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The Hate Factory: A Glimpse into the Effects of the Prison Gang Subculture on Non-Violent Offenders

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THE HATE FACTORY: A GLIMPSE INTO THE EFFECTS OF THE PRISON GANG
SUBCULTURE ON NON-VIOLENT OFFENDERS

by

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B.A., Westminster College, 2009

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the
Masters of Public Administration

Department of Political Science
in the Graduate School
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Masters of Public Administration

in the field of Political Science

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

JACKSON FREDMAN, for the Masters of Public Administration degree in POLITICAL SCIENCE, presented on November 6, 2013, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: THE HATE FACTORY: A GLIMPSE INTO THE EFFECTS OF THE PRISON GANG SUBCULTURE ON NON-VIOLENT OFFENDERS

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Randolph Burnside

In an effort to ascertain ways to combat the indoctrination of non-violent, low-level offenders into prison gangs, this study looks at a synthesis of previous research on gang management strategies in conjunction with interviews given to a select group of Southern Illinois prison administrators. It is concluded that the best way to keep these vulnerable offenders away from the influence of prison gangs is to quickly separate the two groups as best as possible. This study is admittedly modest in scope, but the findings are couched within current literature looking to determine effective ways to combat the spread of prison gang propaganda and provides a relatively useful framework for future studies on the subject.

Introduction

In the early morning hours of June 7, 1998, William King, Lawrence Brewer, and Shawn Berry, three former inmates of the Texas Department of Corrections, were driving down a dirt road in Jasper, Texas when they spotted James Byrd, Jr., a middle-aged black man. Byrd was savagely beaten by the three ex-convicts, chained by his ankles to the back of Berry's pickup truck, and dragged down a dirt road for three miles. His body was literally ripped to shreds in a brutal display of the effects of the prison gang subculture, as all three men had joined white-supremacist prison gangs while serving their time. King, Brewer, and Berry had indeed been to prison, but for petty crimes such as burglary and theft. They went into the system as non-violent, low-level offenders and emerged from the dungeon transformed.

As the Jasper ringleader, William King's tale is the most intriguing because of the magnitude in which he immersed himself into the prison gang subculture. During the early days of his incarceration, King was gang raped by several black prison gang members, so he sought out the white gangs for protection. While serving his time, he joined a white supremacist prison gang and was completely indoctrinated into their way of thinking. He covered his body head-to-toe with Nazi and Ku Klux Klan tattoos and was a changed man by the time he got out of prison. Rather than reform King's propensity for petty theft, the penal system turned him into an animal capable of a heinous murder before releasing him back into the community.

While the actions of King, Brewer, and Berry are inexcusable, the story of their radicalization casts a rather unflattering light on one of the major problems faced by our correctional facilities today. The presence of prison gangs is felt throughout the entire United States prison system and little is done to shield low-level offenders from their influence. Prison gang culture has been thoroughly examined in the academic community, but minimal focus has

been placed on the gangs' indoctrination of non-violent, low-level offenders into the aggressive, racist subculture who did not have those tendencies prior to incarceration.

When an individual is convicted of a felony in the United States, they are sent to prison where they serve their time with other offenders convicted of similar crimes. Because it is supposed to be a punishment for breaking the law, prison life is not for the faint of heart. Although the environment is controlled by the State, there is a very prevalent subculture within the prison system that is akin to Thomas Hobbes' state of nature in which only the strong endure. This concept is not new, as evidenced by the depiction of prison decades ago by Hayner and Ash (1940) as a deadening, coercive, and criminogenic environment. This violent subculture breeds extreme violence and hatred within the prison walls. Due to overpopulation and various economic constraints, prisons have steadily become more dangerous over the years. In order to survive in such a hostile place, many offenders like William King are forced to join prison gangs for protection. The gangs provide somewhat of a safe haven for offenders, but the gang lifestyle seems to facilitate a more radical transformation than the hazardous prison environment does by itself. Although prison gangs themselves are not the sole cause of violence amongst inmates, they heighten the propensity to commit violence in an overpopulated and understaffed environment that already facilitates an animalistic transformation.

It is time to do away with the myth that the prison system effectively rehabilitates non-violent offenders into becoming productive members of society. It has become increasingly apparent that many lower tier inmates are not ready to go back into civilization after they serve their time. In fact, many prisons are actually endangering society by the way they expose non-violent offenders to the racist ideologies of prison gangs within the system. Shockingly, this means that taxpayer money is going towards making offenders better criminals with extensive

networks rather than rehabilitate their behavior. Prison gangs undermine non-violent offender rehabilitative programming by injecting criminogenic and racist values into the corrections process that is designed to *correct* a societal problem, not make it worse. Unfortunately, the system seems to be making matters more difficult for society by the way non-violent offenders are exposed to the gangs. Instances such as the Jasper, Texas fiasco gives testament to this chilling effect.

Although it is the most gruesome tale of the effects of prison gang indoctrination, the James Byrd, Jr. incident is not unique. There are countless other instances of extremist activities by low-level offenders who become indoctrinated into racist prison gang ideologies through incarceration. It is the goal of this paper to determine the preventative measures prison officials can take to prevent non-violent, low-level offenders from joining prison gangs. This is a particularly important issue for the Southern Illinois community since there are numerous correctional facilities in the area from which offenders are constantly released back into mainstream society.

Literature Review

Many studies have shown that gangs flourish in modern prisons and their influence is increasing as time goes by. (Camp & Camp, 1985). Due to their prevalence, prison gangs are now a widely accepted as part of the prison experience in both federal as well as state institutions. As Hagedorn (1998) reports, “prison gangs have become a principle form of inmate organization in many prisons.” Many prison gangs form along racial or ethnic lines, and this contributes to much higher levels of inter-group tensions within correctional facilities than in the outside world. (Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, 2002; Ross & Richards, 2002).

Simply put, a prison gang is a gang that originated within the prison system. For instance, gangs such as the Aryan Brotherhood, Latin Kings, Black Guerilla Family, and the Dirty White Boys (a small Texas branch of the Aryan Brotherhood whose name comes from a 1985 prison softball team) would be “pure” prison gangs because they are not street gangs that were later incorporated into the correctional system; these gangs were founded within the correctional system itself. These particular gangs are separate and distinct from criminal enterprises like the Crips or the Bloods, which originated outside the prison walls. Lyman (1989) defines a prison gang as:

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

The first known American prison gang was the Gypsy Jokers formed in the 1950s in the Washington state correctional institutions. (Orlando-Morningstar, 1997; Stastny & Trynauer, 1983). The first prison gang with nationwide membership was the Mexican Mafia, emerging in 1957 in the California Department of Corrections. (Fleisher & Decker, 2001). Stemming from a desire for protection as well as a sense of belonging amongst the inmate population, it is no secret that prison gangs have been a significant part of the correctional system for quite some time now.

Although they may have very different doctrines, prison gangs tend to share many organizational similarities. They are very elusive, so it is all but impossible to determine their

organizational hierarchy. However, it is known that they usually have a structure in which the leader oversees a council of members who make the group's final decisions. (Fleisher & Decker, 2001). These individuals in authoritarian positions are typically referred to as "shot callers." The rank-and-file form a hierarchy that makes the gangs appear to be more similar to organized crime syndicates than their counterparts on the outside. (Decker, Bynum, & Weisel, 1998). Similar to some of their street gang counterparts, prison gangs have a creed or motto, unique symbols of membership, and a constitution prescribing group behavior. Absolute loyalty to the gang is a requirement (Marquart & Sorensen, 1997), as is secrecy. (Fong & Buentello, 1991). Violence is customary and is commonly used to move an offender upward toward more important positions within the gang's hierarchy.

Prison gangs are able to sustain an existence through the drug trafficking trade. (Fleisher & Decker, 2001). In addition to being responsible for most of the prison violence, prison gangs completely dominate the drug business. (Ingraham & Wellford, 1987). Motivated by a desire to make as much money as possible and to be at the top of an institution's power structure, prison gangs exploit the many inherent weaknesses within over-crowded and understaffed facilities.

Prison gangs are, for the most part, at the top of the inmate social hierarchy. As such, they are ruthless to defecting members. According to Fong & Vogel (1995), gang members are the essential capital in their crime-oriented social groups, so when members want to leave the group, such out-group movement jeopardizes group security, thus the so-called "blood in, blood out" doctrine, a term initially coined by the Mexican Mafia. These researchers surveyed 85 defecting prison gang members in protective custody throughout various Texas prisons and found that the number of gang defectors was proportional to their prison gang's size. While a number of motivations were cited for leaving the gang, the three most common reasons were: (1) losing

interest in gang activities, (2) refusing to carry out a hit on a non-gang member, and (3) disagreeing with the direction of the gang's leadership. It is practically impossible to know how many defectors have been killed inside and outside of prisons as a percentage of the total number of defectors. (Fong & Vogel, 1995). Due to the secretive nature of prison gangs, these figures will probably never be known.

There is a growing concern about the criminal activities of prison gang members, both within correctional facilities as well as those released back into the community. (Winterdyk & Ruddell, 2010). As mentioned above, the James Byrd, Jr. incident is not as isolated as it may seem. Researchers have reported that the boundaries between the gangs in prison and the community are becoming increasingly blurred as the gangs become much more sophisticated, threatening not only prison security, but public safety as well. (Curry & Decker, 2003; Wilkinson & Delgado, 2006). It is important, then, to understand the scope of the prison gang problem in order to protect the public from prison gang influence by keeping the gangs away from inmates shown to have non-violent tendencies.

Studies show a high correlation between gang membership and recidivism. (Adams & Olson, 2002; Olson, Dooley, & Kane, 2004). For example, McShane, Williams, & Dolny (2003) determined that parolees who were affiliated with prison gangs were more likely to be returned to prison on a trivial technical violation or re-offend with a new crime than were parolees not affiliated with a prison gang. Similarly, Hueber, Varano, & Bynum (2007) found that gang membership was a strong indicator of reconviction and that parolees who were gang-related had the highest rates of reconviction, showing that membership in a prison gang does not bode well for a safe transition into the community at large. Gangs and gang membership have been steadily

expanding, so this problem is only getting worse as times goes by. (Decker, 2003; Hill, 2004, 2009; Ruddell, Decker, & Egley, 2006; Wells, Minor, Angel, Carter, & Cox, 2002).

Despite their secretive nature, prison gangs have been analyzed rather thoroughly in the academic community with the primary focus being on gang suppression in general. However, there appears to be a distinct lack of examination on the measures that can be taken to prevent prison gangs from reaching non-violent, low-level offenders. Therefore, it is the aim of this paper to uncover some potential solutions to this inherent problem. In order to aid in the protection of Southern Illinois as well as surrounding areas, this paper will examine measures that certain regional prisons have taken to prevent the spread of prison gang propaganda to non-violent offenders.

Description of the Prisons Analyzed for this Study

This study will focus primarily on Menard Correctional Center in Chester, Illinois as well as United States Penitentiary (USP) Marion located in Marion, Illinois. Representing both the Illinois Department of Corrections as well as the Federal Bureau of Prisons, these two facilities are singled out because of their significance to the Southern Illinois region. Menard and Marion each represent historical importance for the area and each play a large role in their surrounding local communities.

Menard Correctional Center, Illinois Department of Corrections

As one of three maximum-security prisons in the Illinois Department of Corrections, Menard Correctional Center is located right off of the Mississippi River in the small Southern Illinois town of Chester. Opened in 1878, it is the second oldest prison in the state of Illinois. Built to house many of the state's worst adult male offenders, it has maintained this purpose despite its age and is currently home to adult males classified as maximum-security and high medium-

security threat risks. Because of its designation as a maximum-security facility, a large part of Menard's inmate culture centers around the prison gangs. Although most of the gang chiefs are held up north at Pontiac and Stateville, Menard's sister maximum-security facilities, there is a prevalent prison gang culture within its walls.

Menard is an intriguing correctional institution for the purposes of this study because it is one of the state of Illinois' few intake facilities. When inmates are initially transferred from their county jail to the custody of the Illinois Department of Corrections, the first place many of them go is to Menard for processing. They begin their sentence at Menard regardless of the seriousness of their offense. This creates a potential (however brief) for low-level, non-violent offenders to be subjected to the prison gang culture. The methods in which Menard combats this problematic situation will be examined below.

United States Penitentiary Marion, Federal Bureau of Prisons

Representing the federal side of corrections, USP Marion was specifically built in 1963 to replace the infamous Alcatraz Island maximum-security federal prison. Out of all the potential locations for Alcatraz's replacement, Southern Illinois was chosen because of its rural location right in the middle of the country, as far away from our nation's borders as any feasible location would allow. Since its construction, Marion has been one of the Southern Illinois region's largest and most consistent employers.

On October 22, 1983, two members of the Aryan Brotherhood murdered two Correctional Officers in separate incidents. As a result, USP Marion was soon thereafter designated as the nation's first "Supermax" facility in which containment, rather than rehabilitation, was the primary objective. Under the new scheme, inmates (mostly high escape risks and shot callers) were kept in solitary confinement for 22 to 23 hours out of every day. This proved to be quite

successful in suppressing prison gang activity, as the gang chiefs were given minimal opportunity to influence the world outside of their own cell. In 2006, USP Marion was downgraded to a medium-security unit. Despite its recent security re-classification, many current staff members were around during its former super-maximum security, gang-suppression days. It is for this reason that USP Marion will be the focal point of this study's federal prison gang management strategies.

Methodology

This paper looks to determine policies that would keep non-violent, low-level offenders away from the influence of prison gangs. This will be ascertained by combining previous research with interview answers provided by Southern Illinois prison administrators. First, a synthesis of previous research on prison gang containment strategies will be examined and then the answers to this study's interview questions will be analyzed. These two sources of data will then be looked at in conjunction with one another and recommendations will be made based on information gathered from the synthesis and interviews.

Research Synthesis as a Tool

Research synthesis helps to answer some of the questions posed by policy making, particularly by identifying, critically appraising, and summarizing what is already known in the research literature. (Davies, 2006). The types of questions raised by policy making require different types of research synthesis. For the purposes of this paper, a synthesis of implementation evidence approach will be taken. This type of synthesis is appropriate for this study because it seeks to ascertain the effectiveness of current policies.

Knowing exactly "what works" from a policy making perspective is insufficient without adequate evidence about knowing how to make a policy work in various contexts and

environments, and with different groups of people. (Davies, 2006). This includes evidence of the likely barriers to effective policy implementation as well as ways to overcome them. Such knowledge comes from implementation studies that use a range of research methods that include experimental and quasi-experimental designs, theories of change, focus groups, participant observation, documentary analysis, and realistic evaluation and qualitative studies using in-depth interviews. (Davies, 2006).

Interviews as a Tool

In this study, four Menard and USP Marion administrative staff will be interviewed. Two will be chosen from each prison and these particular individuals are to be singled out because of their familiarity with the gang activity within their facility. The USP Marion interviewees will consist of a Lieutenant as well as a member of the Special Investigative Service, which is essentially the Federal Bureau of Prisons' version of Internal Affairs who are tasked, among other things, to keep track of all gang members within the Bureau of Prisons. The Menard interviewees will comprise of a seasoned Corrections Officer and a Sergeant who both work directly with known gang members. The four interviews will consist of six open-ended questions asked at the interviewees' residences and lasting approximately twenty minutes each. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter, the four interviewees' identifications will remain anonymous throughout this paper.

Qualitative data is sought in this study due to the rather secretive nature of the subject matter sought. In an effort to add depth and substance to the data provided by previous research, the questions asked to the interviewees will be open-ended and structured based off the framework provided the previous studies. Open-ended questions are to be used to see if the interviewees will independently confirm that the methods for combating gang activity suggested by previous

research are methods that are actually utilized in prisons. The questions look to reveal certain aspects of the two facilities' gang culture by determining:

- The types of problems the gangs cause the facilities' day-to-day operations;
- The manners in which staff are able to identify gang members;
- The general gang-management strategies employed by each of the two facilities;
- How non-violent, low-level offenders within each facility are screened off from the gangs; and
- How the USP Marion and Menard staff would keep non-violent, low-level offenders away from prison gang culture if they could implement a policy.

After this data is collected, a thematic approach will be taken to uncover common themes between the two facilities' gang management policies, but also to see where there is a divergence.

Synthesis

The synthesis in the literature about preventing the spread of gang activities in the prison system shows that there is little doubt that gangs pose a very serious problem for modern day correctional facilities. For this reason, it is important to develop strategies in order to reduce the influence of such groups as well as preventing the recruitment of new members. (Winterdyk & Ruddell, 2010). The literature tells us that it is vital to analyze the different gang management strategies currently employed in our nation's prison system in order to develop a working policy on how to combat the integration of non-violent offenders into prison gangs. To accomplish this task, the first step is to determine what strategies have been working and what strategies have been unsuccessful within prisons throughout the country.

Because the gangs are such a prevalent disruptive force to day-to-day correctional operations, the literature shows that prison administrators have attempted a variety of overt and covert

strategies to combat gang activity. Some common practices include using gang informants (affectionately known as “rats”), designating segregation units for gang members, isolating gang leaders from their gangs, locking down entire institutions, vigorously prosecuting criminal acts committed by known gang members, and interrupting the gangs’ internal and external communication network. (Fleisher & Decker, 2001). To date, no single strategy has been proven to be superior at managing the gangs because what may be successful in one jurisdiction with a particular gang is not guaranteed to work in another jurisdiction with a different gang. (Winterdyk & Ruddell, 2010). While no one suppression tactic is used across the board, many prison systems have developed a common set of strategies that include programs like staff training and intelligence sharing, while others have developed more specialized interventions like isolating gang leaders, tactical transfers, and implementing gang renunciation strategies. (Winterdyk & Ruddell, 2010).

One thing is clear: intelligence gathering and dissemination is the key priority for prisons wishing to fight the presence of gang activities within their walls. Wells, et al. (2002) reported that over three-quarters of prisons have established gang management strategies that included various forms of communication monitoring, collecting and compiling information from searches (or “shakedowns”), and in many cases sharing this information with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. Nadel (1997) has noted that investigations may result in the development of profiles on known gang members as well as the gangs themselves in order to help solve crimes committed outside of prison. Corrections officials and administrators routinely share information intercepted from the gangs with law enforcement and these relationships have resulted in increased prosecutions of gang members, which is beneficial to both parties. (Thomas & Thomas, 2007).

In addition to information sharing between law enforcement agencies, many jurisdictions have used different containment strategies to prevent the exposure of gangs to the prison population and to reduce the flow of new members into gangs. Multiple states have experimented with isolating known gang members in specific units or facilities to minimize their influence over the general prison population. (Fischer, 2001; Hill, 2009; U.S. Department of Justice, 1992). Other jurisdictions have tried gang-free prisons where known gang inmates were transferred to designated facilities. Rivera, Cowles, & Dorman (2003) studied a Midwestern state's gang-free prison intended to reduce the likelihood of inmates being recruited and found the program to be relatively successful. This type of scheme is indeed effective, but, unfortunately, rather costly. Given the state of our current economy, this gang-suppression option is not as feasible as it once was.

Successful modern-day strategies have mostly taken the form of isolating leaders or known members and transferring them to different institutions in order to reduce their influence. Despite the best of intentions, however, these programs have proven to be somewhat ineffective if not carefully implemented. In some cases, trying to prevent the proliferation of gangs had the complete opposite effect of what the officials were trying to accomplish. For example, Petersilia (2006) describes the 2004 situation in which "eight leaders of La Nuestra Familia pled guilty to federal racketeering conspiracy charges for directing drug deals, ordering murders, and orchestrating robberies from their cells at Pelican Bay State Prison, California's supermaximum-security prison." This instance reveals that even though the gangs' shot callers were placed in isolation units, they maintained their strong influence over the prison system and were even able to successfully reach out into the community at large.

Although it has shown to be successful at times, transferring gang leaders within the general prison system itself is not always effective. In fact, gang leaders moved to different prison systems to reduce their influence have been shown to have occasionally resulted in higher levels of gang membership. This is because the leaders were able to recruit brand new members they would not have had access to otherwise. (Winterdyk & Ruddell, 2010). This offers a grim reminder how important it is to consider the unforeseen or unanticipated consequences of gang management strategies before they are put into practice.

To recap, previous research reveals multiple strategies prisons implement to combat gang activity, but few have proven to be successful and none are absolutely flawless. The best methods have even been shown to yield catastrophic results when not put into operation properly. In essence, the literature tells us that the four methods most likely to yield results are:

- Utilizing informants;
- Isolating gang members;
- Interrupting gang communication; and
- Using gang-free prisons.

Should prisons wish to prevent the spread of prison gang propaganda to vulnerable inmates, the literature says that at least one of these four approaches is preferable.

Discussion

Both Menard Correctional Center and USP Marion have experienced relative success dealing with the gangs since the incorporation of their respective gang management strategies. Although the two prisons work in the same area of public administration, the agencies they operate within are very different from one another. The Illinois Department of Corrections as well as the Federal Bureau of Prisons work under completely different funding schemes that finance

different gang management initiatives, so their approaches are quite different from one another. However, this does not necessarily mean that one facility's methods are superior to the other. Although implemented in different manners, there is a fair amount of crossover between the two facilities' policies for suppressing prison gang activities.

Problems Gangs Cause Day-to-Day Operations at Menard and USP Marion

Administrators at both Menard and USP Marion stated that the gangs caused an abundance of problems for their facility. When asked to list the specific hindrances gang activity creates, administrators' answers ranged all the way from "assaults on staff" (Anonymous Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 1, 2013) and "moving contraband in the form of weapons and drugs when they can get them in" (Anonymous Interviewee 4, personal communication, November 3, 2013) to "more paperwork." (Anonymous Interviewee 3, personal communication, November 2, 2013). Additionally, consistent with Fleisher & Decker's (2001) assertion, Menard and USP Marion inmates are known to recruit people from the outside to "mule" contraband in such as drugs, tobacco, and weapons. (Anonymous Interviewee 2, personal communication, October 31, 2013; Anonymous Interviewee 3, personal communication, November 2, 2013). It seems that the reach of the prison gangs in both prisons was not limited to the facilities' themselves, causing the staff a variety of problems. There was very little divergence between the types of difficulties described within the two facilities.

Administrators at both prisons stated that the gangs, although based on racial lines, have been known to contract with one another. It seems that the only color that truly matters for prison gangs in Menard and USP Marion is green. Money is used by the gangs for a variety of reasons such as financing contraband smuggling, funding extreme violence, and even to promote gambling. When it came to money, Illegal gambling was a major concern expressed by members

at both facilities primarily because of the way the gambling operations brutally extort inmates unable to pay gambling debts. Enforcement of a gambling debt is usually not very pretty. If the debtor owes even a trivial amount to a gang, “between four to six gang members will roll up on the guy and beat the hell out of them until they pay.” (Anonymous Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 3, 2013). Sometimes when the debt is large enough, the gangs will actually force the debtor into prostitution until their debt is settled. (Anonymous Interviewee 3, personal communication, November 2, 2013). Due to the accumulation of compound interest, this arrangement can last anywhere from a couple of weeks to several years at a time. (Anonymous Interviewee 3, personal communication, November 2, 2013).

How Menard and USP Marion Staff Identifies Gang Members

Determining which inmates are in gangs is very important for both facilities since gang members seem to cause a substantial amount of problems within each prison. Upon the arrival of new inmates to their facilities, the staff at Menard and USP Marion each blatantly ask their intakes who they “ride” with. (Anonymous Interviewee 2, personal communication, October 31, 2013; Anonymous Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 1, 2013). Surprisingly, this simple method is quite effective for learning up front which inmates are gang-affiliated. However, the admission alone does not enable the classification of the individual as a known gang member, or rise to the status as a “verified” gang member at USP Marion. (Anonymous Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 1, 2013). There are certain other attributes the prison officials must observe before an inmate becomes a verified gang member.

USP Marion operates under the Federal Bureau of Prisons’ “Five Point System” to verify the gang member status of inmates. (Anonymous Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 1, 2013; Anonymous Interviewee 3, personal communication, November 2, 2013). According to

this plan, an inmate must acquire five points before they are branded as a known gang member. An inmate gets two points for admitting they are in a gang, one point if they have a gang tattoo, one point if they have been seen affiliating with a known gang member, and one point if they have been observed participating in gang activity. (Anonymous Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 1, 2013; Anonymous Interviewee 3, personal communication, November 2, 2013). A score from one to two deems an inmate as an “associate,” a score of three to four makes them “unverified,” and a score of five classifies them as “verified.” (Anonymous Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 1, 2013). In some rare instances, an inmate will be considered “verified” even when they do not confirm their gang status when it is blatantly obvious through their actions that they are gang affiliated. (Anonymous Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 1, 2013). An associate must “make their bones” before they are considered a “solid guy” in the gang culture, so associates are heavily monitored due to the anticipation they will attempt something drastic. (Anonymous Interviewee 3, personal communication, November 2, 2013). Menard does not have a comparable formal system, but seems to use the same basic tools. Just like USP Marion, they look for tattoos and see who known gang members affiliate with, but seem to rely more heavily on informants when making their determination. (Anonymous Interviewee 2, personal communication, October 31, 2013).

Gang Management Strategies used by Menard and USP Marion

Once gang members are identified by both facilities, they implement a variety of strategies to combat gang activity. As described above, both place a large emphasis on gang recognition by utilizing various mediums, but both facilities seem to combat gang activity in different ways. It appears that Menard takes more a hard proactive stance while USP Marion approaches the matter in a reactive way.

Menard attempts to fight gang activity by trying to prevent the gangs from organizing in the first place. “If they can’t organize,” Anonymous Interviewee 2 explains, “they will have a hard time carrying out the tasks they want to carry out.” (personal communication, October 31, 2013). Menard appears to focus primarily on preventing all gang activity before it can gain any momentum. Consistent with the methodology described by Fleisher & Decker (2001), they do this by heavily monitoring suspected gang communication as well as placing suspected gang members in segregation units the moment they are observed participating in gang activity. Further, inmates observed participating in gang activity could be stripped of other luxuries such as commissary, rec yard, television, and the ability to have visitors. (Anonymous Interviewee 2, personal communication, October 31, 2013). The administrative staff at Menard seems to think that these gang activity disincentives work fairly well, but that they are not completely preventative.

USP Marion relies heavily on communication monitoring to keep track of gang activity. However, even though they share the same goal of gang management as Menard, USP Marion seems to use a very different approach to combating gangs. According to Anonymous Interviewee 3, “It is the unofficial policy of the Bureau [of Prisons] to let some [gang activity] slide. If we came down too hard on everyone, we wouldn’t know anything.” (personal communication, November 2, 2013). This method is in stark contrast to Menard’s philosophy of zero tolerance, but it seems to yield comparably successful results. “The act of allowing some activities to go unpunished enables us to go further down the rabbit hole than we ever would have if we were tough up front,” says Anonymous Interviewee 3. (personal communication, November 2, 2013). Since gang activities can take the form very elaborate, clever schemes, the administrative staff at USP Marion feels that the best way to uncover previously unknown

activities is to let certain low-level gang activities take their course. (Anonymous Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 1, 2013; Anonymous Interviewee 3, personal communication, November 2, 2013). Once the perceived activities rise to the level staff deems acceptable to intervene, USP Marion utilizes the same kinds of punishments as Menard such as placing inmates in segregation (known as Special Housing Units, commonly referred to as “shoe”), restricting commissary, preventing visitation, taking away rec yard, and removing television/entertainment privileges. (Anonymous Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 1, 2013; Anonymous Interviewee 3, personal communication, November 2, 2013). Like Menard, USP Marion staff feels like these measures are successful, but since there is no real way of measuring their success there is no definitive way of knowing exactly how successful.

How Menard and USP Marion Screen off Non-violent, Low-level Offenders from the Gangs Within their Facilities

Surprisingly, the interviews revealed that neither facility has a formal policy for keeping the prison gangs away from non-violent, low-level offenders. However, this does not mean that various informal measures are not taken to keep the two groups separated. Both facilities seem to run fairly extensive background checks on newly transferred inmates in order to ascertain certain attributes such as violent tendencies and gang membership. In a manner similar to that explained by Thomas & Thomas (2007) and Wells, et al. (2002), the two prisons share information with other agencies, both within the field of corrections as well as other agencies involved in different types of law enforcement. At Menard, for example, once the determination has been made as to where an inmate should be temporarily held, the staff tries their best to separate the violent inmates and inmates with gang affiliation from the lower level, non-violent inmates in order to prevent incidences of violence. (Anonymous Interviewee 2, personal communication, October 31, 2013). Although, as Anonymous Interviewee 4 puts it, “It is not a perfect system because

sometimes we don't always get all the information on these guys before we decide where to put them. Sometimes we don't get the whole picture and some really bad guys can end up with fish.¹ It doesn't happen often, but it definitely does from time to time. That is never a good situation, so we try our best to keep fish away from the gangs while they are temporarily housed [at Menard]." (personal communication, November 3, 2013).

True to its easier-going, reactive polity towards gangs, the staff at USP Marion tends to let things run their course when it comes to keeping gangs away from non-violent, low-level offenders. The reason for this is primarily because they have created a system that highly incentivizes gang snitches to inform staff when active recruiting takes place. (Anonymous Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 1, 2013). It does not happen very often because the USP Marion gangs tend to stay away from non-gang members, but when it does the staff immediately attempts to interfere with the process. According to Anonymous Interviewee 3, "When recruitment is suspected, we approach the shot callers and tell them to knock it off and tell them that it is their head if we find out their gang is recruiting." (personal communication, November 2, 2013). Accordingly, this scheme seems to be relatively successful at preventing the spread of gang propaganda to non-violent, low-level offenders, but obviously it is not perfect.

Recommendations by Menard and USP Marion Staff on How to Keep Non-violent, Low-level Offenders Away from the Prison Gang Subculture

It seems as though many incoming inmates already have ties to prison gangs and "unless they have tats or claim to be in a gang, it really makes it difficult to know who is rolling with who," claims Anonymous Interviewee 4. (personal communication, November 3, 2013). While there have been numerous formalized plans to prevent the two groups from crossing paths such as

¹ A term used to denote a new inmate who has never been in corrections, as they are essentially a "fish out of water."

coming down extremely hard on the gangs when they attempt to recruit new members, the gangs will still actively recruit anyway. According to Anonymous Interviewee 2, “Prison gangs are over-glamorized in the media and when new inmates get into prison, they are almost star struck. The gangs know how they are seen in the outside world and take advantage of that when they recruit.” (personal communication, October 31, 2013).

In order to combat this phenomenon, administrators at both facilities seem to agree that the best way to keep the gangs away from non-violent, low-level offenders is to separate them. “It is not cost-effective,” as Anonymous Interviewee 3 puts it, “but you need to keep them away from one another. You can do this by having separate cell blocks, but the very best way to do this would be to have completely different ‘gang free’ prisons.” (personal communication, November 2, 2013). While the option of building new prisons or reclassifying existing facilities as “gang-free” in a manner consistent with that described by Rivera, Cowles, & Dorman (2003) seems to be the consensus as to the superior way to keep gangs away from non-violent, low-level offenders, the cost factor makes this rather unfeasible in practice.

Conclusions and Future Study

This study’s interviews reveal that prison administrators can fight the proliferation of prison gangs either reactively or proactively. Neither way is perfect and the two schemes appear to have their own distinct benefits and detriments. Menard’s retroactive system has the advantage of stopping gang activity before it even starts. This method has the benefit of preventing the spread of prison gang propaganda to non-violent, low-level inmates prior to the ideologies taking root. However, the problem with this approach is that it facilitates an environment in which inmates are forced to become even more secretive to ensure the survival of their gang. This makes

monitoring gang activity extraordinarily difficult, leaving prison administrators with the uneasy feeling that they are not seeing the big picture.

USP Marion's reactive system has the advantage of acquiring remarkable intelligence on the gangs. Because prison gangs are very clever and adaptive, this method of allowing certain types of gang activity to go unpunished allows the USP Marion administrators the ability to learn about gang activities that would have previously gone unnoticed under a more aggressive approach. While this plan provides an abundance of insight into the gangs, the problem is that this method enables illegal gang initiatives to go unpunished inside of a law enforcement facility. In addition, this is incredibly risky because it assumes that larger, more elaborate undertakings will be revealed if the less serious behaviors are disregarded, but that is not always the case.

In order to prevent the spread of gang propaganda to non-violent, low-level offenders, the USP Marion reactive way of gang management is problematic because it facilitates the spreading of racist ideologies and only intervenes when dangerous levels are reached. By the time the intervention takes place, there is no telling how much poison has been injected into a non-violent, low-level offender. For this reason, a proactive approach similar to that employed by Menard would be ideal to prevent the gangs from influencing these types of vulnerable offenders.

When viewed in conjunction with one another, both the literature synthesis and the interviews tell us that the best way to stop gang propaganda from reaching non-violent, low-level offenders is to separate the two groups. Combined with a proactive approach, this means that the separation should take place as early as possible once a gang-status determination is made. Effective law enforcement interagency communication, such as that described by Thomas & Thomas (2007), will help facilitate a quicker classification process and decrease the likelihood of

the two groups coming into contact. The most practical way to accommodate this split would be the utilization of separate “gang-free” housing units. While this recommendation does not completely solve the problem since the gangs can still make contact through other mediums such as chow halls, rec yards, or a variety of other channels, it at least minimizes the opportunities for direct contact.

This paper only examined the gang management strategies of two prisons, so any future inquiries into this subject matter would be encouraged to incorporate a wider variety of facilities into a study. Also, since this study took place during a time of economic disparity, it was unable to fully ascertain the effectiveness of gang-free prisons. Since academics and administrators alike seem to agree that gang-free prisons are possibly the best way to prevent the spread of gang propaganda to non-violent, low-level offenders, it is recommended that any future studies look into the effects of gang-free prisons once the option becomes more feasible.

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