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University of Nevada, Reno

**Trends and Connections between Hispanic High School Dropout and  
Hispanic Adolescent Gang Involvement**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts in Spanish and the Honors Program

by

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We recommend that the thesis  
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## Abstract

Statistics show that Hispanic students have a greater high school dropout rate than other common races in the United States. Hispanic adolescents are also more likely to be involved in gangs during high school years. Hispanic high school dropout and adolescent Hispanic gang involvement appear to have common characteristics, but at this time it is uncertain if these two events have similar causes. While much research has been done on these two events individually, the intent of this thesis is to explore connections between the findings on Hispanic high school dropouts and Hispanic adolescent gang involvement presented in literature published since the year 2000. Research for this review is limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, with comparisons made among studies that were conducted before 2000, between 2000 and 2005, and between 2006 and 2011.

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## **Introduction**

Currently, there are few peer-reviewed journal articles related to the coverage of the connections between high school dropout and gang involvement among Hispanic adolescents. The fact that a high percentage of both the events of dropout and gang involvement is made up by Hispanic youth suggests a potential link between Hispanic adolescents, dropout and gang involvement (e.g. Cervantes & Cordova, 2011). The purpose of this thesis is to bring research studies together that address gangs, dropouts and Hispanic adolescents, and build links to commonalities and differences in relevant studies. Research studies were organized by time period as well as content, thereby giving this review the dual purpose of displaying trends in the performance of the research as well as revealing connections among the content.

## **Background**

Three features of this study were identified and treated separately within the literature review: the aspects of Hispanics, dropouts and gang involvement. The following background information addresses each feature individually regarding both presence in the United States and past study of the subject.

Hispanics have been present in the United States since the 1500s. They have historically occupied the Southern regions but over the centuries have increased their presence throughout this country. The annexation of Puerto Rico in 1898 increased the Hispanic population in the U.S., and in the 1940s an influx of Hispanics through the “Bracero Program” brought immigrant workers from Mexico to the United States (Aguilera-Titus & Figueroa Deck, 2010). Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to wars and national crises in their homelands, many Hispanics from various countries migrated to the

United States for the hope of a new beginning. Finally in 1970, the Hispanic presence was great enough that the federal government distinguished Hispanics as a specific population (Aguilera-Titus & Figueroa Deck, 2010).

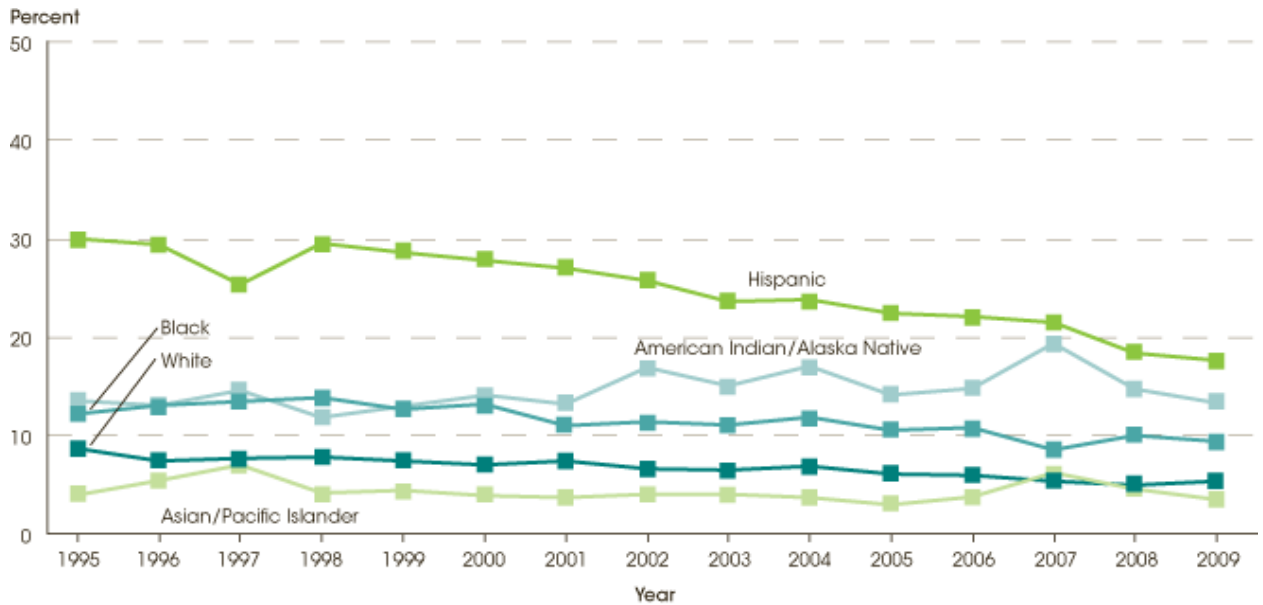
The feature of the high school dropout has not always merited attention by researchers in the United States, as many of the nation's young adults during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century never completed their secondary education. Graduation from high school at that time was seen as a useful asset for students when entering the work force, but by no means was a diploma required or expected (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011a). However, as technology has advanced, skilled laborers have increased in demand, and a high school diploma is seen as a minimum requirement for most jobs. It was not until the 1970s that information began to be gathered about dropouts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011a).

The third feature, gangs, began to manifest itself in the eastern United States in the form of gang-like groups during the late 1700s. These groups eventually evolved into definitive gangs in the early 1800s, and throughout the rest of that century, gangs spread to the Midwest and Western United States (Howell, Egley, Tita and Griffiths, 2011). This problem finally became nationwide when the Southern United States began to experience significant gang activity in the 1970s. Although the nation experienced a decrease of gang activity during the 1990s, there has been an increase since the year 2000. Today, gang activity persists in spite of a decrease in overall crime across the country and is, therefore, of particular concern to researchers and officials throughout the country (Howell, Egley, Tita and Griffiths, 2011).

The first survey on gangs in multiple cities was done in 1962 and focused on exploration of solutions to the problem (National Gang Center, 2011c). Following that survey, several studies were performed in 1980s when knowledge about gangs was still limited. From those studies it was acknowledged that an official center for tracking and monitoring gang activity would be beneficial to research, and the National Youth Gang Center was created in 1995 (National Gang Center, 2011c).

### **Statement of Problem**

Education is acknowledged in the United States as a vital asset to contributing to a global economy and society. Student retention in schools is, therefore, an important topic of study in order to discover the causes and effects of failure to complete high school. As shown in Figure 1, Hispanics have historically maintained the greatest high school dropout rate among other common races found in the United States. While the dropout rates of all students have decreased since 1980, in 2009 Hispanics still remained at almost double the percent of dropouts among the total population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011b).



*Figure 1.* Status dropout rates of 16- through 24-year-olds in the civilian, noninstitutionalized population, by race/ethnicity: October Current Population Survey (CPS) 1995-2009. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011c)

Another noteworthy pattern among Hispanic youth pertains to gang involvement. According to the National Youth Gang Survey in 2004, Hispanics were estimated to make up 49% of gang members in the United States (U.S Department of Justice, 2006). Additionally, in the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth taken by adolescents aged 12 to 17 years, 8% had belonged to a gang by the time they reached 17 years of age (U.S Department of Justice, 2006).

These trends become significant in light of the increase of Hispanics in the general population. Figure 2 shows the Hispanic population increase of over 8 million residents from 2000 to 2006, which contributed to one-half of the nation's population growth. Figure 3 displays population projections based on current trends, which estimate that 1 in 4 people in the U.S. will be Hispanic by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

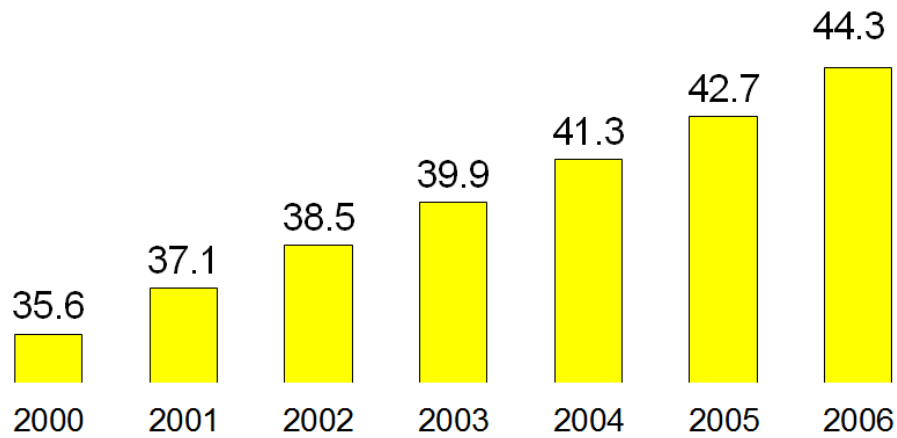


Figure 2. U.S. Hispanic population: 2000 to 2006. Population shown in millions. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008)

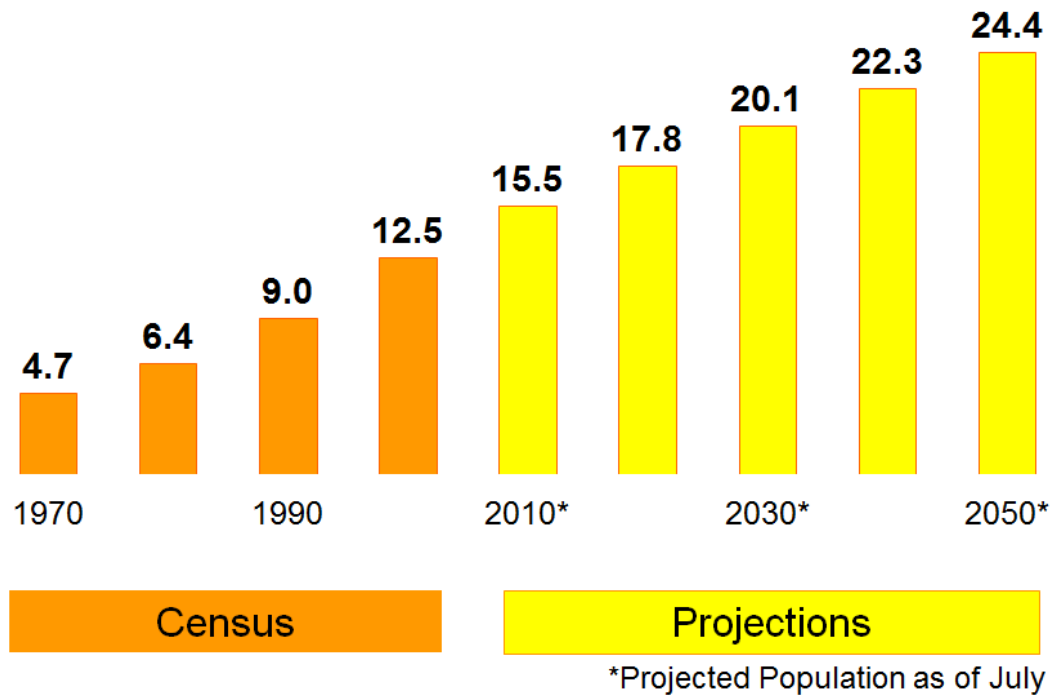


Figure 3. Percent Hispanic of total population in the United States: 1970 to 2050. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008)

This trend is cause for concern among educational institutions due to the fact that, as the U.S. population increases, so will the number of Hispanics attending secondary

schools, thereby perpetuating and increasing the number of students who do not complete high school. Additionally, the increase of Hispanic youth in the general population may contribute to amplified gang activity. These statistics are significant enough to merit research attention to reveal possible explanations and contributing reasons behind them.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this thesis is to compare and contrast recent research studying the separate events of dropout and gang involvement among the population of Hispanic youth in the United States. It explores these two events with the intent of finding trends and connections that are potentially significant or disparities that are worth investigating.

It was anticipated that an analysis of scholarly literature published since the year 2000 would reveal the most current trends in research. The structure of the study was comparative; strong bodies of research on Hispanics, dropout and gang involvement were compared from three time periods: before the year 2000, between 2000 and 2005, and between 2006 and 2011. The divisions of time were chosen with the intent of reviewing literature from the year 2000 until the present day so as to reflect recent findings in scholarly research; in order to compare and contrast the findings, multiple groupings were necessary and an equal division of six years was implemented between 2000 and 2011. When articles were collected, it was discovered that many of the studies were performed before the year 2000, and the earliest time period was therefore added with the purpose of adding more detail and support to the comparative structure of this review. The intent of comparing and contrasting research on the events of dropout and gang involvement among Hispanics over time is to find common trends, display connections, and show distinctions.

This thesis sets groundwork for future studies by assembling a collection of research findings that contribute to the understanding of Hispanic high school dropout and Hispanic adolescent gang membership. Based on the connections found regarding how gang involvement may be intertwined with dropping out of high school among Hispanic youth, the thesis outcome can potentially contribute to the improvement of current programs that address prevention of dropout and gang involvement, as well as offer direction for future research.

### **Definitions**

Acculturation – Ventura Miller, Barnes and Hartley (2009, p. 333) define acculturation as “the process wherein two distinct cultures come into contact resulting in significant changes in one or both.” To clarify the meaning further, as it is used in reference to individuals in all of the articles collected for this review, Cuellar, Arnold and Maldonado (1995, p. 278) characterize personal acculturation as “changes in attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, values, and the like in individuals as a result of acculturation.”

Delinquency – Delinquency is behavior consisting of delinquent acts, which are defined as:

An act committed by a juvenile for which an adult could be prosecuted in a criminal court, but when committed by a juvenile is within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court. Delinquent acts include crimes against persons, crimes against property, drug offenses, and crimes against public order, when juveniles commit such acts. (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2011)

Dropout – Perreira, Harris and Lee (2006, p. 512) defines high school dropouts as “those who fail to graduate from high school regardless of whether they ultimately obtain a General Educational Development (GED) certificate.”

Gang – Although there are multiple types of gangs (e.g. prison gangs, motorcycle gangs), the focus of this thesis is on youth gangs, also known as “street gangs” or “criminal street gangs” (National Gang Center, 2011b). A gang can be defined by the following characteristics:

- The group has three or more members, generally aged 12–24.
- Members share an identity, typically linked to a name, and often other symbols.
- Members view themselves as a gang, and they are recognized by others as a gang.
- The group has some permanence and a degree of organization.
- The group is involved in an elevated level of criminal activity. (National Gang Center, 2011b)

As shown in Table 1, a gang can be defined through multiple traits, but communal criminal activity is the most important characteristic in the members’ definition of a gang.

<b>Definitional Characteristics</b>	<b>Larger Cities</b>	<b>Suburban Counties</b>	<b>Smaller Cities</b>	<b>Rural Counties</b>
<b>Commits crimes together</b>	4.8	4.9	4.7	4.5
<b>Has a name</b>	3.9	3.7	3.3	3.5
<b>Displays colors or other symbols</b>	3.3	3.2	3.3	3.2
<b>Hangs out together</b>	3.1	3.0	3.6	3.3
<b>Claims turf or territory</b>	3.3	3.1	3.0	2.9
<b>Has a leader(s)</b>	2.6	3.1	3.0	3.5

*Table 1.* Definitional characteristics of gangs. Displays average rank of importance according to respondents rating from least important (1) to most important (6). (National Gang Center, 2011a).

Hispanic – Gratton and Gutmann (2000) define Hispanics as having “origins in regions in which language, religion, law and custom have been influenced by Spanish rule.” In contrast, the term “Latino” refers to any persons from Latin America, regardless of their previous heritage. “Hispanic” is a more precise term for this thesis and is, therefore, utilized in the language of this paper. However, due to the overwhelming majority of Hispanics among the Latino population in the United States, and due to the common interchangeability of the two terms, articles utilizing either term were acceptable for this review.

Multiple Marginality – Multiple marginality is a theory applied to minority population groups in the context of gang involvement. Freng and Esbensen (2007, p. 604) define the framework for multiple marginality as “including macrohistorical and macrostructural forces, ecological and economic stressors, elements of social control, and street socialization.”

Socioeconomic status (SES) – The American Psychological Association (2011) defines socioeconomic status as “Socioeconomic status is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation.”

### **Methodology**

The methodology used is a literature review of peer-reviewed journal articles. Research was conducted by collecting relevant scholarly journal articles from online databases. Consequently, articles that were relevant to the topic but were in non-peer-reviewed journals, periodicals and magazines were not included in the formal aspect of

the study. Some of these non-scholarly articles were included in the background of the study and in the section on discussion and implications. Searches were conducted electronically through database search engines to gather research findings. The databases that were utilized included Academic Search Premier, JSTOR and Google Scholar. The search results were limited to articles published from the year 2000 to 2011. In order to concentrate search results in the databases, three basic search terms were needed. “Hispanic,” “dropout,” and “gang” were chosen as the most relevant and simplified terms associated with the research and were therefore labeled as primary terms.

Subordinate terms were needed to narrow the search results further by specifying the age of the subjects referred to in each article. The terms “adolescent” and “high school” were chosen to fulfill this role and will hereafter be called secondary terms. Certain articles were specifically based on youth in high school whereas others did not refer to the scholastic status of their subject. “Adolescent” and “high school” were, therefore, used indiscriminately to generally define the period of life on which the research focused: between ages 14 and 18. They were not used in database searches, but were applied with the author’s discretion.

All of the articles selected for this review pertained to at least one primary term and fell within the scope of at least one of the secondary terms. Articles were then divided according to the year that they were published. Those that were published between 2000 and 2005 were categorized as former studies, and those that were published between 2006 and 2011 were categorized as latter studies. Exceptions were made to these categorizations for articles whose primary research was collected before

the year 2000. Such articles were categorized as pre-existing studies, regardless of the year that they were published.

Articles in each of those time periods that satisfied at least two of the primary terms (“Hispanic,” “dropout” and “gang”) were considered most relevant and were grouped together as part of the main body of research. Those articles that pertained to only one primary term, but satisfy at least one of the secondary terms (“adolescent” and “high school”) and were found relevant to giving background or making significant connections with other primary terms, were included in the study. These were categorized as the supporting body of research.

Following these divisions, the articles that were categorized in the main body of research were divided into three groups: Group A for those that pertained to the primary terms “Hispanic” and “dropout;” Group B for those that pertained to the primary terms “dropout” and “gang;” and Group C for those that pertained to the primary terms “gang” and “Hispanic.” Three more groups were created for the supporting research: Group I for articles that pertained to the term “Hispanic” and satisfied at least one of the secondary terms; Group II for articles that pertained to the term “dropout” and satisfied at least one of the secondary terms; and Group III for articles that pertained to the term “gang” and satisfied at least one of the secondary terms. To specify between articles from different years, groups from the pre-existing studies were labeled with the prefix “p” (e.g. Group pA, Group pI), groups from the former studies were labeled with the prefix “f” (e.g. Group fA, Group fI) and groups from the latter studies were labeled with the prefix “l” (e.g. Group lA, Group lI). Figure 4 demonstrates the different levels of categorization within the entire body of collected research.

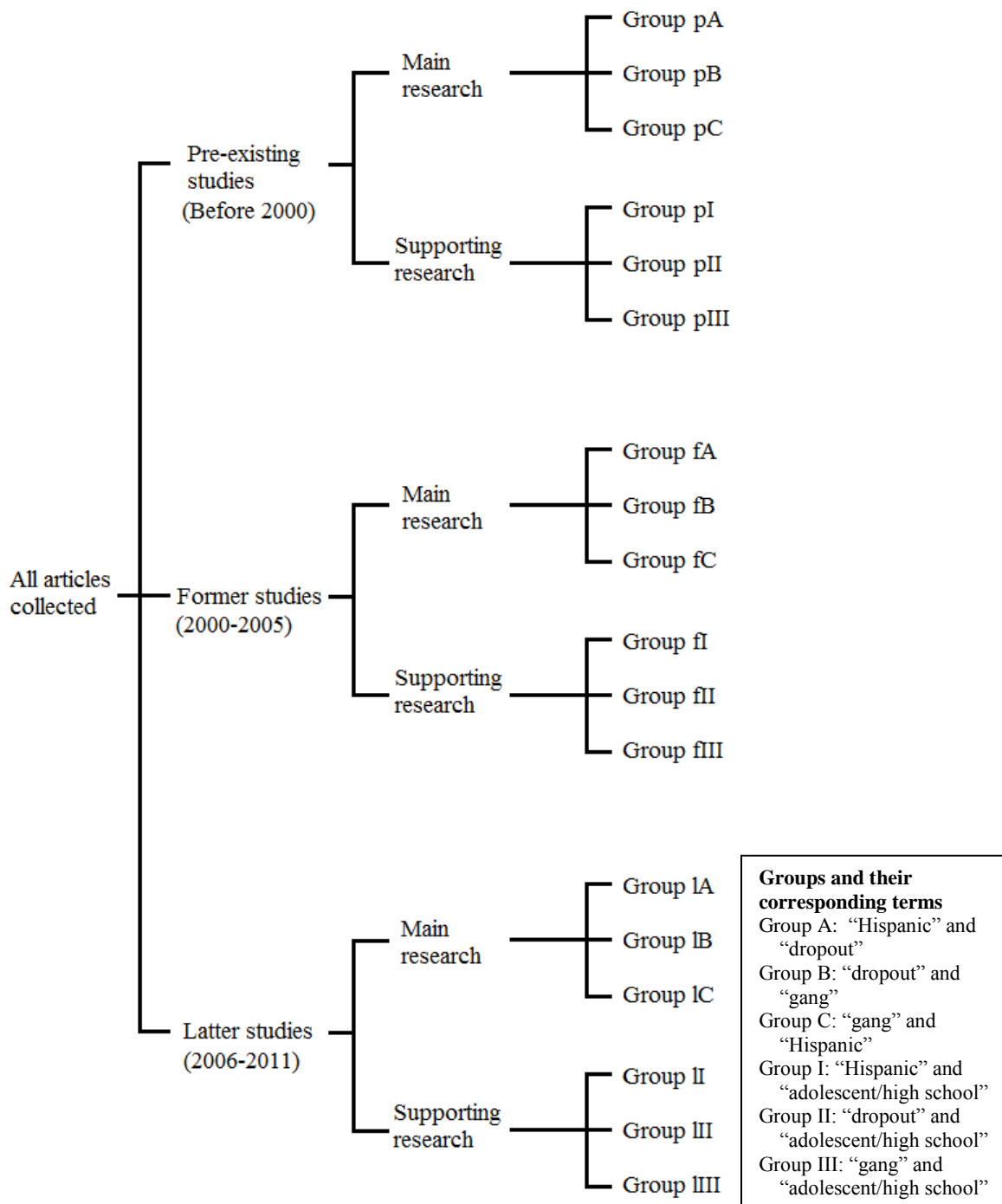
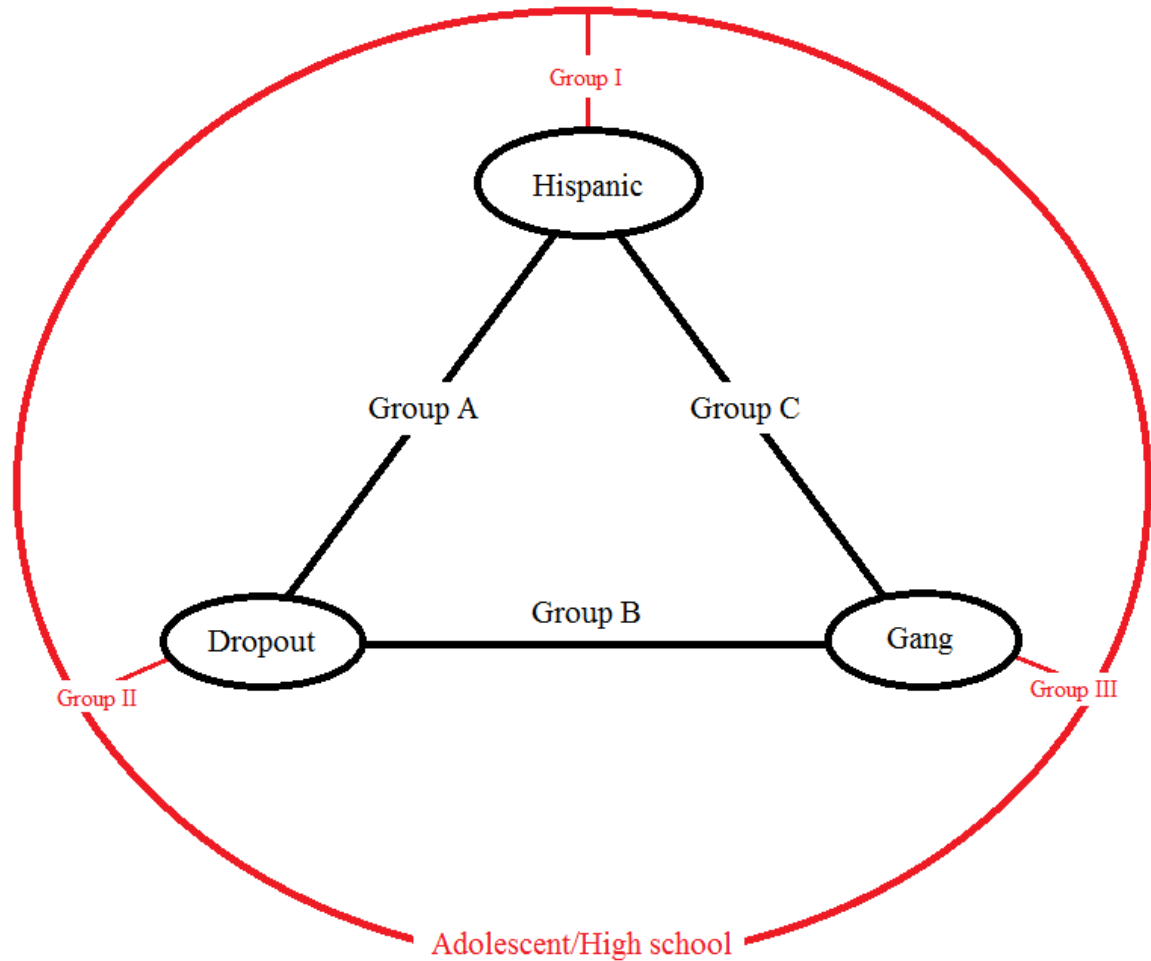


Figure 4. Research organization flow chart. This flow chart represents the entire body of research collected and the divisions created therein.

The framework for analyzing the research was created by forming a model based on the groupings within the differing time periods. To begin creating the model, a visual was made to represent the main body of research. This was achieved by first treating the three primary terms as individual entities. Because Groups A, B and C were each made up of articles that present the union of two of the primary terms, these groups were shown as connectors between their two specific terms. This set-up of three individual terms with defined links between them caused the model to take the form of a triangle, as shown in Figure 5, with the primary terms occupying the angles, and Groups A, B, and C occupying the connecting lines.

The supporting research groupings were then displayed in the model. Because every article added to the collection of research was required to fall within the scope of the secondary terms, “adolescent” and “high school” were visualized by creating a circle that encompassed the entire model. Groups I, II and III were used as labels for the lines that connected their primary term with one of the secondary terms.



*Figure 5.* Research organization model. This model represents the relationships between groupings of the research collected. Primary terms and main research groups are shown in black. Secondary terms and supporting research groups are shown in red.

Analysis of the research in this thesis included two aspects. First, it sought to identify trends within the performance of the research that has been published over time. Second, it sought to identify possible connections between the results of the different groups of research.

To identify trends, the quantity of articles pertaining to certain aspects of research was recorded and a table was created to display the results according to the three time

periods included in this review (see Table 2 in the “Findings” section). The number of articles within each group was shown, followed by the number of articles studying multiple races or Hispanics only. The amount of studies that pertained to a specific gender or were gender inclusive was also displayed. Additionally, the research was divided into several different types. The articles were divided between quantitative and qualitative research, and three main methods of research were identified: large-scale surveys that were not specific to the study but whose data were used as the primary source for research analysis, localized surveys that were created specifically for the research that was conducted in the study, and qualitative research methods (e.g. interviews, observations, focus groups, case studies). An additional category of research was included according to the frameworks of the individual perspective versus the institutional perspective, which Brown and Rodriguez define as follows:

In the first (and most prevalent), the problem is attributed to individual characteristics, commonly called ‘risk factors,’ like race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, (dis)ability, language proficiency and school-related dispositions and behaviors correlated with dropping out. The second perspective locates the problem within institutions, primarily families and schools. Family background and school size, location, resources, student body demographics, and policies and practices are among the institutional factors cited. (2009, p. 222)

The preliminary step taken in order to analyze the content of the collected research for potential connections was to list the principle findings from each article in correlation with their assigned group. These findings were then visually displayed by

filling in the research organization model (Figure 5). These findings were in turn categorized as results from research showing an increased, decreased, or unrelated probability of a link between the two terms to which the research pertains. The second step of analysis was the identification of related findings, either similar or opposite, among the groups of main research, which were then organized by placing them on their correlating connecting line (e.g. similar findings in Groups pA and pB were placed on Line pAB). Figure 6 portrays this connecting of ideas among groups.

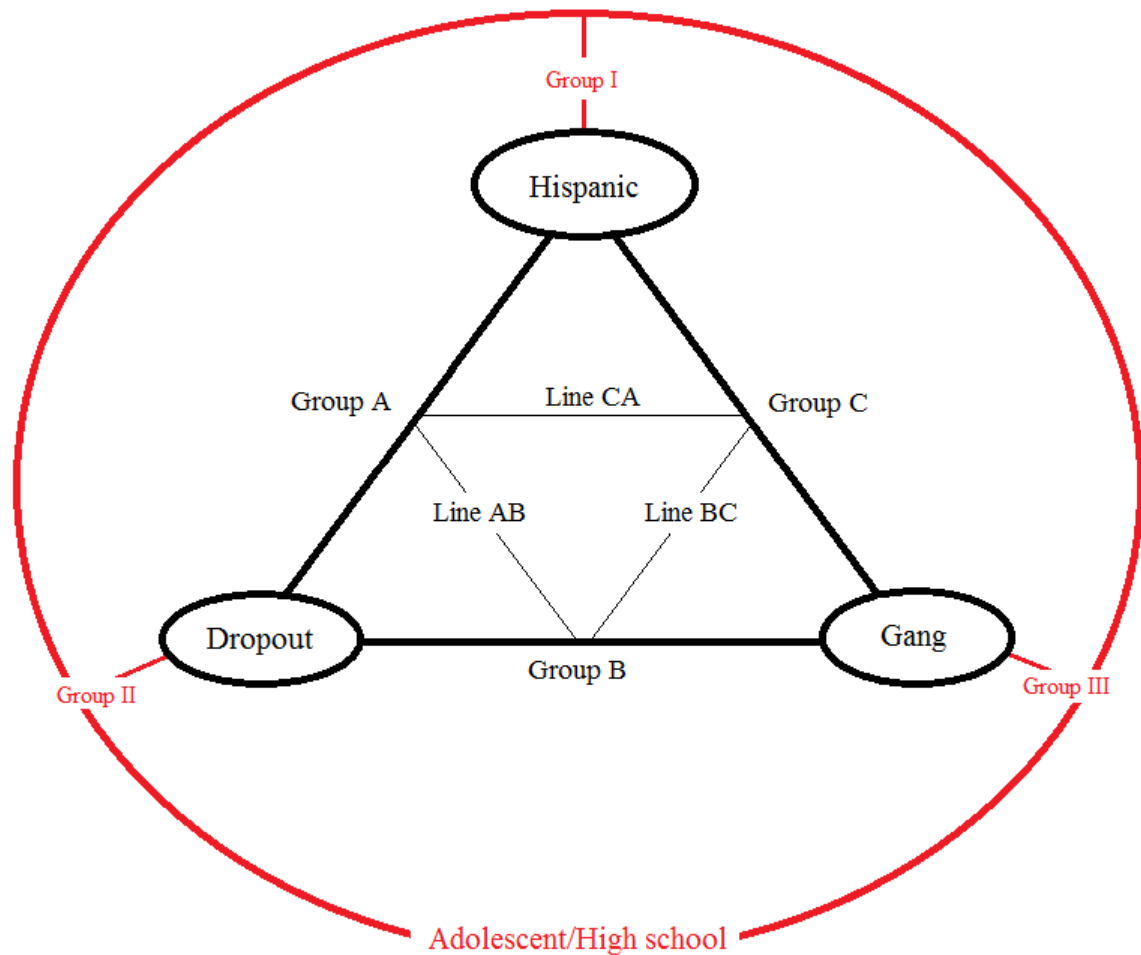


Figure 6. Main research analysis model.

This method was also applied in connecting groups of supporting research with groups of main research (e.g. similar findings in Groups pI and pA were placed on Line pIA). Although connections were not found on all of the connecting lines between supporting research and main research, Figure 7 demonstrates all of the potential linkages that were considered in the analysis.

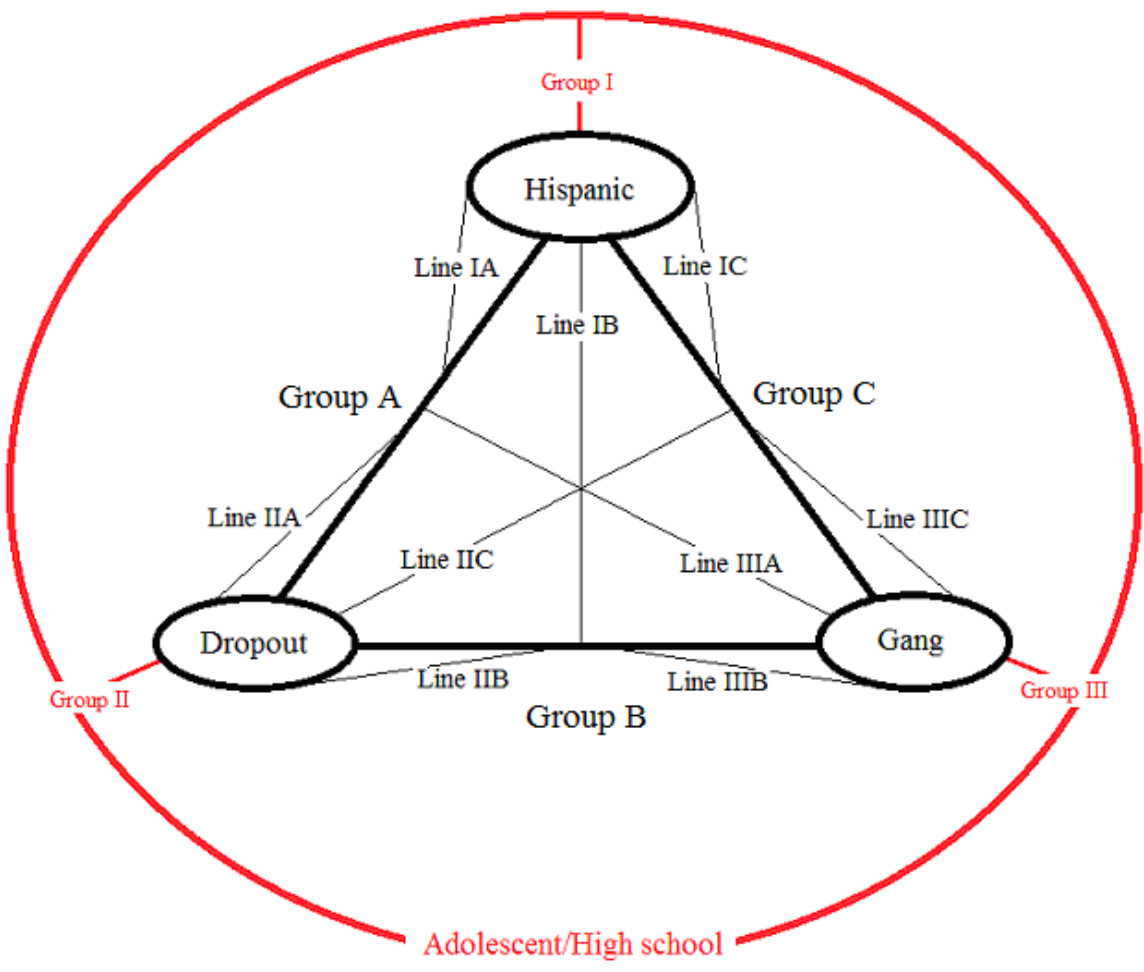


Figure 7. Supporting research analysis model.

In conclusion, the findings from each time period were then compared and contrasted with the correlated findings from the other time periods. Conclusions drawn

from connections among articles within the main body of research were considered stronger due to their particular relevance.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Preexisting Studies: Before 2000**

**Group pA: Preexisting research for “Hispanic” and “dropout.”** Research by McCluskey, Krohn, Lizotte and Rodriguez (2002) explored the causes of premature transitioning to adulthood by Hispanic, White and African American adolescents. Using data from the Rochester Youth Developmental Study and focusing on early substance use, the researchers reported that early use of drugs and alcohol significantly affects the probability of completing high school for each ethnic group ( $p < .05$ ). Additional findings showed that early substance use contributed to dropout independently of family and school factors, although for Hispanic males, substance use was not directly correlated. The study showed that impregnation of a partner was the principle reason for dropout among Hispanic males.

In a study by Carpenter and Ramirez (2007), multiple races were studied to determine variables connected with dropout behavior. They collected data on students, parents, principals and teachers from questionnaires in the National Longitudinal Study of 1988 conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics. The research showed that being held back and being suspended predicted eventual dropout among White, Hispanic and Black students,. For Hispanic students, being male, spending more time on homework and having two parents in the home decreased the chance of dropout.

Perreira, Harris and Lee (2006) studied the dropout rates of immigrant youth by focusing on the differences between the first, second, and native generations. The results

were then analyzed by race. Data were collected from an in-home survey as well as the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health given to middle and high school students across the United States during the school year of 1994-1995. The results showed that there was little difference among immigrant generations but there was impressive variation by race. For Hispanics, there was negligible difference in dropout rates between generations, but likelihood of dropping out increased significantly for students who worked more than 20 hours a week.

Dunham and Wilson (2007) conducted a study on social capital and its scholastic effects among various races. Taking information from the National Educational Longitudinal Study in 1996, several variables were studied in relation to dropout probability. The researchers found that there is a significant relationship between dropout and socioeconomic status or social capital ( $p < .01$ ). Hispanics as an individual group had the highest dropout rate. Additionally, Hispanics consisted of the lowest social class standing and lowest social capital in various forms when combined with African Americans .

Nesman (2007) performed a study to explore why students dropped out of high school in a particular Florida community. She analyzed data gathered from students in schools from the Tampa Bay area during the 1998-1999 school year. Data for this study were collected through questionnaires and group interviews. The findings show that dropout was brought about by lack of support and communication, lack of academic assistance, cultural and linguistic issues, getting into trouble and taking on adult roles.

**Group pB: Preexisting research for “dropout” and “gang.”** Sweeten, Bushway and Paternoster (2009) conducted a study to test identity theory among students

who drop out of high school. Their hypothesis was that students who drop out to move toward a positive possible self (to work or begin a family) are less likely to fall into delinquency. They tested this theory using information from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 Cohort. They found that males who drop out for economic reasons were substantially less likely to be delinquent ( $p < .01$ ) and that females especially are less delinquent as time passes after the event of dropout. Overall, the results showed no evidence of dropout affecting the likelihood of delinquency.

Staff and Kreager (2008) performed a study to test if peer status in violent groups undermines academic achievement. They used peer network data that were acquired between the years on 1994 to 2001 in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Their findings reveal that there is no evidence that males who are involved in violent social groups increase their likelihood of dropping out. Additionally, the results show that low socioeconomic status (SES) males with peer status in violent social groups are more likely to drop out, whereas the results for males with a higher SES were statistically non-significant.

**Group pC: Preexisting research for “gang” and “Hispanic.”** Freng and Esbensen (2007) conducted a study to explore the relationship between race and gang membership under the framework of multiple marginality. In 1995, students of various races who were participating in the Gang Resistance Education and Training Program in 8<sup>th</sup> grade were surveyed. The results of the research show that multiple marginality factors did indeed contribute to predicting gang membership, although there were fewer influencing factors among Hispanics. The only statistical significance that was found for Hispanics was in attitudes toward the police ( $p < .01$ ) and street socialization ( $p < .001$ ).

Krohn, Schmidt, Lizotte and Baldwin (2011) sought to determine distinctions for reasons for joining a gang among youth of various races. Using the framework of multiple marginality, which included variables involving influences of family, school and self esteem, the researchers analyzed data from the 1988 Rochester Youth Development Study. The findings show that for Hispanic youth, the lower the age of their primary female caregiver at her first birth, the greater the probability of gang involvement ( $p < .05$ ). Having parents with high educational expectations and speaking Spanish at home reduced the likelihood of gang involvement ( $p < .05$ ).

A study by Tapia (2011) explored the connections between race and arrests of gang members. Data were collected from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth in 1997. The research showed that Hispanic race moderated the relationship of gang membership with number of arrests and that gang membership increased the expected number of arrests by 45% ( $p < .01$ ).

**Group pI: Supporting research for “Hispanic” and “adolescent/high school.”**

No articles were found pertaining to this group.

**Group pII: Supporting research for “dropout” and “adolescent/high school.”**

No articles were found pertaining to this group.

**Group pIII: Supporting research for “gang” and “adolescent/high school.”**

Finn, Fish and Scott (2008) conducted research using the National Longitudinal Study of 1988 to examine the consequences of misbehavior in high school. Their findings showed that co-occurrence of misbehaviors was prevalent. The event of gang membership showed nonsymmetry in the results: only 5% to 9.2% of students displaying the various other misbehaviors (e.g. using drugs, alcohol) were part of a gang, while 20% to 54.7%

gang members exhibited the other misbehaviors exhibited the other misbehaviors respectively. No findings supported a significant relationship between race and misbehavior. Misbehavior showed a negative relationship with academic achievement and grades. The connection between misbehavior and subsequent college attendance was greater among high school graduates than dropouts.

**Former studies: 2000 – 2005**

**Group fA: Main research for “Hispanic” and “dropout.”** In another study, Martinez, DeGarmo and Eddy (2004) analyzed results from the Latino Youth Survey to search for contributors to school success or failure among Hispanic middle and high school students in Oregon. Potential differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic students and parents’ experiences were found through comparative analyses. In the school context, 50% of Hispanic students had experienced or witnessed racial discrimination. Hispanic students also reported more difficulties for participating in school activities, having less social support available to them and having more contact with gangs than non-Hispanic students. Hispanic parents reported more difficulty in helping with their homework.

Mayer (2004) conducted a study to find if a relationship exists between Mexican American students living in a city with a Hispanic population greater than 50% versus students living in a city of less than 50% Hispanics. She used a complex Chi Square analysis to collect data from the California Basic Educational Data System, which were used to determine a relationship between dropout rates of Mexican American students in the two cities. An additional analysis was done in order to investigate a relationship between male and female dropout rates among these students. Mayer found that there was

a .05 level of significance in the relationship between students of Mexican origin living in a city with a population of more than 50% Hispanic and similar students in a city with less 50% of the population Hispanic. There was also a .05 level of significance in the relationship between male and female dropout rates in the two cities.

Brown and Rodríguez (2009) published an article with a participant-centered perspective based on the experiences of two Hispanic high school students in the Northeast United States. Their research sought to explore the institutional factors that affect the dropout decision. In the 2003-2004 school year, data were collected through interviews, informal conversations and observations of the two subjects. The results reveal educational neglect and social and intellectual alienation in the school environment as contributing factors to the event of dropout.

**Group fB: Main research for “dropout” and “gang.”** No articles were found pertaining to this group.

**Group fC: Main research for “gang” and “Hispanic.”** Walker-Barnes and Mason (2001a) examined the connection between gang involvement or delinquency and peer or parenting behavior. The researchers took data from surveys administered to ninth graders at eight different points in time and later analyzed them using hierarchical linear modeling. Their findings show that peer behavior was significantly related to the respondents' level of gang involvement initially ( $p < .001$ ) and change over time ( $p < .028$ ), and that peer gang delinquency also predicted gang delinquency initially ( $p < .001$ ) and change over time ( $p < .024$ ). Race also had a significant relationship with initial level of gang involvement ( $p < .001$ ).

Another study by Walker-Barnes and Mason (2001b) was conducted to discover the beliefs of adolescents for why their peers join gangs. Thirty-one female students of African American or Hispanic race from an alternative high school in high crime, urban area were interviewed for the study. Within the research categories of friend, neighborhood and family influences, a significant effect was found ( $p < .001$ ). In the category of self, there was no significance. Specific reasons cited for female gang involvement were protection, family conflict, excitement, moneymaking opportunities and obtaining respect, with peer pressure as the most prominent reason.

A study by Lopez and Brummett (2003) investigated the relationship between gang involvement and acculturation. Using the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans (Version II) in three probation camps in the San Fernando Valley of California, the researchers sought to explore “choloization,” which is defined as the “redirection of resentment resulting from marginality and cultural conflict.” It was found that gang members associated with Mexicans more often, were less accepting of Anglos, and identified themselves more often as Mexican or Mexican American.

**Group II: Supporting research for “Hispanic” and “adolescent/high school.”**

Brewster and Bowen (2004) conducted a study to discover the impact of teacher support among at-risk Hispanic students’ school engagement. The study focused on social capital outside of parent support, with gender, family structure, poverty and school level as the framework. Using hierarchical regression analyses of surveys from 633 Hispanic middle and high school students, the results showed that more support from teachers negatively affected problematic behaviors and positively affected the perception of school significance.

In another study, Tapia (2004) conducted a case study to explore the effects of both the household and the school institution on Hispanic students' academic achievement. Two Hispanic households from both Tucson and Philadelphia were studied in relation to the community and school. Family stability was the most significant factor that affected students' school performance. Peer and romantic relationships were also found to affect learning and academic performance.

**Group fII: Supporting research for “dropout” and “adolescent/high school.”**

No articles were found pertaining to this group.

**Group fIII: Supporting research for “gang” and “adolescent/high school.”**

No articles were found pertaining to this group.

**Latter Studies: 2006 – 2011**

**Group IA: Main research for “Hispanic” and “dropout.”** Patterson, Hale and Stessman (2007) conducted a case study of an urban high school to analyze the school's culture and structure contributed to the formation of contradictory beliefs about students and their families. Data were collected through personal interviews, focus groups and a review of documents. Results from the study showed that although teachers valued the diversity of their school, they conveyed deficit views of their first generation Hispanic students. They also believed that the parents of first generation Hispanic students did not value education. The students in this study generally perceived teachers who were caring as good instructors.

A study by Behnke, Gonzalez and Cox (2010) presented information from an in-depth survey of 501 Hispanic students in North Carolina. The survey sought to explore the perceptions Hispanic students have of why they felt their peers dropped out of school,

a perspective not often studied. According to the results, students believed others would drop out mostly because of personal reasons, difficulty with school work, working to financially support their family, and peer pressure.

**Group IB: Main research for “dropout” and “gang.”** No articles were found pertaining to this group.

**Group IC: Main research for “gang” and “Hispanic.”** A study by Lopez, Wishard, Gallimore and Rivera (2006) sought to define gangs and crews and portray Hispanic youth’s perceptions of these social groups. Data were taken from the UCLA Latino Home-School Project through interviews and observations. The results showed that males were more likely than females to be in gangs or crews ( $p < .05$ ), and those who were in a gang or crew were more likely to not be in school (temporarily or permanently) when interviewed in 10<sup>th</sup> grade ( $p < .01$ ). Very low achievers were found to be much more likely to be exposed to gangs and girls in general were significantly less likely to have exposure to gangs ( $p < .05$ ).

Ventura Miller, Barnes and Hartley (2009) explored the effect of acculturation using logistic regression analyses on surveys taken by Hispanic students in grades 9 through 11. Their research revealed that students who were more acculturated and in a higher grade level in school were less likely to report being in a gang. Furthermore, increased drug availability as well as increased perceived ethnic marginalization positively affected the probability of being in a gang. School satisfaction also contributed to the likelihood of gang involvement.

Rios (2010) took part in an action research project that sought to explore the perceptions that gang-associated Hispanic youth have of school and of the police and

discover if educational goals could be fostered amongst them. Data were collected from 2007 to 2009 through observations, interviews and focus groups. His causal findings show that Hispanic youth feel that they experience racial discrimination and stigmatism from a young age and that is a large part of the contribution to their eventual dropout in high school.

**Group II: Supporting research for “Hispanic” and “adolescent/high school.”**

Miller, Miller, Zapata and Yin (2008) conducted a study to test the relationship between acculturation and illicit drug use through logistic regression analyses of surveys given to Mexican American students in grades 7 through 9. The findings show that among the delinquent behaviors considered in the study, gang membership was the least reported, followed by cocaine use. Marijuana use was most prevalent, and the results revealed a link between greater language acculturation and greater marijuana use ( $p < .001$ ), whereas increased social acculturation was connected with less probability of marijuana use ( $p < .001$ ).

Maradiegue (2010) explored the connections between health risk behaviors and family history of depression and alcohol abuse among Central American teenagers. Mothers of girls between the ages of 12 and 17 in Northern Virginia were surveyed. The study showed no evidence for maternal depression affecting health risk behaviors, but the relationship found between a family history of alcohol abuse and health risk behaviors was significant ( $p < .01$ ).

A study done by Cervantes and Cordova (2011) examined the stressors involved in the process of acculturation among Hispanic youth. The study utilized focus group methodology to gather data from Hispanic youth from 11 to 19 years of age. The findings

were categorized into six different categories of stressors that are related to acculturation. Language/communication stress came from not speaking English or needing to translate for monolingual parents. Family stress was a product of intergenerational cultural differences, separations within the family and substance use among family members. Immigration stress evolved from feeling of loss and isolation, as well as perceived discrimination. Peer stress developed from drugs, violence and discrimination. School stress came from language disparities, as well as lack of cultural relevancy in the curricula and perceived discrimination from teachers. Social/economic stress evolved from discrimination and inability to pay for housing and health care.

**Group III: Supporting research for “dropout” and “adolescent/high school.”**

No articles were found pertaining to this group.

**Group III: Supporting research for “gang” and “adolescent/high school.”**

Melde, Taylor and Esbensen (2009) published a study that surveyed students in grade 6 through 9 to examine the relationship between perceived victimization and gang membership. Their findings show that gang members have more perceived risk of victimization than nongang youth ( $p < .05$ ), whereas gang members have a lower fear of victimization ( $p < .05$ ). Gang members also reported the highest level of actual victimization. Hispanic youth were the only respondents to report less perceived risk of victimization ( $p < .05$ ), as well as less actual risk between the two times of data collection. However, their fear of victimization increased, which is contrary to the other gang members who participated in the study and reported that their actual victimization increased but their fear decreased.

## Findings

Table 2 displays the trends found between the different years of research according to number of articles in the distinct groupings of this study, as well as the concentrations on race and gender and the aspects of the research conducted in each article. Among these trends, several shifts can be seen in the content of research being done on these topics. Research pertaining to Group B (articles pertaining to “dropout” and “gang”) is particularly low in all three time periods compared to the other two groups of main research. Also, the focus on race has shifted from consistently studying multiple races to specifically focusing on the Hispanic population. Focus on females in research has increased minimally, while gender inclusive studies remain the norm.

Furthermore, the types of research that are being performed have changed over the years. Whereas during the pre-existing time period quantitative research was the overwhelming majority, the number of qualitative studies has increased over time, and with that, data that are collected personally by researchers (e.g. interviews, observations) have become more common. Large-scale surveys have also decreased in popularity as studies have been performed at a more local level. Additionally, considering that two of the pre-existing studies that involved both individual and institutional perspectives leaned much more heavily towards the individual, it can be tentatively concluded that research with a specifically institutional perspective has become more prevalent over time.

<b>Research Aspects</b>	<b>Pre-existing Studies</b>	<b>Former Studies</b>	<b>Latter Studies</b>
<i>Total articles [N=28]</i>	11 (10)	8 (6)	9 (5)
<b>Number in Group A</b>	5	3	2
<b>Number in Group B</b>	2	0	0
<b>Number in Group C</b>	3	3	3
<b>Number in Group I</b>	0	2	3
<b>Number in Group II</b>	0	0	0
<b>Number in Group III</b>	1	0	1
<i>Race</i>			
<b>Studies of multiple races</b>	11 (10)	2 (2)	2 (1)
<b>Studies of Hispanics</b>	0	6 (4)	7 (4)
<i>Gender</i>			
<b>Studies of males</b>	2 (2)	1 (1)	0 (0)
<b>Studies of females</b>	0	1 (1)	1 (0)
<b>Gender inclusive studies</b>	9 (8)	6 (4)	8 (5)
<i>Research Design</i>			
<b>Quantitative research</b>	11 (10)	5 (4)	4 (1)
<b>Qualitative research</b>	0	3 (2)	5 (4)
<i>Research Perspective</i>			
<b>Individual perspective</b>	7 (6)	4 (3)	6 (4)
<b>Institutional perspective</b>	1 (1)	5 (3)	3 (1)
<b>Individual and institutional perspectives</b>	3 (3)	0	0
<i>Research tools</i>			
<b>Large scale surveys</b>	9 (8)	2 (2)	0
<b>Situational surveys</b>	1 (1)	3 (2)	5 (2)
<b>Interviews/observations</b>	1 (1)	3 (2)	4 (3)

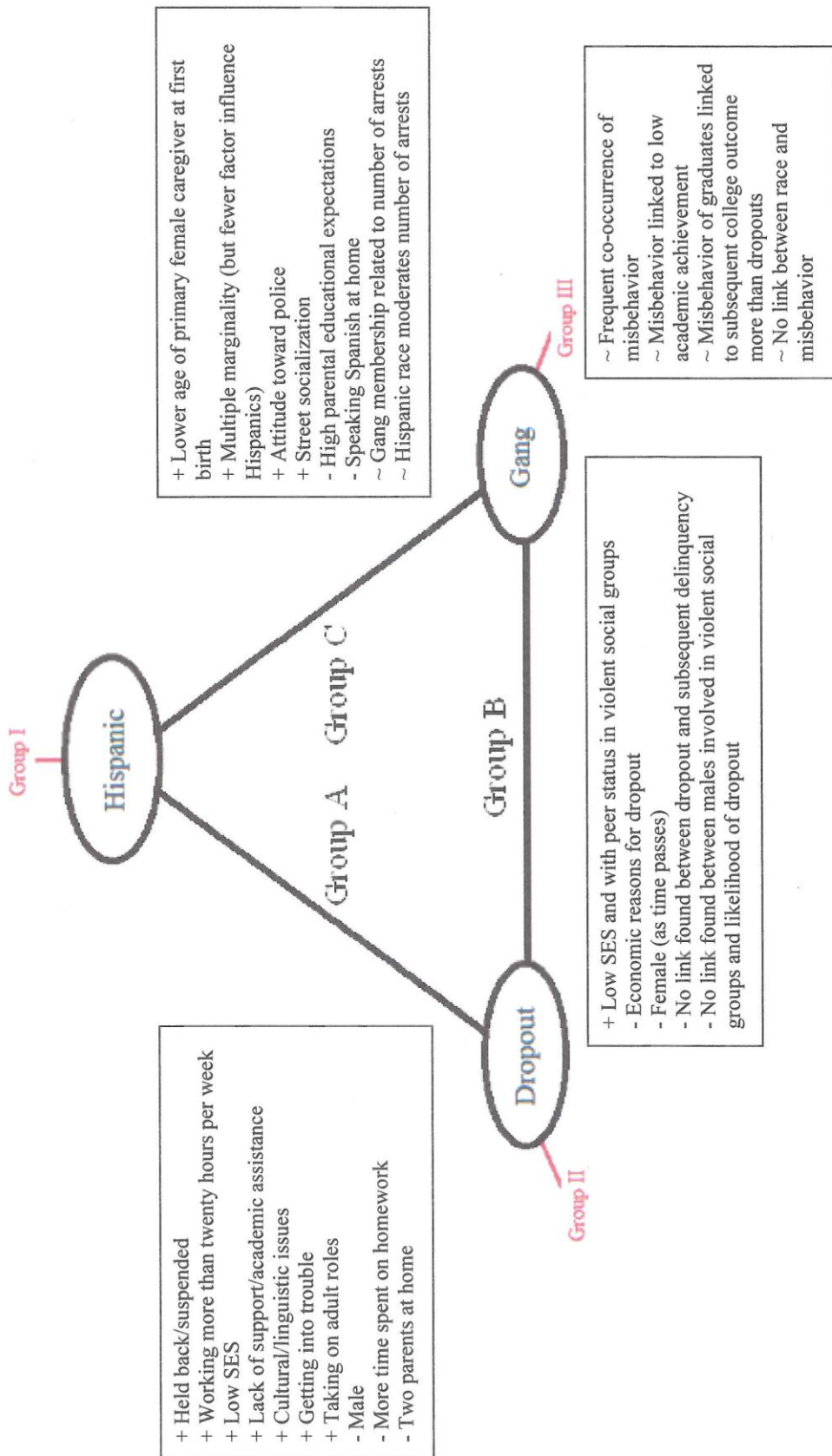
*Table 2.* Table of research aspects among articles. Non-parenthetic numbers refer to total articles. Parenthetic numbers refer to number of articles within the main body of research.

Figure 8 shows the primary results found in the research based on the pre-existing studies. Some of the recurring subjects that were studied in this time period (before 2000) include parents, language, behavior and economic aspects. This is also the only time period where multiple marginality is present. In addition to that, this time period is the only one with statements of no evidence in several studies, all of which were found in

groups connected with the term “gang” (Group B and Group III). These statements reported that no link was found between dropout and subsequent delinquency, between males involved in violent social groups and dropout, and between race and misbehavior.

Figure 8. Findings from pre-existing studies.

- + : Indicates increased probability of link between the two directly involved terms
- : Indicates decreased probability of link between the two directly involved terms
- ~ : Indicates unrelated to probability of link between the two directly involved terms



Although few of the results were explicitly similar among the different groups of the same time period, several findings were linked, as shown in Figure 9. Connections of low SES were found in Group pA, pB and within the framework of multiple marginality in Group pC. The attribute of multiple marginality also relates to the “lack of support/academic assistance” in Group pA. Also, according to Child Trends (2010), the younger a woman is when giving birth, the less likely she is to be married. Therefore, in Group pC, the “lower age of the primary female caregiver at first birth” increasing the likelihood of gang involvement is linked to the finding in Group pA that two parents at home decrease the likelihood of dropout. Additionally, the finding that misbehavior is linked to low academic achievement in Group pIII supports and connects to the findings in Group pA that being held back or suspended and getting into trouble increase probability of Hispanic student dropout.

Two instances of opposing outcomes were noted between groups. In Group pA, “working more than 20 hours per week” and “taking on adult roles” during high school years, which may include working to be financially independent or support one’s family, increased probability of dropout, whereas in Group pB, dropping out for economic reasons decreased the likelihood of becoming involved in delinquent behaviors. Also, linguistic issues increased probability of dropout among Hispanic students in Group pA, but speaking Spanish at home in Group pC contributed to a decreased probability of Hispanic youth being involved with gangs.

Figure 9. Connections from pre-existing studies.  
+ : Indicates similar outcomes of distinct research studies  
- : Indicates dissimilar outcomes of distinct research studies

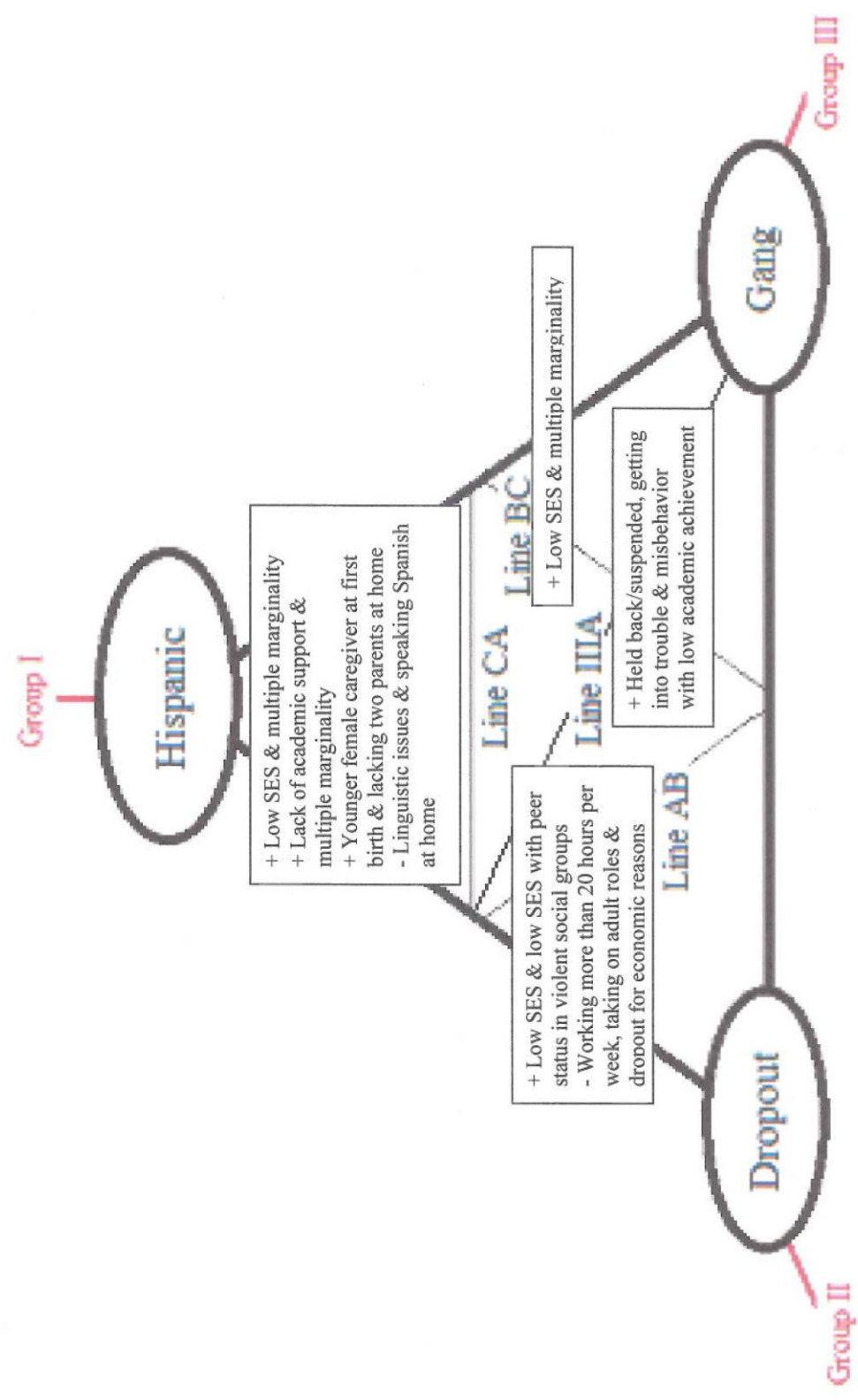
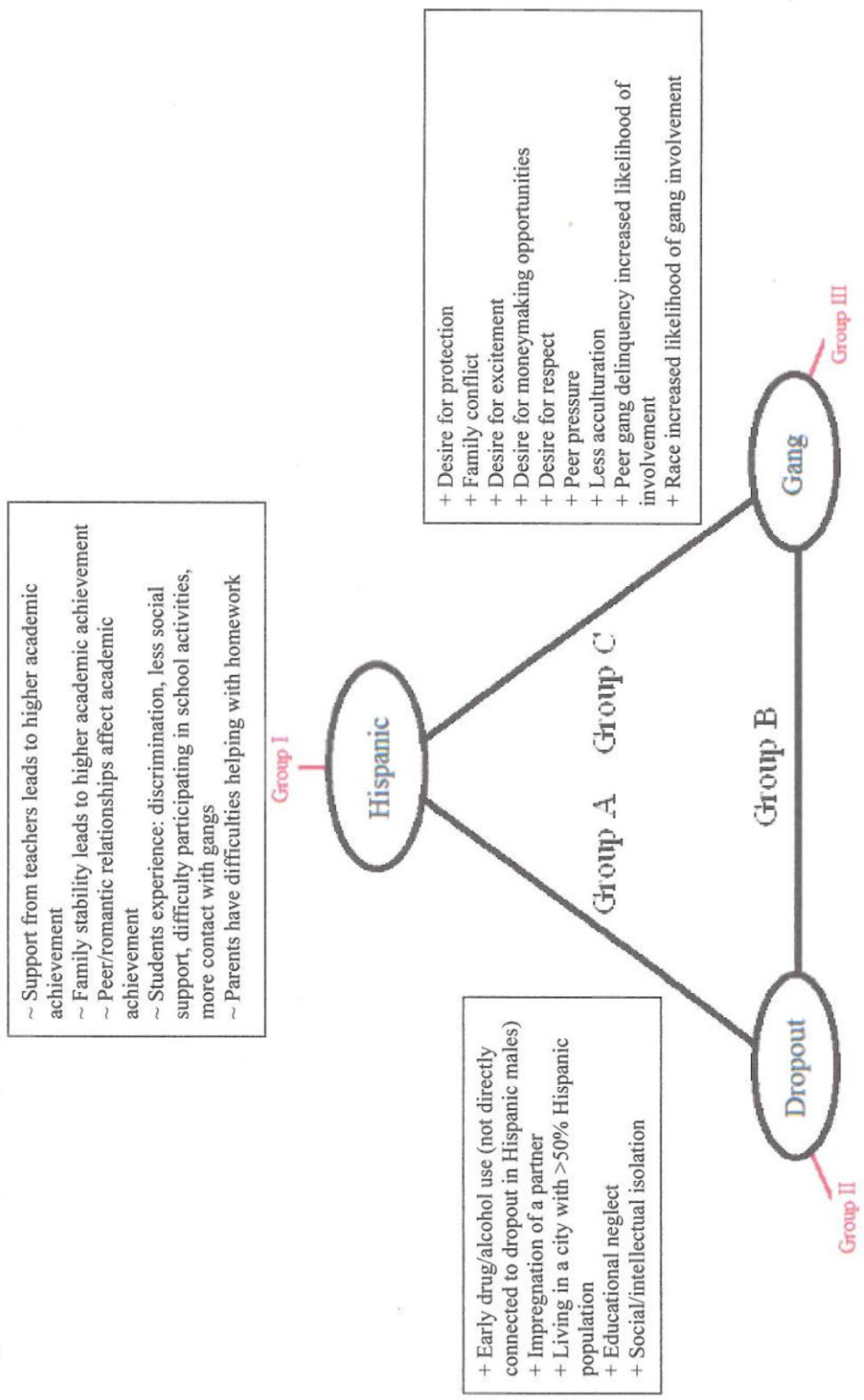


Figure 10 shows the main results of the research in the former studies. Some of the more prevalent topics of findings include those related to family stability, peer influences, and support in school and with schoolwork. This is also the first time that the term acculturation appears in the collected research.

Figure 10. Findings from former studies.

- + : Findings showing increased probability of link between the two directly involved terms
- : Findings showing decreased probability of link between the two directly involved terms
- ~ : Findings unrelated to probability of link between the two directly involved terms



No similarities were found between the main groups of research, as indicated by Figure 11. Considering the supporting research, though, the finding in Group fI that “support from teachers leads to higher academic achievement” connects to the findings in Group fA that educational neglect and intellectual isolation lead to a higher probability of dropout. Also, peer effects on academic achievement in Group fI are similar to the statement of peer pressure and peer gang delinquency increasing likelihood of gang involvement in Group fC. Finally, family stability assisting in academic achievement in fI is linked to the finding in Group fC that family conflict may increase likelihood of gang involvement.

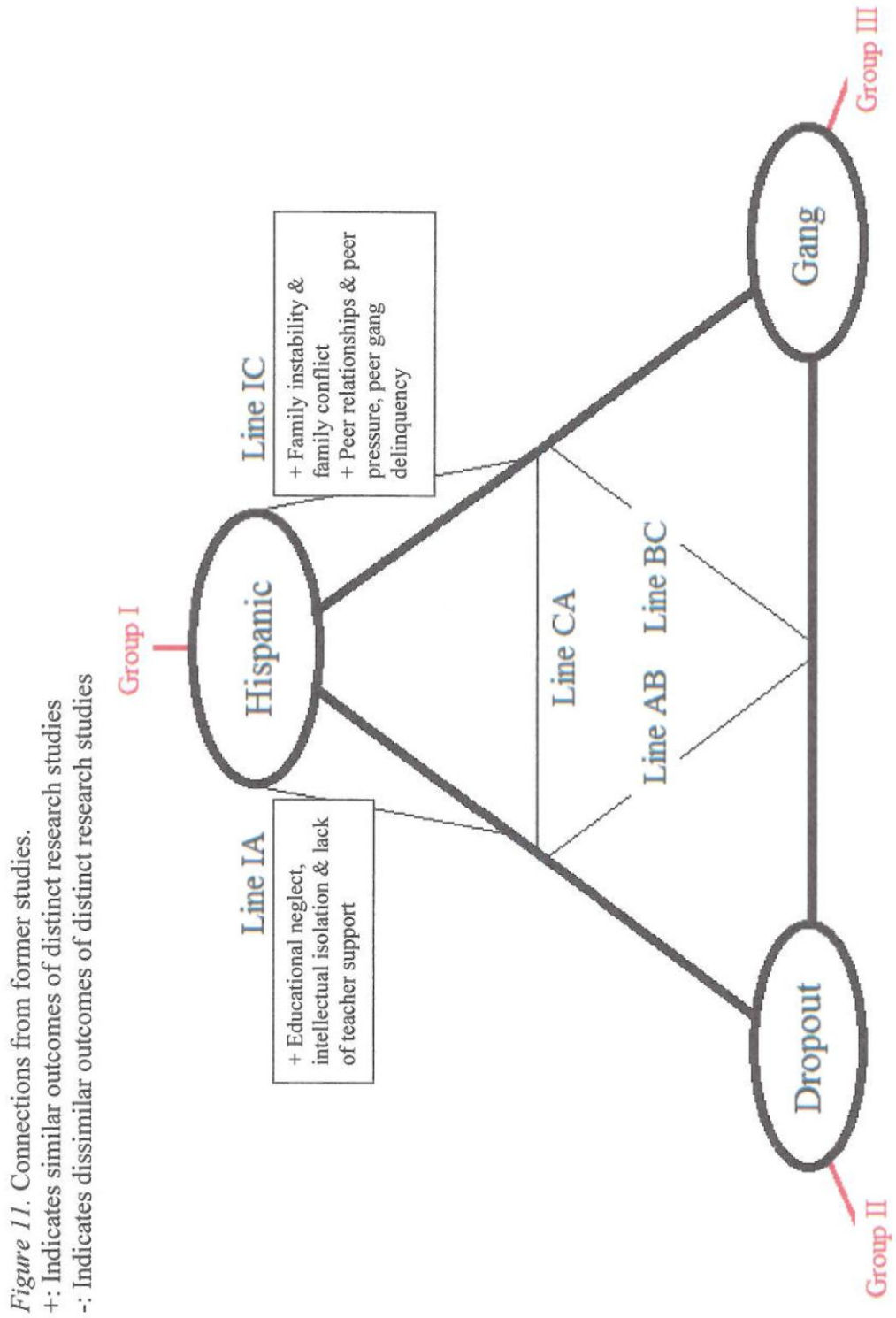


Figure 11. Connections from former studies.

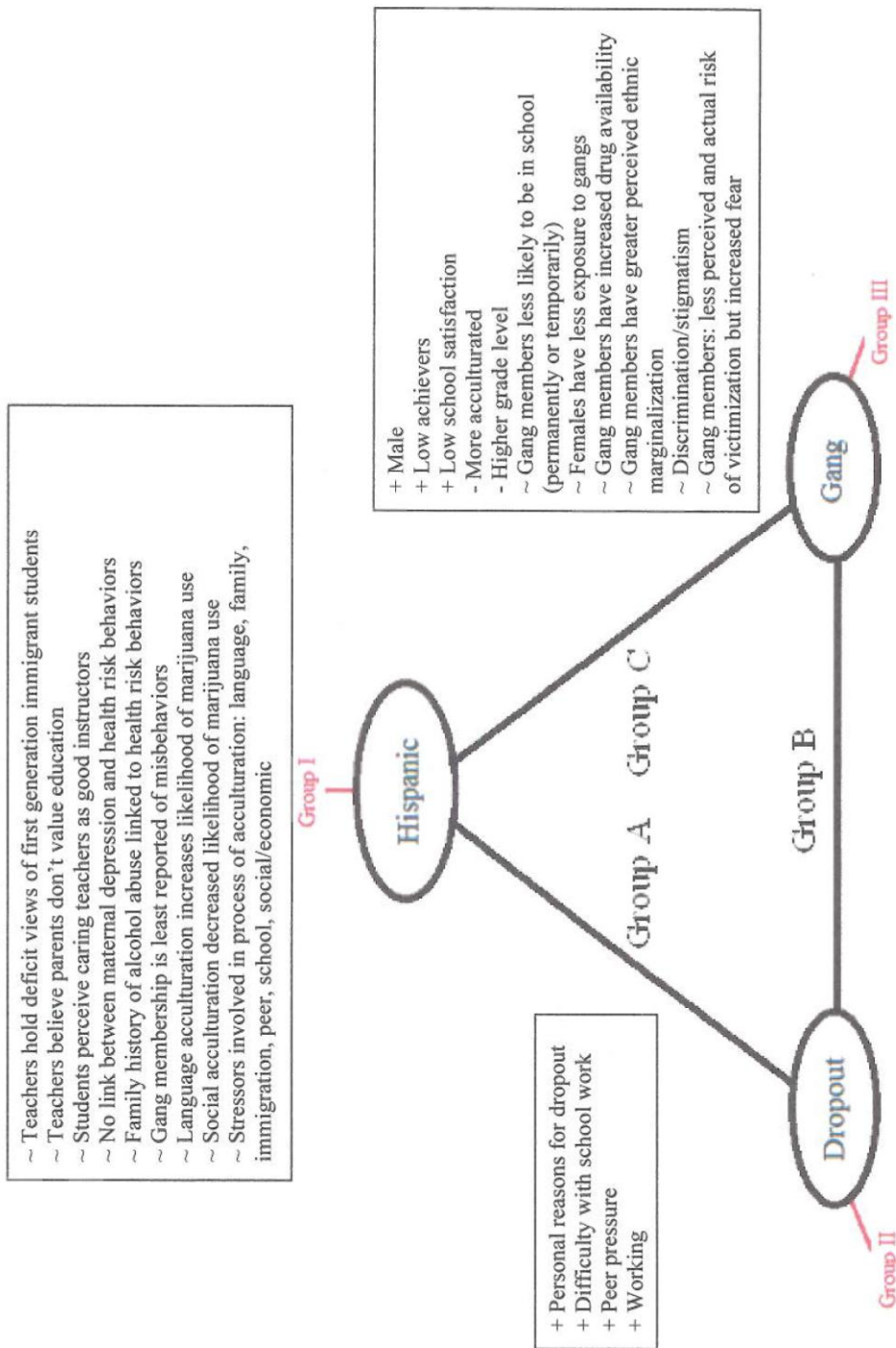
+ : Indicates similar outcomes of distinct research studies

- : Indicates dissimilar outcomes of distinct research studies

Figure 12 shows the findings from the articles in the latter studies. The common topics that were found are school achievement, discrimination, drugs, and acculturation. An increase in studies of drug- and discrimination-related influences in youth's lives is reflected in these articles when compared with articles from the earlier time periods.

Figure 12. Findings from latter studies.

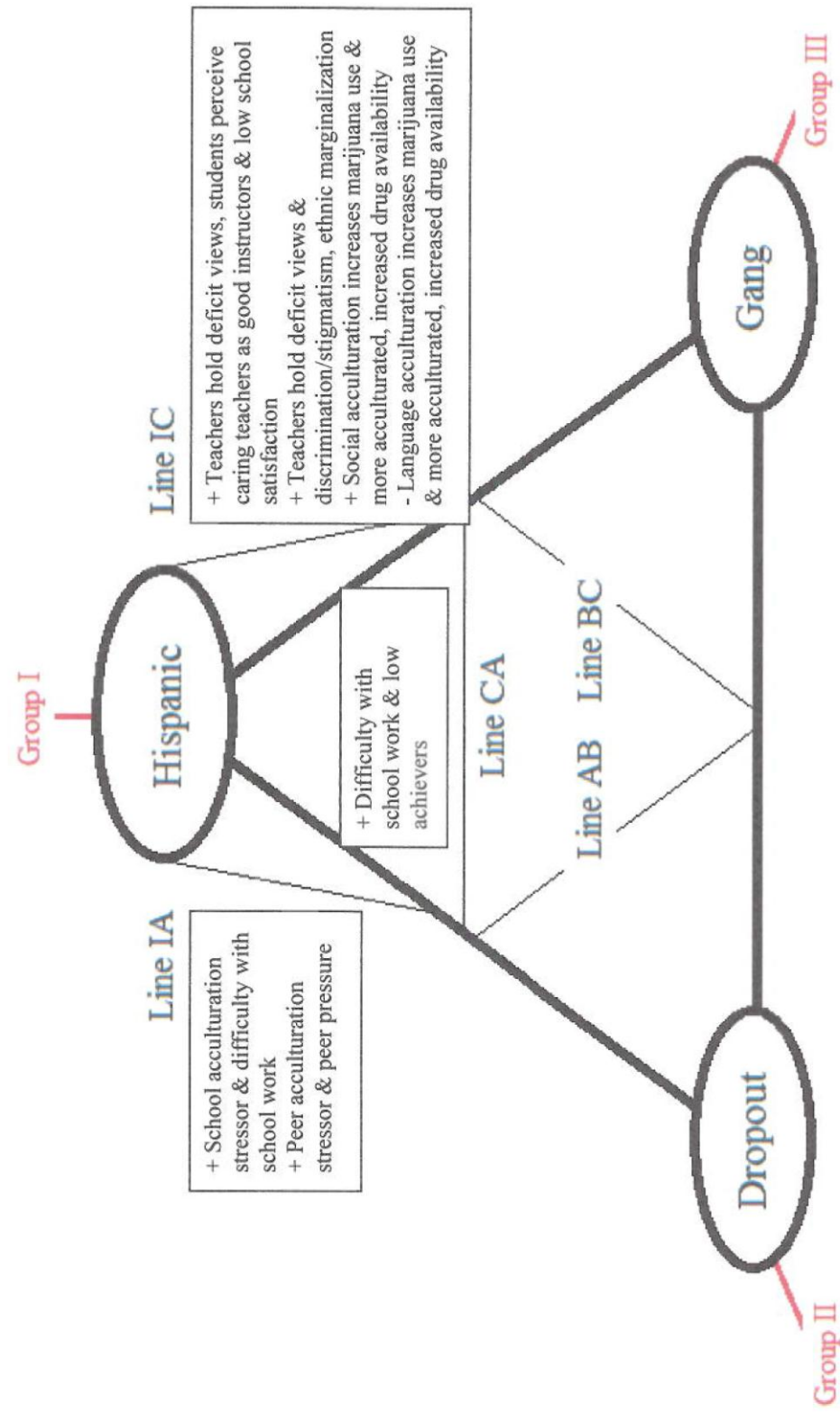
- + : Findings showing increased probability of link between the two directly involved terms
- : Findings showing decreased probability of link between the two directly involved terms
- ~ : Findings unrelated to probability of link between the two directly involved terms



“Difficulty with school work” increasing dropout probability in Group IA is linked to the increased probability of low achievers being involved with gangs and is the only connection between the main groups of research in this time period (see Figure 13). Furthermore, the finding in Group II that “students perceive caring teachers as good instructors” while “teachers hold deficit views of first generation immigrant students” may be connected to Group IC by helping to explain the low school satisfaction of students. Also between those two groups, the finding that teachers hold deficit views of their immigrant students supports the perception of Hispanic students that they are stigmatized and discriminated against and the perception of ethnic marginalization. Additionally, the Group IC findings that gang members are less acculturated and have more drug availability is supported by the statement in Group II that social acculturation decreases probability of marijuana use. Conversely, the statement in that same group that language acculturation increases marijuana use contradicts that finding.

Figure 13. Connections from latter studies.

+: Indicates similar outcomes of distinct research studies  
 -: Indicates dissimilar outcomes of distinct research studies



### **Limitations**

Before discussing these findings, it is important to note the limitations of this review. The databases that were utilized to find and collect documents were not encompassing of all the available literature on this topic today. It is possible that more literature that could be considered relevant is present in certain sources and may add or detract from the significance of the findings here. However, the databases that were used for this thesis were among some of the most public that require no prerequisite association or membership and some of the most accessible for those who have university affiliations. It is, therefore, reflective of the information that is available to the general academic populace and those with at least minimal scholarly associations.

A second limitation reflects the nature of the research process; results in any study are not always made immediately available. The fact that all of the pre-existing studies were actually published during the latter time period suggests that more research from the former and latter time periods may yet be missing from the public domain. In the next ten years, more research that portrays findings from 2000 onward may be made available in its published form.

### **Discussion and Implications**

The findings identified in Table 2 portray several significant trends that provide discussion on the direction of research relevant to this topic over time (see page 30). The first finding that is curious is the minimal research that has been conducted specifically regarding links between dropout and gangs. Although gangs continue to be a problem in the United States, and the government is increasingly turning its attention toward

improving education and graduation rates, it appears from this pattern that the two events at this time are not considered to be significantly linked.

Another important trend that lends itself to portraying the current patterns of research is in regards to race. As shown by the marked increase of studies specifically regarding Hispanics instead of race- neutral or inclusive studies, it is clear that Hispanics have garnered greater interest in recent years than in the past. Furthermore, the term “acculturation” was found to be more prominent in the former and latter studies, which is clearly a term that is specific to immigrants. This finding is not surprising when set within the context of the nation’s increasing Hispanic populace and the subsequent effects that this growth has on the events of dropout and gang involvement. Due to projections of the population increase, and combined with this apparent trend, it is clear that Hispanics will continue to be a subject of interest for researchers in the coming years.

Additionally, Table 2 shows an important change in research design. Over the years it appears that qualitative data have increased in value in regards to this topic. The shift from taking data from large-scale surveys that are not necessarily specific to the study being done to using more study-specific and localized surveys or more qualitative methods like interviews and observations shows a desire from researchers for deeper understanding of this topic. Also, as indicated by the greater prevalence of research focusing on the institutional perspective, these studies show researchers’ increased understanding because of their acknowledgement of distinct influences outside of youths’ own personal contributions to the eventual outcome of dropout or gang involvement.

In reviewing the preliminary research findings from all three time periods, 13 general topics were found occurring in two groups or more. Those subjects are the

following: SES, peers, teachers, schoolwork, family, work, drugs, acculturation, discrimination, misbehavior, gender, language and race. The cross-group recurrence of these subjects positively affecting the probability of the links between the primary terms clearly reveals connections in influences on dropout and gang involvement. Two more topics that were not found to be recurring (pregnancy and demographics) are assumed to have occurred in isolation due to the limiting factors of this review rather than the uniqueness of the subjects themselves.

Among the connections in research content, low socioeconomic status (SES) was the most prevalent of any of the findings; it was the only result present in all three main groups of research. However, low SES only occurred in the results of the pre-existing studies. This occurrence may in part be due to the shift from a previously weighted research perspective in favor of the individual, whereas the increase in studies with an institutional perspective is evident from the trends noted in this review. The research content also shows that the more recent the study is, the greater focus there is on schools and their influences on youth. It should not be assumed, though, that low SES is the strongest connecting factor among the three terms investigated herein. Peers' influence on Hispanic youth was present in both Line fIC and Line IIA, suggesting that peers do indeed affect these youths' actions and outcomes for both dropout and gang involvement. Also, the mention of peer status in violent groups in Group pB, which connects dropouts with gang involvement, strengthens the stance of "peers" as a potentially significant factor in these two events. More research, however, is necessary to explore the actual significance.

When considering the implications of these conclusions, the shifts in the type of research that are portrayed in the findings of this review are noteworthy when considering projections for the future. The increased use of qualitative data lends richness to the body of research on these subjects that cannot be found in statistics due to its variable and detailed nature. Especially in studies regarding human subjects and multiple influences, the personal nature of these topics must be acknowledged, and gathering qualitative data can more fully shed light on the complexity of the matter being studied. Because of these advantages, it is recommended that research continue to be balanced between quantitative and qualitative studies.

In addition to the research design, particular research concentrations would be useful for creating a more comprehensive body of research on this topic. The continued focus on Hispanic youth will be important to understanding their particular experiences and influences in isolation. However, a trend that did not appear significantly among the collected articles was the change in gender specific studies. Although there was a marginal increase in research on females, studies of males remained stable and minimal while gender inclusive studies continue to be the norm. The lack of gender focus could be problematic in the future if research is not more gender specific. It is obvious that male and female youth are in some ways affected differently or experience different circumstances during their adolescence, so a more in depth exploration of the distinctions between genders would expand the field of research in necessary ways.

The lack of concentration on the potential link between dropout and gangs shown in the scholarly articles collected for this review reveals an area that should be improved upon in the research field. While this paper did not require that such specific research be

present and merely sought to bring together the differing areas of research, the results found here cannot substitute for studies done directly regarding the features in question. The connections identified in this thesis show the existence of links between the two events and verify that further exploration into this subject would yield potentially significant results.

In light of this lack of current literature on these subjects, research that comprehensively reflects the three features of Hispanics, dropout and gang involvement would contribute considerably to the present research. More connections were found linking main groups to supporting groups than linking main groups to main groups, which somewhat weakened the significance of the results of this review due to the lower frequency of connections found between the most relevant articles. The undeniable and significant presence of Hispanics in dropout statistics and gang involvement qualifies those subjects for concentrated further study. The absence of such research with studies that address all three features was noted during analysis of the collected articles and considered somewhat surprising due to the flagrant statistics of Hispanic youths associated with both events. The 15 general topics that were identified throughout the collected studies show obvious patterns for potential research questions in the future, and their presence across groups proves that exploration utilizing all three features would be worthwhile. It is because of these topics' accumulated presence across the years, though, that causes research among any of them to warrant attention so that such connections can be uncovered in a more current and concentrated time period. Again, considering the findings in this review, there are clearly potential links to be found if specific research was dedicated to the question of these connections.

Overall, any research furthering the topics discussed in this review is recommended. In 2010, Hill and Torres published an article specifically examining the paradox between the expectations of Hispanic immigrant families and the academic outcomes of their children. Some of the themes addressed involved discrimination, lack of resources, and differing expectations and world views between families and schools. Because of the widespread opposing expectation and reality of life in the United States for Hispanics, it is evident that more attention is needed in this area to improve what is experienced by this population. Furthermore, given the current position of the United States in endeavoring to increase the rate of high school completion as well as prevent youth involvement in gangs, more research is necessary to continue learning about these particular topics in greater detail. Any research that is conducted on these subjects can contribute to and further the development of programs that prevent dropout and gang involvement and thereby improve the citizenship of the next generation, especially those who are minorities. As the nation continues to receive greater numbers of Hispanics for which it is responsible, understanding such social issues as dropout and gang involvement will be vital to assist these youth during their adolescence.

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