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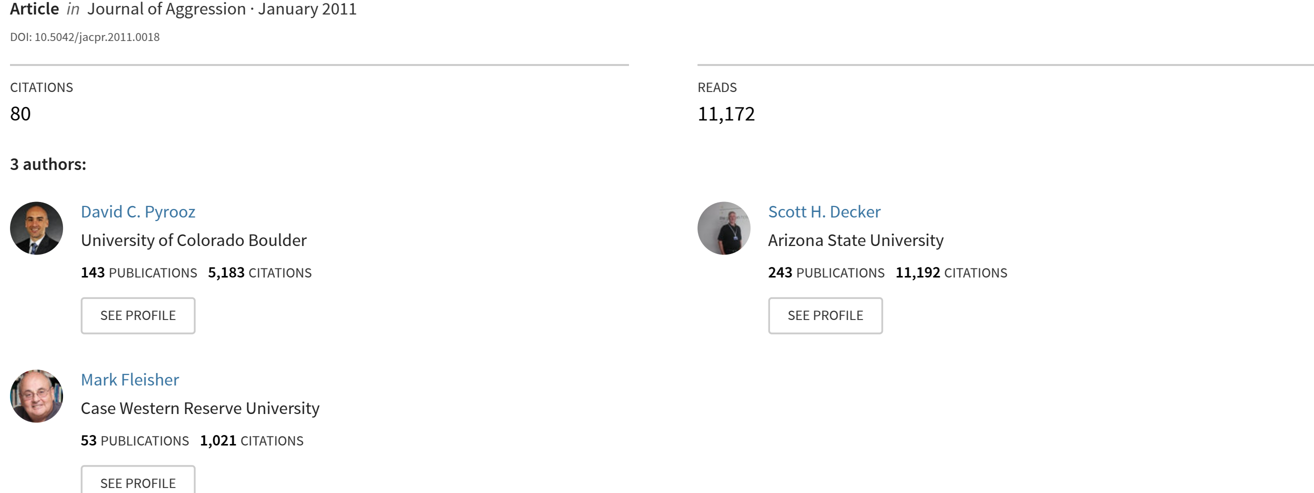

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Invited paper

From the street to the prison, from the prison to the street: understanding and responding to prison gangs

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ABSTRACT
This article examines a range of issues associated with gangs in incarcerated settings. We begin by examining the similarities and differences between street and prison gangs, and differentiating them from other types of criminal groups. Next, we focus on the emergence and growth of gangs in prison, including patterns and theoretical explanations. Importantly, we draw theoretical linkages between differing perspectives on gang emergence and gang violence. We also present administrative and official responses to gangs in prison. Finally, we discuss the movement from prison to the street, examining the difficulties that former prisoners face when re-entering communities.

KEY WORDS
Gangs; prison; programming; re-entry.

Introduction

The presence of gangs in incarcerated facilities presents a host of issues for policymakers and correctional staff, managers and administrators. Estimates from the US indicate that gang members comprise as much as 13% of jail populations (Ruddell *et al*, 2006), 12% to 17% of state prison populations (Griffin & Hepburn, 2006; Kreinert and Fleisher, 2001), and nine per cent of the federal prison population (Gaes *et al*, 2002). These figures take on added significance when considering the violence associated with gangs, inside and outside of prison walls. In large US cities, for example, Decker and Pyrooz (2010) reported that gang members have homicide rates 100 times higher than the national average.

Gang members are disproportionately represented in prisons, but our knowledge of prison gangs does not match their level of prison involvement. We attribute this discrepancy to two main sources. First, there are administrative challenges to gathering such information. Correctional agencies screen research proposals and may consider appropriate only those projects with relevance to programmes and operations of correctional institutions. Researchers must also receive approval from university and correctional agencies' human subjects committee. Second, there are methodological limitations. There are no field studies on prison gangs, and information about prison gang activity must be

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garnered through interviews with inmates, prison staff or prison records (see Gaes *et al*, 2002). Researchers remain sceptical about the validity of prison record data, which is confounded by definitional variability and variation in disciplinary policies (Fleisher & Decker, 2001).

This article delves into a range of issues associated with gangs in incarcerated settings. We begin by examining the similarities and differences between street and prison gangs, and what differentiates them from other types of criminal groups. Next, we focus on the emergence and growth of gangs in prison, reviewing the literature on patterns of gang behaviour and theoretical explanations for that behaviour. Importantly, we draw theoretical linkages between differing perspectives on the formation of gangs and gang violence. We next review official responses to gangs in prison. Finally, we discuss the movement from prison to the street, examining the difficulties former prisoners face when re-entering communities, and recidivism patterns. For all intents and purposes, we use 'prison gangs' as the term to encompass gangs in incarcerated facilities, which also includes jails and other settings. Further, while prison administrators commonly refer to gangs as 'security threat groups' or 'inmate disruptive groups', we refer to these groups simply as 'gangs' for ease of discussion of the movement from the street to the prison and back.

Street and prison gang similarities and differences

Street and prison gangs are groups that engage in criminal activity. In this regard they are similar to graffiti or tagging groups, or groups engaging in human, firearms or drug trafficking. There are, however, distinctive characteristics that distinguish street and prison gangs from these groups, as well as from one another. Street and prison gangs differ from the aforementioned groups in that they are more durable (in terms of persistence across time) and they maintain a collective identity (typically in terms of a name or set of insignia). The durability of prison gangs reflects their age structure, higher level of organisation, and role in illicit activity.

While similarities such as durability and identity distinguish street and prison gangs from other types of criminal groups, there are differences between the two (see ***Table 1***). According to Klein and Maxson (2006, p4), street gangs are: '*durable, street-oriented youth group*[s] *whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity*'. The prison gang, on the other hand, is defined by Lyman (1989, p48) as: '*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*'. It is important to point out that definitions of gangs in prison have not been met with the same degree of criticism as definitions of street gangs. Only after many decades of debate has some semblance of consensus been reached on the definitional criteria of street gangs. The lack of research attention to gangs in prison, as mentioned previously, could be partially attributed for this divergence.

In ***Table 1***, we display a series of variables comparing street and prison gangs. While there are a number of similarities, it could be argued that prison gangs are more controlled, organised versions of street gangs. Prison gangs exhibit higher levels of racial and ethnic homogeneity, instrumental violence, entrepreneurial offending, covert behaviours and actions, collective drug dealing, and unqualified loyalty to the gang. These are characteristics that are found only in rare cases in the street context. In street gangs, membership tends to be fluid, leadership is situational, violence is less co-ordinated and more symbolic, and drug dealing tends to be individualistic rather than collective (Curry & Decker, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Klein & Maxson, 2006).

From street to prison

Emergence and growth of prison gangs

The Gypsy Jokers, formed in the 1950s in Washington state prisons, were the first identified American prison gang (Orlando-Morningstar, 1997, pp1–13; Stastny & Tyrnauer, 1983). In 1957, the Mexican Mafia (*La Eme*) was first documented in California. *Le Eme* was the first prison gang with alleged nationwide

Table 1: A comparison of prison and street gangs

Variable	Prison gang	Street gang
Race	Single race or ethnicity	Mostly single race or ethnicity
Age	Concentrated in mid-20s, with members into 30s-40s	Average age in upper teens
Organisational structure*	Hierarchical	Situational/hierarchical
Sources of violence	Symbolic and instrumental; core activity	Symbolic; core activity
Offending style**	Entrepreneurial	Cafeteria style
Visibility of behaviour	Covert	Overt
Drug trafficking	Major activity; organised, collective	Varies; mostly individualistic
Loyalty to gang	Absolute	Weak bonds
Key to membership	Unqualified fidelity, abide by gang rules; willingness to engage in violence	Real or perceived fidelity; hanging out; abide by street rules
Key psychological attribute***	Oppositional, intimidation, control, manipulation	Oppositional, intimidation, camaraderie

Notes:
** Situational refers to structural flexibility from loose to more rigid.*
*** Entrepreneurial activity refers to specific types of profit-generating activity. Cafeteria-style activity refers to a range of profit-generating and non-profit activities.*
**** Oppositional refers to attitudes toward correctional supervision in the case of prison gangs. For street gangs, it reflects a generalised opposition to authority.*

ties. In 1980, America's state prisons housed 294,000 inmates and federal prisons housed 21,974. Camp and Camp's 1985 national prison survey identified approximately 114 gangs with a membership of approximately 13,000 inmates. Of the 49 correctional agencies surveyed, 33 reported gangs. Of those 33 gangs, 26 had street gang counterparts. For example, Illinois had 14 gangs and 5,300 gang members; Pennsylvania had 15 gangs and 2,400 gang members; California had 2,050 gang members; Texas had nine prison gangs with 2,407 gang members (Ralph & Marquart, 1991); and Fong (1990) reported eight Texas gangs with 1,174 members. The American Correctional Association reported that prison gang membership nearly quadrupled between 1985 and 1992, from 12,624 to 46,190 (Baugh, 1993).

Prison gangs expanded as prisons did. Useem and Piehl (2008) assessed the rate of imprisonment from 1930 to 2005, finding four distinct periods of imprisonment:

1. The 1930–1960 period is described as a '*trendless trend*'.
2. The 1961–1972 period is described as a '*large to modest decline*' trend.
3. The 1973–1988 period is described as '*the buildup begins*' trend.
4. The 1989–2005 period is described as '*accelerated growth*'.

The context for prison gang growth is the expansion of America's prison systems as a consequence of national crime control policy (Garland, 2001; Travis, 2005). Over the past 30 years, as state and federal prisons were constructed in the US, hundreds of thousands of prisoners poured into state prisons from 1980 to 2007. Over the years, the prison population grew from 315,974 in 1980, to 739,980 in 1990, to 1,331,278 in 2000 and to 1,532,800 inmates in 2007 – approximately a five-fold increase. In 2000, there were 84 federal and 1,023 general confinement facilities equalling 1,107 state and federal prisons. By year-end 2005, there were 1,821 state and federal correctional facilities (United States Department of Justice, 2003).

While the number of prisons and inmate population expanded, there are no national (or state) longitudinal data tracking street gang expansion in state and federal prisons, and prison gang growth over the three decades of prison expansion. We do, however, have data that infer street gang expansion into state prisons. If one assumes that some percentage of the street gang members per 1,000 state residents are arrested and imprisoned, then it can be inferred that those states with the highest per capita rate of gang members should also have the highest number of imprisoned gangs and gang members. The 2009 National Gang Threat Assessment (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009) provided data on gang members per capita. The state of Illinois has the highest rate per capita (eight to eleven per 1,000 residents); California, Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada have the second highest rates at five to seven per 1,000; and Idaho and Florida are third highest with four per 1,000. Most prison gang members are 20 to 30 years old. We recognise the difficulty of collecting accurate estimates of the number of prison gangs and gang membership, particularly today when prisons house an enormous imprisoned population. In mid-year 2009, state and federal prisons housed more than 1.6 million prisoners (West, 2010).

Explaining gang emergence and gang violence in prison

Two perspectives have guided the explanation of gangs in prison: adaptation/deprivation (Fishman, 1934; Clemmer, 1958) and importation (Irwin & Cressey, 1962).[1] These perspectives focus mostly on the development of prison culture. Implicit in the description of prison culture is the emergence of gangs. The seeds of what later became known as adaptation/deprivation are found in Fishman (1934). Fishman's concept of deprivation applied to imprisonment as a type of punishment but also connoted the loss of freedom (*'loss of liberty constitutes the real punishment'*, p165). Clemmer (1958) expanded the discussion of deprivation in *The Prison Community*, arguing that structural constraints (such as isolation and the lack of privacy) strip inmates of their identity. Cultures endogenous to the institution arise as an adaptive response to prison conditions – gangs being one of them. Incoming inmates are then socialised gradually into various prison subcultures (see also Jacobs, 1974), including gangs. This socialisation accounts for gang members who shed their street gang identity upon admission to the prison, where they assume membership in a prison gang.

The importation model, alternatively, advocates that pre-institutional characteristics shape prison culture. This perspective is argued most prominently by Irwin and Cressey (1962). Inmate composition, including demographic characteristics, cultural background and personality characteristics, are responsible for the prison culture. In other words, prison gangs do not emerge due to indigenous conditions within the prison; rather, they emerge due to pre-institutional conditions that inmates bring with them. Schwartz (1971) termed this '*cultural drift*', as compositional factors do not observe the boundaries and walls of the prison. In this way, gang members bring their individual and cultural histories with them when they go to prison.

Parallel arguments can be found in the street gang literature. It has been argued that the emergence of gangs is consistent with the principles of homophily, where similarly-situated and like-minded individuals come together because of personality deficiencies and geographical proximity (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Further, elevated criminal propensity (eg. poor self-control) is the key characteristic drawing the gang together. This

[1] Modern terminology notwithstanding, the seminal germination of the concepts of importation and deprivation were conceived in ancient Greece (Morris & Rothman, 1995). That offenders 'import' characteristics, personality traits, beliefs, values and norms into prison was the basis of debate over the effects of prison conditions on inmates in late 13th century Italian prisons and onwards throughout the history of prisons (Geltner, 2008).

perspective is consistent with the importation model; that is, conditions of deprivation unique to the prison don't draw inmates together – propensity and other characteristics external to the prison environment are the driving force in this process. The counterpart to the homophily perspective can be found in the works of Cloward and Ohlin (1960), Cohen (1955), Miller (1958) and Thrasher (1927), where socioeconomic conditions, limited opportunity structures and neighborhood subculture are the driving force behind gang emergence.

At the individual level, the conceptual arguments about gang emergence have translated into a set of theoretical models on the relationship between gang membership and criminal offending. Thornberry *et al* (1993) advanced three models – selection, facilitation, and enhancement – to account for this relationship. Selection effects were supported if offending remained elevated before and after gang membership, but did not increase during periods of gang membership (consistent with propensity views). Facilitation effects were supported if offending increased during periods of gang membership, but remained minimal before and after gang membership (consistent with process or deprivation views). Enhancement was any combination of the two. A considerable amount of attention has been devoted to testing these models empirically. In a recent review of the literature, Krohn and Thornberry (2008) concluded that findings in favour of the facilitation effect exceed that of the selection effect in terms of the prevalence of the studies and the frequency of effects.

In the prison context, a modest body of literature has explored the effect of gang membership on prison misconduct (see ***Table 2***). Similar to the street gang literature, gang membership appears to exhibit a robust effect on prison misconduct (see DeLisi *et al* (2004) for the lone exception). It should be noted that the methodological rigour of the prison gang literature is not comparable to the street gang literature, where researchers have modelled the relationship using elaborate analytic techniques and with longitudinal data capable of capturing the entire life course of gang membership. That said, the findings displayed in ***Table 2*** portend

Table 2: Studies examining the effect of gang membership on criminogenic outcomes in prison settings

Study	Data	Key finding
DeLisi *et al* (2004)	Southwestern US state, *N*=1,005	Prison gang: Violent misconduct (+) Street gang: Violent misconduct (+) Street & prison gang: Violence (ns)
Gaes *et al* (2002)	Bureau of Prisons, 1997-98, *N*=82,504	Gang to non-gang: Violence (+) Core to periphery gang: Violence (+)
Griffin & Hepburn (2006)	Arizona DOC, new admissions 1996, *N*=2,158	Assault (+), Threats (+), Fights (ns), Weapons (ns)
Huebner (2003)	185 state correctional facilities, *N*=4,168	Assault correctional staff (+)
Kreinert & Fleisher (2001)	Nebraska prison system admissions, *N*=704	Engage in assault (+), Drug use (+)
MacDonald (1999)	California Youth Authority, two samples, FYs 82 and 87, *N*=3,995	Various acts of violence (+)

Note: a positive effect of gang membership on criminogenic outcomes is symbolised by (+), negative effect (-) and no effect (ns).

what future research may find, suggesting that gangs do indeed exert an effect on offending behaviour in incarcerated settings.

The UK experience

Gangs have been documented in European cities and countries for at least two decades (Klein *et al*, 2001; Decker *et al*, 2009). The presence of gangs in Europe suggests that studies in prison facilities should find gangs and gang activity. The problem, however, is that, outside of England, so little is known on gangs in jails and prisons that there is little to discuss.

Adult male gang members' behaviour was linked to higher levels of offending in the UK, similar to the US. In a study of recent arrestees, Bennett and Holloway (2004) found that current gang members were more involved in robbery, drug-related offences and weapons offences than former and non-gang members. Further, gang members (current and former) comprised 15% of the sample, yet accounted for 31% of all of the offences reported, including 89% of all the robberies. The above results, as a whole, are consistent with studies in the US.

Jane Wood and colleagues have conducted a series of studies on gang activity in English prisons (Wood, 2006; Wood and Adler, 2001; Wood, Moir, and James, 2009; Wood, Williams, and James, 2010). Based on information and approaches from American studies of gangs, they examined the views of staff members in English prisons. Staff members across 16 prisons were asked questions regarding their knowledge of gangs, gang members and gang behaviours. Gang activity was highest in male institutions that maintained medium security. Gangs formed around race, and there were high levels of drug possession among prison gangs. This study was a groundbreaking approach to understanding the issue of prison gangs in England although, as the authors noted, it is an indirect measure of prison activity. Regional affiliations were a key part of gang groups, as noted above in American prisons, as individuals from the same regions tended to associate together.

Institutional gang intervention strategies

In this section, we summarise prison and jail gang intervention strategies. Note that the interventions we discuss have not been evaluated for their effectiveness in the prevention and intervention of gang activity. This is consistent with our generally low state of knowledge about prison gangs.

Correctional agencies have developed policies guiding initiatives that control gang-affiliated inmates' misconduct. Carlson and Garrett's 2006 collection of essays illustrates the diverse approaches that major correctional agencies have implemented to manage prison gangs.

Since Clemmer's (1958) *The Prison Community*, prison scholars have debated the effects of prison administration and management on the formation of inmate groups and individual behaviour. Do prison policies and procedures intended to create safe prisons have iatrogenic effects on inmates, which then result in the formation of disruptive groups? In spite of prison managers' best efforts to create a positive environment, inmates continue to form disruptive groups as a prison extension of their street behaviour (Jacobs 1977; Hunt *et al*, 1993).

Prisons have tried a variety of overt and covert strategies, including the use of inmate informants, the use of segregation units for prison gang members, the isolation of prison gang leaders, the lockdown of entire institutions, vigorous prosecution of criminal acts committed by prison gang members, the interruption of prison gang members' internal and external communications, and the case-by-case examination of prison gang offences. There are, however, no published evaluations testing the efficacy of these suppression strategies on curbing prison gang violence and/or other criminal conduct inside correctional institutions. These substantial gaps in our knowledge hinder the safety of other inmates, staff and ultimately the public (see also Trulson *et al*, 2006).

The Texas state legislature passed a bill in September 1985 that made it a '*felony for any inmate to possess a weapon*' (Ralph & Marquart, 1991, p45). The bill also limited the discretionary authority of sentencing judges: inmates convicted of weapon possession must serve that sentence subsequent to other sentences. Officials believe that laws such as this one help to keep inmates, especially those in prison gangs, under control (Ralph & Marquart, 1991).

A common inmate control procedure is administrative segregation, often referred to as 'secured housing units' (SHU). This isolation strategy is commonly applied to gang members.

Segregation keeps inmates alone in a cell, 23 hours a day, with one hour assigned to recreation and/or other activities. Texas used administrative segregation and, in 1985, put all known prison gang members into segregation in the hope of limiting their influence on mainline inmate populations. Violence in the general population decreased, resulting in nine prison gang-motivated homicides from 1985 to 1990; fewer armed assaults were reported as well. By 1991, segregation housed more than 1,500 gang members (Ralph & Marquart, 1991). Knox (2000) reported that a majority of 133 prison officials interviewed in a national survey believed segregation policy did not accomplish its anti-gang crime objective. Nevertheless, isolating gang members, and especially gang leaders, is a popular control strategy. With prison gang leaders locked down, officials hoped vertical communication within the gang would be weakened, resulting in an erosion of group solidarity.

Another form of isolation transfers prison gang leaders among institutions (United States Department of Justice, 1992). To reduce gang membership, an official notice of suspected gang activity is kept in an inmate's file, a procedure known as 'jacketing'. This note follows the inmate and allows authorities to transfer him to a high-security facility. Hunt *et al* (1993) describe a 'debriefing' technique. This requires prison gang inmates to report information about their gangs as a precondition of release from a high-security facility. Staff might use a threat of a transfer to high-security facility unless the inmate divulges information. The legality of this procedure remains questionable and may threaten the life of an inmate who has been, or is thought to have been, debriefed.

The constitutionality of these policies has been challenged in federal courts. The argument behind these challenges is that secure housing facilities are reserved for inmates responsible for disciplinary infractions ranging from minor malfeasance to major acts of violence. Based on this logic, if a gang member has not violated prison rules then they should not be confined in a SHU; however, prison policies systematically segregate and transfer gang members to more secured settings (see Toch, 2007). Prison officials contend that gang members maintain an elevated propensity for violence and that if all gang members were left in the general population, violence would erupt between rival gangs. Two key federal court rulings have addressed this issue: Toussaint v. McCarthy (1984) and Madrid v. Gomez (1995). In the Toussaint case, the courts held that segregating inmates based on gang affiliation was permissible, based on the opinion that segregation is administrative as opposed to punitive or disciplinary. Because of the administrative designation, the ruling held that inmates that are labelled as gang affiliated should not be afforded more rigorous standards of due process (eg. notice of charges, representation, witnesses). The court recognised, however, that special considerations were necessary for determining gang membership and that minimal due process rights should be provided to inmates. In other words, the implications for policies on gang members in general were that prison officials would need to develop more systematic methods for classifying inmates as gang members. This ruling was ultimately upheld in the Madrid case (for a more detailed discussion, see Tachiki, 1995).

Orlando-Morningstar (1997) cites the need for better information gathering and sharing between law enforcement and corrections. Law enforcement can provide corrections officials with background information on street conflicts among inmates entering facilities. Corrections can provide similar information for offenders returning to the community. Correctional agencies now use databases to track prison gang members and gang activities. This allows for more effective communication between a correctional and a state police agency, and improves data accuracy because data can be entered as soon as they are gathered (Gaston, 1996). The New York City Department of Correction uses a system that allows for digitised photos that document gang members' marks and/or tattoos. Database searches can be done by tattoo, scars or other identifying marks. The speed and capacity to update intelligence information makes the use of a shared database an effective tool in prison gang management.

Providing alternative programming could become part of prison gang management strategies; however, prison gang members have not embraced such programming. The Hampden County Correctional Center in Ludlow, Massachusetts, developed a graduated programme for prison gang members who wanted to leave segregation. Two years into the programme, 190

inmates had been enrolled and 17 had been returned to segregation for gang activities (Toller & Tsagaris, 1996), although no details of the programme's evaluation were available.

Out-of-state transfers are a control strategy that sends key prison gang members out of state, in the hope of stopping or slowing a prison gang's activities. If a gang exists, officials hope a transfer will disrupt its leadership and activity and cause its elimination; however, there has not been an evaluation of this strategy to control gang activity. The United States Department of Justice (1992) reported that transfers may export gang activity to other prisons. Correctional agencies have tried to weaken prison gangs by assigning members of different prison gangs to the same work assignment and living quarters, in anticipation of limiting the number – and thus the power of one prison gang over another – at a specific place. Illinois tried this approach to no avail, because the inmate prison gang population was too large to control effectively within a few locations (United States Department of Justice, 1992). Camp and Camp (1985) surveyed facilities and asked officials which strategies they were most likely to employ against prison gangs. Transfer was cited by 27 of the 33 agencies; the use of informers was cited 21 times; prison gang member segregation was cited 20 times; prison gang leader segregation was cited 20 times; facility lockdown down was cited 18 times; and vigorous prosecution and interception of prison gang members' communications was cited 16 times.

Knox (2000) shows that training for correctional officers has improved, and that over two-thirds of the 133 facilities surveyed provided some gang training in 1999. Despite this, only 20% of prison administrators surveyed by Knox (2005) indicated that they had programming for gang members who wanted to leave the gang. Correctional administrators (Knox, 2005) identified six potential solutions to make their institutions safer:

1. increased sanctions against gang members
2. special housing for gang members
3. new restrictions on benefits for prison misconduct
4. new services for prison gang members
5. new policies to deal with prison gang members
6. increased staffing and resources.

From the prison to the street

Re-entry

The prison boom over the last two decades has forced policymakers and researchers alike to turn their attention to prisoner re-entry. Lynch and Sabol (2001, p6) reported that, from 1985 to 1995, the number of prisoners released into society increased from 260,000 to 566,000. These figures beg the question: what happens to people once they are released from prison? Once paroled or released, the institutional controls over behaviour are removed, and material benefits of imprisonment (housing, food, activity, supervision, medication etc) disappear. Forty years ago, Irwin (1970, p107) observed that the '*impact of release is dramatic … The problems of the first weeks are usually staggering and sometimes insurmountable … and for many impossible*'. The burden is lessened for only a select few, but especially among those with strong familial support systems (Martinez, 2007). These challenges remain today.

Given the prevalence of gang membership in prison, it is logical to conclude that many of those released from prisoners are gang members. Should they return to their place of last residence or to areas where they grew up, it is likely that they will associate or reconnect with their gang (see eg. Petersilia, 2003; Pyrooz *et al*, in press). While these street gang members were in prison, their gang allegiances may have changed and the hierarchies, processes and behaviour of their street gang will certainly have changed. They return to a very different gang scene than before they went to prison. A body of risk factor research indicates that street and prison gang members possess an array of risk factors, ranging from poor education to poor mental health to poor job skills to poor social support in the community. In the modern economy, where will former inmates, with inadequate skills, personal problems, grade school reading levels, and a history of felony convictions and imprisonment, fit in the marketplace? While opportunities for legitimate employment appear slim (see eg. Pager, 2003; Huebner, 2005), opportunities for illegitimate money-generating activities appear ubiquitous. For these reasons, it is not surprising that former prisoners end up back in prison, especially gang members.

Recidivism

State and federal prisons have the responsibility to 'correct' the behavioural problems prisoners import into prison. Because prisons stand outside the mainstream of American cultural and behavioural patterns, it is important that they do not further isolate already marginal men and women. It is also argued that communities have little concern for prisoners' families and the well-being of prisoners once they are released to the community. Some (DuPont-Morales and Harris 1994) call such disregard '*lackadaisical*' and a '*damaging mistake*' (see also Tonry, 2004). Logan and Gaes (1993) contend that prison's primary role focuses on the fair governance of prison institutions but does not extend to the rehabilitation and reintegration of former prisoners into the community. Others contend that prison system performance can be best measured by the lawful behaviour of released prisoners (eg. Harding, 2001). Correctional funding data precisely define the prisons' legislatively prescribed role: state governments pay for security officers but not for teachers, psychologists, treatment specialists, mental health care or even basic constitutional requirements for medical care systems (see, for example, Plata *et al* v. Schwarzenegger *et al*, 2006). Prison staff cannot control, influence or moderate the behaviour of released prisoners any more than physicians can control the calorie intake of obese patients outside of hospitals and treatment centres. Despite this, recidivism among former inmates remains a large issue.

Two studies have examined the effect of gang membership on recidivism. Olson and Dooley (2006) used data gathered from 3,364 probationers discharged from supervision and 2,534 prison releases/parolees in Illinois. Six per cent of the probation sample and 24% of the prison sample were reportedly gang active. They found that within two years, 64% of gang probationers (compared to 30% of non-gang probationers) and 75% of gang prison releases/parolees (compared to 65% of non-gang releases/parolees) were rearrested for a new crime. Huebner *et al* (2007) examined a sample of 322 young male subjects released from prison in a Midwestern state, using more sophisticated analyses. Gang members comprised 37% of the sample. Contrary to Olson and Dooley's (2006) findings, gang members were twice as likely to be convicted; however, a five-year window was allotted for reconviction. Gang members were not only more likely to recidivate, but also recidivate more quickly, than drug-dependents. Huebner *et al* (2007, p208) concluded that gang membership proves to be a '*difficult barrier to overcome and* [has] *important effects on the timing of post release convictions*'. The obstacles faced by those who are released from prison are substantial; such obstacles are significantly greater for gang members.

In an experimental study, Di Placido *et al* (2006) examined the effectiveness of high intensity cognitive behavioural programmes on gang member recidivism. Using data on 1,824 male adult offenders drawn from the Regional Psychiatric Centre, a mental health hospital in Canada, the researchers matched treated and untreated gang and non-gang members on age, race, criminal history and conviction type (ie. a 2X2 design; N=160). Treated subjects experienced programming that targeted criminogenic attitudes and beliefs, aggression and substance use, as well as educational and life skills when appropriate. The follow-up period for the subjects was two years. Twenty-five per cent of the treated gang members recidivated, compared to 40% of the untreated gang members and 35% of the non-gang treated and untreated subjects. Further, among those recidivating, the untreated gang members received the longest sentences (33 months), whereas treated gang members (12 months), treated non-gang members (seven months) and untreated non-gang members (11 months) received around one-third of the sentence. At a cost of $100,000 for an eight-month stay, the authors maintained that treatment would outweigh the social and economic costs of doing nothing.

Conclusion

This review has documented the substantial magnitude of the problem posed by incarcerated gang members. Gang members enter prison with very high levels of crime in their background. They are more prone to be involved in violence, have weak community ties, have low integration into conventional society and possess deficits that impede their progress in the employment market. Once in prison, opportunities for involvement in crime abound. Whether by affiliating with members of their own gang, neighborhood or new prison

gangs, gang members engage in higher levels of institutional misconduct. This misconduct can take a variety of forms, including but not limited to violence, extortion and the sale of drugs and other contraband. The presence of white hate groups in prison exacerbates institutional tensions and conflicts in prison, multiplying the opportunities for misconduct and the longer prison sentences and isolation that accompany such behaviour. Such patterns of conduct further insulate gang members from opportunities to learn skills and to have experiences that will help them transition to legitimate society. As a consequence of prison misconduct, there are few programming opportunities directed specifically at gang members. They are more often the target of segregation, jacketing or isolation, activities that may (or may not, as our review documents) make it easier to manage prisons, but are not likely to improve the chances of gang members successfully transitioning from the prison to the street. When gang members are released back into their communities, they find a different environment in many ways. The labour market is certainly dynamic and demands new skills, skills many gang members lack entering prison and fail to accumulate while in prison. The criminal landscape, along with the power relationships among and within gangs, also changes. A gang 'leader' who is incarcerated for several years may return to their community only to find that their gang has been absorbed into a new gang with new leaders and new activities. Worse yet, gang members returning from prison may not be known by a new 'generation' of gang members, as 'generations' of gang members turn over with great frequency.

We know far more about how gang members get from 'the street to the prison' and far less about how they get from 'the prison to the street'. The evidence that does exist is only suggestive, but several conclusions can be drawn. First, gang members are 'hard cases'; that is, they are likely to become the targets of institutional control through misconduct, disciplinary hearings, segregation and 'jacketing'. Second, and as a consequence of such behaviour, they are isolated from routine programming, educational and employment opportunities available to the general prison population. Third, while in prison gang members are likely to form new alliances with prison gangs that differ than the ones they had on the street before entering prison. Fourth, when leaving prison, gang members find a changed landscape in their communities and the gangs that they once belonged to. Finally, as a consequence of this, gang members have among the highest risks for return to prison. While considerable effort is expended on prevention of gang membership, promoting gang desistance on the part of gang members leaving prison needs careful scrutiny.

The existing knowledge base does offer the basis to reflect on several theoretical issues of importance to understanding the relationship between prison gangs and the street. First, the contrast between importation versus adaptation remains salient. Clearly, the individuals who end up in prison bring a large amount of 'baggage' with them. This baggage includes educational and employment deficits, a history of substance abuse, negative family relationships, and friendships with peers who violate the law on a regular basis, among other things. For a new inmate, the presence of prior gang membership also means that they have a ready source of enemies and allies as they navigate their way through prison life. The deficits imported to prison by gang members are likely to be greater than those of non-gang members, largely because of the increased involvement in crime – especially violent crime – that gang membership brings with it. Prison socialisation can be contrasted to importation. Clearly prisons have their own cultures and subcultures, and these can be powerful forces in shaping the behaviour of inmates, choking off legitimate opportunities for change, and opening doors to misconduct within prison (Griffin & Hepburn, 2006). The street alliances and history that gang members bring with them to prison makes their socialisation into prison more difficult as they bring a set of ready-made enemies through the door of the prison. Yet, in prison, their street gang alliance may neither protect them from rivals nor provide easy alliances. But clearly, street gang members are more likely to be socialised into prison gang culture, owing to their familiarity with 'the life' and commitment generally to the norms of oppositional culture. We believe that the life course conceptual framework offered by Thornberry *et al* (2003) can be integrated into an understanding of prison gangs (see DeLisi *et al*, in press). Importation clearly is related to the importation model of prison culture described by Clemmer

(1958). Selection and facilitation are related to the powerful prison socialisation process – adaptation – as inmates attempt to 'fit in' to their new institutional setting. While there have been no tests of these concepts in the prison setting, they offer robust opportunities for future examinations of the prison process for street gang members.

Implications for practice

- Gang members are disproportionately involved in crime on the street and in prison.
- There is a small body of research on prison gangs in Europe and the US to guide practice.
- Prison gang members import values, behaviour and affiliation from the street into prison.
- Prison socialisation alters existing gang affiliations and behaviour.
- Re-entry prospects for gang members appear worse than those of the general inmate population.

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