

**Analysis of the Social Capital Stock of Young Latinos Latinas/os and Gang  
Membership in Washington State**

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## Introduction

As at the national level, young Latinas/os in Washington State are disproportionately over-represented in the juvenile justice system: “if you are young, Latino and male [in the United States], your odds of being in juvenile detention are more than twice those of your Anglo counterpart.”<sup>1</sup> Such over-representation in detention facilities suggests that racism is still not eliminated from the juvenile justice system. A study performed by Dr. George Bridges where he reviewed Washington State’s juvenile cases “found that juvenile court officials’ subjective assessments of youth shaped case outcomes.”<sup>2</sup> For the most part, research on the over-representation of minorities in the juvenile justice system deals with juveniles that are already active in crime and focuses on the decision-making of the juvenile justice centers. The focus of this investigation is to examine what happens before young Latinas/os enter the juvenile justice system, specifically the social agents that encourage gang activity. According to a survey done by the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC), 49 percent of all gang members in the United States are of Latino origin.<sup>3</sup> Research also shows that youth are more criminally active during active gang membership.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that young Latinas/os are more likely to join gangs thus becoming engaged in delinquency. Such criminal behavior then leads to young Latinos entering the juvenile detention centers.

Consequently, this research concentrates on the gang activity in the Walla Walla and Yakima counties and looks at the various factors that induce young Latinas/os to join gangs and engage in crimes. Such gang activity does not occur in isolation but rather the social conditions of these young Latinos are what induce them to become part of gangs. This study looks at poverty/income level and structure of family life as part of the factors that may push young Latinos into gangs. I hypothesize that as these factors cause young Latinos to join gangs, the lack of school support groups further contributes to the participation of Latinos in gangs. For the purpose of this research, I define school support groups as any form of support or resource that contributes to the social capital stock among young Latinas/os such as a positive attitude from the school administration towards Latinas/os, and the availability of teachers as mentors or migrant counselors. The greater the social capital stock such as the “relationships [that] shapes opportunities for interpersonal interaction...[which] can facilitate or inhibit access to resources and action for mutual benefit,” the less likely that young Latinos will become delinquent.<sup>5</sup> This report explores whether there is a correlation between the support provided by structural settings at schools (teacher mentorship, migrant counseling, etc) for Latinos and the rate at which Latinos enter the juvenile detention system.

In collaboration with my Walla Walla community partner, Mr. Vance Norsworthy, (a probation officer at the Walla Walla Juvenile Justice Center) I was able to

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<sup>1</sup> Ellis Cose, “Race and Redemption,” *The American Prospect*. (2005): 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice, “2003 Juvenile Justice Report,” (2003): 46.

<sup>3</sup> National Youth Gang Center, “What is the racial and ethnic composition of youth gangs?” 19 Oct. 2005. <<http://www.iir.com/nygc/faq.htm>>.

<sup>4</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice (2003): 108.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas L. McNulty and Paul E. Bellair, “Explaining racial and ethnic differences in adolescent violence: Structural disadvantage, family well-being, and social capital,” *Justice Quarterly*, Vol. 20. (2003): 1-31, 7

gather state and county level data for Latino juvenile detainees in Washington State and learn more in detail about the juvenile justice process. In addition, interviews, Washington state government sources, and previous scholarly articles relating to young Latinas/os and gang activity highlight the major impact that poverty and structure of family life has on young Latina/o students and their propensity to join gangs and thus enter the juvenile justice system. The two factors researched turned out to be closely interconnected. Poverty among Latinos stems from a structurally embedded demand for their exploitable labor as explained in detail in Eleanor's and Paulina's chapter. In addition, the fact that a single parent heads about one third of Latino homes and a large percentage of Latino parents are hardly present at home due to low wage, and demanding jobs demonstrates that a lack of resources further contributes to the poverty level.<sup>6</sup> These two risk factors do not work independently; instead they reinforce each other to maintain the current situation of Latino juveniles in Washington State. Therefore, in order to tackle this lack of resources that leads young Latinos to join gangs, there needs to be a larger emphasis on providing support systems by the government to fill the missing gap which would help the students according to their needs. Meanwhile, the state government should also allocate more funds for educational and employment training programs that improve the economic situation of low-income Washingtonians including Latinas/os to alleviate poverty as suggested by the Seattle Jobs Initiative's report.<sup>7</sup> In taking a multilateral action, the Washington government can expect to see improvements not only the Latino community but in the state as a whole.

## Methods

In order to better understand what risk factors encourage Latino gang involvement, this study concentrates on the poverty level and family structure of young Latinas/os in the State of Washington with a focus on Latino juvenile detainees and gang members. The propensity for young Latinas/os to join gangs tends to occur when "conventional socializing agents, such as families and schools are largely ineffective and alienating" which leads to street socialization.<sup>8</sup> Studies done by Krivo and Peterson, and Peeples and Loeber have found that minorities including Latinas/os "exhibit higher rates of violence than do whites because they are more likely to reside in community contexts with high levels of poverty, unemployment, family disruption and residential instability."<sup>9</sup>

**Poverty** is a cause frequently associated with youth joining gangs and engaging in criminal activity. Such a connection is seen in the emergence of Chicano gangs in Los Angeles. Diego Vigil's argument that overall neighborhood quality has an important impact on gangs, also explains that among young Mexicans in Los Angeles, "the more isolated and poverty-stricken the barrio, the more 'boundedness' and the more likely the

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "U.S. Hispanic Population: 2000," March 2000.

<<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/ho00.html>>. (5 November 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Seattle Jobs Initiative, "Beyond The Bottom Line: Expanding Economic opportunities for Washington's Working Families 2004," (2004): 26

<sup>8</sup> National Youth Gang Center 2.

<sup>9</sup> McNulty and Bellair, 7.

children there have severe problems that lead inexorably to prolonged and deep street socialization.”<sup>10</sup> Youth who live in low socioeconomic status neighborhoods are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior.<sup>11</sup> Also, recent research explains that Hispanic youth referred to the juvenile justice system are disproportionately poor.<sup>12</sup> The historical account of gangs in Los Angeles and previous research illustrate the significant impact that poverty has on young Latinas/os’ propensity to join gangs that then leads them to the juvenile justice system. Therefore, my investigation looks closely at the poverty level of young Latinas/os in the State of Washington to better understand the high percentage of Latinas/os in the juvenile justice system.

Another aspect that this research examines is **the dynamics of family structure** (or lack thereof) and how that contributes to the high percentage of Latinos in gangs, and hence the high representation of Latinas/os in Washington’s juvenile detention facilities. Previous studies have found that “youth who are less closely supervised, have poor communication with their parents, and are less involved in family activities are at risk for associating with delinquent peers, also raising the risk of delinquency and violence.”<sup>13</sup> Since youth who do not have a close relationship with their parents will often cultivate relationships outside of the home such as with their peers. Also, “Latinos, and members of other racial-ethnic groups are less likely than whites to live in two-biological-parent homes.”<sup>14</sup> Since Latino families are more likely than Non-Hispanic White families to be headed by a single parent, this suggests that there is a higher likelihood for Latino children to lack supervision and spend less time with her/his parent, especially when poverty is already present.<sup>15</sup> This can help explain the higher tendency for Latinas/os to commit crimes compared to their white peers. In addition, the majority of occupations held by Latinas/os in the United States are in Sales (e.g. cashier), Service (e.g. janitorial work, food preparation, etc), and Transportation (e.g. truck drivers), which tend to have constraints on their daily schedule that limit the amount of time parents in those jobs can spend with their children. For example, people who work in janitorial occupations such as cleaning schools or hotels have odd work schedules where they often work in the evenings or late at night.<sup>16</sup> It is precisely in the evenings after kids have been released from school that they need supervision most, which is when many Latino parents are working. Please refer to Eleanor’s chapter about Latinos in the service industry for more details about the demanding work schedule. Also, Paulina Ocegura’s chapter on farm labor describes the job conditions that impact family life. “Some youth may...become attached to a gang due to alienation from more conventional (e.g. family and school)

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<sup>10</sup> Diego Vigil, “Community Dynamics and Rise of Street Gangs,” (2002): 104.

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer M. Beyers and Rolf Loeber, “What Predicts Adolescent Violence in Better-Off Neighborhoods?” *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, October 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Lisa J. Bond-Maupin and James R. Maupin, “Juvenile justice decision making in a rural Hispanic community,” *Journal of Criminal Justice*. Vol. 26. (1998): 373-384

<sup>13</sup> Beyers and Loeber, (2001).

<sup>14</sup> McNulty and Bellair, 25.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, (2000).

<sup>16</sup> “Janitors,” Career Perspectives in Virginia, 8 Aug. 2005. <

[http://66.102.7.104/custom?q=cache:lEgHqd5HhmAJ:www3.ccps.virginia.edu/career\\_prospects/briefs/E-J/Janitors.shtml+hours+of+janitors&hl=en&ie=UTF-8](http://66.102.7.104/custom?q=cache:lEgHqd5HhmAJ:www3.ccps.virginia.edu/career_prospects/briefs/E-J/Janitors.shtml+hours+of+janitors&hl=en&ie=UTF-8)>. (14 Nov. 2005).

linkages to society.”<sup>17</sup> The lack of interaction between parents and their children or the lack of social capital encourages young Latinas/os to search for support outside the home such as in gangs.

The poverty and structure of family life of young Latinas/os are some of the factors that create the lack of social capital that leads them to delinquent behavior. Social capital “refers to the collective value of all ‘social networks’ and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other.”<sup>18</sup> These social networks are necessary because “children who are connected to adults whom they respect and admire are more likely to abide by adults’ expectation and consider the reactions of others when contemplating delinquent behavior and hence are less likely to engage in it.”<sup>19</sup> Significant poverty, single parent homes, and low-paying and demanding jobs, make Latino parents unable to supervise their children, much less interact with them. If such attention and social ties were possible, it would add to the social capital stock of the child thus preventing gang involvement.

McNulty and Bellair’s research about racial and ethnic differences in adolescent violence stresses the importance of social capital that could prevent youth from criminal behavior. Nonetheless, the large emphasis on parental interaction as social capital in their research does not take into account the role of teachers and mentors in youths’ lives. Also, McNulty and Bellair’s study assumes that parents are capable of spending time with their child, when in reality for many Latinos this is not the case. The poverty prevalent among Latinas/os leads to parents being unable to be present at the home because they need to work. As a result, Latino parents are unable to facilitate social control, and thus a lack of social capital results. Furthermore, many low-income Latino parents are unable to offer other alternatives for social capital to make up for the missing parental interaction with their children as a wealthy parent might. Parents in higher economic status can use their market power to their advantage and therefore provide extracurricular activities or get someone to take care of their children which would make up for the social capital or lack of interactions that may result from the parent’s job schedule. Nevertheless, the inability of Latino parents to create social ties with their children that would otherwise decrease delinquent behavior is a gap that can be filled in by school support groups such as mentors and teachers.

As this research looks at adolescent violence, specifically gang-related crime and its ties to poverty and family structure, the lack of school support systems is also significant. This research demonstrates that support groups can add to the social capital stock of young Latinas/os that would help offset the social capital deficit they already experience. A recent report looking at the structural characteristics of high schools in the United States found that “Hispanic teens are more likely than any other racial or ethnic group to attend public high schools that have the dual characteristics of extreme size and

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<sup>17</sup> D. A. Lopez and Patricia O’Donnell Brummett, “Gang Membership and Acculturation: ARSMA-II and Choloization.” *Crime and Delinquency*. Vol. 29. (2001): 627-642, 628.

<sup>18</sup> Robert D. Putman, “Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community,” (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> McNulty and Bellair, 7.

poverty.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, “about 37 percent of Latinos attend the 10 percent of schools with the highest student-teacher ratios...[compared to] 14 percent of black students and 13 percent of whites attend those schools, which have a student-teacher ratio greater than 22-to-1 compared with the national average of 16-to-1.”<sup>21</sup> This implies that young Latinas/os are less likely to foster social relations with teachers because there are too many students to allow close interaction with one teacher. This decreases the chances of teachers being able to help build the social capital stock of the Latino youth. In addition, federal budget cuts for programs whose main purpose is to provide support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds such as TRIO further contribute to the lack of support groups in schools. Also, not only does the lack of funding for school support programs further contribute to Latino youth involvement in gangs by not keeping them in school but also the “deficit-based expectations about Latina/o students’ culture, language, values, and ability to learn [by counselors] often impose structural barriers that inhibit college level preparation and academic success.”<sup>22</sup> Since support groups in schools are able to supply social capital that could potentially discourage Latinas/os from joining gangs, this research examines the school support groups in Washington State.

### Data Collection

The majority of the quantitative data gathered for this research came from national and state government reports, private organizations and interviews with police officers in the Walla Walla and Yakima counties. A helpful source used for this study was the 2003 and 2004 “Juvenile Justice Report” prepared by the Office of Juvenile Justice in Washington that I accessed from Mr. Vanceworthy. This report includes detailed information about the composition of juvenile detainees in Washington State including a brief analysis of Washington’s youth in regards to poverty and gangs. The report, however, did not break down much of the information by ethnicity and often omitted Latinas/os from their analysis. This report also briefly describes the different programs provided by the state government to address the overrepresentation of minorities in Washington’s juvenile justice centers. Also, the “Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 2002” compiled by the Bureau of Justice Statistics aided this study in comparing statistics from Washington state to the rest of the nation. These two government resources provided adequate information about the Latinas/os in the juvenile justice system. Also, the U.S. Census Bureau website contained supportive data about Latino family households as well as the occupations they hold which gave me a better idea of the structure of the family life.

Government reports and social networking enabled me to gather more quantitative data for this research. After looking at the “Juvenile Justice Report” and interviewing the detention manager of the Yakima County Juvenile Justice Center, I became aware of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which focuses on helping disadvantaged children and

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<sup>20</sup> Pew Hispanic Center Press Release, “Latinos More Likely Than Blacks, Whites To Attend the Largest Public High Schools,” Press Hispanic Center Newsroom, 1 Nov. 2005  
<<http://pewhispanic.org/newsroom/releases/release.php?ReleaseID=36>>. 14 Nov. 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Pew Hispanic Center Press Release, (2005).

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Solorzano, “Educational Inequities and Latina/o Undergraduate in the United States: A Critical Race Analysis of their Educational Progress,” Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, Vol. 1. (2002): 272-294, 283.

families. One of the many programs the Foundation has established, is the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) which focuses on reducing the overrepresentation of minorities in detention centers and develops alternative approaches to improve conditions.<sup>23</sup> It was through this foundation that the report, “Kids Count: Latino Children, State-Level Measures of Child Well-being from the 2000 Census” was published. From this I was able to find information on the poverty level, and family structure of Latino youth in the State of Washington.

For the most part the quantitative data I gathered were detailed and useful for this project. Nonetheless, in many of the data tables only the actual numbers of arrests or population were given but they were not presented as percentages. Therefore, for the purpose of comparing statistics, I had to calculate percentages given the available data. Much of the statistical data that could have been extremely helpful for this report were not used because it did not separate categories by ethnicity. When I attempted to assess the percentage of Latino students at the poverty or low-income level by looking at the number of Latinos in free and reduced lunch, the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction did not have that information, even though it does present the percentage of Latino population in the various school districts. This is also seen in Washington’s “Juvenile Justice Report” in its analysis of youth gangs where it does not mention specifically the percentage of Latinos in gangs in Washington. Another interesting finding in this research is that many government sources do not separate the term “Hispanics” or “Latinos” from the term “White.” The Office of Juvenile Justice for the “2003 Juvenile Justice Report” includes Latina/os in any of the “races.” In the “Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics,” the tables are designed in this same way. It appears that ethnicity is used only for certain data. It is interesting to note that government agencies do not separate Latinas/os into a separate group from other races when the statistics involve arrests, but when it comes to stating the juvenile population the percentage of Hispanic origin was given. Such a method of gathering data is also seen outside of Washington State. A report published by the University of Michigan found that 14 juvenile justice agencies in 14 different states often counted Latino youth as “White.”<sup>24</sup> The implications of this omission in Washington’s Juvenile Justice Report are significant, especially since Latinos constitute the largest minority in the state of Washington.<sup>25</sup> Most likely Hispanics constitute a large portion of the percentage by *White* juvenile arrests. This overstates the proportion of White juveniles and understates the proportion of Latino juveniles in Washington detention centers. The way the data are selectively gathered by many government agencies, in which, ethnicity is not separated from race or simply not mentioned, impairs the State of Washington and researchers to respond adequately to Latino youth's needs.

## Case Studies

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<sup>23</sup> “Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI),” Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005. < <http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/jdai/>>. (20 Oct. 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Building Block for Youth, “Donde esta la justicia?: A call to action on behalf of Latino and Latina youth in the U.S. justice system,” (2005): 4.

<sup>25</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice, “2004 Juvenile Justice Report,” (2004): 65.

The data gathered to research the local conditions in Walla Walla with community people relating to the two factors (poverty, and structure of family life) came primarily from personal interviews. The Juvenile Justice Report also provided information on the Walla Walla Juvenile Justice Center and the number of Latinas/os detained annually at the center.

This study also focuses on Yakima County because of its high Hispanic juvenile detention population. Even though Walla Walla County has a much lower Hispanic juvenile detention rate than Yakima's, Walla Walla will serve as a good comparison. Comparing what the Walla Walla Juvenile Justice Center and Walla Walla Police Gang Unit do differently than those of Yakima might explain why there is a much lower disparity between Hispanic and non Hispanics in the juvenile justice center. As well as comparing the structural setting of schools, I investigate the various programs that these two counties offer for students that help add to the social capital stock of students such as Latinas/os.

### Interviews

The "2003 Juvenile Justice Report" shows that the risk of joining a gang "rose most sharply at age 15--the age at which most students make the transition to high school."<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the interviewees were around this age group to examine closely the prevalence of the research factors (poverty level, and structure of family life), the events occurring at this stage that might be pushing him or her to become involved in gangs and the role of school support groups. The three different Latino youth associated with gangs that were interviewed were 12, 15 and 19 years old. These interviewees were either in middle school or at the beginning of their high school year. Of the three interviewees, the 19-year-old interviewee is not currently part of the gang subculture although she was in middle school.

Mr. Norsworthy introduced me to one of the three interviewees associated with gangs. The 12-year-old boy is currently under probation in Walla Walla. This interview with the young boy was conducted at his home in the presence of his younger siblings and mother, who is a single parent. Therefore a mixture of Spanish and English was used throughout the interview. The interview lasted about an hour and a half and was recorded with a tape recorder, through which I was able to make an interview transcript.

Through Professor Apostolidis, I was able to meet and interview Mr. Andrew Gomsrud, a middle school teacher of Paine Secondary Alternative Education Center in Walla Walla. The National Youth Gang Center found that one of the community conditions which facilitate youth joining a gang is that "adolescents must have a great deal of free time that is not consumed by other prosocial roles."<sup>27</sup> This implies that Latino students' dropout rate has an impact on young Latinos' predisposition to become involved in gangs. When a student drops out, they have more free time that might allow them to have an increased chance of involvement in criminal activity. In addition, most

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<sup>26</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice (2003): 109.

<sup>27</sup> National Youth Gang Center (2005): 2.



gang crime tends to be done by youth who no longer attend schools.<sup>28</sup> Mr. Gomsrud mentioned that a very small number of students that are referred to the alternative school program graduate from high school because of the lack of support and funding from the administration. The majority of these students referred to this alternative program are Latinas/os. Mr. Gomsrud interview highlights the role of school groups in further contributing to Latino youth gang involvement by not keeping them in school. The way that support groups at school can partially maintain Latino students in school and deter them from gangs is to provide the social capital that many young Latinas/os lack at their homes which stems from poverty and an absence of structure in their family life. Previous studies “found that Hispanics were more likely to join gangs when schools failed to meet their social, emotional and education needs.”<sup>29</sup> Mr. Gomsrud’s position as a teacher at the alternative school provides great insight about Walla Walla schools’ structural setting/supportive group and their influence on the dropout rate among Latinos. The interview with Mr. Gomsrud lasted about an hour and took place at the Whitman campus. I took written notes for this interview.

The other two interviewees that were or are gang associated are from Yakima. One of these interviewees is a previous acquaintance from high school. For the reason mentioned earlier, I chose to interview her because of her age group at the time she was associated with gangs and to hear the narratives of a young Latina, who is now a college student but was once affiliated with gangs during middle school. Her interview informs us of what factors overcame the “cumulative effects of inadequate educational reparation and schooling conditions of Latinas/os at the elementary levels.”<sup>30</sup> Her past experience as a gangster and now a student at a four-year private liberal arts college shed light on the importance of school support groups. The interview lasted about two hours and the languages used were both Spanish and English. I interviewed her at the Whitman campus.

I also interviewed a high school student in Yakima who is currently associated with many gangster friends. He fits the age group that I am interested in researching and I was able to see how poverty/income level and structure of family life influences his gang involvement. Also, after I found out about the gang-prevention program called the Yakima Police Athletic League (PAL), I wanted to interview a young Latina/o who is part of the program to see how it serves as social capital. The young boy interviewed currently participates in the PAL program. The PAL program offers tutoring and extracurricular activities in an attempt to deter at risk youth (e.g. kids that live in low-socioeconomic neighborhoods) from joining gangs. This program functions as a support group outside of school and offers another example of the various kinds of social capital building that can help prevent Latinos from becoming criminally active and hence entering the juvenile justice system. His interview illustrates the effect of the PAL program as a support group that might serve as an important source of social capital.

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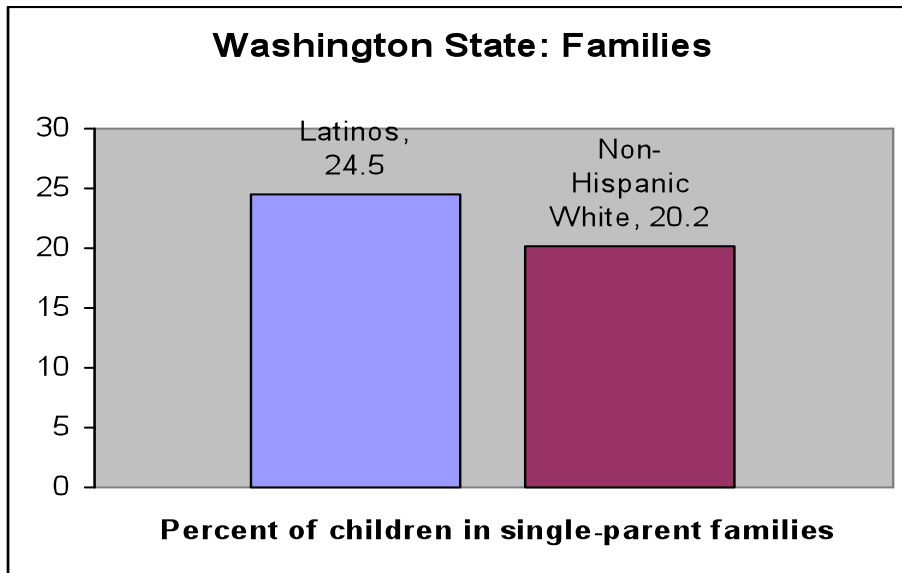
<sup>28</sup> Thomas Jr. Winfree, Frances P. Bernat and Finn-Aage Esbensen. “Hispanic and Anglo gang membership in two southwestern cities.” *The Social Science Journal*. Vol. 28. (2001): 112

<sup>29</sup> Winfree, Frances, and Esbensen, 107.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel Solorzano, 277.

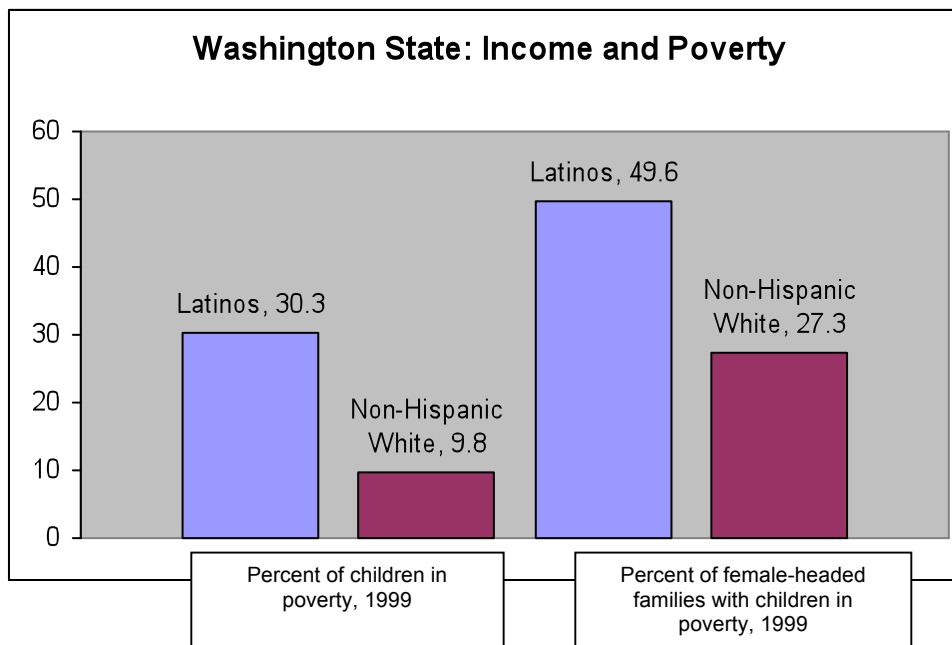
## Data Presentation

Graph 1



Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count 2003, "Latino Children: State-level Measures of Child Well-Being From the 2000 Census," 2003

Graph 2



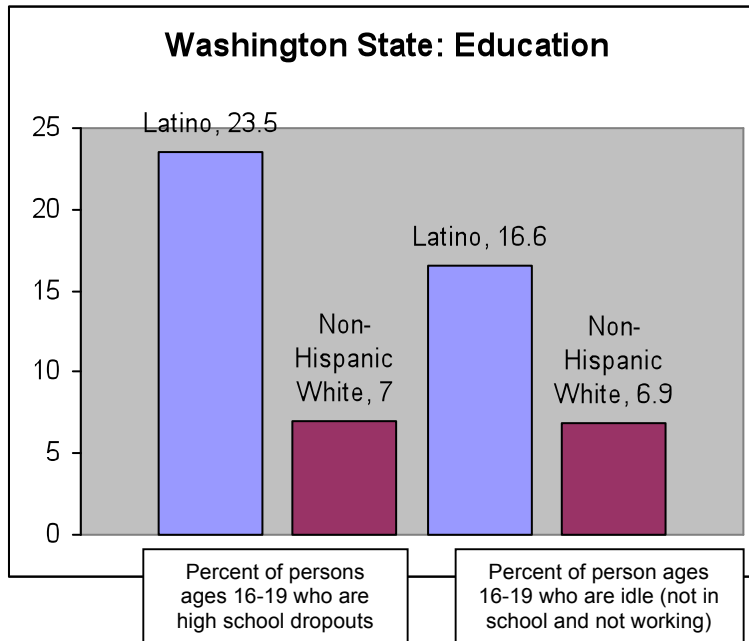
Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count 2003, "Latino Children: State-level Measures of Child Well-Being From the 2000 Census," 2003

Graph 2: Even though the percentage of young Latinas/os in single-parent families is not substantially higher than that of Non-Hispanic White children, the percent of Latino

female-headed families with children in poverty is 22.3% higher than Non-Hispanic Whites.

Graph 2 shows that the level of poverty faced by Latino youth (under 18 years old) is three times greater than for Non-Hispanic White youth in the State of Washington. According to previous research, these graphs imply that young Latinas/os are more susceptible to gang violence than Whites due to the social conditions Latinas/os face such as poverty. The data illustrates the presence of poverty among Latino children in the state of Washington thus increasing their chances of entering a gang and the juvenile justice system.

Graph 3

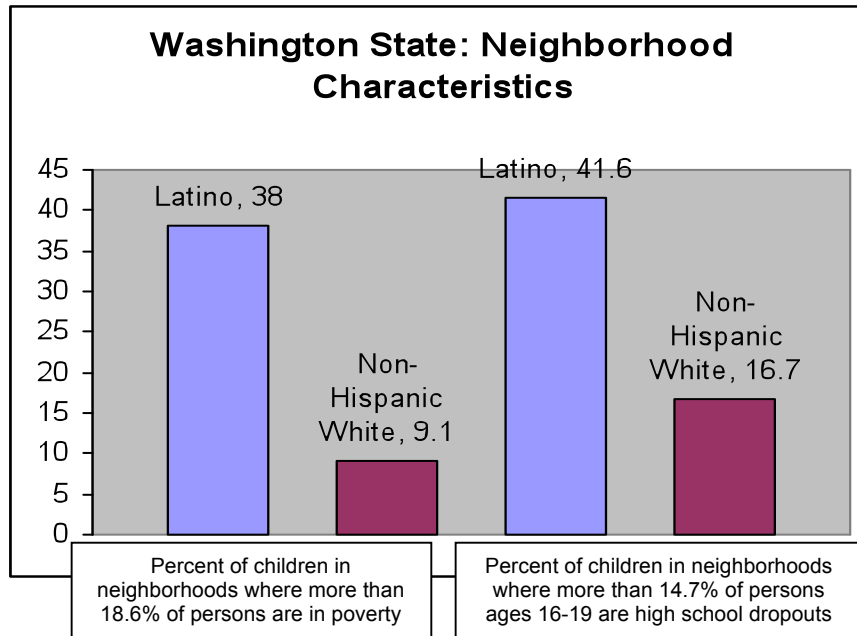


Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count 2003, "Latino Children: State-level Measures of Child Well-Being From the 2000 Census," 2003

In general a larger percentage of young Latinas/os are more likely to be out of school. Out of the 23.5% Latino youth that drop out, 16.6% do not work, which suggests that 6.9% of young Latinas/os enter the workforce compared to 0.1% of Non-Hispanic White youth. The discrepancy between young Latinas/os and Non-Hispanic Whites can possibly be attributed to the fact that Latino children are more likely to come from low-income families than Non-Hispanic White children and therefore need to contribute to the household. Also, the 6.9% of young Latinas/os that drop out and work are probably less likely to join gangs than the 16.6% of Latino juveniles who are idle. As mentioned earlier, this is due to kids being out of school with lots of time to spare compared to those that entered the work force and thus will likely become involved in gang activity.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> National Youth Gang Center (2005).

Graph 4



Source: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count 2003, "Latino Children: State-level Measures of Child Well-Being From the 2000 Census," 2003

Graph 4 shows that not only are Latino children more likely to live in poverty (Graph 2) than whites, they also live in neighborhoods that suffer from poverty. The poor neighborhoods in which a large portion of Latino children resides once again reflect a deficit in resources such as the need for youth centers to offer social capital. This is similar to the inferior L.A. barrios where many Chicano gangs emerged. Vigil's analysis of street gangs in L.A. states that due to the lack of resources faced by the barrios, which could have imposed social control, many Mexican youth became delinquents.<sup>32</sup> Other research has also shown that "community disadvantage and instability," like the neighborhoods Latino youth live in, "diminish the prevalence and interdependence of social networks that facilitate the social control of children," which could deter them from violence.<sup>33</sup> The bar graph on the left further illustrates the presence of poverty among Latino children in the State of Washington thus increasing their chances of entering gangs and the juvenile justice system.

Graph 4 also shows that Latino children are more likely to be surrounded by high school dropouts. "Among youth gang members the high school drop-out rate is significantly higher than among non gang members" in the state of Washington.<sup>34</sup> This implies that Latino children are more likely to live in neighborhoods with gang members. In addition, a study done by Winfree, Bernat and Esbensen concluded that gang membership is linked with having delinquent peers.<sup>35</sup> Therefore these data hint that because young Latinoas/os

<sup>32</sup> Vigil, 101.

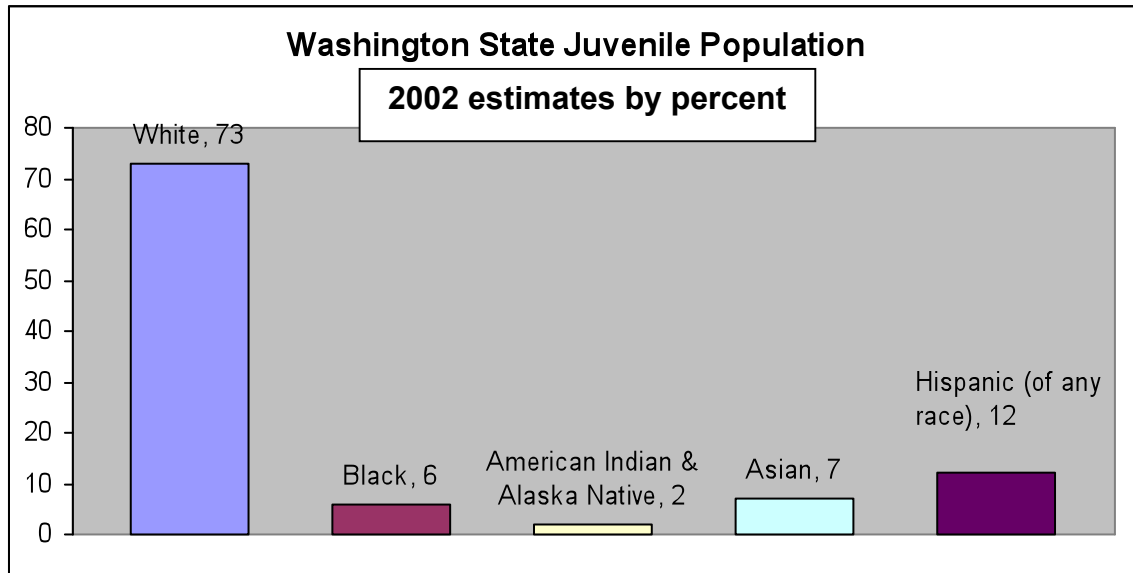
<sup>33</sup> McNulty and Bellair, 5.

<sup>34</sup> National Youth Gang Center, "Washington: Gang-Related Legislation," 2005. <<http://www.iir.com/nygc/gang-legis/washington.htm>>, (19 Oct. 2005).

<sup>35</sup> Winfree, Frances, and Esbensen, 111.

are more likely to live among dropouts who tend to be gangsters, this increases the probability that Latinas/os will join gangs. Of course we want research looking closely at the relationship between children living in neighborhoods with a large population that are dropouts and the propensity of those children joining gangs to verify the relationship directly.

Graph 5



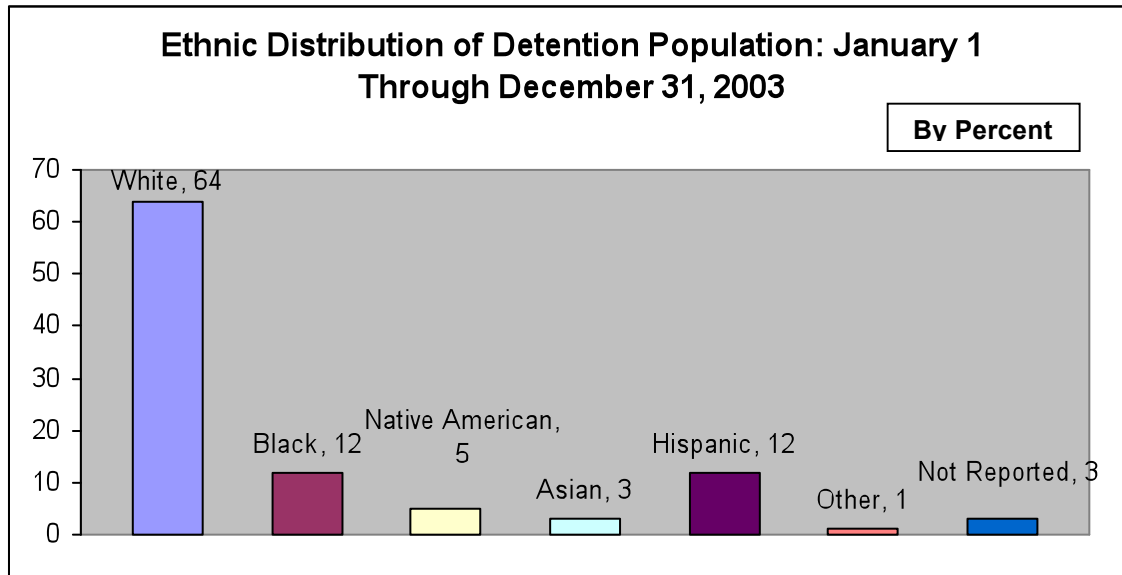
Source: Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, 2004 Juvenile Justice Report "Racial and Ethnic Distribution," 2004.

Graph 5: The current Hispanic juvenile population is 12%. Since 1990, the Hispanic juvenile population has doubled in the State of Washington.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, "2004 Juvenile Justice Report: Racial and Ethnic Distribution," (2004).

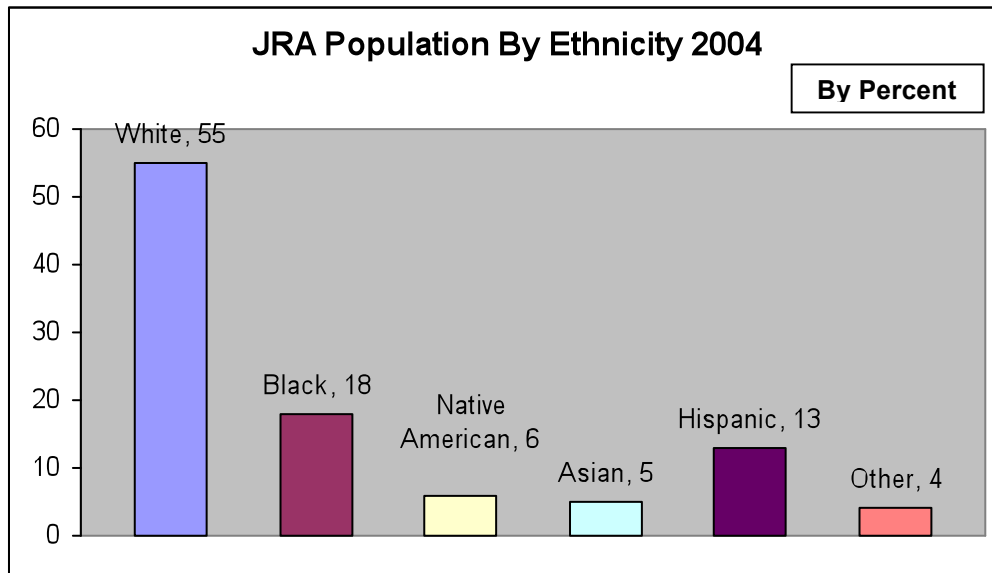
Graph 6



Source: Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, 2004 Juvenile Justice Report, "Ethnic Distribution of Detention Population: January 1 Through December 31, 1997-2003," 2004

As Graph 6 shows, the percentage of Hispanic youth detained in juvenile justice centers is representative of the population. Nevertheless, the only groups that are not overrepresented in the detention centers are White and Asian juveniles.

Graph 7

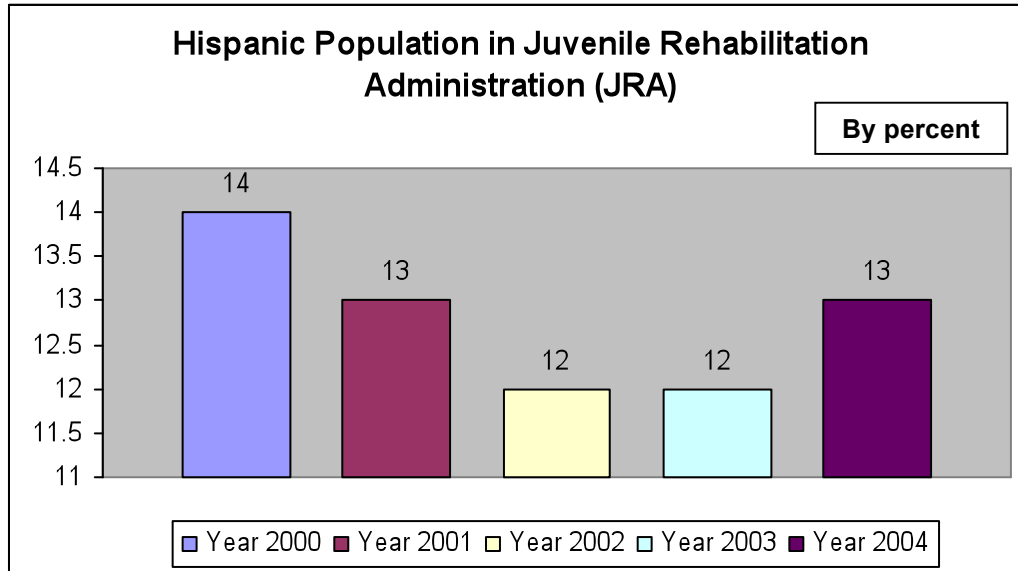


Source: Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, 2004 Juvenile Justice Report, "JRA Population By Race/Ethnicity/Gender," 2004

The percent of Hispanics in Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (JRA) centers is higher than the total Hispanic population. JRA is where juveniles with longer sentences are sent. All of the minority group population in JRAs increases from the minority group in the detention center, whereas the population of White youth is the only one that

decreases. As mentioned earlier, this agrees with what Dr. George Bridges found in his study: that race plays a significant role in how minority detainees are perceived.<sup>37</sup> In juvenile court reports, minorities detained were described as being inherently flawed but whites that were apprehended were seen as anomalies. Apart from being a problem within the juvenile system among court officials and probation officers, this also raises the question about police officers that detain them in the first place. Are police officers are more likely to be suspicious of Latino youth when patrolling a poor neighborhood?

Graph 8

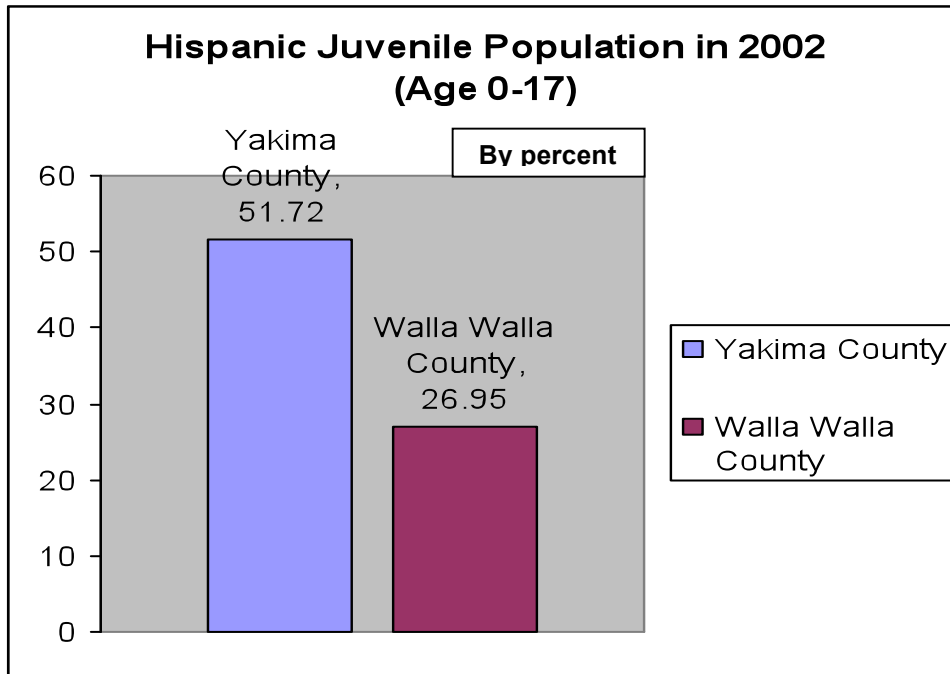


Source: Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, 2004 Juvenile Justice Report, "JRA Population By Race/Ethnicity/Gender," 2004

Graph 8 shows the Hispanic population in JRAs has not fallen below 12%. Between 2000 and 2003 there was a decrease.

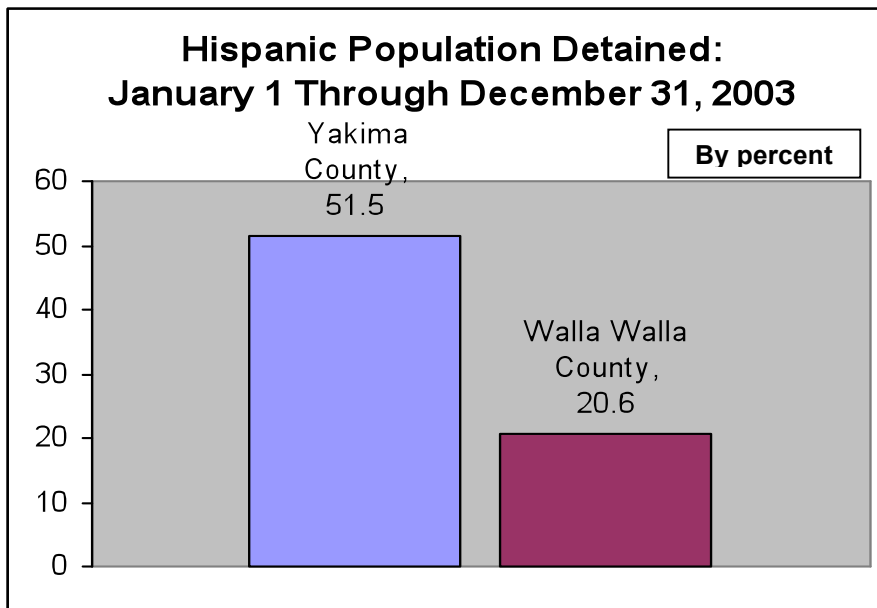
<sup>37</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice (2003): 47.

Graph 9



Source: Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, 2004 Juvenile Justice Report

Graph 10\*



Source: Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, 2004 Juvenile Justice Report, "Detention Population by Ethnic Group: January 1 Through December 31, 2003," 2004.

\*I calculated the percentage of each county to be able to compare to other data. Original data table was given by population count.

The percent of the Hispanic population detained at the Walla Walla County Juvenile Justice Center is less than its overall population, whereas in the Yakima County, the population of Hispanic matches the population of detained Hispanics in the juvenile detention center. This then brings up a several questions; is the lower proportion of Hispanic youth detained in Walla Walla due to the efforts of the juvenile justice center to



eliminate racial bias? Or are the social factors such as poverty and disadvantage family background more prevalent in Yakima than in Walla Walla? And what role does school support groups play in this discrepancy? First, according to the Yakima Juvenile Justice Detention Manager, even though Yakima faces an over-representation of Latinas/os in the centers, Yakima does not have the resources to address the issue.<sup>38</sup> Second, a larger percentage of low-income working families reside in Yakima County than in Walla Walla County.<sup>39</sup> Finally, the Latino high school dropout rate in Yakima County far exceeds that of Walla Walla County (20.9% and 7.5% respectively).<sup>40</sup>

## **Interview Discussion**

The interview materials with Latino youth, and police officers, both in Yakima and Walla Walla are consistent with the hypothesis that **poverty/low income level** does influence young Latinas/os' likelihood of becoming gang members. Officer Saul Reyna from the Walla Walla Police Department explained that one of the reasons they maintain a tracking system for gang members is because many of the gang members move often since they live in rental property.<sup>41</sup> Referring to Alan's chapter on Housing, Latinas/os have low homeownership rates due to their low-income employment. Since many gang members in Walla Walla tend to live in rental property and 98% of the youth involved in gangs are Latinas/os, this suggests that many gang members have a higher likelihood of coming from low-income homes.<sup>42</sup> In addition the occupations held by the interviewees' parents had some of the lowest salaries in the nation. For example, most of their parents work either in the service or agricultural industries and the median earnings for those occupational groups are \$21,000 and \$20,000 respectively. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, these two occupational groups have the lowest earnings of any of the other occupational groups (farming being the lowest and service being second to last).<sup>43</sup>

The occupations that the parents of the interviewees hold and their earnings illustrate the lack of resources they face and also show how poverty helps create the **dynamics of family structure** that push Latino children to become involved in gangs. Sergeant Joe Salinas, head of the Gang Enforcement Unit in Yakima, stated that "gang activity is a pattern that starts with problems at home, and you couple that with poverty in the [Yakima] valley."<sup>44</sup> One of the problems at home that push youth to socialize out in the streets is the absence of parents at home. The low-wage jobs that many Latino parents work place constraints on their schedule, such as late hours or little time off. This limits the parents' interaction with their children, which could help deter their children from delinquency. Sergeant Randy Allesio from the Walla Walla Police Department

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<sup>38</sup>Milt Ewing, Personal Interview, 10 October 2005.

<sup>39</sup> Seattle Jobs Initiative, "Beyond the Bottom Line: Expanding Economic opportunities for Washington's Working Families 2004," (2004), 10.

<sup>40</sup>Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, "Annual Dropout Statistics for Districts and Schools," (2003-03): 29-31.

<sup>41</sup>Off. Saul Reyna, Personal Interview, 11 November 2005.

<sup>42</sup>Off. Saul Reyna, Personal Interview, 11 November 2005.

<sup>43</sup>Peter Fronczek, and Patricia Johnson, "Census Debrief, Occupations: 2000," U.S. Census Bureau, (2003): 5-7.

<sup>44</sup> Sgt. Joe Salinas, Phone Interview, 3 November 2005.

stated that it is common for the parents of gang members to work full time, and because of that, the parents are unable to offer attention to their children:

Most of the kids have both parents but they work full time and are not home. They work in canneries or in the fields...[kids] need attention and if they can't find it, they will look somewhere else, they are going to go and get involved [in gangs]. I don't think that they start wanting to be in gangs<sup>45</sup>

Also, in my interview with the 19-year-old college student, the lack of parental interaction due to both parents' tough work schedule and their absence comes up as she describes her family life and the lives of her friends involved in gangs.

I remember, looking back at middle school, my parents were never there. Well, my parents were there but they were always working. She [mom] would come home around 6, my mom would be cooking, getting ready for the next day and go to bed because she was tired. That's the only time I saw her...My friends didn't have their parents. I didn't have my parents there but because they worked. But my friends didn't have their parents there because they were either in Mexico or they were dead or they were living with their brothers and sisters.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to many Latino parents working in low-wage positions, coming from a single parent household also adds to the poverty and lack of parental interaction young Latinas/os already encounter. When I interviewed the 16-year-old high school boy, I asked about his friends that were involved in gangs. His interview indicates that the structure of family life such as coming from a single parent home (and thus a lack in social capital) does have an impact on young Latinas/os' tendency to become involved in gangs: "Most of my friends are in gangs because their parents separated, or because their dad hasn't been there to support them. Supposedly you get the support from them because parents are supposed to be there."<sup>47</sup>

This lack of parental interaction, which could facilitate social control over their children in order to help prevent their children from delinquency, was explicit during the interview with the 12-year-old boy and his single mother from Walla Walla. The mother of the boy often interrupted him while he talked or vice versa. They appeared not to pay attention to what the other was saying suggesting that the social ties between the mother and her son are not strong. The 12-year-old boy has been detained at the juvenile justice center twice, which suggests that sufficient social capital has not yet been provided. Mr. Milt Ewing, the Yakima Juvenile Justice Detention Manager, stated that the Yakima juvenile center has a high recidivism rate and he partly believes that it is due to the lack of parenting and because "they [juveniles] don't have a support structure, when they come here, the kids get structure and they like the detention center, kids know what's expected of them."<sup>48</sup> So, if juvenile justice centers provide 'structure' which is lacking at

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<sup>45</sup> Sgt. Randy Allesio, Personal Interview, 11 November 2005.

<sup>46</sup> Appendix A: Interview Transcript

<sup>47</sup> Anonymous, Phone Interview, 11 November 2005.

<sup>48</sup> Milt Ewing, Personal Interview, 10 October 2005.

home, should there be another government-funded agency that is *not* a detention center that can offer that ‘structure’? In the interviews, it becomes apparent that school support groups can provide the ‘structure’ and social capital to discourage Latinas/os from entering gangs and thus, the juvenile justice system.

The intricate combination of poverty and structure of family life pushes young Latinas/os to join gangs, and even more so with the lack of **support groups in schools**. The budget cuts in school programs that offer mentorship for disadvantaged students and the low expectations of Latina/o students from school personnel do not offset the social capital deficit experienced by young Latinas/os in the state of Washington. The failure of schools is evidenced by the high dropout rate among gang members. According to the Yakima Police Department, 85% of gang members drop out before the age of 16 and 65-70% of all the gang members in Yakima are Latinas/os.<sup>49</sup> In Yakima, over 80% of gang members have gone through the juvenile justice system, compared to over 95% in Walla Walla. Both Yakima (65-70%) and Walla Walla (98%) have a higher percentage of Latinas/os in gangs than the national level (49%).<sup>50</sup> This data shows that gang members are most likely to be Latinas/os, which implies that Latinas/os have a higher likelihood of being in the need for social capital. That is, the societal agents (poverty, family structure, etc) that result in a lack of social capital tend to push youth into gangs. Nevertheless, the high dropout rate for Latino students, the second highest in the state of Washington (10.2%), implies that schools may further contribute to the gang problem.<sup>51</sup> The interviews illustrate the current structural setting of schools and its influence in preventing gang membership among Latinas/os by offering social capital that keeps them in school.

Even though I was unable to gather statistical data to help assess the lack of social capital in Washington schools, the information I found from the interviews suggest that there is a basis for the need of school support groups and thus more research should be done. The interviews provide substantial support that school support groups do influence young Latinas/os’ involvement in gangs. The school experiences of the two boys I interviewed were not very positive. The 12-year-old middle school student mentioned that often the negative attitude of teachers towards him caused him to be angry, thus leading him to retaliate with hostility.

Every time you do something wrong she [teacher] just yells at you for no reason and she corrects you but in a mean way. I don’t know, they [teachers] just pick at me. Like one time I was holding the door for everyone to get out and then I came and the teacher was like “where were you, you took a little long” or something like that and that made me mad, they give me attitude. I feel like sometimes teachers are picking on me.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Sgt. Joe Salinas, Phone Interview, 3 November 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Sgt. Joe Salinas, Phone Interview, 3 November 2005, and Officer Saul Reyna, Personal Interview, 11 November 2005.

<sup>51</sup> Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction, “Graduation and Dropout Statistics: For Washington’s Counties, Districts, and School Year 2003-04,” September 2005, 14.

<sup>52</sup> Appendix B: Interview Transcript.

The 16-year-old high school student who currently participates in the PAL program clearly stated during the interview that he was not part of a gang, but that he has friends who are. Nonetheless, he said “the feeling that I get is that they treat me like a gangster, that’s the feeling I get, because my friends are in gangs.”<sup>53</sup> When I asked who were “they,” the names he mentioned were of the personnel from the school administration such as the vice-principal. Even though this high school student is not in a gang, it appears that the school is not helping him stay away from gangs by providing support and instead is pushing him towards gangs. In the interview with the 19-year-old college student, she mentioned how a teacher that supported her, defended her against the school administration whom saw her as a gangster with no potential.

At the end of middle school, I was going to be placed in ESL classes and my English was as good as it is now. I was fluent. I had lived in the United States forever! And so these ladies [administration] in my middle school wanted to place me in ESL classes. They didn’t like me [because I always got in trouble]. And my teacher talked with these people and made them give me test and I got into all honors classes in high school. So she [teacher] was looking out at the bright side even though I never showed a bright side.<sup>54</sup>

It is exactly because she was enrolled in honors classes in high school that she was able to slowly get away from the gang subculture. What would have happened if she had stayed in the ESL classes, as her middle school administration had recommended? We can only speculate, nonetheless the fact the majority of this young woman’s gangster friends who did not have that one teacher that provided them with support, are now dead or in the juvenile justice system provides us with a pretty good prediction. Even though the administration failed to offer support and encouragement to the young Latina, the teacher that helped in her struggles shows the importance of schools in providing social capital.

As my conversation with the 19-year-old college student progressed, she repeatedly mentioned the teacher, whom she claims saved her “from being in prison right now or dead.”<sup>55</sup> The personal story about her teacher further supports the significance of support systems in schools and its major role in the lives of students, especially those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, which many Latinos in the state of Washington face.

She [teacher] did the most important thing, which was... to believe in me. She would see me getting in fights or I would come to class with bloody fingers or whatever and she would joke about it like in a, in a way that made me see things differently... She would always, every time if I got in trouble she would go to the

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<sup>53</sup>Anonymous, Phone Interview, 3 November 2005.

<sup>54</sup> Appendix A: Interview Transcript.

<sup>55</sup> Appendix A: Interview Transcript.

office and be there. Or if I ever got in fights, she wouldn't never be blaming like "oh, here you go again, I couldn't have expected any less."<sup>56</sup>

Also, looking back at a passage mentioned earlier, the benefit of social capital is that youth who are more "connected to adults whom they respect and admire are more likely to abide by adults' expectations and to consider the reactions of others when contemplating delinquent behavior."<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, the information gathered in this study and these interviews demonstrates that because of the economic situation of Latinos, who are more likely to be in poverty due to their demand for cheap labor-racism, which in turn results in parents working in occupations that place constraints on their daily schedule, parents are unable to interact with their children as often as they should or would like to. This then leads to the need for additional or supplementary kinds of social capital. In order to fill that gap or need, the college student interviewee looked for her *homies* to support her. Nonetheless, the teacher's great effort provided the student with support and social capital. This in a sense replaced the role gangs played in the student's life.

Even though the teacher of the Latina student helped prevent the student from engaging seriously in a gang, it is also important to note that dependence on a teacher's fondness or personal interests to help a student is arbitrary and unreliable. People such as young Latinas/os in Washington State need institutional support to make the experience more generalizable for all the students. Nonetheless, the interviews suggest that that is not the case for the state of Washington. Mr. Gomsrud, a teacher at the alternative school, expressed concern over the Walla Walla School District's approach in their attempts to reduce the dropout rate in compliance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: "they try to be more reactive than proactive; they look at the high school and not the elementary to take care of the dropout rate."<sup>58</sup> Mr. Gomsrud works with middle school students who have been referred by their public school to the middle school alternative program. The alternative middle school is supposed to help students get back on track and enter back into the regular public school system; however, it is common for the public schools to deny reentry of students who have been referred to the alternative program.<sup>59</sup> This has given the alternative school a negative stigma, making the alternative program seem like it is only for those students that the regular public school does not want to deal with. Mr. Gomsrud also mentioned that the level of education at the alternative middle school was not equivalent to that at the regular middle schools. He is the only teacher at the middle school and works with an average of ten students that are in different grade levels: according to Mr. Gomsrud, there is "not enough attention on the program, they try to put them under one umbrella."<sup>60</sup> For example, 12 and 15 years-old students are in the same classroom. Furthermore, some of these students will already have strong 'gangster' tendencies, yet these 'hardcore' kids are in the same classroom with other students that have not yet built those inclinations.

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<sup>56</sup> Appendix A: Interview Transcript

<sup>57</sup> Thomas L. McNulty (2003): 8

<sup>58</sup> Andrew Gomsrud, Personal Interview, 20 October 2005.

<sup>59</sup> Andrew Gomsrud, Personal Interview, 20 October 2005.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Gomsrud, Personal Interview, 20 October 2005.

As previously mentioned, Winfree's study on predicting gang membership found that delinquent peers influence youth's predisposition to joining a gang.<sup>61</sup> This study implies that the Walla Walla School District help construct the surroundings for students to join gangs by not separating the students based on their needs and age and thus not providing the students with social capital. The majority of the students referred to the alternative program in Walla Walla are Latinas/os and a very small percentage of the students referred to the middle school alternative program graduate from high school.<sup>62</sup> Mr. Gomsrud also mentioned that many teachers have a pretty good sense of whether their students are not doing well yet the teachers are not doing much to prevent their failure. He often receives remarks from teachers to the effect of "oh yeah, I figured that he/she would end up in your program." Once again, this suggests that the lack of school support groups by not retaining students in school increases the student's likelihood of becoming a gang member.

Despite the low level of support from the Walla Walla School District for alternative schools, there are outside programs that provide assistance to students from disadvantaged backgrounds such as TRIO. TRIO are federally funded programs that were initiated as part of the civil rights movement in the 1960s to combat poverty and to offer equal access to education.<sup>63</sup> Educational Talent Search (ETS) is one of the TRIO programs that encourage students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds to pursue higher education. ETS is currently present both in the Walla Walla Community College and Walla Walla High School (WaHi); nevertheless, TRIO programs have been experiencing budget cuts which limits the amount of help they can offer.<sup>64</sup> The need for funding programs was also a concern for the Walla Walla police officers. During the interview with them (as in the rest of this investigation) the lack of supervision repeatedly came up as one the factors contributing to gang membership. As earlier established in this report, this lack of parental interaction amongst Latinas/os originates from various societal issues (such as poverty, low-wage employment, etc.) which inhibit the parent from granting/providing social capital to their children. Sergeant Randy Alessio from Walla Walla acknowledges that the Walla Walla community in general is not providing the social capital many Latina/o students need; "we are not filling in the gap, our schools don't have the resources and there's no money, no one has no money to do that."<sup>65</sup>

As stated earlier, the little funding TRIO has does constraint the number of students they can serve. The staff member of the ETS program I interviewed who works mainly at WaHi spoke highly of the program but mentioned that at times she felt that there was little cooperation from the school members. According to the ETS counselor some teachers are opposed to the ETS program because they claim it only offers counseling to low-income students. Furthermore, since the ETS program does provide counseling, there have been incidents of miscommunication on the part of the school-

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<sup>61</sup> Winfree, Frances, and Esbensen, 113.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew Gomsrud, Personal Interview, 20 October 2005.

<sup>63</sup> Office of Postsecondary Education, "History of the Federal TRIO Programs," U.S. Department of Education, <<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/triohistory.html>>. (15 November 2005).

<sup>64</sup> ETS counselor, Personal Interview, 24 October 2005

<sup>65</sup> Sgt. Randy Alessio, Personal Interview, 11 November 2005.

counseling center. For example, every year the Preliminary SATs (PSATs) are offered at the high schools to help students prepare for the SATs. The PSATs are open to all students but usually students take the exam during their sophomore year so that they can take the SATs during their junior and senior year. The ETS counselor at WaHi during the interview mentioned that she had sent out emails and made flyers advertising the PSATs to her ETS sophomore students but that one of the WaHi counselors became irritated. According to the ETS counselor, the WaHi counselor claimed that the PSATs were supposed to be only for juniors and that by encouraging sophomores to take the exam that would overcrowd the cafeteria.<sup>66</sup> Despite the good intentions of the ETS counselor, misinterpretation or simply resistance from the school counselor can be attributed to the lack of teamwork in providing educational opportunities for students. This indicates that in order for educational outreach programs to be successful in providing social capital to students, the commitment and support of the school needs to present.

## **Conclusion**

The quantitative data and interviews emphasize the large portion of young Latinas/os in poverty and single parent families. These social agents allow for the Latino youth to easily become part of a gang because they search for that social capital that they do not have at home. The interview material strongly suggests that support groups in schools (mentoring, educational programs, etc.) help prevent Latino youth delinquency since these support groups can replace that nourishment gangs provide to young disadvantage Latinas/os. Now, the best way to tackle the overrepresentation of Latino youth in detention centers is for the government to take a multilateral approach by funding employment-training programs that will help low-income parents and promoting support systems for young Latinas/os in the state of Washington.

Access to employment training programs, which would improve low-income parents' education skills, would help increase parents' employment opportunities. Such opportunities imply higher wages and better work conditions. So not only would the parent be able to economically assist their family but they would also have more time available to spend with their children, and thus have social control to help prevent their children from joining gangs.

In addition with the state government helping low-income parents provide social capital to their children at home, the state government should also provide valuable institutionalized support groups in schools to help with the different social aspects that young Latinas/os face, as we have seen. Creating strong support groups in schools is another tangible way to undertake the complexity of poverty and the dynamics of family structure. As Mr. Gomsrud said, "schools need support systems that find these kids before they fail."<sup>67</sup> My interview with the college student also pointed out that it is imperative that there exists institutionalized support in the schools to ensure that all students receive social capital. A manageable way to achieve this is for the federal

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<sup>66</sup> ETS counselor, Personal Interview, 24 October 2005.

<sup>67</sup> Andrew Gomsrud, Personal Interview, 20 October 2005.

government to help fund educational outreach programs such as TRIO, which assist low-socioeconomic students. The school districts, however, should have a serious commitment in providing social capital to their students, especially those that need it the most. Moreover, the local police departments and community members should also become involved in offering social capital. Police department should apply for grants to help fund programs such as the PAL program. The PAL program in Yakima has been successful in offering activities, which inhibit gang involvement. As for community members, they should volunteer at teen centers such as at the PAL program and if there are no youth outlets in their communities, community members should advocate for one to their city council members. If the federal and state government, the school board, the police department, and community members work closely together, this will help curb gang membership not just amongst Latinas/os but youth in general. In providing such support we will not only deter Latino youth from gang activity but also prepare youth to become successful people in our communities. Also, at the same time we will reduce the likelihood of young Latinas/os becoming criminals. In implementing these support groups, the participation of the Latino youth needs to be considered. This will allow for young Latinas/os to express their feelings, thoughts, and experiences thus the school will be able to create a support group appropriate to the students' needs. Finally, allowing young Latinas/os to help create the support group offers them a position of visibility in the public sphere. In doing so, these Latino students will feel empowered to continue to better the situation of their communities. It is when the government establishes a relationship with the Latino community to help achieve equality that we are able to see noteworthy results.



## Appendix A: Interview Transcript

**Interview 10/12/05 6:40pm**

**Walla Walla, Wa**

**Interviewee: Latina student from Yakima**

**College Student:** During my recess or my whatever break, they [my gangster friends] would come over to meet me.

**Interviewer:** You went to an upscale school with few Latinos, so how did you meet them?

**College Student:** From elementary school, so in fifth grade all my friends, you know like you are suppose to choose your middle school. My friends either went to Washington, Franklin middle school or Lewis and Clark. So all them went there and I was the only one going to the discovery lab school because it was one block from my house

**Interviewer:** So were you and your friends into the gang scene before middle school?

**College Student:** No we weren't but they [my friends] had older brothers and cousins that were involved in gangs. So my friends weren't really into gangs at the time. But my cousins were and their cousins and like their peers were. So that's how we started, whenever they started a fight or whatever we were always there and at the end there was like, okay, if you gonna be there and you get your ass kicked we are not going to back you up unless you join the gang

So its kind of when your friends are in a gang you hang out with them, if somebody hates Your friend, then they hate you because you are their friend. So in order to defend you, you have to be in a gang

I was about to join a couple of times but it things never worked out. But officially, I remember one time, like I told you the time I was caught stealing, [so because of that I didn't get to make it to the initiation]

**Interviewer:** When you were stealing things or doing these mischievous things, what was going through your head?

**College Student:** I remember once when my mom would go grocery shopping. My mom would be down an aisle buying her things and I would go to the school supply section and steal pencils not because I needed them but just because. I don't know just because you have nothing else to do I guess...

**Interviewer:** When did you start getting into fights and things like that?

**College Student:** It was like sixth grade.

**Interviewer:** Why do you think that you ended up being like that?

**College Student:** I grew up in California and most of my cousins were selling drugs or into gangs. So that's what I looked up to. My brother, the only one that was a goody boy. I didn't get along with my brother so I didn't want to be like him. What I wanted to be was just a reflection of my cousins. So moving up here [Washington], and not having them here, I had cousins but they were all younger and the ones that were older they didn't let me hang out with them or else they would get in trouble with my dad. So I didn't have that anymore, so I started taking the initiative in sixth grade.

**Interviewer:** What about your friends?

**College Student:** For each of my friends it's a different case; most of my friends had a harsher life compared to mine. I really don't have an excuse to the things I was doing. Like some of my friends, I remember one of my girlfriends was raped. She would come to school crying because her *padaastro*, her step dad raped her. Every time she would come to school and get in fights she would get her anger out, like by fights and getting even with other people. My friends didn't have their parents. I didn't have my parents there but because they worked. But my friends didn't have their parents there because they were either in Mexico or they were dead or they were like living with their brothers and sisters. And the brothers and sisters didn't treat them well.

**Interviewer:** Where are your friends now?

**College Student:** I actually saw [one of my old friends] this weekend, he was almost killed my freshman year [of high school]. He got in a fight. He was in a gang. We grew up, in middle school we would always hang out. And my freshman year when I was at Davis, he got in a fight and they found him dead, they left him there and the other gang thought he was dead so they left him there. They hit the side of his head with a brick so many times people thought he was dead. And now I just saw him.

Most of my friends are either dead or in juvy.

**Interviewer:** Why do you think you are here[college] and they[friends] are not?

**College Student:** I seriously think it's because of the people I met along the way. I remember, looking back at middle school, my parents were never there. Well, my parents were there but they were always working. She [mom] would come home around 6, my mom would be cooking, getting ready for the next day and go to bed because she was tired. That's the only time I saw her, and then I would get screamed at because they would get messages on the answering machine [from school]. She would scream at me, that is all I saw of her. My parents would get mad at me, my brother was always the goody good and I was always compared to him. So my parents were never really there

you know. They were only there to beat my ass or to scream. Going to middle school, I met my teacher, she was not really like, you know people always talk about the role model that helped them, that helped them financially or that person will do things for them. She never did things like that for me but she did the most important thing, which was... to believe in me. She would see me getting in fights or I would come to class with bloody fingers or whatever and she would joke about it like in a, in a way that made me see things differently.

Once she asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up and I just said a dentist to shut her up and because I had heard my brother say that, so I just said that. But then she asked me "how do you plan to be a dentists with no fingers?" or she say, "I don't want you checking my kid's teeth with those fingers." So that would make me think, she made me think of things I had never really thought of but then you start thinking about them. She would always, every time if I got in trouble she would go to the office and be there. Or if I ever got in fights, she wouldn't never be blaming like "oh, here you go again, I couldn't have expected any less." You know. She would always tell me "how long are you going to continue this?" or like I would take tests, I would flunk them, I didn't even try and she would be like I know you can do better than this. She would always just be there, supporting me.

At the end of middle school, I was going to be placed in ESL classes and my English was as good as it is now. I was fluent. I had lived in the United States forever! And so that these ladies [administration] in my middle school wanted to place me in ESL classes. They didn't like me. And my teacher talked with these people and made them give me test and I got into all honors classes in high school. So she [teacher] was looking out at the bright side even though I never showed a bright side. She was always trying to look for it. Like always engaging me in sports, or activities, asking oh doesn't this sport look like fun and things like that. I don't know why she did that.

I see her as the person who saved me from being in prison right now or dead.

**Interviewer:** So in sixth grade is when you got into gangs and in eighth grade is when they were trying to place you in ESL classes?

**College Student:** In eighth grade, that's when you know you are going into high school, that's when they start assigning you the classes. So they wanted me to have full ESL, and after passing the exam I went to honors. Even my principal, I was always in the office, they all hated me. They hated my guts. But Miss Rockwell, when she would come to the office, she would always fight for me, she would always defend me. So my principal hated Miss Rockwell just because of that. So when Mrs. Rockwell was trying to get me out of the ESL classes, she would say let her take exams and she will pass. But they got in a fight. There was money involved, I don't know how exactly but there was money involved. The principal would tell Miss Rockwell, we cannot be spending money like this, she belongs in ESL. But miss Rockwell made it happen.

**Interviewer:** When you first found out that you were being placed in ESL classes even though you were knew English, what was your reaction?

**College Student:** I didn't even know what ESL was, so I was going to go to ESL classes.

**Interviewer:** So when did you start caring about school?

**College Student:** I think it was...I would say eighth grade year.

**Interviewer:** After you took the [placement] exams?

**College Student:** No. When they put me in the ESL classes, I was already caring. I didn't, I didn't know what was going on, what ESL was, but I was already at a point where, not really school, I just cared in general, I cared about life. Because Before I was just like whatever happens happens. You know like if something happens you go for it, and just you know just like all about the homies and stuff. That was my philosophy. But like in eighth grade I started to caring about life in general, not just school, but everything. Like my family. I just started caring.

**Interviewer:** Why did you start caring?

**College Student:** That's when, my eighth grade year my cousins back home [California] were having, my cousins where I grew up, two of them got killed because of gangs and stuff. And up here my friend he got killed. When my brother was graduating, like, a lot things happened, a lot things happened and then during those time I started to go to *retiros* and I started to care. Well I had gone to *retiros* but I would just sit there and chill. But during that time a whole bunch of things happened. The people who I cared were no longer there, the people who would back me there would no longer there.

**Interviewer:** So the people that would back you up' you mean your homies?

**College Student:** Yeah, homies.

**Interviewer:** Where were they?

**College Student:** One of my good friends from here died, during that year, because, I was kind of one of the reasons that he got killed. The day after I got in a fight, he got killed. That was just like, I don't know, an eye opener. I don't even know but it's a very long story. But I was part of why he was killed or at least I felt that it that way. That's why I was just, I don't know.

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**Interviewer:** Do you think that the reason you made [to college] it and your friends didn't is because you were smarter or your personal attributes?

**College Student:** Oh no. I have a lot of friends that could have fit this college campus way better than I. They were way smarter than I.

**Interviewer:** So what kept them from realizing that?

**College Student:** Different paths... they never got the 'you can do it' or the 'you can step out of it', that there's more. All I think is just, I think you just need someone to believe in you that you can do it even if you don't believe it yourself. Someone to show you that there is more to life than just getting married and having kids, that there's more. When you come from underprivileged homes, you are expected not to succeed; they are expected to just do whatever. I remember when I was in middle school, me and my friends we never thought about college. I mean thinking about that that was just for white people. If we graduated from middle school, that was our big party. Our accomplishment. Going to high school, oh my gosh you are honor roll! Graduating from high school, nobody does that, nobody does that? So I mean graduating from high school was like, will I be alive to graduate from high school. That was my, when I was growing up, I remember asking myself that when my brother graduated from high school, will I ever be alive to graduate from high school? That was my, like I wish I was alive to graduate. That was my goal in middle school. And I know a lot of my friends that was on their goal list. Does that make sense?

## Appendix B: Interview Transcript

**Interview 10/18/05 5:30pm**

**Walla Walla, Wa**

**Interviewee: Latino middle school student from Walla Walla**

**Interviewer:** When did your mom go visit you at the juvenile detention center the day that you fainted?

**Middle school boy student:** I don't know, I don't remember, we don't have clocks, they don't tell us.

**Interviewer:** (in Spanish asks mother) the day that he fainted that's the day you visited him?

**Mother of student:** After I went to go visit him, he was telling me 'I fainted,' but he doesn't remember what day he had fainted, if it was a day before he got arrested or a day after. He doesn't remember.

**Interviewer:** Why don't you remember?

**Student:** I don't know, they [detention center] don't have clocks.

**Mother:** He was sleeping so he thought that a day had passed. They [detention officers] didn't think he had truthfully fainted. Because many kids will do that, they will hold their breath or do little tricks, so they thought he had done something. Nobody called me to tell me, they took him to the doctor after I asked them [detention officers] about it the evening that I went.

**Interviewer:** Did they take you to the doctor? What did they do there?

**Student:** They said that I was fine. They asked me if I had drank water, and I said no. And they asked me what I was doing, I told them I was just exercising in the morning. They said next time it happens they will put a monitor inside me to see what my heart is doing.

**Mother:** If I had not gone to visit my son, I would have not found out that he had fainted in the juvenile detention center. They didn't call me and they knew about it. I had asked a friend to call [the detention center] that day and when she called she asked for my son and they said "oh yeah the kid that fainted," so they knew but they didn't tell me.

**Interviewer:** Who did you talk to about this after you found out he had fainted?

**Mother:** (asks son) What's the name of the guy?

**Student:** Oh, Manny, he gives the food out, he is staff.

**Mother:** He [Manny] said he didn't know because he wasn't there.

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**Interviewer:** What do you do with your friends when you are hanging out?

**Student:** we just get together and break windows

**Interviewer:** Are any of your friend involved in gangs?

**Student:** I don't know

**Interviewer:** What gangs are here in Walla Walla, what are they called?

**Student:** 13<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>

**Interviewer:** is 13<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> the street that they live on?

**Student:** no, is what they claim.

**Interviewer:** They street that they claim?

**Student:** No, is what they claim, like the gang.

**Mother**(talking to the student): but do you know why that happened back in those times, is because the kids would see how people killed their parents, so the kids wanted to get revenge of all the things they had done to their parents and that's where the gangs began. But what I don't understand is why you [student] and or why your brother are in gangs, if nobody has killed or harmed your family. Why do you have to take it out on other people?

**Student:** Ana's dad.

**Mother:** I don't understand why kids want to do harm.

**Student:** why do you think, why do you think [speaking to the mother], because what he did to us?

**Mother:** because he would put you in the corner when you behaved badly??

**Interviewer:** Why are you involved in gangs and your sister is not?

**Student:** girls don't do that kind off stuff, they just don't.

**Interviewer:** so it's okay for you to do and not for them?

**Student:** I guess, I don't know

**Interviewer:** What about school, how are your teachers?

**Student:** My first period teacher is nice, he lets us eat in his classroom and we don't have to ask to go to the bathroom...my second class teacher, every time you do something wrong she just yells at you for no reason and she corrects you but in a mean way.

I don't know, they [teachers] just pick at me. Like one time I was holding the door for everyone to get out and then I came and the teacher was like "where were you, you took a little long" or something like that and that made me mad, they give me attitude. I feel like sometimes teachers are picking on me.



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