

**The Infamous 'One Percenters': A  
Review of the Criminality,  
Subculture, and Structure of Modern  
Biker Gangs**

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## **Abstract**

*Owing to the difficulty of conducting empirical research within sophisticated and highly organized criminal enterprises, modern biker gangs have long remained an enigma within law enforcement and academic circles. Despite their secrecy, with an army of an estimated 20,000 members and an unknown number of associates willing to do their bidding, these organizations are responsible for drug trafficking in the streets and within prisons, violence, theft, prostitution rings, and other dangerous criminal behavior both domestically and abroad. In order to address the dearth of readily available information regarding modern biker gangs, this paper serves as a review of the current literature. Utilizing the available research, this paper synthesizes and describes the literature regarding the subculture and values of biker gangs that separates them from traditional motorcycle clubs, the structure and criminality of biker gangs, and profiles of four of the largest modern biker gangs (the Hells Angels, the Bandidos, the Outlaws, and the Mongols). Policy implications to better track these groups are also discussed. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings and implications for future research.*

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# **The Infamous ‘One Percenters’: A Review of the Criminality, Subculture, and Structure of Modern Biker Gangs**

## **Introduction**

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, an estimated 7.1 million motorcycles were registered in the United States as of 2008 (NHTSA, 2008). The vast majority of motorcycle riders are law-abiding citizens who enjoy motorcycles as a hobby or form of transportation. Some enthusiasts even belong to clubs or groups devoted to motorcyclists; for example, an estimated 230,000 riders belong to the American Motorcyclist Association, one of the largest motorcycle clubs in the United States (AMA, 2011). However, a small proportion of motorcycle clubs function as gangs that embrace anti-social attitudes and engage in a variety of deviant behavior and criminal activities, rejecting the values of conventional organizations such as the AMA. Individual members of such clubs proudly call themselves “One Percenters,” a nickname that originated from a comment made by the American Motorcycle Association that 99 percent of bikers follow the law (Glod, 2010). Formally, large groups or clubs of outlaw motorcyclists are classified by law enforcement as Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs, or OMGs,<sup>1</sup> defined by the United States Department of Justice as “organizations whose members use their motorcycle clubs as conduits for criminal enterprises” (USDOJ, 2011, para. 1).

As of 2008, law enforcement organizations have determined that approximately 280 to 520 Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs are in existence across the United States, with a total of roughly 20,000 confirmed members (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009). Though OMGs themselves are known for their secrecy about the structure of their organizations, they are

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the terms “One percenter clubs/groups”, “motorcycle gangs”, “biker gangs” and “OMGs” will be used interchangeably. Although the author is aware that some (e.g., Quinn, 2001; Barker, 2005) reject the use of the term OMG, for the purpose of this article, this distinction is not made.

infamous for the criminal activities they engage in, including drug and firearms trafficking, violent offenses, money laundering, theft, prostitution, gambling, and extortion (NGIC, 2009). Though they have been known to deal with a variety of illicit substances, OMGs have gained a reputation among law enforcement agencies for their widespread distribution and personal use of Methamphetamine (Drug Enforcement Administration [DEA], n.d.), as it is financially profitable and many bikers utilize it to stay awake during lengthy trips. As is the case with other gangs, the crime associated with OMGs also extends well beyond the borders of the United States, as they have been known to traffic drugs and weapons to and from Canada as well as Mexico, and several OMGs now have chapters in various foreign countries (NGIC, 2009; DEA, n.d.). Thus, OMGs are seen as a dangerous threat because of their heavy involvement in crime on a national and global level, preference for violence, and their efforts to evade law enforcement (NIGC, 2009). However, despite their relative infamously, there is still much to be discovered about these organizations, both from an academic perspective to further unearth their behavior and also from a law enforcement perspective to effectively share sensitive intelligence and suppress their dangerous activity.

This paper will serve as a review of more recent literature surrounding OMGs. First, OMGs will be compared and contrasted to their traditional motorcycle clubs, their law-abiding counterparts. Next, the leadership and membership structure of OMGs will be described along with the features of their criminal activities and enterprises. In order to illustrate the discussed findings, in the following sections, four prominent motorcycle gangs (the Hells Angels, the Mongols, the Bandidos, and the Outlaws) will be briefly featured, including available information on their values, practices, and history. Finally, policy implications to combat and

control the emergence of biker gangs and more effectively disseminate information about these groups will be examined. A discussion of the findings will follow.

### **The 1%ers and the other 99%: A comparison**

In order to properly frame a discussion of OMGs, it is important to examine the characteristics that set OMGs apart from conventional motorcycle clubs and organizations as well as the qualities these groups share. To this end, Quinn and Forsyth (2009) characterize motorcycle organizations on a continuum, organized by the degree of criminal involvement of such groups and their devotion to OMGs: motorcycle associations, motorcycle clubs, supporter clubs, satellite/puppet clubs, and Outlaw Motorcycle Groups themselves. Motorcycle associations reach out to riders that own a specific bike model (e.g., Harley Davidsons) as well as individuals characterized as RUBs (Rich Urban Bikers), but members are not heavily engaged in these types of groups (Quinn & Forsyth, 2009). Motorcycle clubs are more exclusive and organized in terms of leadership, with some clubs embracing the same values as one percenters, while others are fairly benign and simply bring together people who enjoy riding motorcycles in a fraternal setting.

Motorcycle clubs that support one percenters set themselves apart from other clubs and associations in that they may involve themselves in some degree of criminal activity and have ties to larger OMGs in order to boost their credibility, usually wearing the colors of the group they support and engaging in fraternization at events, such as bike shows and races (Quinn & Forsyth, 2009). Clubs that go further in their support of OMGs are known as “Satellite” or “Puppet” clubs, and often do the criminal bidding of OMGs in an effort to prove their suitability for membership (Quinn & Forsyth, 2009, p. 239). Clubs, associations, and OMGs share some notable similarities, such as their leadership structure (central leadership that dictates to loosely

independent, locally based chapters), an emphasis on superficiality (e.g., making sure that one's bike is of superior quality), and a probable identification with "the iconography of the modern outlaw" (Quinn & Forsyth, 2009, p. 242). As a testament to the sometimes blurred line between one percenters and their law-abiding counterparts, Quinn and Forsyth (2009) note:

It is difficult to distinguish a modern one percenter from other bikers unless the insignia is present. Further, the core traits of one percenters and their clubs are merely the extreme of a continuum that runs from law-abiding to crime immersed and from the countercultural gang member to the sophisticated subcultural entrepreneur (p. 248, adapted from Quinn & Forsyth, 2007).

According to Quinn and Koch (2003), motorcycle gangs are characterized by their general rebellious attitudes and refusal to adopt most mainstream values, with the exception of a desire to appear powerful. The culture of OMGs embraces masculinity, a sense of skill with mechanical tasks, and appearance as a dangerous, tough outlaw (Quinn & Koch, 2003) with a certain element of "romance" due to the risk-taking that is inherent in riding a motorcycle (Quinn & Forsyth, 2009). While RUBs and other motorcyclists enjoy using their bikes as an occasional hobby, OMGs define themselves by riding their motorcycles as frequently as they can, with some groups even fining members for not riding their bike at least once per month (Quinn & Forsyth, 2009). One percenters are often deeply embedded in their organizations and the fraternal bonds between fellow members, as well as with the appearance and performance of their motorcycles (Quinn & Forsyth, 2009). Bikers in OMGs also value respect and honor and are willing to go to great (and extremely violent) lengths to avenge acts of disrespect, evidenced by the bitter rivalries present among modern OMGs and confrontations with those who dare to challenge or otherwise affront OMGs.

### *The Criminality and Structure of OMGs*

The exact nature of the criminal offending of OMGs still remains somewhat turbid. However, it appears that criminality among OMGs is not uniform, and like other gangs, varies based on the situations that members find themselves in and the overarching goals of the organization. In a study of the criminality of biker gangs, Quinn and Koch (2003) outlined four distinct types of offending that can be observed within these groups: spontaneous expressive acts, planned expressive acts, short-term instrumental acts, and ongoing instrumental enterprises. *Spontaneous expressive acts* are typically violent crimes that arise between rivals in social settings and are committed by small numbers rather than the entire group (e.g., bar fights). *Planned expressive acts* are usually committed against adversaries (e.g., revenge for an affront via murder) and may be planned at the national or local level to represent the club's mission or interests. *Short-term instrumental acts* are those in which a small portion of members exploit a favorable situation to meet a goal for at least one member, such as stealing another's property or participating in the prostitution of an Old Lady (the girlfriend or wife of a biker), and may be either spur of the moment or carefully planned. Finally, *ongoing instrumental enterprises* generally consist of carefully planned criminal activities that demand a considerable amount of time and energy and are utilized to financially support the club (e.g., the widespread selling of drugs). One percenters exude certain characteristics and behaviors that invite violent encounters, such as travelling with weapons in large groups, their code of honor and intolerance for disrespect, and their relative proficiency with violence (Quinn & Koch, 2003). Additionally, the incorporation of structural illegal crime is also commonplace because of the lack of separation between bikers and their respective OMG. As noted by the authors,

...the creation and dissolution of illegal enterprises within a 1% club is a normal and natural phenomena occurring routinely under the umbrella of the club. For



them it is no more or less independent of their membership than any other aspect of their lives. This highly integrated lifestyle that lacks boundaries between personal and collective spheres is quite distinct from the compartmentalized lives typical of modern citizens (Quinn & Koch, 2003, p. 299-300).

Though law enforcement does not officially tally the crimes of OMGs, Barker and Human (2009) attempted to empirically examine the crimes of four OMGs (the Hells Angels, Outlaws, Bandidos, and Pagans) by performing a content analysis on newspaper articles depicting their criminal activities. A total of 631 articles were utilized, ranging from 1980 to 2005. The criminality of the OMGs was coded utilizing the abovementioned framework of Quinn and Koch (2003); incidents were classified as spontaneous expressive acts, planned expressive acts, short-term instrumental acts, and ongoing instrumental enterprises. Overall, a total of 89 criminal incidents were attributed to the OMGs. Most criminal incidents (50%) were ongoing instrumental enterprises, mostly comprised of the distribution of drugs and weapons. Planned aggressive acts (20%), such as the assault or murder of rival gang members, were roughly tied with spontaneous expressive acts (19%), such as bar fights with rivals or assaulting police officers. Short-term instrumental acts were less commonly observed (10%), and involved acts such as theft, rape, and extortion. Comparatively, the Hells Angels committed the most offenses (46%), followed by the Outlaws (29%), the Bandidos (18%), and the Pagans (7%). Notably, the Hells Angels also had the most ongoing criminal enterprises (26% of all criminal incidents) and planned aggressive acts (11% of all criminal incidents) compared to the other OMGs.

The Hells Angels were featured in 209 articles and a total of 41 criminal acts. The majority (23) featured ongoing criminal enterprises, followed by planned aggressive acts (10). Spontaneous expressive acts and short-term instrumental acts were less common (four incidents

were observed for each category). The Outlaws had 204 criminal articles accounting for 26 different incidents. Approximately half were in regards to ongoing criminal enterprises. The remainder focused on spontaneous expressive acts (six incidents), short-term instrumental acts (three incidents) and planned aggressive acts (three incidents). The Pagans had a total of 13 criminal articles. Four articles involved ongoing criminal enterprises, while one described a spontaneous aggressive act and a planned aggressive act. In regards to the Bandidos, they had 25 criminal articles featuring six spontaneous expressive acts, five ongoing instrumental enterprises, four planned expressive acts, and one short-term instrumental act. These findings call into question the decision to not collect official estimates of the crimes committed by OMGs, as the media does not report every criminal incident amassed by these groups (Barker & Human, 2009). More importantly, these findings also suggest that the reputation enjoyed by the OMGs for their prominent role in drug trafficking and violence is likely well-deserved, as many of these incidents were of a serious nature.

According to Quinn (2001), not all one percenters can be lumped together, as there are two distinct types of members in these groups that are vastly different in terms of their propensity for criminal activity that are known as conservatives and radicals. While conservative members seek to enjoy the fraternal aspects of belonging to a club as well as the reckless abandon that comes with being a biker, they are not inherently criminal. Radical individuals, however, are committed to the criminal aspects of existing in an OMG. Though both radical and conservative individuals may exist within the same one percenter club, one group is typically dominant and is greatly influential in regards to the behavior and philosophies of the organization (Quinn, 2001). While most one percenter groups are headed conservative individuals who try to keep the group out of significant trouble, the major OMGs (such as the

Hells Angels, Bandidos, and Outlaws) are led by radical individuals who steer the club in the direction of organized crime, such as racketeering and extortion, drug trafficking, prostitution, theft, and violence (Quinn, 2001). At different points in time, wars between rival gangs have contributed to an expansion of these OMGs, both in way of membership and organized crime to fund these costly inter-group battles (Quinn, 2001). After many several of the major OMGs were condemned by law enforcement and the public, they eventually began to scale back their behavior to avoid negative publicity, a trend that endures today; the Hells Angels, for example, has attempted to sway the public by engaging in acts of charity for children and veterans (James, 2009). Though modern OMGs have evolved in the sense that they are more clandestine about their criminality, they are still very much involved in organized crime, as the culture of OMGs is one that embraces detachment from mainstream society and is a probable breeding ground for deviance. As Quinn (2001) notes,

These clubs provide an outlet for the status frustration of their members that is facilitated by their isolation from the mainstream... Isolation intensifies bonding processes while creating a world view and emotional tone that encourage violence (p. 395-396).

Due to their sophistication and structure, OMGs have long been compared to organized crime syndicates, such as the mafia, both by researchers and law enforcement (Quinn & Koch, 2003). Abadinsky (2009) loosely defines organized crime as adhering to eight main characteristics:

1. Has no political goal
2. Is hierarchical
3. Has a limited or exclusive membership
4. Constitutes a unique subculture
5. Perpetuates itself
6. Exhibits a willingness to use illegal violence
7. Is monopolistic
8. Is governed by explicit rules and regulations (p. 3).

The major modern OMGs exemplify each of these characteristics. In terms of political goals, as noted above, OMGs define themselves by their abandonment of societal values and are involved in their organizations because of a pursuit of power (Quinn & Koch, 2003). These groups are also incredibly hierarchical, as in terms of leadership, OMGs generally follow the orders and requirements established by a national chapter (Quinn & Koch, 2003). Local chapters operate somewhat independently, but must carefully adhere to national guidelines. Individual chapters are typically led by elected officers (e.g., a president, vice president, and so on) (Quinn & Koch, 2003). Attaining membership in an OMG is a difficult task; in general, one must become a “prospect” (a potential member that often does undesirable tasks to prove their loyalty) for at least one year before they are “patched”, or considered a full-fledged member (Quinn & Koch, 2003). OMGs also participate in a unique subculture marked by machismo, freedom, and adherence to an outlaw persona (Quinn, 2001; Quinn & Koch, 2003; Quinn & Forsyth, 2009). OMGs attempt to perpetuate their organizations, through the promotion of positive publicity via acts of charity (James, 2009), maintaining public websites to rally supporters (Barker, 2005), and soliciting new members to join.

OMGs have also been defined by their willingness to use violence against rivals and citizens (non 1%ers) alike. Like organized crime families, OMGs may utilize a team of ‘enforcers’ to intimidate or harm others, such as rivals or disgraced club members (Quinn & Koch, 2003). One percenter clubs have also displayed a liking for monopolist dominance, as there have been various wars between OMGs over turf; for years, the Hells Angels warred with the Mongols over their presence in Northern California, which the Hells Angels had long claimed as their territory (LeDuff, 2002). Finally, OMGs adhere to an extensive repertoire of

rules and regulations, usually determined by a national headquarters. Individual clubs have various rules regarding the display of logos, the upkeep of motorcycles, drug use (e.g., prohibiting the use of selected drugs, such as heroin), and respect for other members (Quinn & Koch, 2003). Despite the longstanding nature of the parallels between traditional organized crime and anecdotal and empirical evidence supporting the criminality of these groups (Barker & Human, 2009), OMGs such as the Hells Angels, have vehemently insisted that they are not criminal organizations (James, 2009).

### **Prominent Motorcycle Gangs**

In this section, four of the largest Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs will be featured: the Hells Angels, the Bandidos, the Outlaws, and the Mongols. While OMGs have taken to the web and are attempting to promote positive publicity, they are still quite secretive about the exact nature, structure, and behavior of their organizations, as many OMG members have refused to be interviewed and law enforcement generally does not readily divulge extremely detailed information about these groups (Barker, 2005). Therefore, it is likely that the exact picture of these gangs is still somewhat lacking because of the inherent difficulty of studying such organizations and the relative scarcity of detailed information. In line with the previous sections and discussed findings, these vignettes are meant to demonstrate some of the common characteristics of well-known OMGs, their known practices/rituals, and the values that they embody. Though they will not be examined, it should also be mentioned that there are countless other OMGs in existence, including the Sons of Silence, the Pagans, the Iron Horses, and the Warlocks that exist in across the United States, and though they are smaller, still wield the force of hundreds of members and chapters (Barker, 2005).

The Hells Angels Motorcycle Club (HAMC), nicknamed “The Mafia on Wheels” by some (Martin, 1992), was created during 1948 in San Bernardino, California by veteran World War II pilots and went by the moniker “Pissed Off Bastards of Bloomington” (National Drug Intelligence Center [NDIC], 2002a, p.1). An additional chapter was created in Oakland, California, which helped bring the club to prominence and eventually became the club’s headquarters (NDIC, 2002a). The name “Hells Angels” was reportedly used because of its association with bomber squads (James, 2009). Over the next several decades, the HAMC continued to flourish, eventually expanding to other countries, including New Zealand, Canada, Africa, and Australia and becoming the largest OMG (NDIC, 2002a). The Hells Angels has an approximate total of 2,000 to 2,500 members across the United States and 26 countries (NGIC, 2009). Nationwide, the HAMC has 900 to 950 members and nearly 70 chapters that span approximately 22 states (NGIC, 2009). It now has a presence on a total of six continents, with a particular stronghold in Canada through distribution of drugs, among other crimes (NGIC, 2009; CBCNews, 2011). The motto of the Hells Angels is telling: “When we do right nobody remembers, when we do wrong nobody forgets” (Hells Angels Motorcycle Club, n.d.).

The process of becoming a Hells Angel is arduous; only White individuals over the age of 21 may apply and must have an approved bike (typically a Harley Davidson) (Langton, 2009). After associating with the club from anywhere from three months to two years, applicants are considered a “hangaround” and are tasked with protecting clubhouses (Langton, 2009). After they are approved by everyone in a chapter, they are promoted to a “prospect,” a process in which individuals are on-call at all hours of the day and are at the mercy of other members who may ask them to commit dangerous or illegal acts (Langton, 2009). However, prospects are allowed to display the colors of the Hells Angels (red and white) as well as an incomplete set of

patches and are able to utilize clubhouses (Langton, 2009). Eventually, prospects are “patched in”, or initiated, and given a complete set of patches displaying the symbol of the Hells Angels known as the “death’s head” (James, 2009). According to Langton (2009), Hells Angels treat their colors with great respect, as

...the colors are said to be more important to a Hells Angel than any other possession or woman. The colors are precious and rules around them are complex and absolute. They cannot be touched by a non-member without punishment. A Hells Angel who forgets to wear his colors to a party or meeting will likely be beaten by other Angels. If he loses his colors, he will probably be exiled forever. To desecrate an Angel’s colors is said to be an offense punishable by death, even when done by other Angels (Chapter 2).

As there is not a national leadership structure that is in charge of every HAMC chapter, individual chapters are organized by geographic region (West Coast and East Coast) and are headed by separate, elected leadership councils responsible for each region (NDICa, 2002). Each HAMC chapter has a sophisticated leadership structure, complete with a President (a position with full authority over the HAMC, including the power to veto), Vice President (the Vice President runs the organization if the President cannot), Sergeant-at-arms (an enforcer), and Secretary/Treasurer (an overseer of the financial transactions of the HAMC) (NDIC, 2002a). Members are required to follow rules set forth by the national chapter and attend meetings on a local and national level (NDIC, 2002a). To this day, members of the HAMC may have a military background, adding to their skill and dangerousness (NGIC, 2009). In terms of criminal activity, the HAMC is said to move and sell marijuana, methamphetamine, cocaine, hashish, heroin, LSD, PCP, ecstasy, and prescription drugs (NGIC, 2009). The HAMC has also attracted legal attention for fighting, motor vehicle theft, money laundering, and murder (NGIC, 2009).

The Bandidos Motorcycle Club, the second largest OMG, was founded in Texas in 1966 by an ex-marine (Coulthart & McNab, 2008; Bandidos MC Randers, 2011). While some have

claimed that the Bandidos were created to exert influence over the markets of prostitution and drugs (Barker, 2005), others have advanced the idea that the Bandidos emulated the Hells Angels in an attempt to outdo them (Coulthart & McNab, 2008). The Bandidos were named for “the Mexican bandits of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, men who refused to ‘live by anyone’s rules but their own’”(Coulthart & McNab, 2008, p. 14). The Bandidos currently have a total of 2,000 to 2,500 members worldwide (NGIC, 2009). In the United States, the Bandidos boast approximately 900 bikers in nearly 90 chapters across 16 states, an unknown amount of which have prior military experience; this OMG also has chapters in 13 different foreign countries (NGIC, 2009). The club’s colors are red and gold, while the symbol is a figure donning a sombrero and holding a sword (Bandidos MC Randers, 2011), while revealingly, the motto of the of the Bandidos is “Fuck the world. We are the people our parents warned us about” (Coulthart & McNab, 2008, p. 14).

The leadership of the Bandidos consists of an “El Presidente”, or an international club president that has authority over every chapter (Sims, 2009a). Independent chapters each have a President, Vice President, Sergeant-at-arms, Road Captain, and a Secretary/Treasurer (Sims, 2009b). Members are expected to abide by certain by-laws, such as not wearing the club patch while riding in a car or truck, and the broad philosophy “All members are your brothers and your family” (Sims, 2009b, para. 5). They are also required to attend meetings (nicknamed “Church”) four times a month and are penalized if they do not show up (Sims, 2009b). In order to join the Bandidos in the first place, potential members, or prospects, are required to serve the club for a period of at least one year before they are admitted (Sims, 2009b). Once admitted, the Bandidos reportedly engage in a particularly vile initiation process:

New members were told to put their vest on and then his fellow members would urinate, defecate and vomit on it. The new member would then put the now moist



vest back on, hop on his bike, and go motoring until the vest had dried (Coulthart & McNab, 2008, p. 15).

Among law enforcement, the Bandidos are known to move and sell cocaine, marijuana, and methamphetamine (NGIC, 2009); it is also thought that they utilize “puppet” clubs to assist them with their criminal activities (NGIC, 2009). Additionally, as a testament to the violence of the Bandidos, there is an entire chapter within this OMG, known as the Nomads, that is responsible for disciplining members (Barker, 2005). Strikingly, the Bandidos are friendly with the Outlaws and at one point, the two almost merged (Quinn & Forsyth, 2009); the Bandidos are said to obtain their drugs from the Outlaws (Barker, 2005). However, like several other OMGs, the Bandidos consider the Hells Angels enemies (Barker, 2005).

The Outlaws Motorcycle Club (also known as the American Outlaws Association, or A.O.A.) calls themselves the original OMG, claiming to have originated in Illinois during 1935 under the moniker “McCook Outlaws Motorcycle Club” (Barker, 2005, p. 105). Following a second name change, the club emerged as the “Outlaws Motorcycle Club”. Today, the Outlaws are said to have at least 1,700 members divided among 176 chapters worldwide (NGIC, 2009). Across the nation, the Outlaws have established 176 chapters across 22 different states, retaining a total of at least 700 members. The Outlaws have also expanded to 12 countries outside of the United States (NGIC, 2009). The colors of the Outlaws are black and white, while the logo is a white skull (named “Charlie”) affixed to two pistons (NDIC, 2002b, p. 5). The motto of the club is, “God forgives, Outlaws don’t”, which may be featured on patches in the form of “GFOD” (NDIC, 2002b). As is the case with several other OMGs, some members of the Outlaws are said to have military backgrounds (NGIC, 2009).

The Outlaws have an elaborate network of governance. The Outlaw Motorcycle Club is headed by an International and National President (NDIC, 2002b) while individuals regions (divided and named by color, such as the red and copper regions) are commanded by bosses that work with national leadership (Hench, 2010). Individual chapters are led by a President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Sergeant-at-Arms (Enforcer) (Hench, 2010). Chapters follow guidelines that dictate election procedures, gatherings, and action against members who have disobeyed the rules (NDIC, 2002b). Members are required to pay dues of \$1200.00 per year in order to finance activities such as memorials and group excursions and are instructed to attend meetings on the local and national level (Hench, 2010). To be eligible for membership, applicants must be White men over the age of 21 and also be in possession of an American motorcycle (preferably a Harley Davidson) (NDIC, 2002b). To be formally inducted into this OMG, applicants begin as a “Hangaround” and assist the chapter before being made a “prospect”; If he is approved by the club, then a prospect is moved up to “probate” status, a position in which he is required to demonstrate his commitment to the Outlaw Motorcycle Club (NDIC, 2002b).

According to law enforcement officials, this OMG traffics and sells methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana and ecstasy and has been known to engage in “arson, assault, explosives operations, extortion, fraud, homicide, intimidation, kidnapping, money laundering, prostitution operations, robbery, theft, and weapons violations” (NGIC, 2009, p 30) as well as violence in the name of expanding their organization (NDIC, 2002b). Furthering their criminality, the Outlaws do not get along with the HAMC and have violently warred regarding territory (NGIC, 2009), a far cry from the sense of camaraderie the two clubs shared during the 1960s (Barker, 2005).

The Mongols Nation Motorcycle Club, a predominantly Hispanic OMG, first originated in Montebello, California during 1969; the club allegedly formed because of the Hells Angels' exclusion of Latinos (Mongols Nation Motorcycle Club, 2009; Francis, 2008). Though smaller than some of the other OMGs in the United States, the Mongols are said to be the most brutal and treacherous (NGIC, 2009). The Mongols, headquartered in California, have approximately 800 to 850 members divided across 70 nationwide chapters (NGIC, 2009). The symbol of the Mongols is a caricature of Genghis Kahn, a tribute to the ferocity of the Mongol Empire (Quinn & Forsyth, 2009; Mongols Nation Motorcycle Club, 2009). The motto of the Mongols is "Respect few, fear none," a phrase that embodies their adherence to old-school, rebellious values (Queen, 2007). Members of the Mongols have been involved in the distribution of cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana as well as various violent crimes, particularly murder (NGIC, 2009; Queen, 2009). An undercover ATF (Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms) Agent who infiltrated the Mongols succinctly describes them as "the most violent motorcycle gang in America, a tight-knit collective of crazies, unpredictable and unrepentant badasses" (Queen, 2007, p.4).

The Mongols are organized in a hierarchical manner. Headed by a Mother Chapter (located in Commerce, California) and a national President, each individual Mongols chapter is led by a President, Vice President, Sergeant-at-Arms, and a Treasurer/Secretary (Queen, 2007). Each chapter financially pays tribute to the Mother Chapter (Queen, 2007). Somewhat recently, the Mongols have undergone a leadership change in the Mother Chapter. Arrested in a law enforcement operation known as "Black Rain", the former Mongols national president, Ruben "Doc" Cavazos, reportedly became an informant against the OMG and is accused of

substantially involving the club in organized crime (Mongols Nation Motorcycle Club, 2009).

Like other OMGs, the process of becoming a member of the Mongols is somewhat unpleasant:

As a prospect, you're a slave, the property of the club. You have to do everything a member tells you to do, from hauling drugs and guns to wiping a member's ass if he orders you to. Some members were good for simple orders like 'Prospect, go get me a beer,' or 'Light my cigarette,' or 'Clean my bike.' But others... took inordinate pleasure in making a prospect's life a living hell (Queen, 2007, p. 4).

Members of the Mongols are required to give a monthly fee to the club and participate in chapter meetings (Queen, 2007). The Mongols have a lengthy constitution, spanning 70 pages, outlining the rules members are required to follow (Queen, 2007). For example, though likely adapted so as to appear law-abiding, as it is posted on a public website maintained by a Mongols chapter in Canada, 10 "Commandments<sup>2</sup>" are required of members in this particular chapter:

1. A Mongol never lies to another Mongol
2. A Mongol never steals from another Mongol
3. A Mongol never messes with another Mongol's ol' lady
4. A Mongol never causes another Mongol to get arrested in any way, shape, or form
5. A Mongol never uses his patch for any personal gain or any criminal or illegal activities
6. A Mongol can never abuse or sell drugs period
7. A Mongol should either be legitimately employed full time or actively seeking legitimate employment
8. A Mongol (patch or no patch) should never use his patch for any personal gain and should never be involved in any criminal or illegal activities
9. All Mongols should be brotherly and respectful to one another and a Mongol should never fight with another Mongol
10. A Mongol should always be there for another Mongol... A Mongol always has another Mongol's back (Mongols Motorcycle Club Canada Incorporated, 2010, para. 3).

During their tenure, the Mongols have made enemies. The Mongols are fierce enemies of the Hells Angels; some members even bear a tattoo with the club's motto, "Respect few, fear none", an honor that is earned upon harming a Hells Angel (Garmire, 2008). Initially, the Hells

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<sup>2</sup> Note: To aid with the presentation of these commandments, they were slightly grammatically revised for the purpose of clarity and readability, but the content remains unchanged and unaltered.

Angels and Mongols warred over territory in Southern California, as the Hells Angels were infuriated that the Mongols were wearing a California rocker (a patch displayed on a biker's vest) (NGIC, 2009; Queen, 2007). A truce was made, with the Hells Angels yielding Southern California to the Mongols (NGIC, 2009; LeDuff, 2002). Eventually, however, the Mongols defiantly moved into Northern California (LeDuff, 2002), provoking the Hells Angels and culminating in a bloody brawl in a Laughlin Casino that left 3 gang members dead and wounded at least 12 (Associated Press, 2006). The violence has continued; in 2008, a Hells Angel President was murdered by a member of the Mongols (Van Derbeken, 2008). In contrast, the Mongols are currently on friendly terms with the Bandidos, Outlaws, Sons of Silence, and Pagans (NGIC, 2009). The Mongols also have ties to the Mexican Mafia. In a bid to expand membership, the Mongols recruited street gang members into their gang, including the Sureños (Bell & Lucas, 2008). As tension increased between the two groups, the Mexican Mafia requested payment from the Mongols due to their increasing presence in the drug market; the Mongols refused, and a war erupted, resulting in bloodshed on both sides (Bell & Lucas, 2008). The gangs ended up resolving their differences, however, and currently cooperate with respect to drug trafficking (Bell & Lucas, 2008; Daniels, 2009).

### **Policy Implications for Tracking and Studying Biker Gangs**

Though progress has been and continues to be made (Short, 2009), it is an interesting yet troubling contradiction that although OMGs have maintained a relatively public existence until somewhat recently (Williams, 2009), they remain incredibly difficult to effectively access and study. Though OMGs are problematic because of their deep-seated involvement in criminal enterprises and other forms of criminal activity, there have been gaps in effectively tracking and describing them by law enforcement and academicians (Short, 2009). These gaps have

contributed to the dearth of precise and detailed information that is present regarding the structure and criminal activities of OMGs; Law enforcement officials do not even formally tally the crimes that are committed by OMGs, despite the fact that they are now an international presence and have contributed to various crimes domestically for decades (Barker, 2005). The lack of available law enforcement crime data related to OMGs makes an informed, scholarly analysis of such activities nearly impossible using conventional and more reliable methods (see Human & Barker, 2009). Adding to this problem is the recent evolution within biker gangs themselves and their newfound desire to keep out of the public eye, though bikers have traditionally refused to be interviewed for scholarly purposes (Barker, 2005). Williams (2009) asserts that members of biker gangs have begun to change, instead preferring to blend into their respective communities rather than attracting attention from law enforcement and the public:

...the Hell's Angels are a national and international criminal syndicate. When was the last time the media reported a town terrorized by the Hell's Angels? About 30 years ago, so what has happened? They no longer wish to receive any recognition or identification, publicly or by law enforcement (p. 276; as cited in Harris, 1985; Jamison, 2008; Lavigne, 1989).

In addition to the above-mentioned problems with gathering information about biker gangs, there are also controversies surrounding the very definition of what constitutes a gang or a gang member (Short, 2009; Barrows & Huff, 2009; Kennedy, 2009), creating problems for law enforcement and researchers, as it is exceedingly difficult to study a phenomena if there is a lack of agreement on something so very fundamental to its study. Specific to OMGs, the line can sometimes appear quite blurred between a criminal organization and a fraternal group of individuals who simply enjoy riding bikes as a hobby, particularly if not all members of a traditionally recognized biker gang or motorcycle club are engaging in criminal activities (Quinn & Forsyth, 2009). Though most major OMGs are led by radical leaders who steer the group

toward criminal involvement, other groups that could be loosely classified as biker gangs (e.g., puppet groups that do things for and cooperate with major OMGs) may contain individuals that are law-abiding in contrast to other more anti-social members in the group (Quinn, 2001). As summed up by Kennedy (2001), “Scholars have been at this issue [defining gangs] for generations and have not yet reached a satisfactory conclusion,” throwing a proverbial monkey wrench in the notion of an effective classification schema for gangs (p. 712).

Despite the contentious issue of how to exactly define gangs, an answer to the call for more available and reliable intelligence regarding gangs and their respective members (street gangs, prison gangs, biker gangs, and so on) has been the creation of gang databases to more effectively maintain and disseminate information among law enforcement agencies. Notably, only nine states have passed legislation to regulate gang databases (Barrows & Huff, 2009). Barrows and Huff (2009) propose a gang database model that is based on the statutes and policies enacted in Minnesota. The Minnesota Metro Gang Strike Force (MGSF) has established a three-tier definition to identify gang members: suspected gang members, confirmed gang members, and confirmed and convicted gang members. To fit each respective definition, individuals must match with a set number of 10 distinct criteria developed by MGSF, such as “admits gang membership or association” or “is in a photograph with known gang members and/or using gang related hand signs” (Barrows & Huff, 2009, p. 689).

There are two separate systems that are utilized in Minnesota to track gangs. The first, GangNET, contains information such on individuals (e.g., employment information, arrest records, pictures, gang nicknames) as well as gangs as a whole (e.g., gang symbols, territorial information) that is stored and accessed electronically by police officers. Upon ensuring the accuracy of information, trained officers can attempt to enter new information into the database

and form a new file in the system (or add information to a file that is already in the database) (Barrows & Huff, 2009). The second, the Pointer File, is a system that officers can access from anywhere and is useful when having stopped a suspect that may be gang affiliated; officers can search for individuals in this system by using identifying information (e.g., date of birth) to determine if the individual has previously been identified as a “confirmed and convicted gang member” (Barrows & Huff, 2009, p. 691). Notably, the Minnesota Model has implemented certain safeguards to help ensure the veracity of the data that is used in both systems. Both systems are subject to audits to ensure the accuracy of information; if entries are found to have been made in error, they may be removed from the system. Entries can only be in the system for up to 3 years (if, however, a new arrest is made, the entry can remain for another 3 years) (Barrows & Huff, 2009). While the Minnesota model is not without flaws, it may be a promising model for other states to follow in terms of establishing a gang database.

Though there are advantages to having a gang database for law enforcement agencies, harboring such information is of little use if it is restricted to only one agency. The lack of coordination between law enforcement agencies has not gone unnoticed by those within the fold. To this end, former Special Agent Charles Williams (2009) proposed a system in order to combat the changing face of gangs and increase the availability of information between law enforcement agencies domestically and abroad. This proposed system centers around an inter-linked network of intelligence, connected by different “nodes,” or respective law enforcement agencies that maintain a gang database (Williams, 2009, p. 277). Williams states that all agencies should be included, ranging from “a 10-person police department, a state department of Public Safety or all Sherriff’s departments and jails” and that these agencies should each be treated in an equal, horizontal manner rather than through a vertical network that is based on seniority and agency



dominance (Williams, 2009, p. 277). Each node should provide its own independent intelligence in order to protect the integrity of the information; intelligence submitted should also be protected from modification by other agencies to foster an atmosphere of trust among agencies, attract the confidence of international agencies, and ward off attempts to undermine the security of the system. Williams (2009) emphasizes that accessing intelligence within the database should be instantaneous to aid effective investigation and tracking gang activity:

A hit or new entry of information, say an arrest, would prompt the entire system to access and search each node's information databases and automatically respond to the node that entered the information (Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004; Watts, 2003). For example, if a known member of the Aryan Brotherhood is pulled over by the police in Fort Worth, Texas, that office can be alerted to the last known Idaho address of the suspect and that he was stopped in Kansas 2 days ago (p. 277).

Williams even goes so far as to assert that in order to keep up with the evolution of gangs and the scope of their criminal activity, the United States should begin to treat gangs in the same manner as terrorist organizations. Not only are OMGs a threat domestically, but they also have a presence in countless foreign countries (e.g., Canada, Germany, and Australia). This presence serves as a means to increase their power and dangerousness of OMGs and other gangs, as they may be cooperating with other criminal organizations in these countries (Williams, 2009). In order to address the challenges associated with tracking such groups, there is a distinct need to increase the availability of additional options to pursue and disrupt them, an effort that would be more easily undertaken if the threat that gangs pose was treated in a more seriously. By tailoring policy in order to bolster anti-gang efforts, not only would law enforcement agencies would have more tools at their disposal, but it would also allow for greater cooperation with international law enforcement agencies to combat OMGs that have expanded beyond the reach of the United States (Williams, 2009).

Though there is some support for gang databases within law enforcement, scholars have asserted that there are significant pitfalls associated with the use of such databases. Some have contended that there are a variety of errors present in the current collection and upkeep of gang intelligence, further complicating an already complex problem (Short, 2009; Barrows & Huff, 2009). For instance, if someone is mistakenly classified as gang member, adverse aftereffects may occur, such as unwarranted interactions with the police, potential danger posed by legitimate gang members who seek to harm rivals, and other varied life disruptions (i.e., loss of employment) (Barrows & Huff, 2009). In contrast, leaving someone out of such a database is also problematic; such individuals will go on to commit criminal acts under the radar of law enforcement (Barrows & Huff, 2009). Kennedy (2009) points out that because gangs are now more commonly resemble loosely affiliated hybrid gangs (i.e., groups that do not have a unifying moniker or signs), it will be harder to enter these groups into databases. This logic extends to OMGs in the sense that there are many smaller gangs that might fall through the cracks if they don't resemble traditional biker gangs. It has also been argued that efforts to control and classify gangs should extend beyond just the police to community institutions, as "at the most fundamental level... problems will remain as long as the police are the primary arbiters of gang and gang-member identity" (Short, 2009, p. 725). Finally, as Williams (2009) notes, that there are pieces of information that may be "too sensitive" to divulge to other agencies and place into the database (p. 278). Therefore, it would seem that the utility of gang databases will only be as powerful as the willingness of agencies to part with intelligence and cooperate with other agencies and researchers.

Overall, it seems that there are four potential policy solutions in dealing with OMGs. First, it is vital that law enforcement start collecting statistics on the crimes committed

specifically by biker gangs, rather than lumping them in with street gangs, as biker gangs are a separate entity and function in a manner that is distinct from traditional street gangs. Second, it is essential that law enforcement agencies coordinate with not only each other another to better distribute information, but that they also become willing to share the information that they have gathered, when possible, with researchers; a better picture of the problem benefits everyone, and cooperation is key to achieve this. In a related vein, it is important that law enforcement officials work with agencies in other countries to better keep afoot of the activities of OMGs, as although biker gangs started as a domestic problem, it has grown beyond the confines of the United States. Third, an improved model of gang classification (i.e., a more widely agreed upon definition of what constitutes a gang) is necessary, particularly in light of the changing face of gangs; it is without question that in order to appreciate the scope of the problem, something as fundamental as a definition of the problem is vital. To this end, Barrows and Huff (2009) suggest the enactment of a national commission that would research trends in gang crime and attempt to provide a more general and widely followed gang definition. Finally, building upon a more uniform gang definition, there is a need to improve gang databases and the way that they are utilized. Before entering someone into the database, efforts should be made to confirm their gang affiliation to avoid confusion and misinformation. Though there have been positive steps to improve the policy in dealing with gangs, there is still much to be done.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Based on the available literature, it is clear why OMGs pose an alarming threat in spite of their efforts to improve their public image, recruit new members through the development of chapter websites, and their vehement denial of criminal involvement (James, 2009). According to available literature, in several ways, biker gangs mirror other organized crime organizations,

adding to their dangerousness. Like other crime organizations, biker gangs systematically engage in a variety of violent, drug, prostitution, and racketeering-related criminal activities in the United States as well as foreign nations, enjoying the financial rewards and status boost that comes with engaging in such activities (NGIC, 2009). Though the exact nature of each biker gang's pattern of criminal offending can differ, generally, OMGs operate in a similar manner to traditional organized crime syndicates in that they enjoy a highly sophisticated leadership structure, guidance from a central point of authority, and a complicated set of rules that one must abide by. The elaborate hierarchy of these groups lends well to the secrecy that OMGs have tried to uphold as well as disciplining their members, much like other organized crime syndicates; some prominent OMGs have been known to have enforcers, or those specifically tasked with disciplining members who have somehow disobeyed or disgraced the group. Thus, though most bikers and motorcycle clubs obey the law, the emergence and continual expansion of new and old OMGs alike should be taken seriously, as not only are they highly organized and wield the power of as many as 20,000 members and a plethora of puppet clubs, but have been involved in various types of criminal behavior, ranging from the possession and sale of narcotics to murder.

There are also elements of the specific subculture of biker gangs that also contribute to their ferocity. OMGs thrive on the need to be perceived as outlaws and live on the fringe of traditional societal values, but still feel the need to pursue influence and a feeling of powerfulness (Quinn & Forsyth, 2009). This has generally been achieved through stark rivalries with competing OMGs, typically resulting in bloodshed and increased problems for law enforcement officials. Additionally, based on the power hierarchy of these groups and their need to maintain a reputation of toughness and machismo, like other gangs, OMGs also tend to

respond to gestures of disrespect or other perceived affronts with violence. Yet, it is interesting that many non-criminal motorcycle clubs share things in common with OMGs, such as a love of motorcycles and a desire for fraternal brotherhood (Quinn & Forsyth, 2009), suggesting that criminal offending is not the only part of being a member of an OMG, as is the case with other criminal gangs. Additionally, it is of interest that some of the more prominent OMGs were founded by former members of the military (e.g., the HAMC) and it has been noted by law enforcement some members of the OMGs have military experience (NGIC, 2009), potentially contributing to sophisticated leadership styles, emphasis on brotherhood, and skill with violence that these groups embody.

However, despite evidence of the threat that certain OMGs pose, there is a distinct dearth of information regarding these groups, as understandably, OMGs have gone to great lengths to conceal the structure of their organization and the exact nature of their activities from the public, researchers, and law enforcement officials. Considering the dangerousness of these groups and their continued growth on a global scale, from an empirical and pragmatic standpoint, it is imperative to increase the awareness and information that can be gleaned from enduring and in-depth study of biker gangs. Though the undertaking of attempting an observational study of biker gangs remains a potentially hazardous and logistically difficult task, at the very least, law enforcement can aid the research process by formally tracking the crime that is attributed to OMGs and by sharing this information with the public, as well as by sharing more general intelligence about these groups. It appears that the reluctance of law enforcement to collect official estimates of the crimes committed by biker gangs may be unfounded based on a recent empirical examination of their criminality as reported by media outlets, supporting the notion that biker gangs are committing more crime than is acknowledged (Barker & Human, 2009).

Unfortunately, it will be difficult to diffuse the mystery that surrounds OMGs without more accurate and updated research as well as known intelligence, ensuring their indefinite status as an enigma.

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