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SCROLLING THROUGH THE STREETS: EXAMINING WOMEN'S GANG-RELATED
DIGITAL IDENTITIES

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SCROLLING THROUGH THE STREETS: EXAMINING WOMEN'S GANG-RELATED
DIGITAL IDENTITIES

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Abstract

Past research examining the online presence of urban street gangs found that around 74% of urban street gang members identify themselves as active on internet platforms. Studies seeking to understand the function of online interactions between gang members have concluded that spaces, such as social media, operate like a “virtual street corner” and allow for performances of collective identities. However, there is little research examining how girls and women in gangs conduct themselves on these “virtual street corners.” This study aims to examine the behavior of girls and women engaging in online gang spaces to understand how they navigate these hypermasculine spaces and identify common styles of engagement. The data from this study was collected through the web-scraping of a public Facebook page dedicated to Latina/o gangs in Chicago. From this data I created a subset of 2,312 comments and replies from girls and women posted January 2015 to November 2016 and performed a thematic analysis of the comments. My findings show that the women engaging with this Facebook page fall into four categories of engagement styles: Observational, Confrontational, Regulatory, and Adaptive.

Keywords: Gangs, Gender, Digital Street, and Social Media

Introduction

In 2023, national surveys found that up to 95% of adolescents have access to a smartphone, with 46% of U.S. youth reporting they are online “almost constantly” (Vogels, Gelles-Watnick and Massarat 2022). Given that street gang members are, on average, adolescents themselves (Decker, Pyrooz, and Densley 2022), we can infer they also use the internet frequently. Research from 2013 found that 74% of urban youth reported using social media—a number that has likely risen drastically over the past decade.

Beyond general social media use, gang-affiliated youth also engage in deviant behaviors online, including cyberbullying, harassment, drug sales, and posting violent content, sometimes leading to offline conflicts (Hsiao, Liverso, and Papachristos 2023; Liverso and Hsiao 2021; Pawelz and Elvers 2018). This phenomenon, commonly referred to as *internet banging*, has been theorized as a way for individuals to perform and express both their gang identity and masculinity (Lane 2016; Patton, Eschmann, and Butler 2013). However, much of this work has focused primarily on boys and men, leaving the ways in which young women engage online largely unexplored.

This gap is particularly concerning given that young women report higher rates of activity on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook compared to young men (Faverio and Sidoti 2024; Vogels et al. 2022). While one study has examined girls and women in online gang spaces, it found that they are neither marginalized nor central within these networks (Liverso et al. 2025). While this research is a valuable starting point, we still lack qualitative studies that explore how girls and women perform their identities within these hypermasculine digital spaces.

This research is especially important to our understanding of how the internet acts as a space where individuals may experiment with identity construction that may differ or align with real-life expectations. Beyond this, we have yet to detail the ways in which girls and women perform traditional and non-traditional forms of femininity on the digital street, that in turn influence their status and experience within the gang as well as reinforce or challenge gender hegemony.

My study examines the online behavior of girls and women on social media who engage in gang-affiliated online spaces through the following research questions (1) How do girls and women perform their gendered and gang identities in these spaces? (2) Are these performances different from what we have observed on the street? To answer this, my analysis identifies methods and common styles of engagement through qualitative content analysis of a public Facebook account dedicated to Latina/o gangs in Chicago. To do so, I developed quantitative codes as well as a typology of engagement styles using thematic analysis, where each type speaks to approaches of performance reflected in the analog world.

This study has strong implications for scholarship not only in gang research, but also research investigating the enactment of gendered expression online. Specifically, I investigate how performances of femininity mediate respectability and survival and argue that women in hypermasculine online spaces such as the digital street use gendered expressions strategically rather than passively.

Theoretical Background

Women in Gangs

Over time, we have come to understand the notion that an individual's identity is socially constructed through a process of self-definition based on personal attributes and experiences

(Slay and Smith 2011), with the act of performance working as an ongoing process that aids individuals in reaffirming values and committing to meaningful aspects of life (Erikson 1968). For girls and women in gangs, performances of identity must be understood within the context of their involvement in the gang, which necessitates a discussion of our current knowledge of these young women's lived experiences and the current literature.

Social perceptions of women gang members have changed substantially in recent years. Specifically, there has been resistance to long-standing traditions of criminologist's use of boys and men as the "default" in research (Chesney-Lind 1989), with researchers now recognizing girls and women as active rather than auxiliary members of gangs (Wang 2000; Decker, Pyrooz, and Densley 2022). Recent research has identified that most urban street gangs are mixed gendered with young women comprising up to fifty percent of the group at times, as well as a noted rise in number and status of all-female gangs in the past decade (Leverso and Matsueda 2019; Sutton 2017).

Pre-existing mental health issues, feelings of isolation, risky sexual behavior, substance use, and low-self-esteem are all individual level risk factors that have been identified for young women to engage in gang activity (Sutton 2017; Chesney-Lind and Hagedorn 1999). Additionally, young women who have experienced multiple kinds of violent victimization, such as domestic abuse, are at greater risk of becoming members of gangs (Miller and Decker 2001; Esbensen, Deschenes, and Winfree 1999). Paying attention to the histories of victimization that girls and women in gangs have endured suggests that joining a gang, in many ways, is an attempt to survive their trauma and their performance of gang identities showcase this.

Keeping in mind that delinquency is often a normative aspect of urban street gangs, it is not incredibly surprising that young women in gangs engage in significantly higher rates of

offending than non-gang women. However, it is important to emphasize that young women in gangs still have significantly lower rates of offending than their male counterparts and are less likely to engage in gang-motivated violence (Miller and Decker 2001). While some criminologists cite testimonies from men in the gang to support the claim that women are bound by rules and restrictions in mixed gender gangs resulting in women's lower engagement in violence, research focusing on women in mixed-gender gangs found that these same women describe their lack of involvement in particular gang activities as a personal choice (Sutton 2019; Miller and Brunson 2000). Young women observe that they can utilize their gender to avoid these kinds of activities and characterize the actions of their male peers as needlessly dangerous, especially when it comes to gun-related crimes or fights (Miller 1998; Sutton 2019). This is not to say that women are not subject to marginalization on the basis of their gender within the gang, as scholarship has shown women are often denied legitimacy within the gang hierarchy and barred from engaging in certain status enhancing activities (Leverso 2024; Decker et al. 2022). Nevertheless, the agency of women within these spaces should not be overlooked.

Accomplishing Femininity in the Gang

Women's experiences within gang culture are shaped not only by their involvement in criminal activities but also by their gender identity. Therefore, it is essential to go beyond traditional criminological perspectives and incorporate theories of femininity, both those that have been used to theorize women's gang involvement in the past and those that have not.

Messerschmidt's (1995) "oppositional" or "bad girl femininity" and Miller's concept of "doing masculinity" (2002) have both commonly been used to understand how girls and women in gangs navigate interactions on the street and perceive their own identities. In his 1995 work,

Messerschmidt argues that crime is in itself a resource for accomplishing gender, specifically theorizing structured action theory which posits that boys and men attach meaning to their social actions such as crime to construct masculine identities. In addition to this, he theorized women who engage in deviant and criminal behavior employ a type of “oppositional femininity” which rejects traditional gendered behavior for women and embraces actions characterized as masculine such as crime as a resource for gaining status. (Messerschmidt 1995).

Miller’s (2002) engagement with Messerschmidt’s (1995) structured action theory and feminist criminologists’ application of “doing gender” draw attention to the emphasis scholars have put on normative features without considering structural inequalities, power relations, differential accesses to resources, and privilege. Miller (2002) critiqued Messerschmidt’s (1995) structured action approach, claiming that “doing gender” and crime presents a tautological issue, suggesting instead an approach that can account for dynamic, resistant, and transformative aspects of personal agency. Miller (2002) expands on this critique by offering her understanding of how women gang members interact and perceive themselves within the gang context, stating that girls and women in gangs “do masculinity” to construct a masculine identity pointedly within the context of the gang (Kolb and Palys 2016). Studies applying both “oppositional femininity” and “doing masculinity” found results similar to those of Miller (2002), with female participants stating they felt equal to their male counterparts, with differences lying in gendered expectations and experiences of both men and women (Kolb and Palys 2016).

However, other researchers applying these frameworks depicted the actions of women in gangs as more conforming to Messerschmidt’s (1995) “bad girl femininity” in which performances of masculine behavior were seen as normative in certain situations while “culturally appropriate” femininity was employed in others (Hughes, Botchkovar, and Short

2019). This is somewhat in line with gender scholars' conceptualization of hybrid femininities where young women cast out what they view as obvious feminine qualities believing they signal a lack of autonomy but return to what is socially ascribed to be traditionally feminine when they fear stigmatization (Budgeon 2014). Their analysis of friendships between gang girls additionally held evidence supporting Kandiyoti's (1998) "bargaining with the patriarchy," which postulates that women's strategies and use of patriarchal bargains are a conscious response and are enacted as a dialogue that defines limits, and inflects their opinions (Kolb and Palys 2016; Hughes et al. 2019). Little evidence was found to support Miller's (2001) theory of girls and women constructing masculine identities within the context of the gang (Hughes et al. 2019). Nevertheless, multiple theoretical interpretations should be employed when studying women's interactions within the gang to gain a more holistic understanding.

Similar to Messerschmidt's (1995) theory of "bad girl femininity," a more recent study by Jones (2009) concentrating on the application of Anderson's *Code of the Street* (1995) to girls and women has found that circumstances of inner-city life have led to the development of an anomalous type of femininity among young women that encourages and confines girls' use of physical violence. Jones (2008) concluded that men and women in distressed inner-city neighborhoods share appreciation for similar values and notes gender-based differences in the enactment of street codes, emphasizing that men's participation in violent acts is viewed as a part of their masculinity. At the same time, women view violence as a tool to navigate street life (Jones 2004). Inner-city girls, while lacking a manhood to defend, share a concern for safety and survival shaped by their urban environments (Jones 2004). Through socialization, they come to recognize how respect, reputation, and retaliation—termed the three R's in Anderson's (1995) *Code of the Street*—structure their social dynamics (Jones 2008). Jones (2009) found that they

skillfully navigate situations, strategically choosing behaviors such as "aggressiveness" or "prettiness" to their advantage (92).

It is important to also keep in mind the ethnic and cultural contexts of femininity. Latina women especially have been found to be socialized with far more traditional values such as *familismo* and *marianismo* which emphasize a woman's role in the home and family as one of service (Rafael and Ontai 2004). Similar to Budgeon's (2019) theory of hybrid femininities and Jones' (2009) findings on inner-city women's strategic adoption of behaviors, Denner and Dunbar (2004) found that for young Latina women, "being a girl is associated with multiple contradictory meanings," (305; see also Williford 2011). Latina women were observed to both move in and around these norms to satisfy their own and others' expectations (Denner and Dunbar 2004; Williford 2011). Their narratives reveal active agency, as they consciously adopt different class, gendered, and racial expressions depending on the circumstances and the public image they wish to portray. These choices reflect a survival strategy rooted in the historical challenges faced by impoverished and marginalized women and girls in the United States. This idea that women walk a tightrope between traditional and oppositional expressions of femininity echoes through these different theories. However, no studies to date have examined how gang-involved women navigate performing their own contrasting identities on the digital street.

In this study, I extend past research by analyzing women's construction of identity on the digital street.

The Digital Street

Research has found that although social media networks were created to foster social and professional connections, these online spaces often generate and publicize violence (Patton et al.

2013). For many adolescents, both gang and non-gang, the possible anonymity of online platforms and protection from immediate physical harm can influence levels of aggression and antisocial behavior online (McCreery and Krach 2018). National surveys measuring adolescents experiences with the following behaviors used to measure online harassment: (1) name-calling, (2) spreading of rumors, (3) receiving unwanted explicit images, (4) physical threats, (5) online stalking, and (5) having explicit images posted of themselves without their consent, found that 46% of U.S. teens aged 13-17 report experiencing at least one of the behaviors and 28% report experiencing multiple types (Vogels 2022). This volatile online environment is likely to be felt more extremely for members and those affiliated with urban street gangs as the same study found individuals from economically disadvantaged homes and members of racial/ethnic minorities were more likely to experience online harassment (Vogels 2022).

Scholars focusing on gang members' interactions on social media platforms have concluded that online gang activity can be seen as an extension of gang activity on the streets (Leverso and Hsiao 2021; Pawelz and Elvers 2018; Pyrooz et al. 2015). A study focusing on gang interactions online presents three main conclusions concerning the online activities of gang members: (1) gang members use social networking sites at higher rates than their nongang peers, (2) gang members commit deviant and criminal acts online at a higher rate than their nongang peers, and (3) gangs are unlikely to use social media to obtain organizational goals, rather using it for symbolic needs (Pyrooz et al. 2015).

In addition, other research has found that gang members on social media treat the sites like a "virtual street corner" (Hsiao, Leverso, and Papachristos 2023; Pawelz and Elvers 2018; Lauger and Densley 2018). Social media allows for performances of collective gang identities that stress and dramatize their ability to enact lethal violence to a public audience (Lauger and

Densley 2018). Lauger and Densley (2018) emphasized that online social networks do not completely replace face-to-face interactions' sociability but act as a supplement to them.

Leverso and Hsiao (2021)'s research investigating how gang group processes manifest on the digital street found a moderate correlation between geographic proximity and online antagonism, with antagonism often mirroring historic rivalries and disputes, reflecting offline dynamics.

While their work supports the parallelism hypothesis that online gang behavior mirrors behavior seen on the streets, the authors emphasize the important implications of digital spaces facilitating interactions between geographically distant gangs (Leverso and Hsiao 2021).

The interactions surrounding gang-affiliated youth and gang members and their performances of collective identity online have come to be known as “internet banging” (Patton et al. 2013). “Internet-banging” has largely been characterized in gang literature as a man-dominated and hyper-masculine behavior meant to assert an individual’s gang identity online (Patton et al. 2013). Furthermore, Stewart’s (2019) study expands on the concept of internet-banging in his work reporting that gang-associated youth use social media to publicly challenge and invalidate the legitimacy and reputation of their rivals through “cross-referencing,” “calling bluffs,” and “catching lacking.”

Gang Women Navigating the Digital Street

Few studies currently discuss how women and girls in street gangs interact online or how they engage in “internet-banging” behaviors. Therefore, to investigate how girls and women in urban street gangs interact and embody their gendered identities in online spaces, we must also look at the existing research on underrepresented women’s experiences and behavior on social media. A study by Hutchinson (2019) focusing specifically on the experiences of women

belonging to marginalized communities online found that despite experiencing various forms of social oppression in online spaces, women have found ways to create and engage in communities to resist such oppression. In addition to this, Hutchinson (2019) posits that these acts of resistance have contributed to a better understanding of how social media platforms are designed to oppress marginalized users. Findings such as these challenge the notion that women, especially women of color, have not played a significant role in the evolution of online platforms. Instead, Hutchinson (2019) argues that despite the platforms' design, women of color have taken on a critical role in online spaces by asserting their cultural sovereignty, advocating for political rights, and creating communities that promote resistance and survivance.

Women are a vulnerable population among internet users despite their involvement in building communities online, and this is amplified for women who belong to additional marginalized communities. Social media specifically can be a space that enables hate, abuse, discrimination, and gender-based violence (Phipps 2022; Owens et al. 2019). In addition to their gender, women's gang status can have deleterious effects on their experiences both online and on the street. Young women in gangs are especially imperiled as a population as they are more likely to face certain types of victimization such as sexual exploitation and abuse than their male counterparts and non-gang peers, which can be magnified in online settings (Sutton 2017; Phipps 2022; Vogels 2022).

Key research that has discussed women and girls' presence in online gang spaces include Lane's (2016) digital ethnography as well as Liverso et al.'s (2025) investigation of the liberating potential of social media for gang involved women. One of the main findings made by Lane (2016) in his digital ethnography is that women have much more extensive and geographically broad networks in online spaces than their male peers. Girls in gangs have also

been observed as “knowledge bearers” online, coinciding with their performance of reconnaissance, and notifying their male peers of impending violence (Lane 2016). Liverso et al.’s (2025) network analysis found that while social media expands women’s possible spaces for identity management and reduces immediate physical risk, girls and women are less connected and less central to both collaborative and hostile exchanges. Their discussion on the implications of digitalization on women’s social location within the gang emphasizes the persistence of misogyny online mirroring that seen in the analog world (Liverso et al. 2025).

While “internet-banging” is characterized as a man-dominated and hypermasculine behavior, we know that girls and women in gangs are also active in online spaces (Lane 2016; Patton et al. 2013; Liverso et al. 2025). In order to elaborate on our current knowledge, the current study describes characteristics of engagement for women involved in online gang spaces and identifies engagement styles in which women enact and break socially ascribed gender norms on the digital street.

Methods

Data

I use data from a public Facebook page collected via web-scraping to investigate where and how gangs interact in online settings (Liverso and Hsiao 2021). The data includes all posts comments and replies over a 10-month period from January 2015 to November 2016. The page was identified in 2015 through qualitative research in which gang members were asked informally about social media sites that they frequently used, with findings reflecting that, at the time, Facebook was the model social media platform among gang members (Liverso and Hsiao 2021). The public Facebook page centered around Chicago gangs, with members engaging on

the page being primarily Latina/o. At the time of data collection, the page had 30,666 followers and had an average of 2-3 posts per day.

For context, public pages on Facebook can be explored, followed, and interacted without permission or communication with the administrators of the account. Due to the public nature of the page, gang members and gang-affiliated persons were able to interact with those outside their normal social network on the streets which may be bound by their physical location. Content that was sent to the creator/s of the account by gang members or gang-affiliated persons was posted on the page by the administrator/s, and anyone exploring the page could like, comment, or reply to others. The content posted on the page varied from pictures of individuals throwing up gang signs, antagonistic posts aimed at rival gangs, pictures of well-known gang leaders, and pictures posted in remembrance of gang members who had died. Comments and replies under each post analyzed in this study also differ in their topic and level of aggression allowing for a comprehensive analysis of types of commenters and engagements in this online setting. Figure 1 shows an example of one of the posts scraped from the Facebook page where it shows a piece of art depicting a man wearing a five-point crown, a symbol of the gang the Latin Kings. Commenters responding to the post range from those insulting members of the Latin Kings to individuals expressing their love for the gang.

[INSERT FIGURE 1. HERE]

It should be noted that while the page itself was dedicated to Latina/o gangs, the Facebook page was public, and analysis of comments revealed other non-Latina/o gangs engaging in discourse. While most comments were made by those affiliated with the Latin

Kings, Two Six, and La Raza – primarily Latina/o gangs – there were still a substantial number of individuals on the page claiming membership to gangs with different racial/ethnic backgrounds such as the Gangster Disciples and Black P Stones, both historically black gangs. For these reasons as well as the public nature of the page, I discuss my findings towards a broader understanding the digital street, rather than claiming all those engaging with the page are Latina/o. Where appropriate, however, I will discuss Latina identity.

Because this research focuses on girls and women, the dataset is restricted to only their comments. Identifying the gender of commenters was a two-step process in which they were first coded via their names and pictures on their profile and later checked again, cross-referencing this coding with the content of individuals' comments and pronouns used to address them by others in the dataset (see Leverso et al. 2025). This resulted in an analytic sample of 2,312 comments and replies from 591 posts over nearly two years, originating from 811 unique accounts identified as belonging to women. Concerning the distribution of number of comments from women, out of the 811 individual accounts coded as being women, the majority of them commented between 1 to 5 times, comprising over 80% of the sample. The average number of comments for this group was 2.85, and the largest recorded number of comments from one individual in the data set is 102.

Analytical Method

Codes for this analysis were conducted in a series of steps over a period of 6 months through the process of closely reading the 2,309 comments and replies from 591 individual posts and identifying initial patterns. Following this, I created an initial codebook (Appendix A) used to code each individual comment based on the following variables: Comment Tone, Gang Vernacular, Cultural Knowledge, Insult Towards Man or Woman, Racialized Language, Racial

Slurs, Slut Shaming, Homophobic Slurs, Feminizing Slurs, Masculinity Insults, Insults to Appearance, Direct Threats, and Tagging. Comment Tone was coded using a Likert style scale of intensity to reflect aggression coded (0) Not Aggressive at All to (5) Extremely Aggressive. Insult Towards Man or Woman was coded as a categorical variable in which (0) meant no direct insults were identified (1) man was insulted and (2) woman was insulted. The coding schema for the rest of the variables was based on frequency where (1) reflected the code was present and (0) for not present.

Following the quantitative coding process, I then conducted a thematic analysis to assess how individuals performed their gendered and gangster identity. In order to do so, I restructured the data so that the comments were grouped by individual. I then analyzed each woman's comments holistically. Women and girls are coded on their expressions of femininity, their gang identity, and their techniques for navigating the somewhat paradoxical identities within the context of engagements surrounding it. I then sort women's styles of engagement into groups based on my findings in order to better convey the varying types of digital identities constructed by women in gang affiliated online spaces as well as address commonly used techniques each group of women used to navigate interactions.

This process led to my theorization of four main engagement styles (1) Observational style characterized through limited self-expression and identity performance, (2) Confrontational style where women engage actively in internet bashing behaviors that express their ability to enact violence and affirm their gangster identity, (3) Regulatory style used by women to enhance their status using performances of emphasized femininity while disparaging women who break gendered norms (4), and Adaptive style in which woman leverage their toughness and renegotiate femininity through their performances of identity. Each individual woman was coded

as using one of the four (i.e., the codes were mutually exclusive) which coincide with different performances of their gendered and gangster identities. Serious consideration was given to the possibility of code switching or women employing different engagement styles between posts. However, within the review process it was determined to be less common and while it is considered within the discussion, it is not within the key observations within this study.

Findings

Quantitative Findings

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for comment level codes. Nearly half, 49.85%, of comments were coded as Not Aggressive at all, followed by 14.51% for Slightly Aggressive, 13.68% for Moderately Non-Aggressive, 12.86% for Moderately Aggressive, 6.45% for Highly Aggressive, and 2.55% for Extremely Aggressive. This is somewhat in line with Leverso et al.'s (2025) work which claims girls and women are less central within hostile exchanges on the digital street. However, with about half of comments and replies coded as Slightly Aggressive or more, we can assume that women are not simply a passive entity in these hypermasculine spaces. Due to the content of the more aggressive comments varying extensively from arguments centered around women's reputation as a gangster to their role as a mother, I do not draw conclusions concerning girls and women's expressions of their gendered identity based on level of aggression.

Within the sample of 2,309 comments and replies, 11.72% were identified as having a direct insult towards a man compared to 4.55% that contained a direct insult towards a woman. This finding may point towards several aspects of women's experience online (1) women are less active on the digital street therefore less likely to interact with other women and (2) girls and women may be more likely to engage in debates with men online when protected from

immediate physical harm. Moreover, women's willingness to insult or engage in disagreements with men online points to their resistance of marginalization on the digital street through the use of traditionally masculine behavior, supporting Messerschmidt's (1995) theory of oppositional femininity.

Other common codes include *Tagging* (19.37%), *Casting Doubt on Others Reputation* (18.29%), *Feminizing Slurs* (14.03%), *Racial Language* (10.54%), and use of *Gang Vernacular* (10.39%). *Tagging* – an action specific to social media sites – is where an individual directly links another person usually using an “@” symbol followed by their username which notifies them they have been mentioned in the specific post. The widespread use of *Tagging* along with the 14.64% of comments coded including *Cultural Knowledge* supports Lane's (2016) finding that women online collect and disseminate information using their broader networks, mirroring actions performed on the street.

Casting Doubt on Others Reputation is characterized as any comment with the purpose of injuring a group or individuals' reputation. The common presence of this behavior within the data set emphasizes women's adherence to street codes valuing reputation and respect online. It is important to note that challenges to others reputation took on several forms with women challenging both men and women's reputations as a gangster, sexual and romantic partner, and often women's reputation as a mother. This finding is similar to that of Stuart's (2019) where members of gangs engaged in techniques such as “cross-referencing,” where individuals referenced past online activities of others, “calling bluffs,” a way in which individuals challenged others to follow through with online threats, and “catching lacking,” which provides evidence contradicting an individual's online performance of gang identity in order to invalidate the legitimacy of rivals online.

Feminizing Slurs refers to the use of gendered insults such as “bitch,” “cunt,” “pussy,” “slut,” or “whore,” identified within a comment. Feminizing slurs were commonly used in a way that insulted an individual’s toughness. While this type of language is normative, it is important that we acknowledge that some women use words like “bitch” in a colloquial manner towards individuals they are friends with which is not accounted for in this measure. Contrastingly, the variable *Racial Language* refers specifically to colloquial uses of the N-word. Both of these types of language have been identified as common within research looking at men’s behavior on the digital street and is mirrored within the women in this data set.

Gang vernacular has also been found to be a normative aspect of the digital street and can be characterized as the use of gang abbreviations or slang to affirm their membership or speak positively/negatively about other gangs online. An example of this would be a comment saying “KK” or “king killer,” which in this context, is an insult or threat to members of the Latin Kings. Contrastingly, one could post a comment saying “ALKQN” which would mean, “almighty king and queen nation,” showing support for men and women members of the Latin Kings.

[INSERT TABLE 1. HERE]

The use of *Racial Slurs*, *Slut Shaming*, *Homophobic Slurs*, *Masculinity Insults*, *Threats or Challenges*, and *Profile Stalking* were found within the data set but are not indicative of normative behavior for girls and women on the digital street or specifically linked with a certain style of engagement. The use of Racial Slurs (0.29%) , or derogatory language meant to disparage someone based on their racial/ethnic identity, was less common with only six total comments containing them. *Slut shaming*, or insults towards women based on their real or

perceived sexual behavior, was coded as appearing in 2.56% of comments but was less common than was anticipated during preliminary construction of the codebook. In addition to being less common, individuals who employed slut shaming spanned across engagement styles.

Homophobic Slurs (2.94%), insults meant to disparage someone on the basis of their real or perceived sexual identity were aimed primarily at men but were not recurrent in the data. The variable *Masculinity Insults* captures the use of language meant to demean an individual's masculinity and was used within 5.25% of the comments. These insults were commonly used in tandem with an individuals' use of *Casting Doubt on Other's Reputation*. *Threats or Challenges* refers to an individual's comment that includes a direct threat or challenge towards a named individual or commenter. *Threats or Challenges* only appeared in 3.33% of comments and were found most often within comments rated as having a more aggressive tone. Lastly, *Profile Stalking* (1.57%) is defined in this study as the commenters use of information gained from viewing other commenters' personal profiles and was used sparingly by girls and women.

Overall, quantitative findings suggest girls and women on this gang affiliated Facebook page engaged in many ways with some findings mirroring those made for gang women in the analog world and others being distinctly an online action. Some of the most common codes include: *Tagging*, *Casting Doubt on Others Reputation*, *Cultural Knowledge*, *Feminizing Slurs*, *Racial Language*, and *Gang Vernacular*. While the majority of comments from girls and women were coded as either *Not Aggressive at All* or *Slightly Aggressive*, the presence of women engaging actively in both cooperative and antagonistic ways calls for a deeper analysis of their behavior. The findings discussed above not only aids in providing a baseline for studying gang-affiliated girls and women's behavior online, but also acts as a supplement to the qualitative analysis of engagement styles.

Qualitative Findings

This study develops a typology of engagement styles to understand how girls and women perform their gendered and gangster identities on the digital street. The study is largely exploratory and there are no types of engagement styles that are explicitly expected based on past literature. However, I draw comparisons to normative aspects of engagement for men in gangs online and women's actions on the street. In addition to this, my findings suggest that the women engaging with this Facebook page employ engagement styles that fall into the following categories: *Observational*, *Confrontational*, *Regulatory*, and *Adaptive*.

Women coded as employing an *Observational* engagement style commented more passively and prioritized their safety online altercations through remaining neutral and rarely performing their identities online. Women using *Confrontational* styles employed common net-banging behaviors seen for men, performing their gangster identity online and rejecting performances of femininity. Antithetically, women who were coded using the *Regulatory* style of engagement could be identified through their renouncement of gang culture and harsh criticism of women breaking gendered norms. Women coded using the *Adaptive* engagement style walk a thin line between performing their gendered identity in ways that negotiate their independence while upholding their status as “decent” woman and maintaining their reputation of toughness on the streets. Themes and actions identified across styles are information gathering and dispersal, management of reputation, gang vernacular, and the balance of gang status with traditional gendered roles.

Observational

Observational is the most commonly employed style used by women commenting in this data set. These women quite literally keep a low profile when engaging in posts, with many of

the engagements by this group being comments that tag another individual without any additional text other than the tag itself. When women using *Observational* styles do engage more actively, their comments often include identifying an individual in the post, sharing exclamatory reactions, and sharing history and culture of gangs. Many of these findings hold support for past research positing that women are known largely as “knowledge bearers” both online and on the streets as well as arguments that girls and women use online spaces to assert their cultural sovereignty (Lane 2016; Hutchinson 2019). For example, in response to a man who expressed confusion concerning gang signs being shown in the post who commented, “Wait one dude is throwing up the rakes and the rest of them is throwing up VL?” the woman replied, “Throwing down kings n folks.” While the man was unfamiliar and had guessed the signs were showing affiliation for the Gangster Disciples and Vice Lords, the woman was able to engage more actively identifying the signs as being negative towards the Latin Kings and other gangs belonging to the alliance without being attacked by other commenters. These women seamlessly avoid online arguments by sparingly inflecting their personal opinions in their comments and rarely engaging in retaliation when challenged by other commenters. It could be argued that these women fly under the radar due to their limited performance of both their gendered and gang identities, keeping the metaphorical and physical target off their backs. To further illustrate this, Table 2 includes comments from women coded as using an *Observational* style of engagement with their direct interpretations.

[INSERT TABLE 2. HERE]

I conceptualize this engagement style as an online representation of both Jone's (2009) theory of gang girls being hard for the street pretty for the pictures and Messerschmidt's (1995) bad girl femininity. Both theories discuss women's strategic use of different types of gendered expression as survival strategies yet are not often applied to girls and women in the event that they choose not to enact or break gendered norms. This focus of our research on either encouragement or confinement of traditionally masculine behavior for women in hypermasculine spaces has led to a large group of women's behavior passed over for theoretical interpretation. Rather than characterize these comments as lacking in substance for analysis, I argue that the lack of substance is what necessitates it.

Confrontational

The second largest group of women use a *Confrontational* engagement style, which can be characterized by strict adherence to street codes seen in their interactions and the performance of anomalous types of femininity. These women were those most likely to employ the use of gang vernacular. In this context, that type of language was used as a gateway to confrontation, where an individual who used it in their comment was more likely to be challenged by rivals. Consequently, these women consistently engaged in heated exchanges with both men and women concerning their reputation usually resulting in the threat of violence, which is in line with the findings of past research on the internet behavior of gang members (Patton et al. 2017). Miller's (2002) concept of "doing masculinity" is easily applied in this group as they engage in "internet-banging" to enhance their status and construct their "masculine" identity online.

Outside of engaging in arguments and threats of presumptive violence, women in this group also engaged in tagging. While in comparison to *Observational*, women coded as having a

Confrontational engagement style employed tagging less often, the way in which they used it warrants attention. For these women, tagging was mainly used to call out individuals they wished to confront as well as to “call for backup” when already in an online altercation. For example, when a man commented under a post insinuated she was having sex with multiple members of the Satan Gangster Disciples saying, “Shes goes around the SGDz too lmao.” During the ensuing argument, the woman tagged the man she was arguing with in her response saying, “@Man’sName look at this tuff guy 😂😂 broke ass nigga why you mad tho ??” Her tagging adds an additional layer of aggression as this action allows individuals reading the comments to see exactly who she is referring to and go straight to this man’s profile from her comment. In addition to this, tagging notifies the user of the profile which can make it more difficult to disengage from arguments. To further illustrate, Table 3 includes comments and direct interpretations from women coded as using a *Confrontational* engagement style.

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

Additionally, girls and women coded as using a *Confrontational* style, in their effort to maintain their image, often used feminizing slurs and devalued what they deemed as “feminine,” using it as an insult in online altercations writing comments such as, “who would take any of yall nikkas seriously gangbangin wearin pink.” While the comment is specifically directed at members of the Imperial Gangsters whose colors include pink, it is still indicative of the feminine being used as derogatory. Comments like this were directed towards all genders but were more commonly used against men to challenge their masculinity. This could be understood through Kandiyoti’s (1998)’s lens of “bargaining with the patriarchy,” that hypothesizes women,

especially those within man-dominated spheres, will find ways to use oppressive forces in their favor. For these women, insults to men's masculinity and the devaluation of things viewed as traditionally feminine serve as powerful tools for expressing their identity as a gangster as well as constructing an online masculine identity.

Regulatory

This relatively small, but still notable group, can be identified through their acute rejection of gang life and identity and their embrace of traditional gendered roles. These women primarily target other women, most commonly women using confrontational styles of engagement, and criticize their lifestyles. Comments often include digs at other women's capability to be a "good" mother or wife because of perceived failings such as being in or associated with the gang in some way. Insults towards men were also present, though less common, and were usually directed towards their identity as a gangster rather than their masculinity. *Regulatory* engagement styles aim to place themselves morally above others who are affiliated or members of gangs, with their comments often reflecting values of *marianismo* and *familisimo*. Concerning their expressions of femininity, these women seem to perform *emphasized femininity* the most, a concept rarely connected with online gang spaces. *Emphasized femininity*, a term coined by Connell (1987) is characterized as women's compliance with gender inequality and complicit accommodation of the desires of men. This finding points towards the continued marginalization of girls and women on the digital street as actively reproduced by women in these spaces in addition to men. To further illustrate, Table 4 includes comments from women coded as using a *Regulatory* engagement style and their direct interpretations.

[INSERT TABLE 4. HERE]

However, these performances are not without risk. Their overt criticism of gang life and women who engage in it often invites challenges or retaliation, with most women using *Regulatory* styles choosing to deescalate or disengage at the threat of presumptive violence. For example, in one post, an individual coded as using a *Regulatory* engagement style responded to a comment asking about the profession of the woman in the post, saying her job was, “Dick sucking 1o1.” The woman referenced in her comment, who was coded as using a *Confrontational* engagement style, responded under the same comment writing, “My profession? lmaooo bitch you must be a CNA 🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔 I BEEN IN COLLEGE GOT SCHOLARSHIPS ND WAS IN THE ARMY GOOFY BITCH ALL BEFORE 20 HOW TF YOU SOUND JEALOUS BITCH! ALL YOU DUMB ASS BITCHES WANNA JUDGE HOE I BEEN DOING IT! 🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔.” Rather than continue this argument the women using a *Regulatory* style of engagement replied, “Wow wow wow okay 🙌🙌 chill Killa I wants no smoke 🤔,” which deescalated the confrontation before disengaging with the post.

In addition to this, women employing *Regulatory* styles did not often engage in tagging or the use of gang vernacular, a stark difference to all other engagement styles. It is unclear whether these women in the data had connections to gangs or gang culture through social ties or geographic proximity, but the existence of women policing other women in hypermasculine online spaces should not be overlooked. The presence of *Regulatory* styles of engagement represents an essential component of women’s experiences online, as well as highlights the rift between traditional gendered expectations and gang culture.

Adaptive

Finally, women using an *Adaptive* style of engagement straddle the line between *Confrontational* and *Observational* but can be identified largely through their enactment of Budgeon's (2014) "new" femininity, walking a tightrope between what is perceived as traditionally feminine and that which is not under the guise of individualism. Women coded as using *Adaptive* styles, while not rejecting gang culture, typically navigate the Facebook page as to avoid conflict. To do so they sparingly self-identify as gang affiliated in their comments protecting them from the backlash seen against both men and women who use gang vernacular to show their membership. When affiliation is stated by women using *Adaptive* styles of engagement, it is commonly expressed as a connection through another individual, which affords them more leeway for inflecting their opinions. Despite the fact that these women do not often provoke others online, they fiercely defend their reputation when it is called to question. Impression management online for women using *Adaptive* engagement styles can be seen as centered around their status as a "decent" female, daughter, mother, sister, or wife on top of defending their reputation as tough. To further illustrate, Table 5 includes comments from women coded as using an *Adaptive* engagement style as well as direct interpretations.

[INSERT TABLE 5. HERE]

There is additional evidence of Jones' (2009) finding that girls and women in urban spaces share values with men such as reputation and retaliation, with gendered differences in their methods of enactment and end-goals. While men in these spaces use violent and aggressive language to construct their masculine identity online and assert their gang membership, women

may use similar language to defend their reputation as a “decent” female while still asserting their toughness. This is seen in *Adaptive* women’s responses and comments connected to gendered roles that challenge their ability to be a wife or mother, which are met with aggressive responses outside of the norm for women using *Adaptive* engagement styles. For example, in response to a comment from a woman questioning her reputation as a mother she writes,

“Like I sit here throwing my pussy around lmaooo WOMAN’SNAME you know I don't cuz you ain't get it and can't none of my folks say they did so alllllaattt bs don't mean shit to me lmao. I DO THIS SHIT for ME and MINE and don't none yall niggas know me to say shit to me or about me TBH 🤔🤔🔥 I do what I do for personal reasons . Woman’sName you're a child and that's another reason ima mfn gangsta . I know how to talk, I know how to do the shit I DO wisely while y'all think I'm dumb and don't know what I'm talking bout. 🤔🤔🤔 gangstas move in silence and yall thinking of me just the way I love y'all thinking about me, NOT KNOWING SHIT. 🙌 Now lemme stop this facebook talk because I got better things to do than to argue w a bunch of hating ass lames. If you ain't got no haters you ain't poppinnnn haaannn 🤔🔥🙌”

In this comment, she first denies any sexual promiscuity re-establishing herself as a “decent female,” followed by a statement that she works only for herself and her family saying, “I DO THIS SHIT for ME and MINE.” She then casts doubt on the reputation of the other woman calling her a “child,” and expresses her belief that she is a “real” gangster in comparison. After defending her reputation as a mother and a gangster in this comment,

she chooses then to disengage saying, “I got better things to do than argue w a bunch of hating ass lames,” once again insulting the woman who challenged her while letting those know in the comments she will no longer be responding. Despite their comments’ role in reproducing women’s marginalization online, they successfully incorporate what are traditionally viewed as masculine attributes without threatening hegemonic masculinity through a process that is both progressive yet reassuringly feminine (Budgeon 2014).

Discussion

The purpose of this study examining the behavior of girls and women engaging in online gang spaces has been to understand how they navigate and actively perform gendered and gangster identities within hypermasculine spaces. Through a mixed methodological analysis using data subset of comments and replies from women involved on a public Facebook page dedicated to Latina/o gangs in Chicago, I was able to identify normative behavior for women on the digital street as well as theorize styles of engagement used by girls and women.

The findings from this study exemplify how girls and women in gang-affiliated digital spaces perform their conflicting identities and contrasts normative behavior with those found for women on the street and men online. Quantitative findings align with those found in previous research from Leverso et al. (2025) that women are less central to hostile exchanges, with 49.85% of comments being coded as Not Aggressive at All. However, the fact that nearly half of the comments exhibited some level of aggression and the presence of women casting doubt on others reputation and use of gang vernacular suggests that women also resist suppression by adopting behaviors traditionally associated with men on the digital street. Furthermore, support was found for Lane’s (2016) concept of women as “knowledge bearers” through the presence of cultural knowledge and tagging.

The four engagement styles identified in the qualitative analysis—*Observational*, *Confrontational*, *Regulatory*, and *Adaptive*—represent a range of strategies used by women to assert, negotiate, or conceal their gendered and gang identities, with each style reflecting different methods of managing reputation, utilizing gang culture, and navigating patriarchal power structures online. *Observational* comments are characterized by minimal self-expression and participation and represents largest portion of the sample mirroring survival strategies observed in offline gang culture. Their behavior can be understood through the lens of both Jones’ (2009) and Messerschmidt’s (1995) theories detailing anomalous or oppositional types of femininities which situationally hinder women’s ability to engage in the performance of traditionally masculine behavior depending on the context. I argue in addition to constraining their ability to engage in performances of masculine identities, these theories may be applied to women’s strategic refusal to perform traditionally feminine identities as well, choosing to instead express neither outwardly online. The second most common style, *Confrontational*, is where we see women engage most similarly to what has been found for men on the digital street. I theorize these women’s frequent use of gang vernacular, violent language, and devaluation of the feminine as gang women “doing masculinity,” and “bargaining with the patriarchy,” due to their behavior showcasing overt performances of gendered behavior characterized as masculine and use of common internet bashing behavior such as expressing their membership through gang vernacular and enhancing their status online through the disparagement of both men and women using feminizing slurs (Miller 2002; Kandiyoti 1998). The *Regulatory* engagement style adds an additional layer of nuance to the analysis as these women are outspoken in their rejection of gang culture. *Regulatory* styles act as a way to both perform emphasized femininity and elevate women’s status by criticizing the choices of other women who break gendered norms (Connell

1987). Finally, women using *Adaptive* styles straddle the line of performing traditionally feminine identities and those that connect with gang culture. Through leveraging their toughness while maintaining their reputation as “decent” women, women employing *Regulatory* styles engage in selective performance similarly to individuals using *Observational* engagement styles. Their behavior can be understood through the concept of Budgeon’s (2014) “new” femininity where women renegotiate the bounds of femininity, increasing their influence without disrupting traditional gendered roles.

This study contributes to the study of gangs, gender, and identity through the establishment of what may constitute normative behavior for gang affiliated women online, the connection of scholarship on gang girls and women’s strategic performance of identity to their actions on the digital street, and its continuation of scholarship that highlights marginalized women’s agency within patriarchal systems. Beyond this, these findings may have broader applications to our understanding of women and girls in gangs in the analog world. Research on gang affiliated individuals on the digital street has found their behavior and dynamics to reflect those observed on the physical streets (Leverso and Hsaio 2021). This has important implications for groups whose narratives may not be recognized within past research on gangs as web-scraped data provides evidence of their presence in these spaces and first-hand accounts of their lived experiences.

While all individuals were categorized based on styles of engagement, it is important to mention that women also were observed to use different techniques to move in and around conversations in these online spaces safely. This behavior conceptualized as a type of *code switching* where individuals participate in behaviors and express identities that most benefit them within a specific context. Code switching was more likely to be employed by those with

Adaptive and *Confrontational* styles, but due to its weak presence in the dataset, it is not discussed as a key observation within the findings.

In sum, the findings demonstrate that the behavior among girls and women on the digital street mirror observed offline dynamics. Digital spaces offer new opportunities to engage in identity construction while reducing immediate physical risks, Yet the persistence of misogyny and gendered oppression online continues to reject hypotheses of digital liberation. Findings affirm the importance of recognizing women's agency within these systems and their ability to strategically use performances of identity to navigate online spaces safely. While the argument could be made that strategic performance is unable to be determined based on data collected from an online space that is gang affiliated, I found that girls and women's expressions of both traditional and oppositional values in their comments allows for a nuanced analysis incorporating theories meant to be applied across different contexts. I emphasize that girls and women, especially those belonging to more marginalized groups, not only understand these constraints but actively seek ways to use this knowledge to their advantage to build their reputation online, whether that be as a mother, romantic partner, gangster, or "decent female". In addition to this, the study emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the varying ways in which we can apply different theories of femininity and identity performance for girls and women in gangs both online and on the street.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations of this study include the timeframe in which it was collected as well as the sample being limited to a singular Facebook page. In the time data was collected – 2015 to 2016 – Facebook was observed to be one of the most popular social networking site for gang members

(Leverso and Hsaio 2021). However, Facebook has been placed on the backburner by young adults in recent years (Vogels et al. 2022), which necessitates further research on additional platforms. Concerning the size and scope of the data collected, the quality and richness of the information should not be overlooked. The average number of comments from each individual account is likely a roadblock that may be remedied through future case selection and amount of data collected. However, I argue that case studies, undervalued as they may be, provide context and insights that would otherwise be missed in lieu of providing causal inference.

Conclusion

This study contributes to our understanding of the ways in which girls and women act and perform their identities in gang-affiliated hypermasculine spaces. Through identifying normative behavior and four distinct engagement styles – *Observational*, *Confrontational*, *Regulatory*, and *Adaptive*– using mixed methods, it provides a new way to view women’s performances of gendered and gangster identities as deliberate and dynamic rather than passive and unchanging. These findings build upon past research on the construction of identities online as well as what we know about the digital street. In addition to its contributions, this research adds to a growing body of literature challenging gang scholarship’s historical neglect of girls and women.

As social media continues to grow and change, so too will the behavior and experiences of its users. In order to continue investigating women’s methods of constructing, performing, and defending their identity, further research across several social networking platforms is needed. By advancing research in these spaces, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the intersection of gender, gang culture, and online identity performances.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Descriptive Table for Qualitative Codes

<u>Qualitative Code</u>	Frequency	Frequency (%)
Comment Tone		
<i>Not Aggressive at All</i>	1,151	49.85%
<i>Slightly Aggressive</i>	335	14.51%
<i>Moderately Non-Aggressive</i>	316	13.68%
<i>Moderately Aggressive</i>	297	12.86%
<i>Highly Aggressive</i>	149	6.45%
<i>Extremely Aggressive</i>	59	2.55%
Gang Vernacular	240	10.39%
Cultural Knowledge	338	14.64%
Direct Insult		
<i>Toward a Man</i>	239	11.72%
<i>Toward a Woman</i>	105	4.55%
Casting Doubt on Reputation	373	18.29%
Racial Language	215	10.54%
Racial Slur	6	0.29%
Slut Shaming	56	2.75%
Homophobic Slur	60	2.94%
Feminizing Slur	286	14.03%
Masculinity Insult	107	5.25%
Threat or Challenge	68	3.33%
Mention of Appearance	140	6.87%
Tagging	395	19.37%
Profile Stalking	32	1.57%
<i>Total (N) Comments</i>	2,309	

Table 2. Observational Comments and Interpretations

Comment	Interpretation
Woman 1: @Woman'sName remember u used to talk to that guy on the left lol	<i>"@Woman'sName" indicates that the commenter tagged another woman in this post followed by the message "remember u used to talk to the guy on the left," adding context as to why the commenter chose to tag this particular woman.</i>
Woman 2: Nooooo wayyyy fr??? 😂😂😂😂😂😂	<i>The comment "Nooooo wayyyy fr???" expresses disbelief at a post asking if it is for real or genuine and "😂😂😂😂😂😂," crying laughing emojis representing the commenter finding the post funny.</i>
Woman 3: Ik one of them	<i>The commenter uses "Ik" for "I know" and references "one of them," for an individual in the picture posted which lets the reader know they are familiar with someone shown in the picture and expresses neither positive or negative feelings towards the individual.</i>
Woman 4: I loves this place. Boston Banana Split!!	<i>The comment starts with the statement "I loves this place," which is directed towards a specific business shown in the picture. The commenter then writes "Boston Banana Split," referencing a popular item sold at the business mentioned by others in the comment section.</i>

Table 3. Confrontational Comments and Interpretations

Comment	Interpretation
Latin Queen Woman 1: Ahhhh shit amor...once a queen always a queen lil vill. 👑	<i>The commenter says “Ahhhh shit amor,” expressing love for the gang with the word “amor” directly translating to love in English. She then says, “once a queen always a queen,” affirming her membership as a Latin Queen, followed by “lil vill,” referencing the neighborhood Little Village in Chicago where the gang the Latin Kings have a large presence and still have territory. Finally, the commenter puts an emoticon of a five point crown, “👑,” which is a symbol of the Latin Kings which is linked to the symbol of the people alliance which is a five point star.</i>
Satan Disciple Woman: Your folkks must of trained you hard.. Lmao who would take any of yall nikkas seriously if you tryna act hard and gangbangin wearing pink? Lol would you knock it tf off	<i>“Your folkks must of trained you hard,” acts as an insult to the individual, the Latin Kings and the folks alliance. The use of the word “trained,” is an insult to the individual insinuating they have had sex with multiple men. They insult the Latin Kings through the addition of an additional “k” to “folkks” which can be interpreted as “king killer.” Following this, “Lmao who would take any of yall nikkas seriously.” expresses the commenter is “laughing their ass off” and casting doubt on the gangster reputation of the gang Imperial Gangsters whose colors include pink saying they are “gangbangin wearing pink.” In addition to casting doubt and insulting their masculinity the word, “nikkas,” once again uses two k’s meaning “King Killer.” They then tell them to “knock it tf off” meaning “knock it the fuck off” which shows their disapproval of wearing the color.</i>
Maniac Latin Disciple Woman: Trigger Rotz	<i>“Trigger,” in this context is the nick name of an individual followed by the word “Rotz,” means that Trigger is rotting in the ground rather than resting in peace.</i>
Gangster Disciple Woman:	<i>The use of “Bishop killa” references the commenters intention to kill members of the</i>

Bishop killa fuck the opps GDN to da world
blow fool folks world

Bishops and “fuck the opps” insults rival gang members with “opp” meaning opposition. Following this “GDN to da world blow,” emphasizes the commenters allegiance to the Gangster Disciple Nation,” as unwavering using “to da world blow” as a way of saying forever or always. Finally their use of “folks world,” reaffirms their loyalty to the folks alliance which the Gangster Disciples are a member.

Spanish Cobra Woman 1:

Dkats y omski rotz in a blakk And green Box
Cobra Love FKst💎🐍

This woman comments “Dkats y omski rotz” adding a “k” to the slang word “Dats” or “that’s” to mean “disciple killer,” an insult to the Maniac Latin Disciples followed by “y omski rotz,” which refers to an individual named “Omski” who is a deceased former leader of the gang the Maniac Latin Disciples saying he, “rotz” or is rotting in the ground rather than resting in peace in a “blakk and green Box,” which references the colors of the Cobras saying their caskets are in the Cobras colors and insults the gang the Latin Kings with the word “blakk” containing two k’s meaning “king killer.” She then says “Cobra Love,” expressing her support for the gang the Spanish Cobras. Finally she writes, “FKst💎🐍,” referring to the cross streets Fullerton and Kilbourn in Chicago where she likely is from with the diamond and cobra emoticons represent symbols belonging to the gang the Cobras.

Insane Spanish Cobra Woman 2:

Ima mfcking Insane Spanish cobra you ashy
ass nigga lmao

This woman responds to a man saying “Ima mfcking Insane Spanish Cobra,” which states her membership to the gang Insane Spanish Cobras followed by an insult calling the man a, “ashy ass nigga lmao.” The word “ashy” in this context is an insult to the man’s appearance with the word usually directed towards black individuals to say their skin is not moisturized or that they lack hygiene and self-care. The slang term “lmao” means “laughing my ass off.”

Table 4. Regulatory Comments and Interpretations

Comment	Interpretation
Woman 5: Stupid, ghetto low-life bitch. Why are your lips perched? And your profile picture... You think you're bad? You stand no chance on living a respectable life. A disgrace to the Hispanic community is what you are. What a shame.	<i>This woman responds to another woman in the comments calling her a “Stupid, ghetto low-life bitch,” insulting her intelligence and class followed by asking her, “why are your lips perched,” insulting her appearance. She then comments on the woman’s profile saying, “And your profile picture... You think you're bad?” which again insults the woman’s appearance and questions her reputation as “bad” meaning “tough” in this instance. She continues this by saying, “You stand no chance on living a respectable life,” expressing her disapproval of this woman’s life choices. The commenter finishes by saying, “A disgrace to the Hispanic community is what you are. What a shame,” once again expressing her disapproval and insinuating the woman she is talking to is a poor representative for the Hispanic community.</i>
Woman 6: I'm sorry, it looks so bad when females are out gang banging....they make themselves look like trash.	<i>The commenter writes “I’m sorry, it looks so bad when females are out gang banging,” expressing their belief that women should not be involved in gang activity and that “they make themselves look like trash,” both blaming women in gangs for others’ perceptions of them and insulting them by calling them “trash.”</i>
Woman 7: So ghetto!	<i>This commenter insults people shown in the picture by calling them “ghetto,” a word with heavy racial connotations that people use to call others low-class.</i>
Woman 8: You sound dumb as hell!! You want your kids to be out acting like you when they older? How old are you? Lol. Still tryna act like the hardest bitch in the hood, think it's time to grow up and give your kids an ACTUAL role model to look up too... you supposed to want	<i>This commenter is responding to another woman saying “You sound dumb as hell!!!” and challenging her reputation as a mother by asking “You want your kids to be out acting like you when they older?” which insinuates that she does not behave in a way that sets a good example, then saying “Still</i>

better for your kids, not for them to look up to someone who's only gonna teach them how to end up in prison or get shot

tryna act like the hardest bitch in the hood,” *attacking her reputation as a gangster by saying that her persona is an “act.” She finishes with another insult to the woman’s ability to be a mother saying, “think its time to grow up and give your kids an ACTUAL role model,” and that she is currently teaching them, “how to end up in prison or get shot.”*

Women 9:

Nahh. Finish school. Get a fuckin job. Stop ruining our kids futures on the real

This woman comments under a post saying “Finish school. Get a fuckin job,” an insult to people shown in the photo and is followed by “Stop ruining our kids futures on the real,” blaming gang involved individuals for ruining kids futures in their community.

Table 5. Adaptive Comments and Interpretations

Comment	Interpretation
Woman 10: Link up for what??I'm just stating facts lil girl. See, that's what I trip on. Bitches get put on blast then want to defend their "honor" afterwards., Decent females don't give no mfkrs no reason to talk shit unless there's some given	<i>This comment asks another woman, "Link up for what???" responding to a challenge where "link up," is a slang term meaning to meet in person. She then says "I'm just stating facts lil girl," demeaning the other woman by calling her a little girl. She then states that she "trips on" or dislikes when "Bitches get put on blast then want to defend their "honor" afterwards." In this context, she means that she dislikes how women try to defend their reputation after being "put on blast," which means to be publicly called out or insulted. She ends with saying "Decent females don't give mfkrs no reason to talk shit unless there's some given," implying that the other woman is not a "decent female."</i>
Woman 11: I will always love my King	<i>The comment "I will always love my King," expresses love for a member of the Latin Kings gang. Likely this woman's significant other.</i>
Woman 12: Shorty stp u ova here tlkn bout my nieces n nephews dats a whole nother story fk u bringing kids in it daz how dum ass bitchz lyk u get whooped	<i>This woman replies to another woman's comment saying "Shorty stp tlkn bout my nieces n nephews," telling her to stop discussing her family members. She then threatens physical violence saying, "bringing kids in it daz how dum ass bitchz lyk u get whooped," meaning the reason she's going to get beat up is because she talked about another woman's children and calling her a dumb ass bitch.</i>
Woman 13: Oms when you date a gangbanger lol	<i>The comment, "Oms when you date a gang member," uses the slang "Oms" to say, "on my soul," which expresses sincerity followed by "when you date a gang banger." The comment serves to emphasize her relationship and relate to others in the comments.</i>
Latin Queen Woman 2: Like look Bitch just cause ur daughter flip flops n suxz hella Cox doesn't mean every	<i>This comment is a response insulting another woman that says, "Like look bitch just cause ur daughter flip flops n suxz hella Cox doesn't mean every bodies kids will." She</i>

bodies kids will...lol don't worry bout mines n get in ur mother duties

first insults the other woman's daughter calling her a, "flip flop" which is a way to say someone who switches their loyalty easily or jumps from gang to gang and slut shames her saying she "suxz hella Cox" or often performs oral sex. The commenter then says, "lol don't worry bout mines n get in ur mother duties," reaffirming her own reputation as a mother and casting doubt on the other woman's reputation.

Figure 1.



APPENDIX

A.

Quantitative Code Book

Code Name	Code Description	Code Values
<i>Comment Tone</i>	Intensity variable using a Likert scale on levels of aggression perceived within a comment or reply.	[0] Not Aggressive at All - Completely benign, no aggression evident. [1] Slightly Aggressive - Minimal signs of aggression, mostly non-threatening. [2] Moderately Non-Aggressive - Somewhat assertive, but not overtly aggressive towards an individual. [3] Moderately Aggressive - Noticeable level of aggression and confrontational. [4] Highly Aggressive - Strongly aggressive, highly confrontational or hostile. [5] Extremely Aggressive - Extremely hostile, threatening, or violent in nature
<i>Gang Vernacular</i>	Frequency variable noting whether commenter uses gang abbreviations or slang to affirm their membership or insult/threaten rival gangs online	[0] No use of gang vernacular identified [1] Use of gang vernacular identified
<i>Cultural Knowledge</i>	Frequency variable noting whether commenter demonstrates cultural or historical knowledge pertaining to gangs.	[0] No demonstration of historical knowledge identified [1] Demonstration of historical knowledge identified

<i>Direct Insult</i>	Categorical Variable noting whom the commenter is insulting directly.	[0] No direct insult identified. [1] Direct insult towards a man identified. [2] Direct insult towards a woman identified.
<i>Casting Doubt on Reputation</i>	Frequency variable noting whether commenter speaks poorly upon a group or individuals' reputation.	[0] No use of casting doubt on reputation. [1] Casting doubt on reputation identified.
<i>Racialized Language</i>	Frequency variable noting colloquial use of racialized language not meant to degrade an individual due to their race or ethnicity.	[0] No use of racialized language identified [1] Use of racialized language identified
<i>Racial Slur</i>	Frequency variable noting whether commenter uses derogatory language meant to disparage someone on the basis of their race/ethnicity.	[0] No use of racial slur identified [1] Use of racial slur identified
<i>Slut Shaming</i>	Frequency variable noting whether commenter uses derogatory language meant to disparage someone for their perceived sexual activity.	[0] No slut shaming identified [1] Slut shaming identified
<i>Homophobic Slur</i>	Frequency variable noting whether commenter uses derogatory language meant to disparage someone on the basis of their sexuality.	[0] No homophobic slurs identified [1] Homophobic slurs identified
<i>Feminizing Slur</i>	Frequency variable noting whether commenter uses derogatory language meant to disparage someone on the basis of their gender.	[0] No feminizing slurs identified [1] Feminizing slurs identified
<i>Masculinity Insult</i>	Frequency variable noting whether commenter uses derogatory language meant to	[0] No masculinity insult identified

	disparage someone on the basis of their masculinity.	[1] Masculinity insult identified
<i>Insult to Appearance</i>	Frequency variable noting whether commenter uses derogatory language meant to disparage someone on the basis of their appearance.	[0] No insult to appearance identified [1] Insult to appearance identified
<i>Direct Threat</i>	Frequency variable noting whether commenter directly threatens harm to a specific person or group of people.	[0] No direct threat identified [1] Direct threat identified
<i>Tagging/Diffusion</i>	Frequency variable noting whether commenter tags another individual.	[0] No tagging identified [1] Tagging identified
<i>Profile Stalking</i>	Frequency variable noting whether commenter uses information from another individuals personal Facebook page	[0] No Profile Stalking identified [1] Profile Stalking identified