THE CORRELATES OF SPECIALIZED POLICE GANG UNITS

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Dustin C. Gaines

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by

Dustin C. Gaines

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APPROVED:

Jurg Gerber, PhD
Dissertation Director

Willard Oliver, PhD
Committee Member

Brittany Hayes, PhD
Committee Member

Phillip Lyons, PhD
Dean, College of Criminal Justice

DEDICATION

I owe a great deal to the many individuals who have helped me finish this dissertation. Some of them have provided sound guidance throughout the process while others have simply provided some support for while I worked through a rut. First, I like to thank the three members of my committee, Drs. Jurg Gerber, Willard Oliver, and Brittany Hayes. They have exhibited a stalwart patience with me when their first agreement to join the committee to this dissertation's defense. Though they may say they were only doing their jobs, they have left me in a debt of gratitude. I'd also like to thank my wife, Nancy Gartner, and my parents, Larry and Jean Gaines. They have been a limitless source of social support for me and I can only hope to meet their high expectations for my future.

ABSTRACT

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This study's analyses are the result of a combination of secondary data from the U.S. Decennial Census, Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the National Gang Center. Hypotheses are made and tested on the relationship between specialized police gang units and the multiple indicators of crime as well as the relationship between a variety of theoretical and atheoretical explanations, including those provided by contingency theory and social threat theory, for why gang units are implemented in their respective jurisdictions. A combination of logistic and OLS regressions first find that jurisdictions with gang units do not experience crime rates any lower than those rates found in jurisdictions without gang units. Second, the presence of gang units in a given jurisdiction is not a reflection of a police department's response to gang activity but a jurisdiction being heavily populated, racially diverse, and socioeconomically equal and police department's preference for specialized investigative units. Overall, these findings support a reevaluation of gang units' role in their police departments and respective communities, but are limited by the cross-sectional nature of the data used in this study.

KEY WORDS: Inequality, Gangs, Police organizations, Race, Specialized units

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Table **Page**

CHAPTER I

Introduction

America's crusade against gangs has entered its second century. Despite the presence of gangs since American cities were but colonies, the first war on gangs was declared in New York in 1916 (Hasking, 1974). American gangs' story is largely intertwined with American history; the major waves of gang crime follow the waves of immigrants, industrialization, and urbanization that defined the United States as a *melting pot* (Howell, 1998). While White gangs have been recognized for centuries, Black gangs first received widespread recognition in the early 1900s, when large numbers of Blacks moved North (Adamson, 2000). Black gangs did not appear until gangs, themselves, changed "from caste- to class-specific forms of segregation which did not get underway until the second quarter of the twentieth century" (Adamson, 2000, p. 290). White gangs successfully integrated White immigrants into mainstream society while Black gangs bolstered Blacks' notions and perceptions of racial segregation and isolation (Adamson, 2000).

The notion that gangs are inherently criminal originates in some of the earliest criminological theories. Puffer (1912) viewed gangs as a major component of juvenile socialization that may positively impact the development of a juvenile's values. Competing explanations place blame on this reimagining of gangs on either changes in racial demographics across America (see Hagedorn, n.d.) or the boom in illegal drug markets in the nation (Swift, 2011). Howell and Griffiths (2016), upon examining the history of gangs, explain that minority population migration, especially to larger cities, resulted in racial friction and violence, and minority groups formed gangs to protect

themselves or to compete with White gangs. This led to gangs having a higher profile and being recognized as a more fermentable social problem. In terms of drugs, Howell and Griffiths (2016) noted that these gangs melded into the street culture while selling and using drugs. Subsequently, gangs such as the Bloods and Crips achieved a national reputation for drug dealing and violence.

Gang activity is an ever-changing social phenomenon with entire gangs forming and dissipating differently from year to year (National Gang Center, n. d.). Prosecutors and law enforcement officials believe that the gang membership, gang-related violence, and citizens' complaints about gangs have consistently increased over multiple years (Johnson, Webster, Connors, & Saenz, 1995; Katz & Webb, 2004). Law enforcement officials' beliefs on what causes gang violence are changing over time (National Gang Center, n.d.). Paradoxically, police responses towards gangs are trending towards homogeneity while gangs' compositions are trending towards heterogeneity (Curry, Ball, & Fox, 1994; Weisel & Painter, 1997). Youthful gang members tend to be quite diverse with ages ranging from ages 12-17, youths of all races "with Black and Latino/Latina youth [being] somewhat overrepresented," and with females being more proportional with male gang members at younger ages (Esbensen & Carson, 2012, p. 478; Pyrooz, 2014).

Police officials are aware of the variation of gang participation in drug sales and trafficking across different jurisdictions (Weisel & Painter, 1997). Outside of metropolitan jurisdictions, many jurisdictions have transitional gang problems; gangs are present some years and absent other years (Wells & Weisheit, 2001). During a period of record low homicide rates, the NYPD expanded its gang unit by three-fold through a

2012 initiative known as 'Operation Crew-Cut' (Howell, 2015). Despite our nation's long history with gangs, the severity of gangs, as a problem, appears fluid and hopefully, amendable through policy intervention.

Arguably, the primary justification for targeting gangs, as opposed to typical criminals, is based on the belief that gang members commit more crimes and are a greater threat to public safety. In studying this belief, academics often compare gang members' offense rates with non-gang member offenders' rates (Block, 2000; Esbensen, Petersen, Taylor, & Freng, 2010; Friedman, Mann, & Friedman, 1975; Huff, 1996; Katz & Webb, 2004; Klein et al., 1986; Miller, 1982). Studies have identified a variety of differences between gang members and non-gang member delinquents including higher rates of criminal activity, a higher likelihood to engage in violent crime, and/or serious narcotics offenses (Friedman et al., 1975; Katz & Webb, 2004; Katz, Webb, & Schaefer, 2000). Research evidence supports the notion that gang members commit larger volumes of crime, particularly violent crime, when compared with non-delinquents or non-gang delinquents, and their highest levels of crime occur when they are active members of the gang (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Huff, 1996; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, & Chard-Wierschem, 1993). Gang members can offend at rates 2 to 4 times higher than the rates of other individuals (Huff, 1996). Gangs can account for up nine-tenths of the violent offending in some jurisdictions and nearly half of all violent crime across all jurisdictions (National Gang Intelligence Center (NGIC), 2012). While gang-related homicides vary substantively from year to year, gangs make substantial contributions to the overall homicide rate (Decker & Curry, 2002; Rosenfeld, Bray, & Egley, 1999). Juvenile gang members commit a disproportionately greater percentage of homicides in major cities

given the small percentage of the total juvenile population who are gang members (Miller, 1982). Gang members commit homicide at 100 times the rate of other individuals (Decker & Pyrooz, 2010a). Further, gang-related homicides disproportionately account for homicides involving firearms (Klein et al., 1986) and homicides occurring on the streets, locations where police activities should most easily deter crime (Klein et al., 1986; Rosenfeld et al., 1999). Gang activity results in both younger homicide victims and younger homicide offenders (Decker & Curry, 2002; Klein et al., 1986). Nearly half of major city police departments report that youth gangs in their jurisdictions commit serious violent crimes (Needle & Stapleton, 1983). Spatially, there is more violent and drug-related crime in city spaces where there is a larger number of gangs (Block, 2000).

Similar to the research results on chronic offenders, surveys of offending show that although gang members make up a small percentage of all offenders, they account for the majority of violent crime reported (Esbensen et al., 2010). Individuals' offending increases upon joining a gang and decreases upon leaving a gang (Melde & Esbensen, 2013; Thornberry et al., 1993). According to analyses of data from the Seattle Social Development Project and Rochester Youth Development Study, the effects of gang membership on criminality are both independent of and stronger than the effects of delinquent peer effects (Battin-Pearson, Thornberry, Hawkins, & Krohn, 1998). Also similar to chronic offenders, gang membership can extend criminality beyond individuals' adolescent years of development (Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003). Even before joining a gang, juveniles are more criminally active than other juveniles who do not go on to join a gang (Huff, 1998).

Decker (2007) warns of the persistence of gangs, the increasing number of gang members, and gangs' disproportionate impact on crime. Gangs are a significant danger to public safety and the functioning of communities' most important social institutions. Given the characteristics and effects of gangs, Decker advocates for greater law enforcement against gangs.

Other researchers have found reason to question the assumption that gangs are a consistent and serious threat to public order and safety. Juveniles, who are gang members, differ from non-offending juveniles on several criminogenic factors, but are quite like juveniles who are not gang members but participate in serious criminal offending (Esbensen, Huizinga, & Weiher, 1993). Needle and Stapleton (1983) find that serious offenses by juveniles make up nearly 40% of total juvenile arrests, but less than 10% of total arrests. These numbers allow one to frame gang issues as either a serious or a non-serious issue. Officers assigned to gang units believe that gangs are responsible for substantial portions of crime in their jurisdictions when those officers' own units estimate that gangs account for small portions of crime (Katz & Webb, 1986). While some researchers state that gangs are becoming increasingly involved in drug trafficking (Curry, Decker, & Pyrooz, 2013; Fagan, 1989) and drugs are a major component in gang life and violence (Fagan, 1989), others downplay the role of gangs as replaceable service-providers to larger drug cartels (Swift, 2011) who have little impact on underground drug markets (Decker & Van Winkle, 1994). Some provide typologies recognizing the existence of gangs that are a serious public concern and those that are not (Skolnick, Correl, Navarro, & Rabb, 1990).

Most major city police and community agency personnel believe that gangs exist to sell drugs (Spergel, Curry, Ross, & Chance, 1990) and in some cases drug sales are used as an indicator of gang presence (Archbold & Meyer, 1999). Howell's (1999) literature review on gang homicides finds that drug markets indirectly contribute to gang homicides. Specifically, demand for illegal drugs, draws competing gangs closer to one another's territory, allowing for the occurrence of inter-gang conflicts, which represent a major source of gang-related homicides. However, Howell (1999) concludes researchers should treat the effects of gang membership on gang-related homicide as independent of the effects of the transportation and sales of illegal drugs. In other words, drug trafficking is a complex process with different activities exposing gang members to different levels of violence.

A report reviewing relevant research by the Justice Policy Institute by Greene and Pranis (2007) determined that there is some overestimation of gangs' contribution to rates of violence and drug sales. They explain that this error may be a result of gang members making many of their crimes and criminal lifestyles publicly known. News and official depictions of gangs focus on cases of serious violent crimes that are unrepresentative of the totality of crimes committed by gangs. Further, news and official sources often depict all crimes of a type or in an area, such as drug sales, as being specifically gang-related. Essentially, the media is in the business of selling drama, resulting in overestimates of gangs and gang activities (Greene & Pranis, 2007). Curry (2015) also discusses that some caution should be used when looking at "gangs, gang members, or gang crimes" as these all are tied to the definition of a gang that is being used (p.7).

One particularly significant dataset that measures gang activity is the National Gang Center's (n.d.) National Youth Gangs Survey (NYGS) which started in 1996 and ceased data collection in 2012. Data from this survey is collected from a nationally representative sample of police departments and is one of the only national estimates of gang activity in the United States. An analysis of NYGS data indicates that the percentage of sampled police departments with known gang problems was at its highest at 1996 with 39.9%, fell to a low of 23.9% in 2001, rebounded to 33.6% in 2005, and remained, on average, at 32.9% until the survey's final wave in 2012 (NYGS, n.d.). Each year, more heavily populated counties and cities have higher percentages of gang prevalence. Across multiple years, areas of each population level (e.g., larger cities, suburban counties, smaller cities, rural counties) have comparable trends in their percentages of gang prevalence over time. In other words, the rise and fall of the percentage of larger cities with gangs from year to year positively associate with the rise and fall of the percentage of suburban counties with gangs and so on. Nonetheless, the portion of large cities with gangs varies least year-to-year compared to cities or counties with smaller populations.

The NYGS (n.d.) also asks police departments to identify when their jurisdictions first experienced gangs as a problem. Roughly half of all large cities first experienced gangs before the 1990s while another third of large cities experienced gangs during the 1990s (National Gang Center, n.d.). For jurisdictions with increasingly smaller populations, gangs are a more recent social problem. More than 30% of all small cities and rural counties first experienced gangs during the 2000s (National Gang Center, n.d.). In line with this trend, jurisdictions with increasingly smaller populations have a larger

portion of their gangs that are composed of juvenile (as opposed to adult) gangs (National Gang Center, n.d.).

While gang territories are typically imagined as in the inner most areas of major cities, consistent with a concentric zone or social disorganization perspective, researchers have found that the relationship between city size and gang activity is weak (Spergel et al., 1990). According to the NYGS's (n.d.) results, roughly two-fifths of all gangs are in large cities (i.e., cities populated with at least 50,000 residents) and half of all gangs are split between suburban counties and smaller cities (National Gang Center, n.d.). Overall, 30% of large cities have between five and ten gangs, a quarter of large cities have between eleven and twenty-five gangs, and a quarter of large cities have more than twenty-five gangs (National Gang Center, n.d.). Only about one in twenty gangs are found in rural counties with half of those counties having between one and five gangs (National Gang Center, n.d.). The number of gangs is typically highest in the most heavily populated jurisdictions. Egley, Howell and Harris (2014) examined National Youth Gang data and found that the number of gangs in the United States diminished over the last year of the survey (2012) with this decrease occurring primarily in small cities. Simultaneously, the estimated number of gang members increased from 782,000 to 850,000. Although there are fewer gangs, those remaining gangs had increasing membership (Egley et al., 2014).

Miethe and McCorkle (2002) describe obstacles to effectively controlling gangs. Police officers are often unknowledgeable regarding gangs and gang members present in their jurisdictions. And witnesses of gang crimes often lack credibility, are intimidated, or do not rely on the criminal justice system for the administration of justice (see also

Burns & Deakin, 1989). The prosecution of gang members requires more time and resources than other cases, requires specialized expertise, and often occurs in both the criminal justice system and the juvenile justice system. Obstacles to convicting gang members are severe enough for prosecutors to prefer pursuing parole and probation violations to trying gang members for new offenses. Burns and Deakin (1989) elaborate that typical detectives do not have the available time and other resources to investigate drug-related offenses properly and because individual detectives do not investigate the pattern of offenses associated with individual gangs; the crimes they investigate appear irrational and out-of-place. And while gangs are changing, selling drugs to wealthier, middle-class users, police continue relying on traditional policing methods rather than meet these changes.

Scholars note the lack of research on law enforcement responses to gang activity (Katz & Webb, 2006; Needle & Stapleton, 1983). Katz and Webb (2006) find that research on anti-gang policing activities is largely anecdotal, fails to account for institutional processes, and fails to measure gang unit officials' activities. Katz, Maguire, and Roncek (2002) emphasize the lack of research on the establishment of specialized policing units, while Katz (2001) calls for the study of the support a gang unit receives from its police department. Katz (2001) also calls for further study on the relationship between socio-politically powerful members of police departments' jurisdictions and the establishment/operation of specialized police units as well as studying the effects of race from sources internal and external to police departments. Decker and Pyrooz (2010b) highlight the lack of research on gang-related homicides that analyze multiple

jurisdictions. Decker and Pyrooz (2010b) conclude that researchers should use available data to study the citywide effects of law enforcement on gang activity.

During the 1980s and the mid-1990s, America was experiencing a rise in gang-related crime (Weisel & Shelley, 2004). This boom in gangs prompted policing agencies to respond with their own boom in the creation of police gang units (Weisel & Shelley, 2004). While this spread of specialized units was despite the perception that such investigative units contradict the organizational changes required to implement a community policing strategy, police departments operated within a climate where law enforcements' goals became opaque (Weisel & Shelley, 2004). When he asked about the goals of gang units, Carlie (2002) received various responses, even from officers assigned to the same gang unit. According to Carlie (2002), gang units' activities can be categorized as "gathering and analyzing intelligence, and making arrests (suppression), other methods include deterrence, education, mediation and diversion and referral" (para. 24). Gang units can provide a variety of services and follow a variety of strategies all with the shared goal of reducing gang activities (Carlie, 2002).

As illustrated in the research review below, there is substantial variation in the definition of gangs as well as police beliefs on and responses to gangs. This variation is often impacted by the social context that police departments operate in. Additionally, these definitions and beliefs on gangs can impact the implementation and operation of gang units, and by extension, their effectiveness in combating gang activity. The review below will also highlight the major theories that can best explain the social, political, and organization creation and conducting of police gang units. Gang units and the variety of services they provide will also be discussed.

This research examines police gang units and their impact on gang problems. Most police departments surveyed by the NYGS have established gang units, resulting in the substantial dedication of public resources towards a reasonably specific anti-gang tactic. This investment raises the question, 'Are gang units effective in combating gang activity (i.e., reduces gang-related crimes and other activities), thus justifying these expenditures?' This dissertation will also analyze the differences between gang units as well as the different contexts gang units operate within to explore how such differences may impact the effectiveness of gang units' efforts. Hence, the second question this study, 'Is the variation in the enactment of specialized police gang units by different police departments explained by contingency theory, and social threat theory?'

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

As previously addressed, gangs persist as a social problem. Gangs remain a relevant issue among policy makers and the public as a source of other societal ills. Police departments combat gang activity using a variety of tactics with specialized gang units receiving specific scrutiny in this study. This research covers both the establishment and the effectiveness of gang units. Specialized gang units are a relatively modern response to the social phenomenon, gangs. What social forces led to the development of these gang units? Why do some police departments, rather than others, choose to create their own gang units? Can a department's decision to implement a gang unit be completely explained by rational decision-making? This review examines the theories behind the development of gang units and gang unit operation. But first, this review discusses the various definitions of gangs as well as some of the obstacles to developing a universal definition of gangs.

Defining Gangs

Over time, several definitions of a gang have been proposed (e.g., Curry et al., 2013; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Hagedorn, 1988; Spergel, 1984). And gang definitions are important as "Gang problem prevalence is linked to how gangs are defined and what unit of analysis—gang, gang members, or gang crimes—is used" (Curry, 2015, p. 7).

One of the first seminal studies on gangs is Thrasher's *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago* (1927/2013). Thrasher (1927/2013) provides one of the first and most multifaceted definitions of gangs.

> The gang is an interstitial group originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict. It is characterized by the following types of behavior: meeting face to face, milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict, and planning. The result of this collective behavior is the development of tradition, unreflective internal structure, esprit de corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness, and attachment to a local territory. (p. 57)

While contributive, other academics criticize Thrasher's (1927/2013) definition for based on merely his own empirical observations, and more importantly Thrasher's (1927/2013) definition considers a gang to be interstitial (i.e., a gang does not have to fulfill all the characteristics included in Thrasher's (1927/2013) definition) (Ball & Curry, 1995; Curry, 2015; Needle & Stapleton, 1983). Therefore, his definition brought little clarity to what a gang was:

> The next iconic definition of a gang was put forward by Klein (1971) as:
> … any denotable group of youngsters who (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood, (b) recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost invariably with a group name), and (c) have been involved in a sufficient number of delinquent incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or law enforcement agencies. (p. 111)

Klein's (1971) definition was criticized for excluding young adults and adults. Another criticism was that Klein's (1971) definition could be applied to legitimate social

groups because members shared friendships and common interests (e.g., college fraternities) (Ball & Curry, 1995; Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Curry, 2015).

Next, Miller (1975) built a definition of gangs using results from a survey of social service and criminal justice personnel from twelve U.S. cities – New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Houston, Detroit, Baltimore, Washington, Cleveland, San Francisco, St. Louis and New Orleans. Miller (1975) conducted the survey in part to address the lack of uniformity in the definition of a gang and to include the observations of agency personnel in the construction of a more well-rounded understanding of gangs in the U.S. The idea was that a definition based on the observations of practitioners rather than scholars might foster more precise data collection on the prevalence of gangs, the number and characteristics of gang members, the types and trends of gang-related crime, and the approaches to preventing and/or addressing gang activity (Miller, 1975). Miller's (1975) definition is:

> A gang is a group of recurrently associating individuals with identifiable leadership and internal organization, identifying with or claiming control over territory in the community, and engaging either individually or collectively in violent or other forms of illegal behavior. (p. 9)

This definition was criticized because many scholars felt that a poll of practitioners could not in fact create a viable definition of a gang for criminological or sociological research. Researchers felt that the differing contexts, experiences, and perspectives of social service and criminal justice system personnel also clouded the nuances in characteristics between cities in favor of a definition created through a "popularity poll" named characteristics by city (Ball & Curry, 1995, Curry, 2015; Klein & Maxson, 2006, p.7).

Curry (2015) argues that the gang definitions through Miller's (1975) did not traditionally include criminal behaviors. However, as a result of empirical research on gangs' relationship with crime in the 1970s, researchers began to integrate criminal behaviors in their gang definitions (Miller, 1975; Miller, 1982; Spergel, 1990). Swift (2011) describes the inclusion of criminal behaviors into gang definitions as a result of changes that occurred in the 1980s. As Swift (2011) explains, "[i]t was in this period that a whole series of gang-related and youth violence issues came to the fore—the crack cocaine epidemic, the child soldier, the narco-trafficker, the epidemic of gun violence, rising crime rates" (p. 80).

This generation of gang definitions is best illustrated by Curry and Spergel (1988) who defined a gang as:

> [J]uveniles and adults in or related to groups that are complexly organized although sometimes diffuse, sometimes cohesive with established leadership and rules. The gang also engages in a range of crime but significantly more violence within a framework of communal values in respect to mutual support, conflict relations with other gangs, and a tradition often of turf, colors, signs, and symbols. Subgroups of the gang may be differentially committed to various delinquent or criminal patterns, such as drug trafficking, gang fighting, or burglary. (p. 181)

McCorkle and Miethe (1998) believe that definitions for identifying gangs must include gang activity. Otherwise, these definitions run the risk of causing false-positive identifications of gang members (McCorkle & Miethe, 1998).

Furthermore, Bjerregaard (2002) stresses that other attributes (e.g., clothes, tattoos, territory) may potentially apply to individuals who do not self-identify as gang

members. To remedy this flaw, Bjerregaard (2002) suggests the inclusion of the following factors in gang definitions: the level of organization, commitment of violent and property crime, membership size, presence of a group name, routine meetings, territorial claims, and existence of places to store firearms. These factors are better able to distinguish disorganized gangs from deviant groups that do not identify as gangs (Bjerregaard, 2002).

Currently, the prevailing definition of a gang is the Eurogang definition: "A street gang is any durable street-oriented youth group hose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity" (Curry, 2015; Klein & Maxson, 2006, p. 4). This definition was created "by a consortium of more than 100 American and European researchers and policy makers between 1997 and 2005" and is the most commonly used definition in contemporary scholarly publications (Curry, 2015; Klein & Maxson, 2006, p. 4). And its use is justified, as "the Eurogang definition identified the largest percentage of the sample [in the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) study] as gang members" compared to self-nomination or associations with peers who are gang members (Curry, 2015, p. 15; Matseuda, Esbensen, & Carson, 2012).

Although there is a long history behind the development of the definition of a gang, it remains a fluid concept that seems to change with the times (Curry, 2015; Spergel, 1989). Curry (2015) recommends that empirical studies testing the Eurogang definition should continue until "the empirical consensus on the definition is on par with the researcher consensus on the definition" (p. 15).

Beyond the scholarly definitions, the definitions used by law enforcement agencies to identify gang members within their communities and gang-related crimes can

be quite different as well (Curry, 2015; Katz et al., 2000, National Gang Center, n.d.). The National Gang Center's (n.d.) NYGS Analysis identifies the six common characteristics that law enforcement agencies use to identify gangs in their jurisdiction; these characteristics are as follows: "commits crimes together; has a name; displays colors or other symbols; hangs out together; claims turf or territory [and]; has a leader or leaders" (p. 1). McCorkle and Miethe (1998), however, cautioned the use of cultural artifacts such as clothing (e.g., colors, accessories) and symbols (e.g., tattoos, hand signs) because these identifiers are becoming integrated into mainstream society. Although the National Youth Gang Survey is no longer being administered, up until 2012, there remained questions within the survey to allow for law enforcement agencies to identify their definition of a gang (Curry, 2015; National Gang Center, n.d.). Those questions highlight the remaining differences between law enforcement agencies' definitions of a gang.

Differences are also present in law enforcement agencies' definitions of gang-related crimes – and more specifically, gang-related homicides - between and within jurisdictions (Block & Block, 1993; Curry, 2015; Maxson, Gordon, & Klein, 1990; Maxson & Klein, 1990). A notable example is Maxson and Klein's (1990) finding that Los Angeles city police department and Los Angeles county sheriff's department were defining and recording gang-related homicides differently. The major difference was that the city considered homicides gang-related if the perpetrator or victim was a gang member, and the county considered homicides gang related if the crime was related to a function of gang activity (e.g., initiation rituals) (Maxson & Klein, 1990).

Overall, there remains a great deal of variance in how different researchers identify gangs, gang members, and gang-related crime. This variance makes it difficult for researchers to summarize what is known about gangs, gang membership, and gang crime (Curry, 2015).

Evolution of Police Tactics

The National Gang Center's (n.d.) NYGS Analysis includes information on law enforcement agencies' perspectives on the causes of gang violence. Information from this analysis indicates that agencies most often believe that drug-related issues are the cause of gang violence (National Gang Center, n.d.). Disputes between gangs are the second most commonly held belief. Of the categories provided, law enforcement agencies least often indicate that the immigration of gang members into the United States from foreign nations causes gang violence (National Gang Center, n.d.).

Over time, various explanations of gang violence gain and lose support from law enforcement officials (National Gang Center, n.d.). The migration of gang members, both within and into the United States, as well as the establishment of new gangs are decreasingly popular explanations for gang violence (National Gang Center, n.d.). Disputes between members of the same gangs, reentry from incarceration into communities, and drug-related explanations are increasingly common beliefs (National Gang Center, n.d.).

According to Katz and Webb (2006), the intersection of specific societal changes explains why suppression is police departments' primary tactic for combating gang activity. The mainstream of the American public and elected officials no longer believes that welfare policies that target social structure and social processes can effectively

prevent gang activity. Further, police believe that providing adequate attention towards gangs has been limited by the policy reforms of the 1970s (Spergel, 1991). While these groups lose faith in such social policies, modern gangs are considered substantially more dangerous and a greater problem than previous decades and generations' gangs are. With the introduction of a new perceived threat and the loss of an acceptable solution, police departments and society are ready to accept suppression as the default response to gang activity.

Weisel and Painter (1997) include case studies of five police department responses to gangs in their respective jurisdictions. Most police departments focus on gang-related violent crime and auto-thefts. They find variation in police responses to gang activity. These responses reflected police departments' preexisting "orientation" towards crime in general (Weisel & Painter, 1997, p. 75). Responses can range from general to specific and departments modify these responses in reaction to the feedback they receive. Overall, police departments' responses to gangs have become more uniform over time. This trend is met, paradoxically, by a trend towards increasingly different types of gangs and gang members. Additionally, gangs are engaging in a larger number of crimes that traditionally, have not been associated with gang activity, such as white-collar crime (NGIC, 2012). Other emerging practices include the development of more collaborative relationships between agencies and greater efforts to collect and analyze large stores of data relative to the gang problem (Weisel and Painter, 1997).

All but one of the gang units featured in Katz and Webb's (2006) study are in facilities outside of their main police departments' headquarters. These locations are secret to prevent gang members from easily identifying gang officers and their vehicles,

which could compromise investigations and officers' safety. However, this leads to gang unit officers' unavailability for consulting and coordinating with other officers, residents, and other community figures. The operational and organizational complexity of the gang units in Katz and Webb's (2006) study are difficult to categorize. Despite this obstacle, Katz and Webb (2006) find that simpler gang units have less supervision and fewer procedures while more complex gang units have greater supervision and more procedures.

Organizational Theory

Organizational theory explains how organizations, including police departments, behave and structure themselves (Foster, n.d.). Police departments with large numbers of police officers organize in a variety of ways (e.g., have a variety of different units). A number of organizational theories help explain why departments create gang units. Of the organizational theories available, institutional theory, resource dependency theory, and diffusion theory are relevant explanations to the implementation of gang units and are reviewed below.

Institutional theory. Institutional theory posits that organizations change in response to their environments and is often contrasted with theories that explain organizational behavior as rationally motivated (Crank, 2003; Crank & Langworthy, 1992; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Katz, 2001; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). This is also known as "instrumental utilitarianism" (Crank, 2003, p. 196). Researchers call for the establishing and use of gang units to address the obstacles to successfully combating gang activity (Burns & Deakin, 1989) or because gangs are simply a substantial problem (Decker, 2007). While bivariate research finds that police departments in jurisdictions

with more gang-related crime are more likely to have gang units (Needle & Stapleton, 1983), these results are not replicated in studies featuring multivariate analyses (Katz et al., 2002). Organizations do not always act rationally. This is because extraneous factors interplay with organizations that result in pressure to operate irrationally (e.g., politics). Atypical organizations are treated as lacking credibility or being inefficient. Institutional theory arose because of scholars attempting to explain why organizations do not structure themselves to maximize efficiency or profit (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Certain organizational structures and procedures gain a *mythical* status or perceived effectiveness, resulting in organizations adopting these structures and procedures, however inefficient they are. Some organizations do this, so they may maintain a credible appearance (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). These mythical structures and procedures may receive political support or have low-risk or normative reputations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Meyer and Rowan (1977) explain that atypical organizations lose profits due to attacks on their legitimacy. To some extent, organizations have irrational structures and must act irrationally to maintain their reputation. Applying institutional theory to police departments suggests that departments fail through being efficient or minimizing crime in their jurisdictions, but through becoming *isomorphic* with their environments or matching the normative and mythical expectations placed on them by the residents, political, and other relevant constituents. In achieving isomorphism, police departments secure their reputations and public financing (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). There are several unintentional consequences of institutional theory's isomorphic processes, starting with the *decoupling* of police departments' structures from their operations. Police departments seek to achieve isomorphism with

their jurisdictions, constituents, and policy makers, but it is difficult for police departments to supervise officers in the field and objectively evaluate officers' police work (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Meyer and Rowan (1977) explain that departments that are unable to effectively monitor and assess their line officers while maintaining a legitimate reputation have an incentive to *decouple* their departmental structure from their officers' activities. With this decoupling, departments' structures maintain isomorphism with their environments without hindering their officers. Non-isomorphic departments can prevent officers' activities from affecting the departments' reputation (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Officers "commit themselves to supporting an organization's ceremonial façade . . . engage in informal coordination that, although often formally inappropriate, keeps technical activities running smoothly and avoids public embarrassments" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 358). Finally, police departments will actively avoid subjecting themselves to investigations and evaluations to maintain departments' reputations and supportive constituents (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). As Crank (2003) explains, police departments' constituents evaluate departmental work on a subjective rather than financial basis. For constituents to value departments positively, those departments must communicate or appear to value their constituents' concerns. This causes institutions to have structures and operations that reflect the values of their constituents (Crank, 2003). Administrators and other stakeholders within a police department may perceive local gang activity to be on the decline while political, media, and community figures perceive such activity to be increasing (Katz & Webb, 2006). Pressure from community members generally does spur a response from a police department (Weisel & Painter, 1997); however, most initial responses by police agencies

are based on suppression tactics such as "arrest, incarceration, and close monitoring and supervision" (Spergel et al., 1994, p. 15). The creation of gang units, as a mechanism to implement suppression tactics has been found to decrease gang-related crime in some instances (Archbold & Meyer, 1999; Spergel et al., 1994), but these units have also failed to impact gang-related crime in other cases (Katz & Webb, 2006). Community members want to see the decrease in gang-related crime; however, they may not have a full understanding of the variety of factors that influence rates of gang-related crime including the initial rates of gang-related crime in the jurisdiction (Archbold & Meyer, 1999). Nor does the public generally understand the financial constraints that limit a law enforcement agency's ability to create a gang unit to address gang-related crimes (Archbold & Meyer, 1999). Katz and Webb (2006) find that gang units experience resentment by other police officials who feel those units fail to meet expectations. This division causes officers to refuse to work in a gang unit. Nonetheless, the gang units in Katz and Webb's (2006) study are becoming institutionalized, leading to these units' independence of the department's organizational control and structure. Institutionalization often results in resiliency and a degree of permanence.

Resource dependency theory. Police officials use claims of increases in gang-related crime to pressure policy makers to increase funding to police departments. When this occurs, there is often no evidence of an actual increase in gangs or gang-related crime (Miethe & McCorkle, 2002). In making claims of an increasing need for more funds to combat gang-related crime, police departments must also show that current levels of funding are insufficient. These requests are often couched demands for additional officers. Since gangs are ever-present in some jurisdictions, departments can easily

defend an additional funding request. Police departments that receive federal funding to combat gang-related crime and report increases in gang activity are in a precarious position (Zatz, 1987). On one hand, police departments' justifications for further increases in funding may be "structural" as departments use funding to identify (or inadvertently cause) more gang activity (Zatz, 1987, p. 131). On the other hand, police departments' justifications for more funding may be "duplicitous" as police officials are manipulating gang intelligence and public or media sentiments to garner more funding irrespective of offending levels or threats to public safety (Zatz, 1987, p. 131). In conducting this "balancing act," gang units often blame increases in gang activity on factors outside the realm of police control (Zatz, 1987, p. 131). Archbold and Meyer (1999) find evidence of that gang units use measures of gangs that best manufacture the presence of gangs, thus justifying the continued financing of the unit. There is a moderate correlation between police departments establishing gang units and those departments receiving external funding (Katz et al., 2002). Katz et al. (2002) find that resource dependency theory weakly impacts the presence of gang units in police departments. Police departments may seek funding from grants and similar external sources simply due to the financial incentive to do so. However, these departments may seek such funding to avoid a possible penalty for not seeking the funding. Government administrations often see the awarding of state and federal funds to a police department as a sign of professionalism or innovation.

Diffusion theory. The diffusion of specialized police gang units, akin to other forms of technological diffusion, may be divided into *inter firm diffusion* and *intra firm diffusion*. Inter firm diffusion refers to the growing number of organizations that adopt a

technology while intra firm diffusion refers to the spread or intensification of use of that technology within an organization (Stoneman & Diederen, 1994). Technologies are argued to follow similar patterns of diffusion across time and adopters (Grübler, 1996). To their detriment, police departments may adopt an innovation when imitating other organizations, because of extra-departmental influences that unnecessarily bring adoption into the vogue, or a department being coerced to adopt an innovation (Abrahamson, 1991). Grübler (1996) describes the pattern of diffusion as "slow growth at the beginning, followed by accelerating and then decelerating growth, culminating in saturation or a full niche" (pp. 19-20). With the number of technology adopters and time as axes, diffusion would follow an s-shaped curve on a graph. This s-curve illustrates the different stages of diffusion as well as the different types of adopters of innovation. Especially early or late adopters of an innovation are differentiated from the average adopters that make up the large middle slope of the s-curve. Grübler (1996) applies these different groups and stages of the s-curve to provide a spatial explanation of the diffusion of innovations, "[o]riginating from innovation centers, a particular idea, practice, or artifact spreads out to its hinterland by means of a hierarchy of sub-innovation centers and into the periphery, defined spatially, functionally, or socially" (p. 38). Different types of adopters have different motivations and experiences with innovation (see Skogan & Hartnett, 2005) and the process of innovation is spurred and encumbered by qualitatively significant events. However, Grübler (1996) maintains diffusion is a reasonably similar process across different innovations. Demir (2009) finds that the earliest and latest adopters of crime mapping technology have more in common with one another than with average adopters. Demir (2009) also evidences a spatial component to

the diffusion of crime mapping across departments. Overall, the spatial components of diffusion theory may explain the adoption of gang units in police departments. Many large departments serving jurisdictions with significant gang problems were the first to create gang units, serving as the trendsetters in the spread of gang units. Following these large departments' lead, gang units spread to other police departments experiencing gang problems and searching for strategies to deal with them. Surveys by the National Gang Center (n.d.) have shown an increase in the number of jurisdictions reporting gang problems and establishing gang units. In addition to theories on organizational behavior, there are sociological and criminal justice theories that apply to police departments' implementation of gang units. Moral panic theory and social threat theory are two of such theories and are reviewed below.

Moral Panic Theory

Moral panics begin with the perception, by the public and politicians, that a problem is greater or more severe than in actuality. In moral panics, community residents' perceptions of a threat to their safety often originate in and receive confirmation by claims of danger made by law enforcement or other "social control agents" (Archbold & Meyer, 1999, p. 201). As Archbold and Meyer (1999) explain:

> Authority figures and other social control groups play a big part in defining what type of people and behaviors pose a threat to the general population … Moral panics are more likely to spread across larger populations and last for a longer period of time with the validation of authority or authority figures. (p. 204)

These perceived threats increase residents' fears, which further increase the perception of a present threat. Finally, a moral panic arises in reaction to the perception of a systemic decline in the governing social order (Archbold & Meyer, 1999).

Zatz (1987) provides an illustrative example of moral panic with the city of Phoenix during the late 1970s and early 1980s when one in every four young, male Latinos was classified as a gang member despite official measures of violent crime showing a weak increase, followed by a decrease in crime, through this time period (Zatz, 1987). In attempting to bolster justifications for increases in federal funding to combat gang activity and community support for more severe enforcement against gang activity, police departments and the media find themselves with shared interests. Gangs can provide police departments with more resources, and the media obtain news that is of greater interest to the public. A police department facilitates this process by providing the media with news content while the media can focus public attention on the gang problem. Ultimately, the police became disproportionately invasive in the lives and neighborhoods of Latino/Latina juveniles. The police essentially created a crime problem and contributed to a moral panic. There are other examples of the perceived threat of gangs being far greater than the actual criminal threat of gangs (McCorkle & Miethe, 1998; Schaefer, 2002; Zatz, 1987).

McCorkle and Miethe (1998) find that moral panics surrounding gangs have short life spans, but long-term effects, such as the expansion of policing, security measures in schools, and the criminal justice system's jurisdiction in juvenile cases. In McCorkle and Miethe's (1998) study, the police divert public attention towards gangs to draw attention away from scandals within the police department. This diversion occurs using a

needlessly vague definition of gang members that justifies large numbers of arrests. This influx of arrests results in gang members receiving lenient treatment by courts and an expansion of police resources that dwarfs the co-occurring growth in gang activity. McCorkle and Miethe (1998) description of this moral panic predates a boom in non-White populations and Black unemployment in Nevada. And their finding validates a social threat theoretical explanation of police behavior, which is described in the next section.

Social Threat Theory

Social threat theory explains a dominant's group perception that another group poses a threat due to real or perceived differences between both groups. In some cases, these differences are normative, but generally, the differences are racial or ethnic in origin. Modern social threat perceptions have their roots in race in many American communities. After the 1960s, the racial composition of cities significantly influences the size of police departments, particularly in the South (Liska, Lawrence, & Benson, 1981). By 1972, cities composed of larger portions of non-White residents are policed by larger departments, while more racially segregated Southern cities are policed by smaller departments (Liska et al., 1981). The presence of larger populations of poor residents has no effect on police size (Liska et al., 1981). White residents are more fearful of crime when their neighborhoods are composed of larger numbers of racial minorities and Black residents' fearfulness is independent of the racial composition of their neighborhoods (Chiricos, Hogan, & Gertz, 1997).

Durán's (2009) ethnographic study of Mexican American communities in Ogden, Utah and Denver, Colorado highlights many of the controversial elements of gang law

enforcement. These cities had growing Mexican-American populations alongside perceptions of a growing gang problem and a growing moral panic. This study's results support social threat theory alongside ecological contamination theory (Durán, 2009). Enforcement against gangs includes frequently stopping and questioning or searching Mexican-American community members. These stops are not initiated because of substantive criminal activity, but rather as a result of extra-legal variables, evidencing an apparent abuse of the broad discretion available to officers to justify such stops. During stops, Durán (2009) found that police attempted to provoke suspects into committing an act that could justify an arrest. Police were also more likely to draw their firearms while conducting these stops. Residents subjected to officers' negative conduct feel they cannot report abuses to the police department, which motivates further abuse by officers (Durán, 2009). Community residents perceive these stops as racial or stereotypical profiling and harassment, leading residents to doubt officers' intentions to police gangs. Ultimately, law enforcement against gangs' damages police departments' relations with the Mexican American communities (Durán, 2009).

Effects similar to those described by ecological containment theory are found in Ralphs, Medina, and Aldridge's (2009) ethnographic study of one United Kingdom city. Neighborhood gangs regulate juveniles' associations and safe spaces. Juveniles avoid certain places or associating with certain individuals for fear of being identified as a gang member and thus, being attacked by rival gang members. Juveniles had to avoid dressing like outsider gangs and are regularly confronted, interrogated, and even searched by local gang members. These fears force juveniles to reside in their local neighborhoods. This results in juveniles intermixing with neighborhood gangs. These associations cause the

police to mislabel local juveniles as gang members. Being labeled gang members, despite no self-identification as gang members or criminal history, results in juveniles being stigmatized, excluded from community events, and subjected to police harassment and surveillance. These false positives result in police substantially overestimating the size of gangs. Not surprisingly, these processes damage police-juvenile relations.

Over the waves of data collection by the NYGS, the largest portion of gangs is Latino/Latinas compared to other ethnicities or races (National Gang Center, n.d.). The second largest ethnic or racial category of gangs reported by police is Black (National Gang Center, n.d.). Parker, Stults, and Rice (2005) find that Blacks are arrested disproportionately less often if they live in neighborhoods composed largely of Latinos/Latinas.

Katz et al. (2002) explain why the effects of ethnicity/race may reverse directions despite these groups not making up a majority of the population. First, there may be no single point where an ethnicity or race achieves mainstream status. Rather, as a non-dominant group composes a larger percentage of a population, the dominant group makes concessions in its imposition of power over the non-dominant group (such as the use of law enforcement). The non-dominant group reciprocates these concessions by conforming to impositions or requirements by the dominant group.

Second, perceptions of the threat posed by an ethnic/racial group may not relate to the population size of that group (Katz et al., 2002). For example, media coverage and related framing processes may affect these perceptions.

Third, there are obstacles to measuring populations of ethnic and racial groups (Katz et al., 2002). For example, the United States Census does not count many legal and

illegal Latino/Latinas immigrants, who then remain hidden from public view (Katz et al., 2002). This example shows how law enforcement agencies' estimates of potential gang affiliates may not be accurate (Weisel & Painter, 1997).

Erroneous estimates of racial or ethnic populations may influence the intensity and/or type of police responses to a perceived gang problem. These responses can include the over policing of a certain racially and/or ethnically homogeneous area or increased attention to individuals of a certain race and/or ethnicity (Durán, 2009; Katz & Webb, 2006; Ralphs, Medina, & Aldridge, 2009). This can result in the over policing of certain neighborhoods or undue scrutiny of individuals thought to be affiliated with a gang with racial and/or ethnic ties despite a lack of actual threat to public safety (Durán, 2009; Ralphs et al., 2009).

Weisel and Shelley (2004) list fears of gang units harming police departments' relations with non-White neighborhoods as a key factor limiting the spread of gang units. Police gang units rely on directed patrols and conducting large numbers of stops in neighborhoods perceived to have gang problems, which are often neighborhoods dominated by non-White residents (Katz & Webb, 2006). Law enforcement polices gangs in non-White neighborhoods because of those neighborhoods' residents and local media accusing the department of neglecting gang activity (Katz & Webb, 2006). Qualitative work by Archbold and Meyer (1999) finds that police use race as a measure of the presence of gangs. The percentage of Latinos/Latinas within a jurisdiction weakly correlates with the presence of a gang unit (Katz et al., 2002). Katz et al. (2002) confirm that the percentage of a jurisdiction's Latino/Latina population affect the presence of

gang units in neighborhoods. Overall, there is a curvilinear relationship between Latino/Latina populations and police departments' gang suppression activities.

Police departments are more likely to establish or operate gang units in response to Latino/Latina populations, but this relationship reverses itself as the percentage of Latinos/Latinas in a jurisdiction reaches approximately 20% of the population, wherein the Latino/Latina population obtains a mainstream status (Katz et al., 2002). Black and populations of a lower socio-economic class, however, have no significant impact on the presence of gang units in those populations' local police departments. However, race played a factor in the distribution of stop-and-frisks by NYPD officers (*Floyd v. City of New York*, 2013).

Other Relevant Factors

Police departments that operate in jurisdictions with more gang-related crime are larger and more specialized in addressing gang activity (Needle & Stapleton, 1983). Based on bivariate correlations in their study, Katz et al. (2002) found that Western regional, vertically differentiated, and functionally similar, police departments that serve larger populations are more likely to have established a gang unit. However, the multivariate analyses in Katz et al.'s (2002) study showed that only organizational age and being in the Midwestern significantly, albeit weakly, correlate with the presence of gang units in police departments. Even when gang units are present within a department, there are multiple police units (e.g., patrol, investigation, juvenile) tasked with addressing gang activity (Needle & Stapleton, 1983). Needle and Stapleton (1983) recommend a centralized administrative unit for implementing and coordinating anti-gang police activities across all units within a department.

The importance of regional differences in police behavior is poorly understood (Katz et al., 2002). Howell and Moore's (2010) review of the historical origins of gangs in the Unites States provide varying explanations for the different regions of the Unites States. Katz et al. (2002) note that regions may differ in the structures of their political systems, the breadth of diffusion of policing innovations, and the unique historical development of policing in these areas. The decision to create a gang unit is a complicated process where multiple variables or factors may come under consideration. From 2009 to 2011, the Midwest and West had the largest numbers of gang members, but Eastern regions were gaining gang members at the fastest rate (NGIC, 2012). In addition to other atheoretical explanations for the implementation of gang units, immigration receives an expanded review below.

Immigration. Lane's (2002) ethnographic study of fear of gangs finds how social processes like those described in social disorganization theory explain residents' fear of immigrant gangs in Santa Ana, California. Community residents' fear of gangs is determined by their perceptions of Latino/Latina immigrants in their communities and the shortening social and cultural distances between White residents and immigrants. Recent immigrants to the United States are seen as different from previous generations of immigrants. They are believed to be mostly gang members who are, culturally, very different from Americans and previous generations of Latino/Latina immigrants (Lane, 2002). Recent immigrants are perceived to be more numerous and resistant to integration into American society. Residents believe that the different cultural practices illegal immigrants introduce into neighborhoods (multiple families living in the same household, loitering on street corners, street vendors, etc.) lead to more physical disorder and social

incivility (Lane, 2002). Residents see this disorder as causing their communities to deteriorate. Finally, residents believe that gangs move into their neighborhoods, causing residents' fear of gangs to increase (Lane, 2002). Historically, gangs in America are tied to major waves of immigration, especially waves of Black and Latino/Latina immigrants, occurring during the 1950s and 1960s (Howell & Moore, 2010). There are also examples of immigration leading to gangs in Europe (Swift, 2011). Some major inner-city neighborhoods, such as those in New York, experienced substantive demographics shifts with an influx in Latino/Latina residents from roughly 1975 to 1995 while other neighborhoods, such as those within Chicago and Los Angeles, experienced such shifts from the movements of Black populations from the South to the North and West (Howell & Moore, 2010). Gangs are reported to associate with drug cartels and similar drug smuggling organizations in Central and South America (NGIC, 2012). Race relations can play a substantive role in the formation of gangs (Howell & Griffiths, 2016; Swift, 2011), but the salience of this process varies from city to city (Howell & Moore, 2010). Mexican-American community members believe that police subject immigrants to worse treatment than to non-immigrants (Durán, 2009). Jurisdictions with real or perceived gang problems can affect the residents of neighboring jurisdictions. Officers in the Las Vegas Police Department believed that gang members had migrated from Los Angeles to Las Vegas, causing gang activity there to rise (Katz & Webb, 2004). Curry, Ball, and Decker (1996) found gang crime to be increasing and geographically spreading at substantial rates in the early 1990s. In 2010, law enforcement agencies across the U.S. reported the presence of migrating gang members in 70% of their jurisdictions (National Gang Center, n.d.). However, only 12% of nonmetropolitan jurisdictions within the U.S.

have experienced such migrating gang members (National Gang Center, n.d.). Police officials report that gang members migrate into their jurisdictions because of personal reasons that do not directly relate to their gangs or criminal careers (Maxson, 1998; National Gang Center, n.d.). Researchers find that gang presence in non-metropolitan jurisdictions does not significantly relate to the proximity of those jurisdictions to metropolitan areas where gangs may migrate from (Wells & Weisheit, 2001).

Specialized Police Gang Units

Scholars note the lack of consensus on defining what specialized policing units are (Katz et al., 2002; Zatz, 1987). For the purposes of this paper, one functional, though possibly vague or incomplete, definition of a gang unit is "[a] police gang unit is a secondary or tertiary functional division within a police organization, with at least one sworn officer whose sole function is to engage in gang control efforts" (Katz & Webb, 2006, p. 10). Weisel and Shelley (2004) illustrate the variation of gang units with their description of Indianapolis and San Diego's gang units:

> In San Diego, the gang unit consisted of a centralized uniformed and investigative unit with nearly 45 personnel; additional high-level investigations were coordinated through the department's involvement in a federal task force. In Indianapolis, the department's approach to gangs combines decentralized tactical units with no particular focus on gangs, and a centralized covert investigative unit comprised of six detectives on a federal task force. (p. 4)

In addition to gang units' specialization in combating gang activities, gang units and other units share anti-gang police work with one another in their departments (Needle &

Stapleton, 1983). Despite the difficulties in defining gang units and Weisel and Shelley's (2004) examples above, research finds that gang units have a typical organization (Katz & Webb, 2006).

Beginning in the 1960s and continuing into the mid-1990s, suppression has been the primary anti-gang strategy used by police (Spergel, 1991). Gang units most often focus on the use of suppression as the primary tactic and will not participate in or de-emphasize gang prevention (Katz & Webb, 2006). Neither of the gang units studied by Weisel and Shelley (2004) conducted any gang prevention activities. However, police departments rarely rely on suppression or any other tactic alone in combating gang activity (Curry et al., 1994). Some of the strategies employed by gang units include surveillance, identifying gang members and associates, punishing gang offenders to achieve specific deterrence, specializing responses to match categorical different groups of gangs, intervening in inter-gang conflicts, and focusing police resources on serious and repeat gang offenders (Weisel & Shelley, 2004, pp. 5-6).

Gangs units will often work to improve collaboration between the police department and other community-based agencies (Miethe & McCorkle, 2002; Needle & Stapleton, 1983). Likewise, police and prosecutors believe that strengthening criminal justice-community programs and gang prevention programs would most effectively combat gang problems in their jurisdictions (Johnson et al., 1995). Prosecutors working with gang units often ensure that a gang-related case has the same prosecutor and investigator assigned to it throughout the legal process, known as vertical prosecution (Miethe & McCorkle, 2002). Vertical prosecution arrangements are useful for developing prosecutors with an expertise in handling gang-related cases and for allowing

investigators to develop relationships with witnesses (Miethe & McCorkle, 2002). However, gang units rarely include prosecutors among their staff possibly due to concerns regarding prosecutor involvement in the investigation of gangs (Johnson, Webster, Connors, & Saenz, 1995).

Departments with specialized gang units are more likely to take a focused (rather than generalized) approach towards gangs (Weisel & Painter, 1997), however, this causal order is unclear as departments with established gang units are considered more specialized in addressing gang activity than departments without such units (Needle & Stapleton, 1983). Roughly half of all major cities' police departments and 15% of all small cities' police departments have a gang unit (National Gang Center, n.d.). Nearly 40% of all police departments participate in a multijurisdictional task force that deals with gangs (Johnson et al., 1995).

Katz's (2001) study analyzed the operations of a Midwestern city's gang unit following its establishment. The gang unit originally operated as a means of communicating to the community that the police department was working to address the gang problem (Katz, 2001). The law enforcement response to gangs often includes community engagement (Weisel & Painter, 1997). This operation was largely composed of meeting with community members and educating locals about gangs. Because the Black community was one of the major groups that advocated for police action against the gang problem, the police gang unit was staffed predominately with Black police officers and the gang unit operated out of a substation in close proximity to Black neighborhoods.

In Katz's (2001) case study, the gang unit received mixed support from within the department and underwent substantial reform. The unit was initially established to improve public awareness on gangs rather than conduct police operations that are more congruent with police officials' typical expectations for a gang unit. This community relations approach and the assignment of disproportionately more Black officers to the gang unit, whom other officers viewed as being less qualified, resulted in the gang unit receiving a negative reputation within the police department (Katz, 2001). Officers viewed the community relations approach and the race of the gang unit officers as evidence that the unit's operation was politically motivated and that the unit was ineffectual in combating gangs in the community. More practically, officers argued that the gang unit was lacking staff with specialized skills while members of the gang unit countered that Black and Latino/Latina officers had more rapport with Black and Latino/Latina residents of the community (Katz, 2001).

The gang unit studied by Katz (2001) was reformed in reaction to the lack of support the unit received within the police department. The unit's location in the department's organizational structure was moved from community relations to investigations. The gang unit thus abandoned its intended purpose of improving community relations for a crime-fighting purpose to address the lack of support by other police officers. Despite this shift, the unit continued to build collaborative relationships with resources outside of the department - in addition to resources within the department (Katz, 2001).

The change in the focus of the gang unit studied by Katz (2001) depicts the focus of today's gang units on suppression and enforcement (Howell & Griffiths, 2016). Gang

prevention is antithetical in many police organizations. This likely is the result of prevention's impact occurring in the distant future; effective prevention programming often has a delayed and weak effect (see Howell & Griffiths, 2016). Prevention programs coupled with suppression likely have a more substantial impact on gang problems.

Officers often join gang units due to supervisors and managers advertising these units as opportunities for thrill and fighting evildoers rather than simple criminal elements (Katz & Webb, 2006). Gang unit officers receive little guidance on their use of suppression tactics (Katz & Webb, 2006). Officers conduct suppression activities at their own discretion, namely "directed patrol and investigation" (Katz & Webb, 2006, p. 200). Due to limited police department funding and training on gangs, most officers, assigned to specialized units and tasked with combating gangs, receive insufficient training on gangs (Katz & Webb, 2006; Needle & Stapleton, 1983). Gang unit officers may note their unique expertise in and intelligence for investigating gang-related crimes, but these officials receive little training in investigations and are rarely directly involved in investigations (Katz & Webb, 2006). Officials assigned to gang units believe in the use of gang prevention tactics, but do not consider gang units' roles to include prevention or lack funding to conduct prevention (Katz & Webb, 2006).

Why gang units are formed. There many practical reasons police departments establish specialized gang units. Gang units provide a means for the department to specialize and focus resources such as personnel on combating gang activities (Katz & Webb, 2006). This specialization is required for interacting with atypical populations, like gang members, who may require more resources and different strategies (Katz & Webb, 2006). Gang units are also good organizational units for facilitating collective

action by work groups (Katz & Webb, 2006). They focus on specific problems. Through a combination of field observations, interviews, and reviews of articles and records, Katz (2001) qualitatively studied the establishment of a gang unit.

Prior to establishing the gang unit, national discussions on gangs resulted in community stakeholders reinterpreting local crime as being gang-related. These stakeholders then advocated for the local government to do more to address gangs in the community. While the police chief did not believe there was a gang problem in the community, other community officials and groups believed there was a problem. Other local government officials established a workgroup to explore the gang problem and a local association of Black police officers accused the police department of neglecting the needs of the local Black community (Katz, 2001).

Soon after the establishment of the gang workgroup and the accusations made against the police department, police officials began to perceive a gang problem and the police chief was pressured to have the police department organizationally respond (Katz, 2001). During the year of the gang unit's establishment, records indicate that the jurisdiction had little gang-related crime. The gang-related offending were mostly minor offenses (Katz, 2001). Gang-related offending continued to be rare and minor in the community for years after the establishment of the gang unit. Overall, the department formed a gang unit to satisfy interests external to the department (Katz, 2001).

The department's behavior supports institutional theory. Additionally, the department did not contribute to the social construction of gangs in the local community. Rather, the Black community participated in the social construction of gangs and advocated for more law enforcement. Katz (2001) argued that Blacks' fears of gangs and

perception that police offered little protection led to Blacks to participate in social construction. Like Katz (2001), Archbold and Meyer's (1999) case study find that those social processes driving the establishment of a gang unit are reasonably independent of gang-related offending. One homicide, with questionable relation to local gangs, sparked media and public concerns of gangs in the local communities. These concerns spurned the city council to establish a task force to evaluate the severity of local youth-related problems. During Archbold and Meyer's (1999) evaluation, police officers provided statistical support for the fear of increasing juvenile delinquency and gang-related offending in the area. Despite the questionable validity of these statistics and their interpretation by the police, these data were used to justify the establishment of a gang unit. Officers then believed in policing gangs to prevent the formation of gangs (Archbold & Meyer, 1999).

Weisel and Painter's (1997) study of five major police departments argues that gang units form in reaction to community pressures following major gang-related incidents or news stories. However, Weisel and Painter (1997) found that gang units are a police department's first response to gangs. Initially, no other alternatives are considered. When created, gang units first focus on suppression tactics, but integrate other tactics, over time, into a "comprehensive" criminal justice response to gang activity (Weisel & Painter, 1997, p. 85).

In their study of four police departments' responses to gang activity in their jurisdictions, Katz and Webb (2006) find that gang units are established in police departments as "indirect rather than . . . direct response[s] to local gang problems" (p. 267). They conclude that gang units are created from pressures by local political interests

to police gangs, rather than to address the pre-existing problems arising from gang activity. Katz and Webb (2002) find that gang units are not established because of the social construction of gangs or processes like those described in moral panic or social threat theory. Residents of non-White neighborhoods criticize their police departments for neglecting to address local gang problems, which spurs media and policy makers to pressure departments to conduct more anti-gang activities, such as establish a gang unit.

Additionally, Decker and Pyrooz (2010b) find that gang units may form in police jurisdictions that do not significantly differ in the rates of gang-related homicides from jurisdictions without gang units. Partisan politics plays a role in the creation of gang units. Meehan (2000) studied the formation of a gang unit in one police department. Officers and civilians stated that their police department's recent increases in enforcement against gangs were motivated by the upcoming mayoral election. The incumbent mayor needed to show voters that he was taking action against gangs. In this case, the presence of a gang problem is an excellent political foil. This problem received substantial attention in the community, and the mayor showed forceful action on the issue.

Overall, studies find a variety of motivations for the establishment of gang units. Many of these motivations relate little to gangs' threat to public safety. Political pressures emanating from politicians, community members, and police officials may be substantive causes of the establishment of gang units. These pressures cause police departments to appease socially significant stakeholders by redistributing public resources that may not significantly reduce gang activity and crime.

Gang unit intelligence. Police departments sometimes improvise measures of crime to estimate gang-related offending. In one case, a police department interprets all crimes committed by adults as being gang-related and a higher presence of non-White juveniles to indicate a greater gang presence (Archbold & Meyer, 1999). Often, police departments operate computerized crime records including gang-related crime (Johnson et al., 1995). Various groups use intelligence on gangs and gang members to better combat gangs, to distribute department resources as result of gangs and their activities, and to select gang suppression activities (Katz et al., 2000; Klein et al., 1986).

In one study, "a special vertical prosecution program, several police programs, a probation-concentrated caseload program, [and] a large detached worker program" use data from two departments as indicators of program success (Klein et al., 1986, pp. 489-490). This demonstrates that gang intelligence has a number of uses for a variety of criminal justice agencies. Stakeholders value gang units' gathering and dissemination of gang-related intelligence (Katz & Webb, 2006). Gathering and disseminating gang-related intelligence is one of the most common functions of gang units and this intelligence has a variety of applications, but the prioritization and quality of gang-related intelligence varies substantively between different gang units (Katz & Webb, 2006).

With a consistent and accurate definition of gangs, officials may better estimate the number of gangs and gang members in a jurisdiction. This leads to the development of more effective anti-gang policies (Petersen, 2000). However as discussed above, there is no universal definition of a gang (Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001). Instead, there are a variety of definitions across different settings and gang experts disagree about which definition is most appropriate (Esbensen et al., 2001). One reason the

Albuquerque Police Department did not record gang-related crime rates was managing officers' disagreement over the definition of gang-related crimes (Katz & Webb, 2006). Depending on the two definitions used by the Albuquerque Police Department, gang-related homicides may have been halved (Katz & Webb, 2006). Police gang intelligence and estimates of gangs, gang-related crimes, and gang members have been criticized for multiple reasons. There are substantive obstacles to establishing a universal definition of gangs. It is recommended to use an ungeneralizable definition of gangs that includes "the community and national context from which [local gangs] arose" to craft policies that effectively combat those gangs (Swift, 2011, p. 18).

Police officers' broad discretion in reporting on gang activity can result in individuals, groups, and crimes being frivolously included in or excluded from such estimates (Durán, 2009; Jacobs, 2009; Katz et al., 2000; McCorkle & Miethe, 1998). Officers assigned to gang units are often tasked with informing other police and political officials about local gang problems, but gang unit officials often have biased or erroneous knowledge of local gangs and run the risk of misleading other policy makers (Katz & Webb, 2006). Given that prosecutors, judges, schools, and employers all have access to gang intelligence databases for differing reasons, the identification of a given individual as a gang member is practically public knowledge (Jacobs, 2009). Labeling individuals as gang members has serious consequences for those individuals' school lives, employability, and social status (Jacobs, 2009). The sharing of gang intelligence between jurisdictions has contributed to gang-related moral panics and false beliefs that gangs or drug sales are migrating into previously low-crime jurisdictions (Schaefer, 2002).

Klein, Gordon, and Maxson (1986) examine measures of gang-related homicides from the Los Angeles Police Department and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. There are substantive differences in the situational circumstances (e.g., use of automobiles, use of weapons, number of offenses committed per incident, etc.) and the participants (number of suspects, number of victims, whether the homicide suspect had a gang affiliation, etc.) between gang-related and other homicides (Klein et al., 1986). More importantly, qualities of the investigations of gang-related and other homicides (e.g., number of pages of investigations, number of interviews per case, number of charges filed per case, etc.) also significantly differ. Results show that investigations differ little between gang-related homicides and other homicides while the homicide contexts and participants in homicides have substantially more influence on the determination of a homicide as gang-related. Klein et al. (1986) interpreted these findings to indicate that differences in settings and participants are more influential on the determination that a homicide is gang-related than differences in how investigations are conducted.

Zatz (1987) finds that of the Latino/Latina juveniles referred to juvenile court, there were few significant differences between those juveniles identified as gang members and other referred juveniles. The significant differences between gang and non-gang juveniles are weak in statistical power. While juveniles identified as gang members have more delinquent or criminal siblings, have more past referrals for delinquency, and are more likely to be referred for fighting, juveniles identified as gang members are less likely to be referred for committing a narcotics-related offense. Furthermore, a near totality of juveniles' violent offending is fighting. Juveniles identified as gang members

are more likely to be referred for fighting in groups, mostly with other groups of Latino/Latina juveniles. Non-gang juveniles are more likely to be referred for committing property crimes in groups (Zatz, 1987).

Zatz (1987) argues that juveniles identified as gang members are a greater threat to public safety than other juveniles referred to court and gang members can be identified by examining their past criminal records. However, this is of little value during early onset. Katz, Webb, and Schaefer (2002) analyze the Mesa Police Department and Maricopa County Juvenile Probation Department's intelligence on gang activity in Mesa, Arizona. Comparisons between gang members and non-gang members show that gang members are more often arrested (especially for serious violent crimes) and arrested for the first time at younger ages. By identifying individuals with higher rates of criminal offending, law enforcement officials were able to effectively determine which individuals posed a greater threat to public safety (Katz, Webb, & Schaefer, 2002). Furthermore, police identification of the especially criminally active individuals is not biased by differences in the neighborhoods' criminal activity that those individuals reside in. Police estimates of gangs are found to validly reflect actual gang related activities.

In Weisel and Painter's study (1997), gang specialists doubt the accuracy of patrol officers' estimates of gang activity. These specialists emphasize a need for building relationships with gang members to be able to understand a given jurisdiction's level of gang activity. In addition to the typical measurement issues associated with the official measurement of crime, there is a "failure to recognize gang association, victim intimidation, [and] false reporting to focus police attention on rival gangs" (p. 82). Patrol officers fail to identify gang members because of other work-related demands. When

patrol officers identify gang members, it is often the result of criminal offenders and victims who identified gang members for responding officers.

Also, officers' interpretation of gang-related information and intelligence is biased towards similar interpretations by national media outlets and national law enforcement agencies, leading to a "false national consensus about local gang problems" (p. 89). Wiesel and Painter conclude that departments' data collection on gangs is poor and national estimates of gang activity should be treated with caution. An extended consequence of this erroneous data is police departments being unable to evaluate the effectiveness of enforcement against gangs.

Durán (2009) criticizes police departments' intelligence gathering for labeling individuals, who have never committed a gang-related crime, as gang members. In some Mexican-American communities, most residents know at least one gang member, and this association was used by police to consider residents to be gang members. For the gang databases in Durán (2009), gang labels are maintained for at least five years, but cannot be verified for accuracy by anyone outside of the police department and can result in an individual being subjected to considerable suspicion or harassment by police. Officers' stereotypes of gang members in Mexican-American communities are generalized to apply to almost all Mexican-American community members, justifying enhanced enforcement tactics against these community members. Ecological contamination theory explains this effect. Furthermore, officers' assumption that gang members are "constant criminals even when following the law" (p. 157) hampers gang members' attempts to desist from a criminal lifestyle.

Meehan (2000) provides a study on the political and organizational processes that lead to the creation of one police department's estimates of gang activity. Researchers often focus on the effects of different definitions of gangs, gang members, and gang-related crime while overlooking the routine activities where such definitions are used. While many officials rely on a "'social science' definition" of gangs, they interchange groups of juveniles with the term, juvenile gang (p. 340).

As stated above, politics motivated the establishment of a gang unit in the jurisdiction in Meehan's (2000) study. The police department solved its funding problems during an election's approach with the anti-gang program ending less than a month after that election. During the mayoral election season, citizens, police, and the media take various actions to label juvenile delinquents as gang members wrongfully. Citizens making calls for service to the police refer to any group of juveniles as a gang to ensure that police take the complaint seriously and police dispatchers often coach complainants into referring to groups of juveniles as gangs. When patrol officers log or otherwise record their responses to civilians' complaints, they refer to incidents as gang-related wrongfully to avoid blame should the original complainant file a grievance with the department.

Ultimately, gangs are not a new problem for the jurisdiction in Meehan's (2000) study, but the politically motivated actions the department takes to police gangs results in the direction of more criminal justice resources towards juveniles committing minor crimes and social incivilities. Meehan (2000) ultimately questions the use of police estimates of gang-related crime when the organizational and political processes that lead to the creation of these estimates are not considered.

In his ethnographic study, Katz (2003) analyzes a police department's internal processes that produce estimates of local gang activity. As Katz (2003) explains, most research on gang activity data test the external validity of these estimates. The study police department's procedure for identifying gang members is sophisticated. It includes a typology for classifying more and less active gang members, including a "wanna be" category (Katz, 2003, p. 494). Definitions for the categories include gang colors, gang gestures, gang tattoos, the corroboration of membership by other sources, and the committing of serious gang-related crimes. However, the clear majority of gang-related intelligence comes from an active subset of the department's patrol officers rather than from the department's specialized gang unit (Katz, 2003).

Gang unit members do not know their department's official definition of gangs or where to find that definition. Overall, gang unit members do not communicate or interact with officers outside of their unit on a regular basis. In documenting gang members, gang unit officials do not reference the original incident reports. Most patrol officers consider reporting gang activity to the gang unit extra work or believe that there is no serious gang problem in the jurisdiction. Further, patrol officers receive no training on the identification of gang members using their department's definitions and similar criteria.

Decker and Pyrooz (2010b) compare the National Gang Center's estimates of gang activity to the Uniform Crime Report and Supplementary Homicide Report's data sets. Measures of gang-related homicides are substantively similar across the three data sets, indicating the National Gang Center's estimates are valid. Further, the presence of a gang unit within a police department does not influence measures of gang-related

homicide and the National Gang Center's estimates. While this supports the consistency of estimates of gang activity, it does cast doubt on the notion that gang units improve departments' knowledge of gang activity in their jurisdictions.

Another finding is that estimates of gang membership are more valid than estimates of the number of gangs (Decker & Pyrooz, 2010b). A police department in Katz (2003) uses its gang unit's measures of gang activity similar to how police use UCR crime measures. Specifically, the department uses these measures to show that the department is effectively combating gangs (Katz, 2003). However, the department's chief and the city's mayor no longer release the gang unit's reports to the public because the statistics have been found to be inaccurate, and these statistics may bolster the gang members' morale. Similarly, departments studied in Weisel and Painter (1997) do not report the names of gangs or offending gang members due to concerns that publishing names would prompt violent gang retaliations.

Are gang units effective. The suppression strategy against gangs has been matched by an increase in gang violence in the decades leading to the late 90s, but this association likely lacks causation (Spergel, 1991). A better elaborated concern is that gang members grow cohesive when subject to police suppression tactics (Howell, 2015). A common strategy for gang units is to temporarily increase undirected police patrols or police presence in areas where gangs are present.

Research indicates that increased patrols do not affect preventable street crimes (Fritsch, Caeti, & Taylor, 1999). Even directed patrols can have no effect on gang activities or even unintended consequences, such increased solidarity between gang members (Katz & Webb, 2006). A possible explanation is that patrols directed against

gangs often amounts to harassment that is no different than actions taken by patrol officers. Police departments cannot sustain enhanced patrol for long periods of time due to personnel requirements and shortages. However, police crackdowns on curfew violations, where police remove juveniles from the streets after the curfew time cutoff, and truancy do reduce juvenile delinquency (Fritsch et al., 1999). The most common police response to curfew violations is to turn juveniles over to a parent or guardian, though some may be charged. In some jurisdictions, police may charge a parent if their child continuously violates curfew. Curfews remove juveniles from the street when juveniles are most criminally active, having a soft incapacitation effect on juveniles.

Many police departments have implemented community policing. One community policing tenet is to decentralize decision making to allow officers and units to develop and implement solutions fitted to their jurisdiction's problems (Kappeler & Gaines, 2015). This tenet gives gang units officers more latitude in responding to gang-related problems. However, officers report that community policing is beneficial to efforts for policing gangs but are unable to specify how community policing has changed gang unit operations (Katz & Webb, 2006).

Many gang units' policies and organizational structures are not affected by police departments' implementation of community policing (Katz & Webb, 2006). When community policing is implemented it generally results in police officers being given more discretion in selecting policing tactics and strategies. Thus, community policing requires well educated and trained gang unit officers (Katz & Webb, 2006). However, Decker (2007) argues that the major obstacles to successful gang unit performance are similar to the obstacles community policing is designed to address. Gang units are often

located off-site from police departments' primary locations, which leads to gang units having minimal contact with other officers and community members as well as limited dissemination of gang units' intelligence (Katz & Webb, 2006).

Although gang units are primarily charged with policing gangs, other operational units such as patrol, criminal investigation, or juvenile are involved. When gang units do not interact or coordinate with these other units, a police department's gang enforcement effectiveness is restricted. Most police departments evaluate the effectiveness of their gang units. However, in Katz and Webb's (2006) study, only one department used observable measures of performance and that department did not apply those measures to evaluate its gang unit. Needle and Stapleton (1983) identified many departments that were unable to evaluate their anti-gang activities. While gang unit officers doubt the validity and consistency of official estimates of gang activity, these officers do believe the work done by their units reduces gang-related crime, especially interventions to prevent retaliations by gangs (Weisel & Painter, 1997). However, without an adequate evaluation, the actual impact of these units' impact on gang problems cannot be determined.

Gang units' participation in gang-related homicide investigations positively affects the investigations' outcome. Gang units increase the probability of arresting and charging suspects in such investigations (Klein, Gordon, & Maxson, 1986). However, these probabilities are uncorrelated with how early or late in the investigation that gang units become involved (Klein et al., 1986). Therefore, gang unit officers can join an investigation at any point. Katz's (2003) study provides insight into the use of the intelligence collected by gang units. Gang unit officers report that the intelligence they

collect is required for solving many gang-related crimes. Gang unit officers also report that prosecutors use that intelligence to increase bail requirements and the severity of sentences for defendants. However, Katz (2003) found that gang unit members fail to disseminate gang-related intelligence to other officers and that judges typically prohibit the use of gang unit intelligence. Instead, employers use gang intelligence in hiring decisions. Officers sometimes join gang units because supervisors and managers advertise these units as opportunities for thrill and fighting evil-doers (Katz & Webb, 2006).

Gang unit officers receive little guidance on the use of suppression tactics. By extension, gang unit officers tend to conduct suppression activities at their own discretion, namely "directed patrol and investigation" (Katz & Webb, 2006, p. 200). When gang unit managers do not understand the effectiveness of various strategies, managers use what they know, which is enhancing patrols. On the other hand, officers see gang unit assignments as positions of prestige that are free of many of the work requirements of other officer positions, which leads to officers competitively seeking such positions (Wiesel & Painter, 1997). This competition makes is questionable if some gang unit officers have the wherewithal to function effectively with the units.

Commitment to the task of reducing a jurisdiction's gang problem should be the overarching motivation for officers entering gang units (Weisel & Painter, 1997). After a gang unit is created and operational, it is difficult to change the unit's operational philosophy. Katz and Webb (2006) conclude that:

> Once the gang units had been created, abundantly staffed, and given ample resources, their autonomous organizational structures and operational strategies

> rapidly became entrenched within the agencies. None of the structures or strategies allowed for rational organizational adaptation, should the community's gang problem, albeit still in existence become less serious. (p. 269)

While Needle and Stapleton (1983) offer praise for gang units' efforts to combat gangs with external organizations, such "efforts are informally organized, sporadically utilized, and designed to serve all youths rather than specifically focusing on youth gangs and their members" (p. 37). Further, just under half of their responding departments call for including more community resources to combat gangs. Within police departments, there are rarely formal procedures establishing collaborative anti-gang activities between the multiple policing units tasked with combating gangs.

Finally, there is research examining gang members' perceptions of gang units and officers. Gang members perceive gang unit officers' behavior as differing little from other officers' behavior, which largely consists of harassment and needless uses of force (Katz & Webb, 2006). Anecdotally, gang members report that gang units have little influence on their lives (Katz & Webb, 2006). This is a general indictment on gang units. It indicates that gang units only have a superficial impact on gangs. There are no established procedures for incorporating "what works" with gangs into gang units' strategies and tactics. Once founded, police gang units and outside agencies tend to continue their established operational procedures but have some measure of communications and coordination. Often, they do not achieve an optimal response to gang problems.

In concluding this review of the research, the importance of context should be made clear. As stated above, there is substantial variation in the definition of gangs and

police responses to gangs. Social context has played a role in shaping our definitions of gangs and law enforcement's beliefs on gangs. Our very definition of what gangs are is impacted by our social context and these social factors, in turn, impact how police respond to and gather intelligence on gangs. Further, social, political, and organizational factors can directly impact the policing of gangs. Naturally, these same social and organizational factors can determine the implementation of gang units. This review has highlighted several the major explanations for the criminal justice system's reaction to gang activity, including the creation of gang units. Gang units can provide a variety of specialized services in addressing gang problems in American communities. However, there has not been any large-scale evaluation of the effects of gang units on gang-related crime.

CHAPTER III

Methods

The current study features multiple analyses with some fitting in a correlation design and those that fit within a quasi-experimental design, specifically a natural experiment. These analyses are the result of the use of survey instruments on a sample. This sample is described below (see Data Sets), which will include individual descriptions of each separate source of secondary data used in this study. This followed by a description of each hypothesis, which is presented in a manner that highlights what variables are specifically being used in the analyses as well as what quantitative methods are used in said analyses (see Table 2).

Data Sets

To explore an issue as multifaceted as the establishment and effectiveness of specialized police gang units, the current study tests multiple competing explanations of criminal justice behavior. By extension, testing several explanations requires measures drawn from multiple sources. To meet these requirements, this study taps several data sets. The United States Decennial Census provides measures of the racial and socioeconomic demographics of police departments' jurisdictions. The Decennial Census is collected every decade for the purposes of redrawing the borders of congressional jurisdictions, reassigning congressional seats based on changes in states' populations, and allotting federal funds proportionately to different public interests across the country (U. S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

From as far back as 1930, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program provides annual data on measures of arrests and crimes in

jurisdictions. These data are collected through the voluntary participation of a near totality of the nation's public law enforcement agencies. These data form one of the most comprehensive measures of longitudinal crime rates nationally and by jurisdiction. General measures of crime are taken from the UCR's Arrests by Age, Sex, and Race (ASR) files.

From 1996 to 2012, the National Youth Gang Survey has collected nationally representative samples of police departments' estimates of gangs, gang members, and gang activity in their jurisdictions (National Gang Center, n.d.). Individual waves of the NYGS typically have an 85% response rate and all but 5% of those solicited have responded to at least one of the survey's waves (National Gang Center, n.d.). Unfortunately, random samples of departments are surveyed each year, which limits cross-sectional analyses. Although the data included in the surveys are police department estimates and likely have some measure of inaccuracy, they represent the reasonably best estimates of gang activity in American jurisdictions (National Gang Center, n.d.).

From 1987 to 2013, the Law Enforcement and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) series has periodically surveyed all large police departments as well as a representative sample of smaller police departments and other law enforcement agencies across the nation. These surveys provide information about police departments' organization and operations. Finally, the Census of Law Enforcement Gang Units (CLEGU) provides data on the gang units in greater depth than similar data provided by the LEMAS surveys. Administered alongside the 2007 LEMAS survey, CLEGU also surveyed all police departments with at least 100 sworn police officials with at least one sworn officer

assigned to full-time anti-gang activities. These data are used to explore in depth police gang units.

National Youth Gang Survey mechanics. Since this study focuses on police gang units and gangs, it is important to use reliable measures of these activities. There are two major criticisms of the NYGS as explained by Wells & Weisheit (2001). The first criticism is that that the survey does not provide its own definition of gangs; rather the survey asks responding agencies to provide their working definitions of a gang.

Second, the survey's results are based on police departments' estimates of gang activity in their jurisdictions (Wells & Weisheit, 2001). As mentioned previously, there is a great deal of variance in law enforcement agencies definitions of gang, gang membership and gang activity (Curry, 2015; Katz et al., 2000, National Gang Center, n.d.). This variance makes it difficult for agencies' rates of gang-crime to be compared (Curry, 2015). Although the definition of gangs may not be consistent among agencies responding to the NYGS, the studies demonstrate that agencies estimates of the presence and number of gangs as well as the measures of gang-related crime are generally reliable (Decker & Pyrooz, 2010b; Katz, Fox, Britt, & Stevenson, 2012).

Although these criticisms of the NYGS exist, studies have demonstrated that police departments' estimates of gang presence and the number of gangs are reported similarly in both the NYGS and the Arizona Gang Threat Assessment which include overlapping time periods (Katz et al., 2012). The researchers find that the two surveys are consistent indicating a level of reliability for the NYGS. Their research also demonstrates that young male arrests are a reliable proxy measure of gangs.

Jurisdictions with lower populations are more responsive to and knowledgeable in answering the NYGS's questions on the number of local gang members (Katz et al., 2012). Police departments' estimates of gang-related crime and gang membership are reliable from year-to-year, while estimates of gang-related homicides are unreliable in jurisdictions with low populations (Katz et al., 2012). The NYGS's measure of gangs is uncorrelated with gang homicides, while gang membership is uncorrelated with gang homicides in less populated jurisdictions or in the Northeast or South (Katz et al., 2012). Although gangs are recognized as drivers of homicides, these data indicate that the number of gangs cannot accurately estimate the number of homicides in a jurisdiction. Nonetheless, the survey does reliably measure the number of gangs.

Sample

For the purpose of this study's analyses, police departments (with or without gang units) serve as individual cases. The primary sample was data on police departments responding to the LEMAS 2007 survey; however, data from the 2000 LEMAS survey was utilized for the analyses that determined the relationship between the presence of a gang unit and its impact on crime in the jurisdiction. The secondary data sets used were the National Youth Gang Survey 2007-2008 and Uniform Crime Reports Age, Sex, Race data from 2007.

Based on the data available through secondary data, the police departments studied are composed of large municipal police agencies. Katz et al. (2002) explain that "a 'large' police agency is one that employs 100 or more full-time actual (not authorized) sworn police officers [while] a 'municipal' police agency is one whose primary jurisdiction is a city or town" (pp. 480-481). The responding large, municipal, law

enforcement agencies all responded to the long form of the LEMAS survey which includes additional questions than the standard short form survey.

The primary LEMAS sample's agencies were matched with agencies who responded to the NYGS to establish a data set to guide analyses regarding the existence of gang units in responding jurisdictions. A separate data set was constructed matching the LEMAS sample's agencies with the UCR's ASR data to allow for the analysis of the effect of an established gang unit on local crime rates. These data sets were created to separately in an effort to maintain adequate sample sizes for this study's analyses. The resulting samples for the current study were 243 agencies for the LEMAS and NYGS data set and 425 agencies for the LEMAS and UCR's ASR data set (see Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Responding Agencies

Variable	N	M	S.D.	Min.	Max.
LEMAS 2000					
Police Per Capita[a]	425	435.487	993.191	66	13466
Functional Differentiation[b]	425	7.031	3.426	0	15
Occupational Differentiation[c]	425	.247	.096	0	.547
LEMAS 20007					
Police Per Capita[a]	425	452.424	989.781	81	13.336
Gang Unit Presence	425	.593	.491	0	1
Functional Differentiation[b]	420	7.255	3.243	0	15

(continued)

Variable	N	M	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Occupational Differentiation[c]	425	.256	.103	0	.588
Population	504	214162.3	474577	29361	8220196
CLEGU 2007					
Gang Unit Tenure	425	4.304	7.170	0	32
UCR ASR 2007					
Young Male Violent Crime Per Capita	425	94.658	72.273	4.573	1002.259
Young Male Property Crime Per Capita	425	230.849	127.758	5.83	950.431
Young Male Weapons Offenses Per Capita	425	43.56	31.55	0	252.035
Young Male Drug Crime Per Capita	425	264.057	175.372	6.802	1460.984
Young Male Misdemeanor Assault Crime Per Capita	425	155.788	110.923	1.892	1042.888
NYGS 2007-2008					
Number of Gang Members	243	1037.827	2928.218	10	39457
Number of Gang-Member Homicides	280	3.796	8.03	0	64
Number of Gang-Motivated Homicides	253	2.431	5.204	0	40
2000 CENSUS					
% Black	504	17.445	17.538	.2	89.5
% Latino/Latina	504	15.511	17.192	.8	94.1
County Inequality	504	.450	.034	.342	.586

(continued)

Variable	N	M	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Unemployment	504	3.761	1.085	1.7	10.1
% Below Poverty Line	504	12.164	4.999	2.7	37.8

Note. M = mean; S.D. = Standard Deviation;

[a] Calculated by dividing the number of full-time sworn police working in the police department, dividing this number by the 2007 population estimates provided by the Census, and multiplying this number by 100,000.

[b] Calculated by adding up the number of unique special units measured in both the 2000 and 2007 LEMAS surveys.

[c] Calculated based on the percentage of employees who are civilians (i.e., not sworn officials) out of all police department employees.

Hypotheses and their Dependent and Independent Variables

Hypothesis 1. The presence of a specialized policing gang unit in a law enforcement department should decrease that jurisdiction's crime and gang-related crime rates.

Several models have been run with different dependent and independent variables. For a reference on which dependent and independent variables are used in testing each hypothesis, see Table 2 below. Hypothesis 1 involves testing the effects of gang units on crime. This hypothesis is based on the belief that gang units may effectively reduce young male and gang-related crime in a jurisdiction. The dependent variables for this hypothesis are from the ASR files of the UCR. The UCR provides measures of arrests for males, aged 12 to 24, for violent crimes, property crimes, drug-related crimes, minor assaults, and weapons offenses in 2007. Dividing these measures of crime by 2007 population estimates provided by the Census and multiplying the outcome by 100,000, these measures of crimes are converted to account for population differences across different jurisdictions. Katz et al. (2002) use these variables as proxy

measures of gang-related crime. Arrests of males, between 12 and 24 perform substantively no different from estimates of gang-related crime and membership obtained from the National Youth Gang Center. The second set of dependent variables are from the 2007-2008 NYGS. The NYGS provides measures of the number of gang members, homicides involving gang members and gang-motivated homicides. For descriptive statistics on these measures, see Table 1.

The primary theoretical independent variable being tested in the first hypothesis is the presence (or lack) of a specialized gang unit in a given police department. For measurement purposes, police departments are not presumed to have a specialized gang unit unless they have at least one full-time employee assigned to a gang unit. Katz et al. (2002) use this same mechanical definition. Univariate analyses of this study's theoretical variables are in Table 1. Of the 773 matching-respondents of the 2000 LEMAS Survey, 404 (52.26%) also have gang units. Gang units will be coded as a "0" or "1" to indicate the lack of or presence of a gang unit in a given department. Other independent variables include 1) percent of jurisdiction's population below the poverty line as measured by the 2000 decennial census, 2) Gini coefficients that measure income inequality (Burkey, 2006), 3) racial composition as measured by the census, and 4) police per capita.

These regression models will be calculated using these independent variables to predict violent crime arrests, property crime arrests, and drug-related arrests. Of interest is the amount of variance accounted for by the independent variable, presence of a gang unit. It is hypothesized that this model significantly explains variation in the dependent

variables due to the presence of a negative relationship between the presence of gang units and crime.

Table 2

Hypothesis Models and their Variables

Variable	Hypothesis 1	Hypothesis 2	Hypothesis 3	Hypothesis 4	Hypothesis 5
Gang Unit Presence 2007	IV		DV	DV	DV
Gang Unit Tenure 2007		IV			
Gang Members 2007	DV		IV		
Gang Member Homicides 2007	DV		IV		
Gang Motivates Homicides 2007	DV		IV		
Young Male Violent Crimes Per Capita 2007	DV	DV	IV		
Young Male Property Crimes Per Capita 2007	DV	DV	IV		
Young Male Weapons Offense Per Capita 2007	DV	DV	IV		
Young Male Drug Offenses Per Capita 2007	DV	DV	IV		
Young Male Misdemeanor Assaults Per Capita 2007	DV	DV	IV		
% Black 2000	IV	IV		IV	
% Latino 2000	IV	IV		IV	
County Inequality 2000	IV	IV			IV
% Unemployment 2000	IV	IV			IV
% Below Poverty Line 2000	IV	IV			IV
Police Per Capita 2007	IV	IV			

(continued)

Variable	Hypothesis 1	Hypothesis 2	Hypothesis 3	Hypothesis 4	Hypothesis 5
Agency Size 2007			IV	IV	IV
Functional Differentiation 2007			IV	IV	IV
Occupational Differentiation 2007			IV	IV	IV
Population 2007	IV				
Ln(Population) 2007			IV	IV	IV

Note. IV = Independent Variable; DV = Dependent Variable

Hypothesis 2. The longer the tenure of a law enforcement department's gang unit, the lower the jurisdiction's crime and gang-related crime rates.

Hypothesis 2 is tested with dependent variables identical to those in use for testing hypothesis 1. The independent variables are consistent with those tested in this hypothesis except the gang unit is modified. Rather than coding the variable "0" or "1", the number of years that a gang unit has been in existence is entered. Gang units that had existed for less than a full year during the collection of the CLEGU survey are rounded up to "1" and police departments without gang units are coded as "0". All gang units that have operated for 2 or more years are recorded in whole numbers. Theoretically, gang units should become more proficient over time. The number of years a gang unit is active within a police department identifies departments benefitting from more experienced gang unit members and gang units' lag effects on crime from other departments with gang units. Again, regression models are used to determine gang units' effect on various crimes.

Hypothesis 3. A higher rate of young male offenses and gang-related crime increases the likelihood that a police department will have a gang unit.

The third, fourth, and fifth hypotheses examine contingency and social threat theories' contribution to explaining decisions to create gang units. Independent variables for both theories as well as control variables are tested in the same model. Hence, several independent variables are included in the regression model. The dependent variable in the model is presence of a gang unit. The model also includes organizational controls functional differentiation as measured by the number of specialized units in departments as measured by the 2000 and 2007 LEMAS survey and occupational differentiation as measured by percent of employees who are civilian. Additionally, environmental controls are included in the model. They include 2007 estimates of population and department size from the 2007 LEMAS survey. This hypothesis states that contingency theory significantly explain the presence of gang units such that there is a positive relationship between gang activity and gang unit presence. The data are analyzed using a regression model.

The third hypothesis tests if contingency theory contributes to the creation of gang units. Contingency theory posits that police respond to crime and gang-related crime by creating gang units. Contingency theory is measured by the amount of violent, property, and drug-related crime arrests of young males per capita at the time of the gang unit's creation. These arrests are reported in the ASR files of the UCR. A second measurement of contingency theory is the number of years that a department has experienced a gang problem until founding a gang unit. Each department's year of first experiencing gang problems is provided by various waves of the NYGS. The year of founding a gang unit was subtracted from 2007 to produce a length of gang unit tenure.

Hypothesis 4. A law enforcement agency is more likely to have a gang unit if the jurisdiction's population has a high proportion of Blacks and Latinos/Latinas compared to Whites.

Social threat theory, as applied to the social threat posed to Whites by racial/ethnic minorities, is measured based on the percentage of Blacks and Latinos/Latinas within a jurisdiction (a.k.a. ethnic/racial composition) (Katz et al., 2002). More specifically, jurisdictions with higher percentages of Blacks and Latinos/Latinas in their population are more likely to have law enforcement agencies that utilize more punitive policies towards offenders. In this study, the interest is whether law enforcement - through a gang unit - is a response to more minority citizens being present. The Decennial Census will provide measures for the racial composition of jurisdictions during the decade each gang unit was founded. Additionally, these percentages are squared to allow multivariate analyses to account for some of the nonlinear relationships between police behavior and race/ethnicity (Katz et al., 2002).

Parker et al. (2005) comment that social threat theory's inability to explain the criminal justice system's reaction to Black populations consistently is likely due to the diverse methodological approaches researchers take to test the theory. Other methods of measuring social threat theory include comparing the educational attainment and the employment rates of different racial or ethnic groups (e.g., ethnic/racial inequality) as well as the change in percentage of Blacks and Latinos/Latinas within specified areas (a.k.a. ethnic/racial immigration) (Parker, Stults, and Rice, 2005).

Hypothesis 5. The higher the percentage of a jurisdiction's population under the poverty line, the higher percentage of unemployed citizens, and the higher the economic

inequality present in a jurisdiction, the more likely a jurisdiction will have a gang unit present.

Social threat theory, as applied to socioeconomic class (SES), is measured based on the Gini index and the percentage of a jurisdiction's population that are impoverished (Katz et al., 2002). For this hypothesis, social threat theory predicts that wealthier individuals in a jurisdiction are threatened by increases in the number of lower income individuals in the jurisdiction. Income inequality between jurisdictions is measured using the Gini index, one of the most common and oldest formulas for calculating measures of income inequality (Gini, 1921; Ogwang, 2000). The Gini index is used in place of other measures of economic status, which often do not account for the distribution of economic wealth (Swift, 2011). Using the 2000 Decennial Census measures of household income, Burkey (2006) provides Gini coefficients for all states, counties, and independent cities in this study. See Burkey (n.d.) for an explanation for how he calculated Gini coefficients in his data. Additionally, the Decennial Census also provides county and independent city level measures of the percentage of the population living in poverty, which is also tested (Katz et al., 2002).

Organizational controls. Crank and Langworthy (1992) call for researchers to examine the role the institutional environment plays in police departments' decision-making. Likewise, Katz et al. (2002) note the significant impact organizational measures have on organizational behavior. The current study will include controls for differences in organizational structure and other organizational variables. First among the organizational controls is functional differentiation. An approximate measurement of functional differentiation within a police department is the number of specialized units

established and operated within that department (Katz et al., 2002). For the purposes of this study, specialized gang units and units not measured by both the 2000 and 2007 LEMAS survey are not included in the measures of functional differentiation. State and local law enforcement agencies, responding to the 2007 LEMAS survey, have an average of 7.37 specialized units (standard deviation 3.21; range 0-15). Those agencies responding to the 2000 LEMAS survey have an average of 7.02 specialized units (standard deviation 3.39). Both LEMAS waves were used for measuring occupational differentiation.

The second organizational control is occupational differentiation. An approximate measure of occupational differentiation within a police department is the percentage of department staff who are civilians (Katz et al., 2002). In this study, both part-time and full-time employees, as provided by the LEMAS survey, are included in the measure of occupation differentiation. The 2000 LEMAS survey indicates that 25.56% of large state and local law enforcement agencies' employees are civilians. By 2007, this civilianization increased to 32.22%. However, agencies may have no civilian employees or up to 73.31% and 87.61%, respectively, of agencies' employees may be civilians. The 2007 LEMAS measure of civilianization is used the current dissertation's analyses. Hypothetically, agencies with greater functional and occupational differentiation are likely to establish gang units.

Environmental controls. In addition to the theoretical and organizational variables listed above, the current study seeks to account for the social environment in which police departments and gang units operate. Two of such environmental variables are the size of the population policed by a police department. As in past studies on gang

units (Katz et al., 2002), the population of the study's jurisdictions is controlled for. Measures of jurisdiction populations is logarithmically transformed to improve the distributions of these measures and to include the effects of diminishing returns on increases in police departments' size due to increases in those departments' jurisdictions' populations (Katz et al., 2002). Katz et al. (2002) uses principal components analysis to combine their measures of social threat theory, as applied to lower class and poor populations to address multicollinearity between those different measures.

Quantitative Analyses

Separate analyses are necessary for examining research questions regarding the unequal distribution of gang units across police departments and research questions regarding gang units' impact on crime and gang-related activity. Given that the presence (or lack thereof) of a specialized gang unit within a police department is a nominal measure and that police departments serve as the cases for this study, a logistic regression is used to analyze the independent variables' ability to explain the varying presence of gang units in different police departments (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). In a separate set of statistical models, multiple Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions will be used to measure effects of specialized gang units and other control variables on crime (see Hair et al., 2006).

CHAPTER IV

Results

The purpose of this research is to examine the efficacy of gang units and the theoretical rationale for their creation. Police jurisdictions created gang units for different reasons. This research ferrets out these reasons. Their effectiveness in combating crime is also of interest. To examine these issues, this study sets out to prove or disprove the following five hypotheses as listed in the previous chapter. They are:

Hypothesis 1: *The presence of specialized policing gang unit in a law enforcement department should decrease that jurisdiction's crime and gang-related crime rates.*

Hypothesis 2: The longer the tenure of a law enforcement department's gang unit, the lower the jurisdiction's crime and gang-related crime rates.

Hypothesis 3: *A higher rate of young male offenses and gang-related crime increases the likelihood that a police department will have a gang unit.*

Hypothesis 4: A law enforcement agency is more likely to have a gang unit if the jurisdiction's population has a high proportion of Blacks and Latinos/Latinas compared to Whites.

Hypothesis 5: The higher the percentage of a jurisdiction's population under the poverty line, the higher percentage of unemployed citizens, and the higher the economic inequality present in a jurisdiction, the more likely a jurisdiction will have a gang unit present.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1: The presence of specialized policing gang unit in a law enforcement department should decrease that jurisdiction's crime and gang-related crime rates.

The independent variable that is of the greatest interest in the first hypothesis is the presence (or lack) of a specialized gang unit in a given police department. Gang units will be coded as a "0" or "1" to indicate the lack of or presence of a gang unit in a given department. Other independent variables include 1) percent of jurisdiction's population below the poverty line as measured by the 2000 decennial census, 2) Gini coefficients that measure income inequality (Burkey, 2006), 3) racial composition as measured by the census, 4) police per capita, and 5) jurisdictions' populations based on 2007 estimates provided by the Census Bureau.

The regression models will be calculated using these independent variables to predict violent crime arrests, property crime arrests, and drug-related arrests (dependent variables). In answering this first hypothesis, this study also seeks to provide empirical evidence measuring the relationship between gang units and the criminal activity those units combat. The dependent variables for first multivariate regression conducted in these analyses are from the ASR files of the UCR. The UCR provides measures of arrests for males, aged 10 to 24, for violent offenses, property offenses, weapons offenses, drug-related offenses, and misdemeanor assaults in 2007. Using these measures as well as the UCR's measures of population in jurisdictions, municipal crime rates were calculated for violent crimes, property crimes, weapons offenses, drug-related offenses, and misdemeanor assault offenses. These results of this regression are presented in Tables 3-6.

Violent crime arrests. Starting with violent crime (see Table 3), four of the independent variables weakly but statistically significantly explained young male crime rates in jurisdictions. The percentage of Blacks residents, percentage of Latino residents, the percentage of unemployed residents, and the number of police per capita all positively correlated with violence. The presence of a specialized gang unit is marginally and positively related to the rate of violent crime in the jurisdiction. In total, these factors explained 19.1% of the variation in violent offending across jurisdictions. Thus, it appears that gang units have a marginal impact on decreasing rates of violent crime.

Table 3

OLS Multivariate Regression - Impact of Gang Unit on Violent Crime Per Capita, 2007

Variable	b^*	*B*	SE	Prob.
Gang Unit Presence 2007	.092	13.487	6.903	.051
% Black 2000	.182***	.768	.236	.001
% Latino 2000	.136*	.568	.219	.010
County Inequality 2000	-.087	-188.448	124.739	.132
% Unemployment 2000	.277***	19.337	5.154	.000
% Below Poverty Line 2000	-.118	-1.721	1.173	.143
Police Per Capita 2007	.224***	.208	.051	.000
Constant		53.484	50.004	.285
R^2	.191			
F (7, 417)	14.06***			
Root MSE	65.55			

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Property crime arrests. Nineteen percent (R^2 = .193) of the variation in the rates of young males committing of property crimes across different jurisdiction can be

explained by the model (see Table 4). Jurisdictions with a greater percentage of Latino residents, greater inequality, and a lower percentage of residents under the poverty line experience lower property crimes rates. It is noteworthy that inequality's beta coefficient has a moderate strength (beta = -.411) and that poverty had a strong coefficient (beta = .634). All other independent variables had weak beta coefficients. Unlike violent crime, property crime decreases as the number of officers per capita increases. The presence of police gang units had no significant effect on property crime rates.

Table 4

OLS Multivariate Regression - Impact of Gang Unit on Property Crime Per Capita, 2007

Variable	b^*	*b*	SE	Prob.
Gang Unit Presence 2007	-.045	-11.724	12.185	.337
% Black 2000	-.073	-.542	.416	.193
% Latino 2000	-.133*	-.984	.386	.011
County Inequality 2000	-.411***	-1574.997	220.195	.000
% Unemployment 2000	-.121	-14.89738	9.097	.102
% Below Poverty Line 2000	.634***	16.521	2.071	.000
Police Per Capita 2007	.115*	.188	.089	.036
Constant		784.636	88.269	.000
R^2	.193			
F (7, 417)	14.27***			
Root MSE	115.71			

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Weapons offense arrests. Table 5 shows the results of a multiple regression in explaining the weapon offenses per capita in major American cities. Roughly a third of the variation (r-squared = .337) in weapon offenses committed by young males can be

explained by the independent variables. As a jurisdiction gains a greater portion of Black residents and police officers, weapon offenses by young males moderately increase.

Table 5

OLS Multivariate Regression - Impact of Gang Unit on Weapons Offenses Per Capita, 2007

Variable	b^*	b	SE	Prob.
Gang Unit Presence 2007	.088*	5.672	2.728	.038
% Black 2000	.302***	.557	.093	.000
% Latino 2000	.219***	.398	.086	.000
County Inequality 2000	-.272***	-257.022	49.295	.000
% Unemployment 2000	.216**	6.587	2.037	.001
% Below Poverty Line 2000	.008	.048	.464	.917
Police Per Capita 2007	.305***	.124	.020	.000
Constant		88.311	19.761	.000
R^2	.337			
F (7, 417)	30.28***			
Root MSE	25.905			

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

And as a jurisdictions' population includes more Latinos/Latinas and the unemployed and begins receiving the services of a police gang unit, weapon offenses by young males increase to a weak extent. When a jurisdiction's population becomes increasingly economically unequal, weapon offenses decrease to a weak extent. Nonetheless, police gang units appear to have a marginal effect on decreasing the number of arrests for weapons offenses.

As a jurisdiction experiences a greater population of Latino residents, less inequality, higher levels of poverty, and higher levels of policing, that jurisdiction also experiences more drug offenses committed by young males. The percentage of Black residents had a marginal, positive relationship (p = .079) with drug offenses. The most notable finding for the purposes of this study is that gang units had no relationship with drug offending rates.

Misdemeanor assault arrests. The percentage of Black residents, equality within jurisdiction's counties, the percentage of impoverished residents, and the ratio of police to residents all significantly and positively relate to the misdemeanor assault rates by young male offenders (see Table 6). Minor attacks increased with Black residents, poverty, and police officials and decreased with inequality. These factors explained 19.4% of the variation in less severe assaults across municipalities. Gang units did not significantly impact the number of misdemeanor assaults committed by young men.

Table 6

OLS Multivariate Regression - Impact of Gang Unit on Misdemeanor Assault Offenses Per Capita, 2007

Variable	b^*	b	SE	Prob.
Gang Unit Presence 2007	.008	1.75	10.575	.869
% Black 2000	.131*	.85	.361	.019
% Latino 2000	-.080	-.513	.335	.127
County Inequality 2000	-.371***	-1233.085	191.093	.000
% Unemployment 2000	.051	5.502	7.895	.486
% Below Poverty Line 2000	.257**	5.768	1.797	.001
Police Per Capita 2007	.277***	.395	.078	.000

(continued)

Variable	b^*	b	SE	Prob.
Constant		527.283	76.603	.000
R^2	.194			
F (7, 417)	14.33***			
Root MSE	100.42			

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Impact of gang units on gang members, gang-member homicides, and gang-motivated homicides. The second set of dependent variables are from the 2007-2008 NYGS. The NYGS provides measures of the number of gang members, homicides involving gang members and gang-motivated homicides. Using a multiple regression, the presence of gang units in a jurisdiction was tested to determine their effect on gangs (see Table 7). The effects of gang unit presence will be estimated controlling for several independent variables, racial composition, inequality, unemployment, and poverty of the jurisdictions studied. Other independent variables include the jurisdiction's population and its number of police per capita.

Gang members. A multiple regression was calculated to explain variation within the number of gang members in the nation's police jurisdictions. It would make sense that a jurisdiction with a gang unit would have a large number of identified gang members. Results, as shown in Table 7, indicate that a jurisdiction with a larger population is statistically more likely to have more gang members. Jurisdictions with more Latino residents and more police per capita have significantly more gang members. Measures of economic status (i.e., county inequality, unemployment, and poverty) did not significantly predict the number of gang members in a jurisdiction. Finally, the presence

of a gang unit was not statistically related to the number of gang members in a given jurisdiction.

Table 7

OLS Multivariate Regression – Impact of Gang Unit on Number of Gang Members

Variable	b^*	*b*	SE	Prob.
Gang Unit Presence 2007	.015	84.601	281.949	.764
% Black 2000	.004	.691	9.471	.942
% Latino 2000	.139*	22.126	9.529	.021
County Inequality 2000	-.006	-488.634	4968.656	.922
% Unemployment 2000	.133	349.763	210.238	.097
% Below Poverty Line 2000	-.077	-44.656	50.254	.375
Police Per Capita 2007	.176**	7.013	2.353	.003
Population 2007	.59***	.005	.000	.000
Constant		-2613.161	2009.408	.195
R-squared	.447			
F(8, 271)	27.38***			
Root MSE	2075			

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Gang-Member Homicides. The impact of gang units on gang-related crime was examined by calculating an OLS multiple regression. The multiple regression was used to explain the variation in gang member homicides across different jurisdictions. These analyses will specifically provide the variance in gang-member homicides that is explained by presence of gang units in these jurisdictions, see Table 8. As Table 8 shows, only high racial/ethnic diversity and larger populations significantly increased the number of gang-member homicides in a jurisdiction. The presence of a specialized gang

unit, the number of police per capita, and the economic indicator variables all had no significant impact on the rates of gang-member homicides.

Table 8

OLS Multivariate Regression – Impact of Gang Unit on Gang-Member Homicides

Variable	b^*	*b*	SE	Prob.
Gang Unit Presence 2007	-.050	-.780	.745	.296
% Black 2000	.170**	.077	.025	.003
% Latino 2000	.158**	.071	.024	.003
County Inequality 2000	.023	5.375	13.666	.694
% Unemployment 2000	.097	.731	.566	.197
% Below Poverty Line 2000	-.063	-.101	.132	.446
Police Per Capita 2007	.046	.005	.006	.405
Population 2007	.587***	.000	.000	.000
Constant		-6.47	5.49	.240
R-squared	.436			
F(8, 271)	29.71***			
Root MSE	5.823			

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Gang-Motivated Homicides. To more closely examine the effects of police gang units on gang-related crime, a regression analysis was conducted to explain the variance of gang motivated homicides across jurisdictions. The results (see Table 9) show that, like gang-member homicides, gang-motivated homicides are best described by demographic variables.

Of the statistically significant dependent variables, higher percentages of Black and Latino/Latina residents predicted higher numbers of gang-motivated homicides along

with jurisdictions with larger populations. Again, the presence of a gang unit in a jurisdiction had no significant effect on gang-motivated homicides in that jurisdiction.

Table 9

OLS Multivariate Regression – Impact of Gang Unit on Gang-Motivated Homicides

Variable	b^*	*b*	SE	Prob.
Gang Unit Presence 2007	-.059	-.591	.556	.289
% Black 2000	.201**	.06	.02	.003
% Latino 2000	.256***	.072	.018	.000
County Inequality 2000	-.03	-4.673	10.249	.649
% Unemployment 2000	.165	.791	.420	.061
% Below Poverty Line 2000	-.177	-.181	.098	.066
Police Per Capita 2007	.001	.000	.005	.990
Population 2007	.455***	.000	.000	.000
Constant		.08	4.168	.985
R-squared			.311	
F(8, 271)			15.77***	
Root MSE			4.155	

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Overall, the presence of a gang unit was only significantly related to a decrease in the rate of weapons offenses in a jurisdiction. This indicates that gang units have a very limited impact on the rates of a majority of crimes, including gang-related crimes, committed in a jurisdiction.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2: The longer the tenure of a law enforcement department's gang unit, the lower the jurisdiction's crime and gang-related crime rates.

Hypothesis 2 was tested using OLS multivariate regression models. These models were run to determine whether gang units with longer tenures decreased crime rates within a jurisdiction. The dependent variables are the violent crime, property crime, weapons offenses, drug offenses, and misdemeanor assault rates per capita. The main independent variable is the number of years a gang unit has been in operation. The control variables are racial composition, inequality, unemployment, poverty of the jurisdictions, and police per capita.

Table 10

OLS Multivariate Regression – Impact of Gang Unit Tenure on Violent Crime Rates

Variable	b^*	*b*	SE	Prob.
Gang Unit Tenure 2007	.058	.580	.473	.220
% Black 2000	.193**	.814	.234	.001
% Latino 2000	.149**	.621	.218	.005
County Inequality 2000	-.1	-215.986	123.897	.082
% Unemployment 2000	.277***	19.354	5.172	.000
% Below Poverty Line 2000	-.121	-1.763	1.177	.135
Police Per Capita 2007	.226***	.21	.051	.000
Constant		69.770	49.161	.157
R-squared	.173			
F(7, 417)	13.66***			
Root MSE	65.73			

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Violent crime rate. The first category of aggregate crime by young males is violent crime (see Table 10). Four of the independent variables have a positive and statistically significant relationship with violent crime. Jurisdictions with more racially diverse populations, more unemployment, and more police are significantly more likely to experience increased numbers of arrests for violent crime. More economically equal populations are also significantly more likely to have more violent crime. The number of years a jurisdiction has had a specialized gang unit does not significantly relate to the extent of its violent crime problem.

Table 11

OLS Multivariate Regression – Impact of Gang Unit Tenure on Property Crime Rates

Variable	b^*	*b*	SE	Prob.
Gang Unit Tenure 2007	-.012	-.209	.833	-.25
% Black 2000	-.080	-.599	.413	-1.45
% Latino 2000	-.145**	-1.067	.384	-2.78
County Inequality 2000	-.403***	-1546.66	218.333	-7.08
% Unemployment 2000	-.122	-15.093	9.115	-1.66
% Below Poverty Line 2000	.640***	16.552	2.073	7.98
Police Per Capita 2007	.115*	.188	.09	2.10
Constant		768.481	86.633	.000
R-squared	.178			
F(7, 417)	14.11***			
Root MSE	115.83			

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Property crime rate. Approximately 18% (r-squared = .178) of the property crimes committed by young males can be attributed to four independent variables (see Table 11). Jurisdictions with a greater percentage of Latino residents, greater inequality, a smaller portion of residents living under the poverty line, and fewer police per capita are significantly more likely to experience lower property crime rates. As with violent crime rates, the tenure of a police gang unit has no significant effect on property crime rates in a jurisdiction.

Table 12

OLS Multivariate Regression – Impact of Gang Unit Tenure on Weapons Offense Rates

Variable	b^*	*b*	SE	Prob.
Gang Unit Tenure 2007	.083	.366	.186	.050
% Black 2000	.309***	.569	.093	.000
% Latino 2000	.223***	.406	.086	.000
County Inequality 2000	-.282***	-266.79	48.855	.000
% Unemployment 2000	.214**	6.52	2.04	.001
% Below Poverty Line 2000	.004	.028	.464	.951
Police Per Capita 2007	.309***	.125	.020	.000
Constant		94.337	19.385	.000
R-squared	.336			
F(7, 417)	30.18***			
Root MSE	25.919			

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Weapons offense rates. Table 12 shows the results of a multiple regression in explaining the weapon offenses per capita in major American cities. As before, roughly a

third of the variation (r-squared = .336) in young males' weapon offenses can be explained by the study's independent variables. Jurisdictions with a greater proportion of Black and Latino residents and a higher rate of police officers per capita have significantly larger rates of weapons offenses. Also, jurisdictions with more unemployment but less inequality have significantly higher rates of young male weapon offenses. Additionally, the number of weapons offenses in a jurisdiction does not significantly increase as the tenure of a jurisdiction's gang unit becomes longer.

Drug offense rates. There are significantly higher rates of young male drug offending in jurisdictions that have an even distribution of wealth and a greater percentage of residents living below the poverty line. Additionally, major police departments' jurisdictions with greater number of police per capita experience significantly more youth male drug offending. Notably, there is no relationship between the racial/ethnic makeup of a jurisdiction's population with its rates of drug offenses. Also, for drug-related offending, the gang units with longer tenure do not significantly impact the rates of young male drug offending in a jurisdiction (see Table 13).

Table 13

OLS Multivariate Regression – Impact of Gang Unit Tenure on Drug Offense Rates

Variable	b^*	b	SE	Prob.
Gang Unit Tenure 2007	.02	.483	1.062	.650
% Black 2000	.1	1.022	.527	.053
% Latino 2000	.045	.457	.489	.350
County Inequality 2000	-.247***	-1300.789	278.156	.000
% Unemployment 2000	.003	.549	11.61221	.962
% Below Poverty Line 2000	.267***	9.482	2.641	.000

(continued)

Variable	b^*	*b*	SE	Prob.
Police Per Capita 2007	.479***	1.08	.114	.000
Constant		476.238	110.37	.000
R-squared	.304			
F(7, 417)	25.97***			
Root MSE	147.57			

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Misdemeanor assault rates. Arrests for misdemeanor assaults increased alongside the percentage of residents that are Black, the percentage of residents that are under the poverty line and the ratio of police officials to residents while decreasing as the distribution of wealth becomes more unequal (see Table 14). In total, 19.6% of these attacks may be explained by the aforementioned variables. Gang unit tenure did not significantly affect the rates of misdemeanor assaults committed by young men in a jurisdiction.

Table 14

OLS Multivariate Regression – Impact of Gang Unit Tenure on Misdemeanor Assault Rates

Variable	b^*	*b*	SE	Prob.
Gang Unit Tenure 2007	.008	-.805	.721	.265
% Black 2000	.131*	.906	.358	.012
% Latino 2000	-.080	-.396	.332	.234
County Inequality 2000	-.371***	-1249.769	189.006	.000
% Unemployment 2000	.051	6.042	7.890	.444
% Below Poverty Line 2000	.257**	5.778	1.794	.001
Police Per Capita 2007	.277***	.390	.078	.000

(continued)

Variable	b^*	b	SE	Prob.
Constant		535.351	74.996	.000
R-squared	.196			
F(7, 417)	14.55***			
Root MSE	100.27			

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3: A higher rate of young male offenses and gang-related crime increases the likelihood that a police department will have a gang unit.

The primary outcome variable being tested in the second hypothesis is the presence (or lack) of a specialized gang unit in a police department. As stated before, gang units are measured with a dummy variable wherein a "1" indicates the presence of a gang unit within a given department. The testing of this hypothesis involves explaining the variation gang units across local law enforcement jurisdictions nationwide. Specifically, variation in gang unit presence is explained by 1) percent of jurisdiction's population below the poverty line as measured by the 2000 decennial census, 2) Gini coefficients that measure income inequality (Burkey, 2006), 3) racial composition as measured by the census, 4) police per capita, and 5) jurisdictions' populations based on 2007 estimates provided by the Census Bureau.

The results of the Contingency Model 1 (see Table 15) show evidence supporting contingency theory. Higher rates of violent crime and weapons offenses committed by young males significantly predict the presence of gang units. However, once organizational and environmental controls are introduced these relationships change (see Contingency Model 2 in Table 15). It should be noted that young male crimes were

changed into crime rates above to prevent multicollinearity with agency size. This is because both aggregate crimes and crime rates may be similar indicators of threats to public safety and thus, indicators of influences on police departments that may be described by contingency theory. Changing department size into a per capita measure may result in a variable that no longer represents the same measure of agency size as studied in organizational research.

Contingency Model 2 also shows that violent crime no longer significantly relates to the presence of gang units as it did without control variables (see Table 15). Higher rates of weapons offenses continue to significantly predict the presence of gang units. The higher the functional differentiation of a department and the larger the population of its jurisdiction significantly predict the presence of a gang unit.

Table 15

Logistic Regression – Explaining Gang Unit Presence with Contingency Theory – Models 1 and 2

Variable	b^*	b	SE	Prob.
Contingency Theory 1				
Violent Crime	.501*	.004	.002	.025
Property Crime	-.025	-.000	.001	.848
Weapons Offenses	.534*	.010	.005	.023
Drug Offenses	-.086	-.000	.001	.759
Misdemeanor Assaults	-.056	-.000	.001	.682
Constant		-.571	.173	.001
Log likelihood	-246.469			
LR Chi-squared (5)	81.47			
Prob > Chi-squared	.000			

(continued)

Variable	b^*	b	SE	Prob.
Pseudo R-squared	.142			
Contingency Theory Model 2				
Violent Crime	.111	.004	.002	.128
Property Crime	-.109	-.002	.001	.072
Weapons Offenses	.226**	.017	.005	.002
Drug Offenses	.004	.000	.001	.960
Misdemeanor Assaults	-.004	-.000	.001	.952
Agency Size	-.150	--.000	.000	.138
Functional Differentiation	.278***	.141	.035	.000
Occupational Differentiation	.022	.503	1.206	.676
Ln(Population)	.404***	1.098	.264	.000
Constant		-14.200	2.868	.000
Log likelihood	-218.319			
LR Chi-squared (5)	128.69			
Prob > Chi-squared	.000			
Pseudo R-squared	.228			

Note. All variables are from the year 2007; b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

For comparison between official reports of young male offending and police estimates of gang activity, logistic regression models were calculated using the NYGS. The results of these models are shown in Table 16.

Before (see Table 16, Contingency Model 3) and after the introduction of organizational and environmental control variables (see Table 16, Contingency Model 4), the results show that higher estimates of gang membership by police officers is a significant predictor of whether a specialized gang unit is present in a jurisdiction. Of the control variables, only higher rates of occupational differentiation significantly predicted

the presence of specialized gang units. Therefore, the results show that increasingly civilianized police departments are more likely to have specialized gang units.

Table 16

Logistic Regression – Explaining Gang Unit Presence with Contingency Theory – Models 3 and 4

Variable	b^*	b	SE	Prob.
Contingency Theory Model 3				
Gang Members	.916***	.003	.000	.000
Gang-Member Homicides	-.050	-.030	.057	.597
Gang-Motivated Homicides	.029	.027	.103	.794
Constant		-.595	.197	.003
Log likelihood	-123.966			
LR Chi-squared (3)	62.85			
Prob > Chi-squared	.000			
Pseudo R-squared	.202			
Contingency Theory Model 4				
Gang Members	.853***	.003	.001	.000
Gang-Member Homicides	-.047	-.027	.071	.707
Gang-Motivated Homicides	.000	.000	.119	.998
Agency Size	-.041	-.000	.000	.151
Functional Differentiation	.054	.050	.054	.270
Occupational Differentiation	.081*	3.199	1.593	.045
Ln(Population)	.106	.576	.402	.151
Constant		-8.397	4.407	.057
Log likelihood	-117.483			
LR Chi-squared (7)	75.82			
Prob > Chi-squared	.000			

(continued)

Variable	b^*	b	SE	Prob.
Pseudo R-squared	.244			

Note. All variables are from the year 2007; b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4: A law enforcement agency is more likely to have a gang unit if the jurisdiction's population has a high proportion of Blacks and Latinos/Latinas compared to Whites.

The analyses testing social threat theory utilized measures on the racial demographics of the jurisdictions policed by the various departments. The models used in testing social threat theory explain variation in the use of gang units by police departments. The first model is used to explain how well racial threat theory directly explains the presence of the gang units. The results of this logistic regression are presented in Table 17. In Race/Ethnicity Threat Model 1 (see Table 17), the presence of larger percentages of both Black and Latino/Latina residents significantly increases the likelihood that a gang unit is present in a jurisdiction.

Table 17

Logistic Regression – Explaining Gang Unit Presence with Race/Ethnicity Threat

Variable	b^*	b	SE	Prob.
Race/Ethnicity Threat Model 1				
% Black[a]	.17**	.0225	.007	.002
% Latino/Latina[a]	.412*	.056	.010	.036
Constant		-.695	.217	.001
Log likelihood	-218.495			
LR Chi-squared (2)	45.74			

(continued)

Variable	b^*	b	SE	Prob.
Prob > Chi-squared	.000			
Pseudo R-squared	.095			
Race/Ethnicity Threat Model 2				
% Black[a]	.107*	.015	.007	.040
% Latino/Latina[a]	.342***	.048	.01	.000
Agency Size[b]	-.097	-.000	.000	.493
Functional Differentiation[b]	.245***	.127	.036	.000
Occupational Differentiation[b]	.009	.205	1.204	.865
Ln(Population)[b]	.368***	1.027	.275	.000
Constant		-13.576	2.99	.000
Log likelihood	213.896			
LR Chi-squared (2)	137.54			
Prob > Chi-squared	.000			
Pseudo R-squared	.243			

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .00; [a] Variable from the year 2000; [b] Variable from the year 2007

With the introduction of control variables at the organizational and environmental level, the percent of Black and Latino/Latina residents continue to affect the presence of gang units. Higher functional differentiation in a police department and a larger jurisdictional population significantly predicted the presence of gang units in police departments. The introduction of these two variables more than doubles the percentage of variation in the dependent variables that is explained by the logistic regression model.

Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5: The higher the percentage of a jurisdiction's population under the poverty line, the higher percentage of unemployed citizens, and the higher the economic inequality present in a jurisdiction, the more likely a jurisdiction will have a gang unit present.

In addition to measures of the racial and ethnic composition of jurisdictions' residents, the socioeconomic composition of those residents is also used to measure how well social threat theory may explain the presence of specialized gang units. The results of the analyses used in testing the socioeconomic angle of social threat theory are presented in Table 18.

In Socioeconomic Threat Model 1 (see Table 18), socioeconomic variables explain only 2% of the variation in the use of gang units when control variables are not included in the model. Further, the only statistically significant variable, county-level inequality, has a negative relationship, which is to say that as a jurisdiction becomes increasingly equal in the distribution of wealth among its residents, police departments in those jurisdictions are increasingly likely to create a specialized police gang unit. This is the opposite direction of any explanation provided by social threat theory.

Table 18

Logistic Regression – Explaining Gang Unit Presence with Socioeconomic Threat

Variable	*b**	*b*	SE	Prob.
Socioeconomic Threat Model 1				
County Inequality[a]	-.195**	-10.821	3.782	.004
% Unemployment[a]	.140	.250	.166	.131
% Below Poverty Line[a]	.081	.030	.037	.417
Constant		3.928	1.542	.011
Log likelihood	-281.017			
LR Chi-squared (3)	12.37			
Prob > Chi-squared	.006			
Pseudo R-squared	.022			

(continued)

Variable	b^*	b	SE	Prob.
Socioeconomic Threat Model 2				
County Inequality[a]	-.132	-9.02	4.461	.043
% Unemployment[a]	.231**	.510	.195	.009
% Below Poverty Line[a]	-.046	-.022	.043	.607
Agency Size[b]	-.033	-.000	.000	.854
Functional Differentiation[b]	.305***	.151	.035	.000
Occupational Differentiation[b]	.038	.834	1.163	.473
Ln(Population)[b]	.339**	.899	.285	.002
Constant		-9.238	3.901	.018
Log likelihood	-224.783			
LR Chi-squared (7)	115.76			
Prob > Chi-squared	.000			
Pseudo R-squared	.205			

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .00; [a] Variable from the year 2000; [b] Variable from the year 2007

Next, a logistic regression model was run using socioeconomic independent variables in conjunction with organizational and environmental variables (see Table 18, Socioeconomic Threat Theory Model 2). Police departments with higher levels of functional differentiation and jurisdictions with larger populations were significantly more likely to have a gang unit. The results also showed that there is a confounding effect as unemployment became a significant predictor of the presence of gang units only once controls were included in the model. As predicted by social threat theory, jurisdictions with more unemployment are more likely to have gang units. Like the models analyzed in testing hypotheses 3 and 4, the use of the organizational control variables and population increases the variance in the presence of gang units explained to roughly 20%.

Explaining Gang Unit Presence based on Contingency, Social Threat, and Organizational Theories.

In Table 19, the results of a full logistic regression analysis of the effects of all major independent variables on the presence of specialized gang units across various police departments. In studying the effects of contingency theory, social threat theory, and organizational theory on the distribution of specialized gang units across America's major police departments, it would be advisable to test these theories against one another.

Table 19

Logistic Regression - Explaining Gang Unit Presence based on Contingency, Social Threat, and Organizational Theory

Variable	b^*	b	SE	Prob.
Violent Crimes Per Capita[a]	.070	.002	.002	.259
Property Crimes Per Capita[a]	-.085	-.002	.001	.203
Weapons Offenses Per Capita[a]	.123	.01	.006	.106
Drug Offenses Per Capita[a]	.044	.001	.001	.532
Misdemeanor Assaults Per Capita[a]	.004	.000	.001	.955
% Black	.042	.006	.001	.521
% Latino/Latina	.276***	.04	.009	.000
County Inequality	-.131	-9.673	5.108	.058
% Unemployment	.104	.248	.215	.250
% Below Poverty Line	-.043	-.022	.053	.683
Agency Size[a]	-.125	-.000	.000	.331
Functional Differentiation[a]	.284***	.151	.038	.000
Occupational Differentiation[a]	-.011	-.261	1.278	.838
Ln(Population)[a]	.342**	.976	.285	.001

(continued)

Variable	b^*	b	SE	Prob.
Constant		-9.546	4.106	.020
Log likelihood	-205.876			
LR Chi-squared (14)	153.58			
Prob > Chi-squared	.000			
Pseudo R-squared	.272			

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .00; [a] Variable from the year 2000; [b] Variable from the year 2007

The results show that when controlling for total number of variables tested in this study, gang units are implemented independently of the direct effects of crime within these units' jurisdictions (see Table 19). Also, as a given jurisdiction's population increases and is composed of more Latino residents, that jurisdiction's police department is significantly more likely to create a gang unit. Further, police departments that are more functionally differentiated are also significantly more likely to have a gang unit. Finally, jurisdictions with more equally distributed wealth are significantly more likely to have gang units.

Explaining the Presence of Gang Units with Significant Variables

A final logistic regression model was run (see Table 20) including only those independent variables that significantly related to the presence of gang units when tested alongside environmental and organizational control variables. The results show that the effects of Latino/Latina residents, functional differentiation, and population size have maintained similar significance and strength as in previous analyses.

Table 20

Logistic Regression – Explaining the Presence of Gang Units with Previously Significant Variables

Variable	b^*	*b*	SE	Prob.
Weapons Offense Per Capita[b]	.12*	.009	.005	.039
% Black[a]	.064	.009	.009	.290
% Latino/Latina[a]	.297***	.043	.010	.000
County Inequality[a]	-.134*	-9.888	4.451	.026
% Unemployment[a]	.069	.164	.149	.271
Functional Differentiation[b]	.273***	.836	.038	.000
Ln(Population)[b]	.292***	.146	.229	.000
Constant		-7.975	3.298	.016
Log likelihood	-207.982			
LR Chi-squared (14)	149.37			
Prob > Chi-squared	.000			
Pseudo R-squared	.264			

Note. b^* = standardized beta; b = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; Prob. = 2-tailed significance; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .00; [a] Variable from the year 2000; [b] Variable from the year 2007

However, with the removal of the nonsignificant variables from previous models (and arguably statistical noise), weapons offense rates and county-level inequality now significantly predict the presence of a gang unit. The significance of the weapons offending and inequality in this model may reflect the decrease in statistical noise compared to the model detailed in Table 19. Therefore, the threat of gun violence within economically equitable communities makes citizens more likely to pressure their police departments to address a gang problem through the creation of a specialized gang unit.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

Research Results

The results presented in the previous chapter are discussed here. This discussion concentrates on the five hypotheses that were examined in Chapter IV. Essentially, this research examines the efficacy of gang units in terms of their impacts on crime, and it explores police departments' rationale for forming these units.

Hypothesis 1. The first hypothesis is that the presence of specialized policing gang unit in a law enforcement department should decrease that jurisdiction's crime and gang-related crime rates. This is the first of two hypotheses providing an evaluation on the gang units' impact on crime. This was accomplished using the available secondary data. It was originally hypothesized that specialized gang units would significantly decrease crime rates based on the results of Katz et al. (2002) study which found no quantitative support for a relationship between gang units and crime.

Summarizing the results presented in Chapter IV, the presence of gang units in police departments had no significant relationship with four of the five measures of crimes taken from the UCR's ASR files. Specifically, the presence of a gang unit only marginally (Prob. = .051) decreased the rates of violent crime and significantly decreased the rates of weapons offenses within a jurisdiction. Separate analyses concluded that the presence of gang units did not significantly decrease rates of gang membership, gang-related homicides, or gang-motivated homicides.

These results show that, in aggregate, gang units do not lower crime rates. At best, gang unit activities improve departments' ability to make more arrests for violent

offenses. However, given that gang units do not appear to affect officers' estimates and gangs in their jurisdictions, the presence of gang units may just as easily reflect a department philosophy that prioritizes law enforcement against serious offenses as compared to departments without gang units. Overall, the hypothesis that gang unit presence decreases crime rates is not supported by the empirical data.

Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis two evaluates the relationship between the tenure of a gang unit on rates of crime and gang-related crime. A gang units' years of service was included in the models as a separate variable to allow for any delayed or long-term benefits of gang units to be identified. The results of this study show that the number of years a gang unit has been serving a community leads to no significant decrease in rates of offending in that jurisdiction. Therefore, the hypothesis that longer gang unit tenures decrease crime and gang-related crime rates in their jurisdictions is not supported by evidence. A possible explanation for this effect is that gang units, once established, rarely change their operating philosophy, resulting in a stable effect on gangs and gang-related crime.

Hypothesis 3. Hypothesis three is the first of three hypotheses testing whether organizational and social threat theories predict why gang units exist in certain police departments and jurisdictions and not in others. Specifically, hypothesis three tests the validity of contingency theory in explaining the implementation of gang units. This was included as Katz et al. (2002) found no evidence that contingency theory predicted the presence of gang units. The current study hypothesizes that higher rates of young male offenses and gang-related crime increase the likelihood that a gang unit is present within a police department.

The presence of a gang unit is significantly more likely if the jurisdiction has higher rates of violent crime and weapons offenses when no controls are present. However, once organizational and environmental variables are controlled, the presence of a gang unit is only significantly more likely when there are higher rates weapons offending. Furthermore, the model with controls determined that police departments in heavily populated urban cities and departments with a high degree of functional differentiation were significantly more likely to operate gang units. These departments may make large numbers of violent crime arrests or coincidentally operate in jurisdictions with high violent crime rates, which would explain the original relationship between violent crime and gang units.

In a separate set of analyses, data from the NYGS are tested to see if contingency theory explanations are valid when using police estimates of gang activity. Contradicting the findings by Katz et al. (2002), NYGS data perform substantially differently from the young male crime rates provided by the UCR. Specifically, police departments operating in jurisdictions with larger estimated numbers of gang members are significantly more likely to have gang units. This relationship is strong and persists when controlling for organizational and environmental controls. Finally, when alternative theoretical explanations are accounted for, contingency theory's variables fail to maintain a significant relationship with the presence of gang units.

Overall, there is mixed support for contingency theory. Gang units are not significantly more likely to exist based on specific criminal offending - at least offending by young men. But, gang units are significantly more likely to be present in jurisdictions

with large estimated numbers of gang members regardless of whether there is evidence of increased crime and gang-related crime activity.

Hypothesis 4. Hypothesis four features this study's first tests of social threat theory. Specifically, the social threat posed by higher proportions of minority populations (i.e., Blacks and Latinos/Latinas) in a jurisdiction. Without controlling for other variables, a jurisdiction with a high percentage of Blacks and/or Latinos/Latinas in its population is significantly more likely to have a gang unit.

When social threat posed by minority populations is tested alongside environmental and organizational controls, both racial threat variables (i.e., % Black and % Latino/Latina) maintain significance while functional differentiation and population contribute to the model as additional significant explanatory variables. This means that larger percentages of Blacks and Latinos/Latinas in a population do play a significant role in an agency's decision to implement a gang unit. Also, when police departments place more employees in specialized units, those departments are significantly more likely to have a gang unit present.

Overall, the empirical evidence supports the role of social threat theory – specifically a threat based on race/ethnicity – in the creation of specialized gang units. Higher proportions of Black and Latino/Latina residents in a jurisdiction's population significantly predict the presence of a gang unit even when environmental and organizational controls are accounted for. It is important to highlight that there are alternative explanations for this relationship beside that provided by racial threat theory. Rather than representing racial prejudice on part of the police and White residents, the significance of race may reflect a need for police departments to communicate to non-

White communities that the police do care about gang-related crime, which may adversely impact or appear to impact non-White communities. Another possibility, non-White communities may prefer to be policed by gang units, which are focused on severe crimes and are often staffed with non-White officers who may also live in the communities most affected by gangs.

Hypothesis 5. The logistic regression for the last hypothesis examines the criminal justice system's reaction to the social threat posed by lower socioeconomic classes towards society's mainstream. The findings of the analysis without controls show that only economic inequality, measured by the Gini coefficient, significantly increased the likelihood that an agency would have a gang unit. However, the relationship between economic inequality and the presence of a gang unit did so in the direction opposite to that predicted in social threat theory. This means that the more economically equal jurisdictions were, the more likely their police departments would have gang units. Neither the percentage of residents who were unemployed or the percentage of residents living under the poverty line significantly predicted the presence of a gang unit in a jurisdiction.

The introduction of organizational and environmental controls to the socioeconomic indicators reveals a confounding effect. Unemployment, which had no significance prior to the introduction of these controls, now has a significant relationship with the presence of gang units in police departments. Confounding effects can be difficult to interpret, including the current case. One possible explanation for the change in significance for employment is that police departments that are functionally differentiated or in heavily populated jurisdictions may have varying levels of

unemployment, which statistically obscures the relationship between unemployment and gang units.

Another potential explanation is that the unemployment measure used in this study is, in fact, a combination of two types of groups that each behave differently. The first group would be those unemployed individuals who are only unemployed for the short-term, such as being in-between jobs. The second group is composed on individuals who will remain unemployed for the long-term and thus, may have a more direct impact on the appearance of a larger lower class population in a given jurisdiction. Overall, there is partial support for social threat posed by lower socioeconomic classes in predicting the presence of gang units.

One should note that though income inequality was tested in this study, there may be superior alternatives for testing effects of inequality. The Gini coefficient has been subject to some criticism (Chitiga, Sekyere, & Tsaonamatsie, n.d.). The Human Sciences Research Council provides a helpful critique of the Gini coefficient (Chitiga et al., n.d.). First, the Gini coefficient may provide different results on the inequality of a given set of areas based on the specific income concept used in the coefficient's calculations (Chitiga et al., n.d.). A measure of individual income versus a measure of household income could produce different results on the severity of inequality in a county (Chitiga et al., n.d.).

A second criticism is that the Gini coefficient is calculated without taking into account the differences in taxes, based on place of residence, that incomes are subjected to (Chitiga et al., n.d.). It is common knowledge that tax codes can be structured to be flat, progressive, or regressive, which have differential impacts on the income inequality.

Third, the Gini coefficient does not account for the various services provided by the government that may combat or exacerbate the effects of inequality, such as a food stamps program or worker's compensation (Chitiga et al., n.d.).

Finally, Gini coefficients do not reflect differences in demographics that may explain inequality (Chitiga et al., n.d.). Counties more heavily populated by residents with fixed incomes, such as pensions for the elderly, may appear more unequal despite this inequality being nested in the demographic makeup of those counties. Given these criticisms, there may be better ways to measure socioeconomic inequality with this dissertation only providing a foundation for future research on this topic.

Combined theoretical model. Another model was run where the variables representing all theories were tested against one another. Three variables were statistically significant, and they all significantly predicted the presence of gang units. Jurisdictions with more Latino residents and a highly functionally differentiated department also have a weakly increased likelihood of having gang units. And departments that police heavily populated urban jurisdictions are also significantly more likely to have specialized gang units.

Overall, contingency theory, despite its simplicity, popularity, and its direct explanation of the behavior of police departments, is not a suitable explanation for the popularity of gang units. Instead, police departments are likely to adopt gangs to help them manage larger populations or because those departments follow a philosophy that favors the use of a variety of specialized units. Additionally, concerns over the racial and ethnic motivations behind the use of gang units may be founded on concrete evidence

rather than political contrarianism. Race does play a key role in the formation of gang units.

Model with only significant variables. The final model described in the results was run only with the variables that were significant in the models including controls for hypotheses 1 through 5. This was done to limit the number of variables to only the best predictors, making for a more parsimonious model, while still attempting to maximize the percent of the dependent variable explained by the model. The results showed that young male weapons offending, the percentage of population being Latino/Latina, functional differentiation, and population all had a positive relationship with the presence of gang units while county inequality, measured through the Gini coefficient, had a negative relationship. So, gang units do respond to firearms offenses and shootings, but gang units also appear to be a response to growing, economically equal populations, especially Latino/Latina populations and the presence of a gang unit reflects a police department's favoritism of the use of specialized and often investigative units over a generalized patrol force.

This leads one to question how effective gang units can be if they are being enacted in response to nongang-related problems, which these units are not designed to address. Perhaps the resources dedicated to combating gangs would be better dedicated to gun violence prevention and policing programs that help departments police larger populations with a smaller police force.

Implications for the Literature

Gangs as social phenomenon in communities have had a history of segregating and isolating racially non-White communities from the societal mainstream (Adamson,

2000). This history may explain why police departments react more to gangs in Latino/Latina communities compared to communities with different demographics. A necessary clarification for this hypothesis would be the identification of the origin of the motivation for gang units. Do police departments adopt gang units because of their perceptions of Latino/Latina communities as being hotbeds of gang activity? Do various jurisdictions' stakeholders pressure police into targeting gang activity because of mainstream society holding a similar view of Latino/Latina communities? Or, is it possible that Latino/Latina communities, themselves, see gangs as the cause of the social processes that typify Latino/Latina communities as an 'other' portion of society? And in answering any of these questions, should the study of gangs be approached with the measurement of the historical effects gangs have on law enforcement and stakeholders.

Johnson et al.'s (1995) prior finding, that law enforcement officials believe gangs to be a worsening social issue, points future researchers to continue to focus on law enforcement's perceptions of the gang problem. How these perceptions lead to the policing of race and large cities in their pursuit of gangs should continue to be studied as well. On the other hand, officials' beliefs on what causes gang activity are changing over time (National Gang Center, n.d.), which leads one to believe that officers' perceptions are externally influenced or that those perceptions readjust to fit the contextual evidence that best supports the belief of a severe gang problem. Gang-unit officers are overestimating their own official measures of gang activity would support the latter supposition (Katz & Webb, 1986).

Related to law enforcement's views towards gangs, gangs and gang culture is intertwined with other social issues. Many officials link drug sales to the presence of

gangs (Spergel et al., 1990) and have even interchanged the concepts (Archbold & Meyer, 1999). Future studies on officers' perceptions of gangs should also measure officers' perceptions of drugs as a community problem and larger social issue. Similarly, previous researchers have considered the boisterousness, visibility, and popular appeal of gang culture as a cause of the overestimation of the effects of gangs on crime (Greene & Pranis, 2007). Adding measures of such cultural artifacts to this growing list would lead to a very sociological approach to the underpinnings of a criminal justice policy.

CLEGU data shows that though gang units are not a new organizational feature, the proliferation of gang units has spread faster through the 2000s (Langton, 2010). Data from the NYGS shows that many small cities and rural counties have law enforcement agencies that have enacted gang units for the first time in the 2000s (National Gang Center, n.d.). This finding is at odds with other researchers finding that gang units spread alongside the spread of gangs (Weisel & Shelley, 2004). The results of the current study support the notion that the enactment of gang units is not heavily motivated by gang activity. Instead, modern gang units may be a response to smaller cities' and rural counties' various concerns surrounding urbanization and diversifying populations. Very often the apparent threat of gangs outweighs those groups' actual dangerousness (McCorkle & Miethe, 1998; Schaefer, 2002; Zatz, 1987) and these perceptions may fit within the overall perception of a decline in social order (Archbold & Meyer, 1999). This spread may be because gang units, as a strategic response, have achieved mainstream acceptance by the policing community to the extent of being described as mythical (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This acceptance may explain the implementation

of gang units with officers who have unclear perspectives on their gang units' goals (Carlie, 2002).

Study Limitations

There are several limitations to the current study. As with many quantitative tests of theoretical explanations for various phenomena in criminal justice, this study was unable to test all alternative explanations for the implementation of gang units. In particular, federal programs that incentivized the implementation of gang unit programs would fit within a resource dependency-based explanation for police officials' behavior. Further, the resource dependency effect was measured and tested in Katz et al.'s (2002) paper. Both Katz et al. (2002) and the current study highlight the importance in Latino residents for the decision to implement gang units. Exploring the effects of immigration status and the decision to police gangs may be a natural next step in studying this topic.

A second limitation is that all analyses were cross-sectional. It should be noted that steps were taken to ensure that the temporal ordering of the variables is accounted for. However, the use of panel analyses and path analyses would allow for the relationships between different waves of data and interrelated explanatory variables to be better illustrated statistically.

A third limitation relates directly to the data used in the current study. There were notable limitations with the use of the NYGS data that were not present when Katz et al. (2002) used different waves of that same data. In 2007, the NYGS did not measure police estimates of the number of gang-related crimes in categories other than homicide. Additionally, both the NYGS and the CLEGU surveys' limitations in their response rates prevented those data sets from being featured in more analyses. Specifically, the CLEGU

survey did not fully cover all police departments with gang units that also had gang units and the NYGS's individual waves had smaller sample sizes compared to the data set as a whole.

Public Policy Implications

The results of the current study provide some support for critics of specialized gang units. Gang units do not appear to have been constituted in jurisdictions where crime is most problematic nor do gang units appear to impact crime in jurisdictions where they do appear. A simple implication is for police departments to not use gang units; however, this may be oversimplifying the issue. A better reaction would be for departments to reevaluate their motivations for having gang units as well as the evaluations they use to ensure that gang units are delivering results in combatting gang activity. While most major police departments are familiar with self-evaluation, understanding the relationship between the police and gangs would require law enforcement leaders to innovate on their definitions and estimates of gang activity. Improvements in measuring gang-related crime can range from cooperating with academic and other police agencies in creating a consistent and reasonably valid definition of gangs to having third-parties provide definitions and estimates of gang activity that may be compared with departments' own dat. Furthermore, evaluations of gang units should include input from community stakeholders, particularly from residents who may not hold the most political power in a given jurisdiction but may be most directly policed by a gang unit in their jurisdiction. Lastly while many departments are apprehensive to ceasing a gang unit's operations, the reformation and restructuring of

gang units to prevent those units from relying on suppression tactics is more palatable recommendation.

Future Research

As Katz et al. (2002) have done, this study highlights the importance of examining why police agencies structure their organizations and implement new policing programs and positions to address crime in their communities. Unfortunately, the continued rise of gang units through the 2000s has been paired with a rise in policing Latino and heavily populated communities. Further studying this topic can bring more attention to addressing this problem and provide a venue for solutions to be proposed. Additionally, future studies should expand the number of variables and methods used to measure gang activity and the threat to public safety posed by gangs. While the NYGS has performed well in evaluations and is among the best data available, it has been discontinued despite no known decrease in the use of gang units. Finally, future studies should examine differences in gang units and how those differences may affect gang unit performance or reflect the philosophy of their department's executive officials. CLEGU provides several of such measures, but newer data that reaches a greater percentage of police agencies would be ideal.

Conclusion

The current study was able to provide the first national evaluation of gang units in the United States. While the results may be less exciting, they do lend support to previous studies that warned of the motivations for why gang units were being implemented. This caution is more important now that gang units are approaching regular use by all mainstream police departments. In examining gang units at a national

level, which find that gang units do not reduce crime, nor do they arise as a result of crime, but from large numbers Latino residents, jurisdictions with concentrated populations, and from police departments having a philosophy that favors the use of various specialized units (regardless of their effectiveness). These findings inform and bring attention to the area of policing gangs. With some fortune, these results may play a part in reforming police practices and the police-community partnership on a wide scale level.

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VITA

D. CODY GAINES

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Criminal Justice, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX, *Expected completion Fall 2018.* Dissertation Topic: The effectiveness and formation of specialized police gang units. Chair: Dr. Jurg Gerber.

M.A. Criminal Justice, California State University, San Bernardino, 2011.

B.A. Economics University of California, Santa Barbara, 2009.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2018 to Present University of Wisconsin, Platteville, WI.
LECTURER. Funded by the Department of Criminal Justice.

2017 to 2018 University of Wisconsin, Parkside, Kenosha, WI.
Assistant Professor. Funded by the Department of Criminal Justice.

2017 University of Wisconsin, Platteville, WI.
LECTURER. Funded by the Department of Criminal Justice.

2013 to 2015 Sam Houston State University, Criminal Justice Center, Huntsville, TX.
GRADUATE TEACHING FELLOW. Funded by Criminal Justice Center.

2011 to 2015 Sam Houston State University, Criminal Justice Center, Huntsville, TX.
GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT. Funded by Criminal Justice Center.

2009 to 2011 California State University, San Bernardino, Department of Criminal Justice.
GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT. Funded by The Riverside County California Probation Department: Youth Accountability Team/Youth Awareness Board.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

Gaines, D. C., & Wells, W. (2017). Investigators' and prosecutors' perceptions of collaborating with victim advocates on sexual assault casework. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, *28*(6), 555-569.

Gau, J., & Gaines, D. C. (2012). Top-down management and patrol officers' attitudes about the importance of public order maintenance: A research note. *Police Quarterly*, *15*(1), 45-61.

Other Journal Articles

Gaines, D. C., & Wells, W. (2016). Working with Advocates: Views of Criminal Justice Officials. *Sexual Assault Report, 19*(3).

Book Chapters

Famega, C., & Gaines, D. C. (2014). Explaining drug crime with criminological theory. In L. K. Gaines & J. Kremling (Eds.) *Drugs, crime, & justice: Contemporary perspectives* (3rd Edition). Spring Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

Encyclopedia Submissions

Gaines, D. C. (2013). Kansas City preventive patrol experiment. In K. Peak (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of community policing and problem solving* (pp. 229-232). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Gaines, D. C. (2013). First-line supervisors' roles. In K. Peak (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of community policing and problem solving* (pp. 363-367). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Technical Reports

2012. Wells, W., Gaines, D. C., & Fallik, S. Prosecutors' & Investigators' Perspectives on Collaborating with Victim Advocates. Report submitted to the Houston, TX Sexual Assault Kit Action-Research Working Group.

2012. Wells, W., & Gaines, D. C. Priorities for Testing Sexual Assault Kits: Evidence from Interviews with Investigators and Surveys of Prosecutors. Report submitted to the Houston, TX Sexual Assault Kit Action-Research Working Group.

2010. Gaines, L. K., Gau, J., & Gaines, D.C. CSUSB's analysis of the San Bernardino Employee Survey 2009. Report submitted to the San Bernardino Police Department, CA.

2010. Gau, J., & Gaines, D.C. Development of a San Bernardino community crime survey. Report submitted to the San Bernardino Police Department, CA.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2015. Gaines, D. C. Investigators' and prosecutors' perceptions of collaborating with victim advocates on sexual assault casework. Presentation at the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, Orlando, FL.

2013. Gaines, D. C. Perceived organizational support and organizational justice in officers' procedural compliance. Presentation at the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, Dallas, TX.

2012. Gaines, D. C. Organizational factors that influence police officer perceptions of being valued. Presentation at the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, New York City, NY.

2010. Gau, J. & Gaines, D. C. Order maintenance policing as top-down strategy: Do patrol officers' agree that disorder is the problem. Presentation at the American Society of Criminology, San Francisco, CA.

TEACHING AND ADVISING

Courses Previously Taught (* denotes teaching assistant)

Undergraduate Level: Criminology; Juvenile Delinquency and Juvenile Justice; Introduction to Methods of Research*; Substance Use and Abuse

Graduate Teaching Fellow

Sam Houston State University College of Criminal Justice 2013-2015

Graduate Student Training and Supervision

Ryan Larson (M.A. 2010-11, as part of YAT/YAB) -
California State University, San Bernardino.

Matthew Tracy (M.A., 2010-11, as part of YAT/YAB)
California State University, San Bernardino.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE ACTIVITIES

Manuscript Review for the Sexual Assault Report

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences
American Society of Criminology

AWARDS

2012 Rolando V. del Carmen Criminal Justice Endowed Scholarship
2011 Golden Key International Honour Society Membership

AREAS OF EMPHASIS

Policing, Policy Evaluation, Law, Research Methods