

Criminalizing Latino Youth By Affiliation

Prisons help recruit gang members.

HOUSTON, TX, UNITED STATES, May 24, 2016 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Does the prison system help recruit gang members? The incarceration system in Fresno, California creates and perpetuates

negative, gang-like identities for Latino youth in the system - identities that are used to police and profile them for future arrests.

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Identities formed within the prison system spillover as youth carry those identities outside the prison when they return home - taking the label of “gang member” with them.

Patrick Lopez-Aguado

Through a series of interviews and observations at two juvenile justice facilities, Santa Clara University professor Patrick Lopez-Aguado argues that identities developed within the California prison system impact life in high-incarceration Latino communities. Lopez-Aguado recently published this research in "[Social Problems](#)," a flagship academic journal of sociology.

The results of this study add to the complexity of discussions regarding the traditional “school-to-prison pipeline.” The author’s research reconfigures the one-way direction that this metaphor uses, and shows how prisons also confirm criminal identities as probationary youth return to their neighborhoods and communities - demonstrating a cycle rather than a straight flow of Latino youth between the prison system and their neighborhoods. Lopez-Aguado finds that the criminal justice system’s use of sorting youth based on geographical regions solidifies their perceived affiliation with gang inmates even if Latino youth are not affiliated with gangs upon their sentencing and sorting. Youths must then affiliate with gang members in the justice facilities as a way to navigate life in those facilities.

Navigating prison life requires linking community identities with those developed in prison as community affiliations allowed Latino youth to fit into the prison system on a day-to-day level. Identities formed within the prison system spillover as youth carry those identities outside the prison when they return home - taking the label of “gang member” with them. This connection between the juvenile justice system and the communities in which these Latino youth come from contribute to legitimizing their neighborhoods as target sites for policing and mass incarceration. Lopez-Aguado argues that juvenile facilities should hesitate to categorize or segregate youth based on assumed or potential gang ties. The pipeline metaphor used to understand Latino youth incarceration should be understood as a cycle that also implicates the police and prison systems which influence incarceration among Latino youth.

For further information, please contact Kasey Henricks at khenricks@luc.edu. The article appears in the May 2016 issue of "Social Problems" and is entitled, "[I Would be a Bulldog](#)": Tracing the Spillover of Carceral Identity.”

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contemporary social issues. For additional commentary, you can follow the journal on Twitter at @socprobsjournal.

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