

gang membership, race, and social class: a test of the group hazard and master status hypotheses

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This article examines the extent to which gang membership, race, and social class affect a youth's chances of being arrested, independent of their self-reported delinquent behavior. We couple the concepts of group hazard and master status to frame our theoretical predictions. Using data from the Seattle Youth Study (Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis 1981), we find that the odds of being arrested are roughly similar for gang and nongang members, controlling for the nature and level of self-reported delinquency. While being a gang member does not pose a group hazard to being arrested, a youth's master status based on race and social class is associated with arrest risk. Both being black and lower class increases a youth's odds of being arrested, independent of delinquency. Neither race nor class effects can be accounted for by the frequency with which youth hang out with their best friends. We propose several recommendations for reducing race and class profiling.

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The issue of profiling in arrest practices has received considerable attention in media and criminal justice circles in recent years (Goldberg 1999). Much of this attention has been devoted to racial differences in police practices (Anderson 1990; Beckett and Sasson 2000). Others have focused attention on gang shakedowns (McCorkle and Miethe 1998) and the criminal warehousing of economically disadvantaged persons (Morash 1984; Spohn and Holleran 2000).

The theme of group arrest susceptibility is compatible with two principles in sociology. One is the concept of a "master status" as originally proposed by Hughes (1945) and delineated by Becker (1963). Hughes (1945) argued that the placement of persons in certain social categories powerfully constrains the characteristics attributed to them by others. This principle has been observed in laboratory studies where subjects have demonstrated a tendency to infer the existence of underlying dispositions and behaviors on the basis of surface identities (Backman 1981). While Hughes addressed this principle in regard to conventional behaviors, Becker (1963) argued that one's master status can affect being suspected and labeled for criminal activity by overshadowing and nullifying the effects of offense characteristics in arrest practices. This principle is particularly applicable to arrest practices since research demonstrates that social distance is positively related to the application of a master status (Ericson 1977).

Race, gang, and class profiling also can be framed by Erickson's (1971) early work on group hazard. Erickson (1971) speculated that the group nature of delinquency placed young offenders at a greater risk of arrest than older offenders. Older offenders, who more frequently committed crimes alone, lowered their risk of arrest by their reduced visibility and by participating in an activity involving fewer coparticipants who had knowledge of the act. Erickson's (1971) own data showed that young offenders under 18 did not account for as high a percentage of crimes cleared by arrest, suggesting an age differential in police perceptions of suspicious activity.

Coupling the principles of group hazard and master status may have value for explaining arrest patterns. The decision to arrest is pivotal because it affects the entire course of the juvenile justice system (Vito, Tewsbury, and Wilson 1998). For instance, by virtue of their tendency to wear distinctive clothing and repeatedly occupy the same physical location, gang members are especially subject to the group hazard risk. Besides being highly

visible, gang members have become increasing police targets due to widespread anti-gang legislation to increase the certainty of punishment for gang-related crime (Klein 1995). Strategies which demarcate certain master statuses as menaces to the community may lead police to more closely monitor, suspect, and subsequently arrest gang members for law violations (McCorkle and Miethe 1998). This could make gang members hasty targets for police roundups.

Several studies have examined whether the master status of race affects arrest practices (Radelet 1981; Wilbanks 1987). Some criminologists believe that blacks are more likely to be arrested than whites, controlling for the criminal or delinquent behavior of individuals (Hagan and Zatz 1985; Anderson 1990). By virtue of residing in more heavily patrolled neighborhoods, the activities of black youth become more public. Moreover, assigning more patrol units to black neighborhoods may prejudice individual officers to surmise that blacks require closer scrutiny because they are less law abiding than whites (Irwin 1985). Finally, disproportionate patrolling practices in black communities may produce resentment among blacks, which in turn generates hostile suspects, thereby increasing the probability of arrest (Anderson 1990). Many gangs, of course, are also racially homogenous groups, suggesting that in addition to their master status risk, black gang members may be susceptible to the group hazard risk of arrest.

Several researchers have also suggested that the master status of being poor raises a red flag for arrest practices. Both Morash (1984) and Irwin (1985) argue that the police have developed stereotypes of criminals that identify a typical offender as poor and disreputable. These stereotypes exist independently of actual involvement in criminal or delinquent behavior. Stinchcombe (1963) argued that social class is positively related to access to private space, making the activities of lower class youth disproportionately observable to the police. Because lower class youth may perceive police persecution, they too may have a tendency to band together in groups, thereby elevating the risk of group hazard.

In this article, we examine the extent to which gang membership, race, and social class have an effect on the chances of being arrested by the police, independent of self-reported delinquent behavior. Do police patrolling practices, which probably are concentrated in gang-occupied, lower class, black neighborhoods, artificially increase the probability that youth matching these characteristics will be arrested, independent of delinquent activity? If

so, do any of these characteristics interact to confer a greater arrest risk on youth? Does hanging out with friends (group hazard) help in interpreting the relationship between these three characteristics and arrest probability? Or, does the effect of group hazard on arrest probability interact with gang membership, race, and social class? These hypotheses are tested using data from the Seattle Youth Study (Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis 1981).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gangs

By itself, the concept of group hazard implicates the gang. Gang members are known to hang out collectively and violate the law in groups (Klein 1995). Being a gang member engenders special meaning as a master status in the law enforcement community, neutralizing the importance of offender and offense characteristics (Miethe and McCorkle 1997).

While several criminologists have tested the group hazard hypothesis (Hindelang 1976; Morash 1984), the literature on whether being a gang member poses an arrest risk independent of offense characteristics is somewhat limited. Sampson (1986) examined whether gang membership per se had an effect on arrest probability. He reported that gang membership was unrelated to the chances of being arrested. However, because peer delinquency was entered in the same equation as gang membership, the high intercorrelation between the two may not signal a definitive test of the group hazard hypothesis. Battin et al. (1998), however, has found that gang membership contributes to self-reported delinquency independent of peer delinquency. In more recent research using court data gathered in Las Vegas, Miethe and McCorkle (1997) found that sentencing decisions for gang members were less likely than for nongang members to be affected by other offender and offense characteristics. Interestingly, gang members were treated more leniently in charging and sentencing decisions than comparable nongang members, supporting the group hazard/master status hypothesis that gang members are routinely rounded up for political purposes. Such practices were observed by Hepburn (1978) over 20 years ago as serving functions such as teaching respect to young offenders and pacifying public outrage over crime.

We examine here whether there are differential arrest patterns for gang and nongang members independent of self-reported delinquency while excluding peer delinquency from the model. We also test whether gang membership interacts with race, social class or both (4-way interaction) to further exacerbate the odds of arrest.

Race

A number of researchers have examined the effect of racial characteristics on arrest practices. These studies have arrived at mixed conclusions regarding racial discrimination in arrest practices. Klein (1995) observes that less than 10% of known street gangs in American cities are predominately white; more than 80% of street gangs are composed predominately of visible minorities, such as blacks or Hispanics living in poor urban areas. However, several studies have found that blacks are disproportionately arrested for minor offenses that embody greater police discretion (Piliavin and Briar 1964). Police seem to be influenced by an assessment of the suspect's demeanor in these encounters. Because blacks have been shown to harbor greater resentment toward the police than whites (Mann 1993; Alpert and Dunham 1988), in expressing this hostility they elevate their risk of arrest (Smith and Visser 1981; Worden and Shephard 1996). Others however, have found that race and demeanor do not significantly affect arrest after controlling for criminal conduct (Klinger 1994; Lundman 1996).

A number of studies have examined the effect of race on arrest practices for more serious offenses. A Canadian study found that being black raised the probability of arrest, controlling for the nature of the offense (Hagan and Zatz 1985). The bulk of studies in this area however, conclude that racial differences in arrest rates tend to essentially reflect racial differences in criminal behavior (Black and Reiss 1970; Tonry 1995; Lynch and Patterson 1991). Analysis of victimization and UCR data by Hindelang (1981) also reveals that victim descriptions of the race of assailants in robbery, rape, and assault cases yield similar racial differences in rates of crime as arrest data.

In this article, we test for main effects of race on arrest, controlling for self-reported delinquency. Following a finding of a significant race effect, we examine whether the tendency to hang in groups mediates this association and whether the effect of group hazard on arrest is different for blacks than whites. Given the racial composition of many gangs, are black gang members more vulnerable to arrest through both group hazard and master status? Evidence

of synergism (race, gang membership, arrest), would support this hypothesis. Finally, does being black, poor, and in a gang further raise the odds of arrest?

Social Class

Several researchers have examined whether there is class bias in policing practices. In his classic observational study, Chambliss (1973) concluded that the lower class boys he observed (known as Roughnecks) were much more likely to be arrested than were the middle class boys (known as Saints) in the neighborhood. A number of quantitative studies have shared this conclusion, although such discrimination is not especially pronounced (Jensen and Rojek 1998). Thornberry (1973) reported more severe treatment of lower class males compared with higher status suspects. Erickson (1973) found a negative, but insignificant coefficient between Socio-economic Status (SES) and official delinquency. Sampson (1986) found that a measure of individual SES was a weak, but significant correlate of arrest and that boys living in poor neighborhoods were significantly more likely than boys living in middle class neighborhoods to disagree with the question, "Did you do what [the police] say you had done?"

If lower class boys disproportionately appear in arrest statistics, it could be because they have higher group violation rates than middle class boys. Erickson's (1973) work however disconfirms this group hazard hypothesis, finding that the inclination to violate in groups was not associated with SES. In related research, Erickson (1973) found that SES could not account for the relationship between group violation rates and arrest frequency.

In sum, the class bias so frequently assumed in arrest practice remains in dispute (Wright et al. 1999; Sheley 2000). One possibility examined in this article is that the class effect on arrest rates is interlocked with race and perhaps gang membership. We also examine whether the effects of social class on arrest practices are mediated by or interact with group association.

METHOD

Data and Measures

The data for this article were taken from the Seattle Youth Study (Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis 1981). In a personal communication with one of the study investigators, we were told that Seattle had

several well-publicized gang-related crimes at the time the research was being conducted. However, public concern with gang crime was not as intense in Seattle at the time as it was in cities such as Los Angeles in the 1980s and 1990s. One possible limitation of this data may be that gang membership was a less salient master status in Seattle than in cities such as Los Angeles which have had a more pronounced gang problem.

Klein (1995) reports that the incidence of gang-related homicides actually peaked in the early 1980s in Los Angeles County. The incidence of gang homicides in this county has declined slightly since the early 1980s. Thus, the Seattle data were collected during a period with a relatively high rate of serious gang crimes on the west coast.

In addition to questionnaire and interview data collected from students in the Seattle School District, local police records were searched for offenses other than dependency cases and traffic violations. Petty or status offenses such as truancy and incorrigibility also were excluded from our measure of arrest. The offenses for which subjects had an arrest record included a range of property crimes (including burglary, breaking and entering, auto theft, and shoplifting), violent offenses (including assault, aggravated assault, carrying a concealed weapon, and sexual assault), and drug and alcohol related offenses (including narcotics possession and sale, marijuana possession and sale, and illegal purchase and sale of alcohol).

The sample was stratified by involvement with the police and with the local juvenile court in order to check the validity and reliability of the self-report data. Hindelang et al. (1981) conducted one of the most thorough empirical studies of the validity and reliability of self-report data in the Seattle Youth Study, comparing police and court records with self-reports of delinquency.

Logit regression was used in the analyses of the arrest measure given the highly skewed nature of this measure of arrest. Very few students in this study had a record of more than one arrest.

A wide variety of self-reported measures of delinquency are available in the Seattle Youth Study (Hindelang, Hirschi, and Weis 1981). We constructed an index of self-reported delinquency based on a measure of self-reported assault ("Not counting fights you may have had with a brother or sister, have you ever beaten up on anyone on purpose?") and two measures of property crime ("Have you ever taken things of large value (worth over \$50) that did not belong to you?" and "Have you ever taken a car

belonging to someone you didn't know for a ride without the owner's permission?"). All three measures form a valid scale (Cronbach's alpha = .76), and the two property crimes in particular have been found to be very useful measures of involvement in relatively serious criminal activity (Brownfield and Sorenson 1987).

Gang membership was also self-reported, measured by responses to the following item: "Do you belong to what some people might call a youth gang?" More than one-third (35.9%) of the sample reported membership in a gang. The Seattle Youth Study disproportionately sampled blacks; 40.1% of the sample are blacks. (This is due at least in part to a conscious effort to disproportionately sample youth with a record of police contact or a juvenile court record.) As a measure of family social class, we used father's education, recorded into three categories: 1) less than high school graduation; 2) high school graduate; and 3) college graduate. Alternative measures of social class (such as father's occupation) were also examined, and these measures yielded similar results to those found using the measure of father's education.

Finally, we employed a measure of group frequency association from the following item, "Outside of school, how often do you hang around with your best friends?" Response categories ranged from "No best friends" (1) to "almost every day" (5). This item served as a proxy measure for group hazard.

FINDINGS

We first attempt to determine whether gang members have a greater risk of being arrested, holding constant their involvement in delinquent or criminal behavior. In Table 1, we present the results of a logit regression analysis, regressing the chances of being arrested (or technically, the "log odds on being arrested")

TABLE 1 Logit Regression of Arrest Probability on Gang Membership and Self-Reported Delinquency

	B	SE(B)	P	Exp (B)
One self-reported delinquent act	.311	.11	.01	1.365
2 + self-reported delinquent acts	1.738	.17	.01	5.688
Gang membership	.050	.18	.78	1.051
Constant	-.403	.08	.01	

Model Chi-square—130.29, 3 df, $p < .01$

on self-reported delinquency and gang membership. Note that in Table 1 we have used dummy variables to represent the effect of self-reported delinquency on the chances or log odds of being arrested. We found in a previous logit regression equation that a model fitting a linear effect of self-reported delinquency and the effect of gang membership was not statistically significant (Model chi-square = 2.49, 2 df, $p > .10$). These data show that the chances of being arrested are not substantially different for those with no self-reported delinquent acts (40.1%) and those with only one self-reported delinquent act (47.8%). In contrast, more than eighty percent (80.8%) of those with two or more self-reported delinquent acts had an arrest record. While the rate of arrest for gang members (58.8%) is somewhat higher than it is for nongang members (48.9%), this difference is not statistically significant controlling for the effects of self-reported delinquency. Because we do not find empirical support for the group hazard hypothesis as applied to gang members, we make no attempt to test for its interaction with race and social class in subsequent analyses.

We next assessed whether race as a master status figured in arrest decisions for this sample. Blacks are indeed more likely to have an arrest record (57.4%) than whites (46.6%). However, this differential is relatively small and could be attributed to the greater involvement of blacks in serious delinquent or criminal behavior. To test this hypothesis, we regressed the chances of being arrested on race and self-reported delinquency. In Table 2, we show the results of this logit regression analysis. We find that blacks are significantly more likely than whites to be arrested, holding constant involvement in self-reported delinquency. Controlling for the nature and volume of their self-reported delinquency, blacks have odds of arrest that are 1.75 times higher than whites. Racial profiling by police very likely contributes greatly to this differential

TABLE 2 Logit Regression of Arrest Probability on Race and Self-Reported Delinquency

	B	SE(B)	P	Exp (B)
One self-reported delinquent act	.301	.11	.01	1.351
2 + self-reported delinquent acts	1.797	.17	.01	6.033
Race	.560	.12	.01	1.754
Constant	-1.143	.17	.01	

Model Chi-square—154.89, 3 df, $p < .01$

in arrests. The extent of the racial effect on arrest however, is quite modest, which is consistent with previous studies on racial discrimination by the police.

To test whether this racial effect is a function of group hazard, we entered the variable “Hang with best friends” into the logit regressions. In Table 3, we show that the effect of hanging with best friends significantly raises a youth’s odds of arrest. The more frequently youth hang out with best friends, the higher their arrest odds. However, the introduction of this variable into the regression equation does not reduce the size of the race coefficient, suggesting that this variable does not mediate the effects of race on arrest. The interaction term between race and group hazard also is not significant, suggesting that the effect of group hazard on arrest is similar for blacks and whites.

In Table 4 we assessed whether the master status of class background affected arrest practices for this sample. Recall that prior research has found some class bias in arrest practices by police, but that this bias also is not particularly pronounced. The logit regressions show that class does have a small, negative

TABLE 3 Logit Regression of Arrest Probability on Race, Self-Reported Delinquency, and Group Hazard

	B	SE(B)	P	Exp (B)
One self-reported delinquent act	.277	.12	.02	1.32
2 + self-reported delinquent acts	1.78	.17	.01	5.92
Race	.591	.12	.01	1.80
Group hazard	-.143	.10	.01	.867
Constant	-.908	.19	.01	

Model Chi-square—161.91, 4 df, $p < .01$

TABLE 4 Logit Regression of Arrest Probability on Social Class and Self-Reported Delinquency

	B	SE(B)	P	Exp (B)
One self-reported delinquent act	.371	.12	.01	1.450
2 + self-reported delinquent acts	1.787	.18	.01	5.970
Social class (father’s education)	-.149	.04	.01	.862
Constant	-.153	.11	.18	

Model Chi-square—130.63, 3 df, $p < .01$

($b = .149$) effect on the likelihood of having an arrest record, holding constant self-reported delinquency. Children of college graduates are somewhat less likely to have an arrest record (43.9%) than children of high school graduates (53.1%) or children whose fathers have less than a high school education (57.5%).

In keeping with our analysis of race, we examined whether group hazard mediated the class-arrest relationship. In Table 5, we show again that the more frequently youth hang out with their best friends, the higher their arrest probability. However, entering this variable into the equation does not reduce the class effect on arrest probability. Further, the interaction term for class by group hazard is not significant, suggesting that the effect of group hazard on arrest is the same for youth from all three social class levels.

Because race and class significantly predicted arrest, we tested the possibility that these two characteristics have an additive and interactive effect on arrest. In Table 6, we show that both race ($b = .530$) and social class ($b = -.117$) remain significantly correlated with the chances of being arrested, holding self-reported

TABLE 5 Logit Regression of Arrest Probability on Social Class, Self-Reported Delinquency, and Group Hazard

	B	SE(B)	P	Exp (B)
One self-reported delinquent act	.361	.12	.01	1.43
2 + self-reported delinquent acts	1.76	.18	.01	5.81
Social class (father's education)	-.146	.04	.01	.864
Group hazard	-.131	.06	.02	.877
Constant	.085	.17	.62	

Model Chi-square—130.70, 4 df, $p < .01$

TABLE 6 Logit Regression of Arrest Probability on Race, Social Class, and Self-Reported Delinquency

	B	SE(B)	P	Exp (B)
One self-reported delinquent act	.366	.12	.01	1.442
2 + self-reported delinquent acts	1.837	.18	.01	6.278
Social class (father's education)	-.117	.04	.01	.890
Race	.530	.13	.01	1.699
Race by social class	.05	.04	.07	
Constant	-.905	.22	.01	

Model Chi-square—153.91, 4 df, $p < .01$

delinquency constant. The size of both coefficients diminish slightly, suggesting that part of the variance accounted for by race in Table 2 is a function of social class and vice versa for class in Table 4. The interaction term tests the possibility that the police are particularly likely to arrest poor blacks. The interaction term for race and class however, was not statistically significant ($b = .05$, $p = .07$), suggesting that the effect of social class on arrest is the same for blacks and whites.

DISCUSSION

This study attempted to assemble better information about the effect of extralegal factors on arrest practices. Specifically, we examined whether gang membership, race, and social class affected the odds of arrest, independent of the nature and level of self-reported delinquency. Gang membership has been theorized to subject youth to a group hazard by making gang members more visible and suspicious in the eyes of the police. We also argued that being a gang member is a master status that takes on special meaning for the police through attributions and expectations. By virtue of their status, blacks and the poor have also been theorized to be subject to differential police treatment. We examined the separate effects of these statuses on arrest as well to determine whether occupying several of these statuses further elevated the risk of arrest.

Our findings show that gang membership is not related to arrest risk after partialling out the effects of self-reported delinquency. We do find however, that the master statuses of race and social class significantly affect arrest in a direction commensurate with previous literature (Anderson 1990; Morash 1984). Black youth have higher arrest odds than whites at similar levels of self-reported delinquency. Holding constant the nature and level of self-reported delinquency, blacks in this study had odds of arrest that were 1.75 times higher than whites. At similar levels of self-reported delinquency, having a father with at least a college education also reduces a youth's odds of being arrested. This effect was not as strong as race. We did not find however, that being poor and black contributed significantly to arrest, over and above the main effects of race and class.

The findings regarding race and class inform us that a youth's master status was predictive of acquiring a police record beyond the nature and scope of his or her criminal involvement in Seattle

in the early 1980s. Race also exerted a significant effect on a youth's arrest chances independent of class. Our data show that this was not because blacks were more inclined than whites to hang out in groups since this variable did not mediate the effect of race on arrest. Nor did group hazard mediate the effect of class on arrest. If there is some kind of group hazard which makes blacks and the poor more vulnerable to arrest, we could not identify this structure in the data.

Why do the master statuses of race and class contribute to arrest odds, holding constant the nature and level of criminal activity? One possibility is that the activities of black and lower class youth are more public and therefore more heavily scrutinized by the police. Consequently, blacks and the poor elevate their chances of getting caught, more because of where they live rather than what they do. A second possibility is simply that the police use their powers of discretion more frequently in arresting blacks and the poor. Piliavin and Briar (1964) noted many years ago that about 90% of all police encounters with juvenile suspects involved minor offenses. While a serious crime such as rape or robbery might mandate an arrest regardless of race or class, minor offenses allow for more discretion. In these instances, the police seem to be influenced by an assessment of the suspect's general demeanor. Since minority groups and lower class youth may tend to hold negative views of the police (Mann 1993; Maguire and Pastore 1999), more frequently expressing this hostility increases the probability that they will be taken into custody. Our own data lead us to reject a third interpretation. That is, that gang status raises the probability of arrest for black and lower class youth. We did not find that the master status of being a gang member increased a youth's odds of arrest independent of self-reported delinquency. Although being a gang member likely qualifies as a more threatening status in the eyes of the police than being black or poor, we can probably dismiss this interpretation.

Interestingly, our data show that gang members were not more likely to appear in arrest statistics than nongang members, independent of their criminal activity. It could be that a significant minority of gang members were not identifiable to the police and therefore avoided being labeled and stigmatized. We also surmise that this data collection effort preceded the more recent nationwide gang menace and that Seattle gang members were not subject to "gang sweeps" until the mid 1980s. We encourage

researchers to revisit this hypothesis with data gathered during the "gang menace" years. In recent years, many gangs have gone underground to avoid police attention. Consequently, it might be prudent to test the group hazard hypothesis with recent data to determine if it is more difficult for the police to typecast these youth.

It is conceivable that arrest practices based on race could be a function of a city's race ratio related to positions of municipal authority, law enforcement, and demographics. A study in Detroit for instance (Frank et al. 1996) showed that African Americans' attitudes toward the police were more favorable than whites, possibly because African Americans formed a substantial majority of the population and police force and had formidable representation in municipal government. While we do not know if these attitudes are associated with less unfavorable police practices toward blacks, it is possible that an ethnoracial political and demographic transition could be the key to reducing racial profiling.

Our research lends itself to several other recommendations for reducing race and class profiling. If indeed the activities of lower class youth and blacks are more publicly carried out on the street, perhaps communities should develop more extensive after school and summer programming for youth. The recent National Institute of Justice report chronicled effective and promising youth programs for combatting delinquency and substance use (Sherman et al. 1998). In addition, after school programming money targeting inner city schools has recently been made available from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiatives through the U.S. Department of Education.

We also suggest that criminologists revisit the issue of police organization and professionalization to determine whether variation in these structures has implications for arrest practices (See Wilson 1968). In order to reduce resentment, we suggest that community policing initiatives be pursued more vigorously to develop feelings of mutual trust and respect. At a minimum, police agencies must review not only their arrest practices but also procedures related to informal stopping and questioning of citizens. The repeated stopping and interrogation of black citizens in particular, as noted above, is probably a major source of friction between the police and the minority community.

Research also is needed to identify law enforcement characteristics that are associated with profiling tendencies. This research

could be used to facilitate diversity training and education. Hopefully, such research driven policies will lead to more uniform investigation and arrest practices.

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