

# Gang Members, Career Criminals and Prison Violence: Further Specification of the Importation Model of Inmate Behavior

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*The importation model posits that inmate behavior is primarily an extension of the assorted antisocial behaviors that criminal offenders develop in the community. Persons involved in gangs are viewed as especially at-risk for prison misconduct. Using the official infraction records of 831 male inmates sampled from the southwestern USA, this study explored the prison violence records of inmates involved in street gangs, prison gangs and both types of gangs vis-à-vis chronic offenders. Negative binomial regression models indicated that gang variables were significantly predictive of prison violence only in the full model when various types of gang membership (e.g. street, prison or both) were considered. Overall, the effects of gang membership were smaller than some of the risk factors related to chronic offending, such as history of violence and prior confinement, and other controls such as race. Although investigations of prison violence and misconduct are rightfully and importantly moving toward explanations that integrate importation, deprivation, and situational effects, we conclude that further specification of the importation model is needed.*

**Keywords:** *Importation model; Street gang; Prison gang; Career criminal; Inmate behavior*

## **Introduction**

In communities and within correctional facilities, among youth and prisoners, gang membership is a robust correlate of delinquency, violence and other forms of antisocial

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behavior. Penologists have identified gang membership as an important determinant of prison misconduct. This research takes one of two general forms. On one hand, investigators view street gang involvement as a pre-prison characteristic that is imported by inmates into the facility and contributes to their involvement in prison violence, misconduct and maladjustment (Cao, Zhao, & Van Dine, 1997; Harer & Steffensmeier, 1996; Irwin & Cressey, 1962). From the importation perspective, prison behavior is largely a function of the individual inmate's criminality. On the other hand, criminologists view prison gang involvement as an adaptive niche that is the outcome of the structural conditions of prison itself or the situational dynamics of prison life (Clemmer, 1940; Jiang & Fisher-Giorlando, 2002; Sykes, 1958). According to deprivation theorists, super-individual structural forces especially the pains and adversities of prison primarily cause inmate behavior. Indeed, whether treated as an importation or deprivation variable, several studies have found that gang-affiliated inmates disproportionately engage in acts of prison violence and other forms of misconduct (Allender & Marcell, 2003; DeLisi, 2003; Fischer, 2001; Gaes, Wallace, Gilman, Klein-Saffran, & Supra, 2002; Huff & Meyer, 1997; MacDonald, 1999; Zaitzow & Houston, 1999).

This article focuses on the importation model of inmate behavior and seeks to advance our understanding of the causes of prison violence using a data source that contains measures of street gang activity, prison gang activity, and cumulative gang involvement and compares gang status groups to another potent threat to prison order, habitual offenders.

## Literature Review

### *Street Gangs*

Members of street gangs offend at higher levels than their non-gang counterparts and account for a disproportionate amount of delinquency, especially serious and violent crime (Battin, Hill, Abbott, Catalano, & Hawkins, 1998; Curry, 2000; Huff 1998; Miller & Decker 2001). For example, comparing matched samples of gang members and at-risk youth from Aurora, Colorado, Denver, Colorado, Broward County, Florida and Cleveland, Ohio, Huff (1998) found that gang members in these various settings were 20 times more likely than at-risk youth to participate in a drive-by shooting, 10 times more likely to commit a homicide, eight times more likely to commit robbery and three times more likely to assault someone in public. In addition to these forms of violence, gang members committed antisocial acts such as randomly intimidating or assaulting patrons in shopping centers and grocery stores, using and selling drugs in school and assaulting their teachers during class at significantly higher rates. Even among samples of youth characterized by multiple risk factors for delinquency and violence, gang members are noteworthy for their strident criminality. For example, Thornberry and Burch (1997) found that gang members comprised 30 percent of the Rochester Youth Development Study yet they accounted for 86 percent of the most serious forms of crime.

Facilitating the gang-violence link is its interrelationship with illegal firearms. Across a variety of contexts, gang members are significantly more likely than non-gang youth

to possess guns. For example, Bjerregaard and Lizotte (1995) found that compared to non-gang members, adolescents who were involved in gangs were more likely to own guns, carry guns, have peers who owned and carried guns and carry concealed weapons. Gang members are significantly more likely than non-gang youth to carry a firearm to school, possess assorted illegal weapons and furnish a firearm during the commission of a violent crime (Decker & Curry, 2002; Huff, 1998; Miller & Decker, 2001). The gang–violence–guns nexus is so profound that the murder and violent crime rates of major cities, such as Chicago (Curry, 2000), Cleveland (Huff, 1998), Denver (Huff, 1998), Los Angeles (Howell & Decker, 1999), Miami (Inciardi & Pottieger, 1991), Milwaukee (Hagedorn, 1994) and St. Louis (Miller & Decker, 2001) have been largely attributed to fluctuations in gang activities.

In addition to violence, street gang members are also responsible for committing disproportionate amounts of other forms of crime. For example, street gang members commit offenses such as shoplifting, credit card theft, forgery, and buying and selling stolen property at significantly higher levels than youth not affiliated with gangs (Huff, 1998). Indeed, upwards of 30 percent of gang members' illegal activities pertain to property crimes (Schneider, 2001). However, the bulk of criminal activity among street gang members is drug-related. Compared to non-gang members, gang youth are more likely to sell and use narcotics (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Fagan, 1989; Huff, 1998; Klein, Maxson, & Cunningham, 1991) and more likely to be involved, as perpetrators or victims, in a drug-related homicide (Decker & Curry, 2002). The drug activity of street gang members with all of the negative attendant consequences, has been likened to an epidemic (Hutson, Anglin, Kyriacou, Hart, & Spears, 1995).<sup>1</sup>

Overall, gang membership is a powerful correlate of delinquency. At the individual level, youth who are involved in gangs face a multitude of risks including criminal activity, victimization, substance abuse, school failure, peer rejection and failure attaching to conventional social institutions (Battin *et al.*, 1998; Esbensen, Deschenes, & Winfree, 1999; Esbensen, Huizinga, & Weiher, 1993; Li, Stanton, Pack, Harris, Cottrell, & Burns, 2002; Winfree, Mays, & Vigil-Backstrom, 1994; Winfree, Vigil-Backstrom, & Mays, 1994). At the aggregate level, communities characterized by high levels of street gang activity also tend to suffer from poverty, victimization and fear, and social disorganization (Chin, 1996; Curry & Spengel, 1988; Howell & Decker, 1999; Howell, Egley, & Gleason, 2002; Hutson *et al.*, 1995; Kelly, Chin, & Fagan, 2000).

### *Prison Gangs/Security Threat Groups*

Broadly defined, prison gangs are an 'organization which operates within the prison system as a self-perpetuating criminally oriented entity, consisting of a select group of inmates who have established an organized chain of command and are governed by an established code of conduct. The prison gang will usually operate in secrecy and has its goal to conduct gang activities by controlling their prison environment through intimidation and violence directed toward non-members' (Lyman, 1989, p. 48). Security

threat groups are identifiable collections of inmates whose misconduct poses various hazards to prison order. Security threat groups may coalesce into prison gangs, or they may remain relatively disorganized. Despite differences in their organizational structure, prison gangs and security threat groups are often used interchangeably because of their similarly disproportionate involvement in misconduct and violence occurring behind bars (Allender & Marcell, 2003; Fong & Vogel, 1995).<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the effective handling of prison gang members is *the* paramount concern of prison administrators (Carlson, 2001; Huff & Meyer, 1997).<sup>3</sup> For instance, Fischer (2001) found that prison gang members were 74 percent more likely than non-gang inmates to commit serious disciplinary violations. Similarly, MacDonald (1999) found that gang members were 30 percent more likely to commit assorted acts of prison violence using two samples of parolees from the California Youth Authority. Using diverse sources of data and research methods, prior investigators have found that compared to non-gang inmates, prisoners involved in prison gangs or security threat groups commit significantly more acts of misconduct, including various forms of violent behavior such as murder, rape, assaulting staff or use of deadly weapons (DeLisi, 2003; Fleisher & Decker, 2001; Fong & Vogel, 1995; Gaes *et al.*, 2002; Huff & Meyer, 1997; Maghan, 1999; Ralph & Marquart, 1992; Zaitzow & Houston, 1999). Prison gangs are so troublesome that they can cripple an entire state prison system under certain conditions. For example, Ralph and Marquart (1992) found that a loosening of social control in Texas prisons unleashed a gang problem that produced a 10-old increase in the rate of murders, weapon assaults and sex assaults. In a two-year span, prison gang members committed more homicides than in the previous 20 years.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously, gangs are problematic whether considering community safety or social order within a correctional facility. What remains unresolved from the importation theoretical standpoint is *which* offender groups are most at-risk for perpetuating prison violence. For example, Jacobs (1977, 1979) has argued that prison gangs composed of racial minorities were extensions of street gangs whereas prison gang behavior among white inmates reflected a response to the structural order of the penitentiary. In this sense, it is unclear whether street gang members or prison gang members are the most difficult-to-manage inmates. Moreover, it is unclear whether inmates who are involved in prison gangs are the same individuals who are involved in street gangs. Because the current data include measures of three forms of gang membership or involvement, this research project is uniquely situated to empirically explore this further.

### *Career Criminals*

A recurrent finding in criminal career research is that more than half of the incidence of crime is accounted for by less than 10 percent of all offenders. This circumscribed group, variously referred to as chronic, habitual or career criminals, is also responsible for an even larger share of the most serious forms of violence, such as violent Index offenses (Blumstein, Cohen, Roth, & Visher, 1986; DeLisi, 2001, 2002; DeLisi &

Gatling, 2003; Piquero, Farrington, & Blumstein, 2003; Weiner, 1989). Like members of street gangs, habitual offenders also tend to continue their offending careers while incarcerated. Indeed, prior investigators have found that inmates with extensive arrest, conviction and incarceration histories were among the most violent and difficult-to-manage inmates based on their prison infraction records (e.g. Goetting & Howsen, 1986; Simon, 1993; Winfree, Mays, Crowley, & Peat, 1994; Wooldredge, 1994).

It has been suggested that the behavioral tendencies and interpersonal characteristics commonly displayed by career criminals make them particularly difficult-to-manage when incarcerated. For example, Allender and Marcell (2003) identified four aspects of career criminals that contribute to problems for correctional staff. These are (1) a disdain for authority, particularly legal authority, that when coupled with a propensity for violence can lead to sudden and unpredictable acts of aggression; (2) an acute awareness of their environment that can be used to take advantage of less savvy inmates; (3) criminal versatility that allows habitual offenders to engage in assorted acts of misconduct with fluidity; and (4) an inflated sense of self that can contribute to attempts to intimidate, coerce, and prey upon other inmates. Although Allender and Marcell's profile has not been empirically tested, prior research suggests that because of their high-rate criminality, chronic offenders are a significant risk to prison order. For example, 60 years ago, Schrag (1954) found that individuals who emerged as inmate leaders had served multiple prior terms in prison, were often incarcerated for the most serious forms of crime, had been diagnosed as psychopathic, and had been adjudicated as habitual criminals. Most importantly, career criminals/inmate leaders committed significantly more major rule violations, including escape and assaulting other inmates and staff.

### **Research Purpose**

To summarize, street gang members, prison gang members and career criminals constitute some of the most recidivistic and dangerous offenders whether at-large in the community or confined in correctional facilities. The importation model of inmate behavior asserts that inmate conduct is primarily the result of offender attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors that form outside prison walls and are brought into or imported into the facility (Irwin & Cressey, 1962). In this sense, inmates' traits, characteristics, and backgrounds set the mold for their pliability or incorrigibility in prison. Although prison violence has been studied for decades, many questions as to which offender groups are most problematic remain. Specifically, are inmates who were involved in street gangs or inmates who are involved in prison gangs the most difficult to manage? Is there continuity between individual involvement in street and prison gangs? If so, are inmates who participate in gang activity before and during their confinement among the most dangerous prisoners? Finally, are gang-affiliated inmates the greatest threat to prison order vis-à-vis other inmates such as habitual criminals? By answering these questions, the current study seeks to further the specification of the importation model of inmate behavior.

## Methods

### *Data and Sample*

Data were derived from publicly available information recorded by the offender classification system within the department of corrections of a large state located in the southwestern USA. The purpose of the offender classification system is to provide an appropriate classification and institutional placement to each inmate who is committed to correctional supervision by the criminal courts. To accomplish this, an objective administrative classification system quantifies each inmate according to his or her social background, criminal history, substance abuse history and related demographic information. Each area is scored within a range between 1 (very low risk) and 5 (very high risk).

A simple-random sample from a roster of over 20,000 inmates yielded an initial sample of 1,005 inmates. Of the inmates selected, 831 were male (83 percent) and 174 were female (17 percent). Unfortunately, only one female inmate had a gang risk score that exceeded the lowest level of risk and the remaining female inmate's score was two, still suggestive of low risk. Ostensibly, the female inmates in the sample had no prior gang involvement thus they were excluded from the study. Admittedly, this limits the generalizability of the current findings to male inmates incarcerated within correctional facilities within the state. The majority of the males (54 percent) were members of racial minority groups and the remaining 46 percent were white. The average inmate age was nearly 34 years with a range of 16 to 78 years.

### *Independent Variables*

#### *Gang variables*

Three gang variables were used. Street gang indicated the level of risk that the inmate posed based on his involvement in delinquent gangs before entering prison. Overall, inmates demonstrated a relatively low street gang risk ( $M = 1.26$ ,  $SD = .65$ ). Security threat group indicated the level of risk that the inmate posed based on his affiliation with prison gangs. Risk assessment for prison gang activity was somewhat higher than street gang risk ( $M = 1.95$ ,  $SD = .22$ ). A third variable, a multiplicative term that was the product of street gang risk and prison gang risk, was created to capture the interaction and potential continuity in gang involvement from the street into prison ( $M = 2.47$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ). Theoretically, inmates who were always gang-affiliated would import gang behaviors that would contribute to prison misconduct.

#### *Criminal career variables*

Five criminal career variables were used in the analyses because prior research indicated an empirical relationship between these constructs and involvement in prison violence. Confinement history ( $M = 1.76$ ,  $SD = .84$ ) quantified the risk that each inmate posed based on the extensiveness of his incarceration record. Based on prior research (e.g. DeLisi, 2003; Wooldredge, 1994), the hypothesized effect is that risk

based on confinement history positively predicts prison violence. Violence history ( $M = 1.66$ ,  $SD = .91$ ) was a risk factor that encompassed the number of prior arrests the inmate had for crimes of interpersonal violence. It is expected that inmates whose criminal records contain multiple arrests for violent crimes would be more likely to commit prison violence (Wooldredge, 1991). Similarly, the escape risk score ( $M = 1.52$ ,  $SD = .65$ ) quantified the level of dangerousness that an inmate posed to the general public should he escape from prison. Severity of offense ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) measured the degree of violence used in the inmate's instant conviction offense. Prior investigators (Flanagan, 1983; Wooldredge, 1991) have found that offenders convicted of more serious crimes were disproportionately involved in prison violence. Similarly, inmates with more extensive substance abuse histories ( $M = 1.95$ ,  $SD = .79$ ) were hypothesized as greater risks to engage in prison violence (Flanagan, 1983).

#### *Social demographic variables*

Seven social demographic variables were included in the analyses because of their theoretical and empirical links to prison violence. The importation model posits that pre-confinement characteristics predict subsequent misconduct, thus they should similarly affect prison behavior. It has consistently been found that young (Flanagan, 1983; Goetting & Howsen, 1986; Wooldredge, 1991, 1994) and non-white inmates (Harer & Steffensmeier, 1996; Wooldredge, 1994) were significantly more dangerous prisoners than older inmates and white inmates. Inmate age ( $M = 33.85$ ,  $SD = 11.46$ ) and dichotomous terms for minority status (0 = non-white, 1 = white) and resident alien status (0 = US National, 1 = non-US National, 89 percent US citizen, 11 percent non-US citizen) were created to control for relevant demographic factors. Prior research (e.g. Camp, Gaes, Langan, & Saylor, 2003, pp. 516–518) has shown that age has a quadratic effect on prison misconduct, thus a squared age term was created ( $M = 1228.79$ ,  $SD = 850.36$ ). Additional sociological risk factors can also contribute to involvement in prison violence (see Wooldredge, 1994), thus additional social demographic controls are inmate educational status ( $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = .75$ ), vocational skills ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = .79$ ), and a residency risk scale that measured the familial and social support that the inmate had ( $M = 1.38$ ,  $SD = .71$ ).

#### *Remaining control variables*

Three additional covariates were included in the analysis. Previous investigators (e.g. Cao et al., 1997; Zamble, 1992) have found that misconduct is most likely to occur in the earliest stages of confinement as inmates learn to adjust to prison life. The diagnostic unit has created a scale to assess each inmate's adjustment during initial classification ( $M = 1.04$ ,  $SD = .28$ ). To control for time served, a proxy for opportunity to engage in prison misconduct, two measures were used. Length of sentence ( $M = 2.58$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ) assessed the risk posed by an inmate based on the amount of time he has served for his current sentence. Sentence length ( $M = 4.96$ ,  $SD = 5.84$ ) represented the court ordered sentence in years that the inmate must serve. Non-capital sentences ranged from four



months (.25 years) to 70 years. Overall, research investigating the link between sentence length, time served and prison misconduct has produced mixed results. Some have found that inmates serving shorter sentences are more prone to misconduct (e.g. Flanagan, 1980; Wooldredge, 1991) while others have found that inmates serving lengthier sentences engage in more misconduct (e.g. Goetting & Howsen, 1986).

### *Dependent Variable and Analytical Procedure*

To measure prison violence, we included only the most serious forms of inmate misconduct. These were murder, rape, aggravated assault, arson, extortion, escape, hostage taking, rioting, simple assault, menacing/threatening prison staff and possession of a deadly weapon ( $M = 1.06$ ,  $SD = 2.65$ , range 0–26). Incidents of official prison violence are count data. Because count data have heteroscedastic error terms, are highly skewed, are bound by zero, and do not occur monotonically, they are not properly estimated using ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression. Fortunately, negative binomial regression can accommodate the Poisson distribution of counts of acts of prison violence.<sup>5</sup>

By definition, the importation model of inmate behavior denotes a temporal order. Regarding gang variables, street gang involvement precedes prison gang involvement that in turn affects prison behavior. To approximate this temporal ordering, an iterated regression approach is used. Equation (1) (baseline model) contains the street gang variable and remaining variables. Equation (2) (second model) adds prison gang to the baseline model. Equation (3) (full model) adds the summary gang variable indicated to measure continuity in gang involvement. This procedure permits the empirical assessment of the gang variables as theoretically and empirically relevant covariates are added. The full model also provides a ‘head-to-head’ comparison of the gang variables with the criminal career variables.

### **Findings**

Some unexpected findings regarding the effects of the gang variables on prison violence were produced. As indicated in Table 1, one could not fully understand the gang-prison violence relationship until the full model was specified. The baseline model indicated that inmates with prior street gang involvement were no more likely than other inmates to engage in prison violence. Similarly, the second model demonstrated that neither street gang nor prison gang significantly predicted involvement in prison violence. However, when all three gang measures were specified a different picture emerged. Inmates with street gang history (estimate = 1.26,  $z = 1.62$ ) and inmates with prison gang involvement (estimate = 1.23,  $z = 1.67$ ) were significantly involved in prison violence compared to non-gang-affiliated inmates. Unexpectedly, the interaction gang variable, designed to measure offenders who were always or never gang-involved, was not significantly related to prison violence (estimate =  $-.6940$ ,  $z = 1.60$ ), moreover its effect was in the opposite direction than expected.

How could inmates with the greatest involvement in street and prison gangs be less likely to accumulate violations for prison violence? It is likely that precisely because of



**Table 1** Prison Violence Negative Binomial Regression Models

	Baseline Model	Second Model	Full Model
Street Gang	.040 (0.36)	.049 (0.44)	1.26 (1.62)*
Prison Gang	–	.222 (0.51)	1.23 (1.67)*
Gang Summary	–	–	–.640 (1.60)
Age	.084 (1.99)**	.083 (1.98)**	.080 (1.81)**
Age <sup>2</sup>	–.001 (2.18)**	–.001 (2.17)**	–.001 (2.13)**
Race	–.790(4.74)***	–.795(4.77)***	–.808(4.85)***
Residency	–.123 (0.50)	–.127 (0.51)	–.106 (0.43)
Drug History Risk	–.102 (1.03)	–.102 (1.03)	–.108 (1.10)
Education Risk	.322(2.94)***	.317(2.88)***	.313(2.86)***
Family Ties Risk	.483(4.89)***	.480(4.86)***	.488(4.94)***
Sentence Length	–.001 (1.61)	–.001 (1.50)	–.001 (1.32)
Time Served	.371 (3.96)***	.373(3.98)***	.366(3.92)***
Initial Prison Adjustment	.107 (0.52)	.101 (0.450)	.109 (0.54)
Vocation Risk	.028 (0.26)	.019 (0.18)	–.002 (0.02)
Offense Severity	.149 (1.43)	.152 (1.46)	.146 (1.40)
Escape Risk	.240 (2.24)**	.234 (2.17)**	.246 (2.27)**
Violence History Risk	.375(4.00)***	.372(3.96)***	.388(4.12)***
Confinement History Risk	.409(3.82)***	.404(3.76)***	.413(3.86)***
Constant	–6.29 (3.82)***	–6.67 (5.35)***	–8.47 (5.12)***
Model $\chi^2$	194.4***	194.6***	197.9***
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.112	.112	.114

Note: \* $p < .10$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$

their cumulative gang risk, chronic gang members are isolated from the general inmate population and therefore greatly restricted from criminal opportunities. Prior research suggests that this was indeed the case. Using data from the same state as the current study, Fischer (2001) found that isolating known gang members in a special management unit reduced the rates of serious assault, rioting, drug violations and threats to staff by 50 percent. In other words, the greatest gang threats were significantly less likely to commit prison violence because they were identified, housed in specialized units, and prevented access to many potential criminal opportunities.

Unlike the gang variables, the remaining covariates were similarly predictive of prison violence across the three models.<sup>6</sup> Some of the strongest predictors of prison violence were the criminal career variables, especially risks based on violence history (estimate = .388,  $z = 4.12$ ), confinement history (estimate = .413,  $z = 3.86$ ), and escape history (estimate = .246,  $z = 2.27$ ). Offense severity and risk based on substance abuse history were not significantly predictive of prison violence.

Inmates from racial and ethnic minority groups were significantly more violent than white inmates (estimate = –.808,  $z = 4.85$ ) based on their accumulation of tickets for major forms of prison violence. Although race and ethnicity was an important predictor of prison violence, resident alien status was not. Inmates who were residents of foreign

states, such as Mexican Nationals, and US Nationals committed similar levels of prison violence. Older inmates (estimate = .080,  $z = 1.81$ ) totaled more violent prison violations than younger inmates, however the quadratic age term (estimate =  $-.001$ ,  $z = 2.13$ ) was also significant. Like prior research, this suggests that inmates engage in more misconduct when they are young and then gradually desist as they age. Two sociological variables, education and family ties, were robust predictors of prison violence. Inmates who had completed fewer years of formal education (estimate = .313,  $z = 2.86$ , variable was reverse coded) and with less social and familial support (estimate = .488,  $z = 4.94$ , variable was reverse coded) committed significantly more acts of serious prison violence. Expectedly, time served in prison (estimate = .366,  $z = 3.92$ ) was positively related to prison violence because opportunities to engage in crime increase as confinement increases. Finally, risks based on vocation history and initial prison adjustment were not significantly related to violent prison offending.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Before delving into the meaning of these findings, some important limitations need to be addressed. The data were selected from a single state, relied on official infraction records, and the analysis was limited to male inmates, conditions that temper the overall generalizability of the findings. The reliance on official data sources can be particularly problematic given the enormous discretionary power of correctional staff who wield power in issuing infraction tickets. Indeed, there is evidence that prison staff do not treat all inmates equally. For example, Hemmens and Marquart (2000) examined the perceptions of inmate-staff relations among a sample of recently released prisoners (referred to in the study as 'exmates'). They found that compared to older exmates, younger exmates reported having more problems with prison staff, believed that staff treated them poorly, and reported that correctional staff used unnecessary force on inmates. Similarly, black and Hispanic exmates perceived that correctional staff treated them unfairly and in an unduly harsh and dehumanizing manner. White exmates reported significantly fewer of these concerns. Interestingly, the inmates whom are traditionally most likely to engage in misconduct (e.g. younger inmates and minorities) also disproportionately perceive that prison staff members behave inappropriately towards them. Unfortunately, the current authors were unable to assess if these official data were contaminated by officer bias.

It is also important to recognize that the importation model of inmate behavior is at most only one third of the theoretical landscape other important theoretical perspectives are the deprivation and situational approaches. The current data set contained neither measures of facilities (e.g. crowding, type of supervision, staff to inmate ratio, programming) that could be used to assess institutional determinants of prison violence, nor situational measures (e.g. involvement in inmate economy) which could illustrate how interactional patterns or lifestyle influence inmate behavior. An important recent study (Jiang & Fisher-Giorlando, 2002, pp. 349–352) that was able to compare the three theoretical approaches found that the situational model was the best predictor of inmate misconduct directed against prison staff and intra-inmate violence.

However, they also found that based on the  $\chi^2$  change per variable in each model that the deprivation model was the most powerful predictor of misconduct.

Similarly, penologists (e.g. Gaes *et al.*, 2002; Gaes *et al.*, 2003; Wooldredge, Griffin, & Pratt, 2001) are increasingly advocating the use of both individual and institutional variables coupled with multilevel data analysis to better specify models of inmate behavior. Indeed, on this note, Gaes *et al.* (2003, p. 530) issued a challenge to investigators of inmate behavior to simultaneously examine variables at both units of analysis that encompass all three theoretical perspectives. We agree that the future for studies of inmate behavior is this more integrated, methodologically sophisticated approach.

However, this does not mean that theoretical questions that can be examined with local data are fully settled. Indeed, our central findings indicated that although street gang members and persons involved in security threat groups were important threats to prison order, they paled in comparison to chronic offenders, racial and ethnic minorities, and inmates with weak familial ties or social support. As suggested earlier, that inmates whom were always involved in gangs were negatively involved in prison violence was, we presume, a function of the department of corrections to identify and appropriately supervise those inmates who posed the greatest gang threat. In fact, our findings largely conflict with the recent study by Gaes *et al.* (2002, p. 381) who found that gang membership increased violence and almost all other forms of prison misconduct whether these behaviors were rule infractions or actual crimes. Moreover, their gang effects were robust controlling for measures of violent risk, history of violence, and other relevant background factors.

What accounts for these discrepant findings? Gaes *et al.*'s (2002) study was in many ways vastly superior to the current effort in that the sample was the entire male population of the Bureau of Prisons and they controlled for 27 separate gangs. Comparatively, the current effort used proxies of risk based on street gang, prison gang and interaction gang involvement. Thus, it is possible that the robust gang effect does not fully emerge until the various types of gangs are disaggregated. The discordant findings could also reflect the behavioral differences between state prisoners and inmates in the federal system.

Still, the importation model of inmate behavior should be considered a project under construction. The current findings lend credence to Allender and Marcell's (2003) advisement about the assorted threats posed by inmates roughly classified as street gang members, prison gang members or career criminals. The enduring importance of pre-prison indicators of criminality speak to the continued salience of the importation model although it is clear that further refinement of all theoretical perspectives is warranted before they are successfully integrated.

## Notes

- [1] Some (e.g. Howell & Decker, 1999; Klein, 1995) have distinguished drug gangs which are well-organized entities that are part of a large drug distribution network from street gangs whose involvement with drugs is merely part and parcel of their generalized involvement in crime. This is an important distinction, however the purpose of the current literature

- review is simply to demonstrate the overall range of criminal activities that gang members take part.
- [2] A variety of factors such as prior criminal activity, depth of membership, and length of involvement discern prison gangs from security threat groups (Allender & Marcell, 2003; Fleisher & Decker, 2001; Fong & Vogel, 1995), however the current research views and treats these phenomena interchangeably.
  - [3] The concern with gang-affiliated inmates is so dramatic that some states build correctional facilities with the expressed purpose of housing gang members. For example, California, the state with the largest correctional population, one that is nearly as large as the entire federal prisoner population (Harrison & Beck, 2003) has built the Pelican Bay State Prison, a facility with an annual operating budget of \$115 million, to supervise the most difficult to manage inmates in the state. The inmates at Pelican Bay are disproportionately street and/or prison gang members and the facility has a transitional housing unit whose programmatic function is to help reintegrate prison gang members upon reentry.
  - [4] The sea change in social control within Texas prisons was a direct outgrowth of the *Ruiz v. Estelle* (1980) decision in which several aspects of the policies practiced by the Texas department of corrections (e.g. overcrowding, frequent and excessive use of guard-inmate force, inadequate medical care, arbitrary disciplinary practices, and denial of access to legal resources) were found in violation of the 8th Amendment's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment (for a review, see Marquart & Crouch, 1985).
  - [5] Poisson regression is commonly used to estimate count-data dependent variables, however Poisson regression is most appropriate for counts of relatively rare events. However, chronic offenders are often cited for numerous violations causing the distribution to become over-dispersed where the variance exceeds the mean. Diagnostic analyses of preliminary Poisson regression models for equation 1 ( $R^2$  1291.11,  $p = .000$ ), equation (2) ( $R^2$  1291.08,  $p = .000$ ), and equation (3) ( $R^2$  1283.65,  $p = .000$ ) indicated that the dependent variable was indeed over-dispersed suggesting the need for negative binomial regression which can accommodate this effect (see Dean & Lawless, 1989; Zorn, 1998).
  - [6] For the remaining variables, coefficients from the full model are presented unless otherwise specified.

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