

Gangster Undergrads: Perceptions Regarding Gang Members in Colleges and Universities

by

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Abstract

With the growing presence of criminal street gang members in the United States, communities everywhere are experiencing the damaging impact of their criminal behavior. A 2011 report by the National Gang Intelligence Center reported the number of gang members in the United States was conservatively estimated at 1.4 million. As gang members evolve, are they using our nation's colleges and universities to educate themselves? How will that affect our communities? This article includes results of a survey of college students and campus police regarding their perception of the presence of gang members on their campus. The research question was to what extent is there a difference in individuals' perceptions of the presence of gang members on college and university campuses by the control variable of campus role (student or campus police)? Less than one in four students thought there was a gang problem in the community around their campus, while two of three of the police thought a problem existed. Students and police agreed in similar percentages that there was a gang problem within the campus community. At least half of both students and police thought gang members were responsible for less than 10% of crime on campus. About two of three students and police reported less than 10% of the students were active gang members. The Bloods, Crips, and Gangster Disciples were the top three gangs in the campus community for both groups. Drug crimes, assaults, assorted weapons crimes, robberies and sexual assaults were reported as crimes gang members committed on campus. The challenges to success that gang members experience in institutions of higher education may be explained by several theories, including differential integration, which posits that the explanation for failure to leave the criminal or gang lifestyle involves both limited opportunities and the attraction of a deviant subculture. The leadership of our nation's colleges and universities must address the increase in students who affiliate with members or join criminal street gangs.

Introduction

A 2011 report by the National Gang Intelligence Center (NGIC) reported an overall increase in gang membership, and the expansion of criminal street gangs' control of street-level drug sales and collaboration with rival gangs and other criminal organizations. The NGIC (2011) reported the number of gang members in the United States was estimated at 1.4 million. That figure represented an increase of 400,000 over the conservatively estimated 1,000,000 as of September 2008. The 2009 NGIC estimate represented 212,000 more gang members (26% higher) than the 2007 report. The estimate was 215,000 (28%) higher than the number of gang members reported by the National Youth Gang Center in 2006 (Egley & O'Donnell, 2008). The estimate was also 200,000 (25%) higher than the 800,000 gang members reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Deputy Director Pistole (2008) in March of 2008.

Gangs have expanded and evolved, and have posed an increasing threat to communities nationwide. Many gangs have become sophisticated criminal networks with members who are violent, but their crimes are not limited to violence. They distribute wholesale quantities of drugs, and develop and maintain close working relationships with members and associates of transnational criminal and drug trafficking organizations (NGIC, 2011). Gang members engage in counterfeiting, identity theft, and mortgage fraud, primarily due to the high profitability and much lower visibility and risk of detection and punishment of those white collar crimes than drug and weapons trafficking (NGIC, 2011). Gangs have become increasingly adaptable and sophisticated. They have employed new and advanced technology to facilitate criminal activity discreetly, enhancing their criminal operations (NGIC, 2011). Gang membership has increased when unemployment was high (Seals, 2009). With the recent economic challenges and relatively high unemployment, gang leaders may have begun recruiting from the more educated ranks or arrange higher education for their members to fill the more technical roles that such evolved and advanced gangs require. The problems with such a move have not yet been sufficiently identified in the literature.

The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) (2012) recently reported crime on college campuses was slightly higher (4.2%) than in previous years. Drug violations have increased yearly since 2008 for a total increase of 46.8% with 2010-2011 having the largest year to year percentage increase of 25.7%. There was a 46.7% increase in forcible sex offenses reported with the number increasing from 30 in 2010 to 44 in 2011. 37.1% of all 2011 offenses reported were categorized as larceny or theft. The number of simple assaults increased 15.3% from 340 in 2010 to 392 in 2011.

Though there was not a breakdown of crimes that were gang-related, in fact, the word *gang* was found nowhere in the report, it was generally accepted that a correlation between crime and gang activity existed. As the report represented only the state where the research was conducted, the results of the report were deemed relevant primarily for this article. The results cannot be used to evaluate crime in other states without analysis of similar data. Of note was the reporting that curfew violations and loitering reported decreased 93.6% from 2010 to 2011 and trespassing increased 22.9% from 118 in 2010 to 145 in 2011, as those were traditional gang-related crimes.

The purpose of the current study was to examine individuals' perceptions of the presence of gang members on college and university campuses. First, we reviewed the existing literature regarding gangs and crime in higher education. Next we discussed of the methodology of the study, followed by the findings of the research. The findings appeared to provide the first examination of individuals' perceptions regarding the presence of gangs in colleges or universities. Lastly, policy implications of the study were discussed.

Literature Review

Theories explaining gang crime. Gangs are unique organizations and their members are seen as representing both themselves as individuals and the gang as an organization. The theories from what has been referred to as the *Chicago School* address both the individual and the organization, and include the following. Sutherland (1940) proposed a social learning theory called differential association in contradiction to the notion that crimes were committed only by those in the lower social classes. The principles of differential association proposed by Sutherland included the premise that criminal behavior was learned in communication with others within intimate personal groups. The process of learning criminal behavior by association with criminal and anti-criminal patterns involves all the mechanisms involved in any other learning process (Sutherland, 1940).

Shaw and McKay's (1942) social disorganization theory held that social disorganization produced weak institutional controls, which in turn loosened the constraints on individuals' natural propensity to deviate. Traditions of delinquency were passed on through the generations in the same way language, roles, and attitudes were transmitted (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Social disorganization was seen as the inability of local

government to solve problems and understand the needs of the community, and suggested community empowerment as a solution to the gang problem.

A modification to differential association theory resulted in Glaser's (1956) theory of differential identification, which meant "a person pursues criminal behavior to the extent that he identifies himself with real or imaginary persons from whose perspective his criminal behavior seems acceptable" (p. 440). Prior identification and present circumstances play key roles in the selection of people with whom we identify and associate (Glaser, 1956). The observation affects our ability to associate with one group (e.g., a criminal street gang), while maintaining employment by or membership in a second group whose institutional values and norms oppose those of the first group (e.g., the college or university student body). Glaser observed that using the differential identification theory to explain an individual's participation in crime was not difficult.

Differential opportunity theory (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960) focused on the intervening variables that account for the forms crime and deviance can take. In their analysis, an opportunity deemed illegal or illegitimate was a chance to get away with a criminal or deviant act. Such actions required learning and expressing the beliefs necessary for support from the particular subcultural. The foundation of the theory was: "the disparity between what lower class youth are led to want and what is actually available to them is the source of a major problem of adjustment" (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960, p. 86). Many individuals resent the push for success they feel but believe that money is the means for that success, and the gap between ability and desire provides an inclination toward criminal involvement (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960).

Knox (1981) examined the use of structural and subcultural models of social- and reintegration for exoffenders and proposed the use of a synthesis of the two in the concept of differential integration. The concept of differential integration was based on the commonality of emphasis on group affiliation in both structural and subcultural approaches (Knox, 1981). Knox (1981) observed that exoffenders have limited legitimate opportunities and are, as a result, less integrated into the traditional, law-abiding community while having ready access to many subgroups in the community more inclined toward deviance. Differential integration states that the explanation for why exoffenders return to criminal activity (recidivate) involves both the limited opportunities they face and the attraction of the deviant subculture to which they are exposed.

Those theories, as applied to the study of gang members in higher education, have provided a platform on which to examine simultaneous membership in organizations with conflicting roles in society. The theories serve to explain the troubles associated with the social integration of gang members into legitimate sectors of opportunity, i.e. the learning structure of higher education, while having membership in not only a deviant group but also a possibly violent and criminal lifestyle such as that found accompanying gang membership. If applied to gang members, the theories would explain the difficulties they have adapting to jobs, communities, relationships, and lifestyles that favor an absence of criminal activity. Those theories may also explain a lack of matriculation, dropping out, inability to graduate on-time, poor academic performance, cheating, and related activities gang members may experience in higher education.

Higher education and gang crime. The presence of gangs in K-12 schools was not surprising considering the typical ages of gang members (Alpert, Rojek, Hansen, Shannon, and Decker, 2011). What may have been surprising was that gang members in higher education were not as distinguishable from the general population. Encounters with gang members may have been expected in large and not-so-large urban areas, but most would not have expected such an encounter in the typical college or university setting.

As individuals have increased their commitment to gangs they have withdrawn from school life, which has led to declined attendance rates, disciplinary actions, poor academic performance, and ultimately dropping out of school (Klein, 1995; Spergel, 1995). Gang members have been disproportionately involved in criminal activity (Thornberry, 1998).

Gang membership has been correlated with academic failure (Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003). A pattern of low academic achievement and dropping out in K-12 education has created obvious challenges for those needing to meet the academic standards to enter college (Alpert, et al., 2011). Those patterns were not universal, though, and some gang members have performed at minimally qualifying academic levels or even excelled (Alpert, et al., 2011).

A connection between gang membership and college education has been identified in a variety of disciplines. It was deemed noteworthy that three of the organizations responding to the 2011 NGIC survey were University Police Departments. Economics, sociology, criminal justice and psychology were among the academic disciplines in which gang activity in higher education has been briefly examined.

Martin's (1993) essay reflected on in-class conversations like whether colleges and universities should allow gang members to attend classes. Many of the students were wearing hats, though only one had it cocked to the side (at the time that was an indicator of potential gang membership). When asked, many explained they had not combed their hair and found the wearing of a hat more presentable. Martin (1993) noted there was no university policy on wearing gang colors and he was asked by the dean to develop one. The essay was written while he was awaiting approval from university faculty leadership.

Economist Levitt and Sociologist Venkatesh (2000) examined the profits of a Chicago-based drug gang relative to legitimate labor market activities. The average wage of gang members was somewhat above legitimate opportunities, but not appreciably so (Levitt & Venkatesh, 2000). The gang operated in an area with very high unemployment (over 35% -- 6 times the national average) and 40% of the males were not in the labor force (Levitt & Venkatesh, 2000). Median family income was half the national average, at \$15,077, and roughly one-third of the gang leaders were incarcerated at any given time.

That gang, according to Levitt and Dubner (2006), was run by a college-educated leader named *J.T.*, who reported to the gang's board of directors. *J.T.* had between 25 and 75 paid subordinates working for him, with as many as 200 gang members under his leadership. *J.T.* earned over \$100,000 in untaxed income, until he was promoted to the board of directors, making an estimated \$500,000 per year (Levitt & Dubner, 2006). That income represented a significantly higher amount than he made during his brief office job following college (Levitt & Dubner, 2006).

Cadwallar (2010) examined potential correlations and relationships between membership in fraternities and gangs. The study posed questions regarding club and fraternity participation, tattoos, musical preference, academic standing, demographics, and acquaintance with gang members from before college (Cadwallar, 2010). The study included the party, risk, competent, and withdrawn factors. Finding no relationship between the variables in the self-reported survey questionnaires, the researcher suggested future studies examine non-traditional, non-sanctioned, off-campus organizations.

Cureton and Bellamy (2007) interviewed a college junior, known as *Sweet T*, a member of the Rigsby Court Gangster Bloods street gang from San Antonio, TX. *Sweet T* joined the gang at age 14 and was well known as a fighter. He was raised in a two-parent home, and his father was a minister. He reported a perfect home life, significant exposure to organized religious activities, and recruitment by the gang leaders while spending a lot of time alone, as his parents both worked (Cureton & Bellamy, 2007).

Sweet T did not enroll in his senior year. He left school to return to the gang life, explaining that he felt at home and comfortable, and he mattered there (Cureton & Bellamy, 2007). The gang offered him freedom and independence from the conventional regulation of the University. *Sweet T* said he traded the University life for the regulation of the gang (Cureton & Bellamy, 2007). His decision to leave the University was framed by economic hardship, less than ideal academic performance, an inability to integrate with the social scene, and continued affiliation with his gang (Cureton & Bellamy, 2007). After a brief time in which he realized that gang life was for younger men, *Sweet T* joined the United States Air Force, and when last heard from by the researcher, was attending college classes part-time

(Cureton & Bellamy, 2007).

Though the literature in this area is growing, it has yet to provide an accurate portrayal of the problems associated with mixing gang members with the traditional student population. Gang leaders are likely to recruit more from and send their members to institutions of higher education. Are our colleges and universities able to address the resulting increase in students who regularly associate with individuals who commit crimes as part of their organizational mission or who have a criminal past?

More street gang members are adults. Many communities have not counted adults when they refer to gang members (Klein, 1995). A recent study found a significant increase in the average age of gang members from 20.03-26.59 between 1996 and 2006 (Etter & Swymeler, 2006). Though many street gang members were in their 20s and 30s, most had average ages in adolescence or early 20s (Klein, 2005). That appeared to have changed, as reflected in the data in Table 1, with a summary of findings, with a comparison of each of the studies' findings of gang member demographics, by age.

* Katz and Webb (2006) found that most (79% or more) gang members in Phoenix, Albuquerque, and Las Vegas were young adults 18 - 36 years old.

* The National Youth Gang Center's (NYGC) annual survey has shown a progressive increase in adult gang members for almost every year since 1996.

* In 2007, the New Jersey State Police (NJSP) Street Gang Bureau found that most (60%) gang members in 2001 were adults.

* The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) 2007 Statewide Gang Survey indicated 56.5% of the state gang population was adults.

Table 1: Summary of Findings by Age

Location	Adult %	Juvenile %
Arizona (Phoenix) (2000)	84.2	15.8
Florida (2007)	56.5	38.4
Nevada (Las Vegas) (1998)	79.0	11.0
New Jersey (2004)	53.0	47.0
New Mexico (Albuquerque) (1999)	88.6	10.5
United States (2006)	63.5	36.5
Average	70.8	26.5

Adapted from "2007 Statewide Gang Survey Results," by the Florida Dept. of Law Enforcement; "Policing Gangs in America" by Charles M. Katz and Vincent J. Webb, 2006, New York: Cambridge University Press, pages 98-114; National Youth gang survey analysis, by the NYGC, 2009, and Gangs in New Jersey: Municipal law enforcement response to the 2007 NJSP survey.

Advanced gangs require more educated leaders. Three generations (or types) of gangs, turf gangs, drug or entrepreneurial gangs, and globally oriented gangs with a mix of political and mercenary elements, have been identified (Sullivan & Bunker, 2007). First generation gangs have been characterized as traditional street gangs. Understanding the evolutionary continuum and its relationship to those generations was critical in attempts to understand the impact of those groups on national security (Wilson & Sullivan, 2007). The analysts who authored the NGIC report (2009, 2011) identified those first generation gangs as local-level street gangs, which comprise the highest number of gangs in the United States.

Second generation gangs have had a more organized structure and the leaders have operated the gang like a business. Members of those gangs tended to have more of a market orientation (Sullivan & Bunker, 2007). Those gangs usually operated in a broader geographic area and had a more centralized and developed leadership (Sullivan & Bunker, 2007). Members of those gangs were more likely to benefit from higher education as their roles serving the gang would likely be in leadership, transportation, logistics, communications, and finance, and gang members with higher education may have successfully concealed their gang affiliation and activity from law enforcement. Authors of the NGIC reports (2009, 2011) identified those gangs as regional-level street gangs, which

may have some members in foreign countries and maintain ties to drug trafficking and other criminal organizations in the United States.

Third generation gangs were highly sophisticated, with goals of political power or financial acquisition (Sullivan & Bunker, 2007). Third generation gangs were highly organized and sophisticated criminal organizations, and tended to operate in a global environment (Sullivan & Bunker). Members of those gangs, especially those in leadership positions, were most likely to benefit from the advanced thought process encouraged by higher education. Authors of the NGIC report (2009, 2011) identified those gangs as national-level street gangs, which have established cells in foreign countries that assist the gangs operating in the United States in developed associations with global drug trafficking and other criminal organizations.

Gang members have become more sophisticated in their operations. Gangs in several jurisdictions have modified or ceased traditional or stereotypical gang indicia and no longer display colors, tattoos, or hand signs (NGIC, 2011). NGIC reporting indicated gangs were becoming more involved in white collar crime, including identity theft, bank fraud, credit card fraud, money laundering, fencing stolen goods, counterfeiting, and mortgage fraud, and were recruiting members who possess those skill sets (NGIC, 2011). Advanced skill sets like those may be found by recruiting college-educated students with a propensity or receptiveness toward gang membership. Some gang members have committed sophisticated mortgage fraud schemes by purchasing properties with the intent to receive seller assistance loans and, ultimately retain the proceeds from the loans, or to commingle illicit funds through mortgage payments. Gang members have also exploited vulnerabilities in the banking and mortgage industries for profit (NGIC, 2011). Students with college and university classes in Accounting and Finance may well find themselves seated in class next to gang members.

Research Method

The present study was designed as an exploratory analysis intended to identify the perceived presence of gangs on college and university campuses, and the effects of gang members on the campus community. The research question was to what extent is there a difference in individuals' perceptions of the presence of gang members on college and university campuses by the control variable of campus role (student or campus police)? The research was conducted on data from a convenience sample drawn from primary and secondary acquaintances of the principle investigator. The participants were campus police officers who were trained in a variety of aspects of investigations, and students attending introductory courses in criminal justice at a large, public university in the southeast United States. Because only limited research existed with regard to gang members on college and university campuses, the study used the researcher-developed College Gang Perception Questionnaire (CGPQ). The survey was loosely based on a survey designed by Melita (1990) which examined the perceptions of school administrators and law enforcement personnel regarding gang activity. Melita (1990) studied the differences in perceptions regarding gang activity and asked respondents were asked about their perceptions of gang graffiti, attire, communication, territorialization/turf, campus disruption, and a general overview of perceived problems in the schools, the school system, and surrounding neighborhoods. Melita (1990) found significant differences in perception between groups (administrative and law enforcement) with questions that focused on gangs in the schools and gang problems in the neighborhoods surrounding the schools.

The CGPQ was administered in printed form to the campus police officers and in digital form to the students. The delivery was different only for convenience, as the police officers were handed the questionnaires during training and the students were emailed the survey to take at their leisure toward the end of the course. The CGPQ consisted of personal experience, perceptions, and opinion questions.

Campus police officers are a primary source of knowledge on the criminal and related activities that occur on university campuses. Students, especially those attending criminal

justice classes, were expected to have a different perspective, including a tendency to be aware of fellow students who may be engaged in gang activity. The campus police were recruited by personal contact either face-to-face, during a training session. Students were recruited from introductory criminal justice courses. Nineteen police officers responded to the survey, which was conducted at two separate in-service training sessions for multiple college and university police departments at a large, four-year, state university in the southeast United States. One hundred and seventy-five students responded, representing the majority of students registered for one of three of the same courses taught by the same professor at the same large, four-year, state university in the southeast United States.

Survey Questions. Eight Likert items assessing the participants' level of agreement with statements about gangs were assessed with a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). Demographic questions followed consisting of questions about the respondent and the university they attended or worked for. An open-ended question was placed at the end of the survey, offering respondents an opportunity to clarify or address issues in more detail.

Results

Of particular note (see Table 2) was the percentage of student respondents who agreed or strongly agreed there was a gang problem in the community around campus (22%) while a much larger majority (66%) of the police respondents agreed with the statement. Also noteworthy were the similarity in perceptions with students agreeing there was a gang problem within the campus community (20%) and the percentage of police reporting the same (28%).

Table 2
Frequencies and Percentages for Likert Items

	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>No opinion</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
There is a gang problem in the community around my campus. (<i>N</i> =171) (<i>Students</i>)	28 (16%)	41 (24%)	64 (37%)	24 (14%)	14 (8%)
There is a gang problem within my campus community. (<i>N</i> =171) (<i>Students</i>)	31 (18%)	59 (35%)	54 (32%)	18 (11%)	9 (5%)
There is a gang problem in the community around my campus. (<i>N</i> =18) (<i>Police</i>)	1 (6%)	4 (22%)	1 (6%)	6 (33%)	6 (33%)
There is a gang problem within my campus community. (<i>N</i> =18) (<i>Police</i>)	1 (6%)	5 (28%)	7 (39%)	3 (17%)	2 (11%)

When asked to "Please estimate what percentage of crime on campus is committed by gang members?" Most (88%) police thought gang members were responsible for less than 10% of crime on campus, while half (50%) of the student respondents thought gang members were responsible for over 10% of crime on campus.

When asked to "Please estimate what percentage of your student body are active gang members?" Most of the students (62%) reported less than 10%. About one in four (23%) reported they thought between 11-25% of their fellow students were active gang members, while one in ten (10%) estimated 25-50% of students were active members. Similarly, most of the police respondents (69%) were of the opinion that less than 10% of the students at their university were active gang members. About one in eight (13%) thought the population of gang members in the student body was between 11-25%. The remainder thought that none of the students had active gang affiliation.

When asked to identify which gangs were represented in the student body, the Bloods (96%), Crips (89%), and Gangster Disciples (58%) received the top votes, with the Vice Lords (36%), Skinheads (20%), and Aryan's (16%) receiving the next highest. Respondents were asked to choose all that apply, so the percentages far exceed 100% as most

chose more than one group. The police respondents ranked the Gangster Disciples highest (60%), followed by the Bloods (50%) and Crips (50%), the Mara Salvatrucha (30%) and 18 Street (30%), the Vice Lords (20%) and Skinheads (20%).

An additional question inquired of the *crimes committed by gang members on campus*. Drugs (79%), assaults (73%), and assorted weapons crimes (70%), followed by robberies (64%) and sexual assaults (40%) were reported. The police respondents ranked drugs (75%), robberies (67%), assaults (58%) and weapons offenses (58%). Sexual assaults were deemed gang related by 25%.

When asked “Does your organization have a formal policy that prohibits STUDENTS from displaying gang colors or symbols on their person (clothing, jewelry, etc.) while ON CAMPUS?” Over one-third (37%) of the students thought there was such a policy. A smaller percentage (17%) of the police thought there was such a policy.

When asked “Does your organization have a formal policy that prohibits STUDENTS from displaying gang colors or symbols (graffiti, symbols, etc.) in their dormitory room?” Almost one-half (44%) of the students thought there was such a policy. A smaller percentage (19%) of the police thought there was such a policy.

Discussion

Gangs have expanded their sophisticated criminal networks (NGIC, 2011). Gangs have engaged in white collar crime due to the high profitability and much lower visibility and risk of detection and punishment (NGIC, 2011). Gang members have become increasingly adaptable and sophisticated. They have employed new and advanced technology to facilitate criminal activity discreetly, enhance their criminal operations, and connect with others (NGIC, 2011). Gang members were responsible for an average of 48 percent of violent crime in most jurisdictions and up to 90 percent in several others, according to NGIC (2011) analysis. Major cities and suburban areas experienced the most gang-related violence. Since 2009, gang membership increased most significantly in the Northeast and Southeast United States (NGIC, 2009).

Most (88%) police thought gang members were responsible for less than 10%, while half (50%) of the student respondents thought gang members were responsible for over 10% of crime on campus. Those differences in perceptions may be explained by respondent engagement with criminal gang activity, though both groups may have been wrong. The NGIC (2011) estimated up to 48 percent of violent crime in most jurisdictions and up to 90 percent in several others.

Most of the students (62%) and most of the police respondents (69%) reported less than 10% of students were active gang members. About one in four (23%) of the students and one in eight (13%) of the police officers reported they thought between 11-25% of their fellow students were active gang members. The remainder thought that none of the students had active gang affiliation. The similarities in perceptions may mean those numbers are accurate. Alternatively, there may be members of 2^d and 3rd generation gangs (Sullivan & Bunker, 2007). attending the university. Those groups were more likely to conceal their gang affiliation and blend in with the student body. Alpert, et al. (2011) found a large proportion of campus chiefs, 19.5%, reported direct knowledge of a student-athlete who retained gang membership while at their university.

The Bloods (96%), Crips (89%), and Gangster Disciples (58%) received the top votes by students as gangs represented in the student body, with the Vice Lords (36%), Skinheads (20%), and Aryan’s (16%) receiving the next highest. The police respondents ranked the Gangster Disciples highest (60%), followed by the Bloods (50%) and Crips (50%), the Mara Salvatrucha (30%) and 18 Street (30%), the Vice Lords (20%) and Skinheads (20%). The differences appear to indicate not necessarily a difference in representation, but a difference in the extent of representation.

Drugs (79%), assaults (73%), and assorted weapons crimes (70%), followed by robberies (64%) and sexual assaults (40%) were reported as crimes committed by gang members on campus. Those figures and their order were similar to the statistics reported by

the Tennessee Bureau of Investigations (TBI) (2011) in their summary of crimes 2008-2010 (the years in which the surveys were administered). The police respondents ranked drugs (75%), robberies (67%), assaults (58%) and weapons offenses (58%). Sexual assaults were deemed gang related by 25%. The TBI reported a total of 122 crimes in 2010, with the highest number of aggravated assaults (57), followed by robbery (30), sexual assault (forcible fondling) (18), and forcible rape (10). Those similarities indicated what appeared to be an accurate estimation of the types of crimes committed by gang members. In the NGIC (2011) survey, 69 percent of U.S. law enforcement agencies report gang involvement in drug distribution. Many campus police chiefs reported that gang members on their athletic teams were involved in selling drugs, possessing firearms, and committing burglaries (Alpert, et al., 2011).

Over one-third (37%) of the students thought there was a formal policy that prohibited students from displaying gang colors or symbols on their person (clothing, jewelry, etc.) while on campus or in their dormitory room. No indication of such a policy was seen in a search of administrative prohibitions or known of by any of the police officers, though a small percentage (17%) of the police thought there was such a policy. As Martin (1993) noted, there was some logic to having a policy, though this author has learned many administrators would rather not address the issue.

Community members perceive gang presence differently, apparently depending on their role in the community. Less than one in four student respondents (22%) agreed or strongly agreed that there was a gang problem in the community around their campus, while a much larger percentage (66%) of the police respondents agreed with the statement. Students and police agreed in more similar percentages (20% and 28%, respectively) there was a gang problem within the campus community. Most (88%) police thought gang members were responsible for less than 10% of crime on campus, while only half (50%) of the student respondents thought gang members were responsible for over 10% of crime on campus.

Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to examine individuals' perceptions of the presence of gang members on college campuses. The research question was to what extent is there a difference in individuals' perceptions of the presence of gang members on college campuses by the control variable of campus role (student or campus police)? The CGPQ was administered to students and campus police.

Most of the students (62%) and police (69%) reported less than 10% of the students were active gang members. About one in four students (23%) and one in eight (13%) police reported between 11-25% of the students were active gang members, while one in ten (10%) of the students estimated 25-50% were. The Bloods, Crips, and Gangster Disciples were the top three gangs in the campus community for both groups. Drugs crimes, assaults, assorted weapons crimes, robberies and sexual assaults were reported as gang-related crimes. Those figures and their order were similar to those reported by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigations (TBI) (2011) in their summary of crimes 2008-2010 (the years in which the surveys were administered). Alpert, et al. (2011) found a large proportion of campus chiefs, 19.5%, reported direct knowledge of a student-athlete who retained gang membership while at their university.

Many of the students thought there was a formal policy that prohibited students from displaying gang colors or symbols on their person (37%) or in their dorm room (44%). No indication of such a policy was seen in a search of administrative prohibitions or known of by any of the police officers, though a small percentage (17-19%) of the police thought there was such a policy.

Though many students and some police officers were of the impression there were university policies designed to prevent gang affiliation and activity, actual knowledge of such policies was absent. That was a problem as it reflected a lack of information from university administration regarding their stance of active gang participation on campus.

Recommendations developed from the study include:

*** University police should (continue to) coordinate with adjacent and regional law enforcement to ensure awareness of gang activity trends and sharing of gang intelligence.

*** University police should incorporate information on gang indicators in their crime prevention briefings, and track incidents that are or could be gang-related.

*** University administration should incorporate warnings and the identification of gang presence indicators to faculty, staff, and students to ensure they are informed and able to identify (and avoid) potential gang members).

*** The state bureau of investigations should categorize the crimes they analyze as gang-related if the activity meets state law-defined criteria. Though initially the number of gang-related crimes may be low, with an increased emphasis in identification of gang activity, an increase should follow.

This preliminary study examined the perceptions of a small population of police and students affiliated with a large public university. As the data and analysis represented only one state university, the results of the report should serve to further the discussion on this increasingly important topic. The results cannot be used to evaluate crime in other states without analysis of similar data. Though the study was clearly not conducted of a representative sample of students or campus police officers, it is hoped that the study can add to the foundation of literature in this area. Future studies should explore perceptions of students, staff, and faculty at colleges and universities of all sizes, especially in states elsewhere in the country with students outside the criminal justice field and discipline. Coordination with local law enforcement would provide a more complete evaluation of campus and university gang problems.

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About the Author

Carter F. Smith, J. D., Ph.D. has been involved in military and federal law enforcement for over twenty-two years, and was the team chief for the Army's first gang and hate crime investigations team. He has provided training on gangs to the Florida, Georgia, Northwest, Oklahoma, and Tennessee Gang Investigators Associations, the Regional Organized Crime Information Center, the National Gang Crime Research Center, the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS), the National Crime Prevention Council, the Southern Criminal Justice Association (SCJA), the Department of Justice, and the U.S. Army. He was a founding (Executive) board member of the Tennessee Gang Investigators Association and is a member of the Speaker's Bureau for the National Alliance of Gang Investigator Associations. He is a member of the CID Special Agents' Association, the ACJS, SCJA, and the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), a recipient of the CID Command Enlisted Special Agent of the Year award, and a recipient of the Frederic Milton Thrasher Award of the National Gang Crime Research Center. He has taught criminal justice university courses since 2004, and is currently an Assistant Professor at Austin Peay State University, in Clarksville, TN.

A copy of the survey instrument used for this study is available upon request from the author.