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**GENDER-PREDICTED ATTITUDES TOWARD GANGS
IN NON-METROPOLITAN COMMUNITIES**

by

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Abstract

Little research exists that has examined the predictors of attitudes toward gangs held by young adults in non-metropolitan communities. A predictive correlational research study was conducted to determine the significant predictors of attitudes toward gangs held by micropolitan and small-metropolitan community young adults between the ages of eighteen and 25. By collecting surveys from this sample population, the researchers found that gender was a significant predictor of attitudes toward gangs within this sample population. Implications and recommendations for gang prevention and reduction measures are suggested along with recommendations for future research examining attitudes toward gangs.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) (2009) National Gang Threat Assessment, gangs are spreading to suburban and rural areas from large urban settings. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (a) (2009) reports in the National Youth Gang Survey that between 2002 and 2007, gangs have increased by 40.9% in smaller cities and 15.3% in larger cities. In the past, micropolitan and small metropolitan communities viewed gangs as large metropolitan city problems that were not found in the micropolitan and small metropolitan communities (Violence Prevention Coalition of Greater Los Angeles, 2007). Thus, gang problems in small metropolitan and micropolitan communities are new phenomena that have not been addressed by current gang research. Additionally, Weisheit and Wells (2001) called for additional gang research focusing on small, non-metropolitan communities, citing that current gang research is lacking and incomplete in terms of non-metropolitan gang studies. Similarly, with current statistics indicating gang activity is increasing at larger rates in smaller cities than larger cities, it is necessary to focus research within micropolitan and small metropolitan communities.

Positive or benign attitudes towards gang activities and membership have enabled gangs to proliferate freely (Winfree, Bernat, & Esbensen, 2001), expanding beyond the historical confines of large metropolitan areas and into the seclusion of micropolitan and small metropolitan communities. It is crucial to understand the role of attitudes in gang proliferation; positive attitudes toward gangs are central to the power and growth of gangs (Thrasher 1927/1963; Vigil, 1988, 2002; Weisheit & Wells, 2001; Winfree, Backstrom, & Mays, 1994; Winfree, Bernat, & Esbensen, 2001; Zatz & Portillos, 2000). Winfree, Backstrom, and Mays (1994) and Winfree, Bernat, and Esbensen (2001) posit

that higher levels of positive attitudes toward gangs are related to higher incidences of gang membership among large metropolitan community juveniles. Similarly, Weisheit and Wells (2001) posit that current gang research focusing on non-metropolitan areas is lacking. Thus, it is necessary to examine gangs at non-metropolitan level (Weisheit & Wells, 2001; Winfree et al., 2001).

The purpose of the study was to determine the relationships between attitudes toward gangs held by small metropolitan community adults aged 18-25 years. By understanding attitudes toward gangs in young adults, this study will help facilitate gang prevention and reduction measures that specifically target small metropolitan community gangs and extend the knowledge base of this population.

Previous studies have described relationships between gang membership via gender (Archer & Grascia, 2006; Brown, 1977; Valdez, Mikow, & Cepeda, 2006; National Gang Center, n.d.) and race/ethnicity (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Freng & Esbensen, 2007; Hagedorn, 1988; Lopez & Brummett, 2003; Vigil, 2002) within large metropolitan communities. Winfree et al. (2001) examined gang-related attitudes of juveniles living in two cities, differing in populations. Winfree et al. determined that youths living in larger cities possessed higher levels of pro-gang attitudes, and subsequently, higher levels of gang membership. Supporting the conclusions drawn by Winfree et al., Weisheit and Wells (2001) also called for additional research focusing on gangs in non-metropolitan communities, purporting that current gang research involving non-metropolitan communities is meager and incomplete. Finally, gang research in non-metropolitan communities is necessitated to further advocate the need for preventative

and intervention policies aimed at the gang epidemic (Weisheit & Wells, 2001; Winfree et al., 2001).

The current study surveyed the attitudes of adults aged 18-25 years from micropolitan and small metropolitan areas. By delineating how young groups perceive gangs, it becomes possible to present measures that focus on specific groups that exhibit higher rates of positive attitudes toward gangs (Winfree et al., 2001). This knowledge will help law enforcement and gang scholar's better address and implement gang prevention and reduction measures specific toward micropolitan and small metropolitan communities (Winfree et al., 1994; Winfree et al., 2001).

Previous research has found that females are more likely to perform indirect roles in gang activity (Brown, 1977; Thrasher, 1927/1963; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, & Chard-Wierschem, 1993). However, direct female involvement in gang activity is on the rise (National Alliance of Gang Investigators Association, 2005; Snethen & VanPuymbroeck, 2008). Thus, in terms of social learning theory, it is necessary to determine the predicted power of gender in relation to attitudes toward gangs.

The research study was focused on whether an individuals' gender serves as a predictor for attitudes toward gangs. Attitudes play a pivotal role in predicting future behavior; attitudinal traits allow researchers to distinguish why individuals either engage or disengage in criminal behavior (Wiernik, 2007). The definition of criminal behavior was based upon the collected beliefs or attitudes held toward a particular behavior by a group or society (Durkheim, 1938/1999). Thus, what is believed to be criminal is deemed criminal under the auspices of social attitudes and the values held by said

society. However, definitions can fluctuate with a given societal groups, such as between families or cohorts.

Attitudes are important to the relationship process among young adults. Myers (1999) purports that attitudes are affected by actions and social influences; gang members have self-reported that reasons behind gang membership include the need for family and the appeal held by older gang members (Blatchford, 2004). Current preventative and reduction measures are currently in place within many communities nationwide; the dominant prevention and reduction program currently in practice is the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program. The G.R.E.A.T. program replaced the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) in elementary schools and middle schools beginning in the late 1990s and into the early 2000s (G.R.E.A.T., 2009). The goal of G.R.E.A.T. is to arm school-aged children with the tools to resist pressures to not only engage in drug use, but to also resist, or in some cases, remove one from gang activities (G.R.E.A.T., 2009). In one micropolitan community, the G.R.E.A.T. program occurs in the fifth grade. At the same time, juveniles are most likely to join gangs in middle school, which occurs after participation in the G.R.E.A.T. program (Alpert, 2003; Blatchford, 2004; Poe, 2006).

Research Questions

The current research study was concerned with the predicted value of attitudes toward gangs held by micropolitan and small metropolitan community adults aged 18-25 years as explained by gender. Thus, the researchers asked whether there was a significant relationship between attitudes toward gangs as held by micropolitan and small metropolitan community adults aged 18-25 years and gender.

Previous research has shown the relationship between gang membership and one's gender. In terms of the level of involvement in gangs, males are more likely to directly participate in gang activities while females are more likely to indirectly participate in gang activities or remain on the periphery of gang involvement (Archer & Grascia, 2006; Brown, 1977; Valdez, Mikow, & Cepeda, 2006). Among female involvement, research also suggests that the level of female participation in gang activities is not fixed, but rather fluctuating, with females beginning to take on direct roles in their gangs (National Gang Center, n.d.).

Winfrey et al. (2001) explored the relationship between attitudes toward gangs among juveniles residing in large metropolitan communities; as previously discussed, the authors concluded that juveniles living in large metropolitan communities possessed higher levels of positive attitudes toward gangs and higher levels of gang membership. The study also highlighted the connection between attitudes toward gangs and gang membership, with increased positive attitudes toward gangs leading to increased levels of gang membership (Winfrey et al., 2001). At the same time, Winfrey et al. (2001) implored that gang research continue to explore attitudes toward gangs, with the focus on small cities and young adults, which have yet to endure scholarly research; the authors argued that further gang research involving young adult populations is vital to gang scholarship due to the fact that much juvenile-related crime, such as gang membership, is committed by young adults.

In the study, attitudes toward gangs was measured by the Attitudes toward Gangs Scale (ATGS). A high score indicates a positive attitude about gangs.

Variables.

Gender. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2011), gender is the socially constructed term that society places on activities, roles, behaviors, and attributes (i.e. as being either feminine or masculine). The term “sex” refers to the physiological and biological characteristics that differentiate men from women (WHO, 2001). Also, the California Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC), Section 12 (2011), defines gender as possessing both feminine and neuter characteristics. In the study, gender was synonymous with sex, and was defined as male, female, or transgendered via the demographic questions asked at the beginning of the research survey.

Micropolitan community. In the study, micropolitan community was defined as a community possessing 2,500 up to 49,999 inhabitants per the United States Census Bureau (2009) and both the National Youth Gang Survey (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Program(b), 2012) and the National Gang Threat Assessment (FBI, 2009).

Predictor. According to Creswell (2003) and Tabachnick & Fidell (2001), in regression analysis, determining the predictors of a phenomenon allows projections to be made toward a variable. Thus, in the study, the term predictor (predicted, prediction, and predicted value) was defined as the prediction of a phenomenon towards a given population.

Small metropolitan community. In the study, small metropolitan community was defined as a community possessing between 50,000 and 99,999 inhabitants, per the United States Census Bureau (2009) and both the National Youth Gang Survey (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Program(b), 2012) and the National Gang Threat Assessment (FBI, 2009).

Young adult. Winfree et al. (2001) define a young adult as an individual in their late teens and early twenties. Thus, the study numerically defined a young adult as an individual between the ages of 18 and 25 years.

Despite ample research indicating that gender serves as a predictor of gang membership, determining whether gender serves as a predictor for attitudes toward gangs within young adult populations in micropolitan and small metropolitan communities was unknown (Weisheit & Wells, 2001; Winfree et al., 1994; Winfree et al., 2001). Previous research found that gender and race/ethnicity are related to gang membership, with males being directly involved in gang activities and females taking on indirect gang roles (Archer & Grascia, 2006; Brown, 1977; National Gang Center, n.d.; Valdez, Mikow, & Cepeda, 2006).

Sampling Method

The study applied a nonprobability sampling design of purposive sampling and judgment sampling; purposive sampling utilizes a sample that targets a specific population (Bordens & Abbott, 2008). In the study, the sample was derived from a local community college, as well as other congregations for 18 to 25 year olds, such as the local gym and a dental office. In the study, adults aged 18-25 years who were currently enrolled in the local community college, as well as frequent local businesses, were employed, and several areas of California were representative of the population.

RESULTS

The participant sample was derived from a local community college. Also, specific congregations with high concentrations of 18-25 year olds were targeted, such as a local gym and a local practicing dentist. Participant eligibility included: participants must be between 18-25 years of age, and live in a California city with a population range of 2,500 to 99,999 inhabitants (which was established by the participant disclosing his/her primary city of residence). A total of 116 participants were sampled. Participation in the study was possible via two methods: completion of a hard-copy survey or completion of an online survey. The following study obtained a total of 116 completed surveys, with 85 hard-copy surveys completed and 31 surveys completed online.

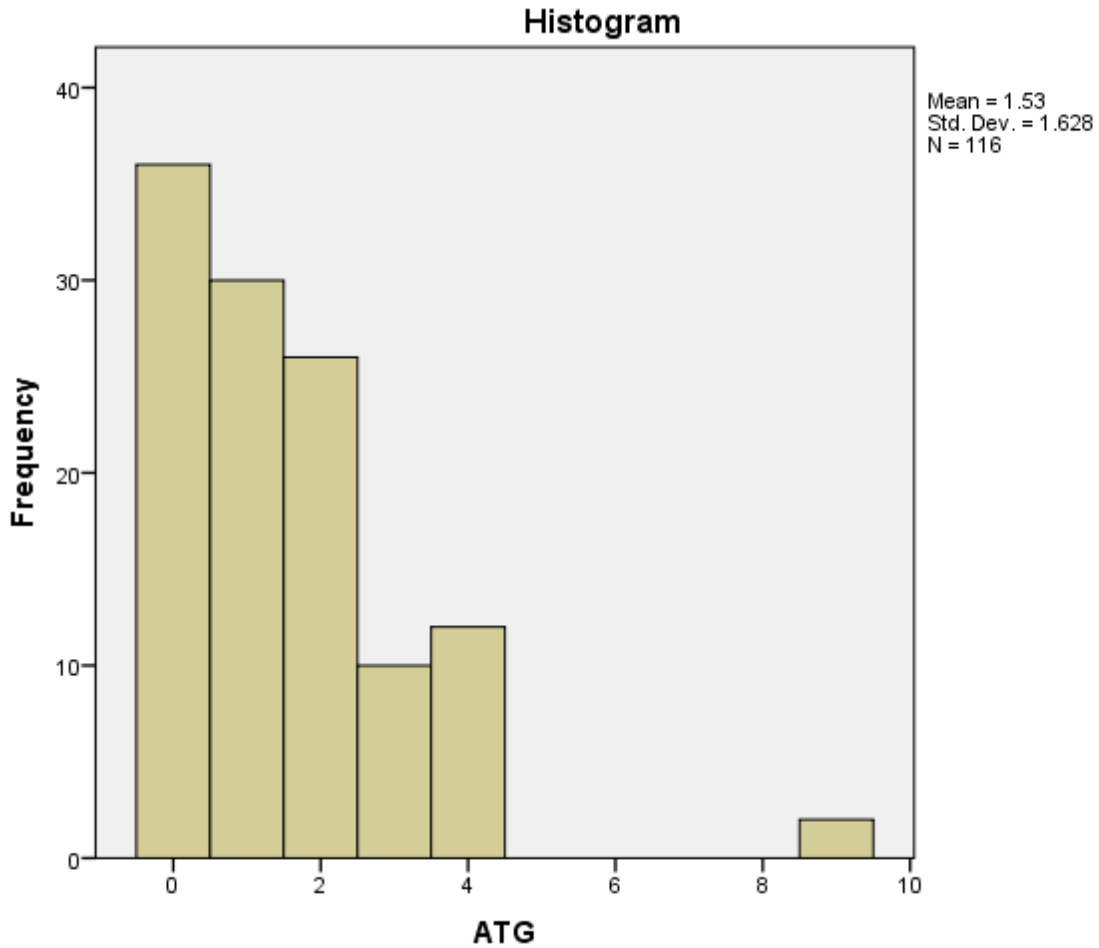
The demographic statistics of the study's sample are displayed in Table 1. The following table displays the sample demographics broken down by: age, gender, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, and religious involvement. The table also displays the total counts based on a sample size of 116 (N=116) and percentages for each sample category/sub-category (e.g. Age/24-25 Year Olds).

Table 1. Sample Demographic Characteristics

Sample Demographic Characteristics		Total (N=116)	Percentage (%)
Age	24-25 Year olds	9	7.8%
	22-23 Year Olds	19	16.4%
	20-21 Year Olds	21	18.1%
	18-19 Year Olds	67	57.8%
Gender	Female	47	40.5%
	Male	69	59.5%
Race/Ethnicity	Other (American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or Black)	18	15.5%
	White	52	44.8%
	Hispanic	46	39.7%
Religious Affiliation	Other (Atheist, Agnostic, or Neutral)	30	25.9%
	Spiritual	41	35.3%
	Religious	45	38.8%
Religious Involvement	Moderate Religious Involvement	45	38.8%
	Low Religious Involvement	48	41.4%
	High Religious Involvement	23	19.8%

Most participants (114 out of 116 participants) reported low to moderate levels of positive attitudes toward gangs (score values of 0-4 in a scale from 0-9). Only two participants reported current gang membership, and maximum scores for positive attitudes toward gangs (score value of 9 on a scale 0-9) (See Table 2).

Table 2. Presentation of Results for Attitudes Toward Gangs (ATG)



The data was analyzed using logistic regression analysis to determine the associations, or predicted value, of attitudes toward gangs held by micropolitan and small metropolitan community adults aged 18 to 25 years given the individuals' gender, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, and religious involvement. The dependent variable, attitudes toward gangs, was measured via the Attitudes Toward Gangs Scale. Responses were measured by coding negative responses (a zero score) as 0 and positive responses (scores of 1-4) as 1. Coding was determined following the removal of the two outliers,

with individuals who presented a score as possessing indicators for high positive attitudes toward gangs. Thus, individuals who presented a score of zero were distinguished between individuals who yielded any score (scores of 1-4).

Gender did serve as a predictor for attitudes toward gangs.

Table 3. Logistic Regression for Attitudes Toward Gangs with Gender

		Variables in the Equation					
		B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Gender	.952	.477	3.977	1	.046	2.590
	Constant	-1.268	.665	3.632	1	.057	.281

The results indicate that gender was highly associated with attitudes toward gangs.

Results found that gender is a significant predictor of attitudes toward gangs. These findings are consistent with previous research that focused on gang membership and attitudes toward gangs held by large metropolitan community juveniles (Archer & Grascia, 2006; Brown, 1977; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Freng & Esbensen, 2007; Hagedorn, 1988; Lopez & Brummett, 2003; Vigil, 1988, 2002; Winfree et al., 2001). Previous research has found that gender maintains high predictive relationships in terms of gang membership. Similarly, although females traditionally maintain indirect gang roles and are predominant on the gang periphery, racial and ethnic minority females are more likely to hold more direct roles and affiliations (Brown, 1977; Freng & Esbensen, 2007; Thrasher, 1927/1963; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, & Chard-Wierschem, 1993; Vigil, 1988, 2002).

Conclusion

The nature of gang proliferation is vast, with many gangs having deep, long historical roots connected to their current livelihood (Allender, 2001; Lengel, 2003). The appeal of gangs is furthered by the glamorization, or media attention, paid to gangs (Blatchford, 2004). Although gang proliferation is often viewed as the product of gangs actively recruiting gang members, it is important to remember that gangs exist in communities not solely because of people joining gangs; small communities were historically void of gangs and the ills associated with gangs (Curry, Ball, & Decker, 1996; Hagedorn, 1998; Maxson, 1998), however, gangs began to look at small communities as sources to expand the gang and tap into new sources for not only gang members, but also revenue (North Carolina: Hispanic Gangs Emerge in Rural Communities, 2004). With small communities possessing fewer economic opportunities than metropolitan centers (Weisheit & Wells, 2001), the lure of immediate income via drug trafficking and extortion provides an inviting environment for gangs to relocate and expand (North Carolina: Hispanic Gangs Emerge in Rural Communities, 2004). Attitudes are central to gang accommodation; positive and benign attitudes provide a conducive environment for gangs, thus allowing gangs to proliferate (Winfrey et al., 2001). Attitudes are strongly tied to future behaviors, in that, if certain behaviors or actions are viewed positively, then the likelihood of said behaviors or actions occurring is high (Iversen, 2004). In other words, attitudes predispose an individual to perform in a preferential manner (Rokeach, 1968).

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