

Introduction

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The Handbook of Gangs is a comprehensive volume that presents the current state of knowledge about gangs. Each of the chapters is written by a leading expert in the world on their chosen topic and stands alone as an insightful review of what is known about that topic. But taken together the chapters provide us with a broad understanding of the foundation for gang research, the theories and methods used to study gang behaviors and processes, the many forms of gangs, the correlates of gangs and gang membership, gang prevention and intervention programs, and gang experts. Indeed, we believe that one of the strengths of the book is the series of interrelationships among the chapters. While the topics of each chapter are different, they are related through themes, problems, theories, and methods.

The goal of this volume is to provide a definitive reference for professionals working in the field of gang prevention or suppression, researchers, and students. What we know about gangs has become interdisciplinary and internationalized in the course of the past 20 years, and our book reflects both of those trends. We believe that this volume pulls together the most contemporary reviews on the key topics in the understanding of gangs and the responses to gangs. To accomplish this, we have engaged the best scholars in their area, many of whom have chosen to work with an emerging scholar. Each chapter provides a critical review of what is known about the topic, as well as the insights of the authors about the topic. In this way the book will be grounded in the current knowledge about the specific topics, but also provides new material that reflects the knowledge of the leading minds in the field. While there is a strong orientation toward sociological criminology in the book, we believe that the chapters reflect a broad approach in both method and theory, continuing to expand the boundaries of gang research.

The book is organized into seven sections:

- 1 Laying the Foundation for Understanding Gangs (Chapters 2–4)
- 2 Theories of Gangs (Chapters 5–10)
- 3 Gang Correlates (Chapters 11–12)
- 4 Gang Processes (Chapters 13–16)

- 5 Responding to Gangs (Chapters 17–21)
- 6 Pioneers in Gang Research (Chapters 22–25)
- 7 Gangs in International Context (Chapters 26–29)

There are many unique features to the book and we use this introduction to walk the reader through those features. One aspect of the book that we are particularly proud of is the personal touch in many of the chapters. We encouraged the authors to give us insights into their personal knowledge about the research and researchers in their topic area. We think this makes the chapters more interesting to the reader. This is an especially important feature of this book as many of the authors are intimately involved with the production of knowledge in the area of their chapter, know other individuals working on contemporary research in the area, and have a strong appreciation for the history of work in that area. For example, Andrew Papachristos is among the leading network theorists and methodologists in the social sciences. He has teamed with Michael Sierra-Arevalo to produce an outstanding chapter (9) on the use of network analysis and theory with gangs which integrates network theory with their ongoing network analysis. Finn Aage-Esbensen wrote a chapter (20) on the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) project that is insightful for what it tells us both about G.R.E.A.T. from an evaluator's perspective as well as about evaluation methods. Similarly, Anthony Braga ranks among the very best police scholars in the world, and has written an excellent chapter (17) on the role of the police in responding to gangs, particularly focused deterrence approaches. We believe that the other chapters reflect a comparable level of prominence among the authors. Indeed, the names of many of these authors are synonymous with the topics of their chapters.

Over the past two decades, there has been a virtual explosion of gang research. Indeed, the third chapter of this book, written by David Pyrooz and Meghan Mitchell, traces the history of gang research and documents this explosion in great detail, what they term the transition from “little” to “big” gang research. A key theme in the history of gang research is the definition of a gang, a theme that David Curry revisits in his chapter (2) nearly two decades after his work on the logic of defining gangs and measuring gang activities. In their chapter (4) on documenting gang activity, Ronald Huff and Julie Barrows show us not only why the definition and measurement of gangs is so important, but also the essential features of how gang intelligence is gathered and recorded. Indeed, the explosion of research on gangs has occurred in tandem to responses to gangs, which rely on the very records carefully described by Huff and Barrows.

Research on gangs has grown in theoretical sophistication as well in methodological rigor. Theoretical developments have followed Short's tripartite focus on macro, micro, and individual theories and levels of explanation. Each of these levels of explanation is represented in this volume. This includes new perspectives such as social psychological approaches to the study of gangs (DaJung Woo, Howard Giles, Michael Hogg, and Liran Goldman, chapter 8), emerging perspectives such as the growing attention to gang membership in developmental and life course perspective (Beidi Dong, Chris Gibson, and Marvin Krohn, chapter 5), and longstanding perspectives such as social learning theory (Thomas Winfree and Adrienne Freng, chapter 7). Further, the correlates of gangs and gang membership are documented in chapter 10, on violence and synergy between gangs and guns (Arna Carlock and Alan Lizotte), chapter 11, on the connections between gangs, drugs, and culture (Mark Fleisher), and chapter 12, that rethinks gender and gangs (Vanessa Panfil and Dana Peterson). At the macro-level Andrew Papachristos and Lorine Hughes (chapter 6) provide a chapter on neighborhoods and gangs that is not anchored

to any single theoretical perspective, which is often contentious, instead viewing gangs as “independent variables” and “dependent variables” as causes and consequences of neighborhood social organization and problems.

Perhaps most importantly, the book also pays explicit attention to explanations of gang-related processes and behaviors. This remains the least studied, yet perhaps most important of the remaining items on the gang research agenda. Chapters 13 and 14 tackle the important processes of how people enter and exit from gangs. James Densley presents readers with a theory of joining gangs that is rooted in a signaling perspective, something that offers great value to gang research. Dena Carson and Michael Vecchio, alternatively, review the current state of the evidence on disengaging from gangs, a burgeoning area of gang research. True to Short’s calls for micro-level gang research, Jean McGloin and Megan Collins expertly outline in chapter 15 the micro-level intra- and inter-gang processes theorized to elevate levels of crime and violence among gangs and gang members. These processes are believed to make gangs qualitatively different, which is why in chapter 16 we (the editors) ask: what are the structural, organizational, and social features that gangs uniquely possess compared to other criminal and extremist groups?

Units of government (cities, states, and the federal government) have worked to develop responses to gangs. While some of these responses have emphasized suppression to the exclusion of other approaches, there is a growing emphasis on prevention and intervention programs. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institute of Justice have collaborated to produce a volume titled *Changing Course*, that reviews the primary areas of responding to gangs from an integrated public health and criminal justice perspective. Many of its chapters explicitly acknowledge the efforts to control the spread of gangs and the harm that gang membership causes through increased criminal involvement. This handbook captures these trends in several chapters, most notably Shytierra Gaston and Beth Huebner’s chapter on gangs and corrections (18), Beth Bjerregaard’s chapter on gang legislation (19), and Erika Gebo, Brenda Bond, and Krystal Campos’s chapter (21) on the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Comprehensive Strategy.

The spread of gangs in the United States and the worldwide growth in the use of the Internet has meant that gangs have “gone global.” American-style youth gangs can now be found in a growing number of countries around the world. While there are some core similarities across these gangs, in many cases they are quite distinctive, reflecting religious, cultural, historical, and institutional differences of the countries. Frank van Gemert and Frank Weerman (chapter 27) examine trends, patterns, and correlates of contemporary European gangs. Their chapter is nicely complemented by Rob Ralphs and Hannah Smithson’s review (chapter 28) of gang intervention strategies in Europe. While much gang research has crossed the Atlantic to Europe, Dennis Rodgers and Adam Baird (chapter 26) identify a growing body of research in Latin American countries and Angela Higginson and Kathryn Benier (chapter 29) close the book with a review of what is known about gangs in Asia, Africa, and Australia. These chapters are explicitly comparative and contemporary.

But we believe that the most unique contribution found in the book comes in the four chapters that examine the work of four individual gang researchers who have made contributions to this literature since the middle classic era of gang research. The four individuals whose contributions are highlighted in separate chapters advancing the understanding of gangs are: Malcolm Klein, Irving Spergel, James F. Short Jr., and Walter Miller. Each of these individuals is responsible for developing a pillar of the foundation of gang research. We term these the “legacy” chapters. Each chapter examining their involvement in gang research has elements of autobiography, historiography, and philosophy of science, in addition to a

review of their work. These chapters were written by individuals who have worked with or have been intimately involved with the work of the four pioneers. Lorine Hughes, who wrote the chapter about James F. Short, Jr., was one of his doctoral students and has worked with him and the data from his Chicago project. Cheryl Maxson wrote the chapter about Malcolm Klein. Cheryl and “Mac” have worked together for over 20 years and no one knows Mac’s work better than Cheryl. James C. Howell worked closely with the late Irving Spergel to develop the “Spergel Model” which became the basis for nearly \$100 million of federal gang intervention efforts. Richard Moule wrote the chapter about Walter Miller. It is fair to say no one has read more of Walter’s work than Richard and while they never met, he understands Miller’s work better than anyone in the field today. We hope you like reading them as much as we have.

It is appropriate to ask what the next steps are for gang research and policy. What are the questions that need to be answered that have not been resolved or not even been asked? We see four broad areas that are ripe for the attention of young scholars.

First, it is important to address the gaps in our current knowledge about gangs. This includes a number of salient topics such as the role of technology in gang behavior and the spread of gang behavior. The digital empowerment assumption holds that the Internet and social media offer key advantages to gangs and other criminal networks, yet it might also prove to be a detriment. What is needed is an understanding of if and how these new technologies influence gang behavior. Also, so much of what is known about gangs is derived from a criminological perspective, yet the very mechanisms leading to criminal behavior are not exclusive to this behavior but general to a variety of non-criminal consequences as well. Therefore it is necessary to learn about the implications – negative and positive – of gangs for other socializing institutions.

Second, we know all too little about group process in gangs despite Short’s work from nearly 50 years ago exhorting us to better understand group process. This concern is closely tied to the level of measurement brought to understand gangs. This is an issue that is far more than an arcane devotion to method and measurement; indeed it is at the core of what we need to know about gangs. Short urges us to consider whether we are studying and responding to individuals (gang members), groups (gangs), or structural aspects of society (class, neighborhood variables, or the like). Despite his influential work on this topic in the 1960s and 1980s, there is still inadequate attention to these issues.

Third, we lack an understanding of how gangs compare to other groups involved in crime. The growth of interest in terrorist and extremist groups, organized crime groups, drug smugglers, and money launderers (to name but a few) is illustrative of this interest. Do these groups share common organizational, structural, or group process variables? Are these groups wholly distinct and different from each other? Are there overlaps between these groups that draw our attention to a common understanding and shared responses? Do individuals belong to multiple gangs or transition from one form of crime organization (such as gangs) to another (such as organized crime or terror groups)? We have a long way to go in pursuing these questions and much of the progress will likely be made outside of gang research.

Fourth, and in a related point, we need to import models and methods from other disciplines. Scholars and policymakers working toward a better understanding and response to organized crime have made valuable use of trial transcripts as sources of data, pointing the way toward more innovative sources of information about the topics we wish to study. Those who study terrorists and terrorism use data from social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and email to better understand and respond to such groups. The world of gang

scholarship has been slow to utilize such data and many have been resistant to the use of new forms of data. This is indeed ironic since most gang members are at the peak ages for the use of social media, the late teens.

As we move ahead in gang research, there is a need to include work from the past in gang research as a foundation to build on, but not to be so tied to prior research that we cannot move ahead to new paradigms. Lorine Hughes has done an excellent job using the Short and Stodtbeck data from Chicago gangs in the 1960s. Andrew Papachristos has “discovered” data from the Chicago Crime Commission about the Capone family activities in Chicago in the 1920s. Decker and Moule are working with the data from the Boston Special Youth Project in the 1950s and Moule is analyzing the Gluecks’ gang data. It appears that the Cambridge-Somerville data is now being used. Of course, Sampson and Laub have led the way by making effective use of the Gluecks’ delinquency data from the Lyman School in the 1940s. In addition to the utility of data sets from earlier times, gang scholars need to preserve the memories, work, and records of earlier researchers. This includes the legacy of individual scholars such as Short, Klein, Miller, and Spergel, as well as countless research projects. The US Justice Department has funded tens of millions of dollars of gang research and evaluation. Perhaps the single best leveraged investment comes from evaluations of the G.R.E.A.T. project. Finn-Aage Esbensen has led multiple evaluations of G.R.E.A.T. programs. While the evaluation focus has been strong and the methodology has been top notch, the data has provided some of the most important basic and theoretical findings about gangs. Similarly, the Causes and Correlates funding has led to important findings in basic and applied knowledge about gangs. Leaders from both of these projects have contributed chapters (5, 10, and 20) to this volume. The importance of this work lies in the very strong research designs that allow them to track changes in behavior over time and thus speak of the causes of gang behavior.

It is also true that our knowledge about gangs needs expansion beyond its current geographic limits. This includes looking past the United States not only to Europe, where thanks to Malcolm Klein, Cheryl Maxson, Hans-Jürgen Kerner, and others, there is a set of burgeoning research projects, but also to Africa, South and Central America, Asia, and Australia. The boundaries of gang research do not just include countries; they also include the scholars involved in the enterprise. Gang research has been conducted largely at a small number of American universities. The boundaries of gang research need to be expanded to include new methods, new locations, new groups, and new scholars. We know very little about gangs in rural and suburban areas, a situation that needs to be addressed. Questions about race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, family, violence, and countless other topics need to be included in the study of gangs. By asking questions about these correlates of gangs in a cross-cultural context we can illustrate the gang context in other countries as well as provide a contrast to the situation in the United States.

The study of gangs needs to avoid a fixed image of the topic. Too often common stereotypes are reified and accepted as if they are true. In many instances this is a consequence of being swayed too much by the “official version” of what gangs are. The “official version” of gangs has always been different from what researchers find, from what programs report, and what gang members have to say about their gangs. This book balances the “common wisdom” about gangs with what objective research has found.

How should one read this book? We think that there is a sequential ordering to the chapters and that the sections of the book reflect common themes. We have also provided links between the various chapters. That said, a theory or correlate chapter could be paired with an intervention chapter to contrast how well they intersect. For example, do the risk factors

or correlates of gang involvement identified by a theory get addressed by an intervention? This would be a way to determine whether interventions are addressing known causes of gangs or if researchers and practitioners are talking “past” each other. The chapters on gangs outside of the United States are useful to compare to those on gangs within the United States.

We brought these authors and their chapters together to produce a comprehensive volume of knowledge about gangs and gang members. The chapters are written by the leading authorities in the world on their given topic. It is our goal that this book will be used by those who seek to understand gangs and to craft changes to improve the lives of gang members and those affected by their behavior. We hope you find that the book accomplishes these goals.

Finally, it is important that we acknowledge those working “behind the scenes” who made this book come together. We thank Chantal Fahmy, Rick Moule, Matthias Woeckener, and Jun Wu, each of whom spent an extraordinary amount of time and care poring over the chapters. The good folks at Wiley Blackwell, notably Lindsay Bourgeois, Haze Humbert, Julia Kirk, Allison Kostka, Breanna Locke, and Julia Teweles, were excellent to work with and ensured the success of this project across each stage of the process. Our colleagues at Arizona State University and Sam Houston State University, including Gaylene Armstrong, Cassia Spohn, and Vince Webb, among others, are deserving of recognition for supporting this project over the last three years. Most importantly, we are grateful to our families. Thank you to JoAnn, Sara, Laura, and Elizabeth. And thank you to Natty, Cyrus, and Adalyn. A final thank you is in order to each of the contributors for participating in this project.

Sadly, our friend and colleague Dave Curry passed away on April 26, 2015. We are very proud to include chapter 2, his last published work, in this volume. Dave was a pivotal figure in the study of gangs and juvenile justice. His work was always motivated by and focused on improving the lives of young people. We miss you, man.