

The author(s) shown below used Federal funds provided by the U.S. Department of Justice and prepared the following final report:

Document Title: Establishment of a Police Gang Unit: An Examination of Rational and Institutional Considerations.

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Document No.: 185725

Date Received: December 11, 2000

Award Number: 95-IJ-CX-0057

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8/28/98 STATUS ~~92~~ 95-IJ-CX-0057

Submitted to Criminology

closed

**THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A POLICE GANG UNIT: AN EXAMINATION OF
RATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS***

185725

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* The author would like to thank Samuel Walker, Vincent Webb, Edward Maguire, Julie Horney, and Russel Smith for their helpful comments and suggests on earlier drafts of this manuscript. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1998 annual meetings of the Academy of Criminal Justice and Sciences in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This research was funded in part by Grant no.95-IJ-CX-0057 from the National Institute of Justice.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A POLICE GANG UNIT: AN EXAMINATION OF RATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

ABSTRACT

Although researchers have begun to document the programs and activities performed by police gang units, there has been little research examining why police gang units are created and why they have responded to local gang problems in the way they have over the past fifteen years. Using a multimethodological research design, the present study examines the factors that shaped a Midwestern police department's response to its community's gang problem. The results from the present study lend support for the institutional perspective. The data suggest that the gang unit was created as a consequence of pressures placed on the police department from various powerful elements within the community, and that once created, the unit's response was largely driven by their need to achieve and maintain organizational legitimacy.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past fifteen years, the United States has seen a dramatic increase in the number of specialized gang units established by police departments around the country (Curry, Fox, Ball, and Stone, 1992). Many police officials and researchers have attributed this rise to the growing number of gangs, gang members, and gang-related problems in cities across the country (Jackson and McBride, 1987; Burns and Deakin, 1989; Huff and McBride, 1993; Weisel and Painter, 1997). However, despite the support that the police have received in their efforts to combat the gang problem, many have questioned the appropriateness and effectiveness of approaches centered around the formation of specialized gang units. Some critics argue that the gang problem in many communities is relatively minor, and that the police response to gangs has been fueled by police departments in their quest for federal funding, or as the result of racial stereotypes (Zatz, 1987; McCorkle and Miethe 1998).

The present study seeks to advance our understanding of some of the issues, problems, and events that shape and define a police department's response to their community's gang problem. Although police executives, researchers, and citizens frequently express their beliefs as to how and why police agencies have responded the way they have toward community gang problems, there has been little systematic research which has investigated these beliefs. This paper, uses a multimethodological approach to examine the factors that shaped a Midwestern police department's response to its community's gang problem. The theoretical issue explored in this study is the utility of the normative versus institutional perspective for understanding police organizational behavior.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In response to the rising concern about gang problems many law enforcement agencies have established special gang units to apprehend gang members and deter gang-related activity. In 1993, the Law Enforcement and Management Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey reported that special gang units existed in 76 percent of all municipal police departments with 100 or more sworn officers, 65 percent of all sheriff's departments with 100 or more sworn officers, 73 percent of all county police agencies with 100 or more sworn officers, and 39 percent of all state law enforcement agencies (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1995: Table C).¹ These findings lead to an estimate of approximately 450 police gang units in the country.² The recency of this phenomenon can be further seen by the fact that over 75 percent of specialized gang units have been established in the past fifteen years (Curry, Fox, Ball, and Stone, 1992).

While specialized police gang units represent a new feature in American policing, it is part of an overall trend among many traditional police departments to create specialized units to address unique law enforcement problems such as repeat offenders, domestic violence, and hate crimes (e.g., Martin, 1986; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1995; Walker and Katz, 1995; Boyd, Berk, and Hamner, 1996). Such specialized units are said to be created to focus departmental resources, energy, and skill on a particular community problem. Additionally, such an approach is

¹ For a discussion of validity problems relevant to specialized units and the LEMAS data see Walker and Katz (1995).

² The estimate of 450 police gang units was determined as follows: 76 percent of the 411 municipal police departments with more than 100 sworn officers (312), 65 percent of the 146 sheriff's departments with more than 100 officers (95), 73 percent of the 33 county police departments with more than 100 sworn officers (24), and 39 percent of the 49 state law enforcement agencies (19).

intended to be a symbolic act to the community, potential offenders, and police officers, that the police department is taking a specific problem seriously (Wasserman, Gardner, and Cohen, 1973; Meyer, 1979).

It appears that, for similar reasons, many police officials and gang scholars have called for the consolidation of gang control functions within police departments (Jackson and McBride, 1985; Burns and Deakin, 1989; Huff and McBride, 1993; Brantley and DiRosa, 1994; Rush, 1996). They have argued that assigning the primary responsibilities of the gang problem to a police gang unit will increase the technical efficiency and effectiveness of a police department's response toward its community's gang problem. They point out that consolidation of gang control functions will permit officers, through training and experience, to develop highly technical skills that would not otherwise be possible. They also claim that consolidation of gang control functions allows police organizations to distribute gang-related work orderly and rationally, which better enables police departments to develop and coordinate their response to community gang problems (Jackson and McBride, 1985; Burns and Deakin, 1989; Huff and McBride, 1993; Brantley and DiRosa, 1994; Rush, 1996).

Despite the justifications for this organizational approach, there is little consensus as to why police gang units are created and why they have responded to local gang problems in the way they have over the past fifteen years. With this said, two very different perspectives have been advanced by researchers to explain the police response to gangs. One perspective argues that specialized gang units have been created as a result of rational considerations on the part of police organizations. The other perspective argues that specialized police gang units have been created

as a result of responding to broader institutional forces.³

The Creation of Police Gang Units as a Result of Rational Considerations

Many researchers, police officials, and citizens have attributed the rise of specialized police gang units around the country to a growing gang problem. They cite the fact that in 1982 only 25 percent of cities with populations of 100,000 or more reported a gang problem (Miller, 1982), whereas, by the early 1990s this figure had risen to approximately 90 percent (Klein, 1995; See also Curry et al., 1992; 1994; 1996; Johnson et al., 1995; Knox et al., 1996; Curry and Decker, 1998). Additionally, they point to the fact that the gang problem is no longer restricted to large cities, but that gangs are becoming prevalent in many small and medium size cities (Klein, 1995; Curry et al., 1996). Evidence provided by Needle and Stapleton (1983), Curry et al. (1992), and Weisel and Painter (1997) have offered support for this explanation, finding that communities that claim a gang problem are significantly more likely to establish a specialized police gang unit than communities that do not.

Others have more specifically attributed the rise of specialized police gang units to the proliferation of gang-related violence and drug trafficking (Burns and Deakin, 1989; Brantley and DiRosa, 1994; Weisel and Painter, 1997). In particular, some individuals in the media and law enforcement claim that much of the gang violence in today's urban communities is fueled by gang-related drug trafficking (Klein, 1995; Spergel, 1995). These claims have also been substantiated by some gang researchers who have found that gangs are driven to outside markets to enhance

³ It should be noted that while the rational and institutional approaches used in this paper are often times discussed as distinctive perspectives on organizational behavior, the two approaches are not necessarily incompatible or necessarily mutually exclusive of one another. For a more complete discussion on this issue see Tolbert and Zucker (1983) and Scott (1992).

their ability for profits in the drug trade, which in turn results in violent conflicts between gangs (Skolnick, 1990). Individuals who advocate this perspective argue much of this change is the result of the fact that some of today's gangs have evolved to become highly rational and organizationally sophisticated, being similar to any other capitalist enterprise, having an established leadership hierarchy, and formal rules and goals to guide their actions (Taylor, 1990; Jankowski, 1991; Padilla, 1992). Therefore, some researchers and police leaders have argued that specialized police gang units have been established as a result of the belief that, if the police are to reduce gang-related violence and drug trafficking, they must become functionally sophisticated themselves and adapt in a specialized manner to suppress gang-related activities (Rush, 1996; Weisel and Painter, 1997).

Accordingly, many argue that the creation of specialized police gang units in communities across the nation has come in direct response to the proliferation of gangs and gang-related problems. They explain that specialized police gang units are established as a result of *rational considerations* on the part of police departments, that their organizations are faced with real and growing gang problems, and that, through specialization, they can enhance the success of their crime control efforts.

Such an explanation of police organizational behavior is based on the normative model. The normative model holds that organizations are rational and behave in a manner to effectively and efficiently achieve specific goals (e.g., crime control and prevention) (Thompson, 1967; Blau and Schoenherr, 1971). This perspective discounts the possibility that police organizational behavior is influenced by myths that are held by those in their institutional environment, or that police organizations themselves manufacture myths in an attempt to further their own interests (Meyer and Rowen, 1977; Crank and Langworthy, 1992). Instead, the normative model proposes

that police organizational behavior is influenced by real problems to which the organization must respond if it is to achieve its goal.

The Creation of Police Gang Units as a Result of Institutional Considerations

Other researchers claim that the gang problem has been greatly exaggerated, and have argued that specialized police gang units have been established for other reasons. For example, Zatz (1987) examined the police response to gangs in Phoenix, Arizona using a variety of data obtained from community members, media reports, and court records. She claimed that the Phoenix community was not faced with a serious gang problem at the time that the gang unit was created, but rather that police officials constructed the gang problem in an effort to campaign for federal grant dollars. She argued that the police department, through the media, successfully constructed a social image of gang members as dangerous, crime-prone Chicano youths that threatened the safety of the Anglo community. She further asserted that the police department also released information warning the public that the gang problem would escalate in the future if the police did not respond. Data obtained from court records and social service agents, however, indicated that gang members did not pose a significant threat to the community at the time, and that the police department's claims of a serious gang problem were grossly over-exaggerated for the purpose of obtaining organizational resources.

Similar findings were reported by McCorkle and Miethe (1998) in their examination of legislative records, media accounts, and official crime data in Las Vegas, Nevada. These authors argued that the gang problem in Las Vegas was over-exaggerated by the police department in an effort to maintain organizational legitimacy and survival. In particular, the authors reported that at the time police officials made claims of a growing gang problem, the police department was

under considerable financial pressure due to a growing community and was concurrently undergoing serious scrutiny by political officials and community members as the result of a number of police misconduct charges. Accordingly, the authors argued that police officials linked national reports of a growing gang problem to concerns of increasing crime rates in Las Vegas in an effort to divert attention away from the problems of the police department and justify the need for additional police resources.

Consequently, some researchers argue that the police response to gangs in communities across the country is the result of police officials becoming actively involved in the social construction of gang problems at the local level. They explain that, in order for local agencies to have access to some forms of federal or local money, they must demonstrate that they have a gang problem within their community. As such, they argue that *institutional considerations*, such as financial resources, have been largely responsible for the police response to gangs.

Such an explanation of police organizational behavior is consistent with the institutional perspective. The central premise of the institutional perspective, as applied to the police, is a belief that the organization and activities of the police must be understood in the context of their institutional environment. Institutional environment, here, refers to powerful actors, called sovereigns, who have the capacity to influence the policies, decisions, and financial resources of the police organization (Meyer and Rowen, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Crank and Langworthy, 1992). Sovereigns in a given community might include, but are not necessarily limited to, the mayor, city council, special interest groups, citizens, and other criminal justice agencies.

Within the institutional perspective it is argued that the organization and activities performed by the police do not necessarily reflect technical rationality. That is, police

departments do not create organizational structures or engage in operational activities simply because they are more efficient and/or more effective. Instead, police departments create organizational structures and engage in operational activities because they reflect the ideas and values that are shared by their institutional environment (Meyer and Rowen, 1977).

Therefore, the institutional perspective holds that for police departments to establish legitimacy, their organizational structures and operational activities must be performed in accordance with the ideas and beliefs that are held by various powerful actors within their environment (Meyer and Rowen, 1977; Crank and Langworthy, 1992; Crank, 1994). Those police organizations that conform to the ideas and beliefs that are prescribed to them by their external environment are more likely to obtain "cultural support" and, henceforth, improve their chances for organizational resources and survival (Meyer and Rowen, 1977). Conversely, those organizations that do not conform to the ideas and beliefs that are held by their institutional environment are at risk of being perceived as useless or unimportant, and may lose any legitimacy that was previously granted by their institutional environment (Crank and Langworthy, 1992).

THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study has two primary purposes. The first is to examine the factors that lead to the establishment of a specialized gang unit. The goal is to tell the story of how one city's gang unit was created and whether it was the result of either rational or institutional considerations. The second purpose is to examine how these factors influence the gang unit's response to the community's gang problem. The intent here is to illustrate how the gang unit's response to the gang problem was affected by the factors that lead to the unit's creation.

SETTING AND METHODS

Setting

The present study takes place in a large Midwestern community, hereafter called Junction City (a pseudonym). The economic base of Junction City consists of a combination of light manufacturing, service industries, and agricultural-related business. Transportation and telecommunication industries also play a major part in the local economy. The city provides many surrounding communities with health care and retail shopping. While Junction City is a fairly prosperous community with a low unemployment rate (3.4%) and a relatively high median household income (\$29,927), 12.6 percent of its residents still live below the poverty line (1996 County and City Extra Annual Metro, City, and County Data Book, 1996).

In terms of ethnic composition the community is diverse, but very similar to national patterns. Caucasians make up approximately 84 percent of the community (compared to 80.3% for the nation), African Americans make up 13.1 percent (compared to 12.1%), Asians make up 1.0 percent (compared to 2.9%), and Hispanics make up 3.1 percent (compared to 9%) (1996 County and City Extra Annual Metro, City and County Data Book, 1996).⁴

Junction City's crime rate has increased somewhat over the past ten years. In 1987 Junction City's crime rate was 6,521.1 per 100,000, whereas by 1995 it had increased to 7,848.7 per 100,000. However, Junction City is thought of a relatively safe city, with a crime rate well below other major Midwestern cities (e.g., Kansas City-11,800 per 100,000, Chicago-9,792.3 per

⁴ Over the course of the study a number of Hispanic social agencies were contacted. These agencies estimated that approximately 7 to 10 percent of the individuals residing in Junction City were Hispanic. They stated that because many of the Hispanics in the community have immigrated illegally they have not been included in the census estimates.

100,000, and St. Louis-16,082 per 100,000) (Crime in the United States, 1996).

The Junction City Police Department has 777 full-time employees, 628 of whom are sworn officers (81%). The police to population ratio is slightly below the national average with 1.9 officers per 1,000 population. The police department proportionally deploys its officers similar to other departments around the nation with 5 percent of the sworn officers being assigned to administration (compared to 5% nationally), 87 percent being assigned to field operations (compared to 90% nationally), and 8 percent being assigned to technical support (compared to 4% nationally) (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1995).

The Junction City Police Department's gang unit currently operates within the Special Investigations Bureau. The unit is composed of 13 individuals, 10 sworn and 3 non-sworn, and is divided into two shifts.⁵ Almost all of the officers and civilian personnel (10) work "B" shift from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Only three officers work "C" shift from 2:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. The Junction City Police Department's gang unit is not physically located at Central Headquarters. Instead, it is housed in the northeastern section of the city, a geographic location which is predominantly African American and is believed to be the center of much of the gang activity.

A Multimethodological Research Design

A limitation of prior research has been that researchers have primarily relied on the police and their perceptions to provide data about the police response to gangs. Therefore, the research design in this project was purposefully constructed to gain a comprehensive view of how and why

⁵ Accordingly, the number of personnel in Junction City's gang unit is very similar to other gang units across the country. Curry et al. (1992) reported that the median size gang unit in the United States is ten personnel. They further reported that only approximately twenty percent of the established police gang units have twenty or more personnel.

the police responded to the gang problem in Junction City. In particular, the present study brings together multiple sources of data (e.g., field observations, in-depth interviews, and documents) to focus on a single point and to help explain, clarify, and corroborate issues of question (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988).

Field Observations and Interviews with Gang Unit Officers

Approximately 300 hours were spent in the field accompanying gang unit officers from the Junction City Police Department between October 1996 and June 1997 (See Table One). The focus of the observations were on the everyday experiences of the gang unit officers. Special attention was paid to the role of the gang unit officer, any contacts the gang unit officer made during the day, informal relationships that developed between the gang unit officer and those in his/her internal and external environment, as well as decisions that were made by gang unit officers.

--Table 1, about here--

This approach proved to be beneficial in two ways. The first is that observation of the gang unit for a prolonged period of time assisted the researcher in seeing things that might not have otherwise been seen. Observations of the officers revealed several subtleties and nuances that gave insight to the factors that shaped Junction City's response to their community's gang problem. These included discussions between officers, or simply observing the nature, extent and types of interactions that the officers had with those outside of the gang unit (e.g., community members, public officials, gang members). The second reason this approach proved to be beneficial is that it permitted the researcher to obtain data that otherwise might not have been made available. For example, after developing rapport with the officers, they became active participants in the research process. The officers often stated "Here is something you should

know about..." or "Come with us, we'll introduce you to (Bob), he might be helpful."

Semi-structured interviews were used to supplement the observations of the gang unit officers. Interviews were conducted with all ten of the officers during their normal working hours. The interviews with the seven investigators and the two sergeants were composed of 120 questions and focused on such major issues as: why the officer choose the gang unit, their perceptions of the gang unit, the history of the gang unit, the organizational structure of the gang unit, program activities performed by the gang unit, and the goals, objectives, and policies of the gang unit. The interview with the lieutenant in charge of the gang unit focused on the organizational constructs of the gang unit. These questions were directed toward the background of the gang unit, personnel selection, measures of success, and budgetary issues. The interviews lasted approximately six hours and usually took two working days to complete.

The Review of Documents

Sixty-two official documents produced by the gang unit and the police department were used for the present study. These included such documents as the gang unit's Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), annual reports, intelligence, training, and network tracking bulletins, sign-in sheets, inter-office communications, statistics kept by the gang unit, grants obtained by the gang unit, booklets produced by the gang unit, and arrest statistics obtained from the Junction City Police Department. These official records were used as historical artifacts, communicating how the officers in the gang unit had been directed to conduct themselves, as well as to shed additional light on the common practices and beliefs of the gang unit and its officers over time.

The present study also made use of 162 articles obtained from local newspapers between

January 1987 and July 1997.⁶ The newspaper articles were not only intended to provide a historical record of the development of the gang unit in terms of its organizational mandate and role, but also to provide additional insight into the beliefs and values that the gang unit wished to portray to the media and the community. Additionally, because the newspaper serves as a forum for the community to speak about its concerns, newspaper articles also provided a rich source of data on how those in the community felt about the gang unit. Accordingly, the newspaper articles are used to offer a different view of the city's gang problem and to illustrate the various external forces that may have impacted the gang unit's response to the city's gang problem.

Interviews with Non-Gang Unit Personnel

Forty-six non-gang unit personnel, representing the internal (e.g., fellow police officers/insiders) and external environments (e.g., non-police officers/outside) of the gang unit, were also interviewed. The main purpose of the interviews with non-gang unit personnel was to add further insight into the gang unit's response to the community's gang problem. The interview schedule was composed of seventeen questions and focused on five major issues: 1) perceptions of the gang problem in the respondent's community; 2) the nature of the relationship between the respondent's unit/agency and the gang unit; 3) influences the gang unit had had on the respondent's unit/agency; 4) advantages to the unit's/agency's relationship with the gang unit; and 5) problems that the unit/agency had had with the gang unit. Accordingly, interviews were designed to obtain subjective reactions, both positive and negative, from those who had had contact with the gang unit.

⁶ Two primary methods were used to locate articles related to the gang unit. The first was a computer search using the Lexus newspaper indexing system with the key terms "gang" "unit" and "police." The second method of obtaining newspaper articles on the gang unit was sifting through old newspaper articles that the gang unit had collected from 1989 through 1991.

With regard to the gang unit's internal relationships, two methods were used to decide who should be interviewed. The first was that over the course of the study an on-going log was kept of those persons with whom the gang unit had had contact in a professional capacity. The second method of determining who should be interviewed was accomplished by asking the gang unit officers whom they felt should be contacted to gain further insight into the gang unit. Interestingly, the officers' suggestions of whom should be contacted were almost identical to the list that had previously been compiled from observations in the field. As a consequence of these observations and suggestions, eight officers representing seven units within the police department were identified as having a close working relationship with the gang unit and as a result were interviewed.

Interviews were also conducted with members of outside agencies. These included both criminal justice and non-criminal justice agency personnel. With respect to criminal justice personnel, 16 members of the Law Enforcement Network/Tracking System were interviewed. The Network/Tracking System is a collection of agencies throughout the Junction City community under the direction and management of the Junction City gang unit that cooperatively exchange gang-related information and intelligence. This collection includes county attorneys, probation and parole personnel, jail and prison administrators, and municipal and county law enforcement agencies from outside the Junction City area.

Non-criminal justice personnel such as school administrators and leaders of various special interest groups were also interviewed. Specifically, fourteen school officials, representing fourteen schools, and seven individuals representing eight special interest groups from around the community were interviewed. This sample was comprised of individuals who were identified by gang unit officers as having frequent contact with the gang unit or individuals who were visibly

seen or heard having contact with or influence on the gang unit during the observational portion of the study. This sample includes individuals and organizations that were viewed by gang unit officers as both favorable and unfavorable.

THE CREATION OF THE GANG UNIT

It appears that social and political factors were largely responsible for the creation of the police gang unit in Junction City. The gang unit was established in 1988, a time when public policy discussion surrounding gangs was common. This can be seen by the number of national and local news reports on gangs. Nationally, prior to 1985, there were fewer than fifty newspaper articles a year published about gangs. By 1988, the number of newspaper articles on gangs increased to over 900 a year (Palumbo et al, 1992: 3). Similarly, in Junction City the local newspaper only published one article on gangs in 1986 and 1987; however, in 1988, over 55 articles on gangs appeared in the local newspaper.

At the same time that Junction City and the nation turned their attention toward gangs, Junction City began to experience political instability. In late 1986, the Chief of Police was fired by the Mayor for insubordination. In turn, this firing led to a recall drive against the Mayor, which in the end resulted in a 1987 election outcome that turned the Mayor out of office (Local Paper, January 14, 1987: 1).⁷ Additionally, shortly after the Mayor was turned out of office, the Chief of Police was reinstated because the firing was ruled unlawful and void by a District judge (Local Paper, March 25, 1987: 1).

⁷ Because the name of the newspaper reporter, the name of the article, and the name of the newspaper would reveal the site under study, the term "Local Paper" has been substituted in an effort to conceal the identity of the organization under study. For similar reasons, the names of individuals and organizations used in this article are pseudonyms.

Consequently, the political instability among key city officials resulted in a lack of leadership, which the Chief of Police stated had a profound impact on the operations of the police department. In an interview with the Chief, for this study, he argued that, because of his firing and later reinstatement, he was left with little support among police officers and key administrators. This was evident in a poll conducted by the police union in which 79 percent of the union members opposed his reinstatement (Local Paper, March 25, 1987). Because the Chief's primary concern was "dealing with the police opposition to his return," he indicated that he had little time to deal with what many had begun to see as a local gang problem.

The Chief of Police argued that as a result of the national exposure on gangs, many people in Junction City had begun to see a local gang problem. He stated, "Everything people looked at appeared to be gang-related, whether it was a crime or anything else." As a result, he claimed that he had begun to feel pressure from community and political leaders, as well as police officers, to do something about the gang problem. Some, he stated, had even suggested that he was "just like the rest of the chiefs around the nation who were in denial about the gang problem." The Chief of Police, however, adamantly argued that he was not in denial, but he simply did not believe that there was a significant gang threat to the community at the time.

An inter-office memorandum lends support to the Chief's claims (Inter-office Communication, 1988). The memorandum was composed by an officer who was ordered to provide an assessment of the current gang problem in Junction City. This officer was by most accounts the first officer in the police department to recognize and promote the idea that gangs were present in the city.⁸ While the officer strongly suggested in his report that there was a gang

⁸ Approximately six months after this inter-office communication was submitted to the Chief of Police the officer was assigned to the newly established gang unit.

problem in Junction City that deserved monitoring and direct intervention, there was little evidence offered in the inter-office memorandum that suggested that gangs posed a significant threat to the community. In fact, the most serious example used to illustrate the seriousness of the gang problem was that an officer was knocked over in an attempt to prevent a fist fight between two gang members (Inter-Office Communication, January 25, 1988). The passage read as follows:

"...I have noticed that some or all of the [gang] members have exhibited signs of deviant anti-social behavior.... A good example of this behavior was demonstrated to one of our most experienced and articulate officers, John Timmes. On 28 December, 1986, Officer Timmes was knocked to the ground by a 17 year-old member of the Lords of Violence when Officer Timmes attempted to break up a fight at 17th and State Street" (Inter-Office Communication, January 25, 1988: 2).

Shortly after the assessment, the Chief of Police established a temporary, four officer Youth Prevention Unit under the direction of the Narcotics Unit. The creation of this new unit was not made public, and was originally constructed to operate for a thirty day period for the purpose of evaluating the nature of the gang problem in Junction City. Unit officers were specifically instructed not to engage in any activity other than information gathering. The four officers were guided by a Youth Coordination Committee that was staffed by nine officers from the homicide, narcotics, organized crime, community relations, and uniform patrol units. These officers were to examine and discuss the intelligence obtained from the Youth Intervention Unit and make policy recommendations to the Chief of Police.

Intelligence records compiled by the Youth Coordination Committee suggested that the gang problem in Junction City was minimal. They estimated that gang membership in Junction City was restricted to 16 to 30 hard-core gang members from the Los Angeles area, as well as 150 youths who "associated" with the gang members. They also reported that gang activity

carried out by these gang members was limited to the wearing of gang colors and to the writing of gang-related graffiti.⁹

At the same time, however, some community leaders began to believe that the police department was not taking an aggressive enough stance against a potential gang problem. In particular, because of the political instability among key municipal leaders, the Chamber of Commerce decided to take a leadership role in addressing the gang issue. The Chamber of Commerce feared that if gangs were not prevented they could take a foothold and hinder the attraction of business to the community. With this in mind, the Chamber of Commerce put together a task force in April of 1988 that was comprised of representatives from many of the city's largest corporations, as well as community leaders from the local school system, police department, and public housing.

Shortly after the community task force on gangs was established, the Guardians, an African American police officers association, publicly proposed an all African American gang squad to deal with the gang problem in the African American section of the city. Their proposal was publicly endorsed by a local African American state senator, an African American city council member, and a group of African American business and community leaders. The Guardians argued that the police department was not being responsive to the needs of the African American community in Junction City with regard to the gang problem. For example, the President of the Guardians was quoted in the local paper as saying

⁹ The Youth Coordination Committee's findings were confirmed through data obtained from media reports, interviews with key police officials, and official records which all suggested that gang-related assaults and homicides were minimal, if not non-existent in Junction City at this time.

"What the police department has done so far hasn't impacted the African American community. We're talking about a serious problem of gang activity and youth violence in the African American community. We're not fabricating this. We are not trying to slander the police department in any way. We're just saying that we can do a better job in this particular area" (Local Paper, May 25, 1988:17).

As a result, the Guardians proposed that an eight to ten person unit, staffed entirely with African Americans, would better address the city's gang problem. They claimed that "We have a vested interests [in the African American] community. Most of us live here. We have doors open to use that won't be opened to them (white officers)" (Local Paper, May 25, 1988:17).

Proponents of this position also maintained that African American officers would be better able to gather intelligence on gang-related activities because of their close connections to community members (Local Paper, June 5, 1988). This proposal, however, was rejected by the Chief because he felt that an all African American gang squad would be a step in the wrong direction, and that he should not succumb to such public pressure (Local Paper, June 5, 1988).

Press releases and interviews with police officials suggested that the organization of the community task force and the public proposal by the Guardians to establish a gang squad was the major turning point in the police response to gangs. Because community leaders, as well as certain segments of the police department, began to recognize publicly that the city had a gang problem, it became difficult for the Chief of Police not to develop an organizational response. In an interview the Chief of Police agreed, stating that while he still did not believe that the city faced a serious gang problem, "Various public elements had an impact on my decision to establish a gang unit." Accordingly, approximately 45 days after the community Task Force was put together and two weeks after the Guardians publicly proposed an all African American gang unit, the Chief of Police announced the creation of the gang unit.

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF LEGITIMACY

While the above section described how the police department's institutional environment impacted the establishment of the gang unit, this section describes the early history of the gang unit and the strategy that was implemented by the unit to respond to the community's gang problem. As will be argued below, it appears that because the gang unit was created as a result of pressure placed on the police department by various sovereigns in their institutional environment, rather than for reasons of technical rationality, the newly established gang unit was faced with a number of competing ideas and beliefs that significantly impacted their organizational structure and operational strategies.

When the gang unit was initially created it was staffed with one sergeant, four plain-clothed investigators, and was organizationally placed in the community relations unit. Officers, in and out of the gang unit, indicated that this was to "Get out there and let the community know that we were out there, and doing something." As a result, gang unit officers, at the time, spent the majority of their time informing the community about the city's gang problem in an effort to prevent gangs from developing. One administrator summed up the police response to the gang problem by stating that,

"...If a problem came up they [gang unit officers] would go to the meeting and talk about the problem and tell the crowd what the department was trying to do about it. They also educated the public about gangs. While they did not have the manpower to educate it was their mandate."

In an interview with the Chief of Police he stated that he chose this strategy because he did not want to give the perception to the public that he was ignoring the problem; yet, at the same time, he did not want to overreact. Therefore, he responded in this manner to "show that he was

concerned, but not too concerned."¹⁰

In response to the African American community's concerns, minority officers were purposefully selected for the gang unit. At the time the gang unit was created, the unit was comprised of three African American officers, one Hispanic officer, and one white officer. It was believed that the minority officers would have greater rapport with the minority community--the community believed to be hit hardest by the gang problem--and that they would be more sensitive to issues facing the minority community. In addition, the gang unit was physically placed in a substation in the northeastern section of the city to provide greater access to the minority community. The substation was also intended to increase the informal contact between the officers and the community. It was hoped that the informal contact would lead to better communication between the police and public, and send a message that the police department was being responsive to the African American community's needs and demands.

Legitimacy Challenged

Within the first two years, the gang unit's legitimacy was continuously challenged. The data suggest that it was not individuals or organizations outside of the police department that challenged the necessity of the gang unit, as suggested by some police officials and researchers (See Spergel, 1995), but rather that the gang unit lacked support from the administrators and police officers in the Junction City Police Department. Interviews with past and present gang unit

¹⁰ While space does not permit a lengthy discussion of the gang unit's mission at this time, gang unit officers also engaged in intelligence and enforcement activities. In particular, gang unit officers documented gang members and were responsible for some enforcement related activities such as patrolling known gang areas and collaborating with other units within the department on gang related problems (e.g., serving search warrants, criminal investigations). However, these activities were subordinate to its community relations mandate.

officers suggested that until recently, the gang unit was extremely unpopular among many administrators and officers in the police department. It was not uncommon for officers to state that, "We were treated like a red haired step child" or "We were the bastard child of the police department."¹¹ It appears that the lack of support experienced by the gang unit was largely a result of the initial strategy chosen by the Chief of Police and gang unit Commander, which conflicted with the expectations of police administrators and police officers of what the gang unit should do and what those in the gang unit should look like.

First, a number of the officers attributed the gang unit's lack of support to the gang unit's organizational mandate of community relations. Many of the officers explained that this "soft-touch" approach was resented by many of the police officers who thought that the gang unit was not taking a strong enough stance against the gang problem. For example, one officer explained, "We were never taken seriously back then because all we did is talk about the problem, but we never actually did anything." Another officer similarly stated, "Back then they (other officers) did not like us because we did not do anything. Before we were thought of as a joke because of the lack of enforcement, all we did was prevention stuff. We were never a threat to the kids on the street."

Second, many of the gang unit officers attributed the unit's lack of support to the disproportionate number of minority officers that were placed in the gang unit. Officers believed that by selecting a disproportionate number of minority officers, the unit was viewed as a "show piece" that was designed for public image rather than to respond to the city's gang problem. As a

¹¹ Interestingly, all of the officers used the same language (i.e., bastard child and red-haired step child). When I asked an officer why, he explained that these were the common nicknames for the gang unit that were used by many of the officers in the department.

result, many of the officers felt that the minority officers selected for the unit were unqualified and were only selected to accommodate the minority community, which, at the time, was publicly calling for an all African American gang unit that would be sympathetic to the African American community's needs.

Based on these perceptions, the officers in the gang unit were viewed as unreliable and unprofessional. One officer commented that,

"When I was in the narcotics unit, the gang unit officers would not record or share any of their information. It was ridiculous. That's what their job was all about. Also, whenever I called them for help on a search warrant, they would not even show up to lend me a hand. They just left me out there hanging."

Another officer stated, "They were just jack-offs. When they went on trips, they would get into a lot of trouble. They also had a bad reputation on the street. I guess what I am saying is that they were just bad officers all around."

Some officers, both in and out of the gang unit, also openly stated that because the unit was predominantly African American, the officers were thought to be corrupt. Specifically, it was rumored that these officers were giving away classified information on the local gang problem. It was believed that because officers in the gang unit were predominantly African American, they were more likely to associate with gang members, and, therefore, would be more likely to share confidential information with gang members. One former African American gang unit officer explained,

"There was not a lot of trust because of the number of minority officers that were in the gang unit. For example, I was kicked out of the gang unit twice.¹² One commander kept writing up reports to internal affairs saying that I was leaking information. He also said that I was not recording all the information that I knew about gang members. I even think that my phone was tapped. He

¹² The officer was re-instated both times because the allegations were found to be unsubstantiated by the internal affairs unit.

(the commander) thought that because all of the search warrants that we were doing were coming up empty that I was leaking it (classified information) to them (the gang members). But the reason that the searches weren't coming up with any drugs was because gang members simply were not selling drugs in Junction City."

Another Hispanic officer in the unit stated that,

"Back then everyone thought that we were corrupt because we were a minority unit. They thought that because we were black and Hispanic that somehow we were more likely to give gang members information. That's why we had no support. We had a crappy office. We did not even have phones or enough cars. All four of us would drive around in one car. INTERVIEWER: What do you mean no phones? RESPONDENT: Ya, we had to use a pay phone forever. It was not until the mayor visited us and wanted to make a call and couldn't that we got some phones."

While these rumors of corruption were never substantiated, the officers, particularly the minority officers, argued that they illustrated the serious problems that the gang unit faced in its formative years.

Legitimacy Regained

In the summer of 1990, the Chief of Police appointed a new African American commander to the gang unit. Upon arrival, the commander recognized that the gang unit was faced with serious opposition within the police department. He explained that,

"When I came to the unit the perception was that we (the gang unit) were the battered child of the Junction City Police Department. This was largely because we did not do anything. We were a support unit, like we are now, but nobody wanted our help then because they did not know what we did."

Accordingly, the lieutenant instituted a number of organizational changes and operational strategies that remain in effect today in an effort to receive support from administrators and police officers in the Junction City Police Department, as well as sovereigns outside of the police department such as local school officials, key community groups; and other criminal justice agencies.

Changes in Personnel

In an effort to gain legitimacy among those in the police department the lieutenant first made significant personnel changes. He "strongly encouraged" all but one of the officers to leave the unit, and brought in new officers whom he believed would add credibility to the unit's image. The lieutenant argued that the only way he could change the status of the gang unit within the police department was to diversify the unit racially. He explained that "Units are evaluated and judged by the friends that they keep in the police department. And, because we were a minority unit, we did not have many friends, and, therefore, we did not receive a great deal of support. So, to get support, we diversified." The lieutenant further explained that as a result he purposefully selected a number of Caucasian officers who were highly respected throughout the police department in an effort to gain credibility among the officers and administrators within the Junction City Police Department. This strategy led to the recruitment and assignment of eight officers to the gang unit.¹³ Of the eight officers, five were Caucasians who had previously worked in the most prestigious units in the police department. Specifically, two of the Caucasian officers transferred into the gang unit from the homicide unit, two from the narcotics unit, and one from the organized crime unit. It was argued that if the unit was to be a "real gang unit" it had to have officers with occupational specialties that were more applicable to dealing with gang-related problems and not just public relations.

However, the lieutenant also selected three minority officers who had a significant amount

¹³ Six months prior to the new commander being appointed to the gang unit, the gang unit was allocated 5 additional officers. While it is unclear as to why, the lieutenant suggested that it was because the gang unit was shifting to more of a law enforcement mandate which required more officers. However, the Lieutenant was unsure of the reasons himself and no other data were available to verify the lieutenant's belief.

of experience in community relations. The supervisors in the unit all explained that while it was important to have Caucasians in the unit for organizational support, minority representation was still important so that the unit "would be representative of the community they serve." The officers in the gang unit agreed, arguing that both African American and Hispanic citizens are more likely to trust officers of their own ethnic background. One Hispanic officer explained that, "When you talk to Hispanics, you have to know and be familiar with their culture. For example, when you are dealing with a Hispanic family, you always talk to the man of the house, never presenting your position to the kid or to the mother." Others stated that some African American youths will not even talk to Caucasian officers and that it was necessary to have African American officers in the unit to deal with such issues.

Changes in Operational Strategy

In an effort to gain legitimacy among those in the police department, the gang unit also made significant changes in their operational strategy. This included the gang unit being organizationally moved from the Community Relations Bureau to the Special Investigations Bureau. This placed the gang unit organizationally parallel to other enforcement-related units such as the Criminal Investigations Unit, Organized Crime Unit, and Vice and Narcotics Unit. This gave the gang unit, organizationally speaking, an image that its primary emphasis was crime control rather than community relations. Administrators in the department commented that such a move gave additional confidence to those inside and outside of the police department that the primary role of the gang unit was law enforcement.

As a consequence, the gang unit's original community relations mandate was replaced with one that was more oriented toward a crime fighting image. In particular, gang unit officers were instructed to allocate approximately 50 percent of their time toward intelligence activities, 25

percent toward enforcement activities, and 25 percent toward educational activities (Gang Unit Standard Operating Procedures, no date). The gang unit was also reconfigured as a support unit, and was mandated to assist other units and organizations with gang-related problems and issues (e.g., gang investigations, patrolling known gang areas). The gang unit's standard operating procedures manual outlines their mission as follows,

"The gang unit has the mission of assisting other Junction City Police Department Investigative Units, the Uniform Patrol Bureau and other [criminal justice] agencies in resolving gang related crimes and diminishing gang related violence. The gang unit stresses emphasis in three specific areas to accomplish this mission. They are Intelligence, Education, and Enforcement" (Gang Unit Standard Operating Procedures, no date: 2).

Accordingly, while the gang unit redefined its mandate to include more law enforcement-oriented activities in an effort to conform to the expectations of officers and administrators in the police department, they also changed their operational strategy to one that placed a premium on building partnerships with individuals and organizations both inside and outside the police department.

This operational strategy of building partnerships by the gang unit appears to have been taken for two reasons. The first is that it promoted an image of operational effectiveness. By establishing and maintaining partnerships with organizations that have already acquired a high degree of legitimacy, the gang unit gained and maintained legitimacy for itself through association with these organizations. For example, the gang unit's enforcement-related activities were found to be primarily conducted in conjunction with units such as homicide and weed and seed--both of which were well supported by sovereigns both inside and outside the police department.

Similarly, the education and intelligence-related activities performed by the gang unit were largely observed to be conducted in coordination and cooperation with such established institutions as local schools, community groups, and criminal justice agencies that lent organizational support to the gang unit. Therefore, by closely aligning themselves with organizations that had already

achieved a high level of legitimacy, and by giving the appearance of usefulness to these organizations, the gang unit gained and maintained legitimacy.

This observation was confirmed by the lieutenant in charge of the gang unit. He continually mentioned that by associating with organizations that had already acquired a high degree of legitimacy, the gang unit would receive organizational support themselves. For example, in one conversation he stated that,

"I may look stupid but I'm a smart guy. To get this unit out from the garbage heap I started to build relationships.... For example, I teamed up with Tom Barkue for more clout.¹⁴ Barkue has more influence than most people in this town. He was the one who got me the space in this building. Because the community liked Barkue and knew that he was on the right track, when I moved over to this building the community thought highly of me."

The second purpose of developing partnerships with sovereigns in their institutional environment was that the gang unit acquired the ability to recruit clients (i.e., gang members) through their organizational partners. In the 289 hours (equivalent to 36.1 working days) that were spent with the officers in the gang unit, there were only 14 contacts observed between gang unit officers and gang members. Furthermore, nine of these contacts occurred on one day in which the gang unit cooperated with the weed and seed unit in a hot spot operation. Therefore, if one excludes the nine contacts made during the hot spot operation, an operation that was conceived and organized by the weed and seed unit, only five contacts were observed between gang unit officers and gang members. Accordingly, it appears that this lack of contact with gang members made it difficult for gang unit officers to gather information on gang members themselves--which was their primary organizational mandate. As a consequence, it appears that

¹⁴ Tom Barkue, an African American, was the head administrator for the Department of Public Housing in Junction City. His position in Junction City was thought of as somewhat unique because of his popularity among both the African American and Caucasian community.

gang unit officers developed partnerships with other agencies in an effort to recruit clients.

This was observed in a number of strategies used by officers in the gang unit. One strategy was their efforts to have patrol officers refer gang members to the gang unit for documentation. Another strategy was presentations to community groups, school officials, and law enforcement personnel in which gang unit officers educated their audience on how to identify gang members and the importance of contacting the gang unit in the event of such an identification. Still another was the Network Tracking Program (a.k.a. Gang Task Force) established by the gang unit, in which participating criminal justice agencies were encouraged to refer individuals names for documentation or risk being excluded from the program.

This strategy lent legitimacy to the gang unit in that it enabled the gang unit to collect and document gang-related information that illustrated the increasing severity of the gang problem. By forming relationships with organizations that had the ability to identify and refer potential clients (i.e., gang members), the gang unit was able to come into contact with clients that it otherwise would have not been able to contact. Such an organizational strategy gained legitimacy for the gang unit by categorizing more individuals within the purview of the gang unit, and thereby demonstrating the need of the gang unit to their institutional environment.¹⁵

¹⁵ As discussed earlier, many researchers and police officials have claimed that such partnerships are created for rational purposes. They argue that these partnerships allow for improved communication which can assist in the arrest, prosecution, and conviction of gang members. They also claim that the communication that results from these partnerships can lead to the prevention of gang-related activity through awareness and education (Jackson and McBride, 1985; Burns and Deakin, 1989; Huff and McBride, 1993; Brantley and DiRosa, 1994; Rush, 1996). However, interviews with Junction City Police officers, school administrators, and officials from other criminal justice agencies indicated that these formalized partnerships served few rational purposes. For example, of the 16 gang task force members 12 stated that gangs were either no problem or a minor problem for their agency. Similarly, observations revealed that with the exception of the homicide unit, only two intelligence-related contacts were observed between gang unit officers and other officers in the Junction City Police Department. School

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Using data obtained from a multimethodological research design, the police response to gangs in Junction City was examined. The purpose of the study was to examine: 1) the factors that led to the creation of a specialized police gang unit, and 2) how these factors influenced the gang unit's response to their community's gang problem. The results from the present study lend support for the institutional perspective. In particular, the data suggest that the gang unit was created as a consequence of pressures placed on the police department from various powerful elements within the community, and that once created, the gang unit's response to the community's gang problem was largely driven by its need to achieve and maintain legitimacy among various sovereigns in their environment. Three general points may be made concerning the findings from this study.

First, while the results of the present study are consistent with the institutional perspective, the findings are at odds with others who have also found that institutional considerations have had an impact on the creation of specialized police gang units (Zatz, 1987; McCorkle and Miethe, 1998). Zatz (1987) and others suggest that the creation of specialized police gang units has largely been a consequence of the police themselves manufacturing myths about the gang problem for the purpose of attaining financial resources. They have further argued that these myths are perpetuated and maintained through the processing of racial stereotypes. However, data from the present study suggest that the Junction City Police Department did not actively participate in the social construction of the local gang problem. Rather, the police department acted in a responsive manner incorporating the beliefs and ideas of those in their institutional environment. The data

administrators also indicated that there was little need for communication with the gang unit because of the lack of gang activity that took place in their schools.

illustrated that the police department created the gang unit under a great deal of pressure that was placed on them by key community stakeholders.

Interestingly, the results of the present study suggest that the African American community played a major role in shaping the police response to gangs in Junction City. In particular, the data revealed that the African American community was one of the foremost advocates of establishing the gang unit and wanting the gang unit to focus its efforts on the African American community. While such a finding is counter-intuitive, it may reflect dual concerns within the African American community: one, that African American community members might feel more vulnerable and fearful of gang-related problems, and two, the perception by African Americans that African American neighborhoods receive too little police protection.¹⁶ While data were not available to examine these issues as part of the present study, past research has found that those in African American communities are significantly more fearful of being victimized and are significantly more likely to be victimized than those living in Caucasian communities (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981; Walker, Spohn, and DeLone, 1996; Skogan and Hartnett, 1997). Accordingly, it might be that members of the African American community in Junction City viewed crime as a major issue facing their community and that gangs contributed to much of their community's crime problem. While the factors that might contribute to this perception are many, the data revealed that the African American police officers association and African American political leaders supported the belief that gangs were responsible for a disproportionate amount of the crime in the African American community. Such a position by

¹⁶ Unfortunately, official crime data and victimization data were not available for the site under study. Over the last six years Junction City has had significant problems in collecting and reporting official data to federal authorities.

these individuals may have reinforced or lent legitimacy to the fears of African American community members.

Second, with respect to the factors that influenced the gang unit's response, it appears that the common theme that unites these findings is that the gang unit's response was extremely susceptible to coercive pressures placed on it by its institutional environment. In particular, the findings of the present study suggest that because the gang unit was created as a result of institutional considerations, rather than as a result of rational considerations, its organizational structure and operational activities were largely a function of ceremony rather than a reflection of the organization's need to act in a rational or effective manner. Indeed, as argued by organizational theorists in the past (Meyer and Scott, 1992; Crank and Langworthy, 1992: 360), through ceremonial displays of legitimacy, and by incorporating often times competing ideas and beliefs into its organizational structure and operational activities, the gang unit was able to convey an image of operational effectiveness when it was otherwise unable to demonstrate success in a normative fashion.

The findings suggest that the officers within the Junction City Police Department may have had the most significant impact on the gang unit's organizational structure and operational activities. While organizational theorists in the field of policing have typically discussed sovereigns in terms of those operating outside of the police department (e.g., mayors, city council members, special interest groups) (for exception see Crank and Rehm, 1994), the results of the present study indicate that the gang unit was influenced and shaped by the interorganizational system in which it is located. Namely the data illustrated that for the gang unit to achieve and maintain legitimacy they had to adhere to and demonstrate a commitment to the professional, political, and social beliefs of the officers in the police department. Such a finding suggests that

the police response to gangs must not only be understood in terms of the broader social system in which the police are located, but also must be understood in the context of police culture.

Finally, the findings from the present study call into question the state of specialized police units. First, the findings challenge the perspective that specialized police units are necessarily created as the result of organizations seeking to improve their technical efficiency and effectiveness. In particular, many have suggested specialized police units are the natural consequence of police departments responding to a unique and increased work load, and are a result of police organizations seeking to devise the most efficient and effective organizational structure. However, the findings from the present study suggest that some specialized police units may be created as a consequences of pressures that are placed on the police department, rather than the police organization actively seeking to improve its technical efficiency and effectiveness.

Second, the findings from the present study challenge the notion that specialized police units necessarily increase technical efficiency and effectiveness. In particular, researchers in the past have argued that the formation of special police units can result in a more successful police response by focusing departmental resources, energy, and skill on a unique law enforcement problem. However, the findings from this study, as well as others (Walker and Katz, 1995), have demonstrated that many of these units might receive minimal support from police departments in terms of administrative support. This in part may be because these special police units are created as a result of external pressures placed on the police department, rather than for reasons of technical efficiency or effectiveness. Accordingly, some special police units may receive only a "bare minimum" of support from police administrators and officers because of the lack of technical effectiveness and efficiency that they are believed to bring to the department. Therefore,

future research should not only examine the factors that lead to the creation of special police units, but also the internal support that these units receive when they are created.

Two potential limitations should be noted before the interpretation of the findings are complete. First, the findings of the present study should not necessarily be generalized to other communities. A number of studies have demonstrated that a community's gang problem is unique and may not be similar to another community's. Accordingly, a police department's response to a gang problem may be highly reflective of the nature of the local gang problem, or may be the result of a unique socio-political climate that exists within a given community or police department. Second, while the findings presented here appear to reflect an accurate account of the police response to gangs in Junction City, it is possible that the data were contaminated by the presence of the investigator. Specifically, officers in the gang unit may have altered their behavior, or may not have provided truthful responses during conversations, interviews, and debriefings, which in turn may have had an impact on the information presented in this study. However, it should be noted that the validity of the present study was increased through repeated observations of gang unit personnel over an extended period of time, and by bringing together multiple sources of data.¹⁷

Future research should continue to examine the impact that key community stakeholders

¹⁷ At the beginning of the study a few of the officers initially resisted the idea of an observer accompanying them in the field. However, this resistance was overcome with both time and pressure from other officers. After the first month officers who were not comfortable with my presence soon saw me as harmless and even began to take pride in the fact that they were taking me under their wing and teaching me the ropes of being a gang unit officer. Eventually I became part of the gang unit's basketball team and was privileged to take part in many events, social gatherings, and conversations that were considered for gang unit officers only. Additionally, I observed and participated in a number of activities that I believe the officers would have not permitted if they were concerned about my presence. For additional information on the reliability of the data see **** (1997) [Name has been omitted for review purposes only.]

and organizations have on the creation of specialized police units and how they continue to impact the unit once created. Furthermore, future research on the police response to gangs should focus on racial considerations, both inside and outside the police department, that may influence the police response to gangs. While researchers have spent much time focusing on ethnicity and its relationship with the gang problem, there has been little research that has focused on how the role of ethnicity has impacted the police response to gangs.

In conclusion, while these findings lend considerable support for the institutional perspective, they nevertheless should caution researchers in generalizing about the factors that might influence a police department's response toward a community's gang problem. The findings of this study, coupled with those of others (Zatz, 1987; Curry et al., 1992; Weisel and Painter, 1997; McCorkle and Miethe, 1998), suggest that there might be considerable variation with respect to the factors associated with the creation of gang units, and how these factors might influence a police department's response to gangs. Future research should examine the impact that both rational and institutional considerations have on the police response to gangs and how these considerations may be geographically and temporally contingent.

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Table 1. Data Collection

Type of Data	Number	Date Collected
INTERVIEWS with POLICE ADMINISTRATORS		
Past Chief of Police (1982-1989)	1	June 1997
Officer in Charge of the Gang Unit	1	April 1997
GANG UNIT DATA		
Field Observation	289 hours	October 1996-June 1997
Interviews with Gang Unit Officers	9	January-May 1997
REVIEW OF DOCUMENTS		
Official Documents	62	October 1996-June 1997
News Paper Articles	162	January 1987-July 1997
INTERVIEWS with NON-GANG UNIT PERSONNEL		
Internal Personnel	8	March-June 1997
Network Tracking Personnel	16	March-June 1997
School Administrators	14	March-June 1997
Special Interest Group Administrators	7	March-June 1997
