A Cross-Sectional Approach to Institutional Anomie and Gang-Related Homicide

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A CROSS-SECTIONAL APPROACH TO INSTITUTIONAL ANOMIE AND GANG-RELATED HOMICIDE

by

Michael T. Klemp-North

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology
Advisor: Charles Crawford, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
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Gangs have recently migrated from major metropolitan areas to suburban and rural communities throughout the United States (Maxson 1998; NAIGA 2005). This migration creates a need for further research and understanding of the gang phenomenon in the United States. One commonly studied aspect of gangs is their propensity to participate in homicide and violent behavior (e.g., Curry and Spergel 1988; Decker and Curry 2002). This tendency has been tested and written about in the literature; however, none of the research addresses the migration and dispersion of gangs throughout states. Therefore, new approaches are needed to better understand gangs and their behavior outside of urban areas.

This study is the first state-level test of gang homicide variation. Previous gang homicide studies incorporated structural level variables; these, however, were limited to metropolitan and urban areas. In addition, the inclusion of structural level variables was commonly without an appropriate theoretical framework able to explain variation in gang homicide rates across states. Messner and Rosenfeld’s (2007) institutional anomie theory provides this framework incorporating the interaction between the cultural ethos and social institutions of states.
Gang homicides, as reported in the Uniform Crime Report Supplementary Homicide Reports from 2000, are used as the dependent variable in the multiple regression models. Cultural ethos is measured through economic decommodification, and education, polity, family, and religion are included as structural measures. Characteristics of a state's population are also included in the regression. These characteristics include: age structure, urban population, minority population, new immigrants, and incarcerated drug offenders. Additive and interactive relationships are tested using multiple regression.

The results of the present study do not provide support for the theoretical model. Support was not found in either the interactive or additive models for any of the structural or cultural theoretical measures. Urban population and the state's age structure did provide empirical support in both the additive and interactive models. Race and immigrant status, as well as drug incarceration rates, did not have empirical support. This study concludes with an in-depth discussion of the unexpected findings, limitations, and future research ideas.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this project and degree does not come without a great deal of support, guidance, and assistance in multiple ways from numerous people. Throughout this project, I have been fortunate to have friends, colleagues, family, students, and mentors around me. This is my opportunity to thank them in a public manner; however, my appreciation goes beyond the words on these pages.

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The final stage involved my committee, chaired by Dr. Charles Crawford, who stepped in at a time of great stress and anxiety in my writing and life. Dr. Crawford provided a kind, open, productive ear to the revisions and finalization of the project’s model. I would like to thank Dr. Greg Howard for introducing me to doctoral studies, institutional anomie, and the “social function of the fool” philosophy. Dr. Davidson stepped in at a time of need for my committee and provided crucial ideas, in both our independent readings and discussions. Dr. Orbe agreed to sit on the committee as an
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introduced me to a wider research agenda—Dumela Mark.

I would also like to thank my colleagues and students at Ferris State University,
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Like many people who are successful in life and face major obstacles, there is a
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family, who in multiple ways did things that made this journey and project successful.
Gary and Gloria were willing to have Rachel and the girls stay during my most busy and
stressful times. Anda and Joe were there for Rachel and the girls when they were in
Wisconsin. Steve provided an ear for my long drives home from Kalamazoo.

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that these words do not capture it. To each of you, thank you for the love and dedication
you gave.

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During the journey, you were a single mother more times than anyone realizes. You put
up with long hours and stress, at times greater than I faced. It has made me aware of how fortunate I truly am. I love you and promise to be there for whatever next goal you want to achieve.

Finally, I dedicate this to my girls, Lexi and Lia, as well as to those who may be unknown today . . .

Michael T. Klemp-North
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Gangs and Gang Homicide in the United States

The gang phenomenon in the United States has changed over the past 150 years. The National Youth Gang Center (2007) reports during the past 10 years there is a yearly average of 25,000 gangs with approximately 750,000 members. One key difference in the gang phenomenon is the location of gangs. Traditionally gangs have been an urban phenomenon, but recent gang research reveals rural and suburban jurisdictions are seeing increased problems (e.g., Maxson 1998; Mays, Fuller, and Winfree 1994; Wells and Weisheit 2001). Howell, Egley, and Gleason (2002) reviewed the National Youth Gang Surveys and found that in the early to mid-1990s a higher percentage of rural counties, smaller cities, and suburban counties began to report onset of gang problems. The National Youth Gang Survey reports that gang problems in all four geographical categories peaked in the late 1990s (Egley and Ritz 2006). The three-year average for 2002-2004 reveals a decline of gang problems in rural counties, no change in suburban counties, and higher reported problems in smaller and larger cities (Egley and Ritz 2006). A common means to test the gang phenomenon and causal factors are to study gang homicides. Using gang-related homicides as a proxy measure is "the tip of the gang problem iceberg" used consistently to assess the gang problem in the United States (Curry and Spergel 1988:384).
Law enforcement jurisdictions reported over 24,000 gang-related homicides to the Federal Bureau of Investigation between 1976 and 2004 (Fox 2007). Howell (1999) reveals that gang-related killings in 59 cities increased 250 percent between 1967 and 1980; in addition, between 1980 and 1995 gang-related homicides increased at a faster pace than non-gang related homicides. On the national level, the number of gang-related homicides has continued to increase between 2000 and 2006 (U.S. Department of Justice 2007). In 2000 there were 713 gang-related homicides in the United States; in 2006, the number had risen to just over 1,000 gang-related homicides being reported to law enforcement. The continual increase in gang homicides throughout the United States, as well as the geographical spread of gang-related problems make this phenomenon crucial to research. In addition, the migration and proliferation of gang homicides requires the shift of focus from “yesterday’s knowledge of gangs” and approach the phenomenon anew (Klein 2007:xiii). This dissertation approaches gang homicides by building on the strengths of past research and theory while incorporating new ideas.

My first encounter with gangs was during my junior year of high school. Groups of Southeast Asian students began to wear collective colors and displaying hand gestures and symbols. The groups had names such as Asian Crips, Oriental Ruthless Boys, and Menace of Destruction. Thrasher ([1927] 2000) would describe these groups as being “interstitial” in that they formed in response to cracks within the social structures of society. Local law enforcement denied that gangs were present within the Wausau area. However, 10 years later I returned as a probation and parole agent to a community facing drive-by shootings, gang-related fights, and proliferation of gangs and associated members. The police chief’s failure to acknowledge gang problems was a political
gesture in attempts to calm residents, and this phenomenon occurs in about one-third of law enforcement jurisdictions within the United States (NAGIA 2005). Part of the denial may be attributed to political reasons, but another is the failure of academics, criminal justice practitioners, and policy makers to develop a comprehensive, consistent, and valid definition of gangs.

Studying Gangs

A major methodological issue surrounding gang research and theoretical development is the inability to arrive at a definitional consensus. The traditional gang theorists attempt to define these groups focusing on the environment and social-reform concepts (e.g., Thrasher [1927] 2000; Cohen 1955). Thrasher ([1927] 2000) defined gangs as an "interstitial group," forming in response to the failure of social structures within the "gangland" areas of urban communities (p. 5). More recent definitions center on the behaviors and characteristics as they relate to the community; as such, Thrasher's definition is criticized for failing to include a deviant or criminal behavior component (Spergel 1995). Knox (2000) argues that this absence reduces the number of "gangs" in Chicago during Thrasher's study from over 1,300 to 1. Spergel (1995) argues that the definition of gangs varies according to the users' standpoint and the "changing social reality" (p. 16). The dynamic nature of the very concept reveals limitations and validity concerns to studying gangs. This has led to a great deal of discussion surrounding the formation and characteristics of definitions (e.g., Ball and Curry 1995; Esbensen et al. 2001; Horowitz 1990; Klemp-North 2007; Klein 2007; Winfree et al. 1992). This dissertation relies on individual law enforcement agencies' conceptualization of gang-
related homicides as reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Supplementary Homicide Reports (Fox 2007). Inclusion and use of this definitional technique is further discussed in Chapter III.

One of the major consequences of gangs is their propensity to participate in violence and homicide at a greater rate than non-gang members (Decker and Curry 2002). The theoretical explanations and urban area centered research are no longer adequate in understanding the evolving phenomenon of gangs. The formation of gangs initially was attributed to the immigrants, “of the poorer type,” who reside in the “gangland” areas of cities (Thrasher [1927] 2000:68). As gangs have evolved within society, the causation of their formation of them has shifted to a multiple marginality framework rather than specifically based on their ethnicity (Vigil 2002). Vigil’s multiple marginality approach allows a better description of the current migration of gangs from urban communities and mega cities to rural and suburban neighborhoods. Maxson (1998) first described the migratory patterns, “as an epidemic” 10 years ago (p. 1). Migratory patterns continue with new communities confronted by gangs and their criminal activity (NAGIA 2005). The causation of the migration is unknown; however, “Socioeconomic factors, such as persistent unemployment, residential segregation, and the lack of recreational, educational, and vocational service for youth are more likely sources of gang formation or expansion than is gang migration” (Maxson 1998:9). A new approach to gangs should build on this premise of structural factors influencing the patterns and subsequent behavior, as well as incorporate the strengths of previous research and theory.
Gang Homicides

The study of gang homicides is a neglected topic in academic research (Howell 1999). The studies that have been completed focus on distinguishing gang homicides from non-gang homicide at multiple levels (e.g., Block and Block 1993; Maxson, Gordon, and Klein 1985; Rogers 1993; Rosenfeld, Bray and Egley 1999; Tita and Abrahamse 2006). In addition, gang homicide work has been limited to large urban areas focusing on trends (e.g., Block et al. 1996; Maxson 1999). Three studies have approached gang homicide rates with aggregate-level predictors. Curry and Spergel (1988) found that gang homicide rate is related to their conceptualization of social disorganization. Block and Block (1993) found that neighborhoods which were expanding and appeared to be prosperous experienced higher levels of expressive gang violence. They also found that those neighborhoods in a period of decline and disruption faced higher level of instrumental gang violence. Kubrin and Wadsworth’s (2003) findings differed from Curry and Spergel’s; however, they did partially support Block and Block’s findings of a positive relationship between disadvantage and gang homicides. As evidence through these limited studies structural concepts have predictive ability in respect to gang homicides. The absence of a relevant appropriate theoretical framework to capture the diffusion of gang homicides throughout society is evident.

Institutional Anomie Theory

Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) developed a theoretical perspective that focuses on an “institutional understanding of crime” (p. 73). Institutional anomie theory proposes...
that explanations of criminal behavior must not be isolated on the individual level but rather the sociocultural environments where those individuals are situated. Messner and Rosenfeld focus on the interaction between the cultural ethos, and social institutions. The American Dream, as a cultural ethos, produces an environment that “encourages members of society to pursue ends, in Merton’s (1957:134) words, ‘limited only by considerations of technical expediency.’ This open, widespread, competitive, and anomic quest for success provides a cultural environment highly conducive to criminal behavior” (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:71). This cultural environment also dominates the other social institutions weakening their ability to provide social control and socialization.

Messner and Rosenfeld’s (2007) creation of institutional anomie focused on the variation of serious crime rates between nations. More explicitly, Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) argued that the “levels of crime in the United States are produced by the cultural and structural organization of American society” (p. x). The interaction between the cultural ethos and structural components creates the social reality. In essence, the framework creates an arena for modeling gang homicides. The proposition that culture and structure intersect capture approaches from gang theories and gang homicide studies.

Macro-level gang theories have taken three categorical approaches: subcultural, social disorganization, and anomie. The last approach, anomie, stems from Cloward and Ohlin’s (1960) differential opportunity theory and is conceptualized differently within institutional anomie; however, material success remains the central foundation. The institutional features of Thrasher’s ([1927] 2000) social disorganization approach are shifted to strength measures in institutional anomie research. An added component of institutional anomie theory is the interaction of these elements to describe social reality.
Gang homicide studies, as briefly described earlier, have found significant relationships between structural components and gang homicide. The institutional anomie framework provides a model to tie these approaches together and better understand their interaction.

**Dissertational Model**

This dissertational model will use state-level data to capture the cultural and structural aspects of the social environment in relation to gang homicides throughout the United States. The cultural aspect will be measured thorough the level of economic decommodification within the state. The structural aspects will include strength measures of four social institutions: education, religion, polity, and family. These variables will be tested in an additive manner initially as seen in previous institutional anomie research (e.g., Chamlin and Cochran 1995). In addition, the structural and cultural interaction effects will be modeled to test the key propositions of institutional anomie theory. Several control variables will also be introduced to separate the effects of immigration, the drug market, age, and urbanization from the theoretical model being tested.

The use of gang-homicides has an inherent methodological problem. The lack of a standard definition of the term gang reduces the validity of any operationalization of gang-homicides. A consensus is forming that police statistics surrounding gang homicides are an appropriate measure (Klein and Maxson 1987; Curry and Spergel 1988). Testing gang homicide through police statistics still has a validity concern especially with the "changing social reality" and discussions surrounding gangs (Spergel 1995:16). These concerns limit the design to a cross-sectional model in attempt to minimize the effects of
definitional changes over time, while still capturing the ability of institutional anomie to explain gang homicides.

This dissertation will provide several contributions to the gang-homicide literature as well as institutional anomie literature. Specifically, it will provide a cross-sectional state-level study of gang homicide rates within the United States. This state-level study will be the first research using institutional anomie theory to explain gang homicide or the gang phenomenon in general. The inclusion of institutional anomie theory provides a framework for the testing of both cultural and structural variables in relation to gang homicide rates, thereby expanding the previous gang homicide literature. The dissertational model will include previously untested cultural and structural variables in respect to gang homicides including: religion, polity, education, and economic dominance. Finally, this dissertation will contribute to the growing amount of institutional anomie literature by incorporating an expanded conceptual model on the state level. This expansion includes a more comprehensive set of structural variables as well as a more accurate measure of economic domination than previously used on the state level. In addition, the expansion will be the first state-level institutional anomie study to use disaggregated homicide rates, specifically gang-related homicide.

There are three major goals that this dissertation sought to achieve. The first is to develop a sub-national test of gang homicide rates within the United States. The second is to examine the additive and interactive effects that cultural and structural variables have on gang homicide rates. Finally, this dissertation will expand institutional anomie research by incorporating another form of disaggregated homicide into a conceptually expanded framework. To accomplish these goals, several steps need to be completed.
Chapter II provides a review of macro-level gang theory, institutional anomie theory, and the empirical literature relevant to this project. Chapter III presents the conceptual model and analytical design. The data sources are discussed, as are the measurements used to capture the theoretical concepts within institutional anomie theory. Chapter IV will present the findings of the regression models. Finally, in Chapter V, I discuss the findings, limitations of the study, and directions for future institutional anomie and gang research.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is not only true that the habitat makes gangs, but what is more practical [sic] importance, is the habitat which determines whether or not their activities shall assume those perverse forms in which they become a menace to the community.

—Robert Park

Robert Park (1927:iv) theorized that gangs and their behaviors are influenced by the environment and social characteristics of their surroundings rather than individual factors. Individual-level factors have been the primary focus of most of work on gangs during the past 20 years (e.g., Esbensen, Huizinga, and Weiher 1993; Hill et al. 1999; Lahey et al. 1999; Thornberry et al. 2003). However, Thrasher ([1927] 2000] initially argued, followed by Cohen (1955), Miller (1958), and Cloward and Ohlin (1960), that gangs are a product of the community and culture around them. Thrasher theorized the formation of gangs and their related behavior using a social disorganization approach. Miller (1958) and Cohen (1955) examined the subcultural context within which gangs formed and behaved. Finally, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) expanded on Cohen’s (1955) subcultural concepts and integrated ideas from Robert Merton’s anomie theory. In light of this, there are four main goals for this chapter: first, I review and critique the limited community-level theoretical explanations of gang homicide. Second, I review institutional anomie theory. Third, I provide an overview of the institutional anomie research focusing on homicide. Fourth and finally, I develop the connections between
gang homicides and institutional anomie theory, focusing on the ability of institutional anomie theory to explain homicide and the uniqueness of gang homicide in respect to non-gang homicide.

Gang Theory

There are four major community-level gang theories which focus primarily on the formation and creation of gangs (see Table 1). The initial community-level gang theory was developed by Thrasher ([1927] 2000) for his dissertation work at the University of Chicago. He is the only theorist to specifically address gang homicides through a social disorganization approach. Miller (1958) and Cloward and Ohlin (1960) explain violence associated with gangs; however, this is limited primarily to assault. Cohen's (1955) subcultural approach limits gang criminal behavior to property-related offenses in response to the middle class standards which have permeated society.

Thrasher's Social Disorganization Approach

Over a period of seven years, Frederic Thrasher surveyed Chicago residents and “Chicago boy's work agencies” (Thrasher [1927] 2000:v). This participant observation followed the Chicago tradition and was a first major attempt at understanding the gang phenomenon. Thrasher's goal was to better understand the behaviors of gang as well the neighborhoods they functioned in. The neighborhoods that Thrasher studied were later described by Shaw and McKay (1942). The efforts and results of this are described by Hardman (1967) as “unparalleled in the field of gang research” (p. 6). Thrasher approached gang formation and their behaviors through a social disorganization
Table 1. Theoretical Overview

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Study</th>
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<th>Explanation of Gang Homicides</th>
<th>Spatial Variation</th>
<th>Temporal Variation</th>
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<td>Cohen (1955)</td>
<td>Subcultural</td>
<td>Cultural Social Class</td>
<td>Property-related offense in response to middle-class standards, No specific explanation of violence or gang homicides.</td>
<td>Restricted to lower-class communities.</td>
<td>Unable to explain variation across lower-class communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller (1958)</td>
<td>Subcultural</td>
<td>Cultural Social Class</td>
<td>Assault associated with status and recognition, No specific explanation of gang homicide.</td>
<td>Restricted to lower-class communities.</td>
<td>Able to explain variation, through focal concerns, across lower-class communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloward and Ohlin (1960)</td>
<td>Integrative – Social Disorganization, Anomie, and Subcultural</td>
<td>Cultural Structural</td>
<td>Violence associated with conflict subculture, No specific explanation of gang homicide.</td>
<td>Restricted to lower-class communities.</td>
<td>Able to explain variation, through differentiation process, across lower-class communities.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

framework. Social disorganization theories describe criminal behavior through the failure of informal social control, and neighborhood structural characteristics such as instability,
ethnic diversity, and poverty. In addition, social disorganization theorists such as Shaw and McKay (1942) describe the transmission of "criminal traditions," which were often in conflict with conventional societies' values (p. 174). Thrasher's theory proposes that gangs and subsequently their behaviors are related to the ability of social institutions to provide control. Gangs will form in communities where there is an absence of institutions and control. Communities who have developed opportunities and filled the void present within "ganglands" will have a decreased number of gangs and associated behavior.

Thrasher examined the creation of "ganglands" within the city of Chicago, which "represent a geographically and socially interstitial area in the city" (Thrasher [1927] 2000:6). The use of the term *interstitial* within the definition is key to understanding Thrasher's social disorganization approach. Ganglands fill the areas within the city that come between one zone and another, as described by Thrasher ([1927] 2000:6), "the poverty belt"—a region characterized by deteriorating neighborhoods, shifting populations, and the mobility and disorganization of the slum." The shifting population includes individuals leaving the neighborhood to seek better residential areas at the same time businesses and industries approach the neighborhoods creating a sense of physical isolation from the greater community.

Thrasher ([1927] 2000:6) characterized the atmosphere and environment created within the "gangland" as an "underworld." Formation of the gang stems from this underworld environment. Thrasher ([1927] 2000) defines gangs as

an interstitial group originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict. It is characterized by the following types of behavior: meeting face to face, milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict, and planning. The result of this collective behavior is the development of tradition, unreflective internal
structure, esprit de corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness, and attachment to a local territory. (Pp. 18-19)

Youth join gangs to establish an identity and status in an environment where they can be successful.

Another key cause of gangs is the manifestation "of the economic, moral, and cultural frontier which marks the interstice" (Thrasher [1927] 2000:6). Gangs initially form within neighborhoods as playgroups, referred to by Thrasher ([1927] 2000:9) as "gangs in embryo." Conflict emerges between the playgroups and conventional society.

The conflict arises on the one hand with groups of its own class in disputes over the valued prerogatives of gangland—territory, loot, play spaces, patronage in illicit business, privileges to exploit and so on; it comes about on the other, through opposition on the part of the conventional social order to the gang's unsupervised activities. (Thrasher, [1927] 2000:9)

Youth struggle in vain to obtain a sense of identity and status within conventional society. Failure in this struggle creates the habitat and impetus for the formation of gangs.

The interstitial areas that create the environment where gangs form are described as being socially disorganized and in physical decay. Thrasher characterized the disorganization through a description of the societal institutions and their inability to provide control and direction for youth within the community, resulting in the formation of the "gangland" area.

The failure of the normally directing and controlling customs and institutions to function efficiently in the boy's experience is indicated by disintegration of family life, inefficiency of schools, formalism and externality of religion, corruption and indifference in local politics, low wages and monotony in occupational activities, unemployment and lack of opportunity for wholesome recreation. (Thrasher [1927] 2000:12)

The inability of institutions to provide direction and control, coupled with the crowded environment and social conflict that emerges, are key elements of Thrasher's approach.
Cultural aspects of these areas, and gang formation, are neglected within Thrasher’s framework. Thrasher ([1927] 2000:143) discusses cultural differences present within the geographic areas, as well as proposes that gangland areas could be defined as a “moral region.” Suggesting that cultural issues have a role in the formation and behavior of gangs is incorrect according to Thrasher; rather gangs are a symptom of the social disorganization present in the gangland environment. The gang is seen as specific to the environment around it rather than a cultural milieu; each is unique in its behavior and appearance.

Thrasher proposed these interstitial groups can be differentiated into five types of gangs based on their unique characteristics: the diffuse type, the solidified type, the conventionalized type, the secret society, and the criminal type. The *diffuse type* of gang is characterized by short-term friendships with minimal trust and loyalty. The *solidified type* is the antithesis of the diffuse gang characterized by a “high degree of loyalty and morale and a minimum of internal friction”; thereby it “presents a solid front against its foes” (Thrasher [1927] 2000:21). Groups associating with athletic clubs and other typical adolescent behaviors are categorized as the *conventionalized type* within Thrasher’s framework. These groups conform to the norms of conventional society and their members are often socialized in a manner similar to those living outside of the gangland area. The *secret society type* of gang uses passwords, codes, and secrecy. These organizations thrive on secrecy for functional purposes, such as security or solidarity against others, or simply to imitate other widely-recognized surreptitious organizations like the Mafia.
The last type of gang, the *criminal type*, is most relevant to this dissertation. The groups in this category do not conform to the norms of conventional society, and their members collectively participate in habitual crime. Thrasher subdivided the criminal type of gang into three types. Master gangs are criminal gangs that are successful, permanent, and are "groups whose names alone are sufficient to strike terror into the hearts of the peaceful residents of the districts where they hold sway" (Thrasher [1927] 2000:148). Master gangs have substantial resources and influence within the community. Their primary focus is the production and distribution of alcohol; however, they also participate in other financially motivated criminal activity. The second type of criminal gang is "the ordinary garden variety of criminal gang" (Thrasher [1927] 2000:148). This type of criminal gang participates in a great deal of crime but has fewer political resources than master gangs. Thrasher ([1927] 2000:148) describes one such gang as being one of the "most vicious groups of criminals in Chicago." The final type of criminal gang consists of temporary associations of criminals from the community. These organizations do not have many resources or power within the community, and are frequently dissolving and reforming.

*Gang Crime*

Criminal behavior of gangs is an internal manifestation as a result of interactions with other criminals and themselves being involved in the court system. Thrasher ([1927] 2000) describes this development of gang criminal behavior as "the result of a process of sifting and selection whose final product is a criminal residue" (p. 145). This residue is present within the underworld of the criminal community paralleling the gangland
communities previously described. Gang-related homicide is one specific criminal behavior expanded on within Thrasher's work. Thrasher does not expand on a specific relationship between the environment and gang homicide. Gang warfare is a function of the conflict group; as such, gangs are influenced by strife and thrive on warfare (Thrasher [1927] 2000).

Thrasher describes three different scenarios that result in gang homicide. The first is a result of the external conflict present between gangs. Gangs are in a constant battle with each other in order to survive and expand. Thrasher ([1927] 2000:61) describes this struggle for existence as necessary for a gang “to maintain its play privileges, its property rights of its members.” This external conflict with other gangs frequently leads to fatal interactions with other gangs. Thrasher ([1927] 2000:63) describes gang warfare as being ruthless and reveals that “gangsters kill each other at the rate of about one a week in their internecine strife.” Gangs also use homicide as a last resort to control their own members with death, using the penalty for disloyalty and other serious rule violations within the gang. Finally, between 1926 and 1927, Thrasher ([1927] 2000:147) attributed over 115 homicides of bystanders and victims to gang criminal behavior. Thus, according to Thrasher, homicides result from the normal operation of gangs. Therefore, the variation of gang homicides between neighborhoods and communities is a result of differing numbers of gangs and members, rather than unique gang homicide explanatory factors.

Conclusion and Critique

Thrasher created a theoretical explanation for the formation of and behaviors of gangs. Gangs are a product of their environment, and specifically are due to the failure of
the community to provide opportunities for, and control over, adolescents and young adults. This failure of institutions creates a void for youth within the gangland neighborhoods. The gang provides a substitute institution, providing adolescents and young adults an opportunity to participate in delinquency as means of excitement and fun, which would otherwise be missing from their lives within the gangland areas. Gang members participate in more aggressive forms of delinquency due to conflict they have with other gangs and the conventional society. In sum, “the gang ... is life, often rough and untamed, yet rich in elemental social processes significant to the student of society and human nature” (Thrasher [1927] 2000:x). Furthermore, the emergence of gangs is facilitated by the inability of societal institutions to provide control and direction, which in turn determines the form of youth gangs, ranging from playgroups to master criminal gangs.

Thrasher’s theory is unable to explain gang-homicide rate variation across states, since neighborhood and communities are the units of description within Thrasher’s framework rather than states. Some propositions, such as the effect of ethnic diversity and immigrants, within the framework are better captured on the neighborhood-level. However, Messner and Rosenfeld (2004) argue that these areas, as subunits of larger environments, are unable to “exhibit variation in the structure of institutional rules” (p. 99). The influence many institutions and social systems have on gang homicide rates must be approached on a higher level than neighborhoods. Examining the rates on the state level would capture the unique and distinct interactions of stratification, economic dominance, and institutions.
Culture and structure are conceptually distinct features of "social reality" that need to remain distinct, but both need to be included within an explanation of crime (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:57). Thrasher fails to incorporate the role culture has within the explanation of crime, assuming instead that neighborhood characteristics and institutional structures are more able to explain the presence of gangs and their associated behavior. Subcultural theorists, such as Cohen (1955), and Miller (1958), fill the gap by emphasizing the influence of culture on the formation and behavior of gangs within their theoretical frameworks.

*Cohen's Subcultural Approach*

In *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*, Cohen (1955) proposed that delinquent subcultures/gangs are formed and maintained as "a solution to certain problems of adjustment shared among a community of individuals" (p. 148). These subcultural groups are typically found within the lower and working-class communities of society. Cohen does not provide a clear definition of delinquent subcultures/gangs. The delinquent subculture has a cultural pattern of "non-utilitarian, malicious and negativistic" behavior towards the middle-class (Cohen 1955:25). Youth within the delinquent subculture band together in an effort to collectively reject the middle-class expectations and values that they cannot attain. Their solidarity allows them to gain recognition and status through behaviors and means contradictory to conventional society's norms and values.

Cohen (1955) included two theoretical discussions within his book. The first explains the formation of subcultures in general; the second is specific to creation of a
delinquent subculture. Subcultures "have this in common: they are acquired only by interaction with those who already share and embody, in their belief and action, the culture [sic] pattern" (Cohen 1955:13). Subcultures provide solutions to problems of adjustment within the greater society. Subcultures are formed and maintained by individuals representing diverse groups located throughout the social stratification system in society.

Subcultures form within society through a process of mutual conversion (Cohen 1955). Individuals convert others and themselves at the same time, thus ensuring acceptability of their ideas and solutions towards the problems of society, and creating "group standards" with a "shared frame of reference" (Cohen 1955:65). Cohen dissected the term subcultural to clarify the nature of the new group formed. The group is cultural, "because each actor's participation in this system of norms is influenced by his perception of the same norms in other actors" (Cohen 1955:65). The "sub" aspect is crucial to capture the phenomenon of membership centering on norms that are often in conflict with those in conventional society. In order for the subcultural pattern to persist over time, initial members must integrate new members into the group.

*Formation of a Delinquent Subculture*

Cohen (1955) argued that working-class youth are confronted with status and adjustment issues in relation to their cultural differences with conventional society. Working-class youth have three possible responses to their adjustment problems. The first two are primarily nondelinquent responses; working-class youth can conform to the "college-boy way of life," or accept the "corner-boy response" (Cohen 1955:128).
Working-class youth may respond to the adjustment problem by shifting from the working-class cultural standards to the middle-class ethic. In conforming to the middle-class standards, working-class youth are accepting the "college-boy way of life" (Cohen 1955:128). The likelihood of this transition is low. A significant amount of dedication is needed to overcome the consequences of their class position such as academic, social, and linguistic limitations as a result of their class socialization (Cohen 1955). A majority of working-class youth respond to the cultural conflict by accepting the corner-boy way of life (Cohen 1955). This subgroup does not migrate out of the working-class way of life, nor do they react to the middle-class standards in the manner seen in the delinquent subculture. The corner-boy subculture interacts with individuals facing similar situations, as well as maintains an open relationship with the middle-class in attempts of pursuing some of their cultural expectations, such as employment.

The last subcultural response described by Cohen (1955) is the delinquent subculture. The basic tenet of this subcultural group "is the explicit and wholesale repudiation of middle-class standards and the adoption of their very antitheses" (p. 129). This differs from the college-boy response by completely rejecting middle-class ideals. The college-boy response strives to accomplish the goals of the middle-class and to succeed according to the middle-class measuring rod. Corner boys neither pursue the middle-class way of life, nor completely reject it. Their "culture temporizes with middle-class morality; the full-fledged delinquent subculture does not" (Cohen 1955:130). The delinquent behavior committed by the corner boys is not based on rejection of middle-class norms, "but because conformity to middle-class norms interferes with conformity to corner-boys norms" (Cohen 1955:129). The crucial element of a delinquent subculture is
the creation and maintenance of a culture that is in opposition to the middle-class measuring rod which permeates society.

Youth within the delinquent subculture are dealing with feelings of hostility and frustration towards conventional society. These feelings are a response to the continual comparison of their values and behavior to the middle-class measuring rod. One of the most apparent assumptions is that working-class youth are concerned about their status in relation to the middle-class values and ethic which is surrounding them. Cohen (1955) argues “it is a plausible assumption . . . that the working-class boy whose status is low in middle-class terms cares about that status, that this status confronts him with a genuine problem of adjustment” (p. 128). A sense of status-frustration is formed towards the middle-class measuring rod and persons in society promoting those standards. This subculture’s delinquent response is directed towards the middle-class representatives since they “are the manifest cause of the status problem” (Cohen 1955:132).

The delinquent behaviors displayed by this subculture are not constrained by middle-class morality and expectations; “For the child who breaks clean with middle-class morality . . . there are no moral inhibitions on the free expression of aggression against the sources of his frustration” (Cohen 1955:132). The delinquent behaviors associated with this subculture are an institutionalized response by the group. Responding as a group to the status and adjustment problems promotes solidarity via collectively rejecting middle-class expectations and standards. Status is achieved through an individual’s participation in the delinquent response towards the middle-class, rather than through the achievement of conventional society’s goals typical of the middle-class way of life.
Gang Crime

Cohen (1955) focuses primarily on property crime as the behavioral response displayed by the delinquent subculture. Property crime is the ultimate antithesis of middle-class values and way of life. The destruction and damage of property victimizes the middle-class in two ways. The first is the financial loss of an individual’s property. Additionally, property crime is “an attack on the middle-class where their egos are most vulnerable” (Cohen 1955:134). One aspect of the middle-class standards is the respect one should have for property and others’ belongings. The destruction of another’s property violates this standard and values promoted within middle-class culture. There are both collective and individual rewards for participating in property crime against the middle-class. Collectively, the group reinforces its rejection of middle-class standards by violating the respect others should have for others’ property. Individually, the group member gains status according to his subculture’s measuring rod through participation in the property crime.

Conclusion and Critique

Cohen presents a theory that explains gang formation in terms of a delinquent subculture. Subcultures are formed by working-class youth within the United States as a response to the status and adjustment problems they experience. These status and adjustment problems are a result of the continual evaluation of working-class youth according to the middle-class measuring rod. One possible response, participation in a delinquent subculture, is based on complete rejection of conventional society’s
expectations and the middle-class measuring rod. Delinquent subculture members participate in property crime directed toward the middle-class as a means to show their rejection of the middle-class measuring rod.

There are three major limitations of Cohen’s (1955) theory of delinquent subcultures. The first is that Cohen fails to consider the role social institutions, other than social class and stratification, play in subcultural formation and associated criminal behavior. Cohen (1955) discusses the educational institution as an arena for middle-class cultural socialization, rather than one that provides social control and opportunities. Educational institutions, as well as other social institutions, provide social control and opportunities for youth. The strength of these institutions, specifically education, may assist working-class youth in overcoming the consequences of their class position. Middle-class culture may permeate educational institutions; however, if these institutions are strong and provide opportunities, the consequences of adjustment problems and status frustration may be minimized if not overcome. Only focusing on the cultural aspect of social reality excludes the structural aspect in the same way that Thrasher ([1927] 2000) excluded culture and focused on structural aspects.

A second limitation is the geographic and demographic restriction of delinquent subcultures to working- and lower-class individuals. Delinquency is prevalent in working- and lower-class communities as a product of value differences between those youth and the middle-class standards. This theory does not provide an explanation for variation in behaviors and prevalence across working- and lower-class communities. In addition, unless cultural attitudes of the middle-class change so that working-class youth are not relegated “to an inferior status,” Cohen’s theory is unable to explain temporal
variation (Cohen 1955:177). Since the likelihood of this cultural transformation is low, this limitation may be alleviated with the inclusion of social structural concepts. The structural strength of the education institutions within working- and lower-class communities may explain the variation in behaviors and prevalence of delinquent subcultures. Furthermore, Cohen's (1955) theory does not explain the establishment of delinquent subcultures outside of lower- and working-class communities such as in middle-class communities, suburbs, and rural areas. Evaluating the cultural and structural aspects of society on a state level would capture the variation seen with gang crime whereas Cohen's theory is spatially limited to lower- and working-class communities.

Finally, Cohen does not provide an explanation for non-property crime committed by delinquent subcultures/gangs. The criminal behavior in the delinquent subcultures in Cohen's theory was in direct response to cultural class conflict. Delinquent subcultures/gangs committed property-related offenses against middle-class individuals. Status was gained through participation in this collective behavior. Cohen did not explain any other types of criminal behavior that delinquent subcultures participated in, such as homicide or other violent offenses. Thrasher ([1927] 2000) describes three reasons for gang homicide: external conflict, internal control, and as a consequence of other criminal behavior. Cohen does not consider any conflict between delinquent subcultures, possibly assuming that the solidarity is strong enough to maintain internal control and minimize conflict between gangs. Finally, there is no discussion of unintended consequences of property crime such as assault and physical injury of the victim. Miller (1958) followed the subcultural framework, however viewed the lower-class having a unique cultural perspective rather than one which directly opposes the middle-class way of life.
Miller's Subcultural Approach

Miller (1958), like Cohen (1955), was interested in the differences between the middle- and lower-class cultural systems within the United States. Unlike Cohen, Miller (1958) did not see the lower-class culture as an antithesis of that of the middle-class; rather it was a distinct cultural tradition "with an integrity of its own" (p. 19). Miller argued that each cultural system had its own set of focal concerns describing the class way of life. Miller described these focal concerns as "areas or issues which command widespread and persistent attention and a high degree of emotional involvement" (p. 6). Lower-class focal concerns promote a different way of life than middle-class focal concerns which have become the cultural standards of society. "Adolescent street corner groups" are one cultural difference between middle and lower-class communities. These groups are "one-sex peer units," which "constitute the major psychic focus and reference group for those over twelve or thirteen" filling the role of family present in middle-class culture (Miller 1958:14). Miller defines delinquent gangs as a subtype of the adolescent street corner group who participated in an increased amount of law-violating activity. The motivation to form gangs and violate middle-class norms is a "by-product" of the lower-class culture, rather than a deliberate response against conventional society as argued by Cohen (Miller 1958:19).

This deliberate response as described by Cohen excludes the ability to provide an explanation for variation in gang-related behavior and prevalence across lower-class communities. According to Miller, each focal concern has multiple responses that can be accepted by the cultural community. For example lower-class individuals may choose to
participate in law-abiding behavior or law-violating behavior due to their individual circumstances. These different responses explain why some lower-class individuals participate in gangs, whereas others are law-abiding. Miller’s theory does not explain the formation of delinquent subcultures outside of lower-class communities.

Gang Crime

Delinquent gangs are a subtype of street corner groups formed within lower-class communities (Miller 1958). This subtype is characterized by its members participating in “law violating behavior” Miller (1958:14). The participation in delinquent acts is supported within the lower-class culture. Members of the gang are cognizance of the illegality and possible consequences for their behavior, rather than being “psychopaths” or “physically or mentally ‘defective’” (Miller 1958:17). In fact, Miller proposes that gangs search out community members who have a higher degree of competence and physical ability.

Participation in property crimes and assault by gang members is an “attempt to achieve ends, states, or conditions which are valued” within the lower-class cultural milieu (Miller 1958:17). Miller proposes that cultural motivation is especially prevalent in youth’s participation in gang fight by increasing one’s status and giving the appearance of being tough to the community and peers. The gang fight is “highly stylized and culturally patterned set of sequences” (Miller 1958:17). First, an act of trespassing occurs by a gang into another gang’s distinct territory. The trespassing gang then violates cultural norms through various means causing a response from the other gang. Typically, the response is a fight between the home turf gang and the trespassing group. The trespassing
gang retreats to their neighborhood and forms retaliation plans due to their status and reputation being threatened. Miller (1958) proposes that the planning and motivating steps prior to the retaliatory fight are more desired than the actual fight. Often the retaliatory fight does not occur due to police presence, or the inability for the other gang to be found. Members respond with disappointment; however, they are often relieved, "their honor has been avenged without incurring injury" (Miller 1958:18).

These culturally supported behaviors are distinct to lower-class communities and are supported by focal concerns such as trouble and toughness. Miller (1958) condenses the manifestation of illegal behavior into three statements:

1. Following cultural practices which comprise essential elements of the total life pattern of lower class culture automatically violates certain legal norms.
2. In instances where alternate avenues to similar objectives are available, the non-law-abiding avenue frequently provides a relatively greater and more immediate return for a relatively smaller investment of energy.
3. The "demanded" response to certain situations recurrently engendered within lower class culture involves the commission of illegal acts. (P. 18)

Miller argues youth within the lower class participate in delinquent behavior to achieve desired qualities and states within their milieu. The label of this behavior stems from the middle-class behaviors and expectations being the "implicit point of reference" (Miller 1958:19). However, the motivation is not a rejection of middle-class expectations as present within Cohen's (1955) approach; rather it is a unique tradition of the lower-class communities. Therefore, the formation and behaviors of delinquent gangs is not present in the middle-class due to differences in desired goals and each class culture's focal
concerns. The inability of Miller (1958) and Cohen (1955) to explain non-lower-class gang behavior is a significant limitation. This limitation is a result of their community-level cultural focus, and the exclusion of the interaction associated with society’s cultural and structural dynamics.

Conclusion and Critique

Miller argued that focal concerns unique to lower-class culture explain the formation of gangs within lower-class communities. The focal concerns present within the lower-class emphasize different achievement and status goals and means for achieving them than those in the middle-class. For example, smartness in the middle-class is a measurement of educational achievement, whereas in the lower-class the ability to con is a measure of smartness. Lower-class youth who join gangs and participate in delinquency are attempting to achieve qualities valued within their own class cultural milieu. These behaviors are not a rejection of the middle-class standards as argued by Cohen (1955); rather, lower-class youth are conforming to the norms and values of their own culture.

Miller’s theory provides an explanation for a wider range of criminal behavior associated with gangs than Cohen. Criminal behavior displayed includes assaults and property crime as means to achieve status and recognition within the cultural milieu. Assaults are used as a response to violations of a gang’s “rep.” Participation in an assault increases ones status within the gang; however, Miller argues that participating in the actual fight is not desired. Miller does not explain gang homicide as a possible outcome of this external conflict. Furthermore, Miller explains that the gang’s most powerful
sanction to internal conflict is exclusion from the group, rather than harm. As with Cohen, Miller does not discuss the possibility of a property crime victim being assaulted or physical injured.

Miller and Cohen both explained the formation of gangs and their behavior through a subcultural approach. However, their limitations differ due to specific propositions within each theory. Miller, like Cohen, excluded the role social institutions play in subcultural formation and associated criminal behavior. In Miller’s discussion of the educational system, social institutions are described as providing social control. However, the variation in institutional strength and its interaction with lower-class focal concerns is not addressed. Miller proposes that street corner groups/gangs fill a void present within lower-class communities by providing a sense of status and belonging to youth. Social institutions may be able to provide opportunities and recognition in lower-class communities, thereby filling the void and possibly minimizing the prevalence of street corner groups/gangs.

**Cloward and Ohlin’s Differential Opportunity Approach**

Cloward and Ohlin developed a theory of the development and persistence of three delinquent subcultures within U.S. society: criminal, conflict, and retreatist. These subcultures are formed through different means, and display unique behavioral patterns, yet “all three are alike in that the norms which guide the behavior of members run counter to the norms of the larger society” (Cloward and Ohlin 1960:2). Cloward and Ohlin’s theory is an expansion and integration of Cohen’s subcultural responses, Thrasher’s social disorganization perspective, and Merton’s (1957) argument of a disjunction
between "culturally induced aspirations among lower-class youth and the possibilities of achieving them by legitimate means" (p. 78). Cloward and Ohlin hypothesize that a major problem of adjustment arises among lower-class youth within United States society. This adjustment problem is a result of the disparity "between what lower-class youth are led to want and what is actually available to them" (Cloward and Ohlin 1960:86). Youth involved in delinquent subcultures "have internalized an emphasis upon conventional goals" (Cloward and Ohlin 1960:86). Youth are confronted with intense frustration since the means of obtaining these goals are blocked and they are "unable to revise their aspirations downward" (Cloward and Ohlin 1960:86). This frustration leads the youth to explore alternatives that do not conform to conventional society. These alternatives result in the formation of delinquent subcultures.

Types of Delinquent Subcultures

Two of Cloward and Ohlin's delinquent subcultures, criminal and conflict, are characterized by criminal behavior. The criminal subculture, as defined by Cloward and Ohlin (1960), is "a type of gang which is devoted to theft, extortion, and other illegal means of securing income" (p. 1). The presence of criminal mentors for youth within the neighborhood increases the propensity for this type of subculture to develop because it allows for relationships and bonds to form between delinquents of different ages. The integration educates youth about alternative means to achieve their success goals. This new opportunity structure, led by adult criminals, restrains the youth from participating in destructive crime; rather they focus on securing money and valuable commodities.
Unlike in the criminal subculture individuals in the *conflict subculture* members participate in violent and destructive crime that is status-producing for members in this subculture. The criminal activity associated with this subculture is more apparent to community members, thereby attracting more attention from the media and citizens.

Conflict subcultures are formed within neighborhoods high in transiency and instability. Subcultural formation is a two-step process based on social disorganization theory. First, disorder within the community prevents opportunities and channels needed to achieve success-goals from being established. Second, the disorganization and high transiency prevents transmission of criminal values and integration of adult and youth offenders that would occur in the criminal subculture. Youth within these neighborhood environments do not have access to legitimate or illegitimate opportunities to gain success. Therefore, they use violence as a status-producing behavior to accomplish their alternative success-goals.

The retreatist subculture's behavior centers on pursuing "kicks" often through drugs or alcohol (Cloward and Ohlin 1960:26). Individuals in the *retreatist* subculture are described as "cats" who are in the "continuous pursuit of the 'kick'" (Cloward and Ohlin 1960:26). A majority of the individuals within this subculture are lower-class youth who have detached themselves from cultural and social aspects of conventional society. Their "kick" is a search for ecstatic experiences” (Cloward and Ohlin 1960:26). In order to acquire the resources necessary for their "kick," this subculture participates in a "hustle." The hustle behaviors associated with the retreatist subculture include petty crime, con-games, begging, as well as catering “to the illegitimate cravings of others peddling drugs or working as a pimp” (Cloward and Ohlin 1960:26). The criminal behavior is secondary
to achieving the "kick." Group status and success-goals are achieved through "cultivating the kick" (Cloward and Ohlin 1960:27).

**Gang Crime**

All three of these groups fall under the umbrella term *delinquent subculture*, defined by Cloward and Ohlin (1960) as "one in which certain forms of delinquent activity are essential requirements for the performance of the dominant roles supported by the subculture" (p. 7). The three delinquent subcultures represent three different "modes of adaptation" to the problems of adjustment lower-class youth face (Cloward and Ohlin 1960:107). These different modes of adaptation have unique behaviors associated with them. The use of violence as a mode of adaptation displayed by the conflict subculture is critical to this dissertation.

Youth within the conflict subculture resort to violence as a means to achieve status as well as an expression of anger. In addition, they resort to violence, since "they are not cut off from access to violent means by vicissitudes of birth" (Cloward and Ohlin 1960:175). Violence is always an option regardless of the blockages in other arenas faced by the youth regardless of their demographic and socio-economic identity. Status can be achieved through violence when status is unable to be achieved through conventional and criminal means as provided within other opportunity structures. In order to achieve status through violence, one must have "‘guts’ and the capacity to endure pain”; in addition to the actual ability to fight it, one’s reputation is also increased through their willingness to participate (Cloward and Ohlin 1960:175). Similar to the description provided by Miller (1958), Cloward and Ohlin propose that a majority of the violence seen within this
subculture stems from gang warfare. Success against other gangs increases the respect and status of the gang with other gangs and the community.

A crucial proposition within Cloward and Ohlin's framework, which differs from Miller (1958), is the termination of violence. Participation in the conflict subculture and subsequently the associated violence is abandoned when new opportunity structures are made available. The introduction of an institutionalized system of opportunity and its associated social control provides youth alternative means for success.

Conclusion and Critique

Cloward and Ohlin (1960) integrated the work of Merton (1957), Cohen (1955), and Thrasher's ([1927] 2000) social disorganization perspective to formulate their theory of delinquent subcultures/gangs. According to their theory, lower-class youth are faced with more frustration than other youth in society. This frustration is a result of the inability to achieve conventional goals due to structural and cultural barriers. These blockages pressure the youth to pursue their alternative goals through illegitimate means. This pursuit becomes a collective response in the form of delinquent subcultures.

Cloward and Ohlin describe three subcultural responses: criminal, conflict, and retreatist. The specific subcultural response is dependent on the level of neighborhood integration and characteristics of the community.

Cloward and Ohlin describe a wide range of criminal behavior associated with delinquent subcultures; however, it does not include gang-related homicides. Criminal behaviors are a means for youth to attain their alternative success-goals. The conflict subculture uses violence and destructive behavior as a means to gain their success-goals;
However, Cloward and Ohlin do not include gang-related homicide as a type of behavior. Lower-class youth within the conflict subculture use violence to promote their "rep" within the community. Cloward and Ohlin do not explain the subcultural responses to internal conflict; nor do they discuss the possibility of a bystander/victim of the criminal subculture being assaulted or killed.

Cloward and Ohlin provide a framework that allows for a partial understanding of gang homicide within the lower-class community. Lower-class youth who reside in disorganized lower-class communities with a higher level of transiency are more likely to respond to frustration through violence and destructive behavior. Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) theory overcomes previous theoretical limitations of explaining intra-community variation. Cloward and Ohlin's gang differentiation process, which incorporates both cultural and structural aspects, explains why not all lower-class youth participate in violent subcultural behavior. In addition, the integrated differentiation process explains variation of gang behavior across lower-class communities. In lower-class communities where there is greater integration as well as a more diverse age-structure, there will be less violent gang behavior. In addition, over time as the community characteristics fluctuate, so will the prevalence and type of gang behavior.

Cloward and Ohlin argue delinquent subcultural formation does occur within the middle-classes. Middle-class delinquent subcultures organize individuals to participate in "petty delinquencies" (Cloward and Ohlin 1960:12). This type of criminal behavior does not include the violence associated with the conflict subculture of the lower-class. Middle-class subcultural formation is related to structural control and change, rather than both structural and cultural aspects as seen within the lower-class communities.
Furthermore, middle-class offenders more likely act alone rather than collectively. The proposed behavior and individual actions of middle-class youth prevent Cloward and Ohlin's theory from predicting gang-related behavior outside of lower-class communities. The varying prevalence of gang-related homicides across space require a theory to be spatially descriptive.

Cloward and Ohlin's differential process partially incorporates the cultural and structural aspects necessary to accomplish this requirement. However, the restriction to lower-class communities prevents the theory from being able to completely capture the variation of gang-related behavior occurring throughout society. A key concept of Cloward and Ohlin is the role social structure has in pressuring individuals to participate in deviance. Those individuals within the lower-class are more likely to face the opportunity blockages to achieve success through legitimate means. This disjunction and frustration that results parallels the concept of Merton's anomie, which is central to Messner and Rosenfeld's (2007) institutional anomie theory.

Institutional Anomie Theory

Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) developed their institutional anomie theory as an expansion of the original work done by Merton (1938). Rosenfeld and Messner (1995) "amplify" Merton's work in two ways (p. 161). First, the authors restore the macro-level nature that was "removed in the conversion of 'anomie theory' into 'strain theory'"; their second expansion involved the interrelationship between American Dream and social institutions (Rosenfeld and Messner 1995:161). Based on this framework, anomie tendencies are inherent to the American Dream. These tendencies are produced and
reproduced within the American Dream's institutional balance of power, which is dominated by the economy. Variation in social behavior is a result of the interplay between cultural ideals of the American Dream and societal institutional arrangements.

Merton's (1938) original work focused on the creation of strain and subsequently anomie within societies. According to Merton, these two phenomena led to an increased likelihood of criminal activity within society. Specifically, individuals respond to strain and anomie through means that are not considered "normal." Merton argued that "certain phases of social structure generate the circumstances in which infringement of social codes constitutes a normal response" (p. 672). In essence, Merton develops two theories of the criminally motivated; "the theories of anomie and strain in Merton's paradigm are analytically distinct" (Featherstone and Deflem 2003:484). The more frequently studied is Merton's strain theory; this holds that people are more likely to pursue illegitimate means to attain culturally prescribed goals when they are blocked from accessing the institutionalized means to these goals.

Anomie

The anomie portion of Merton's theory refers to the deinstitutionalization of norms that occurs when there is a disjunction between the emphasis on cultural goals and institutional means. This conceptualization of anomie has been subject of debate between theorists and its relationship to Durkheim's ideas of anomie (e.g., Bernburg 2002; Orrú 1987). In his text Suicide, Durkheim (1979) theorized that one form of suicide, anomic, is a result of society being unable to regulate an individual's activity, "leaving them without a check-rein" (p. 258). This phenomenon is a result of rapid industrialization without a
similar increase in the moral forces needed to regulate behavior, thereby producing “relentless status-seeking and limitless aspirations” (Bernburg 2002:736). Durkheim’s anomie is a period of confusion, whereas Merton views these forces as institutionalized and normal with anomie created from the cultural atmosphere.

Merton’s anomie propositions refer to the deinstitutionalization of norms, in regards to economic success within lower-class society. This deinstitutionalization occurs as a result of the disjunction that is present between the emphasis on conventional society’s goals and the legitimate means available to achieve them. In other words, anomie is a result of greater importance being placed on cultural goals than the approved norms in achieving them. The “monetary-success goal” is the cultural element central to producing anomie (Merton 1938:674). Anomie resulting from the “deregulated means of social action” is the focal point of institutional anomie theory” (Bernburg 2002:736).

Messner and Rosenfeld depart from Merton’s conceptualization of anomie in two ways. First, unlike Merton who focused specifically on legitimate opportunities for monetary success, institutional anomie theory looks at the “institutional structure of society, beyond the stratification system” (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:14). Anomie is produced throughout the institutional structure of society rather than merely the stratification system. Second, Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) conclude that overcoming barriers to conventional means of success will not reduce crime rates; “the historical evidence fails to support the proposition that reductions in crime follow in any simple, direct manner from an expansion of economic opportunities” (p. 109). They propose that improving economic opportunities for society members increases one’s desire to achieve the “open-ended” American Dream. Thus, individuals will pursue a greater level of
economic success through illegitimate means. In addition to overcoming the barriers, a society's cultural ethos needs to be altered.

*Cultural Aspect*

The focal point of institutional anomie theory is the American Dream, defined by Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) as "a commitment to the goal of material success, to be pursued by everyone in society, under conditions of open, individual competition" (p. 70). Components of the American Dream include achievement, individualism, universalism, and materialism. The latter component leads to a competitive nature. This is demonstrated by the drive to accumulate as much money as possible, a phenomenon seen predominantly in the United States. Together these components "crystallize into the distinctive cultural ethos of the American Dream" (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:64). Institutional anomie theory incorporates not only this cultural ethos of society, but also institutional arrangements existing within society. Featherstone and Deflem (2003) see this integration as a connection of the "Merton paradigm with social-control theory" (p. 485). The effect of the American Dream, creating anomic pressures, along with the failure of social institutions to provide social control, increases the likelihood of criminal behavior to occur.

*Structural Aspect*

The focus of Messner and Rosenfeld’s (2007) institutional understanding of crime includes family, economy, polity, and education. Each society has an institutional map, which is an arrangement of social institutions and the balance of power that is created
among them. This map shapes the culture of a given society; “Culture is, in a sense, ‘given life’ in the institutional structure of society” (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:74). Culture is also sustained by social relationships and a commitment to the norms of society. Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) do not incorporate religion into their institutional map as other researchers have. Messner and Rosenfeld’s (2007) explanation of this absence is limited. They agree that both religion and mass communication have been integral to other criminological research; however, they are not “central to what may be called an institutional understanding of crime” (p. 73). The concern for Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) is not with deviations from cultural norms. Rather, they are concerned about the occurrence of crime within societies that are functioning within their expected manner. The institutional map of the United States focuses on monetary success as proposed by Merton (1938).

According to institutional anomie theory, the economic institution in the United States weakens other societal institutions through devaluation, accommodation, and penetration. Devaluation occurs when societal members do not focus on success within the specific institution, such as education, family, and polity. Rather, they are interested in how the institutional experience will benefit an individual’s economic success; for example, how participation in education will benefit or hinder one’s ability to achieve the American Dream. Finally, the economic institution has exerted its dominance within other societal institutions where the goals within the institutions are driven by characteristics seen in relation to competition and rewards for success. Within United States society, the economy has an increased amount of power in relation to other institutions. “As a result of this economic dominance, the inherent tendencies of a
capitalist economy to orient the members of society toward an unrestrained pursuit of economic achievements are developed to an extreme degree” (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:84). Subsequently, a de-emphasis has been placed on achieving this goal through normative means as proposed within Merton’s (1938) work. This de-emphasis on the cultural level is creating anomie. The state of anomie supports the current institutional structure and reinforces the pursuit of the American Dream through the institutional map that has been created.

The weakening of societal institutions that occurs as a product of anomie creates an increase in criminal motivations and decrease in social control. This exemplifies the second element of the integration between anomie–social control framework (Featherstone and Deflem 2003). Our cultural expectation of achieving the American Dream creates a sense of anomie. Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) write, “At the cultural level, the dominant ethos of the American Dream stimulates criminal motivations and at the same time promotes a weak normative environment (anomie)” (p. 84). In addition, economical dominance in the institutional balance of power weakens the institutional control of our social structure. “At the institutional level, the dominance of the economy in the institutional balance of power undermines the vitality of noneconomic institutions, reducing their capacity to control disapproved behavior and support approved behavior” (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:84). There is an interdependent relationship between culture and social structure, both leading to a higher level of crime.

The interaction between cultural and social structure proposed within institutional anomie theory as an explanation of serious crime captures individual theoretical propositions within gang literature. Institutional anomie incorporates the role of culture,
specifically anomie and the role of material success, as well as structure the ability of institutions to provide control and socialization. These two components have been revealed previously as theoretical explanations for gangs and their associated behaviors. Institutional anomie theory focuses on the variation of serious crimes such as homicide. This dissertation will examine the ability of institutional anomie to explain the variation in gang homicides, a specific circumstantial category of the aggregated homicide measures. This is the first known incorporation of institutional anomie theory into gang homicide research, or gang research in general.

Gang Homicide Studies

The study of gang homicide has been overlooked and neglected within academic literature (Howell 1999). A majority of gang homicide literature summarizes city-level trends; however, it fails to distinguish correlates and characteristics to explain the variation in prevalence (e.g., Block et al. 1996; Maxson 1999). Maxson, Curry, and Howell (2002) attempted to compare city-level trends; however, they were unable to develop characteristics or correlates since the level of gang homicides varied little during the study period.

Several studies examine the uniqueness of gang homicides in respect to non-gang homicides comparing circumstances, setting, and participant circumstances (e.g., Bailey and Unnithan 1994; Rosenfeld, Bray, and Egley 1999; Decker and Curry 2002; Maxson, Gordon, and Klein 1985; Rogers, 1993). Gang homicides are more likely to occur in public settings (Bailey and Unnithan 1994; Maxson et al. 1985). There are a greater number of participants in gang-related homicides than non-gang related homicides.
(Bailey and Unnithan 1994; Maxson, Gordon, and Klein 1985). Gang homicides are also more likely to involve the use of firearms (Bailey and Unnithan 1994; Decker and Curry 2002; Maxson et al. 1985; Rogers 1993; Rosenfeld et al. 1999). The participants in the gang-related homicides are more likely to be non-white than those involved in non-gang homicides (Bailey and Unnithan 1994; Decker and Curry 2002; Maxson et al. 1985). Participants in gang-related homicides often had no previous relationship (Bailey and Unnithan 1994; Maxson et al. 1985). In addition, the participants in gang-related homicides were younger than non-gang related homicides (Decker and Curry 2002; Maxson et al. 1985). Pizarro and McGloin (2006) investigated macro-level differences between gang and non-gang homicides incidences in Newark, New Jersey neighborhoods. Pizarro and McGloin (2006) concluded that poverty was a predictor for gang homicides, whereas social disorganization was not a significant measure. Previous research has shown key differences between gang homicides and non-gang homicides. These notable differences support the need to study gang homicides as a unique phenomenon separate from aggregated homicides.

Only three studies, Curry and Spergel (1988), Block and Block (1993), and Kubrin and Wadsworth (2003), are included in this review. These are the only known studies examining aggregate-level gang homicide rates with macro-level predictors.

Curry and Spergel (1988)

Curry and Spergel expand on previous works that proposed that gang homicide and juvenile delinquency are two distinct behaviors present within communities (e.g., Kornhauser 1978; Morash 1983). Analyzing community-level data from Chicago, Curry
and Spergel focus on the relationship between communities' characteristics and these unique behaviors. Curry and Spergel (1988) hypothesize that gang homicide is a product of social disorganization; accordingly, generalized delinquency has a positive relationship with poverty.

Communities' delinquency rate and gang homicide rate were gathered from the Chicago Police Department. Social disorganization was operationalized as the percentage of Hispanics residing in the geographical area. At the time of Curry and Spergel's study, Chicago was experiencing a rapidly expanding Hispanic population. This expansion and growth measured social disorganization in terms of community mobility "separating social disorganization as it exists in the Hispanic communities of Chicago from chronic poverty as it exists in the black communities" (Curry and Spergel 1988:387). Poverty was captured as a factor score of three interrelated measures: unemployment rate, percentage living below poverty level, and average mortgage investment per unit (Curry and Spergel 1988).

Curry and Spergel's (1988) findings support their hypothesis that delinquency and gang homicides have different causal factors. Delinquency is most strongly predicted by community-level poverty, whereas gang homicides are most strongly associated with social disorganization as measured by the concentration of Hispanics in the community. Poverty indirectly combines with ethnicity and race to explain delinquency in Hispanic communities; however, gang homicide within such communities is unrelated to poverty.

Curry and Spergel performed the initial aggregate-level analysis of gang homicide rates. They found support for the ability of aggregate-level structural variables to explain gang homicide rate differences. The inclusion of only two structural variables limited
Curry and Spergel's ability to test theories other than social disorganization, such as anomie or subcultural theories. Curry and Spergel (1988) propose that cultural concepts may influence the amount of pressures towards delinquency and gang homicide yet exclude measures to test the proposition. The cross-sectional technique excludes the possibility of understanding the relationship between structural and cultural changes, and the gang homicide rate. A final limitation of this empirical study is the geographic limitation to the city of Chicago. With the expansion of gang homicides through all demographic areas, it will be crucial to gain a more diverse understanding of the phenomenon over time and area.

Block and Block (1993)

Block and Block, in a study supported by the National Institute of Justice, analyzed Chicago's gang homicide rate over a 26-year period. As with Curry and Spergel (1988), Block and Block used Chicago Police Department records to provide gang homicide data. Using Chicago Police Department's Murder Analysis Reports, the authors mapped gang homicides in Chicago neighborhoods. Community characteristics of the 77 neighborhoods were gathered from aggregated census tract data. Block and Block (1993) were seeking to understand the extent to which neighborhood characteristics influenced the type and prevalence of street gang activity including homicide. Block and Block do not reveal their measurements of neighborhood characteristics studied.

The National Institute of Justice Report revealed little on the correlation between neighborhood characteristics and gang homicide rates. Weak correlation was found between the neighborhood homicide rate and gang homicide rate. This correlation was
strongest in black neighborhoods versus mixed or Latino neighborhoods (Block and Block 1993). A strong correlation was found between the communities’ gang crime activity and gang homicides within the neighborhood (Block and Block 1993). Gang-motivated assault and battery had a stronger correlation to gang homicide than gang-motivated drug crime (Block and Block 1993).

Block and Block separated gang crimes into expressive and instrumental violence. Expressive violence includes behaviors that are more impulsive and emotional defending an individual’s identity or glorifying their affiliation and gang (Block and Block 1993). The primary goal of expressive violence is the act of violence and injury, whereas in instrumental violence, the acquisition of money or goods is the focus (Block and Block 1993). Neighborhoods that were “relatively prosperous with expanding populations” experienced an increased amount of expressive gang violence, whereas instrumental violence was more prevalent in neighborhoods experiencing decline and disruption (Block and Block 1993:8).

Block and Block fail to capture and analyze neighborhood characteristics that would be beneficial to significant theoretical testing. The correlations found between the types of violence and other criminal behavior studied excluded community cultural and nearly all structural components. The only structural variable discussed was the neighborhood well-being in respect to the type of violence displayed. Understanding the cultural and structural components of the aggregate units studied would better allow theoretical testing and policy response.
Kubrin and Wadsworth (2003)

Kubrin and Wadsworth studied Black homicide rates in St. Louis in attempts to better understand the structural correlates for differing homicide circumstances. Previous research revealed that structural covariates of homicides are race specific; Kubrin and Wadsworth’s project attempts to better understand these relationships. Analyzing St. Louis neighborhoods, Kubrin and Wadsworth use case files from the city’s police department. A key aspect of this study is the disaggregation of homicide into six subtypes, including gang homicides. The authors propose that structural characteristics will have differing levels of influence on each subtype.

Gang homicides were conceptualized as those incidents that were related to the interests of the gang (Kubrin and Wadsworth 2003). In respect to gang homicides, Kubrin and Wadsworth hypothesize a positive relationship between gang homicides and neighborhood disadvantage. Kubrin and Wadsworth (2003) operationalize disadvantage through an index measure consisting of “percentage Black poverty, Black per capita income, percentage Blacks not working, percentage Black families that are female headed, and percentage Blacks with a high school degree” (p. 17). Furthermore, the Kubrin and Wadsworth (2003) hypothesize an inverse relationship between neighborhood instability and gang homicide due to the lower levels of “entrenched social hierarchies” (p. 19). Instability is operationalized by dividing the number of residents who have moved into the community within the past five years by the neighborhood population older than five.
Kubrin and Wadsworth found support for both of their hypotheses in respect to gang homicide. There was a significant negative relationship between gang homicides and instability. In addition, neighborhoods facing increased levels of disadvantage have higher levels of gang homicides. The negative relationship found between gang homicides and instability contradicts previous findings in respect to social disorganization (e.g., Curry and Spergel 1988), possibly a result of differing operationalizations.

Kubrin and Wadsworth (2003) perform an analysis of disaggregated homicide rates within St. Louis neighborhoods. As with previous research (e.g., Curry and Spergel 1988; Block and Block 1993), they found support for structural variables to explain gang homicide rate differences. Kubrin and Wadsworth restrict their analyses to two structural conceptualizations, disadvantage and disorganization, excluding cultural measures. The authors also restricted their analysis to Black homicides within St. Louis, prohibiting the generalizability of the results to differing geographic and demographic areas.

Critique of Existing Gang Homicide Research

The amount of literature on gang homicides in the United States is severely limited. Howell (1999) and Maxson, Curry, and Howell (2002) reviewed gang homicide research and found that a majority of the work reveals city-level trend data of gang homicides. These works do not test correlations or causal factors for variation and prevalence of gang homicides in aggregate units. Block and Block (1993) attempt to determine the role neighborhood characteristics have in predicting gang homicide variation but primarily exclude cultural and structural variables. Curry and Spergel (1988) found a positive relationship between social disorganization and gang homicide rate,
whereas Kubrin and Wadsworth (2003) found a negative relationship using differing operationalizations. These initial community-level approaches to gang homicides limits the structural measurements to those related to social disorganization and poverty/disadvantage. Curry and Spergel (1988), as do Kubrin and Wadsworth (2003), describe the absence of other measures, both structural and cultural.

The above reviews of empirical literature surrounding gang homicide reveal the significant limitations and restricted approaches previously used. The available studies lack testing across diverse demographic units of analysis; furthermore, they have been centered on major metropolitan areas. Structural aspects of society beyond economic and demographic characteristics have been ignored, thereby failing to further test the relationships between social institutions and gang homicides. Social disorganizational concepts were found within the research to have significant predictive abilities towards gang homicides; however, this has been the only theoretical approach adequately tested. Furthermore, social disorganizational approaches have been traditionally limited to explaining criminal behavior within urban areas. Finally, cultural aspects of society have been theoretically argued to have a significant effect on gang presence and their associated behaviors (e.g., Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Cohen 1955; Miller 1958). None of the empirical studies captures or attempts to capture the cultural environment, beyond that associated with social disorganization concepts, of the communities studied. In addition, the studies are restricted to explaining gang-related homicides in urban areas.
Institutional Anomie Research on Homicide and Violence

Messner and Rosenfeld's (2007) institutional anomie theory has been studied through a multitude of different approaches varying in conceptualization of ideas, operationalizations of variables, and units of analysis (see Table 2). The diversity in approaches parallels the difficulties Messner and Rosenfeld (2006) relate to the abstractness of their theoretical concepts: "Although this high level of abstraction enhances the scope of IAT (institutional anomie theory), it renders empirical assessments difficult. Deriving specific causal propositions and identifying operational measures of the key concepts pose daunting challenges" (p. 130). The variation of units of analysis has included cross-national approaches (e.g., Jensen 2002; Kim and Pridemore 2005; Messner and Rosenfeld 1997; Savolainen 2000); states (e.g., Chamlin and Cochran 1995; Piquero and Piquero 1998; Schoepfer and Piquero 2006); General Social Survey geographic sampling units (e.g., Baumer and Gustafson 2007); counties (e.g., Maume and Lee 2003); cities (e.g., Stucky 2003), and micro-level areas (e.g., Muftić 2006). For the purpose of this dissertation, this review includes studies testing the predictive ability of institutional anomie theory in respect to homicide or violence.

Messner and Rosenfeld (1997)

Messner and Rosenfeld performed the first cross-national test of their institutional anomie theory. In addition, Messner and Rosenfeld's (1997) study was the first to incorporate the concept of decommodification, a term which "refers to the granting of services and resources to citizens as a matter of right, thereby reducing their reliance on
Table 2. Summary of Measures Used in Previous Institutional Anomie Empirical Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Units of Analysis</th>
<th>Cultural and Structural Measures</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Control Variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) | Cross-National (45 nations)            | *Economy*: Proxy decommodification index – average annual benefits per household, program expenditures as percent of GDP, percent of benefit expenditures allocated to employment injuries  
*Economic Inequality*: Gini coefficient of household income distribution, economic discrimination | Average Homicide Rate (1980-1990)                                                                  | Developmental Index: Life expectancy, gross national product per capita, infant mortality rate, percent aged over 64, population growth, level of urban development  
Sex Ratio: males per 100 females                                                                                     |
| Piquero and Piquero (1998)    | States                                 | *Education*: Percentage enrolled in college, high school dropouts, and ratio of average teachers’ salary to average citizen pay  
*Family*: Percentage of single parent families  
*Polity*: Percentage of state residents receiving public assistance and voter participation in presidential election  
*Economy*: Percentage of population below the poverty line | Violent and property crime rates                                                                  | Percentage of population residing in urban areas                                                                 |
| Savolainen (2000)          | Cross-National (2 samples: Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) and supplementary sample of nine additional nations) | *Economy*: Percentage of public expenditures directed towards social security and other welfare programs  
*Economic Inequality*: Gini coefficient of income distribution                                               | Homicide Victimization Rate: Disaggregated by sex                                                    | Developmental Index: GDP per capita  
Population age structure: percentage of population aged 15-24  
Sex Ratio: males per 100 females                                                                |
the market for sustenance and support” (p. 1395). This incorporation provided a better economic domination measure than Chamlin and Cochran’s (1995) measure of families living below the poverty level. Also, Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) propose that decommodification measures are partially indicative of the “cultural dynamics postulated by institutional anomie theory” (p. 1408). Their analyses do not include any noneconomic institution strength measures. Messner and Rosenfeld hypothesized an inverse relationship between the decommodification of labor and homicide.
Messner and Rosenfeld developed a proxy measure of Esping-Andersen's (1990) decommodification measure. This proxy measure was necessary due to their expanded sample ($N = 45$). The additional nations within the sample lacked data necessary to construct Esping-Andersen's dimensions of decommodification. Messner and Rosenfeld controlled for the nations' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. The dependent variable was the nation's homicide rate as reported by the World Health Organization.

Messner and Rosenfeld found a significant theoretically expected relationship between decommodification and homicide rates. They acknowledged that their findings are theoretically supportive; however, the model was a partial test of institutional anomie. The model was restricted to the relationship between the economic dominance and inequality and its effect on the homicide rates. They concluded that future research should expand the structural aspect to include education, family, and religion as social institutions (Messner and Rosenfeld 1997).

*Piquero and Piquero (1998)*

Piquero and Piquero used both property, similar to Chamlin and Cochran (1995), and violent crime rates, similar to Messner and Rosenfeld (1997), to test institutional anomie theory sub-nationally. Piquero and Piquero limit their independent variables to social institutions described within Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) institutional anomie framework. Education is measured through three predictors: percent enrolled in college full-time, percent high school dropouts, and educators' salary compared to other occupations (Piquero and Piquero 1998). Family strength is operationalized as the
percentage of single-parent families within the state (Piquero and Piquero 1998). Piquero and Piquero's strength of polity measure is captured through two variables. The first is the percentage of state residents who received public assistance, and the second is the percentage of residents who voted in the 1988 presidential election (Piquero and Piquero 1998). Finally, Piquero and Piquero used the state poverty rate to capture economic institutional strength. Piquero and Piquero control for the percentage of the state's population residing in urban areas. They performed multiple models using different operationalizations of institution strength in hopes to best measure the abstract theoretical concepts. Two model specifications that Piquero and Piquero investigated were the additive and interactive effects between economy and other social institutions.

Piquero and Piquero (1998) found that variation in violent and property crime rates is influenced by economical and noneconomical institutional strength. In the additive model full-time college enrollment and public aid recipients have a direct effect on property and violent crime rate—a direct relationship between their alternative measures, percent living below the poverty line, and the percent of single-parent families with violent and property crime rates.

Interaction models were also run within Piquero and Piquero's empirical study. Both the economy–education and the economy–polity interaction were shown to have a significant relationship with violent crime. The economy–education interaction was also significant in respect to property crime. These findings were dependent on the operationalizations used within the models; "at both the additive and interactive levels, our alternative specifications did not significantly influence either property or violent crime rates" (Piquero and Piquero 1998:80). A crucial conclusion that Piquero and
Piquero arrived at is that different measures of the institutional strength leads to different results; thus, the inclusion of specific operationalizations must be theoretically warranted for valid testing.

The results and theoretical discussions presented within Piquero and Piquero challenge future researchers. In addition to the alternative measurements incorporated within this theoretical framework, Piquero and Piquero argue for the incorporation of cultural-level anomie measures. Future control variables, including race and gender, should be included to better understand the unique predictive ability of institutional anomie in relation to those categories. Piquero and Piquero propose that future research should incorporate different types of crime to expand the general descriptive potential of the theory. Finally, using cross-national models would allow a better understanding of institutional and cultural variation.

Savolainen (2000)

Savolainen (2000) expanded Messner and Rosenfeld’s initial cross-national test by adding a sample of nations some having “emerging market economies” (p. 1029). Savolainen used a similar model to that within Messner and Rosenfeld’s analysis. In addition, Savolainen developed decommodification index for the additional sample that is a highly correlated with Messner and Rosenfeld’s proxy decommodification index. Savolainen, as did Messner and Rosenfeld, controlled for socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the nations. Homicide rates, as reported by the World Health Organization, were disaggregated by sex, thus providing male and female homicide victimization rates. Savolainen (2000) hypothesized that “the positive effect of
economic inequality on the level of lethal violence is strongest in nations where the economy dominates the institutional balance of power” (p. 1026).

Savolainen’s findings were theoretically expected, and paralleled Messner and Rosenfeld’s (1997) results. In both samples, Savolainen found a negative interaction effect between welfare spending and income inequality in relation to homicide rates. In other words, the effects of economic inequality on homicide rates were moderated with an increased level of decommodification. These findings held true to both male and female homicide victimization rates.

Stucky (2003)

Stucky examined the influence polity has on crime using institutional anomie as a framework, arguing that variations in the structure and racial composition of the local political institution will affect the crime rate. Stucky proposed a causal relationship between the predictor variables and crime; therefore, polity measures were captured a year prior to the dependent variable. A significant relationship was found to exist between political structure and the area’s crime rate. Violent crime is reduced in cities where there is district representation versus other political structures. Communities with African-American leadership experienced lower crime rates than those with non-African-American leadership. Finally, Stucky found the influence of a weakened economic system on the crime rate is decreased when there is a greater amount of local representation.

Stucky recognized limitations of his study; methodologically, future research needs to better measure the relationship between the local political system and its constituents. In addition, the interaction between local politics and decommodification
policies should be examined. Specifically, Stucky (2003) suggested examining block grants and welfare spending on the local level. Future studies should control for party politics in respect to both crime rates and decommodification policies. Finally, future research should incorporate more diverse demographic structures such as smaller cities and rural areas.

*Maume and Lee (2003)*

Maume and Lee examined the influence noneconomic institutions have on the effect that the economy has on the homicide rate. Using Supplementary Homicide Reports allowed Maume and Lee to disaggregated homicide into instrumental and expressive rates. Maume and Lee’s development of measures for the effect of noneconomic institutions involves political strength as expressed by voter participation in presidential elections. Family strength was captured by the divorce rate and educational expenditures per school age resident measures institutional strength. Maume and Lee incorporated adherence to religious denominations as a strength measure this noneconomic institution. As seen in previous research, Maume and Lee measured income inequality using the Gini coefficient to indicate the influence and structure of economic conditions (e.g., Messner and Rosenfeld 1997; Savolainen 2000). Maume and Lee incorporated welfare expenditures rather than a decommodification index as Messner and Rosenfeld and Savolainen did to operationalize economic domination.

The results partially support propositions within institutional anomie theory. Noneconomic institutions had a mediating effect on the relationship between income inequality and instrumental homicide. This finding supports the idea that “noneconomic
institutions appear to play an important role in buffering the effects of economic motivation on instrumental violence” (Maume and Lee 2003:1167). Welfare expenditures have a moderating effect on the economy-crime relationship. Maume and Lee hope that future research continues on the sub-national level and argue that institutional anomie theory is a “viable theory for macro level research” (p. 1167).

**Critique of Existing Institutional Anomie Research**

Institutional anomie theory proposes the occurrences of criminal behaviors are related to the social environment. The construction of the social environment consists of both cultural and structural aspects. The structural aspects of society include institutions which provide control and are able to socialize society members. These two institutional functions have been conceptualized throughout institutional anomie research as measures of institutional strength. As reviewed earlier, the measures used to capture institutional strength vary (see Table 2). Many of the previous operationalizations deviate from the functional definitions within Messner and Rosenfeld’s theoretical framework. A critical review of these measures will provide justification for this study’s operationalizations.

**Family**

A majority of previous institutional anomie research has measured the strength of marriage as the family institutional measure. This operationalization involved various uses of marriage and divorce rates (e.g., Chamlin and Cochran 1995; Maume and Lee 2003; Schoepfer and Piquero 2006). Institutional anomie research must capture the ability of families to provide a “haven” in order to “counter balance and temper the harsh,
competitive conditions of public life” (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:72). The ability to provide this protective function is hindered by family disruption. Family disruption is different from marital disruption as a majority of previous research has used. Piquero and Piquero’s (1998) institutional measurement, percent of single-parent families, is a theoretically better measure. Piquero and Piquero, as do Messner and Rosenfeld (2007), argue that single-parent families have more difficulties fulfilling familial functions. Baumer and Gustafson (2007) integrate both approaches using aggregated data to capture both family and marital strength through measuring time spent with the family and individuals’ commitment to marriage.

Religion

Messner and Rosenfeld’s theoretical framework does not include religion; however, several institutional anomie studies (e.g., Baumer and Gustafson 2007; Chamlin and Cochran 1995; Maume and Lee 2003) incorporate it as a noneconomic institution. Religion has similar functions, transmission of values and norms and provides control, to that of others within the framework (Chamlin and Cochran 1995). Chamlin and Cochran (1995) argue that such operationalization “is a reasonable structural proxy for the capacity of religious institutions to reduce the level of anomie” (p. 418).

Polity

Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) theorize that polity has several purposes; one is to mobilize and distribute “power to attain collective goals” (p. 72). In addition, the political institution is responsible for the protection of society members from criminal behavior
and disorder as well as providing an arena for conflict resolution. Voter participation in elections has been a consistent measure of the political institution's strength. This measure was gathered from either congressional (e.g., Chamlin and Cochran 1995), presidential (e.g., Piquero and Piquero 1998; Maume and Lee 2003; Baumer and Gustafson 2007), or local/state elections (e.g., Schoepfer and Piquero 2006). The use of congressional elections provides a more direct measure of the investment and efforts of state residents in response to issues and working towards collective goals.

Piquero and Piquero included an institutional measure of public assistance but for differing reasons (see also Baumer and Gustafson 2007). Piquero and Piquero (1998) incorporate this measure to reflect "the vitality of polity insofar as it is able to help its citizens in need" (p. 69). Baumer and Gustafson incorporate a welfare assistance measure in attempts to capture polity's organization towards the pursuit of economic goals. These conceptualizations of political strength deviate from the theoretical framework proposed by Messner and Rosenfeld (2007). The level of public assistance being offered or used within a state measures the domination of the economy, not political institutional strength. The interaction of the economy and polity, as with other noneconomic institutions, is best measured through interaction rather than individual institutional measures with economical aspects. The political institutional strength measure is best captured through the involvement of individuals towards defining collective goals rather than accessing them. Thus, measuring the level of involvement in elections, rather than level of assistance being received, captures the theoretical function of the political institution.
Education

Messner and Rosenfeld propose that education and family have similar socialization functions. The role of education is to transmit "cultural standards" and train youth for "occupational roles" (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:72). Various combinations of measures are seen within the institutional anomie research to capture this institution's strength. However, a consistent operationalization is high school dropout rate. This measure best captures the ability of the institution to provide socialization and career training. Piquero and Piquero (1998), Maume and Lee (2003), and Baumer and Gustafson (2007) also incorporated an economical aspect of the educational institution. This incorporation is not warranted, since it does not measure the institution's ability to provide control, ability to transmit cultural norms, or commitment to the educational institution. Furthermore, as described earlier, assessing the interaction between the two variables is a better technique to capture the relationship between economy and the institution.

Economy

The economy and its effects on other institutions are a crucial measure to institutional anomie. Several researchers fail to capture the theoretical essence of the economy. Using economic conditions as operationalizations does not measure the dominating effects of the economy as proscribed by Messner and Rosenfeld (2007). The use of unemployment rates or poverty measures describes the condition rather than domination so vital to institutional anomie research. Maume and Lee (2003), as well as
Baumer and Gustafson (2007), use Gini coefficients to measure the economic inequality, arguing that there is a direct relationship between inequality and the level of economic domination. This operationalization still does not capture the structural component of economic dominance; rather, it shows the amount of disparity in economical attainment through legitimate means.

Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) and Savolainen (2000) best operationalize economic dominance through decommodification measures. Messner and Rosenfeld integrate the ideas and work of Esping-Andersen (1990) with institutional anomic. Esping-Andersen’s (1990) principle of decommodification encompasses the idea that there is an interrelationship between the market and the structure of society. Decommodification is more than just a measurement of economic conditions or the amount spent towards social welfare programs; it “reflects the quality as well as the quantity of social rights and entitlements” (Messner and Rosenfeld 1997:1395). Decommodified policies allow society members freedom from the market, thereby making decisions independent of the economy. Weaker levels of decommodification signify a strong interrelationship and “dependence on the market for the resources necessary for survival,” thereby signifying a higher level of economic domination over the ability of other institutions to provide these resources (Messner and Rosenfeld 1997:1395). Individuals within decommodified societies are provided with a “‘social wage,’” thus guaranteeing the ability to acquire the resources for survival independent of the market.

In addition, to better measuring the economic dominance present within societies, decommodification partially captures the “cultural dynamics postulated by institutional-
anomie theory" (Messner and Rosenfeld 1997:1408). The dynamics are captured through
the relationship between decommodification and the cultural ethos. The greater amount of
decommodification signifies a lesser importance of the American Dream at the cultural
level. The ability to capture this abstract concept addresses a limitation seen throughout
previous institutional anomie research in that there are no accurate cross-societal
measures of cultural values.

The interaction between this economic domination and the other societal
institutions is central to institutional anomie theory. However, this specific relationship is
not captured within the previous research; rather, a majority of previous research
examines the interaction between economical conditions and institutional strength (e.g.,
Chamlin and Cochran 1995; Piquero and Piquero 1998; Maume and Lee 2003; Schoepfer
incorporate noneconomic institutions within their analyses; therefore, they are unable to
capture the interrelationship.

Institutional Anomie and Gang Homicides

Institutional anomie theory has two components within its framework which
parallel gang homicides and the previous empirical and theoretical work. Messner and
Rosenfeld (2007) developed institutional anomie theory to explain societal differences in
serious crime rates. This explanation, as reviewed earlier in this chapter, focuses on the
interaction between the culture’s drive for material success, the American Dream and the
impact this ethos has on society’s institutions. In order to frame gang homicide as a
behavior appropriate for institutional anomie theory, two propositions need to be
evaluated. First is using gang homicides, as a disaggregated form of homicide, an appropriate measure in relation to institutional anomie theory? Second, is gang homicide influenced by the social reality or habitat around them?

The incorporation of disaggregated homicide data has been widely supported in the literature; however, it is rarely incorporated in institutional anomie research. Generalized homicide data have been widely studied within the framework with a great deal of theoretical support found (e.g., Maume and Lee 2003; Messner and Rosenfeld 1997; Piquero and Piquero 1998; Savolainen 2000; Stucky 2003). Maume and Lee (2003) and Savolainen (2000) used disaggregated homicide rates in their research. Maume and Lee disaggregated homicide into instrumental and expressive motivation. Maume and Lee (2003) argue that this reveals crucial variations in effects of predictor variables. Savolainen disaggregated homicide by gender in attempts to narrow the variability in the World Health Organization definition of homicide. Wolfgang (1958) first attempted to categorize homicide types, and since then the effort has taken root (Williams and Flewelling 1988). Williams and Flewelling (1988) argue that “The general category of homicide should be disaggregated on the basis of those characteristics that best differentiate the interpersonal and situational contexts in which lethal incidents take place” (p. 424). Their findings support this argument and conclude that the use of total homicide rates is meaningless and should be discontinued (p. 430). This finding has been supported in other homicide research (e.g, Hawkins 1999; Kubrin 2003; Kubrin and Wadsworth 2003; Parker 1989).

Homicide research has shown clear distinctions between gang and non-gang related incidents. Maxson et al. (1985) concluded that “gang homicides differ both
quantitatively and qualitatively from nongang homicides” (p. 220). In addition, it has been highlighted in research that gang-homicide and non-gang homicide trends differ (e.g., Block and Block 1993; Howell 1999; Tita and Abrahamse 2006). The uniqueness of gang homicides in respect to non-gang homicides provides evidence of the need to look at them as separate types of incidents. Furthermore, the seriousness of gang homicides, as any homicide, makes it appropriate for institutional anomie research.

This chapter opened with Park’s description of gang behaviors having a relationship with the habitat. This habitat parallels the conceptualization of “social reality” as described within institutional anomie theory. The ability of institutional anomie theory to capture the habitat or social reality of the states allows for both cultural and institutional aspects to be included within the model. Thrasher ([1927] 2000) proposed that gangs are interstitial groups that have developed in communities where institutions have failed. Miller (1958) and Cohen (1955) proposed gangs have a subcultural element to their formation and function. Cloward and Ohlin (1960) further develop the cultural ethos with their different opportunity structure formation. This later cultural element parallels the cultural ethos propositions of institutional anomie theory.

Institutional anomie has not previously been used to test gang homicides. Furthermore, the limited macro-level gang homicide studies have been limited in both their institutional and cultural variable inclusion. Structural operationalizations have shown significant predicative ability in respect to gang homicide (e.g., Curry and Spergel 1988; Kubrin and Wadsworth 2003). The absence of other structural and cultural measures is a criticism of previous literature that this broader, more abstract framework will address. Messner and Rosenfeld’s (2007) theory allows for a framework to capture
the essence of institutional strength, as well as cultural ethos present in respect to this phenomenon.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the macro-level gang theory literature focusing on gang crime specifically gang homicide (see Table 1). In addition, it has provided an overview of institutional anomie and the propositions, concepts, and theoretical framework. Gang homicide studies and institutional anomie research (see Table 2) focusing on homicide and violence were also reviewed. The chapter concluded with a description of the connection between gang homicide and institutional anomie. The next chapter will elaborate on this discussion and presents the research model for this dissertation.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation has a three-fold purpose: (1) to develop a state-level test of gang homicide rates within the United States, (2) to examine the role cultural and structural variables have in relation to gang homicide rates, and (3) to expand institutional anomie research by testing another form of disaggregated homicide while using a more developed conceptual model. This chapter reviews the steps taken to accomplish these purposes. The first section reviews the model tested within this project. Secondly, a description of the data used within the project is provided. The last three sections review the operationalization of the concepts in the model, the analytical strategy, and the assumptions of ordinary least squares regression.

Conceptual Model

In Chapter II an in-depth discussion was provided on institutional anomie and the empirical work that has been attempted. As described, testing institutional anomie is very difficult due to the high level of conceptual abstraction, which “enhances the scope of institutional anomie theory”; however, “it renders empirical assessment difficult” (Messner and Rosenfeld 2006:130). Messner and Rosenfeld (2006) expand on this difficulty, stating that “Deriving specific causal propositions and identifying operational measures of the key concepts pose daunting challenges” (p. 130). The conceptual model
for this dissertation expands on the strengths of previous assessments while attempting to address weaknesses. There are two aspects of social reality, culture and social structure, which must be captured within an empirical model of institutional anomie theory (Figure 1). This dissertation’s empirical model consists of these two sub-sections with one or more conceptualizations in each. The first sub-section, culture, includes the conceptualization of economic dominance as a measure of the emphasis the American Dream has within the state. The second sub-section, social structure, includes measures of institutional strength, including religion, education, polity, and family. Together the concepts within each of these sub-sections expand on previous research and address some weaknesses previously seen.

![Figure 1. Messner and Rosenfeld’s (2007) Institutional Anomie Analytical Model](image-url)

**Culture**

The first sub-section, culture, measures the emphasis and forcefulness of the American Dream within a society; the American Dream "embodies the basic values..."
commitments of the culture: its achievement orientation, individualism, universalism, and peculiar form of materialism that has been described as the 'fetishism of money'” (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:68). These, independent of each other, contribute to the “anomic character of the American Dream” (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:68). Attempts to capture the value orientation of societies within institutional anomie research have been limited (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Messner and Rosenfeld’s (2007) Institutional Anomie Model Cultural Component

Baumer and Gustafson (2007) used aggregated General Social Survey data to measure commitment to monetary success goals and commitment to legitimate means. The aggregated responses were individuals’ answers to two questions in relation to their commitment to monetary success and weak commitment to legitimate means. These responses are available only in select years of the General Social Survey (1973-1976), thus limiting the replication of this technique in future studies. Muftic (2006) included
culture as a "micro-social concept" within her micro-level analysis, using individual-level scales of value orientation to compare group-level and individual-level orientation.

A majority of institutional anomie research excludes cultural measures from their model; rather, these studies focused on the relationship between economic domination and noneconomic institution in respect to crime. This focus places institutional anomie as a social control theory, rather than a theory incorporating both cultural and structural variables. The ability to find cultural data on an aggregate-level measuring the value orientation of groups is difficult. Chamlin and Cochran (1995) conclude that institutional anomie can be tested even with the inability to measure the value orientation of society. "Although a comprehensive test is beyond reach at this point, it is possible to derive empirical propositions from their work. If they are supported, then the larger theory would gain credence" (Chamlin and Cochran 1995:415). One conceptualization that allows a remedy for the lack of an aggregate-level cultural value measure is the use of a decommodification index.

Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) propose that using an index that captures the levels of "economically induced deprivation . . . [are] at least suggestive of the kinds of cultural dynamics postulated by institutional-anomie theory" (p. 1408). Messner and Rosenfeld's (1997) decommodification index stems from Esping-Andersen's (1990) work. A weaker level of decommodification signifies "complete dependence on the market for the resources necessary for survival" (Messner and Rosenfeld 1997:1395), whereas societies with high decommodification provide individuals with a "'social wage' guaranteeing a socially acceptable level of earning regardless of market participation" (Messner and Rosenfeld 1997:1395). Savolainen (2000) also used a decommodification index as a
means of measuring cultural value orientation in her cross-national study of homicide. Both studies found these measures to have a significant theoretically expected relationship with homicide rate.

**Social Structure**

The ability of institutional socialization and control is the second aspect of institutional anomie theory that needs to be conceptualized. These conceptualizations fulfill the second half of the “anomie-social control” paradigm as described by Featherstone and Deflem (2003). As discussed earlier, according to Messner and Rosenfeld, the economy's domination over other social institutions is apparent in two different yet complementary ways. First, the domination of the economy on other institutions minimizes their ability to socialize and cultivate respect of social norms. Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) propose that “this type of institutional imbalance provides fertile soil for the growth of the anomic cultural pressures” (p. 1396). The noneconomic institutions which traditionally are responsible for the socialization of norms are unable to provide this function due to the imbalance. Second, economic domination weakens the ability of noneconomic institutions to provide social control. Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) capture these two ideas within their analytical model of the social structure as the ability to provide institutional control as well as the amount of institutional support. Less support for institutions decreases their ability to “fulfill their distinctive socializations successfully including the function of social control” (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:85).

Rosenfeld and Messner (1995) summarized the influence of the American Dream on the noneconomic institutions through both a direct and indirect way. The direct is in
the "creation of an anomic normative order . . . in which social norms are unable to exert a strong regulatory force" (p. 175). The indirect way focuses on the shift in institutional power present as a result of the American Dream. This shift of power inhibits the ability of noneconomic institutions to develop "strong mechanisms of external social control" (Messner and Rosenfeld 1995:175). A majority of research conceptualized these two components as institutional strengths via different operationalizations as described in the literature review.

Religion

This conceptual expansion involves the incorporation of religion as a social institution. Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) did not include religion as a societal institution; however, studies within institutional anomie have incorporated it (e.g., Baumer and Gustafson 2007; Chamlin and Cochran 1995; Maume and Lee 2003). Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) argue that the religious institution is not, "in our view, central to what may be called an 'institutional understanding' of crime" (p. 73). This inclusion is well warranted both theoretically and empirically.

Messner and Rosenfeld (2004) define institutions "as rules, or the system of norms that govern behavior" (p. 94). These institutions are the "building blocks of whole societies" (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:71). Durkheim (1954) theorized that religion creates a sense of community, represented by the Church, and built on beliefs and practices. Adler (1995) summarizes Durkheim's perspective on religion "as a force of control that creates a sense of moral obligation on the part of individuals to adhere to group norms" (p. 278). The control provided "binds individuals to values that transcend
individuals and are rooted in the society" (Adler 1995:278). This binding of individuals to
a set of norms would be the antithesis of anomie. Lee and Clyde (1974) found religiosity
to affect normlessness in two ways. First, those who subscribe to the teachings and
ideologies of religion seriously reduce their risk of normlessness. Second, religion
mediates the effects of other factors in the production of anomie (Lee and Clyde 1974).

A majority of the research on religion and criminal behavior within the literature
focuses on juveniles. Johnson et al. (2000) performed a systematic review of the
delinquency literature and found a negative relationship between religion and delinquent
behavior. Furthermore, Johnson et al. (2000) write that, “The results of our review
suggest that future research on delinquency and crime may gain explanatory power by
incorporating the effects of religious variables in theoretical models” (p. 46). Evans et al.
(1995) examined the role religion has within an individual’s likelihood to participate in
criminal behavior. They found that an individual’s participation in religious activities
restrains adults from participating in criminal behavior. On the societal level, Conklin
(2003) argues that the role of religion is significant as an institution in causing crime rate
variation, citing a possible relationship between the decrease crime rates in the 1990s and
the increase in legitimacy of organized religion. Religion is a crucial institution within the
United States to provide control and values; furthermore, it is more alienated from
governmental oversight and shaping than other institutions such as education.

In addition to religion, this project’s model will include education, polity, and
family as noneconomic institutions. A decommodification index will assess economic
strength and domination. This conceptualization of economic strength will mirror the
cultural orientation of societies as previously discussed (e.g., Messner and Rosenfeld
1997). One focal point of Messner and Rosenfeld's (2007) theoretical arguments is the disparity between homicide rates within the United States and other nations, this "volume of criminal violence, and lethal violence in particular, that is truly remarkable in comparative contexts" (p. 4). This project disaggregates lethal violence focusing solely on gang homicide.

Cross-Sectional Versus Longitudinal Design

Approaching criminological research through a longitudinal design rather than a cross-sectional design has been debated within the literature (e.g., Gottfredson and Hirschi 1987, 1990; Menard and Elliott 1990). The debate centers on the causation of an individual's participation in criminal behavior. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1987, 1990) propose that over time factors influencing an individual's propensity to commit crime remain relatively stable. Where an individual's criminal career has been the primary subject of the debate, the points raised need to be addressed for all levels of analysis. In respect to this dissertation, the methodological approach used to study gang homicide rate needs to be discussed and evaluated. This will center on Gottfredson and Hirschi's three major discussion points: theoretical appropriateness, variable change, and presence of criminality prior to the study. A fourth discussion point, dependent variable definitional validity, is also relevant in the methodological justification.

Theoretical Appropriateness

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that longitudinal research is theoretically appropriate when the theory has been constructed in that manner; however, longitudinal
theories are “extremely rare” (p. 250). Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) describe the justification for longitudinal research of cross-sectional theories as “nothing more than the commonsense notion that these factors ‘should make a difference’” (p. 250).

Institutional anomie theory proposes that variation in societies’ institutional maps explain differences in crime rates. This proposition has been restricted within the literature to geographical variation. Theoretically, the variation could also be seen in temporal terms (Messner and Rosenfeld 2004). Messner and Rosenfeld (2004) propose that, in order to capture this variation, the analysis would need to cover several decades. This challenge may be overcome in certain empirical studies; however, it is not possible or appropriate with gang homicide research, as will be discussed later.

Variable Change

Longitudinal researchers propose that a methodological advantage is the ability to capture variable changes over time and the effect they have on criminality. LaFree (1998) provide examples of institutional-level longitudinal analyses of crime (see also Conklin 2003). These studies found significant relationships between variation in social institutions and crime rates. These studies do not incorporate the cultural ethos proscribed within institutional anomie theory. Culture’s interaction with the institutions of society varies over time as the balance of power between the two entities shift. Sacco (2005) argues that crime rate fluctuations are about social change; this social change involves both social and cultural processes within society. In respect to the behavior studied within this dissertation, significant findings have been found in respect to the relationship
between homicide rates and various measures (e.g., Land, McCall, and Cohen 1990; McCall, Parker, and MacDonald 2007).

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) challenge the advantages of longitudinal research and propose they are false assumptions. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1987) argue that even the most intensive observation will not allow us to determine causal order. The previously discussed longitudinal studies provide little evidence or discussion of causal order between the variables. Second, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1987) argue "circumstances are sufficiently stable over time," and "variability is most likely measurement error" (p. 609). The institutional effects on crime within a majority of the above studies were captured over decades rather than shorter periods of time, which this project is restricted to.

Presence of Criminality

Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) final major discussion point focuses on the presence of criminal behavior prior to the research timeframe. They argue that "if the phenomenon of 'criminality' is present at the time that longitudinal research gets under way, no correlational study of the manifestations of this phenomenon can shed light on its causal priority vis-à-vis other phenomena" (p. 253). Gang-related homicides have been occurring for a significant period of time prior to official records being kept. Thrasher ([1927] 2000) found a significant number of gang-related homicides occurring during his research. Gottfredson and Hirschi argue that studying gang homicides longitudinally would be inappropriate since the criminality has been occurring prior to the study period.
Definitional Validity

The ever-changing phenomenon of gang-related homicides itself is a crucial limitation to a longitudinal analysis of the behavior. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) propose that “criminology possesses a dependent variable that is broad or general, stable . . . and predictably variable overtime” (p. 253). The definition of gang-related homicides and more generally gangs have not been stable over time. For example, a significant majority of the gangs described by Thrasher ([1927] 2000) would no longer constitute a gang in today’s definitional context (Knox 2000). Attempting to test a concept, whose definition is dynamic, longitudinally will produce unreliable results and would be methodologically inappropriate.

A possible remedy to this would be decreasing the timeframe studied to a period where a more standardized conceptualization of gangs is used. The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Supplementary Homicide Reports gathered gang homicide data since the 1970s. Restricting the timeframe may increase the definitional validity. However, during this 40-year period, the social context and definition of gangs has been significantly influenced by gang migration, drug markets, gang formation, and, as discussed by Gilbertson and Malinski (2005), the increased number of statutory definitions. Further temporal restriction may increase the definitional validity; however, it minimizes the likelihood of institutional variable change and decreases the theoretical appropriateness of institutional analysis over several decades.

Empirically testing institutional anomie theory longitudinally is theoretically appropriate if the period spans several decades as seen in previous institutional-level
analysis (e.g., LaFree, 1998; Land, McCall, and Cohen 1990). Focusing on several decades will allow the analysis to capture changes in the strength and importance of the institution; Messner and Rosenfeld (2004) support the use of long-term studies in hopes of ensuring “genuine institutional change” (p. 99). Land et al. (1990) argue that theoretical relationships “should hold across time, and the greater the number of time periods ... the more confidence one has” (p. 933). Gottfredson and Hirschi (1987) highlighted two barriers to longitudinal research; the first is the determination of causal order and circumstantial change. Institutional anomie focuses on difference and changes in criminality; thus, the causal order concerns is minimal. Secondly, institutional anomie models, which incorporate decades of institutional measures, will minimize the likelihood of circumstantial change.

A majority of serious crimes appropriate for institutional anomie theory would maintain a high level of definitional validity over the expanded timeframe. The definitional variation and inability to develop a standard gang definition will produce “illusory substantive findings” if gang homicides were tested longitudinally (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1987:581). Therefore, this dissertation will approach the relationship between institutional anomie and gang-related homicides cross-sectionally.

Hypotheses

Institutional anomie theory has generalized hypotheses that focus on the interrelationship between a society’s cultural ethos and social structure, which make up the institutional balance of power. The greater levels of competition, individualism, and materialism experienced by society members creates a higher level of anomie. This
anomic state, referred to as the American Dream, weakens the ability of institutions within society to provide control and support. The lack of control and support releases society members from the normative restraints, making them "exceptionally vulnerable to criminal temptations" (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:87). Thus, as the American Dream has more power in respect to society's social structure, an increased level of crime will be present. As reviewed in Chapter II, a significant amount of empirical support has been found in respect to these generalized hypotheses.

Three hypotheses are formalized and integrated into this conceptual model from the general theoretical hypotheses. In this theoretical model, it is hypothesized that economic decommodification has an inverse relationship with gang homicide rates. It is also hypothesized that noneconomic institutional strength has an inverse relationship with gang homicide rate. A crucial component of institutional anomie is the interaction between the cultural ethos and social structure conceptualized as economic domination and noneconomic institutional strength. This relationship can be measured through the use of interaction effects between the social institutions and economic decommodification. This technique will capture the effect economic domination has on crime rates via institutional strength. In this model, it is hypothesized that the ability of noneconomic institutions to provide control and support, with respect to gang homicides, is inversely related to economic decommodification. Three main hypotheses were tested within this project.

1. There is an inverse relationship between gang homicide rates and decommodification. Therefore, states with stronger economic domination, signified by a lower decommodification, will have higher gang homicide rates.
2. There is an inverse relationship between gang homicide rates and noneconomic institutional strength.

3. The strength of noneconomic institutions will moderate the influence of economic domination on gang homicide rates. The influence of economic domination on gang homicide rates will be lessened in states with strong noneconomic institutions.

Data

The intent of institutional anomie theory is to explain rates and differences in crime rates; therefore, this project uses aggregate-level data. The sample for this cross-sectional state-level analysis is the 50 U.S. States in 2000. State-level analysis has been completed previously within institutional anomie research (e.g., Chamlin and Cochran 1995; Piquero and Piquero 1998; Schoepfer and Piquero 2006). The social dynamics we are attempting to measure are present on the state level. Furthermore, religious adherence and voting behavior are best measured at the state level (Chamlin and Cochran 1995). The dependent variable, gang-related homicide rate, is gathered from the Uniform Crime Report Supplemental Homicide Reports for the year 2000 (Fox 2007). This state-level incorporation of gang-related homicide has not been previously completed. All of the other variables except for two are gathered from the United States Census Bureau’s Statistical Abstract of the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2008). Finke and Scheitle’s (2005) adjusted church adherence measures is used to capture religious institutional strength. Finally, the state crack cocaine incarceration rate is gathered from
the United States Sentencing Commission (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics 2000) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Summary of Variables Used in Empirical Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Variable Operationalization</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang - Homicide Rate</td>
<td></td>
<td>Uniform Crime Reports: Supplementary Homicide Reports, 2000 (Fox, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Percentage of 25 years old and over who are high school graduates or higher residing in the state.</td>
<td>U.S. Census Bureau 2008 Statistical Abstract: Table No. 221 Educational Attainment by State: 1990 to 2006.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>State religious adherence rate adjusted from the 2000 RCMS.</td>
<td>Finke and Scheitle (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State-Level Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Age Structure</td>
<td>Percentage of population aged 15 to 24.</td>
<td>U.S. Census Bureau Census 2000 Summary File 1: Table P12: Sex by Age (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dependent Variable

The operational definition of gang homicide is a key methodological issue in any project approaching the phenomenon (Curry and Spergel 1988). Theoretically, the definition has been under scrutiny since Thrasher ([1927] 2000) first attempted to conceptualize a gang. These conceptualization difficulties have limited the data available to study the gang phenomenon and subsequent behavioral concerns of gang homicide. There are two major data sets that gather information on gang homicide rates within the United States: the National Youth Gang Survey (Egley and Ritz 2006), and the Uniform Crime Reporting Program's Supplemental Homicide Reports (Fox 2007). The National Youth Gang Survey uses a nationally representative sample; however, the sampling is severely limited, preventing state-level accuracy in measurement. In addition, the survey was significantly changed between 2001 and 2002 with no state-level information available prior to 2001. The dependent variable in this study is the state gang-homicide rate for the year 2000, as reported in the Uniform Crime Reporting Program Supplemental Homicide Reports (Fox 2007).

The use of the Uniform Crime Report Supplemental Homicide Reports for the dependent variable data is justified for several reasons. First, an empirical consensus is starting to develop that using police statistics in respect to gang homicide is the best possible measure (Curry and Spergel 1988). Klein, Gordon, and Maxson (1986) studied the validity of gang designations within police reports in respect to investigative processes, finding no adverse effect. Furthermore, Klein et al. (1986) argue that these officially reported rates are "appropriate outcome measures" (p. 510). The use of this
measurement technique has been previously seen within gang homicide research (Curry and Spergel 1988; Kubrin and Wadsworth 2003; Pizarro and McGloin 2006; Rogers 1993). Lopez (2006) used the Uniform Crime Report Supplemental Homicide Report circumstantial data in reference to gangs’ weapons of choice and racial composition.

Second, the Supplemental Homicide Report provides data on gang-related homicides that is estimated to be over 90 percent complete for time period of interest (Fox 2007). Third, the year 2000 is the only known record of police-reported statistics on the state level. Two categories within the SHR will be combined to formulate the gang homicide rate: gangland killings and juvenile gang killings. Gangland killings include those that are labeled by law enforcement officers as related to organized crime. Juvenile gang killings are gang-related homicides involving individuals up to the age 18; this excludes half of all gang-related homicides due to the age restriction (Maxson, Curry, and Howell 2002). Combining these two circumstantial categories captures both juvenile gang homicides, as well as young adult gang homicides (Maxson et al. 2002).

The definitional validity between jurisdictions is a significant concern with using the Supplementary Homicide Report. Maxson et al. (2002) summarize several other concerns with the SHR in respect to gang-related homicides, including police investigation difficulties, “the lack of valid rosters of gang members, and the chaotic situations in which many homicides are committed” (p. 115). Furthermore, the political nature of gang problems leads to underestimation of the incidents (Maxson et al. 2002). Bailey and Unnithan (1994) found an underestimation in the Supplemental Homicide Reports even more than the other law enforcement surveys in respect to gang-related homicides.
**Independent Variables**

*Cultural Variables*

**Economic Decommodification.** Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) use an index to measure economic decommodification as well as the “cultural dynamics” of the society (p. 1408). Following previous researchers on the cross-national level, I created a state-level decommodification scale paralleling the “assumption that general expenditure patterns reflect the underlying logic of social welfare system” (Messner and Rosenfeld 1997:1399). The decommodification measure is a ratio of government spending on welfare, health, and housing to the general expenditures total of the state. The public welfare component of this measure consists of state contributions supplementing federal programs. These programs include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and general relief. This component of the overall decommodification measure is mainly funded through federal participation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003a). The health component includes expenditures towards outpatient health services, hospital financing, public health administration and services, research and education, as well as categorical health services (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003a). The final component consists of the expenditures towards Housing and Community Development programs within the state (U.S. Census Bureau 2003a).

Creating a ratio between social welfare expenditures and the general expenditures totals attempts to operationalize the importance of decommodified policies in relation to the state’s output of financial resources, thereby arguing that the higher this ratio, the less dominant the economy. The incorporation of economic decommodification as a measure
of economic dominance was seen in previous research (e.g., Messner and Rosenfeld 1997; Savolainen 2000). Decommodification indexes capture the structural component of economic dominance as described earlier. Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) interpret the use of economic decommodification as a measure that reflects the ethos of a community and the importance of economic success in relation to social rights and welfare. This project’s index is collected from the United States Census (U.S. Census Bureau 2003b) and provides a measure that parallels the postulates of institutional anomie as proposed by Messner and Rosenfeld.

This project’s economic decommodification index is operationalized in a manner that is an inverse measure of a state’s economic dominance. The index presents a ratio revealing the relationship between a state’s expenditures and decommodified policies. In states where there is a high ratio, more of the state’s financial output is directed towards social policies and programs, thus signifying a culture where the ethos of economic domination is less than those states where the ratio is low. The hypotheses will propose an inverse relationship between economic decommodification and gang homicide rates.

**Structural Variables**

Following previous research (e.g., Chamlin and Cochran 1995; Maume and Lee 2003; Piquero and Piquero 1998), I operationalized the ability of social structure to provide control and support through institutional strength measures. Thus, lower institutional strength decreases the ability of the noneconomic institution to provide control in respect to criminal behavior.
Polity. Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) theorize that polity has a collective purpose to mobilize and distribute “power to attain collective goals” (p. 72). The strength of collective involvement in the political process best measures this institution’s strength. This study follows Chamlin and Cochran (1995), using participation in congressional elections rather than presidential elections. Chamlin and Cochran argued that the use of congressional election captures the interest and investment in local and statewide issues, thereby allowing for a better inter-state comparison. Chamlin and Cochran (1995) found that strong congressional election participation moderates the effect of poverty on property crime consistent with the propositions within institutional anomie. This measure was obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau (2008).

Family. Families have a “protective function” serving as a “haven” which is needed to “counter balance and temper the harsh, competitive conditions of public life” (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:72). Chamlin and Cochran (1995) note that family disruption will weaken this institution’s ability to provide a “haven” (see also Piquero and Piquero 1998). Maume and Lee (2003) and Chamlin and Cochran (1995) both found their family strength operationalization to have significant explanatory ability in crime rate variation. Indiana, Louisiana, California, and Colorado do not gather divorce data on the state level. Piquero and Piquero (1998) used percentage of single-parent families as a “proxy for family disruption” (p. 70). Following Piquero and Piquero (1998), family institutional strength is measured as the percentage of single-parent families residing in the state (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

Education. Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) see a similarity between the socialization functions of family and education. Education is responsible for “transmitting
cultural standards,” and training youth to fulfill their “occupational roles” (p. 72). Maume and Lee (2003) conceptualized educational strength through educational expenditures per student. This measure was found not to have the hypothesized moderating effect on crime rates. Baumer and Gustafson (2007) measured institutional strength through two measures: percentage of government expenditures on education and pupils per teacher, neither of which had a significant effect on crime rates.

Piquero and Piquero (1998) used three different measures for institutional strength: percentage of the population who were full-time college students, comparative educators’ salaries, and percentage of high school dropouts. The inclusion of comparative educators’ salaries as a measure of institutional strength deviates from the institutional definition proposed by Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) as well as integrates the role of economy and institutional strength prematurely. Schoepfer and Piquero (2006) also used the percentage of high school dropouts an educational strength measure. Schoepfer and Piquero (2006) found that educational strength has an inverse relationship with embezzlement rates; however, the hypothesized interactive effect with the economy was nonsignificant. Piquero and Piquero (1998) found that education decreased the effect of the economy on violent and property crime rates.

In this study, measurement of educational institutional strength was operationalized by high school dropout rates, rather than full-time college students or other measures described. This best measures the ability of the educational institution to socialize and prepare students for occupational endeavors. High rates of high school dropouts indicate a weak educational institution. As with other institutional measurements, this dissertation incorporates a measure from the 2000-2001 academic
year (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). Argument could be made for the inclusion of full-time college students; however, the essence of Messner and Rosenfeld’s (2007) educational institution definition centers on the functions of primary and secondary schooling and its role in child-rearing.

Religion. As discussed earlier, Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) do not include religion as crucial noneconomic institution within their theory; however, as previously argued, religion is an important social institution providing both social control and an arena for the transmission of norms. The absence of governmental data on church membership and institutional strength limits the data available for this social institution (Smith 1990). Three institutional anomie studies have included religion as a social institution (e.g., Baumer and Gustafson 2007; Chamlin and Cochran 1995; Maume and Lee 2003). Baumer and Gustafson (2007) did not find significance in their hypothesized relationship that church adherence would moderate the effect of commitment to monetary success through legitimate means. Furthermore, they did find negative relationships between church adherence and crime rates. Chamlin and Cochran (1995) found that church membership reduces the effect of economic inequality and unemployment on crime rates. Maume and Lee (2003) found that the religious institution has a mediating effect on the relationship between income inequality and homicide.

The measurement of religious institutional strength through membership is compounded by three issues. First, there are no governmental data on religion or membership, since “the Census Bureau feels proscribed by the First Amendment from including religious affiliation questions on either the Census or the Current Population Survey” (Smith 1990:225). Second, the accuracy and completeness of data collected in
the Religious Congregations and Membership Study (RCMS) has been challenged in the literature (Finke and Scheitle 2005). These studies have been administered several times through various organizations, most recently by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies. Finke and Scheitle (2005) cite two significant limitations of these surveys. First, not all denominations participate. Second, the extent of undercounting varies in respect to demographic and racial variation. Finke and Scheitle (2005) performed corrective measures, providing a more accurate estimate "by counting the uncounted" (p. 5). The third issue is the use of adherence rate versus membership rates. The RCMS has found that membership means differing things for various organizing bodies. Therefore, they also request the number of adherents, which includes members and their children, as well as the estimated number of participants who are non-members (Jones et al. 2002). The use of an adherent measure better captures the strength and ability of the religious institution to provide control and socialization.

Finke and Scheitle (2005) developed their adjusted adherent measure from the RCMS. This study is a survey of 149 religious bodies within the United States (Finke and Scheitle 2005). Finke and Scheitle compared the results of the 2000 RCMS with the Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches. They identified those churches that did not participate in the RCMS but were listed in the yearbook; these churches consisted of "29 million adherents reported in the YACC that go uncounted in the RCMS" (Finke and Scheitle 2005:10). These adherents included a significant number of traditionally African American denominations which were excluded from the RCMS. There were several other smaller data sets that Finke and Scheitle gathered additional data from. The adjusted adherence rate determined by Finke and Scheitle is approximately 62.7 percent versus
50.2 relying solely on the RCMS (p. 20). Finke and Scheitle performed several corrective calculations to the national adjusted adherence rates to develop specific rates in respect to racial categories and states. These corrections include the inclusion of Census data in the denominator for the rate calculations, as well as incorporating adjusted General Social Survey data of non-Christian religious organization membership.

These adjustments performed by Finke and Scheitle (2005) increased the reliability of the survey. There are, however, some potential concerns with the alterations. The first is that capturing all of the previously uncounted congregations is “far from complete” (p. 19). Second is in respect to adjustments on rates of adherence for traditionally black churches, which may still be undercounted. Despite these limitations, the corrections and adjustments from the Religious Congregations and Membership Study are an improvement over previous measures. For this study, religious institutional strength is measured through the 2000 Religious Congregations and Membership Study adjusted religious adherence rate as calculated by Finke and Scheitle (2005).

Other State-Level Variables. This dissertation will incorporate several other state-level variables to better measure the influence of the economy and noneconomic institutions on gang homicide rates. Past research (e.g., Block and Christakos 1995; Curry and Spergel 1988; Hawkins 1999; Maxson, Curry, and Howell 2002) has not used a state-level approach towards gang homicides; therefore, previous relationships between state-level measures and gang homicides are unknown. The four controls selected are based on other gang homicide research and theory, as well as the National Youth Gang Surveys. The National Youth Gang Surveys (e.g., Egley and Ritz 2006) report that urban areas report a larger number of gang-related problems than non-urban areas. To control for this
on the state level, the percent of urban population (2000) within the state was gathered from the United States Census Bureau. Gangs have traditionally been studied and reported in urban areas. The role of drugs/crack cocaine and gang violence has been studied within the literature (e.g., Block and Block 1993; Klein, Maxson, and Cunningham 1991; Maxson 1999). The findings have been mixed on a relationship between drugs and gang homicide. Howell (1999:227) concludes that drug involvement is an "indirect contributor" to the gang-related homicides. To capture this possible relationship, a rate of sentenced federal drug offenders per state population was included in the model (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics 2000).

Throughout history, gangs have traditionally tied to racial and ethnic minorities as well as immigrant groups (e.g., Hagerdorn 1998; Vigil 2002) Cloward and Ohlin (1960) describe adaptations of immigrant groups, first going through a conflict stage similar to the behaviors displayed by the conflict subculture. Thrasher ([1927] 2000) argues there is an indirect relationship between immigrants and gangs via the disorganization and breakdown of the social system the immigrant is accustomed to. The state immigration rate was also included as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (2002). In addition, following previous research, structural variables have differing effects on whites and non-whites in respect to criminal behavior (e.g., Kubrin and Wadsworth 2003; LaFree, Drass, and O'Day 1992). The percentage of non-white residents within the state was incorporated as gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau (2001).

Finally, state age structure was measured as the percentage of population aged 15 to 24 (2000) gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau. The inclusion of this within the state-level model will control for differences in state population structure. Block and Block
(1993) found that age was a factor in respect to risk of being a victim or offender in regards to homicide within gang areas. In addition to other gang-related empirical studies incorporating age (e.g., Kubrin and Wadsworth 2003; Pizarro and McGloin 2006; Wells and Weisheit 2001), there is an age-related focus in many of the gang theories previously discussed (e.g., Cohen 1955; Miller 1958).

Methods

The previous section reviewed the conceptualization and operationalization of the variables selected for this project. This section will describe the data analysis techniques used to test the three hypotheses. The three hypotheses were tested in two separate models, the additive and interactive models, both of which are expanded upon in this section. Following the description of the models used is a review of the presentation and interpretation of the results. Two additional topics are included within this methodology section. The first is this study’s limitations discussing the issues of secondary data analysis and institutional anomie research. In addition, the definitional validity issues are presented. The last section reviews the data preparation and techniques used to create the best final model for analysis.

Analysis

The data analysis for this dissertation took multiple steps. First, univariate analyses were completed investigating potential problems with variables. The dependent variable, gang homicide rate, is generally tested using the square root to increase their conformity to normality (Curry and Spergel 1988). Non-linear relationships were tested
and model specification changes were made when necessary. Multivariate normality tests and influence analyses were performed to assess whether outliers were affecting the results. The inclusion of several additional state-level variables addressing age, race and ethnicity, immigration, and percentage of urban population increased the possibility of collinearity issues. Homoskedasticity was tested and addressed prior to the final model.

Additive Model

Multiple regression performed by SPSS was used to estimate the model. This allows us to better understand the effect each independent variable has on the gang homicide rate while the other independent variables are held constant. The gang homicide rate was regressed on the institutional and control variables as described above (see Table 3). Two multiple regression analyses were performed: a baseline with the additive effects of the independent variables, and an analysis including the interactive effects. The initial equation for the causal model is:

\[
\text{Gang Homicide Rate} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{ (Economic Decommodification)} + \beta_2 \text{ (Polity)} + \beta_3 \text{ (Family)} + \beta_4 \text{ (Education)} + \beta_5 \text{ (Religion)}
\]

SPSS allows for testing multiple regression and the additive effects described above, as well as the interactive effects of the second analysis.

Interactive Model

The second analyses addressed a key proposition of institutional anomie, the interaction that occurs between the cultural ethos, economic domination, and the noneconomic institutions. Interaction in regression equations allows for capturing the
effect of one variable as it depends on another (Allison 1999). The interaction equation slopes reveal “the change in the effect of one variable as the other variable increases by one unit” (McClendon 1994:286). In other words, interactive effects allow the ability to measure the influence one variable has on another in respect to the dependent variable.

As reviewed in the previous chapter, this technique has been used extensively in previous institutional anomie research (e.g., Baumer and Gustafson 2007; Piquero and Piquero 1998; Savolainen 2000). In this project, the interactive effects measure the influence that economic domination has on a noneconomic institution’s relationship to the gang homicide rate. These interaction equations capture the relationship between economic domination as measured through the decommodification scale and the effect this has on the noneconomic institutions. The interactive effects between each of the variables were tested (Economic Decommodification × Polity; Economic Decommodification × Family; Economic Decommodification × Education; and Economic Decommodification × Religion). The interactive models tested included each interactive effect singularly, as well as all effects tested in the same regression.

Presentation and Interpretation of Data

The coefficient of determination, $R^2$, is reported to reveal the variation in gang homicides explained by the independent variables. This dissertation used the adjusted or “shrunken $R^2$” value due to the significant number of independent and state-level variables included in the model. Failure to use this estimate would lead to an upwardly biased estimate of explained variation (McClendon 2002). The results for both analyses are presented in regression coefficient tables. Due to the directional nature of the
relationships hypothesized, one-tailed significance tests are used. Standardized partial regression coefficients are further discussed and interpreted to reveal the relative strength of the relationship between an independent variable and gang homicides. This measurement, in standard deviation units, allows the comparison between variables in their explanatory strength of gang homicide variation. This measurement is also beneficial to understand the strength of relationship in comparing the additive and interactive effects tested, thereby allowing a test of whether social institutions alone or in interaction with the cultural ethos have a greater influence on gang homicide rates.

Study Limitations

There are three areas of limitations in this study that can be addressed in future research. Many of these are consistent with limitations associated with secondary data analysis and institutional anomie research. The subject matter of this project prevented the collection of dependent variable data. Messner and Rosenfeld (2006) revealed that testing institutional anomie is difficult due to the abstract concepts within their propositions. All institutional anomie research is confronted with this limitation. This variable construction limitation is compounded within this research project by the availability of state-level variables from the U.S. Census Bureau and other organizations.

A second limitation that is associated with variable availability is the construction of the civic institution composite measure. As noted in the subsequent section, the operationalizations used to measure educational and political institutional strength suffered from significant multicollinearity; therefore, one composite measure was constructed overcoming the limitation. Addressing the limitation in this way was the only
response due to the secondary data collection. This is problematic, as institutional anomie models should include separate measures of education and polity in order to determine their interaction with economy.

The definitional validity issues surrounding gang homicides discussed earlier is a significant limitation of this research. The variability of the concept gang and subsequently gang homicide, throughout the United States, presents an inconsistent measure being tested. Furthermore, the skewed nature of gang homicide incidences throughout the United States limits the validity and possibly the ability of institutional anomie to predict gang homicide variation. These limitations are in addition to the concerns of using official statistics and Supplementary Homicide Reports (Mosher, Miethe, and Phillips 2002). In addition, this study is faced with the limitations previously addressed in respect to the validity and reliability of the gang-related measures within the SHR.

A major objective of this research project was to perform the first state-level analysis of gang homicide rates. The skewed nature of gang homicide rates across states created a non-normal distribution for analysis, therefore challenging the ability of a macro-level analysis. If another unit of analysis was used (e.g., major metropolitan cities), a normal distribution of gang homicide rates may be achieved, thereby allowing better theoretical analysis and understanding of gang homicide.

Assumptions of Ordinary Least Squares Regression

Ordinary least squares regression was used to estimate the model. The state-level gang homicide rate for 2000 was regressed on the independent variables. Interaction
effects were then created to examine whether the effect noneconomic social institutions differed by level of economic dominance. The initial univariate descriptives are shown in Table 4. Following Curry and Spergel's (1988) recommendation, the gang homicide rate was squared initially in attempts to address the non-normality present. Ordinary least square assumptions were tested in hopes of creating the best final model, yielding the best, least square, unbiased estimators.

*Linearity*

The first assumption tested was linearity. The assumption in ordinary least squares regression is that a straight line is the best possible description between the dependent and independent variables. Curve estimation revealed a cubic relationship between immigrant status and the square root of gang homicide rate present between these two variables. Curve estimation was also performed between the other variables and the null hypothesis of linearity could not be rejected.

*Normality*

Allison (1999) proposes normality is the least significant assumption within multiple regression, especially if you have a large sample size. However, Allison (1999) reveals that if you have less than 100 cases, "the normality assumption becomes more critical" (p. 131). A regression was performed saving the unstandardized residuals, which were tested for normality. Using the Shapiro-Wilk test, the null hypothesis of normality was rejected ($p = .002$). A second regression was run logging the dependent variable rather than using the square root of gang homicide rate. The unstandardized residuals
Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of Variables (N = 50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang – Homicide Rate</td>
<td>.120</td>
<td>.297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Square Root of Gang – Homicide Rate</td>
<td>.2175</td>
<td>.273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Decommodification Ratio of Welfare, Health, Housing to</td>
<td>.248</td>
<td>.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State General Expenditures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polity</td>
<td>49.816</td>
<td>8.148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% participating in Congressional Election</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>9.060</td>
<td>1.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Single Parent Families</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>85.542</td>
<td>3.999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of High School Graduates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>599.871</td>
<td>132.580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted Adherence Rate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State-Level Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Population</td>
<td>71.694</td>
<td>14.902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% State Population – Urban</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Involvement</td>
<td>8.373</td>
<td>6.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarceration Rate for Drug Offenders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>.213</td>
<td>.170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Population New Immigrants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial and Ethnic Minorities</td>
<td>20.530</td>
<td>12.963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Population Non-White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Age Structure</td>
<td>14.073</td>
<td>1.340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Population between 15-24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

were tested for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test; again the null hypothesis of normality was rejected (p = .000). Univariate analysis revealed normality concerns with family strength, state incarceration rate, age structure, percentage non-white, and percentage of immigrants. Variables of concern were logged; however, multivariate
normality was not achieved (Shapiro-Wilk $p = .000$). Further univariate analysis revealed continued normality concerns with the dependent variable and state age structure.

Normality concerns continue to be present within this analysis despite the efforts to resolve the issues. Normality is the least concerning assumption violation within the ordinary least squares regression (Allison 1999). Normality is unrelated to the ability of a regression model to provide unbiased and efficient results. McClendon (2002) states that if homoskedasticity and other assumptions are met, regardless of normality, the slope will be the “most efficient linear unbiased estimator” (p. 146). Furthermore, the issues of normality are limited, as the sample size increases to the extent that the distribution will become normal in large sample sizes. In order to ensure a better measure, Allison proposes using significance levels that are more stringent, thereby reducing Type I errors preventing the conclusion of effects being present when they are not. This project remedies the distribution issues by using a more stringent significance level ($p < .01$).

**Multicollinearity**

The assumption of noncollinearity was not met and significant corrections were needed. Collinearity was diagnosed following Allison’s (1999) guidelines with tolerances below .40 and variance inflation factors above 2.50 seen with four variables: educational and political strength, as well as percent non-white and percent of population new immigrants. These four variables were grouped into two new constructs: civic institution, a composite measure of educational and political strength, and a composite measure of percentage non-white and population of new immigrants. These constructs
were each grouping’s factor scores saved through SPSS factor analyses. The resulting descriptive statistics are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations of Final Model Variables ($N=50$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Square Root of Gang – Homicide Rate</td>
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<td>.273</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Decommodification Ratio of Welfare, Health, Housing to State General Expenditures</td>
<td>.248</td>
<td>.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Institution – Polity and Education Composite Measure Percent Voter Participation and Percent High School Graduates</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family ln (% Single Parent Families)</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>.120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion Adjusted Adherence Rate</td>
<td>599.871</td>
<td>132.580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State-Level Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Involvement ln (Incarceration Rate for Drug Offenders)</td>
<td>1.908</td>
<td>.64978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority and Immigrant Population Composite Measure Percent Minority and Percent New Immigrants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Age Structure ln(% Population between 15-24)</td>
<td>2.640</td>
<td>.096</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Re-testing of Assumptions*

The previously tested multiple regression assumptions were re-tested. The assumption of noncollinerarity was met with no additional corrections needed. All variables within the regression were below Allison’s (1999) suggested cutoff value of
2.50 for the Variance Inflation Factor test. The second diagnostic test, tolerance, showed a significant amount of unique variance in each of the independent variables. Allison (1999) is concerned with any value below .40. The assumption of linearity was confirmed between the dependent variable and the two new composite measures introduced to the regression.

A regression was run including the composite measures, and the residuals were saved and tested for normality. Using Shapiro-Wilk test, the null hypothesis of normality was rejected due to a $p$-value less than .05 ($p = .000$). Descriptive statistics were requested revealing the minority immigrant composite measure violated the normality assumption ($Shapiro-Wilk p = .001$); this violation was remedied through logging the variable ($Shapiro-Wilk p = .143$). The logging of the minority immigrant composite measure subsequently violated the collinearity assumption ($VIF = 2.786$; $Tolerance = .359$). Therefore, the measure was incorporated into the regression without logging it, violating the normality assumption. The civic institution measure violated the normality assumption ($Shapiro-Wilk p = .043$), which worsened through logging the variable ($Shapiro-Wilk p = .021$). Overall, the normality assumption cannot be achieved primarily due to the skewing of the dependent variable, but also the age structure of the state ($Shapiro-Wilk p = .005$), minority and immigrant composite measure ($Shapiro-Wilk p = .001$), and the civic institution ($Shapiro-Wilk p = .043$).

**Homoskedasticity**

Finally, White's test was performed to test the null hypothesis of homoskedasticity. The critical values ($\chi^2_{.05,8} = 15.507$) for the squared gang homicide
rates in 2000 exceeded the calculated values (11.5). When the critical value is greater, the null hypothesis of homoskedasticity cannot be rejected. All of the assumptions, except normality, of ordinary least squares regression have been fulfilled. This project will use a \( p \)-value of .01 in order to address the normality concerns and follow Allison's (1999) recommendations.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the theoretical and conceptual framework, the data and variables, and the analytical model used to test institutional anomie and gang homicide rates. In addition, this chapter reviewed the assumptions and violation remedies. Chapter IV will present the findings of my empirical research, while Chapter V discusses the findings, notes limitations to gang homicide research and institutional anomie testing, and suggests directions for future research.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

As discussed in previous chapters, a comprehensive state-level model of gang homicide rates within the United States has not yet been tested. Several studies incorporate cultural or structural variables on differing geographic units; however, none fully incorporate a theoretical framework such as Messner and Rosenfeld’s (2007) institutional anomie theory. The theoretical framework tested in the present study incorporates structural, cultural, and other state-level variables in both additive and interactive models. This chapter presents the results of the additive model, the interactive models, and hypotheses. In addition, a discussion of individual findings in relation to institutional anomie and gang homicide is included.

Additive Model Results

This project’s first hypothesis proposes that there will be an inverse relationship between economic decommodification and the state’s gang homicide rate. The second hypothesis predicts that states with stronger noneconomic institutions will have lower gang homicide rates. The additive model was used to test these two hypotheses. The first analysis performed was a baseline model which included no theoretical variables or hypothesized relationships. Subsequent models were added, incorporating additional theoretical variables and hypothesized relationships. The additive models’ adjusted $R^2$
statistic ranged from (.158 to .200), revealing minimal explanation of gang homicide rate variation explained through the empirical models (Table 6). The individual coefficients and their p-values are provided in Table 6. There are only two variables that have a partially significant expected relationship (p < .05): the state’s urban population and state’s gang age population. These findings should be taken with caution due to the normality concerns within this project, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Table 6. Standardized Coefficients of Additive Models (N = 50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Decommodification</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.198</td>
<td>.182</td>
<td>.172</td>
<td>.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Institution – Adherence</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family – Single Parent Percentage</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Institution – Polity and Education</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite Measure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Urban Population</td>
<td>.293</td>
<td>.385</td>
<td>.377</td>
<td>.385</td>
<td>.383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarceration Rate</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Age Structure</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.003*</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority and Immigrant Population</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite Measure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R Square</td>
<td>.181*</td>
<td>.200*</td>
<td>.284*</td>
<td>.168</td>
<td>.158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p < .01; **p < .005.

The first hypothesis suggested that an inverse relationship would be present between gang homicide rates and economic decommodification. Economic decommodification was used to operationalize the cultural ethos of a state in respect to the importance and dominating effect of the economy. States with more financial
investment in social policies and programs in relation to their overall expenditures have a less dominating economic ethos. In other words, states with a higher economic decommodification ratio have a lower level of economic dominance. This hypothesis was tested in the additive model, with the results shown in Table 6. No significant relationship was found between economic decommodification and gang homicide, thereby not supporting the hypothesis.

The second hypothesis was also tested in the additive model and proposed an inverse relationship between gang homicide rates and the noneconomical institutional strengths tested. The stronger the family, religious, and civic institutions are, the lower the gang homicide rates will be. It was expected that a significant negative relationship would be present between religious adherence, and the civic institution an aggregated measure of graduation rates and voter participation. A significant positive relationship was expected with the familial institutional measure; as the percentage of single-parent families increases, so will the gang homicide rate for the state. The results of these models (Table 6) provide no significant relationships between the theoretical variables and the hypothesized relationships.

The two additive model findings that were partially significant, percentage urban and age structure, are to be expected. This expectation parallels the survey results that gangs are more prevalent in urban areas, and gang membership peaks during the late teens and early twenties (e.g., Egley and Ritz 2006). In addition, gangs as a youth and urban phenomenon has been extensively discussed within classic gang theories (e.g., Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Cohen 1955; Thrasher [1927] 2000). Since this project was the first
state-level analysis of gang homicide rates, there are no other empirical studies to compare the findings with.

Interactive Model Results

Institutional anomie proposes there is an interaction between the cultural ethos of a society and its institutions (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007). Institutional anomie proposes social institutions are weakened within societies where the economic institution is more dominating. The third hypothesis in this research project expanded this theoretical relationship; the strength of noneconomic institutions will moderate the influence of economic domination on gang homicide rates. As described earlier, the cultural ethos of society is theorized as economic dominance present and conceptualized as economic decommodification. In order to capture economic dominance theorized by Messner and Rosenfeld (2007), interaction effects were used between economic decommodification and each of the noneconomic social institutions. These interaction effects measure the effect of economic domination on the ability of the other institutions’ strength in respect to gang homicide rates. The third hypothesis was tested in two types of models. The first was each institution and economic decommodification independently, and then a full model.

This research project interactive model’s adjusted $R^2$ statistics provide evidence of better variance explanation ranging from .189 to .202 (Table 7). The individual interactive models provide similar evidence as the full effect model. In each of the individual models, there are partially significant relationships ($p < .05$) between state urban population and the state age structure. In addition, none of the models, individual
or full, shows significant interactive effect relationships between the theoretical variables and gang homicide rate. Furthermore, there were no significant relationships in support of the third hypothesis.

Table 7. Standardized Coefficients of Interactive Models (N = 50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Model 1 Beta</th>
<th>Model 2 Beta</th>
<th>Model 3 Beta</th>
<th>Model 4 Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Decommodification * Civic</td>
<td>-.178</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Decommodification * Religion</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Decommodification * Family</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Urban Population</td>
<td>.336</td>
<td>.335</td>
<td>.393</td>
<td>.394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarceration Rate</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Age Structure</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority and Immigrant Population Composite Measure</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>.157</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.312</td>
<td>-2.411</td>
<td>-2.899*</td>
<td>-2.696*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R Square</td>
<td>.189*</td>
<td>.190*</td>
<td>.202*</td>
<td>.171*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p < .01; **p < .005.

The singular and full interactive models show a nonsignificant negative interactive effect in respect to the economic decommodification and civic institutions. A negative interaction effect signifies that, as the economic decommodification ratio decreases, the control provided by civic institutions increases. In other words, the more dominating the economy is, as measured through the decommodification ratio, the ability of civic institutions to provide control also increases, thereby contradicting theoretical expectations. Institutional anomie theory proposes that, as economic dominance increases, the ability of civic institutions to provide control decreases in respect to gang
homicide rates. The singular interactive effect model shows partially significant relationships \((p < .05)\) between state urban population and state age structure in respect to gang homicide rates; this results parallels the findings within the additive model as discussed previously.

A positive nonsignificant relationship is present between the interaction effect of economic decommodification and religion, supporting the propositions of institutional anomie theory. This finding is present in both the individual and full effect model. The positive interactive effect reveals that, as economic dominance over religious attendance increases, the gang homicide rate increases. In other words, as the economy becomes more dominating, the ability of religious institutions to provide social control decreases. The individual religion economic interactive model has similar results in respects to the other state-level variables. Partially significant relationships \((p < .05)\) were again found between gang homicide rate and a state’s urban population and age structure.

The final institutional interactive relationship tested contradicts institutional anomie theoretical propositions. The family institution’s interactive relationship with economic decommodification is nonsignificant and positive within both the individual and full model. This finding reveals that, as economic domination increases, the ability of the family to provide control also increases. As seen in the other individual interactive effect models, a state’s urban population and age structure have positive partially significant relationships with gang homicide rates \((p < .05)\).
Discussion of Findings

The regression models performed in this project were all subject to non-normal distribution of the dependent variable, even when corrective measures were performed. Violations of the normality assumption can be accepted if more conservative interpretations of significance tests are performed (Allison 1999). Allison (1999) recommends using $p$-values less than .01 rather than .05, as is standard. This restriction is noted in Tables 6 and 7. The conservative interpretations recommended by Allison eliminate all of the significant findings within this project. State urban population and age structure's relationship with gang homicide rate had a $p$-value of less than .05; however, as raised previously, the normality concerns restrict our findings to only those with a $p$-value less than .01.

Theoretical Variables

Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) theorized that serious crime rates are influenced by the economy's relationship with noneconomic institutions. This research project tested the relationship two ways: additive and interactive. The additive model measured the relationship between institutional strength and gang homicide rates. The interactive models tested the influence that the economy has on a noneconomic institution's relationship with gang homicide. The conceptualizations and operationalizations for these models were developed from previous research, which will be discussed later as a possible explanation for insignificant findings. This possibility and remedies will be discussed in Chapter V.
The results reveal no significant variable findings in this sample; however, several directional relationships were found to match expectations (Table 8). The directionally appropriate variables were different in the additive and interactive models. The additive model reveals as civic institution strength increases, gang homicide rates decrease in support of the institutional anomie propositions. Religion and economy interactive effect also has a directionally appropriate relationship, although not significant.

Table 8. Summary Table of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Theoretically Expected Directional Relationship Additive Model</th>
<th>Theoretically Expected Directional Relationship Interactive Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Decommodification</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Institution</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family – Single Parent</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Institution</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Decommodification * Religion</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Decommodification * Family</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Decommodification * Civic</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Urban Population</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarceration Rate</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Age Structure</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority and Immigrant Population</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* + = matched expectations.

These results suggest a possible greater influence of the economy on the ability of religious institutions to provide control versus the other noneconomic institutions. When the noneconomic institutions were tested as control agents, without the effect of economic domination, religion does not have an expected relationship. When religious
strength interacts with economic decommodification, a theoretically expected relationship was present. This relationship between religion and economy supports the propositions of institutional anomie theory, in that the institutions' ability to provide control is limited by economic domination. This interactive effect is not present amongst the other noneconomic institutions.

The lack of significant relationships between the economy and homicide is unexpected in respect to previous studies (e.g., Messner and Rosenfeld 1997; Savolainien 2000). This lack of finding confirms the uniqueness of gang homicides from generalized homicide as found throughout many studies (e.g., Maxson, Gordon, and Klein 1985; Block and Block 1993). These findings support Williams and Flewelling’s (1988) argument that the use of aggregated homicide rates should be discontinued, since the characteristics and factors differ as the contexts of incident vary. The findings of this project reveal that the context of gang homicide is unrelated to the economic situation of the state as measured.

State-Level Variables

Four variables were included within the analysis in order to isolate the theoretical variables in respect to gang homicide rate and institutional anomie theory. The inclusion of these variables was also supported by previous empirical and theoretical gang homicide works. A key outcome of this inclusion is the significant relationships seen between a state's urban population and age structure to gang homicides. This outcome provides evidence that gang homicides can be tested on the state level, which, prior to this study, had not been completed. In addition, the results of this inclusion provide
insight to future research and previous theoretical propositions outside of institutional anomie theory.

A review of the literature provides significant discussion about the relationship between street drugs and gangs (e.g., Klein, Maxson, and Cunningham 1991; Block and Block 1993; Maxson 1999). The findings of these studies have been inconclusive and mixed. This project included federal incarceration rates for crack cocaine as a measure to test the relationship. This research shows a nonsignificant inverse relationship; a higher rate of incarcerated drug offenders leads to a lower gang homicide rate, in both models.

The lack of significant findings of race and immigration populations affecting gang homicide rates challenges previous theories and research (e.g., Thrasher [1927] 2000; Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Hagerdorn 1998; Vigil 2002). The composite measure of non-white population and recent immigrants within the state does not have significant relationships with gang homicide rates. Directionally, this project's findings show support for previous theoretical propositions that increased minority and immigrant population leads to higher gang issues.

Gang theories and research have focused on gangs as an urban phenomenon, as discussed in previous sections. It has been only recently that gang researchers have begun examining the migration of gangs and their associated problems. Both models revealed that the percentage of state population residing in urban areas has a positive partially significant relationship with gang homicide rate. Gangs themselves may have migrated to rural and suburban areas; however, the serious violence associated with them remains an urban phenomenon.
The second partially significant finding reveals that states with higher adolescent populations, with respect to their overall population, have increased gang homicide rates. This theoretically and empirically expected relationship further confirms gangs and violence remain a youth-based problem. Law enforcement studies continue to reveal that gangs remain an adolescent phenomenon. A majority of theories propose gangs are a product of youth within communities (e.g., Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Cohen 1955; Thrasher [1927] 2000). This research further supports these empirical and theoretical works.

The failure to support any of the hypotheses or any theoretically expected relationships is surprising. There are several possible explanations for these results and lack of significance with the relationships. The most likely possibility centers on the rarity of gang homicides within a majority of the states, and a couple of states with a significantly higher rate. In addition, as discussed previously, the lack of a consensus definition between states and jurisdictions influences the findings. Another possibility is the conceptualization of the institutions in respect to gang members versus the general public. The conceptualizations used within this project were developed through an extensive literature review of institutional anomie research. This previous research focused on general crime trends and adult-based characteristics, whereas gangs and gang homicides are distinct in both demographic and criminological characteristics (e.g., Esbensen, Huizinga, and Weiher 1993; Maxson, Gordon, and Klein 1985). Therefore, an explanation of the lack of limited findings may be that the variables used capture the ability of institutions to socialize and control adults but not youth. Finally, the lack of
significant findings may simply be that institutional anomie theory is unable to describe gang homicides.

Conclusion

One of this project's goals was to perform the first state-level analysis of gang homicide rates. In this chapter, I have provided the results of my cross-sectional analysis of gang homicide rates and institutional anomie theory. As described, the failure to support any of the hypotheses or theoretical relationships was surprising and possible explanations were partially discussed. Unfortunately, since this is the first attempt at gang homicide research on the state level, there are limited studies to compare these results with. Therefore, the discussion in Chapter V will focus on the unexpected findings in respect to institutional anomie theory and gang theory. This will include further review on the possible explanations for nonsignificant findings and remedies to the explanations. It is crucial to understand that the failure to find any significant theoretical and hypothesized relationships does not invalidate the importance of this first state-level gang homicide study. This understanding will provide the framework for suggestions of future gang homicide and institutional anomie research.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research project is the first cross-sectional state-level test of gang homicides. This concluding chapter provides an explanation of findings in relation to the hypotheses and other findings from both the additive and interactive multiple regression models presented in Chapter IV. These results will be discussed in relation to gang homicides and institutional anomie theory. Chapter IV briefly introduced possible explanations for the presence of nonsignificant findings. This chapter will expand this discussion as well as provide possible remedies for future research to consider. These suggested remedies will be incorporated into ideas for future research.

Explanation of Findings

_Gang Homicide Rate Distribution_

The first possible explanation for a lack of any significant findings, if using Allison’s (1999) non-normal distribution remedies as discussed, focuses on the dependent variable. Gang homicides, in comparison with other types of homicide, occur at a significant lower rate (Fox 2007). The distribution of these homicides has been and is skewed with a few states having a much higher rate than a majority of the other states. In addition, there were 21 states within this analysis where there were no reported incidents.
of gang-related homicides. If these 21 states had equally distributed statistics in the independent variables, insignificant findings would be present.

There are different remedies that could be incorporated within a macro-level gang analysis to address this possible explanation. The first is to review the years of gang-homicide data collection and select a year where there was an overall greater number of incidents. There is a possibility that this would decrease the number of states that reported no incidents of gang homicides. Second is to change the level of analysis from states to regions, thereby providing a larger aggregate set of data, and thereby reducing the number of units without incidents. Third is to change the methodology from a cross-sectional approach to longitudinal. This latter remedy cannot be performed until the second possible explanation of insignificant findings is addressed.

**Gang Definition**

Definitional validity issues remain a constant limitation within this gang homicide research project. This limitation is a possible explanation for the insignificant findings present within this project. The determination of gang homicides within the data set selected depends on the jurisdiction and its official classifying the incident. As previously described, this creates a dynamic variable that needs to remain consistent and constant for valid results. The definitional validity of gang homicides centers on the term *gang* and the question of what is a gang? This question has been thoroughly debated in the literature and, at this time, a consensus has not been achieved.

The answer to this question, if integrated into the Uniform Crime Report Supplemental Homicide Codebook, would at least provide some guidelines. However, the
likelihood of achieving a consensus definition appears to be rare (e.g., Gilbertson and Malinski 2005; Horowitz 1990). Klein (2007) reviewed the gang definition debate as well as provided a suggested definition stemming from the work of European gang investigators. Gang research would benefit from a consensus definition, both within the United States as well as globally.

The European gang investigators' definition is, "A street gang is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose own identity includes involvement in illegal activity" (Klein 2007:18). This definition provides the key components and could be easily applied to individuals and their behavior in respect to law enforcement officers and researchers. In addition, the acceptance of this definition in Europe, created with the assistance of United States gang investigators, provides validity to the conceptualization. A second remedy, self-report of membership, may be more appropriate and easier to implement throughout data collection and gang research.

One of the common questions asked by law enforcement officers to individuals when being interviewed is if they belong to a gang. Acknowledgement is recorded and stored within jurisdictional databases. This self-acknowledgement would provide evidence that the individual has intent to belong or is a part of the gang phenomenon (Klemp-North 2007). Furthermore, the use of a self-reporting eliminates outsiders' interpretation and establishment of what a gang is. The use of self-report data has been discussed in the general criminological literature (e.g., Golub, Johnson, Taylor and Liberty 2002; Thornberry and Krohn 2000). Thornberry and Krohn (2000:72) concluded that "self-reported measures of delinquency are as reliable as, if not more reliable than, most social science measures." The reliability of self-report data in respect to the gang
Webb, Katz, and Decker (2006) found no difference between gang member and non-gang member disclosure rates with respect to illegal behavior. Participants in homicide incidents could be reviewed and labeled as gang-related if one or more of the parties involved had self-reported gang membership. These could then be entered into the Uniform Crime Report Supplemental Homicide Reports for future gang research.

The lack of a common gang definition or methodological operationalization needs to be addressed; however, our continual debate amongst ourselves does not suffice nor will it produce an accurate outcome. The academic and law enforcement communities appear to have become affixed on a label of “gang,” rather than isolate what behaviors create the identity, meaning we continually rehash the same key phrases within the argument without approaching these groups’ identities with new techniques. In a field that has numerous qualitative works, it is unfortunate we have not focused on the answer to gang identity in these projects.

Focusing on conversations and interactions with youth who reveal a gang member identity will allow us to better understand this abstract concept, as well as possibly develop a consensus definition. This consensus definition will be derived from those individuals who promote and have the most knowledge of the behaviors we are so interested in better understanding. A crucial limitation will be present, regardless of the consensus definition used. These entities that we are attempting to describe in a consistent, easy-to-measure operationalization are as varied and unique as the behaviors they perform. These varieties and peculiarities not only are limiting to research but also create barriers for policy makers and law enforcement in approaching the group behaviors
that are of interest. Juvenile delinquency researchers focus on the behaviors and labels of street-level gangs. State and corporate crime scholars are describing paralleling behaviors in different constructions. Despite the variation and individual peculiarities, the behaviors of interest have similar underlying themes and tendencies.

Variable Conceptualization

Theoretical variable conceptualization for this project was based on past institutional anomie research as described in Chapters II and III. One possible explanation of insignificant findings could be an error in the conceptualization of variables. The previous literature focused primarily on general crime trends or crime often committed by older participants. As discussed in Chapter II, gang homicide participants are younger than those participating in other forms of homicide (e.g., Maxson, Gordon, and Klein 1985; Decker and Curry 2002). Therefore, the institutional strength operationalizations may concentrate on structural and cultural components of society that gang members are not part of.

The remedy for this possible explanation would be to create more age-appropriate age operationalizations. Economic domination, as a cultural ethos, or society as realized by younger individuals, may be best measured through examining the amount of money in relation to gross state product towards children's welfare and cultural programs. The familial strength measure focused on single-parent families; however, a more appropriate measure may be time spent with children. This measure would capture the strength of the institution as experienced by the younger population the study is interested in. This project's religious institutional strength was measured through adherence. A possible
alternative measure would be to incorporate the percentage of school children attending religious schools within the state. The higher the percentage, the greater the strength of religion for this younger cohort's cultural and structural components of society.

The variable conceptualizations and operationalizations performed in this project stemmed from an intensive review of the institutional anomie literature. A weakness of this method was assuming that the variables used connected to the individuals studied. This traditional method of conceptualizing variables, especially in theories with such abstract principles, is consequential to one's project. Rather than focus on past research, investigators should better understand the individuals they are interested in. Introducing qualitative works (e.g., Rodriguez 2005; Sanchez 2000; Scott 1993) as well as qualitative methods such as focus groups would assist in developing better conceptualizations. The introduction of these qualitative techniques would allow a better understanding of how anomie is felt by someone, or, in this case, what is the social structure's relationship with gang members. Therefore, the variables used in respect to institutional strength and the cultural aspects of institutional anomie are conceptualizations that matter to gang members.

This current project developed a civic institution measure that incorporated both educational strength and political strength. This composite measurement presented a study limitation, as discussed in Chapter III, and could be remedied through differing variable operationalizations. This project measured educational institutional strength through high school graduation rates; a more appropriate measure may be teacher-to-student ratio. Political strength was measured through voter participation; however, in future research, not including polity as an institution may be appropriate. The reasoning
for this exclusion stems from the lack of importance and opportunities polity has for the younger cohort.

These alternative measures for institutional strength and cultural ethos are limited by the ability to construct and access state-level data, as discussed in Chapter III. In reviewing the other state-level measures used in this project, a different measure for drug involvement, such as arrests, may be more appropriate. Incorporating a measure of drug arrests in lieu of sentencing would better measure drug activity and involvement. The use of federal sentencing may have an influence of the judicial and political culture in the region affecting the relationship. This limitation may result in further work on the conceptualization and operationalization to integrate the data available.

Institutional Anomie Theory

Institutional anomie theory advocates may argue that these theoretical propositions provide explanation for the partially significant correlations found within this project. As described in Chapter IV, a state’s urban population and age structure have a partially significant relationship with gang homicide rates. Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) describe this phenomenon in respect to crime in general, rather than gang homicides as tested within this project. Messner and Rosenfeld (2007:89) theorize that urban areas are faced with “institutional estrangement,” where communities’ institutions are unable to provide control or support. This culture of estrangement is furthered with youth of the inner city. These adolescents reside in a culture where there is an attitude of “commodity worship” (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:90). This ethos is characterized as
"inflamed consumption desires" faced by urban youth "that even the strongest institutions would have difficulty" controlling (Messner and Rosenfeld 2007:90).

These arguments focus on the conditions and surroundings of individuals on the macro-level, ignoring the individual issues surrounding participation in criminal behavior. Institutional anomie theory has repeatedly provided evidence of explanatory ability towards crime trends cross-nationally and sub-nationally (e.g., Messner and Rosenfeld 1997; Piquero and Piquero 1998; Savolainen 2000). This project's findings were limited to well known and researched correlates of criminal behavior, urban area, and age. The explanations provided by Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) rely on the assumption that institutional strength and cultural ethos is felt across co-cultures and is a universal value. These explanations do not address the rarity of gang-related homicides and limited expressions of violence that are gang-related in urban areas. This limitation is the inability of institutional anomie theory to provide a connection between the individual within the community and the ethos and structure of that community.

This macro-level limitation and cultural assumption can be remedied through two steps. The first is to better understand the relationship between the individuals of a community and the cultural ethos and societal structure. The American Dream may not be present in all communities and cultures within society; the ethos present needs to be better understood rather than assumed as a universal value. Secondly, the introduction of a micro-level theory that integrates well into the macro-level propositions within institutional anomie theory will overcome the limitation as described.

A key proposition of institutional anomie theory as described throughout the literature and this project is the ability of noneconomic institutions to provide control and
socialization. An individual’s relationship with these noneconomic institutions is perceived to be a constant and equal throughout the society. This assumption and limitation is especially challenged within urban communities and their young male residents. A micro-level social control theory that investigates the bond that individuals have to the social institutions would address this limitation. Researchers would be able to understand the importance of an individual’s desire to have an attachment to institutions as well as the ability of the institution to provide socialization and control.

Future Research Implications and Suggestions

The lack of significant findings in this first attempt at state-level gang homicide research does not discredit the value and insight this project can provide for future research. This project laid the groundwork for future gang homicide research on the state level. The foundation, however, should be approached critically with the correlation being found between gang homicides and urban populations. The urban phenomenon of gang homicides was further supported by this research. This support promotes the argument of future gang homicide research to be restricted to urban communities. It would be irrational for researchers to continue macro-level research until the conceptualization and definitional issues previously described are addressed.

The foundation for future gang homicide research on the state level was reviewed previously in this project. First, the theoretical and empirical review of gang research provided argument for macro-level study of gang homicides. Second, this project provided evidence that state-level gang homicide research can be performed; however, as described, this can be improved through better data collection and operationalizations.
This evidence included the correlation between urban populations and age structure in respect to gang homicide rates on the state level. Third, the introduction of an alternative operationalization of economic decommodification can better institutional anomie research in the future. Finally, the discussion and remedies to the unexpected findings will better future gang homicide research on the macro-level. These implications, the study limitations, and remedies to the unexpected findings guide the suggestions for future research. Three lines of future research need to be discussed from this project’s findings: gang homicide research, institutional anomie, and institutional anomie theory’s ability to explain gang homicides.

_Gang Homicide Research_

Chapter II reviewed the prior gang homicide research, revealing that the studies have been limited to smaller units of analysis. This geographic restriction minimized the variability of gang homicide rates in these previous projects. As described, one of the limitations and possible explanations for the unexpected findings in this project was the variability of gang homicide rates. Gang homicides remain isolated incidents within certain states and urban areas. As such future research should follow two trends: first, continue to use geographically restricted areas (e.g., cities and jurisdictions) to minimize the skewed incidents. In addition, this will minimize the definitional validity concerns described previously.

Gang homicide research can occur on the state level; however, the measurement and recording of gang-related homicides, members, and incidents need to be addressed. These changes could be developed from either the implementation of a standardized
definition, relying on the self-reporting of those involved in the incident, or developing a conceptualization of gangs through members. In addition, better data collection could involve further expansion of the National Youth Gang Survey and better delineation of jurisdictional measures. Regardless of the outcome in terms of gang definitions and consistent operationalizations, gangs are a unique and distinct phenomenon that take the shape of many differing organizational structures and members. This variety creates a constant limitation in respect to gang research without a foreseeable remedy.

Addressing the definitional validity issues through whatever means will allow future state-level research to be expanded to include both inter-state variation, as well as intra-state variation over a period. In respect to the concerns raised by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1987) and the issue of definitional validity, longitudinal research can occur only after these methodological changes. This second type of variation will allow for a larger sample and an increased number of incidences. This increased sample size will be able to better handle the skewed nature of gang homicide rate on the state level. Future research of gang homicides and institutional anomie theory will be discussed in a later section.

Institutional Anomie Theory Research

This project approached institutional strength measures through theoretical and empirical discussion and argument. As described previously, the selection of variables was limited due to the availability of state-level data. A second variable limitation was the need for a civic composite measure preventing the ability to measure the individual institutional relationships with gang homicides. This need for a civic composition measure developed from multicollinearity between high school graduation and voter
participation. One explanation of the lack of significant findings within this project was inappropriate conceptualization or operationalization of theoretical variables.

In attempts to address these limitations, institutional anomie researchers need to continue to work on "alternative specifications" with respect to the abstract concepts of the theory (Piquero and Piquero 1998). Researchers also need to consider the concepts with respect to the subject being studied, as in the case of gang members. As described earlier, there is a possibility that the variables as constructed in this study did not correlate with the gang members in the same manner as seen in previous research. As described previously, using a triangulation process in the development of conceptualizations would be a possible remedy in future research. This approach would develop a more gang member viewpoint of societal structure and cultural ethos surrounding them.

These alternatives and new operationalizations could be incorporated from additional data sources, such as the General Social Survey, and introduce new measures, cultural value measures, as seen in recent works (Muftíc 2006; Baumer and Gustafson 2007). The General Social Survey's individual responses could be aggregated within geographic areas to establish measures of cultural attitudes or importance of institutions within these communities. Baumer and Gustafson (2007) incorporated General Social Survey measures to establish levels of value commitment towards monetary success, finding several significant relationships with respect to criminal behavior.

Future institutional anomie research should also incorporate alternative statistical tools such as multi-level modeling. The introduction of multi-level modeling will allow the incorporation of time. Gang homicides are not appropriate for longitudinal analysis as previously described. Messner and Rosenfeld (2004) have proposed that institutional
anomie research does have a place within longitudinal research. Multi-level modeling will allow the testing of institutional anomie theory over decades testing institutional and cultural stability. These models must test other behaviors, such as homicide, in order to respond to the barriers argued by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990). The behaviors selected need to have common, consistent definitions, thus minimizing definitional validity concerns previously argued. The inclusion of other behaviors will also allow the ability to better capture variable changes over decades, as seen in other institutional level research, rather than the temporal restriction of gang homicides seen in this project. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that, unless the project commences before the behavior is in existence, correlations cannot be found. Institutional anomie theory focuses on the variation of crime, rather than the onset as such longitudinal analyses are appropriate.

Institutional anomie, as are many macro-level theories, is limited by their explanatory power. The integration of a micro-level theory with institutional anomie theory will strength the propositions and develop an individual level connection with the social structure and cultural ethos present. This integration, furthered with the culturally sensitive conceptualizations of institutional strength and ethos, would address the significant limitations and assumptions currently present within institutional anomie theory.

Gang Homicide and Institutional Anomie Research

The final area of future research involves further investigating a possible intersection between gang homicides and institutional anomie. No support was present for any of the hypotheses within this project. These findings were unexpected and possible
explanations were discussed previously; in addition, suggestions were provided to address these as well as the other limitations discussed. There are multiple ways to succeed in testing gang homicides and institutional anomie research through implementing the remedies and addressing the limitations. Two of these ways are discussed in this concluding section.

Shifting the analysis from the state level to census tract or smaller geographic areas within urban areas may allow a better understanding of the possible relationship and an arena for testing this project’s hypotheses again. The narrowing of the analysis unit would allow more confidence in the gang definition, and possibly less skewed dependent variable rates. Geographically restricted areas still allow the testing of institutional anomie theory (e.g., Stucky 2003).

Restricting the geographic area also allows for the ability of variable conceptualization to be connected to the residents being studied. The development of variables through a qualitative approach would assist in the design of a better overall research project. This design would allow the abstract concepts present within institutional anomie and the uniqueness of gangs within the community being studied to be more reliable and valid measures.

Previously it was discussed that gang homicides could be researched on the state level; in addition, future research suggestions were provided for institutional anomie tests. The next logical step would be to incorporate the two areas and redesign this current project in attempts to find the hypotheses originally proposed. The first step is to address the definitional validity, either through a consensus definition or participant self-report. Second is to implement a longitudinal methodological design in order to increase the
number of incidences and have a larger sample size. Third, the introduction of new theoretical variable operationalizations would provide a more suitable measure of the social structure and cultural ethos surrounding the youth. This includes the introduction of additional data sources such as the General Social Survey. Not incorporating each of these steps will decrease the ability for validating our expectations in relation to the hypotheses proposed.

Conclusion

Failing to support any of the hypotheses in this project does not discount the arguments, discussions, and implications that it provides. This study was the first cross-sectional state-level test of gang homicides; the study was framed within institutional anomie theory. The lack of significant findings can be explained in several different ways and should be addressed prior to discrediting the ability of institutional anomie theory to explain gang homicide rate variation. This concluding chapter provided suggestions for future research that incorporated the remedies and recommendations to counter the limitations faced within this initial project.
REFERENCES


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Appendix A

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Letter of Approval
Date: September 18, 2008

To: Michael Klemp-North, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: Approval not needed

This letter will serve as confirmation that your project “A Cross-Sectional Approach to Institutional Anomie Theory and Gang-Related Homicide” has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). Based on that review, the HSIRB has determined that approval is not required for you to conduct this project because you are analyzing publicly available data. Thank you for your concerns about protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects.

A copy of your protocol and a copy of this letter will be maintained in the HSIRB files.