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Competing for Control

Pyrooz and Decker pull apart the bars on prison gangs to uncover how they compete for control. While there is much speculation about such gangs, there is little solid research. This book draws on interviews with 802 inmates – half of whom were gang members – in two Texas prisons, one of the largest samples of its kind. Using this data, the authors explore how gangs organize and govern, who joins gangs and how they get out, the dark side of gang activities including misconduct and violence, the ways in which gang membership spills onto the street, and the direct and indirect links between the street and prison gangs. *Competing for Control* captures the nature of gangs in a time of transition, as prison gangs become more horizontal and their power is diffused across groups. There is no study like this one.

David C. Pyrooz is Associate Professor of Sociology and Faculty Associate of the Institute of Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado Boulder. His research interests are in the area of gangs and criminal networks, developmental and life-course criminology, and incarceration and reentry.

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Competing for Control
Gangs and the Social Order of Prisons

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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	page ix
<i>List of Tables</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xii
1 Foundation for the Study	1
<i>The Challenges of Studying Gangs in Prison</i>	2
<i>Incarceration and Gangs in the United States</i>	6
<i>Basics of Prison Gangs</i>	16
<i>Organization of the Book</i>	20
2 Understanding Gangs in Prison	23
<i>Theoretical Groundwork</i>	25
Levels of Explanation	25
Domains of Explanation	26
An Organizing Theoretical Model	28
<i>Theoretical Perspectives</i>	30
Deprivation and Importation Perspectives	31
Extra-legal and Non-state Governance Perspectives	36
Group Structure Perspectives	40
Group Process Perspectives	43
<i>Toward a Study of Gangs in Prison</i>	44
3 The LoneStar Project	46
<i>Texas, Prisons, and Gangs</i>	48
<i>Study Methodology</i>	55
Selecting People and Sites	55
Survey Data Collection	58
Sources of Data	61
Sample and Population Comparisons	62
<i>Fidelity in Survey Research with Gang and Non-gang Prison Inmates</i>	65
Participation Rates	65

	Survey Duration and Item Response Patterns	66
	Inmate and Interviewer Perceptions	67
	Concordance Rates between Survey and Official Data	67
	<i>Summary</i>	70
4	The Characteristics of Gang Members in Prison	71
	<i>Prior Research on Gang and Non-gang Members in Prison</i>	72
	<i>Comparing Gang and Non-gang Members in Prison</i>	75
	Comparative Domains and Measures	76
	Analytic Plan	78
	<i>Descriptive Characteristics of Gang and Non-gang Members</i>	79
	<i>Predictors of Gang Membership in Prison</i>	84
	Bivariate Results	86
	Cumulative Risk	89
	<i>Conclusion</i>	91
5	The Characteristics of Gangs in Prison	94
	<i>Separate and Unequal or Together and Similar?</i>	95
	<i>The Comparative Features of Gangs</i>	98
	<i>Methods for Understanding Gang-Level Characteristics</i>	100
	Measures of Group-Level Characteristics	102
	Analytic Plan	104
	<i>The Group-Level Characteristics of Gangs</i>	108
	Gangs on the Street, Gangs in the Prison, or Both?	108
	Historical and Compositional Gang Characteristics	110
	Group-Level Characteristics of Gangs in Multilevel Context	115
	<i>Conclusion</i>	119
6	The Role of Gangs in the Social Order of Prisons	122
	<i>Who Runs the Joint? And How?</i>	124
	<i>Methods to Understand Gangs and Prison Social Order</i>	128
	Measuring the Contribution of Gangs to Prison Social Order	128
	Analytic Plan	130
	<i>Views on Gangs and the Social Order in Prison</i>	130
	Univariate Analysis of All Prisoners	130
	Comparing Gang and Non-gang Members	133
	Comparisons across a Typology of Gangs	137
	<i>Qualitative Results from Open-Ended Questions</i>	143
	Rules and the Social Order of the Prison	143
	Control of Contraband	145
	The Changing Role of Prison Gangs	146
	The Locus of Control: Street Gangs or Prison Gangs?	148
	<i>Conclusion</i>	150
7	Misconduct and Victimization in Prison	154
	<i>Is Prison a Mirror Image of the Street?</i>	156

Contents

vii

	<i>Misconduct, Victimization, and Their Overlap: A Group Process Perspective</i>	157
	<i>Prison Research on Gang Membership, Misconduct, and Victimization</i>	160
	<i>Studying Gangs, Misconduct, and Victimization</i>	161
	Measures of Misconduct and Victimization	162
	Measuring Gang Membership	164
	Controls for Spuriousness	165
	Analytic Plan	165
	<i>Misconduct and Victimization among Gang and Non-gang Members</i>	167
	Officially Recorded Misconduct	167
	Self-Reported Misconduct and Victimization	169
	Gang-Level Differences in Misconduct and Victimization	174
	<i>Conclusion</i>	176
8	Joining and Avoiding Gangs in Prison	181
	<i>Understanding Gang Joining and Avoiding</i>	183
	<i>Prior Research on Joining and Avoiding Gangs in Prison</i>	184
	<i>Methods to Learn about Joining and Avoiding Gangs</i>	186
	Measuring the Motives and Methods for Joining Gangs	186
	Measuring the Correlates of Gang-Joining Patterns	188
	Measuring the Motives and Methods for Avoiding Gangs	189
	Analytic Plan	190
	<i>Findings on Joining and Avoiding Gangs</i>	191
	The Patterns of Gang Onset and Imprisonment	191
	Motivations for Joining Gangs	193
	Methods for Joining Gangs	198
	Correlates of Different Pathways into Gangs	203
	Avoiding Gangs on the Street and in Prison	207
	<i>Conclusion</i>	214
9	Continuity and Change in Prison Gang Membership	217
	<i>Understanding Disengagement from Gangs</i>	218
	<i>Key Features of Leaving Gangs</i>	220
	<i>Prior Research on Leaving Gangs in Prison</i>	221
	<i>Methods to Learn about Disengagement from Gangs</i>	223
	Measuring Key Features of Gang Disengagement	224
	Measuring the Correlates of Active and Former Gang Membership	227
	Analytic Plan	227
	<i>Findings on Disengaging from Gangs</i>	228
	The Myth and the Reality of Leaving Gangs in Prison	228
	Motivations for Leaving Gangs	231
	Methods for Leaving Gangs	236
	Facilitators of Leaving Gangs	239
	The Residual Consequences of Gang Membership	241
	Continuity in Gang Membership	242

Distinguishing Active and Former Gang Members	244
<i>Conclusion</i>	248
10 Implications of Competing for Control	251
<i>What Have We Learned about Prisons and Gangs?</i>	253
Identification and Identity	253
Life-Course Processes and Transitions	254
Inmate Behavior	254
Social Order and Control	255
<i>What Are the Implications of Our Findings for Policy and Practice?</i>	256
Mass Incarceration and Gangs	256
Gang-Oriented Programming	257
Group Intervention in Prison	258
The Grip of the Gang	258
Prison as a Turning Point for Prevention and Intervention	259
Gang Variation May Require Different Policies and Practices	260
Housing Gang Members	260
Multiple Methods for Understanding Prison Gangs	261
Preparing Gang Members for Community Reentry	262
<i>Final Thoughts</i>	262
<i>Appendix: Preliminary Evaluation of the Gang Renouncement and Disassociation Program</i>	264
<i>What Is GRAD?</i>	265
<i>Is GRAD Effective? A Preliminary Evaluation</i>	268
<i>Conclusion</i>	272
<i>References</i>	274
<i>Index</i>	293

Figures

1.1 Year-end sentenced prison population and annual admissions and releases, 1978–2015	<i>page</i> 7
1.2 Estimates of the prevalence of gang membership in US prisons	14
2.1 Theoretical models on the sources of gang-related activities, culture, and organization in prison	28
3.1 Number of prisoners in the three largest US prison systems, 2001–2014	48
3.2 Count of gang and non-gang inmates and ratio of STG to non-STG inmates in the Texas prison system, 2005–2016	53
3.3 Timeline of key milestones of the LoneStar Project	55
3.4 Self-reported residential locations of the sample by zip code	64
3.5 Correspondence between measures of gang affiliation from survey and administrative data sources	69
4.1 Proportional distribution of cumulative risk factors for gang membership	90
4.2 Cumulative risk of gang membership in prison by survey and official measures of gang membership	90
5.1 Models of the relationship between prison and street gangs	97
5.2 Instrumental, expressive, profit-generation, and communication features of gangs, empirical Bayes predictions	117
7.1 Rivalry network of gangs in prison	159
7.2 Predicted values of official disciplinary incident counts by gang status, prison spell	167
7.3 Predicted values of official disciplinary incident counts by gang status, last six months	169
7.4 Predicted values of all types, violent, and instrumental misconduct and victimization by gang status, prison spell	170
7.5 Predicted values of gang-related and non-gang-related misconduct and victimization by gang status, last six months	171

7.6	Predicted values of violent gang-related and non-gang-related misconduct and victimization by gang status, last six months	172
7.7	Predicted values of the victim–offender overlap by gang status, prison spell, and last six months	173
7.8	Group-level predicted values of disciplinary violations over prison spells across thirty-one groups in the gang typology, official data	175
7.9	Group-level predicted values of misconduct and victimization over prison spells across thirty-one groups in the gang typology, survey data	177
8.1	Patterns of gang joining by location of entry	192
8.2	Motivations for joining a gang by location of entry and group typology	194
8.3	Methods for joining a gang by location of entry and group typology	199
8.4	Potential for gang involvement on the street and in prison, non-gang respondents	208
8.5	Motives for gang avoidance on the street and in prison	210
8.6	Methods for gang avoidance on the street and in prison	211
9.1	Patterns of gang leaving by location of exit	230
9.2	Motivations for leaving a gang by location of exit and group typology	232
9.3	Methods for leaving a gang by location of exit and group typology	237
9.4	Most important source for facilitating gang leaving by location of exit and group typology	240
9.5	Residual consequences of gang leaving by location of exit and group typology	242
A.1	Differences in survey and official measures of current and former gang membership by GRAD and non-GRAD respondents	271
A.2	Differences in aggregated and disaggregated survey measures of gang embeddedness by GRAD and non-GRAD respondents	272
A.3	Differences in survey and official measures of misconduct and victimization prevalence by GRAD and non-GRAD respondents, last six months	273

Tables

1.1	The emergence of street and prison gangs in the US by decade	<i>page</i> 10
1.2	A comparison of prison and street gangs	19
2.1	Elaboration of the prison gang development model	41
3.1	Security Threat Groups in the Texas prison system	52
3.2	Sample and population characteristics, official data	63
4.1	Descriptive characteristics of gang and non-gang members, by official and self-reports of gang membership	80
4.2	Bivariate logistic regression models predicting official and self-reports of gang membership	87
5.1	Gang types based on self-reported gang affiliation	109
5.2	Historical and compositional characteristics gangs	113
6.1	Descriptive statistics for prison social order variables, full sample	131
6.2	Descriptive statistics for prison social order variables, by prison gang and non-gang members	134
6.3	Descriptive statistics for prison social order variables, by gang typology	139
6.4	Standardized differences in prison social order variables by gang typology, Cohen's <i>d</i>	141
8.1	Correlates of street-only, street-to-prison importation, and prison origination gang membership	204
9.1	Differences between respondents who remain in gangs and those who leave on the street and in prison	245
A.1	The features of the phases of the Gang Renouncement and Disassociation program	267
A.2	Descriptive statistics for the study variables in the analysis of GRAD	270

Acknowledgments

There are roughly 2,000 prisons in the United States. These institutions are largely an enigma to the general public. They are places people do not visit unless they are confined there, work there, or know someone there. Public knowledge of daily life inside of prisons is typically warped by sensational accounts provided by the media. Unfortunately, few pay attention to what happens inside of prisons unless there are murders, uprisings, or scandals. Although both of the authors of this book had visited and occasionally conducted research inside correctional facilities, prior to the LoneStar Project prisons were in many ways an enigma to us as well. It is one thing to take a class and summarize the state of knowledge on topics related institutional corrections and prisoner reentry; it is something quite different to interview the men who live in these facilities and learn about their life in prison. The LoneStar Project is among the largest and most comprehensive studies of gangs and gang members in prison. Studies like this are never the sole product of the people named as the investigators, nor are books the sole product of the people named as authors. And we are no exception to this.

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xiii

the reason gang research in prisons is rare is due to access and support; TDCJ and NIJ allowed us to successfully gain such access.

The LoneStar Project was not “just” 802 baseline interviews with prisoners (and over 1,000 post-release interviews). Both the planning and implementation phases involved more than meets the eye—site visits, survey instrument development and testing, software programming, the hiring and training of interviewers, coordinating interviews, managing field relations, and data analysis. And there are the inevitable unexpected challenges. We were fortunate to have a motivated, diligent, and committed team in place to carry out this project. Vince Webb and Doug Dretke were instrumental in facilitating access and securing permissions, as well as fielding questions about planning and implementation as issues arose. Erin Orrick did a phenomenal job serving as the site coordinator in Texas; it is no small feat to enter a project midway through data collection.

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