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Gangkill: An Exploratory Empirical Assessment of Gang Membership, Homicide Offending, and Prison Misconduct

Alan J. Drury[1] and Matt DeLisi[1]

Abstract

Extant research indicates that inmates with street gang history are prone for prison misconduct but that inmates convicted of homicide offenses are less likely to be noncompliant. No research has explored the interaction between street gang history and homicide offending. Based on official infraction data from 1,005 inmates selected from the Southwestern United States, the current study found that inmates with street gang history and convictions for homicide offenses were significantly involved in six types of institutional misconduct, net the effects of homicide offending, offense severity, street and prison gang risk, violence history, and demographics. Implications for theory and research are explored.

Keywords

gang, homicide offending, prison violence, misconduct, importation model

In 2008, the Pew Center on the States combined data from 50 state correctional agencies, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the National Association of State Budget Officers to estimate that one out of every 100 adults in the United States is currently detained in prison or jail (Warren, Gelb, Horowitz, & Riordan, 2008). Despite the magnitude of the

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American correctional population and the attendant sociological and criminological research on prisons, there is considerable disagreement about the prevalence of misconduct occurring behind bars and the types of inmates that are most prone to continued noncompliant behavior (Byrne & Hummer, 2007; Toch, 2007). For instance, gang membership and prison misconduct present continual threats to institutional safety, yet an estimate of the number of gang members in prisons and jails remains elusive. A report by the National Gang Crime Research Center that included data from 193 state correctional institutions across 49 states reported that nearly 25% of state prisoners are gang members (Knox, 2005). Others, however, estimate that street and prison gang-affiliated inmates account for less than 5% of the total prison population in the United States (Trulson, Marquart, & Kawucha, 2006).

Irrespective of varying estimates of the extent of the gang problem in American prisons, there is consensus that gang-affiliated inmates constitute a pressing threat to institutional safety. Despite proactive efforts to document gang members and separate them from the general population (Fischer, 2002; Toch, 2007; Trulson et al., 2006), research has found that gang membership is a strong correlate of prison misconduct. The current study further specifies the relationship between gang membership and institutional misconduct among inmates that have committed homicide offenses.

Literature Review

Empirical Background

Based on an array of samples, modeling strategies, and data, the extant literature has consistently found that gang membership is a predictor of misconduct in prison (Cunningham & Sorensen, 2007; DeLisi, Berg, & Hochstetler, 2004; Gaes, Wallace, Gilman, Klein-Saffran, & Suppa, 2002; Griffin, 2007; Griffin & Hepburn, 2006; Jiang & Fisher-Giorlando, 2002; Reisig, 2002; Trulson, 2007). For instance, Gaes and colleagues (2002) identified 7,445 out of 82,504 male inmates (approximately 9%) who were considered gang affiliated among 27 gangs in the Bureau of Prisons. They found that short-term inmates who were identified as being gang affiliated were more likely to be involved in a range of violent acts while imprisoned, such as homicide, attempted homicide, aggravated assault, arson, possessing a dangerous weapon, rioting, encouraging others to riot, taking hostages, possessing a hazardous tool, fighting, threatening bodily harm, extortion/blackmail, and simple assault. However, long-term inmates who were considered gang affiliated were less likely to be involved in violent misconduct. In explaining this counterintuitive finding, Gaes et al. suggested that it is likely that those who have maintained longer relationships

within a gang were more likely to occupy leadership positions and as a result, give orders to others to commit offenses.

Fischer (2002) found that inmates involved in certified prison gangs, uncertified prison gangs, and street gangs engaged in serious incidents of misconduct at a rate 2 to 3 times higher than nongang members in the same security-level housing unit in Arizona prisons. Gang members in general were more likely than nongang members to be involved in violent misconduct in prison, including assault and fighting. Cunningham and Sorensen (2007) analyzed disciplinary records of 24,514 close-custody inmates in the Florida Department of Corrections and found that even controlling for other correlates of institutional misconduct, prison gang affiliation was predictive of violent misconduct in prison. Based on survey data from more than 400 medium- and maximum-security correctional facilities in the United States, Reisig (2002) reported that correctional institutions that have higher percentages of gang members experience significantly higher rates of inmate homicide. For instance, Ralph and Marquart (1991) reported that during the 1980s, violent prison misconduct in Texas prisons over a 2-year span—including murders, rapes, and assaults among inmates—exploded to more than 10 times the rate of the previous years. Most of the violence was attributed to disputes between rival gangs.

There has been less investigation of the linkages between gang-affiliated inmates and nonviolent forms of prison misconduct. Shelden (1991) surveyed 325 inmates housed in a Nevada state prison, 66 of which were confirmed gang members, and found that gang members were more likely than nongang members to engage in drug-related misconduct while in prison. Gaes et al. (2002) categorized nonviolent misconduct in prison as misconduct that involved drugs, theft, gambling, property damage, sexual misbehavior, sexual exposure, escape attempts, being in unauthorized areas, failure to follow instructions, and other misconduct (a catchall category for any remaining nonviolent misconduct). From a study group of more than 82,000 Bureau of Prisons inmates, Gaes et al. found that gang-affiliated inmates were more likely than nongang-affiliated inmates to be involved in most types of nonviolent misconduct in prison, controlling for other known correlates of prison misconduct.

Theoretical Background

Three general theoretical models have been used to explain inmate misconduct, the importation model, the deprivation model, and the situational model. The importation model contends that there are pre-incarceration characteristics of inmates that are most responsible for explaining their adjustment to confinement and behavior while incarcerated (Irwin & Cressey, 1962). Prior research has consistently found that inmates who are younger, male, less

educated, non-White, and who lack a social support network or have a history of violent crime are more likely to engage in misconduct in prison than are inmates not possessing these characteristics (Berg & DeLisi, 2006; Camp, Gaes, Langan, & Saylor, 2003; Cunningham, Sorensen, & Reidy, 2005; DeLisi, 2003; Goetting & Howsen, 1986; Harer & Steffensmeier, 1996; Shelden, 1991; Wooldredge, 1991, 1994).

The deprivation model posits that misconduct in prison is a result of the pains experienced from the deprivation of adjusting to the prison environment (Clemmer, 1940; Sykes, 1958). Prior research has produced mixed results. For example, some research found that inmates who are in higher security-level housing units and those serving longer prison terms are more likely to be involved in prison misconduct (Camp et al., 2003; Craddock, 1996; Goetting & Howsen, 1986; Jiang & Fisher-Giorlando, 2002). However, other research concluded that the classification of a unit's security level (i.e., where an inmate resides)—and, thus, an environment characterized by greater or lesser deprivation—does not have an effect on misconduct (Bench & Allen, 2003; Camp & Gaes, 2005). Cao, Zhao, and Van Dine (1997) found that misconduct is most prevalent in the early stages of confinement, as inmates learn to adjust to the prison culture; but as they maneuver the daily patterns of prison life and presumably perceive it to be less painful, misconduct declines.

The situational model maintains misconduct in prison is a *where*, *when*, and *with whom* phenomenon (Jiang & Fisher-Giorlando, 2002; Steinke, 1991). Situational factors include types of holding facilities and prison crowding, where the facilities are located, the time of day or night it is, who an inmate has contact with, and where that contact occurs. Steinke (1991) tested the situational model on violent misconduct among male inmates and found that location, higher temperature, and types of staff were predictors of aggressive noncompliance by inmates. Moreover, Camp et al. (2003) collected data on 121,051 federal inmates and found that security level of the unit and prison crowding were not significant predictors of inmate misconduct. However institutions that had a high percentage of female and White staff have higher rates of inmate misconduct in general. Camp et al. concluded, "Indeed, almost all types of inmate misconduct are affected by the institutional context" (p. 527).

In a comprehensive analysis of all three models, Jiang and Fisher-Giorlando (2002) studied nearly 200 inmates and found that those who were more restricted within the prison were more likely to commit acts of violence, which is supportive of deprivation. Inmates with more extensive substance abuse histories before incarceration were more likely to engage in violent misconduct while incarcerated, which is supportive of importation. In accordance with the situational model, the researchers found that violent misconduct was more likely to occur in the cell block area than in work areas. Others have similarly found

that all theoretical models are useful in predicting inmate misconduct and that the most comprehensive models of inmate behavior are those that incorporate or integrate aspects from the deprivation, importation, and situational models (see Cao et al., 1997; DeLisi, Hochstetler, & Murphy, 2003; Graeve, DeLisi, & Hochstetler, 2007; Hochstetler & DeLisi, 2005).

Homicide Offending and Prison Misconduct

An interesting caveat to the literatures on inmate misconduct and models of inmate behavior centers on inmates that have been convicted of homicide offenses, such as first-degree murder, second-degree murder, and manslaughter. Because these offenses are the highest in terms of severity and so warrant the most punitive sentences, including the death penalty and life without the possibility of parole, it is generally assumed that convicted murderers will be significantly involved in institutional misconduct. Empirically, the opposite is true. A range of studies have shown that convicted murderers tend to be more compliant with prison rules and generally less dangerous than inmates not convicted of homicide offenses (for a review, see Cunningham, 2008). For example, Sorensen and Cunningham (IN PRESS) conducted a comparative analysis of misconduct in prison between murderers and other inmates based on the disciplinary records of 51,527 inmates in the Florida Department of Corrections. Nearly 10,000 inmates had been convicted of a homicide offense, but these inmates did not account for a significant amount of misconduct in prison when compared to inmates convicted of non-homicide offenses. Moreover, although the researchers did not control for the level of custody where an inmate was housed, they did find that convicted murders were no more likely than inmates convicted of other offenses to engage in institutional violence. Similarly, Cunningham et al. (2005) found that inmates convicted of murder and sentenced to death or life without the possibility of parole in Missouri were 50% less likely to engage in violent misconduct than were parole-eligible inmates (also see, Marquart, Ekland-Olson, & Sorensen, 1989).

Current Focus

Although much research has investigated gangs, homicide offending, and prison misconduct, there is virtually no research that has explored the interrelationship between inmates and street gang histories, convictions for homicide offenses, and their subsequent involvement in misconduct during confinement. The current study seeks to address this void in the research using official data from a sample of 1,005 state prisoners selected from the department of corrections in the Southwestern region of the United States.

Method

Sample and Data

Data were derived from publicly available information recorded by the Offender Classification System within the Department of Corrections of a large state located in the Southwestern United States. The Offender Classification System assesses each offender convicted of a state offense and classifies each inmate for placement in the appropriate correctional institution. An objective administrative classification system utilizing a risk assessment tool quantifies each inmate according to his or her social background, criminal history, substance abuse history, and related demographic information. Each area is scored within a risk range between 1 (*very low risk*) and 5 (*very high risk*). In addition, the Department of Corrections maintains an official record of disciplinary activity, which includes criminal violations and acts of noncompliance.

A simple random sample of 1,005 inmates was selected from a population of 20,000 inmates within state correctional facilities in 2001. The sample was 83% male ($n = 831$) and 17% female ($n = 174$). The average inmate age was 33.2 years ($SD = 11.2$). In terms of race and ethnicity, the sample was 46% White ($n = 460$), 29% Hispanic ($n = 294$), 16% African American ($n = 160$), 7% Native American ($n = 66$), and 2% Asian ($n = 25$).

Measures

Dependent variables. Six dependent variables were used to cover a range of criminal and noncompliance violations.[1] These included possession of a dangerous weapon ($M = .21$, $SD = .76$, skewness = 6.71), disobeying a correctional officer ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 5.34$, skewness = 3.49), damage to property ($M = .22$, $SD = 1.37$, skewness = 21.65), possession of contraband ($M = .21$, $SD = .71$, and skewness = 4.26). Two summary dependent variables were also utilized: first, having three or more minor (or Group C) violations ($M = .16$, $SD = .59$, skewness = 5.42), which include horseplay, unauthorized altering of physical appearance, bartering, malingering, failure to maintain personal hygiene, failure to maintain sanitation and cleanliness in living area, being in an unauthorized area, littering, use of machinery in unauthorized manner, and participating in an unauthorized meeting or gathering; second, major (or Group A) violations ($M = .66$, $SD = 1.68$, skewness = 4.24), which include rioting, hostage taking, murder, sexual assault, assault with a deadly weapon, escape, and arson.[2]

All dependent variables are cross-sectional count data, which are bound by zero and positively skewed, as evidenced by the skewness statistics. When dependent variables are count data, ordinary least squares regression has a high probability of producing inaccurate measurements resulting from data being

positively skewed and having a high degree of heteroskedasisity (Keith, 2006; Schroeder, Sjoquist, & Stephan, 1986). As a result, all regression models were estimated with negative binomial regression—where the conditional variance exceeds the conditional mean—which has become a standard estimation strategy in penological research (Walters, 2007).[3]

Independent variables. To assess whether inmates that had been convicted of a homicide offense (first-degree murder, second-degree murder, or manslaughter) and had street gang involvement in their criminal history, an interaction term called *gangkill* was created (M = .26, SD = .72, range = 0–3). Eleven additional covariates were also included. A homicide offending index was created by summing the total number of inmates in the sample who had been convicted of first-degree murder, second-degree murder, or manslaughter (M = .15, SD = .36). From the total sample, 152 inmates (15%) were serving time for a homicide offense.[4] Risk scales for street gang history (M = 1.42, SD = 0.80), security threat group history (M = 2.08, SD = 0.39), violence history (M = 1.84, SD = 1.12), offense severity (M = 2.98, SD = 0.95), and time served (M = 2.63, SD = 1.19), were included to provide a more conservative test of the hypothesized link between homicide offending inmates with street gang history and their subsequent misconduct.[5] Five demographic controls were also included: current age (continuously coded), gender (males = 0, female = 1), and dummy terms for Whites (yes = 1), Hispanics (yes = 1), and African Americans (yes = 1).[6]

Findings

Table 1 contains the negative binomial regression model for major (or Group A) violations, which include the most serious forms of prison violence and misconduct. Gangkill denotes a significant and positive effect, meaning that inmates with elevated risk for street gang history and conviction for homicide offenses were likely to accumulate official infractions for major violations. The relationship is unique to inmates with street gang history and homicide offending, as evidenced by the significant negative effect of the homicide index on major misconduct. This means that although inmates who are convicted of homicide offenses are less likely to accrue major violations, street gang members so convicted are more likely to accrue major violations. Risks for street gang and security threat group were not predictive of major violations. White inmates were less likely to commit major violations. Inmates serving longer sentences and those with more extensive violent crimes in their criminal history were more likely to commit major violations.

Similarly, gangkill predicted possession of a dangerous weapon, meaning that the interaction between street gang history and homicide conviction status positively influenced weapon carrying (see Table 2). Among the remaining

Table 1. Negative Binomial Regression Model for Major Violations (n = 1,005)

Variable	Estimate	Bootstrap *SE*	*z*	Confidence Intervals (95%)
Gangkill	0.50	.27	1.87*	–0.02–1.03
Homicide index	–1.01	.49	–2.07*	–1.98–0.06
Gang risk	0.01	.12	0.10	–0.23–0.26
Gender	0.23	.28	0.83	–0.31–0.77
Age	–0.01	.01	–1.11	–0.03–0.01
White	–0.67	.31	–2.12*	–1.28–0.05
Black	–0.10	.31	–0.32	–0.70–0.51
Hispanic	0.35	.30	1.18	–0.23–0.94
Time served risk	0.48	.10	4.91**	0.29–0.67
Offense severity risk	0.04	.11	0.33	–0.19–0.26
Violence history risk	0.28	.11	2.61**	0.07–0.49
Security threat group risk	–0.21	.39	–0.53	–0.97–0.55
Wald χ^2			167.91**	

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

covariates, only White race (less likely to carry weapons) and time served predicted possession of a dangerous weapon. Those with street gang history and homicide convictions were also more likely to disobey officers, as were those with more time served and those with extensive histories of violence. White inmates and inmates convicted of homicide offenses were less likely to disobey correctional officers, which is a potentially serious and disruptive form of institutional noncompliance (see Table 3).

Gangkill was significantly and positively related to damage to property, as were time served and violence history. Several covariates approached statistical significance for damaging property in prison, including gender (males were more likely, $p = .074$), age (younger inmates were more likely, $p = .086$), race (Whites were less likely, $p = .073$), and security threat group risk (prison gang risk less likely, $p = .078$). Offenders convicted of homicide offenses (other than those with street gang risk) were less likely to damage property (see Table 4).

For possession of contraband, strong and significant effects emerged for gangkill (more likely to be cited for contraband) and homicide conviction (less likely to be cited for contraband). A strong effect for gender emerges, with female inmates more likely than male inmates to be cited for possession of contraband. Time served was positively related to possession of contraband (see Table 5). Inmates with street gang history and homicide convictions were also significantly likely to accumulate three or more minor violations, which is a proxy of chronic noncompliance. Several covariates were also significantly

Table 2. Negative Binomial Regression Model for Weapon Possession (n = 1,005)

Variable	Estimate	Bootstrap *SE*	*z*	Confidence Intervals (95%)
Gangkill	0.74	.31	2.38*	0.13–1.36
Homicide index	–0.94	.64	–1.46	–2.20–0.32
Gang risk	–0.12	.24	–0.50	–0.58–0.35
Gender	0.03	.37	0.08	–0.69–0.74
Age	0.00	.01	0.13	–0.02–0.02
White	–0.70	.34	–2.08*	–1.36–0.04
Black	–0.68	.42	–1.61	–1.49–0.14
Hispanic	0.32	.40	0.81	–0.46–1.10
Time served risk	0.63	.16	4.03**	0.33–0.94
Offense severity risk	–0.04	.21	–0.18	–0.44–0.37
Violence history risk	0.19	.12	1.53	–0.05–0.43
Security threat group risk	–0.23	.48	–0.48	–1.18–0.72
Wald χ^2			144.44**	

*p < .05. **p < .01

Table 3. Negative Binomial Regression Model for Disobeying an Officer (n = 1,005)

Variable	Estimate	Bootstrap *SE*	*z*	Confidence Intervals (95%)
Gangkill	0.37	.17	2.15*	0.03–0.70
Homicide index	–0.83	.32	–2.62	–1.46–0.21
Gang risk	–0.01	.07	–0.07	–0.13–0.12
Gender	0.07	.22	0.34	–0.36–0.51
Age	–0.01	.01	–1.73	–0.02–0.00
White	–0.47	.17	–2.82**	–0.79–0.14
Black	0.09	.21	0.43	–0.32–0.50
Hispanic	0.20	.21	0.98	–0.20–0.60
Time served risk	0.35	.08	4.37**	0.19–0.51
Offense severity risk	–0.01	.08	–0.14	–0.18–0.15
Violence history risk	0.20	.06	3.15**	0.07–0.32
Security threat group risk	–0.01	.24	–0.05	–0.48–0.46
Wald χ^2			190.38**	

*p < .05. **p < .01.

associated with having three or more minor violations. Homicide convictions, male gender, and offense severity were negatively related to having three or more minor violations, whereas time served was positively related (Table 6).

Table 4. Negative Binomial Regression Model for Damage Property (n = 1,005)

Variable	Estimate	Bootstrap *SE*	*z*	Confidence Intervals (95%)
Gangkill	0.93	.34	2.74**	0.26–1.60
Homicide index	–1.36	.71	–1.91*	–2.76–0.04
Gang risk	0.16	.20	0.81	–0.23–0.56
Gender	–0.94	.52	–1.79	–1.96–0.09
Age	–0.03	.02	–1.72	–0.06–0.00
White	–0.82	.46	–1.79	–1.72–0.08
Black	–0.62	.43	–1.46	–1.46–0.21
Hispanic	0.36	.39	0.93	–0.40–1.13
Time served risk	0.51	.15	3.35**	0.21–0.82
Offense severity risk	–0.03	.17	–0.16	–0.35–0.30
Violence history risk	0.27	.14	1.98**	0.00–0.55
Security threat group risk	–0.88	.50	–1.76	–1.86–0.10
Wald χ^2			83.68**	

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 5. Negative Binomial Regression Model for Contraband (n = 1,005)

Variable	Estimate	Bootstrap *SE*	*z*	Confidence Intervals (95%)
Gangkill	1.29	.37	3.48**	0.56–2.01
Homicide index	–2.43	.80	–3.03**	–4.01–0.86
Gang risk	–0.48	.31	–1.56	–1.08–0.12
Gender	0.72	.20	3.61**	0.33–1.12
Age	0.02	.01	1.76	–0.00–0.05
White	–0.59	.50	–1.18	–1.59–0.39
Black	–0.60	.56	–1.08	–1.69–0.49
Hispanic	0.35	.48	0.73	–0.59–1.30
Time served risk	0.40	.14	2.84**	0.13–0.68
Offense severity risk	0.18	.15	1.18	–0.12–0.48
Violence history risk	0.12	.16	0.73	–0.20–0.43
Security threat group risk	0.34	.34	1.01	–0.33–1.01
Wald χ^2			110.70**	

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Discussion

The current research goal was to evaluate whether inmates with street gang history and convictions for homicide offenses were significantly at risk for prison misconduct. Addressing this research question opens the door for research to disaggregate data and focus on specific groupings of offenders—such as street

Table 6. Negative Binomial Regression Model for Three or More Minor Violations (n = 1,005)

Variable	Estimate	Bootstrap *SE*	*z*	Confidence Intervals (95%)
Gangkill	0.91	.36	2.56**	0.21–1.60
Homicide index	–2.32	.95	–2.46**	–4.18–0.47
Gang risk	–0.18	.19	–0.95	–0.56–0.20
Gender	0.74	.29	2.53**	0.17–1.31
Age	–0.01	.01	–1.19	–0.03–0.01
White	0.10	.56	0.18	–0.99–1.20
Black	0.69	.64	1.07	–0.57–1.95
Hispanic	0.95	.56	1.69	–0.15–2.06
Time served risk	0.68	.16	4.36**	0.37–0.98
Offense severity risk	–0.56	.15	–3.78**	–0.84–0.27
Violence history risk	0.12	.19	0.62	–0.25–0.48
Security threat group risk	–0.53	.56	–0.95	–1.62–0.56
Wald χ^2			68.53**	

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

gang members who kill—and it has the potential to increase institutional safety through improved risk classification standards. Improving such standards affects not only institutional safety but also the larger community by identifying the risks in the preparation of an offender's postrelease supervision plan. The improved classification and identification of future dangerousness necessarily have an impact on officer safety both inside the correctional institution and after offenders are released to supervision in the community. Although the central variable of interest—gangkill—was consistently and significantly related to all types of prison misconduct, the homicide offending index was just as consistent and negative. Consistent with the preponderance of prior research on homicide conviction status and institutional misconduct (Cunningham, 2008; Cunningham & Sorensen, 2007; Cunningham et al., 2005; Sorensen & Cunningham, IN PRESS), inmates convicted of first-degree murder, second-degree murder, and manslaughter were less involved in all forms of prison misconduct.[7]

Before discussing the meaning of the current findings, some methodological limitations should be addressed. First, the generalizability of the findings is restricted to state prisoners from a single state in the Southwestern United States. It is unknown whether similar trends would apply to state prisoners in other areas of the country or to inmates serving time in private or federal institutions. This study did not include data collected from federal or private correctional facilities. Second, the data are cross-sectional, meaning they were collected at a single point and can be interpreted only as such. Even though the various risk scales created

by the Offender Classification System are based on extant criminal history, which temporally predates their confinement, the true patterning and stability of relationships between variables over time cannot be derived without longitudinal data. Third, the dependent variables are based on official infraction records. Correctional officers employ a large amount of discretionary power when reporting infractions (Hewitt, Poole, & Regoli, 1984). It is also unknown to what degree correctional officers' attitudes influence their supervision of inmates, particularly, those with street gang histories (see Light, 1990). Fourth, we did not have any contextual information on the homicide events that resulted in the offenders' current prison sentences; thus, we were unable to examine whether the murders were gang related or not. This is an important empirical question that future researchers should address. Conceptually, if an offender is actively involved in street gangs and commits a gang-related homicide, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the offender could pose considerable risk for misconduct while confined. However, an offender with more distant street gang history, coupled with a non-gang homicide conviction, could be viewed as posing less risk.

These admonitions notwithstanding, the current analyses utilized rigorous negative binomial regression models with bootstrapped standard errors with 50 replications to ensure valid estimates. In addition, the gangkill variable was subjected to conservative multivariate analyses, with competing controls for street gang history, security threat group history, homicide offending, offense severity, history of violent crime, age, gender, and race. Inmates with street gang history and homicide convictions were significantly involved in an array of antisocial acts in prison spanning major and minor violations, such as damage to property, possession of dangerous weapons, possession of contraband, as well as more discretionary violations, such as disobeying an officer. In a review of the correlates of prison violence, Byrne and Hummer (2007) observed, "Despite the ongoing debate on the nature and extent of gang involvement in violence, it would be a mistake to ignore the potential influence of gang culture in both institutional and community settings" (p. 81).

Researchers studying community-level violence have consistently found that gang influence appears to be strongest in areas where informal social controls are weakest. We argue that one would find a similar relationship in prison communities. Similarly, the current findings suggest that when the disruptive effects of street gangs interact with homicide offending, the subsequent effect on prison misconduct is serious. In this way, violent gang-involved inmates constitute a pressing and real threat to institutional safety—a conclusion that has recently come under attack (Toch, 2007).

Inmates that have been convicted of killing in some manner—as operationalized by the homicide index variable—were significantly less likely to be involved in all forms of institutional misconduct (Marquart et al., 1989; Sorensen

& Cunningham, IN PRESS). Although not investigated in the current study, one explanation that could account for the generally lower rates of misconduct in prison among convicted killers is that many homicides are crimes of passion or accidents not planned but instead tragic artifacts of dynamic interactional situations (Daly & Wilson, 1988).

However, inmates who have been identified as being at risk for gang membership and who are convicted of homicide offenses are another story. In this regard, our analysis found that gang members who kill are significantly more likely to commit various types of misconduct in prison. This lends support for the importation model of inmate behavior (Irwin & Cressey, 1962) and recent research that suggests that there is fluidity in violence and antisocial behavior between communities characterized by high-crime rates and prisons (Berg & DeLisi, 2006; Byrne & Hummer, 2007; DeLisi, 2005). Gang members view themselves as part of a group whereby they must constantly prove their loyalty to be considered valued members. Incarceration does little to deter this motivation and loyalty toward the gang. Thus, gang members convicted of killing in some manner remain motivated to demonstrate that they are loyal gang members and, as a result, are prone for continued misconduct while in prison. Consistent with prior research, the current analyses revealed that inmates who are serving longer sentences (DeLisi et al., 2004; Goetting & Howsen, 1986) and have histories of violence (Camp et al., 2003; Shelden, 1991; Wooldredge, 1991) engaged in prison misconduct more than inmates who are serving shorter sentences and lack histories of violent behavior.

In sum, the current study sheds light on a specific population of inmates. As the prison population continues to grow in the United States, the challenges posed by gang members who are serving time for homicide offenses are likely to become more salient. In this way, inmates with gang and violence histories should continue to figure into public policy discussions about the appropriate classification and placement of specific populations in prison who are disproportionately responsible for multiple forms of prison misconduct.

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Notes

1. Steiner and Wooldredge (2008) advise that

examining different types of misconduct may be relevant for a more complete understanding of inmate deviance. Researchers may want to conduct separate analyses of different types of infractions as opposed to pooling these types into a single outcome. Similarly, facility administrators should consider the varying effects of specific inmate and environmental characteristics on different forms of misconduct. (p. 452)

We agree and so chose to analyze separate offense dependent variables with the exception of the two summary measures, which tap serious misconduct and chronic minor misconduct.

2. Penalties for Group A violations include detention for up to 15 days, loss of good time, placement in parole classification III for up to 90 days, restitution, loss or privileges, extra duty, restrictions, and formal reprimand. Penalties for Group C violations are limited to loss of privileges, extra duty, restrictions, and formal reprimand.
3. A diagnostic dispersion parameter that exceeds zero confirms that negative binomial regression is a more appropriate modeling strategy when compared to other approaches of modeling count data, such as Poisson regression. The likelihood ratio chi-square for each model is as follows: $LR\chi^2 = 548.14$, $p < .0001$ (major violations), $LR\chi^2 = 137.79$, $p < .0001$ (possession of dangerous weapon), $LR\chi^2 = 3{,}005.67$, $p < .0001$ (disobey officer), $LR\chi^2 = 275.87$, $p < .0001$ (damage to property), $LR\chi^2 = 166.06$, $p < .0001$ (contraband), and $LR\chi^2 = 105.92$, $p < .0001$ (three or more minor violations).
4. Of the 152 homicide offenders, 72.4% were convicted of first-degree murder ($n = 110$), 11.2% were convicted of second-degree murder ($n = 17$), and approximately 16.5% were convicted of manslaughter ($n = 25$). Among the homicide offenders, 53.6% ($n = 59$) were identified at risk, based on their street gang membership (i.e., scored 2–5 on the risk scale)—specifically, 48.2% of inmates who were convicted of first-degree murder ($n = 53$), 29.4% of inmates who were convicted of second-degree murder ($n = 5$), and 4.0% of inmates who were convicted of manslaughter ($n = 1$).
5. We were unable to access whether inmates were active in security threat groups upon admission for their homicide conviction; thus, the gangkill measure could be viewed as a static measure because it is based on an offender's street gang history. In this way, it could also be considered a measure of the importation model of inmate behavior.
6. There were significant age differences by gangkill status, according to multivariate analysis of variance tests ($F = 18.37$, $p = .0000$). For gangkill = 0, the average offender age was 32.4 years; for gangkill = 1, it was 35.3 years; for gangkill = 2, it was 27.2 years; and for gangkill = 3, it was 43.3 years.
7. There was insufficient power to conduct negative binomial regression models for the most severe forms of prison misconduct, because of extremely low prevalence rates of these offenses. However, multivariate analysis of variance tests indicate that inmates with convictions for homicide offenses are significantly more violent

than inmates without homicide convictions. This was the case for prison homicide ($F = 21.08$, $p = .0000$), prison aggravated assault ($F = 18.84$, $p = .0000$), prison escape ($F = 6.09$, $p = .0004$), and prison arson ($F = 13.52$, $p = .0000$). There were no significant group differences for prison rape ($F = 1.14$, $p = .3341$).

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