depending upon the value attached to the particular productivity measure

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<sup>5</sup> Peterson et al. (2001) and Weerman (2012) found males in majority-male gangs to be most delinquent. In Weerman’s study, females and males in majority-female gangs were combined with those in sex-balanced gangs, perhaps reducing offending averages in sex-balanced gangs; results are therefore not directly comparable.

<sup>6</sup> Importantly, these processes may not be mirrored in non-gang peer groups, highlighting the amplification of societal gender norms within gangs (see Peterson & Carson, 2012).

examined...gender composition *consistently matters on those dimensions that generate recognition and reward* both inside and outside police work groups, such as felony arrests.”

Females and males in same-sex gangs have the lowest rates of offending compared to their same-sex peers in gangs of differing sex composition (Peterson & Carson, 2012; Peterson et al., 2001; Weerman, 2012). Findings of greater delinquency among both females and males in mixed-sex groups are consistent with arguments that gender (i.e., femininity and masculinity) is situationally performed (Connell, 2005; West & Zimmerman, 1987) and that the presence of members of the opposite sex creates situations conducive to exaggerated gender performances, as supported by a related set of findings comparing females to males within gang types. In sex-balanced gangs, females are significantly less delinquent than males, while in majority-male gangs, females’ and males’ rates are more similar to each other (Peterson & Carson, 2012; Peterson et al., 2001). These findings suggest suppressive practices by males in sex-balanced gangs, in line with Blalock’s (1967) ideas, and Miller’s qualitative research reveals even more processes at work: Males exclude females from some of the gang’s work because they adhere to gender type-scripting of females as weak and unable to handle certain tasks; and, females may also exclude themselves from some activities, essentially relying on similar gender stereotypes (Miller, 1998, 2001; Miller & Brunson, 2000).

These collective findings lead us to hypothesize that gang members’ victimization levels will vary both by sex and by sex composition of their gangs. If females’ and males’ offending levels vary by the ratio of females to males in their gangs, their victimization levels might reasonably follow the same pattern, owing to differential involvement by sex, normative orientation of the group, and gendered processes and strategies that produce differential risk exposure. In addition to the offending-victimization link, there is basis for this supposition from

findings of variation in victimization based on factors such as group organization and composition. Although gangs generally do not exhibit high levels of organization (Decker, Katz, & Webb, 2008; Hagedorn, 1994; Klein, 1971), variations in organization levels correspond to variations in behavior and experiences: greater organization or more formal structure is associated with higher levels of gang crime and individual member delinquency and victimization (Bouchard & Spindler, 2010; Decker et al., 2008; Fagan, 1989; Esbensen et al., 2001; Sheley et al., 1995). Bjerregaard further found that while gang females commit similar types of crime as gang males, a smaller proportion of females are involved and at lower frequency; however, once gang organization is taken into account, sex differences disappear (2002a), and, in organized gangs, more females than males committed certain crimes (2002b).

To our knowledge, just Geoffrey Hunt and Karen Joe-Laidler have explicitly examined variations in victimization across gangs of differing sex composition, though only for females.<sup>7</sup> Their study comparing females in independent female gangs to females in mixed-sex or auxiliary-to-male gangs revealed that females in the latter types experience *more* victimization by serious violence, verbal abuse, and harassment (Hunt & Joe-Laidler, 2001; also reported in Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 1997). They, and other researchers, suggest this is due to their associations with males through which, for instance, they are unintended victims of violence by rival gang members targeting females' fellow male members; further, they may be specifically targeted by rival gangs to send a message, required to fight female members of rival gangs, or instigated by their male counterparts into fights with their fellow "homegirls" (Fishman, 1999; Fleisher & Krienert, 2004; Heinonen, 2011; Miller, 2001; Nurge, 2003; Ward, 2013).

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<sup>7</sup> Miller (1998, 2001) references variations in females' victimization and also in males' victimization (Miller & Brunson, 2000), but this was not a specific focus of the work.

Differences in groups' normative orientation may also play a role: For example, females in primarily female gangs tend to emphasize the social and relational aspects of their gangs, particularly their friendships and "sisterhood" with other girls, while females in majority-male gangs emphasize the status and economic (delinquent) aspects of gang life and many describe themselves as "one of the guys"<sup>8</sup> (Campbell, 1984; Joe & Chesney-Lind, 1995; Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 1997; Lauderback et al., 1992; Miller, 2001; Nurge, 2003). These differences raise the question of the extent to which youths self-select, or are selected, into particular types of groups. Miller and Brunson (2000), for example, speculated about whether young men's beliefs about women's roles led them to join all- or nearly-all male gangs or whether they adopted those attitudes after being exposed to them by other young men in those gangs, and, similarly, whether young women who differentiated themselves from other girls chose to join gangs where they were seen as "one of the guys." Youths' ability to choose may be limited, however, by the gang(s) available in the neighborhood (Miller & Brunson, 2000), and because gangs have reciprocal ability to choose members based on desirable qualities (Densley, 2015; Garot, 2015). Gender is in play here as well, with some suggesting that males have more power to restrict females' involvement (Miller & Brunson, 2000), although gang females do have roles in the selection process: Hagedorn and Devitt (1999) reveal that 88% of black females and 44% of Latinas reported that females, not males, decided who joined their gangs (see too Harris, 1994). However, in their study, African American females' gangs tended to be more independent from, while Latinas' gangs were connected to, males' gangs, and in the latter, 33% reported both males

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<sup>8</sup> Miller (2002) cautions that females in majority-male gangs who are described as "one of the guys" (by themselves and by males in the gang) are not necessarily identifying their *gender* as male; rather, they may adopt "masculine" attitudes and behaviors (such as violence) to situationally enact masculinity, while maintaining female identity.

and females made decisions and 17% said decisions were the sole purview of males. Thus, even issues of selection appear to be structured in part by the sex composition of the group.

### **Questions Guiding Current Study**

Studies examining the influence of the sex composition of gangs are few, so the extent to which processes of gender dynamics within gangs are validated is still an open question. Crime and violence are common among gang members and appear to vary both by sex and the sex composition of gangs to which youth belong. Victimization is similarly common and varies by sex, but the extent to which these experiences, and the victim-offender overlap, vary by gang type is not fully understood. It is possible, due in part to variations in members' delinquency but also to variations in gang orientation, activities, and gender dynamics, that members' victimization will also vary by both sex and gang type. In the current study, we therefore focus on five inter-related questions: (1) Are previous studies' findings about the distribution of *offending* by sex and gang type (i.e., sex composition of the gang) upheld in our sample of self-identified gang members from public schools in seven cities?<sup>9</sup> (2) To what extent does gang members' *victimization* vary by both sex and sex composition of the gang? (3) Do female and male gang members' victimization patterns mirror their offending patterns? (4) To what extent does the victim-offender overlap differ by both sex and gang type? (5) How might answers to these questions be better understood by placing them in the larger context of the group?

### **Current Study**

The data analyzed in the current study were collected as part of the Process and Outcome Evaluation of G.R.E.A.T. (Gang Resistance Education and Training), a longitudinal panel study

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<sup>9</sup> Although these same data were used in a previous study (Peterson & Carson, 2012), that study utilized a different operationalization of "gang member" (the Eurogang definition, as the study was presented at a Eurogang Research Workshop and published in a Eurogang-generated book) and included just one wave of data (Wave 4); our current study, by contrast, uses the self-nomination measure of "gang member" and incorporates data from Waves 3-6.

conducted from 2006-2012 to evaluate a middle-school-based gang prevention program (Esbensen et al., 2013). Seven cities (Albuquerque, NM; Chicago, IL; Greeley, CO; Nashville, TN; Philadelphia, PA; Portland, OR; and a Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW), TX area location) were included in the evaluation based on three main criteria: 1) an established G.R.E.A.T. program, but no program saturation, 2) geographic and demographic diversity, and 3) evidence of gang activity. Four to six public middle schools were selected in each city to represent the student characteristics of the school district as a whole, and principals at 31 middle schools agreed to their schools' participation. Within each school, classrooms in the G.R.E.A.T. grade level (6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup>) were randomly assigned to receive or not receive the program, and all students in those classrooms were eligible to participate in the evaluation. Of 4,905 students enrolled in the 195 classrooms in the 31 middle schools, 89 percent (N=4,372) returned a completed consent form, with 78 percent of parents/guardians (N=3,820) allowing their child's participation (Esbensen et al., 2008). From 2006-2012, students completed pre- and post-test surveys and four annual follow-ups, with completion rates of 98, 95, 87, 83, 75, and 72 percent, respectively. Because of the purposive selection of sites and schools and the limitations of public school-based studies (e.g., exclusion of private school students and those who had dropped out, been expelled or were suspended or absent on data collection days), readers are cautioned that the study sample may not be generalizable to the population of gang members enrolled in public schools in the U.S.

### **Final Sample Creation**

The current study focuses on a sample of gang youth to examine differences in members' offending and victimization across gangs of differing sex composition.<sup>10</sup> Youth who answered

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<sup>10</sup> We acknowledge potential limitations inherent in using individual-level data to describe experiences that we argue stem in part from group-level processes (the "level of measurement" problem asserted by, among others, Short, 1998). We assert that hypotheses about how group dynamics affect individual-level behavior can be proposed based on theoretical and empirical work from sociology of organizations, peer group, and qualitative

“yes” to the question “Are you now in a gang?” in Waves 3 through 6 were pooled to create a sample of 355 unique gang youth.<sup>11</sup> Missing data on the key variables (e.g., sex composition, victimization, offending) reduced the final sample to 287. Measures of the sex composition of groups, victimization, and offending were also pooled across Waves 3-6 to correspond with the first instance of gang membership.

## Measures

Sex composition was determined by asking respondents to circle one of the following five responses about their group: all male; mostly male; about half male, half female; mostly female; or all female. Due to the small proportion of youth in the mostly female (N = 14) and all female (N = 10) categories, these two groups were combined for analyses.<sup>12</sup> In addition, and similar to Peterson and Carson (2012), males who reported belonging to an all-female (N=3) or mostly female (N = 6) gang and females who reported that their gang was “all male” (N = 2) were excluded from these analyses. This was due not only to the low numbers available for comparison, but also because we did not want to assume that respondents meant, for example, that “all other members of my gang *besides me* are male” and combine them with the “majority-male” group.<sup>13</sup> Overall, about half of the gang members indicated belonging to sex-balanced gangs (50.9%), a third to majority-male gangs (34.1%), and 15 percent to same-sex gangs.<sup>14</sup>

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gang research and that findings from individual-level data can be interpreted within this larger framework; recent examples include Hennigan & Spanovic (2012) and Pyrooz et al. (2014) (see too arguments in Decker et al., 2013).

<sup>11</sup>Wave 1 and 2 gang members were excluded from the sample due to the use in this study of emotional victimization and offending measures not included in the survey instrument until Wave 3.

<sup>12</sup> Combining these categories is also consistent with prior work (e.g., Peterson et al., 2001; Peterson & Carson, 2012), and t-test of means comparisons ensured that combining the two groups was not masking important differences between the two; although females in majority-female gangs had lower violent offending and higher violent and property victimization means than those in all-female gangs, there were no statistically significant differences in mean levels of any offending or victimization types.

<sup>13</sup> An alternative, but equally untestable, explanation is that the respondents may have been sex-assigned female at birth but were male-identified in terms of gender identity (or, assigned male at birth, but female-identified).

<sup>14</sup> To streamline discussion, we include all-/majority-female gangs in our references to “same-sex” gangs, throughout the paper.

Three measures each of offending and of victimization in the past six months were created: violence, property, and emotional. For all items, youth were asked to circle a number from zero to ten or “more than 10.” Responses were truncated at 10 and summed to create each index. The violence index consisted of four items (hit someone with idea of hurting him/her, attacked someone with a weapon, used a weapon or force to get money or things from people, been involved in gang fights) and ranged from zero to 40 ( $x = 9.36$ ;  $SD = 10.56$ ), while the property crime index ranged from zero to 50 ( $x = 10.78$ ;  $SD = 13.45$ ) and included five items (damaging/destroying property, illegally spray painting a wall or building, minor theft, serious theft, burglary). Finally, emotional offending was a single item of having said any mean, threatening, or embarrassing things to other students through text messages, phone calls, emails, or websites, ranging from zero to 10 ( $x = 3.89$ ;  $SD = 4.21$ ). Violent victimization included five items: been attacked or threatened on the way to or from school, attacked or threatened at school, been hit by someone trying to hurt them, had someone use a weapon or force to take money or things from them, or been attacked by someone with a weapon or by someone trying to seriously hurt or kill them ( $x = 6.40$ ;  $SD = 11.07$ ). Theft victimization was two items: having had things stolen from them at school and in the community ( $x = 3.67$ ;  $SD = 5.49$ ). Finally, an emotional victimization index included four items: had mean rumors or lies spread about them at school; had sexual jokes, comments, or gestures made to them at school; been made fun of at school because of their looks or the way they talk; and had any mean, threatening, or embarrassing things said to them through text messages, phone calls, email or websites ( $x = 3.67$ ;  $SD = 5.49$ ).

Demographic variables used in the analysis included sex (respondents’ self-selection from the binary of female or male), race/ethnicity (respondents circled “all that apply” from the options of White/Anglo, not Hispanic; black/African American; Hispanic/Latino; American



Indian/Native American; Asian/Pacific Islander/Oriental; and Other (specify)), and age (respondents circled a number from 11 to 17). Overall, there were slightly more male (56.4%) than female gang members in the sample. Race/ethnicity was dummy-coded into white (15.3%), black (22.3%), Hispanic (51.2%), and other racial background (biracial, Native American, Asian) (11.2%). The mean age of the pooled gang sample was 14 years old.

To supplement our findings with regard to offending and victimization, we used a reduced sample (166 youths who answered all questions) to examine additional measures about members and their gangs, allowing us to explore the normative orientation of the group. Gang youth were asked to “circle all that apply” from a list of possible reasons for joining a gang. We examined each response separately and also categorized the motivations into instrumental (e.g., for protection, forced to join, to fit in, for money, and to get respect) and emotional (e.g., for fun, friend in gang, and brother/sister in gang). While 69 percent selected an emotional reason for joining the gang and 61 percent chose an instrumental reason, it was common for youth to select both emotional *and* instrumental motivations. We therefore created a mutually exclusive measure of joining motivations: instrumental only (19%), emotional only (26%), and both (43%), with 12% offering no motivation. Age of joining ( $x = 12$ ) was measured through an open-ended question: “How old were you when you joined this gang?” Gang embeddedness was developed from a question asking: “Imagine a bull’s eye target represents your gang with a 1 in the middle circle and a 5 in the outside ring. How far from the center of the gang are you? Circle the number that best describes your place in your gang.” Youths who circled a one or two were considered core members in their gang (44%). Next, youths described their gangs by selecting “yes” or “no” to a set of 10 characteristics, such as having symbols or colors (85%), an established leader (74%), and specific rules or codes (74%). To more accurately compare level of organization, we

created a variety score ( $x = 6.5$ ). Finally, respondents identified their gangs' activities from a list of nine options: helping out in the community (32%), providing protection (92%), and also seven criminal acts (e.g., gang fights and drug selling), from which we created a variety score to approximate the amount of criminal activity by the gang ( $x = 3.78$ ;  $SD = 2.65$ ).

### **Analytic Plan**

We conducted analyses in two main ways to examine the key questions of interest. First, we compared within sex across the groups of varying sex composition (e.g., comparing females in different gang types to each other); second, we compared females to males within the same gang types to each other. For members' age, offending, and victimization, comparisons within sex, across different gang types utilized Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Levene's test for equality of variances. When equal variances were assumed, differences were examined using Tukey's HSD post-hoc test,<sup>15</sup> and, when variances were not assumed to be equal, a Games-Howell test was used. Independent samples t-tests were used when comparing between sex, within gang type. Finally, differences in race and ethnicity as well as the victim/offender overlap were examined using Fisher's exact test, typically used in place of a traditional chi-square test when the expected value in a cell is less than five.

### **Findings**

We first describe the gang member sample in terms of the sex composition of the gangs to which they belong (see Table 1). In line with prior research, the majority of females (65% of the 125 female gang members) reported being in sex-balanced gangs, followed by about equal proportions in all-/majority-female (18%) and majority-male (17%) gangs. Also in line with prior research, the largest proportion of males reported membership in majority-male gangs

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<sup>15</sup>Due to the unequal sample sizes across gang sex composition, we also checked significant differences using Tukey's Kramer.

(48% of 162 male gang members), with a smaller proportion in sex-balanced (40%) and all-male (12%) gangs.<sup>16</sup> While there are no significant differences across race/ethnicity, Hispanic youth make up the largest proportion of gang youth in all categories<sup>17</sup> except all-/majority female gangs, and examination of row percents within sex reveals interesting patterns with regard to racial/ethnic distribution across gang types. While females of all race/ethnic backgrounds are most prevalent in sex-balanced gangs, among White females, the distribution is more even than among females of other backgrounds (25% same-sex, 30% majority-male, 45% sex-balanced). By contrast 35% of black females are in same-sex gangs, just 8% in majority-male, and 58% in sex-balanced. Among Hispanic females, 72% are in sex-balanced gangs, compared to 16% in majority-male, and just 12% in same-sex gangs. Thus, consistent with prior research on gang-involved females, a greater proportion of black females than others are in all/majority-female gangs, while a greater proportion of Hispanic females than others are in sex-balanced gangs. For males, the largest proportion of black (53%) and Hispanic (51%) males are found in majority-male gangs, while White males are most prevalent (42%) in sex-balanced gangs. With regard to age, females in majority-male gangs are the oldest and males in all-male gangs the youngest of the whole gang member sample, with significant within-sex differences and a between-sex difference only in sex-balanced gangs, in which males are significantly older than are females.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

### **Gang Member Offending by Sex and Sex Composition of Gang**

We first sought to determine the extent to which patterns of gang member delinquency by sex composition of the gang illuminated in prior research are upheld in this pooled sample of self-

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<sup>16</sup> Because the survey instrument did not ask respondents to report the name of their gang, we have no way of knowing whether females and males within the same gang types are reporting on the *same* gang.

<sup>17</sup> The reader is reminded, though, that Hispanic/Latino youth comprised the majority of the overall G.R.E.A.T. evaluation sample.

reported adolescent gang members from seven U.S. cities.<sup>18</sup> Female and male gang members' frequencies of three types of offending (violent, property, and emotional) are presented in the top half of Table 2, separated by gang type (i.e., the sex composition of the group). For violent and property crime, the findings of prior studies are replicated and support institutional perspectives of group interaction and members' experiences. Within-sex analyses reveal that the pattern from most delinquent to least delinquent (with the exception of emotional offending) among females is those in majority-male gangs, followed by those in sex-balanced gangs, and then those in all-/majority-female gangs. Girls in majority-male gangs differed significantly from those in same-sex gangs on violent offending and differences approached significance for property offending. The exception to girls' overall offending pattern is for emotional offending: females in same-sex gangs reported most frequent engagement, followed by females in sex-balanced gangs, then females in majority-male gangs, although these differences failed to reach statistical significance. Among males, sex-balanced gang members are most delinquent<sup>19</sup> (with the exception of emotional offending), followed by those in majority-male gangs, then those in all-male gangs, though just two differences were statistically significant: males in sex-balanced gangs committed significantly more violent offenses than did males in same-sex and majority-male gangs. For emotional offending, boys in majority-male gangs had the highest levels, followed by

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<sup>18</sup> There were no significant differences across the seven cities in gang members' sex, the sex composition of their gangs, or their victimization levels. With regard to offending, gang youth in Philadelphia reported fewer violent and property crimes than youth in Greeley and the Dallas-Fort Worth area city, with no other significant differences. Given these collective findings, we believe there are no confounding site differences with which to be concerned. We thank an anonymous reviewer for inquiring about this possibility.

<sup>19</sup> This differs from Peterson et al. (2001) and Weerman (2012), who found males in majority-male gangs to be most delinquent; the current findings, however, fall more in line with predictions based on institutional theories and are consistent with Peterson and Carson (2012), despite using a different operationalization of "gang member" and different data waves. Further, in Weerman's study, delinquency rates of boys in sex-balanced gangs were combined with majority-female gangs, the latter of which may have pulled down average offending rates.

those in sex-balanced and same-sex gangs. The difference between males in majority-male and same-sex gangs approached significance at the  $p = 0.06$  level.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Looking within gang types, between-sex analyses revealed that for members of same-sex gangs and members of sex-balanced gangs, males' violent and property offending frequencies are higher than their female counterparts (and statistically significant for sex-balanced gangs), and females' rates are greater than males' for emotional offending (at a ratio of almost 2 to 1). In majority-male gangs, however, the opposite is true: females' violence and property crime are higher than males', and males' emotional offending is greater than females'; differences are small and not statistically significant.

Our next research question is whether these within- and across-sex delinquency patterns are upheld for members' victimization? For example, given their greater involvement in offending, would females in majority-male gangs also experience greater victimization compared to their male counterparts in those gangs and compared to females in other gang types?

### **Gang Member Victimization by Sex and Sex Composition of Gang**

The bottom half of Table 2 presents frequencies of three types of victimization, across sex and gang type. Of note at the outset is that females in majority-male gangs experience the highest levels of the whole gang member sample of both theft and emotional victimization and the second-highest levels of violent victimization (behind males in sex-balanced gangs).

Comparing within sex, the pattern among females for violent and property victimization mirrors the pattern for their offending: females in majority-male gangs are most-frequently victimized, followed by females in sex-balanced and then in all-/majority-female gangs, although only one difference is statistically significant. These relative differences are most pronounced

for violent victimization: rates for girls in majority-male gangs (8.67 in past 6 months) are twice those of girls in sex-balanced gangs (3.99) and four times those of girls in same-sex gangs (1.70). Females' pattern of emotional victimization is opposite that of their offending, in that females in majority-male gangs experience the most (13.48) and those in same-sex gangs the least (8.17). Males' patterns of victimization differ slightly from delinquency. As with offending, males in sex-balanced gangs have the highest levels of violent and theft victimization and also greatest frequency of emotional victimization, contrasting with emotional offending (for which majority-male gang males were highest). Males in majority-male gangs report the least violent and emotional victimization among the males.

Comparing females to males within each gang type, the findings largely mirror those for between-sex analyses of offending. Among youth in same-sex gangs, males in all-male gangs have slightly lower theft and emotional victimization rates than do females in all-/majority-female gangs, and significantly higher levels of violent victimization, which males experience at four times the rate of females in same-sex gangs. For youth in sex-balanced gangs, males' violent victimization rates are over twice that of females' and statistically significantly different, and their theft victimizations are higher than females,' though the difference is not statistically significant. In majority-male gangs, the picture of victimization, as with offending, is quite different from the other gang types: Females in these gangs have higher rates of all three types of victimization than their male counterparts; the differences for violent and theft victimization are small and not statistically significant, but for emotional victimization, females' rates are twice that of males' and approach significance ( $p = .055$ ).

The victim-offender overlap is a ubiquitous finding for general offenders (Berg et al., 2012; Sullivan, Ousey & Wilcox, 2016) and gang youth (e.g., Ousey, Wilcox, & Fisher, 2011;

Pyrooz et al., 2014), and we sought to determine if members' overlap varies by their gang's sex composition. We dichotomized the victimization and offending variables in each crime type (i.e., any instance of violent, property, and emotional) to create mutually exclusive categories: Neither victim nor offender; Victim only; Offender only, and Victim and offender. Differences within and across gang types were examined using Fisher's exact test, and results are presented in Table 3. The most prominent differences were found for violence. Males in sex-balanced gangs (63%) and females in majority-male gangs (62%) were most likely to experience the victim-offender overlap in violence (i.e., to be both victims and perpetrators), while females in same-sex gangs (35%) were most likely to be neither violent victims nor offenders. While there were no significant differences among males, consistent with institutional theories, females in majority-male gangs were significantly more likely than other females to experience the overlap, and females in both sex-balanced and same-sex gangs were significantly less likely than their male counterparts to experience the overlap. Also notable is the proportion of gang youth who were *not* involved as perpetrators of violence: almost 50% of females and 25% of males in same-sex gangs were neither victims nor offenders or were victims only. This was true also for about one-fifth of females (19%) and males (22%) in majority-male gangs and 15% of females and 18.5% of males in sex-balanced gangs, highlighting the importance of intra-member comparisons and countering assumptions that all members of gangs are engaged in violent offending.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Although there were no significant differences, similar patterns hold true when examining the victim-offender overlap for property crime, for which females in majority-male gangs were the most likely to experience the overlap followed by males of any gang type. When examining the victim-offender overlap in emotional crime, however, the patterns differ, with

females in same-sex gangs the most likely to be both victims and offenders, followed by females in sex-balanced and in majority-male gangs. Male gang members were less likely overall to experience an overlap in emotional offending and victimization.

### **Summary of Sex Composition Findings**

On the whole, prior studies' findings supporting institutional theories about the influence of sex organization of groups are upheld in the current study. Females in same-sex gangs have the lowest rates, among the entire gang member sample, of violent and property offending and victimization, a pattern also noticeable when examining their victim-offender overlap. Similarly, and in contrast to stereotypical notions of such groups (but consistent with Peterson & Carson, 2012; Peterson et al., 2001; and Weerman, 2012), males in same-sex gangs are least likely of the males to be delinquent; and, their victimization rates fall in the middle, between males in sex-balanced and in majority-male gangs. Females in majority-male gangs, in contrast to females in other gangs, have been described and describe themselves as "one of the guys" (Baird, 2015; Miller, 2001), free (or at least not constrained) to engage in delinquency and subsequently (or concurrently or previously) vulnerable to greater levels of violent and property victimization (also supported by the victim/offender overlap results). Their high rates of emotional victimization, such as being the subject of mean rumors or lies, sexual jokes, comments or gestures and being made fun of, also hint at the trade-offs young women in majority-male gangs might be accepting; however, since there is no way to know who their abusers are (e.g., male counterparts in their gangs, peers at school), this supposition is offered cautiously. Meanwhile, females in sex-balanced gangs, whose delinquency is ostensibly constrained by males, have offending and corresponding victimization levels that fall between females in other gang types. In these gangs, with a large proportion of females, males are the most delinquent among the



males, in line with institutional hypotheses, and they experience correspondingly high victimization rates.

This latter finding for males in sex-balanced gangs may further reflect masculinity norms and perceptions of females.<sup>20</sup> For instance, it is possible that, due to their larger proportion of females, sex-balanced gangs may be viewed, and therefore targeted, by rival gangs as being weaker and less able to defend themselves. Given the protective views expressed by young men in sex-balanced gangs (see, e.g., Miller & Brunson, 2000), they may expose themselves to higher risk of and actual victimization to reduce the risk for their fellow female gang members who are seen as vulnerable. This may also set them up for greater involvement in retaliatory violence. In fact, other research identifies victimization as a masculinity challenge that requires a reaction, especially in the presence of others (e.g., Anderson, 1999), and even more so if females are present (Heber, 2017), as protection/defense of women is part of masculinity ideals. Whether males' high levels of violence are reactive (e.g., in response to high levels of victimization) or proactive (possibly leading to victimization) remains to be determined,<sup>21</sup> but it is the case that males feel pressure to adhere more rigidly to gang values and engage in activities to demonstrate loyalty, respond to external threats, put in work, and defend gang status (Baird, 2015; Durán, 2013; Miller & Brunson, 2000).

While amplification of societal gender norms and suppressive practices by males in sex-balanced gangs may certainly be part of the explanation for these findings, we note that this is by no means the whole story, since such an explanation leaves out agentic actions on the part of

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<sup>20</sup> We thank the anonymous reviewer who encouraged us to further explore this finding.

<sup>21</sup> To explore this issue, we looked at the subset of males who reported membership in sex-balanced gangs at two time points (N=55), predicting their time 2 offending with time 1 victimization and vice versa. While these results suggest the relationship is stronger when victimization predicts offending than when offending predicts victimization, tests for equality of coefficients (Clogg et al., 1995) indicate statistically significant differences only for property (not violent or emotional) victimization and offending.

females. Beyond the explanations provided by institutional theories of group gender dynamics, Miller's work (as well as work on coproduction of masculinity and femininity; Baird, 2015; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) relays another mechanism that may be at work to help explain differences in offending and victimization, especially between females in different gang types. Females in Miller's (2001) study described situations in which they used their gender to exclude themselves from certain kinds of criminal activity, especially violence, and this also served to protect them from the victimizing fall-out of such activity; the male-dominated status hierarchies meant that females had more freedom to decline participation, relying on gender stereotypes and males' views of females as the weaker sex (Miller & Brunson, 2000). These processes may be more apparent for females in sex-balanced gangs, who are also more likely to have their activities constrained by their male counterparts, than for females in majority-male gangs. For the latter, their desire to be seen as "one of the guys," and not type-scripted as weak and in need of protection, likely competes with their desire for self-preservation.<sup>22</sup> Females in majority-male gangs are more "free to deviate," but may also receive less protection, while females in sex-balanced gangs accept the "patriarchal bargain," trading some freedom for some protection.

Our quantitative data do not allow us to examine these more nuanced gendered processes within gangs and as mentioned previously, our individual-level findings can reveal only patterns in the data, explanations for which must be suggested by placing them in context of the larger research literatures. We are able with our data, however, to conduct additional analyses to provide more insight to the discussion of differences in females' and males' offending and victimization experiences across gang type, and we turn now to those supplementary analyses.

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<sup>22</sup> An alternative, or addition, to this perspective is the fact that some females just "like to fight": e.g., female gang members in Hagedorn and Devitt's (1999) study described their affinity for fighting, mostly over respect and gang-related representation. Being in majority-male gangs may offer young women space to escape societal gendered constraints and expectations and engage in what would be societally-viewed as non-normative behaviors.

## **Normative Context of the Gang by Sex and Sex Composition**

A look at additional measures allows investigation into the normative orientation of the group, providing additional context for a deeper understanding of our findings regarding offending and victimization. Vigil (1988, p. 421) argues that “gang norms help shape what a person thinks about himself and others and provides models for how to look and act.” Similarly, Hennigan and Spanovic’s (2012, p. 132) findings supported their assertion that “[a]mong gang members, one would expect to find more correspondence between an individual’s behavior and the gang’s behavioral norms when social identification with the gang is high.” From a social identity perspective, then, if the gang’s identity and norms are more deviance-oriented and, according to studies on gang organization, the organizational characteristics of the gang support this (e.g., greater organization is associated with greater group and member delinquency), we might expect to find that individual gang members’ crime and victimization are similarly higher (Pyrooz et al., 2014). We are unable to directly examine our respondents’ levels of social identification with their gangs, but can get a sense of how much they may adopt gang norms and behave according to gang expectations by examining their motivations for and age at joining the gang, core vs. fringe membership, and their gang’s organizational characteristics and activities. For these analyses, the sample is restricted to the subsample ( $n = 166$ )<sup>23</sup> who answered questions about sex composition, offending, and victimization and also provided valid responses to these additional measures. While we report results of significance tests, the numbers become small when breaking findings down by both sex and sex composition of the gang, so results should be viewed with this caveat in mind.

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<sup>23</sup> Analyses of the distribution of demographic characteristics, offending, and victimization were re-run with this smaller sample and the same general pattern of findings from the larger sample ( $n = 287$ ) was upheld, providing confidence that findings from the subsample might be applicable also to the larger gang member sample.

The general picture portrayed in Tables 4 and 5 is that of same-sex gangs being more socially oriented, less organized, and less delinquent. Of all gang members in our sample, females and males in same-sex gangs were the oldest when they joined their gangs and the most likely (70% or more) to report being core members of their gangs (see Table 4). Notably, and consistent with institutional theories, just one-third of females in sex-balanced gangs considered themselves core members, compared to about 60% of males in those gangs. The reason given by the largest proportion of girls in same-sex gangs for having joined their gangs is “for fun” (60%) followed by equal proportions (20%) having joined for protection and because either a sibling or a friend was in the gang.<sup>24</sup> These more “social” reasons are captured also in the mutually-exclusive categories of motivations: 63% of females in same-sex gangs gave only emotional reasons for joining. Among males in same-sex gangs, reasons appeared more instrumental in nature: 63% noted protection and respect, 50% named money and fun, and overall, 38% gave only instrumental reasons with the remainder (63%) giving both instrumental and emotional reasons. Differences in motivations were not statistically significant between males in different gang types (with the exception that males in same-sex gangs were most likely and males in majority-male gangs least likely to give any instrumental reasons), but males in same-sex gangs were significantly more likely than their female counterparts to have joined for respect.

Females and males in same-sex gangs were generally the least likely to report their gangs had a number of organizational characteristics (see individual items and composite index in top half of Table 5), and, consistent with the idea of the groups’ more social—or less delinquent—orientation, they were generally the least likely of all gang youth to report their gangs’ involvement in a variety of offenses. Females in all/majority-female gangs were significantly

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<sup>24</sup> Although these gangs may be largely social in nature, the protective function of the group is evident: 100 percent of females in same-sex gangs reported that their gangs provide protection for each other (see Table 5).

less likely than other females to indicate that their gangs had specific roles for members, symbols or colors, or specific roles for boys and to report that their gangs stole things or sold marijuana or other illegal drugs (bottom half of Table 5); they differed significantly from females in majority-male gangs on both the gang characteristics and activities indices. Among males, there was just one significant difference in gang characteristics, and no significant differences for gang crime.

INSERT TABLES 4 and 5 ABOUT HERE

In contrast to females in same-sex gangs, females in majority-male gangs were the youngest of the entire gang member sample when they joined their gangs (Table 4). The most common reasons for gang-joining given by these females were having a sibling in the gang (50%, a significant difference from males in majority-male gangs), “to get respect,” and because a friend was in (44% each); while respect appeared a less important motivation for females in other gang types, it was a top selection among males in all gang types. Females in majority-male gangs reported the highest levels of gang organization (7.63 out of 10 for the variety score, significantly different from females in same-sex gangs and their male counterparts in majority-male gangs) and were the most likely of all gang members to report their gangs had established leaders, regular meetings (both significantly different from males in majority-male gangs), specific roles, and symbols or colors (the latter two different from females in other gang types) (Table 5). Finally, females in majority-male gangs reported the highest gang crime variety score (5.31, significantly greater than females in other gangs and males in majority-male gangs), and were most likely to report their gangs’ participation in every measure of gang crime, particularly drug selling, with 94 percent reporting that their gangs sold marijuana and other illegal drugs. Also mirroring the patterns for individual members’ delinquency and victimization, a greater proportion of males in sex-balanced than in other gangs reported various organizational

characteristics, and they were somewhat more likely to report their gang's involvement in various criminal activities, though no differences reached statistical significance for males. Females in sex-balanced gangs and males in majority-male gangs fell in the middle on gang characteristics and activities.

Delinquency appears, therefore, to be a less normative feature of same-sex gangs for both females and males and a more normative feature of mixed-sex groups, in concert with peer group research (e.g., Giordano, 1978; McCarthy, Felmlee, & Hagan, 2004; Warr, 1996, 2002; but see Weerman & Hoeve, 2012); and, these normative features appear to have implications for youths' victimization experiences as well. Our results are consistent with Bjerregaard's (2002a, 2002b) findings that adolescent females and males in more organized gangs are more delinquent than those in less organized gangs. They are also generally consistent with and extend the work of Peterson et al. (2001) regarding differences in gangs' organization and activities across sex composition of groups. The variations in members' victimization by the sex composition of the gang make further sense when placed in the context of these other differences across gang type.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings from our analyses of gang member demographics, offending, and victimization, coupled with the findings of additional analyses of members' reasons for joining and their gangs' characteristics and activities, paint a picture of clear differences between gangs of differing sex composition and support institutional theories' arguments that members' experiences differ by both sex and sex composition. Specifically, females in majority-male gangs are most likely among females to be both perpetrators and victims (even more so than males in those gangs), and among males, those in sex-balanced gangs are most frequently offenders and victims. Institutional theories submit that in more sex-balanced groups, the socially dominant group will

actively inhibit the opportunities for the lesser group to gain status or engage in activities that embody the normative values of the group (Blalock, 1967; Gutek, 1985); in sex-balanced gangs, this can mean that females are left out of (or use their gender to excuse themselves from) criminal activities (especially violence) and are concomitantly less at risk of victimization. By contrast, generic theories suggest that as the number of females in a group increases, their ability to affect the culture of the group increases (Blau, 1977); our findings fail to support this notion, as this would mean that males in sex-balanced gangs would exhibit lower levels of delinquency (and, lower than males in majority-male gangs).

The findings described herein support and extend previous work on sex composition of gangs. Although our numbers are small and not all of the differences are statistically significant, the patterns of offending largely match those in prior studies (Miller, 2001; Peterson et al., 2001; Weerman, 2012), and the current study introduces the possibility that victimization experiences follow a similar pattern, varying by both sex and sex composition of the group. Further work is necessary to determine the extent to which these variations in victimization are merely a function of members' variations in delinquency involvement (e.g., their routine activities or lifestyles, adherence to street code) or are additionally related to other factors/mechanisms (see Berg, 2012; Wu & Pyrooz, 2016). For example, consistent with prior research (e.g., Hunt & Joe-Laidler, 2001), we found females in same-sex gangs have lower victimization rates than females in gangs with males, and previous research suggests the latter's higher rates are due to young women being in treacherous situations as a result of their associations with males; however, our study further delineates these gang types into sex-balanced and majority-male and finds additional processes may be at work, as females in the former type have lower rates than the latter (i.e., it is not just the exposure to victimization based on males' criminal involvement, but due in part to

females' own engagement). Females' agency in participating or withdrawing from dangerous circumstances should be investigated, as well as the interplay with constraining attitudes or behaviors exhibited by their male counterparts (Miller & Brunson, 2000). Our supplemental analyses suggest that the group organization, process, and normative context may play a role, consistent with some prior research (Decker et al., 2008; Hennigan & Spanovic, 2012; Pyrooz et al., 2013): youths who described their gangs as more organized and crime-involved had higher levels of delinquency and victimization themselves. This may be indicative of members' adherence to the group's values and norms, for instance valuing involvement in crime and violence with lower regard for personal safety (i.e., depersonalization), but because we lack a specific measure of social identity, this speculation awaits additional research. Our finding of intra-gang type variation in the victim-offender overlaps suggests that strength of identification (and factors that increase or decrease social identity) may be an essential element to understanding variations in both offending and victimization within gangs. Further, learning why and how some self-identified gang members avoid crime, violence, and victimization can provide unique insights for prevention and intervention efforts, as well as an important reminder that not all gang members are the same (see too Wu & Pyrooz, 2016).

Our inclusion of emotional offending and victimization provides a unique look at experiences that appear also to vary by both sex and gang type. In the case of victimization, we are, unfortunately, not able to determine the source of the victimization—for example, who is attacking or verbally harassing/abusing the youth? Is it youths within their own gangs, youths in rival gangs, non-gang peers, etc.? Determining this in future research could provide better guidance to efforts at lessening these problems for young people in gangs. We know from extant research that verbal harassment and bullying are relatively common among adolescents (U.S.



Department of Education, 2016; Zhang, Musu-Gillette & Ouderkerk, 2016), and our findings cannot speak to whether such emotional victimization is more common for youths in gangs than in other kinds of youth peer groups; research comparing gang and non-gang peer groups could illuminate any differences and help determine whether gangs are qualitatively different entities in this regard, as in the realm of physical violence.

Our findings support suggestions that policies and programs to reduce victimization should be coupled with policies to reduce offending “in order to provide a more effective reduction in both rates of victimization and offending” (Lauritsen & Laub, 2007, p. 69; Pyrooz et al., 2014), especially for gang-involved youth for whom the victimization-offending overlap is significant. Understanding variations by sex and group type are essential, however, as the victim-offender overlap is not consistent for all gang members and not all are exposed to the same risk; prior studies simply comparing females to males, for example, mask important within-gender heterogeneity that can be unveiled by examining differential experiences across gang types. Our study indicates, for example, that females in majority-male gangs and males in sex-balanced gangs may be most in need and benefit most, given their heightened levels of both victimization and offending. As acknowledged at the outset, societal concern for gang members as victims lags behind concern for gang members as offenders, but given interconnections between the two, addressing gang members’ victimization has potential for reducing violence as well. For youth who have already experienced disproportionate exposure to violence in their homes and neighborhoods, victimization can be further traumatizing and lead to more negative outcomes (Kerig et al., 2013; Quinn et al., 2017), highlighting the need for trauma-informed approaches, and specific targeting of those most likely to experience the victim-offender overlap. Understanding interconnected cycles of offending and victimization points to specific

interventions such as Cure Violence (formerly CeaseFire Chicago) and other harm-reduction strategies that seek to decrease retaliatory violence between individuals and groups both proactively and reactively (Skogan et al., 2008; Webster et al., 2012; Whitehill, Webster, & Vernick, 2013). We can also address victimization experiences, including bullying (Shelley & Peterson, nd), that bring some youth to gangs in the first place, give attention to youths' risky lifestyles/routine activities (especially as they pertain to social identification with gang values, which may vary by sex and gang type), and, importantly, address gendered relationships to promote healthy and more balanced interactions between males and females, though we acknowledge that doing so without addressing larger contextual issues (e.g., societal sexism, as well as hegemonic ideals that place gendered expectations on young men to be aggressive and value male-dominated spaces where young women are devalued) merely better equips young women and men to negotiate their immediate social environments and relationships. Acknowledging variations in the interplay of masculinities and femininities in gangs of differing gender ratios allows better understanding of the experiences, including victimization and offending, of females and males within and across gangs and gives us stronger basis for addressing the gendered dynamics that produce variations.

It should be noted that, as with prior studies on this issue, our analyses are cross-sectional in nature, comparing females and males in gangs at only a slice in time, and therefore do not address the question of selection versus social facilitation effects (see too Haynie et al., 2007). That is, the findings as we have described them suggest a facilitative effect of the gang context (in this case, gender dynamics based on the ratio of females to males) on members' behaviors and experiences. It may be, however, that certain kinds of youth self-select into certain types of

peer groups<sup>25</sup> or gangs<sup>26</sup> and/or that entry into gangs, or certain gangs,<sup>27</sup> is restricted (e.g., by males in power) to those who exhibit desirable characteristics (see, e.g., Densley, 2012; Garot, 2015). Or, it may be that both selection and facilitative processes (i.e., “enhancement”) are at work, and these may be gendered in nature (in the peer literature, see, e.g., Haynie, Doogan, & Soller, 2014; Weerman, 2011). Studies by Melde and Esbensen (2011, 2014) demonstrate increases in anti-social behaviors after gang-joining and other research supports this facilitation (Thornberry et al., 2003) or enhancement effect (Bendixen et al., 2006; Gatti et al., 2005; Gordon et al., 2004). Wu and Pyrooz’s (2016) direct examination of the links between gang membership, victimization and offending illustrate both processes, but a larger share due to facilitation. Our preliminary work on this question with the data used in the current study is also suggestive of a facilitation effect (e.g., Peterson, Carson, & Esbensen, 2010), and additional work is underway to help disentangle these competing hypotheses. Beyond this future work, we join others (e.g., Decker et al., 2013; Fox, 2013; Lauritsen & Laub, 2007) in advocating for mixed-methods research that can dig deeper into the gender dynamics, group processes and normative orientations, social identity and gender strategies (including gender identity and performance) that produce differences in experiences and behaviors between and among females and males in gangs of differing sex composition.

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<sup>25</sup> Haynie, Doogan, and Soller (2014), for example, suggest that violent or delinquent females may be motivated, given rejection by peers who scorn their non-normative deviance, to select peers who engage in similar behaviors.

<sup>26</sup> In their research, Miller and Brunson (2000) also note that it is unclear whether youth in their sample self-selected into gangs, or if they adopted certain values and behaviors after they joined; furthermore, the type of group youths were able to join may have been constricted by which gangs exist in their immediate surroundings.

<sup>27</sup> For example, those that are more organized and perhaps able to be more selective, which may help explain findings for females in majority-male gangs.

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**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Full Gang Member Sample (Waves 3-6) and by Sex and Gang Composition (n=287)**

	Total	All/Maj-Female	All-Male	Majority-Male		Sex-Balanced	
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
	% (n)	*Col% (n) Row%	Col% (n) Row%	Col% (n) Row%	Col% (n) Row%	Col% (n) Row%	Col% (n) Row%
	100 (287)	8.0 (23) 18	7.0 (20) 12	7.3 (21) 17	26.8 (77) 48	28.2 (81) 65	22.6 (65) 40
Race % (n)							
White	15.3 (44)	21.7 (5) 25	25.0 (5) 21	28.6 (6) 30	11.7 (9) 38	11.1 (9) 45	15.4 (10) 42
Black	22.3 (64)	39.1 (9) 35	15.0 (3) 8	9.5 (2) 8	26.0 (20) 53	18.5 (15) 58	23.1 (15) 39
Hispanic	51.2 (147)	34.8 (8) 12	40.0 (8) 10	52.4 (11) 16	53.2 (41) 51	59.3 (48) 72	47.7 (31) 39
Other	11.2 (32)	4.3 (1) 8	20.0 (4) 20	9.5 (2) 17	9.1 (7) 35	11.1 (9) 75	13.8 (9) 25
Age <sup>a,b,c,d,e</sup> Mean (SD)	14.01 (1.30)	13.65 (1.40)	13.50 (1.40)	14.67 (1.32)	14.34 (1.17)	13.56 (1.20)	14.35 (1.32)

\*Column percents are within gang type; Row percents are within-sex across gang type (e.g., % of White females present in different gang types)

<sup>a</sup>p < 0.05, ANOVA comparison between females in majority-male gangs and females in sex-balanced gangs;

<sup>b</sup>p < 0.05, ANOVA comparison between females in majority-male gangs and females in same-sex gangs;

<sup>c</sup>p < 0.05, ANOVA comparison between males in same-sex gangs and males in majority-male gangs;

<sup>d</sup>p < 0.05, ANOVA comparison between males in same-sex gangs and males in sex-balanced gangs;

<sup>e</sup>p < 0.05, t-test comparison between male and female gang members in sex-balanced gangs.

**Table 2: Offending and Victimization for Full Gang Member Sample and Across Sex and Gang Composition (N=287)**

	Total	All/Maj Female	All- Male	Majority-Male		Sex-Balanced	
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
N	287	23	20	21	77	81	65
<b>Offending</b>	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Violent <sup>a,b,c,d</sup>	8.87 (9.85)	4.30 (7.38)	6.35 (7.78)	12.52 (11.88)	8.18 (9.90)	9.14 (10.29)	12.74 (11.85)
F:M ratio		0.68		1.53		0.72	
Property <sup>d, ^1</sup>	9.84 (12.05)	4.17 (5.58)	6.75 (9.06)	12.62 (16.10)	11.68 (13.86)	9.49 (12.22)	14.32 (15.49)
F:M ratio		0.62		1.08		0.66	
Emotional <sup>^2</sup>	3.65 (4.04)	4.26 (4.27)	2.20 (3.21)	3.38 (3.85)	4.31 (4.57)	4.17 (4.19)	3.57 (4.14)
F:M ratio		1.94		0.78		1.17	
<b>Victimization</b>							
Violent <sup>a,d,e</sup>	6.35 (10.03)	1.70 (3.82)	7.30 (9.51)	8.67 (13.37)	6.31 (11.47)	3.99 (8.55)	10.15 (13.45)
F:M ratio		0.23		1.37		0.39	
Theft	3.63 (5.24)	2.87 (4.60)	2.40 (2.72)	5.24 (7.40)	3.38 (5.45)	3.44 (4.94)	4.46 (6.32)
F:M ratio		1.20		1.55		0.77	
Emotional <sup>^3</sup>	8.83 (10.97)	8.17 (9.61)	7.40 (8.71)	13.48 (15.13)	6.43 (10.18)	9.04 (10.35)	8.48 (11.84)
F:M ratio		1.10		2.10		1.07	

<sup>a</sup>p < 0.05, ANOVA comparison between females in same-sex gangs and females in majority-male gangs;

<sup>b</sup>p < 0.05, ANOVA comparison between males in sex-balanced gangs and males in majority-male gangs;

<sup>c</sup>p < 0.05, ANOVA comparison between males in sex-balanced gangs and males in same-sex gangs

<sup>d</sup>p < 0.05, t-test comparison between females and males in sex-balanced gangs;

<sup>e</sup>p < 0.05, t-test comparison between females and males in same-sex gangs;

<sup>^1</sup>p = 0.057, ANOVA comparison between females in majority-male gangs and females in same-sex gangs;

<sup>^2</sup>p = 0.056, ANOVA comparison between males in majority-male gangs and males in same-sex gangs;

<sup>^3</sup>p = 0.055, t-test comparison between females and males in majority-male gangs.

**Table 3: Victim-Offender Overlap for Full Gang Member Sample and Across Sex and Gang Composition (N=287)**

	Total	All/Maj Female	All-Male	Majority-Male		Sex-Balanced	
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
N	287	23	20	21	77	81	65
<b>Violence<sup>a,b,c</sup></b>	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Neither	13.6 (39)	34.8 (8)	5 (1)	14.3 (3)	14.3 (11)	11.1 (9)	10.8 (7)
Victim	7.7 (22)	13.0 (3)	20 (4)	4.8 (1)	7.8 (6)	3.7 (3)	7.7 (5)
Offender	27.5 (79)	30.4 (7)	20 (4)	19.0 (4)	24.7 (19)	40.7 (33)	18.5 (12)
Both	51.2 (147)	21.7 (5)	55 (11)	61.9 (13)	53.2 (41)	44.4 (36)	63.1 (41)
<b>Property</b>							
Neither	14.6 (42)	26.1 (6)	10 (2)	19.0 (4)	9.1 (7)	17.3 (14)	13.8 (9)
Victim	11.2 (32)	13.0 (3)	25 (5)	4.8 (1)	11.7 (9)	12.3 (10)	6.2 (4)
Offender	28.9 (83)	26.1 (6)	20 (4)	19.0 (4)	32.5 (25)	27.2 (22)	33.8 (22)
Both	45.3 (130)	34.8 (8)	45 (9)	57.1 (12)	46.8 (36)	43.2 (35)	46.2 (30)
<b>Emotional</b>							
Neither	20.6 (59)	8.7 (2)	15 (3)	28.6 (6)	22.1 (17)	14.8 (12)	29.2 (19)
Victim	20.6 (59)	26.1 (6)	40 (8)	14.3 (3)	23.4 (18)	18.5 (15)	13.8 (9)
Offender	13.9 (40)	8.7 (2)	5 (1)	9.5 (2)	15.6 (12)	12.3 (10)	20.0 (13)
Both	44.9 (129)	56.5 (13)	40 (8)	47.6 (10)	39.0 (30)	54.3 (44)	36.9 (24)

<sup>a</sup>p < 0.05, Fisher's exact test, difference between females and males in sex-balanced gangs;

<sup>b</sup>p < 0.05, Fisher's exact test, difference between females and males in same-sex gangs;

<sup>c</sup>p < 0.05, Fisher's exact test, difference between females across different gang types.



**Table 4: Age at and Reasons for Gang-Joining and Positionality for Reduced Gang Member Sample and by Sex and Gang Composition (n=166)**

	Total	All/Maj-Female	All-Male	Majority-Male		Sex-Balanced	
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
N	166	10	8	16	48	42	42
Age at Join <sup>a</sup> Mean (SD)	11.95 (2.47)	12.80 (1.14)	12.75 (0.87)	10.88 (4.21)	11.98 (2.74)	11.50 (2.03)	12.43 (1.93)
Core Member % (n)	44 (73)	70 (7)	75 (6)	44 (7)	54 (26)	33 (14)	59 (25)
Reasons to Join % (n)							
For Fun	40 (67)	60 (6)	50 (4)	38 (6)	42 (20)	43 (18)	31 (13)
For Protection	37 (61)	20 (2)	63 (5)	38 (6)	35 (17)	36 (15)	38 (16)
Friend in Gang	40 (67)	20 (2)	25 (2)	44 (7)	40 (19)	43 (18)	45 (19)
Sibling in Gang <sup>b</sup>	27 (45)	20 (2)	13 (1)	50 (8)	19 (9)	38 (16)	21 (9)
Forced to join	4 (7)	0	0	6 (1)	0	10 (4)	5 (2)
To get Respect <sup>d</sup>	42 (70)	10 (1)	63 (5)	44 (7)	42 (20)	36 (15)	52 (22)
For Money <sup>c</sup>	28 (46)	10 (1)	50 (4)	38 (6)	27 (13)	14 (6)	38 (16)
To fit in	23 (38)	0	25 (2)	19 (3)	21 (10)	24 (10)	31 (13)
Reasons Category							
Instrumental <sup>c,d,e</sup>	61 (102)	30 (3)	100 (8)	69 (11)	54 (26)	52 (22)	76 (32)
Emotional <sup>c</sup>	69 (115)	70 (7)	63 (5)	63 (10)	65 (31)	83 (35)	64 (27)
Reasons Exclusive* <sup>c,d</sup>							
Instrumental only	19 (31)	13 (1)	38 (3)	23 (3)	19 (9)	10 (4)	26 (11)
Emotional only	27 (44)	63 (5)	0	15 (2)	29 (14)	44 (17)	14 (6)
Both Instr and Emot	43 (71)	25 (2)	63 (5)	62 (8)	35 (17)	46 (18)	50 (21)

\*20 gang members failed to report reasons for joining, and the denominator for the mutually-exclusive measure is the total number of members within each gang type (thus, percentages do not always add to 100).

<sup>a</sup>p < .05, ANOVA comparison between females and males in sex-balanced gangs;

<sup>b</sup>p < .05, Fisher's exact test, difference between females and males in majority-male gangs;

<sup>c</sup>p < .05, Fisher's exact test, difference between females and males in sex-balanced gangs;

<sup>d</sup>p < .05, Fisher's exact test, difference between females and males in same-sex gangs;

<sup>e</sup>p < .05, Fisher's exact test, difference between males across different gang types.

**Table 5: Gangs' Organizational Characteristics and Activities for Reduced Gang Member Sample and by Sex and Gang Composition (n=166)**

	Total	All/Maj-Female	All-Male	Majority-Male		Sex-Balanced	
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
N	166	10	8	16	48	42	42
<b>Organizational Characteristics</b>	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Join before 13	62(103)	60 (6)	50 (4)	63 (10)	54 (26)	64 (27)	71 (30)
Initiation Rites	66(110)	50 (5)	50 (4)	81 (13)	60 (29)	64 (27)	76 (32)
Established Leaders <sup>a</sup>	74(123)	70 (7)	50 (4)	94 (15)	69 (33)	74 (31)	79 (33)
Regular Meetings <sup>a</sup>	60(100)	60 (6)	63 (5)	88 (14)	44 (21)	62 (26)	67 (28)
Rules or Codes	74(123)	50 (5)	75 (6)	75 (12)	75 (36)	74 (31)	79 (33)
Specific Roles <sup>b</sup>	73(121)	40 (4)	63 (5)	94 (15)	71 (34)	74 (31)	76 (32)
Roles Diff Ages <sup>c,d</sup>	47 (78)	30 (3)	13 (1)	44 (7)	44 (21)	43 (18)	67 (28)
Symbols or Colors <sup>b</sup>	85(141)	60 (6)	75 (6)	100(16)	88 (42)	79 (33)	91 (38)
Roles for Girls	51 (85)	20 (2)	38 (3)	63 (10)	46 (22)	52 (22)	62 (26)
Roles for Boys <sup>b</sup>	54 (90)	10 (1)	50 (4)	63 (10)	56 (27)	52 (22)	62 (26)
Gang Organization <sup>e,^</sup> (Variety, 0-10)	6.47 (2.86)	4.5 (2.72)	5.25 (2.96)	7.63 (1.96)	6.06 (3.02)	6.38 (2.53)	7.29 (2.97)
<b>Activities</b>							
Help in Community	32 (53)	20 (2)	38 (3)	31 (5)	33 (16)	31 (13)	33 (14)
Provide Protection	92 (152)	100 (10)	75 (6)	94 (15)	90 (43)	93 (39)	93 (39)
Fight other Gangs	81 (135)	70 (7)	50 (4)	88 (14)	85 (41)	79 (33)	86 (36)
Steal Things <sup>b</sup>	48 (79)	20 (2)	38 (3)	69 (11)	50 (24)	41 (17)	52 (22)
Rob People <sup>d</sup>	40 (67)	20 (2)	38 (3)	56 (9)	42 (20)	29 (12)	50 (21)
Steal Cars	39 (64)	20 (2)	38 (3)	56 (9)	33 (16)	36 (15)	45 (19)
Sell Marijuana <sup>a,b,d</sup>	59 (98)	20 (2)	50 (4)	94 (15)	60 (29)	45 (19)	69 (29)
Sell other Drugs <sup>a,b</sup>	55 (91)	20 (2)	38 (3)	94 (15)	58 (28)	45 (19)	57 (24)
Damage Property	57 (94)	30 (3)	50 (4)	75 (12)	56 (27)	52 (22)	62 (26)
Gang Crime <sup>e,f,g</sup> (Variety Score, 0-7)	3.78 (2.65)	2.00 (2.45)	3.00 (3.38)	5.31 (1.89)	3.85 (2.57)	3.26 (2.69)	4.21 (2.57)

<sup>a</sup>p < .05, Fisher's exact test, difference between females and males in majority-male gangs;

<sup>b</sup>p < .05, Fisher's exact test, difference between females across different gang types;

<sup>c</sup>p < .05, Fisher's exact test, difference between males across different gang types;

<sup>d</sup>p < .05, Fisher's exact test, difference between females and males in sex-balanced gangs.

<sup>e</sup>p < .05, ANOVA comparison between females in majority-male gangs and females in same-sex gangs;

<sup>f</sup>p < .05, ANOVA comparison between females in majority-male gangs and females in sex-balanced gangs;

<sup>g</sup>p < .05, t-test between females and males in majority-male gangs;

<sup>^</sup>p=0.06, t-test between females and males in majority-male gangs.