5-4-2016

Police and Gangs: Undergraduates' Perceptions of the Similarities and Differences

Seroyah Williams
Georgia Southern University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/honors-theses

Part of the Criminal Law Commons, Criminal Procedure Commons, Law and Gender Commons, Law and Psychology Commons, Law and Race Commons, Law and Society Commons, and the Law Enforcement and Corrections Commons

Recommended Citation

Williams, Seroyah, "Police and Gangs: Undergraduates' Perceptions of the Similarities and Differences" (2016). *Honors College Theses*. 202.
https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/honors-theses/202

Police and Gangs: Undergraduates' Perceptions of the Similarities and Differences

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in Justice Studies.

By
Seroyah D. Williams

Under the mentorship of Dr. Adam Bossler

ABSTRACT

Police have been said to be the largest gang in America with badges. With recent events occurring throughout the United States, including police shootings of unarmed citizens, some may say that the police have shown various characteristics similar to those of gangs. Does the public also view officers, in general, in the same perspective? Surveys were administered to a large class of Georgia Southern University students to acquire their perceptions of both the police and gangs. Each student listed characteristics of the police and gangs, their opinion, and different ways those perceptions have been formed. The data collected revealed more positive characteristics for police and more negative for gangs. Police were seen as more protective and courageous amongst the public serving their needs and interests. Gangs gathered the more negative perceptions, such as being more violent and drug-related, and not serving much of the public's interests and needs. The two groups still exhibited ample resemblance that could portray the police subculture as a legitimate gang.

Thesis Mentor: _____

Dr. Adam Bossler

Honors Director: _____

Dr. Steven Engel

April 2016
Justice Studies
University Honors Program
Georgia Southern University

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank Georgia Southern University for such a great learning experience at this illustrious and prestigious university. To Dr. Adam Bossler, I really appreciate the time you have taken out to ensure this research thesis was a success and as good as it possibly could be. I will never forget you, and you truly impacted my life. I would also like to thank my family and friends for sticking by me through the good and bad times because this journey wasn't an easy one. Finally, to the faculty and staff of the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology, I cannot thank you all enough for teaching me the steps and information I need to know to succeed in my future career.

Above all, to the Great Almighty, my strength and savior, for his never-ending love and blessings.

God bless everyone!

Seroyah Williams

Introduction

The subject of police and gangs is one that not many people probably ponder deeply about. Both subcultures attract mostly young and outgoing males who "value order, discipline, and brotherhood" (*CBS News*, 2015). Police have become prone to danger and committing violence in America. Although there are no public data or statistics showing the number of killings by police, there have been individual studies that used crowd-sourcing databases to collect names of victims. Gangs are seen as more violent portraying those same characteristics. Police and gangs relate in ways that they carry themselves, their demeanor, and mentality. The characteristics, public perceptions, and opinions of students are being compared in this research to discover just how similar the police really are to gangs.

When comparing police and gangs, public perceptions of each must be obtained to really grasp an understanding of their resemblance. Gangs have mostly had a negative connotation since their origin, but police are supposed to be appreciated as strictly protectors and servers of its people. Today, we have observed vast amounts of police brutality amongst African American males, but black females have also been killed along with other races. For example, an African American, 28-year-old woman by the name of Sandra Bland was travelling from Illinois to Texas to accept a new job at a university in Waller County when she was pulled over for a minor traffic violation by a state trooper. The CNN article by Ray Sanchez states that the state trooper forced her out of her vehicle with a stun gun pointed at her, using excessive force to get her to the ground and handcuff her. She was taken to a local county jail where she was said to have died a few days later of suicide by hanging. Many people believe she was killed by officers inside of

the jail instead (*Sanchez*, 2015). Issues of this nature have greatly altered public perceptions giving police a bad reputation like that of gangs. Many officers try to persuade us to believe that so-called offenders are the initiators of violence or aggressiveness causing them respond with their heroic tactics. Although we never want to think of our protectors in adverse ways, they are not firmly depicting their true purpose.

Differences in perceptions and opinions do not only lie in age, sex, and race, but also in terms of experience with the two groups. Surveys show diverse ways in which individuals have had direct or indirect contact with either officers or gangs to form their perceptions of each. It also helps shape whether or not each group serve the interests of the individual.

The purpose of this research is to address the topic according to the recent news events that have illustrated the police not being held to the standards that the public expects. The main research question of this study is, "Can be police be considered as gangs?" In order to examine this research question, data from a survey administered in the Spring of 2016 to a sample of college students was collected. The characteristics, public perceptions, and opinions of students are compared in this research to discover how similar the police are to gangs.

Literature Review

In this section, I examine the literature necessary and relevant to understand the public's perceptions of police and gangs for the purpose of comparing the two groups. The community is supposed to feel safe and protected, but instead, there has been much police brutality within the past few years. A person's first instinct of a gang could automatically be "violence." Therefore, why is it that when some people think of the

police, they are constantly drawn to the same conclusion? Maybe, if people keep addressing the issue of how police are presenting themselves as gangs, some things would change in law enforcement, and we, the public, could attain the proper understanding and comfort we need when having to lean or rely on them for assistance.

Scholars have long studied the public's perceptions of police, characteristics of gangs, and the police subculture.

Public Perceptions

Trust and confidence of the police are two key perceptions from the public that hold much importance to their legitimacy. Although much of the public interacts with officers in some shape, form, or fashion, juveniles seem to be more attached to and have higher victimization rates than any other age group making it a key factor in the study of public perceptions of the police. While studying juveniles' opinions, demographics have been the most influential to this research. Individuals who have had "vicarious experiences of police misconduct have more negative perceptions of the police, suggesting the importance of socialization in shaping police legitimacy" (*Romaine and Hassell,* 2014). There are many different sources that have an impact on the socialization of juveniles perceiving the police in such ways, but this "attempts to bridge this gap by examining several possible sources of socialization on how juveniles rate the police both in general and in perceiving prior encounters" (*Romaine and Hassell,* 2014).

Previous studies of demographics and neighborhoods, involving adult research, has shown that juveniles tend to have a more negative approach toward police than older individuals. Research on sex has had many variations although males are more likely to have interactions with the criminal justice system. Race also influences attitudes towards

the police. Romaine and Hassell explain that "Hagan and colleagues proposed a racial gradient in juvenile perceptions of the police stemming from prior police contact and perceived injustice and found that Hispanic and Black juveniles were more likely to rate the police negatively, although Black juveniles reported a higher frequency of prior police contact than Hispanic and White juveniles" (*Romaine and Hassell,* 2014). Neighborhood conditions have also showed implications of juveniles who saw their socioeconomic status as highly disordered to have more negative attitudes towards the police. "Effects of neighborhood perceptions may vary based upon the level of evaluation asked of individuals" (*Romaine and Hassell,* 2014).

Another approach of attitudes towards the police had to deal with the level of contact and sources that may influence their attitude. Studies showed that secondary sources, like television and music, did not have a big "contribution to juveniles' perception, whether in general or specific to actual contact" (*Romaine and Hassell,* 2014). Youth who are known to have negative perceptions of the police may display their attitudes verbally or non-verbally during certain situations, which, in turn, may affect interaction between the police and youth. "In this sense, pre-conceived attitudes about the police may be self-reinforcing when youth come into contact with the police and subsequently perceive unfairness and injustice" (*Romaine and Hassell,* 2014). These juveniles may share their stories of interaction with the police with their friends and other peers, which may reinforce directly contacted individuals to increase the disliking rubbing off on loved ones.

Juveniles' attitudes towards the police are largely influenced by racial factors – more specifically, black youth rate police more negatively than white youth and other

peer evaluations of officers in influential attitude formation. "Youth who come into contact with the police are likely to have prior negative views through socialization with peers. In order to create meaningful partnerships with community members, including juveniles, community-policing initiatives should focus on altering this negative image" (*Romaine and Hassell,* 2014).

Brandl and colleagues (1997) suggest that citizens are consumers as well as co-producers of police outputs. Their study along with many others like John Worrall's *Public Perceptions of Police Efficacy and Image: The "Fuzziness" of Support for the Police* revealed that participants have rather stable and uniform outlooks toward the police and view police in a more positive perspective. When discussing efficacy and image, both give off the positive impression of police towards citizen in that police actually do their jobs as protecting and serving. The perceptions of the police include their ability to protect citizens, solve crime, and prevent crime along with their friendliness and fairness of the police (*Worrall,* 1999). Police have such a big job in keep citizens' needs fulfilled and feeling safe, but they are also not always perceived to be "good guys."

Romaine and Hassell (2014) have already deliberated unsatisfying opinions from the public eye, but other studies also discovered explanations as to why people may feel so undesirable towards the police. Viewing television news and crime-based reality programs significantly increases confidence in the police, while first-hand experiences with crime were more important than the media in shaping individual's opinions of the police. African Americans have a lower opinion of the police and the criminal justice system than Whites. These racial differences were found in Great Britain as well, but

Hispanics seem to lie between blacks and whites. Police contact raises positive attitudes towards the police among Whites but has a negative effect on Blacks' opinions of law enforcement. Being a victim of a crime and having a past arrest significantly reduces positive attitudes. Most citizens only have limited contact with the police, and these experiences primarily consist of brief interactions such as receiving a traffic ticket. Consequently, the majority of citizens are probably not likely to establish their opinions of law enforcement solely on the basis of an occasional encounter, but also from other sources of information about the police, which for most members of the public is chiefly derived from the media. The influence of highly publicized incidences of police misconduct on attitudes towards the police found that crime-related media negatively impacts public attitudes towards the police, especially among race/ethnic minorities (*Callanan and Rosenberger,* 2011). Positive opinions of law enforcement significantly decreased after the controversial Rodney King beating and arrest, irrespective of race, gender and age, although blacks' attitudes decreased more than whites' or Hispanics' and remained lower for a longer period of time.

Another factor of negativity derives from viewing a violent televised arrest of an African-American youth. It significantly lowered attitudes among non-whites adolescents. Highly publicized incidents of police misconduct decrease positive feelings towards law enforcement, but very few studies have examined the effects of general crime-related media consumption on public opinion of the police. This is some evidence that the media has strong influences on opinions of the police.

Other factors that affect negative perceptions include contacts with the police, prior crime victimization, and demographic characteristics, but the specific variables of

age, race, contact with police, and neighborhood seem to be the only ones that have constantly been proven to affect attitudes toward police (*Maxson et al,* 2003).

An example of a specific effect of neighborhood characteristics on shaping attitudes towards the police is provided by Hahn (1971). The attitudes of people from the Twelfth Street Ghetto in Detroit towards the police was studied shortly after the nation's most destructive riots had erupted in this neighborhood in the summer of 1967. Ninety-two percent of the black residents denied that "all laws are enforced equally" (*Hahn,* 1971). Eight-one percent believed Detroit policemen "treat some groups better than others" rather than treating all people the same. Seventy-eight percent stated that police were more interested in trying to "keep things quiet" before the riots. The massive distrust of the law and police practices also seemed to reflect the basic doubts about the integrity of the legal process as well as of the police officers. Eight-eight percent of this population believed that most judges in the local courts break the rules for personal gains or favors. There was nowhere that showed trust in the police or the criminal justice system in this neighborhood.

Characteristics of Gangs

Urban street gangs have existed over the course of 200 plus years since the 1820s in the U.S. Some examples include the Forty Thieves, the Bowery Boys, and the Pug Uglies, who fought over the streets in the Five Point area of NYC. Many street and motorcycle gangs of today developed their traditions and practices from these street gangs. Over half of non-gang members, at about 61%, reported that the gangs that exist inside correctional institutions are basically the same gangs that exist on the street

(*NGCRC,* 1999). Although gangs are made up of mostly males, females make up a small portion of them also.

According the National Gang Crime Research Center in Chicago, a gang can be defined as a group that "exists for or benefits substantially from the continuing criminal activity of its members." Modern street gangs of today are the new urban tribes, in which tribes are generally groups that share the same language, culture, or geographic location with similar self-interests bonded together by the attitudes the people within have towards each other.

Characteristics that describe the functions of gangs vary on a somewhat large scale. Some of those characteristics comprise of (1) a code of conduct, (2) selective membership, and (3) loyalty. Within the code of conduct for its members, it consists of rules and regulations that reflect the environment of which the gang exists. Youth street gangs are typically the ones with these types of codes of conduct involving delinquents who "cannot go above their own experiences, and hence their codes and chosen activities must be studied with reference to the moral codes and activities they meet in the community where they live" (*Etter,* 1998). Most gang leaders tend to be adults known as O.G.'s or Original Gangsters denoting their senior status and their presence when the gang or set was formed.

The next characteristic of gangs is selective membership where they protect themselves from law enforcement. "Race, ethnic, and other cultural considerations are often used as screening tools by gangs to select new members" with "racial and ethnic homogeneity becoming the norm among gang membership" (*Etter,* 1998). Vouching, someone proposing you for membership into a gang, has become a simple and effective

technique for gang membership processing. The person who proposes someone is responsible for new membership conduct within the gang. If he/she does not meet the required responsibilities of that new member, they will reap the consequences.

Lastly, loyalty to your group above all else is one of the most highly held characteristics of gangs. The gang is the member's family where he/she feels comfort, love, and loyalty. Once you're a part of it, your commitment is lifelong, while the gang provides acceptance and emotional support. Gangs must receive your true loyalty, which means you may have to get rid of non-gang friends and associates and strictly conform to your new set. Loyalty usually ties in with the characteristic of initiation into gangs which can be extremely violent where prospective members must prove their worth to the gang and their capabilities of being a warrior to fight or even die for the group. Females are usually discriminated against if they do join gangs in which they usually have no say-so and can be "sexed" into the groups. Statistics show that about 39% of non-gang members have known males in their gang who forced females to have sex.

There are numerous of other characteristics to describe what constitutes a gang, but these are just a few. Some of the others include hand symbols, colors, clothing, tattoos, no respect for the law and going to jail, and many more. Juveniles join gangs for money, prestige, belonging, security, and much more. According to one character in Stewart's book *Gangs* (1997), Tajan, a 16-year-old member of the Gangster Disciples, says he was a good student and a talented athlete before he got involved with gangs. He believes the public has the wrong perception of gangs, however, and says that the purpose of gangs is to protect the neighborhood, not to commit random violence.

Emma Alleyene (2010) conducted a study on the psychological processes of youth's admire for gang membership. Peripheral youth, gang members, and non-gang members from a high school were used as the subjects. Gang members and peripheral youth seemed to be more delinquent than non-gang youth overall, but gang members committed more minor offenses and the peripherals committed more violent offenses than the non-gang youth. Gang members were more anti-authority but equal to peripheral youth in valued social status. Gang members were also more likely to blame victims for their actions and use euphemisms to sanitize their behavior, whereas peripheral youth were more likely to displace responsibility onto their superiors. Factors like these are what constitute to the psychological processes as to who becomes a gang member.

Although gang members are said to have a big hand in violent crimes like extortion, robbery, theft, arson, fighting over territory, they participate in many activities other than violent crime. They go to school, work, hang out, and eat with family and friends. Criminal and violent activity are usually rare occurrences, but gang membership is what is "found to enhance involvement in delinquent activities of all kinds" (*Esbensen, et al* 2008). Violence is due partly to the involvement of gangs in drug trafficking, but so much of gang violence stems from trivial disputes among members in the same gang and between rival gangs.

Today, studies suggest that gangs are different in ways that they have transformed throughout the years. "The newer gangs in the suburbs, small cities and towns, and rural areas are not highly organized and have younger members, more females, more Caucasians, and tend to have more mixed gender and race/ethnicity membership than gangs in cities with more longstanding gang problems" (*Huff,* 2002). The newer gangs

are also not as involved in much criminal activity as their earlier origins, and many

extreme gang problems tend to still lay in the largest cities. Contemporary gangs tend not

to fit the stereotypical mode of youth gangs and are hard to define.

Police Subculture

Steve Herbert talked about the normative behavior or order of the police

subculture defining six key points within departments: "law, bureaucratic control,

adventure/machismo, safety, competence, and morality" *(Herbert,* 1998). Police are "a

social group, differentiated from the general public, whose behavior is more significantly

structured by informal norms than by formal rules" (*Herbert,* 1998). Officers tend to

defend and cover up each other's faults so that the outside world knows nothing of their

actions. Within the police subculture, the general population is mistrusted and is always

suspected of wrongful behavior. The Los Angeles Police Department will be used as a

guide to explain conceptualization as to how we understand the social environment of

policing and the police subculture.

"Police sub-culture is an extensive set of belief, values, and practices" including

particular speech and humor of the occupation, the way the social and physical

environment is perceived, and relationships between officers and others who are not

officers (*Waddington,* 1998). Violence excites them, there is the "us/them" division of

society isolating them while they remain solid and loyal to their in-group, and there exists

the "cult of masculinity." Officers are expected to be tough guys (physically and

emotionally), aggressive, and "engage in traditionally masculine pastimes of heavy

drinking and predatory hetero-sexuality" (*Waddington,* 1998). They are seen as

patriarchal, overpowering, and showing resistance towards the female population, and their masculinity leads to the concern of danger, in which most officers are only concentrated on their own well-being.

Herbert explains two principle shortcomings of the police subculture: (1) how "sharp the distinction is between formal and informal, between the bureaucratic and legal regulations, that ostensibly dictate police behaviors and the less formal ethos of the subculture;" and (2) how the subculture is treated "as if it were a more-or-less cohesive whole" (*Herbert,* 1998). The comparison between these questionable formal and informal rules of the first principle leads up to the second principle and helps to make understanding and differentiate between the two. Based on an officer's attitude towards the public and police work, the subculture describes and explains different types of police.

Culture is explained from the sociological viewpoint carrying its way into understanding subcultures and their normative behaviors. As stated by Herbert, he defines this normative behavior/order as a set of generalized rules and common practices oriented around a common value. These normative orders can have effect on social life. Officers have to be careful when telling their citizens what is "the right or wrong thing to do" because it may conflict with lawful or authorized rules. These "rules" are not always formally encoded in the system, but can just as well be "informally developed within particular social groups" (*Herbert,* 1998).

As mentioned before, there are six key points within the subculture. Herbert took notes, studied, went on ride-alongs, and did much more field work with the LAPD to gain more understanding of the normative order of the social world of the police. The first

point, law, is a resource that the police uses to keep peace or maintain order involving the power of discretion. Next, bureaucratic control "exists to provide structure to the organization and to provide upper-level management a means to control the behavior of those beneath them. It also serves to decrease the sense of uncertainty that is a characteristic of police life" (*Herbert,* 1998). After that, there is safety where officers encourage each other to summon the necessary bravery to handle potentially perilous calls and ensure the preservation of their own life and the lives of others. The normative order of competence works to provide officers with a sense of what constitutes doing a good job, outcomes that will provide approval from their peers, and ensuring that officers pull their own weight, that they do not need unnecessary assistance from others in managing their basic workload. Lastly, the struggle between good and evil is defined as morality.

These six normative orders give us a sense of and a somewhat understanding of the structure of the social world of the police. They differentiate the cultures of the police and can be used in many ways with police discretion.

According to M.H. Haller (1976), police didn't legally form ethical norms until the late 1900s. They wore uniforms and badges, carried handguns and hickory sticks, and patrolled assigned beats. Their structure now is based on military organization, and wherever you are in the hierarchy, military-like titles are also given the more you progress in the work hierarchy. Between 1913 and 1914, recruits, who had quit school around the ages of 13 and 14, were put on the streets without any training. A large amount of the ethnically diverse population distrusted police anyway. As we used to see in politics around the 1960s, police used to contribute a major part of their salaries to a

superior party while participating in illegal activities like gambling, prostitution, and much more. They even put their money into legal aspects like saloons, dance halls, and retail stores to gain profit for doing illegal and unethical deeds with these businesses. "Lastly, police aided local politicians by ignoring or protecting those illegal activities carried on by local politicians and, sometimes, by harassing illegal activities of political rivals" (*Haller,* 1976).

As time progressed, they even bribed people into exchanging their freedom from arrest to receive information. Police discretion being revealed as "merely a cloak for the expression of prejudice" could have led to these types of problems (*Waddington,* 1998). A very thin line existed between being guardians against crime and partners with criminals. Some gangs specialized in pickpocketing and divided territory under the guidance of police. McNamara suggested that police were "isolated and insecure," attracted by the structure of a disciplined hierarchical organization. Policing attracts individuals with "unsavory attitudes," but sociologists prefer to look more into the cultural background for behavioral explanations.

Conser (1979) uses a similar, but somewhat different, approach that divides the subculture into categories to describe their conceptual framework - occupational, psychological, political, and social. The occupational division talks about job-related factors that affect officers. Many of these factors are similar to the problems discussed in *Thought, Talk, and Action* by Peter Waddington (1998) like isolation, solidarity, and negative perceptions of citizens. "Variables of danger and authority are seen as fundamental to a policeman's working personality, and the policeman's occupational role is defined as unique" (*Conser,* 1979). Next, the psychological dimension concerns police

identity and personality development. Authoritarianism is the most popular trait in line

with aggression, power, and many more, but some researchers feel there is no designated

police personality. Thirdly, the political division brings politics in the aspect of police

subculture because of "the style of policing encouraged through the enforcement of rule,

regulations, and policies and through the enforcement of rule, regulations, and policies

through discretion" (*Conser,* 1979). Lastly, the social dimension includes the loyalty and

solidarity of the subculture along with the type of community police work in. Conser

feels that we should view the subculture of police from a jurisdiction point of view

instead of a universal point of view. He explains that police subculture does have a

deleterious effect on police-citizen relations and helps to perpetuate and maintain the

negative perceptions that exist between police and citizens.

When digging further into the research, we discover that a researcher by the name

of S.M. Cox (1996) presents a real life view of the interactions between police and

citizens. Cox feels there must be a trustworthy and understanding relationship between

the two for officers to perform their duties of service providers. There must also be open

communication with the community and a change in the negative image communities

have of officers. We want to make sure these things happen, but according to P.K.

Manning (2014), police have no discretion in their job of duty. Manning describes police

discretion in this way:

> The driving force underlying police subculture is 'discretion', a quasi-legal *ad hoc*
>
> term for a previously-made decisions. Since at common law the police have
>
> original authority, they do not exercise discretion, and they act upon intuition,
>
> hunches, and the like. Discretion lies in the domain of an account, the reasons for

acting if the case is to be sent forward into the legal system… These matters are

not covered by the legal term 'discretion', which refers to choice between legal

standards. The fundamental base of the modes of coping called the occupational

culture is uncertainty, and officers having to act repeatedly in ambiguous events

with authority and power, often alone. Uncertainty pervades and shapes the work,

but as it is there are many sources of uncertainty, depending on one's location in

the organization.

Based on this research, discretion is used too loosely in the subculture and should be

explained and understood in the way that Manning has explained it here.

Methods

Data and Sample

Data were collected through surveys of students in a large Intro to Criminal Justice class at a local university. The surveys were distributed by asking a professor if the survey could be administered during his class. It was given to the students at Georgia Southern University in the Spring of 2016.

There was a total of 96 participants who were all students. The demographics of each student included race, year in school, and sex. They were approximately evenly represented by both males (45.8%) and females (54.2%). Although classifications of the year in school differed amongst the class, Freshmen (29.2%), Sophomores (25%), and Juniors (27.1%) were the highest number representatives with Seniors only representing about 18.8%, which we would probably expect in an intro class. Among the college students at a predominately white institution, whites actually were over half of the participants at 58.3%. Blacks were not far behind in representing about 33.3% of the participants. Hispanics and other races took on a combined total of 8.3%. Every student provided demographic information resulting in no omissions.

Variables

The created survey consisted of only three sections (see Appendix 1). In the first section of the survey, it examined overall perceptions of the police. Students were asked

both to list five characteristics of the police and discuss what they thought of the police. Then, they received a close-ended question to select in which different ways those perceptions had formed. The last open-ended question gave each student the opportunity to explain whether or not the police served their individual interests and why. In the second portion of the survey examining student perceptions of gangs, the same open and close-ended questions were asked, except these were about gangs. Lastly, in the third section, it consisted of some simple demographic close-ended questions. Those included the year of school each student was in, their race, and gender.

Analytic Strategy

As related to the survey, tables were used to collect the quantity of each term used to describe the characteristics of police and gangs. All data from the surveys was entered into Microsoft Excel. For each characteristic provided, it was coded as positive, negative, or neutral. Table 1 for the police was created by putting all the positive words in alphabetical order from the most used to the least used. Each word had their own individual total slot to keep up with the most used and least used terms. Then, all of the neutral and negative terms were done the same exact way. Table 2 for gangs, consisted of the same concepts used in Table 2, except only the characteristics used for gangs was provided here. Words that had similar meanings for each group, police or gangs, were combined to narrow down the amount of words. Table 3 was used to distinguish the percentage of students who provided a positive or negative word of the police and gangs.

Results

Tables 1 and 2 suggest that the difference between positive, negative, and neutral words used to describe the police and gangs has some effect on the perceptions of how people feel about them. The results displayed quite a significance to those variables, but the overall comparison was not as intended. Police seemed to be viewed in a more positive perspective serving more interests, while gangs did the opposite. Many factors could have played a role in the results, including the fact that it was an intro class.

In Table 1 for the police, students mostly see the police in positive ways with a total of 217 positive responses. The police's most positive used terms were being protective and brave. Students also see the police as a caring group who is strong and honest. I thought students would have seen the police as more serving following their protective status, but it was still a popular characteristic used to describe the police. The neutral terms included stern, tough, serious, and armed with an overall total of 59 neutral responses. Lastly, we see that more negative perceptions of the police could be that they are intimidating, mean, and arrogant. The negative terms total was 114 negative perceptions.

Table 1. Characteristics of Police

Positive	Total	Neutral	Total	Negative	Total
Protect	26	Stern	9	Intimidating	8
Brave	18	Tough	9	Mean	8
Caring	16	Armed	7	Arrogant	6
Strong	14	Uniforms	6	Rude	6
Honest	13	Serious	4	Biased	5

Serve	12	White	4	Controlling	5
Intelligent	8	Males	3	Corrupt	5
Loyal	6	Badge	2	Scary	5
Authority	5	Attitude	1	Forceful	4
Good	5	Blue/red lights	1	Irritable	4
Honor	5	Busy	1	Abuse power	3
Law enforcers	5	Chargers	1	Judgmental	3
Power	5	Demeanor	1	Tricky	3
Trained	5	Easily targeted	1	Angry	2
Nice	4	Loud	1	Bad	2
Professional	4	Married	1	Deceptive	2
Attentive	3	Middle-aged	1	Ignorant	2
Informed	3	Nondependent	1	Lawbreakers	2
Justified	3	Regular people	1	Militant	2
Law-abiding	3	Tall	1	Racist	2
Problem solvers	3	Territorial	1	Stubborn	2
Right	3	Work for the gov't	1	Suspicious	2
Stop crime	3	Work long hours	1	Anxious	1
Confident	2			Authoritative	1
Cool	2			Big belly	1
Determined	2			Bored	1
Fit	2			Demanding	1
Hardworking	2			Dicks	1
Lead	2			Do not protect or serve	1
Selfless	2			Don't listen	1
Understanding	2			Extreme	1
Acceptable	1			Incompetent	1
Affirmative	1			Insecure	1

Assertive	1			Likes to eat donuts	1
Can work with you	1			Mistakable	1
Community-based	1			Misunderstood	1
Concerned	1			Negative	1
Control traffic	1			Nosey	1
Direct	1			Out of shape	1
Diverse	1			Overly used	1
Dutiful	1			Overpowering	1
Get drugs out	1			Overprotective	1
Heroes	1			Paranoid	1
In harm's way	1			Petty	1
Keep the peace	1			Prideful	1
Organized	1			Power trip	1
Peace keepers	1			Reckless	1
Quick response	1			Ruin fun	1
Reasonable	1			Stalkers	1
Respect	1			Underpaid	1
Responsible	1			Unfriendly	1
Rule-driven	1			Unpredictable	1
Self-disciplined	1			Uptight	1
Social obligations	1				
Stoic	1				
Suggestive	1				
Swift	1				
Tactical	1				
Thorough	1				
Unit	1				

Total	217	Total	59	Total	114

In Table 2 for gangs, we see that they had more negative words than positive or neutral with a huge total of 248 negative characteristics. Some of the mostly used negative words included violent, drug-related, and dangerous. Neutral terms consisted of such characteristics like minorities, tattoos, and colors with an overall total of 62 neutral items. There were not too many positive words for gangs, but some people still found something good to say about them. Some of those characteristics consisted of family, organized, loyalty, and respect with a total of 58 positive terms.

Table 2. Characteristics of Gangs

Positive	Total	Neutral	Total	Negative	Total
Family	9	Tattoos	6	Violent	46
Organized	8	Minorities	5	Drug-related	26
Unit	8	Black	4	Dangerous	20
Brotherhood	4	Colors	4	Murderers	10
Loyal	4	Weapons	4	Criminals	9
Protect community	3	Clothes	2	Bad	8
Similar beliefs	3	Gang-related terminology	2	Scary	7
Committed	2	Juveniles	2	Mean	6
Strong	2	Large numbers	2	Illegal	5
Can fight	1	Males	2	Intimidating	5
Communal	1	Mexican	2	Trouble	5
Community-driven	1	Money	2	Fear	4
Defensive	1	Territorial	2	Pointless	4
Experienced	1	A way of life	1	Angry	3
Honest	1	Attitude	1	Arrogance	3

Interesting	1	Baggy clothers	1	Disrespectful	3
Motivated	1	Big cities	1	Ignorance	3
Purposeful	1	Bloods	1	Reckless	3
Reliable	1	Crips	1	Thugs	3
Respect	1	Exclusive	1	Anti-police	2
Rich	1	Extended adolescence	1	Corrupt	2
Sheltered	1	Gang signs	1	Cruel	2
Showy	1	Hand gestures	1	Deadly	2
Willing to do anything	1	Hood	1	Desperate	2
		Initiation steps	1	Egotistic	2
		Lit	1	Greedy	2
		Matter of circumstance	1	Prejudice	2
		Music	1	Mislead	2
		Not as common as they seem	1	Problem-causing	2
		Old cars	1	Rash	2
		Poor areas	1	Ruthless	2
		Rough	1	Terrible	2
		Serious	1	Thieves	2
		Sex	1	Uneducated	2
		Stern	1	Assault	1
		Young	1	Bossy	1
		4 and up members	1	Careless	1
				Chaos	1
				Childish	1
				Foolish	1
				Forceful	1
				Graffiti	1
				Immaturity	1

				Insecure	1
				Irresponsible	1
				Judged	1
				Lack perspective	1
				Liars	1
				Loud	1
				Low-class	1
				Media-stricken	1
				Militant	1
				Need to be arrested	1
				Negative	1
				No remorse	1
				Not protective	1
				Nothing else better to do with their lives	1
				Pathetic	1
				Peer pressure	1
				Poor	1
				Power-hungry	1
				Prey on youth	1
				Prone to imprisonment	1
				Rape	1
				Sagging pants	1
				Shootings	1
				Stereotyped	1
				Stressed	1
				Trigger-happy	1
				Unintelligent	1
				Unpredictable	1

				Unprogressive	1
				Unwanted	1
				Useless	1
				Usually more than	1
				Weak-minded	1
Total	**58**	**Total**	**62**	**Total**	**248**

Table 3 looks only at the overall percentage and perceptions students had on police and gangs. Most students believed that police were good people brought to us to protect and serve. Police were also said to be very brave. The percentage of individuals who provided positive words on the police was 79.2%. According to one student, they want to be an officer one day and feel that the police always do the best they can. Another student mentioned that the police are a vital part of law enforcement, and we need them to protect us as a community and from potential crises.

When it came to the gangs, more negative perceptions had been formed. Gangs were said to be more violent, dangerous, and drug-related. Most students had not had direct experience with gangs, but they either knew someone who had or heard it through it the media or movies. The percentage of individuals who provided at least one negative comment about gangs was 88.5%. One student felt like gangs were unnecessary, but also misunderstood because some feel like they need gangs in order to be protected. Another student thought that gangs were bad and were people who hang out together to engage in victimless crimes.

Positive and Negative Characteristics of Police and Gangs

Table 3

	Yes (%)	No (%)
+ *Police words*	79.2	20.8
- *Police words*	62.5	37.5
+ *Gang words*	35.4	64.6
- *Gang words*	88.5	11.5

Just because those were the general findings doesn't mean there was no comparison. Students actually provided both positive and negative characteristics for both police and gangs. 62.5% of students provided at least 1 negative term for the police, and 35.4% of students had at least 1 positive word about gangs. Most students could find both positive and negative perceptions on police and gangs in how they operate. In a more negative perspective of the police, a student said, "I think that there is no such thing as a good cop because the system in which police exists is inherently flawed. I believe to police is to profile." In a more positive sense towards gangs, one student stated in the context of gangs, "…the concept of a close neighborhood and protection is nice." From these perspectives, we see that police and gangs give people some good things to say about each and some bad things to say about each. This is how a similarity between police and gangs has been found.

Discussion/Conclusion

Police and gangs are two important topics that not very many people relate one to another. The results here are important because recent news events have illustrated that the police have not been held to the standard that the public expects. The community is supposed to feel safe and protected, but instead, there has been too much violence within

the past few years. A person's first instinct of a gang could automatically be "violence."

Therefore, why is it that when I think of the police, I'm instantly drawn to the same

conclusion? Maybe if people keep addressing the issue of how police are presenting

themselves in a way that people could even potentially see them as gangs, some things

would change in law enforcement, and we, the public, could get the understanding and

comfort we need when having to lean on them for assistance.

When we connect the results found back to the literature review, we see that

Herbert (1998) actually explained to us that there was an "us/them" division amongst

society when it comes to the police and citizens. Several students from this research gave

insight on how the police only helps certain people and are rude and racist. One research

participant said, "F*** some of the police. We need them to protect and serve us, but

they have other agendas." We see can see from the provocative language that police upset

some people because they may not always care about actually being in the best of interest

of the police. Instead, police could be concerned with meeting a quota for their

department and backing up another officer's wrongdoings. There was a student who

actually said that the police were only satisfied with meeting quota day to day, month to

month.

In the literature review, many researchers, like Mays (1997) and Peak (2013), also

talked about gang violence. We found in the results that violence was one of the mostly

used characteristics to describe gangs. A huge amount of participants felt that gangs were

drug-related due to what they have heard or seen on movies and in the media. Some

researchers from my own studies related the media to many of the drug-related

perceptions people have of gangs. Even from personal experience, I have seen the same thing and formed those perceptions as well.

From doing this research, there are some policy implications that could help better public perceptions of the police. Police should receive better training in learning how to form better community relationships. Citizens want to feel protected and know that the police have their backs in making sure this happens. Police can also improve college students' perceptions by talking to them more and showing more concern rather than trying to take the fun out of their college experiences. Students come to college to learn and have fun at the same time. Police shouldn't take that away from them. Instead, they should visit college campuses and give presentations and speeches on how to stay out of trouble and avoid dangerous situations. Police need to also let students know that no matter what, they will always try their best to ensure their protection and safety when things don't always go as planned.

Although there were some pretty interesting results found out of this study, limitations do exist. There was only one college class at one university who actually participated in this study. College students think differently from the general public. Maybe if we would have done an in-depth study of just 20 individuals, there could have been results that lead to different, and even potentially better, results. If we had done it in a community where people may have more positive feelings of gangs, there could have been closer relationship of police and gangs that resulted from this study.

As for now, there are some future research ideas to gain more from this study. I would like to go out into different communities, outside of college campuses, to

interview individuals and actually observe the police and gang subcultures more closely

and first-hand.

References

Alleyne, E. L., Wood, J. (2010). Gang involvement: psychological and behavioral

    characteristics of gang members, peripheral youth, and nongang Youth.

    Aggressive Behavior, *36*(6), 423-436.

Brandl, S., Frank, J., Wooldredge, J., & Watkins, R. (1997). On the measurement of

    public support for the police: A research note. *Policing: An International Journal

    of Police Strategies & Management*, *20* (3), 473-480.

Brown, B., & Benedict, W. R. (2002). Perceptions of the police: Past findings,

    methodological issues, conceptual issues and policy implications. *Policing*, *25*(3),

    543-580.

Callanan, V. J., & Rosenberger, J. S. (2011). Media and public perceptions of the police:

    examining the impact of race and personal experience. *Policing & Society*, *21*(2),

    167-189.

Clifton, H. (2011). Rioter profile: 'The police are probably the biggest gang in the world'

    Retrieved April 04, 2016, from

    http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/dec/07/rioter-profile-police-biggest-gang

Conser, J. A. (1979). Literary Review of the Police Subculture: Its Characteristics,

    Impact and Policy Implications. *A. Police Stud.: Int'l Rev. Police Dev., 2*, 46.

Cox, S. M. (1996). *Police: Practices, perspectives, problems*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Esbensen, F., Brick, B. T., Melde, C., Tusinski, K., & Taylor, T. J. (2008). The role of

    race and ethnicity in gang membership. In F. van Gemert, D. Peterson, I. Lien

    (Eds.), *Street gangs, migration and ethnicity* (pp. 117-139). Devon, United

    Kingdom: Willan Publishing.

Etter, Sr., G. (1998). Common characteristics of gangs: Examining the cultures of the

new urban tribes. *Journal of Gang Research*, *5*(2), 19-33.

Hahn, H. (1971). Ghetto Assessments of Police Protection and Authority. *Law & Society

Review*, 183-183.

Haller, M. H. (1976). Historical roots of police behavior: Chicago, 1890-1925. *Law and

society review*, 303-323.

Herbert, S. (1998). Police subculture reconsidered. *Criminology*, *36*(2), 343-370.

Huff, C. R. (2002). *Gangs in America III / C. Ronald Huff, editor*. Thousand Oaks : Sage

Publications.

Knox, G. W. (2000). *An introduction to gangs / by George W. Knox*. Peotone, IL : New

Chicago School Press.

Manning, P. K. (2014). Police Culture: Themes and Concepts. *Howard Journal Of

Criminal Justice*, *53*(1), 111-112.

Maxson, C. L., Hennigan, K., & Sloane, D. C. (2003). *Factors that influence public

opinion of the police [electronic resource]*. [Washington, D.C.] : U.S. Dept. of

Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, [2003].

Mays, G. L. (1997). *Gangs and gang behavior / G. Larry Mays, editor*. Chicago : Nelson-

Hall.

National Gang Crime Research Center (1999). A comparison of gang members and non-

gang members from project GANGFACT: A special report of the NGCRC.

Journal of Gang Research, *6*(2), 53-76.

Peak, K. J. (2013). *Gangs and Their Crimes, Characteristics of*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Peak, K. J. (2000). *Policing America: Methods, Issues, Challenges*. Prentice Hall.

Romain, D. M., & Hassell, K. D. (2014). An exploratory examination of the sources of socialisation influencing juvenile perceptions of the police. *International Journal Of Police Science & Management*, *16*(1), 36-51.

Sanchez, R. (2015, July 21). Sandra Bland's death: What we know. Retrieved April 20, 2016, from http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/21/us/texas-sandra-bland-jail-death-explain/

Sinyangwe, S. (2015, May 26). Why do US police keep killing unarmed black men? Retrieved April 20, 2016, from http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-32740523

Sklansky, D. A. (2007). Seeing blue: Police reform, occupational culture, and cognitive burn-in. *Sociology of Crime Law and Deviance, 8*, 19-45.

Stewart, G. B. (1997). *Gangs*. San Diego, CA: Lucent Books.

Thomas, C., & Hyman, J. (1977). Perceptions of Crime, Fear of Victimization, and Public Perceptions of Police. *Journal of Police Science and Administration*, *15*(3), 305-317. Retrieved February 21, 2015, from https://www.ncjrs.gov/App/Publications/abstract.aspx?ID=43171

Waddington, Peter (1998). CHAPTER 4: Thought, Talk and Action. *Policing Citizens* (pp. 97-120). Taylor & Francis Ltd / Books.

Waddington, P., Williams, K., Wright, M., & Newburn, T. (2014). Dissension in public evaluations of the police. *Policing and Society*, *25*(2), 212-235.

Worrall, J. (1999). Public Perceptions of Police Efficacy and Image: The "Fuzziness" of Support for the Police. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, *24*(1), 47-66.

Appendix I

Police and Gangs Comparison Survey

<u>Police</u>

1. List up to 5 characteristics of the police.

   a)

   b)

   c)

   d)

   e)

2. What do you think about the police?

3. What are the different ways that your perceptions of the police have been formed? (Circle all that apply.)

   a) Direct experience with them
   b) Through family or friends
   c) Media
   d) Classes
   e) Other (please specify): _____

4. Do you feel that the police serve your interests? Why or why not?

Gangs

5. List up to 5 characteristics of gangs.

    a)

    b)

    c)

    d)

    e)

6. What do you think about gangs?

7. What are the different ways that your perceptions of gangs have been formed? (Circle all that apply.)

    a) Direct experience with them
    b) Through family or friends
    c) Media
    d) Classes
    e) Other (please specify): _____

8. Do you feel that gangs serve your interests? Why or why not?

Demographics

Sex: Male   Female

Year in School: Freshman   Sophomore   Junior   Senior

Race/Ethnicity: (Please circle one.)
         White, not Hispanic
         Black, not Hispanic
         Hispanic
         Other (please specify): _____

Table 1. Characteristics of Police

Positive	Total	Neutral	Total	Negative	Total
Protect	26	Stern	9	Intimidating	8
Brave	18	Tough	9	Mean	8
Caring	16	Armed	7	Arrogant	6
Strong	14	Uniforms	6	Rude	6
Honest	13	Serious	4	Biased	5
Serve	12	White	4	Controlling	5
Intelligent	8	Males	3	Corrupt	5
Loyal	6	Badge	2	Scary	5
Authority	5	Attitude	1	Forceful	4
Good	5	Blue/red lights	1	Irritable	4
Honor	5	Busy	1	Abuse power	3
Law enforcers	5	Chargers	1	Judgmental	3
Power	5	Demeanor	1	Tricky	3
Trained	5	Easily targeted	1	Angry	2
Nice	4	Loud	1	Bad	2
Professional	4	Married	1	Deceptive	2
Attentive	3	Middle-aged	1	Ignorant	2
Informed	3	Nondependent	1	Lawbreakers	2
Justified	3	Regular people	1	Militant	2
Law-abiding	3	Tall	1	Racist	2
Problem solvers	3	Territorial	1	Stubborn	2
Right	3	Work for the gov't	1	Suspicious	2
Stop crime	3	Work long hours	1	Anxious	1
Confident	2			Authoritative	1
Cool	2			Big belly	1
Determined	2			Bored	1

Fit	2			Demanding	1
Hardworking	2			Dicks	1
Lead	2			Do not protect or serve	1
Selfless	2			Don't listen	1
Understanding	2			Extreme	1
Acceptable	1			Incompetent	1
Affirmative	1			Insecure	1
Assertive	1			Likes to eat donuts	1
Can work with you	1			Mistakable	1
Community-based	1			Misunderstood	1
Concerned	1			Negative	1
Control traffic	1			Nosey	1
Direct	1			Out of shape	1
Diverse	1			Overly used	1
Dutiful	1			Overpowering	1
Get drugs out	1			Overprotective	1
Heroes	1			Paranoid	1
In harm's way	1			Petty	1
Keep the peace	1			Prideful	1
Organized	1			Power trip	1
Peace keepers	1			Reckless	1
Quick response	1			Ruin fun	1
Reasonable	1			Stalkers	1
Respect	1			Underpaid	1
Responsible	1			Unfriendly	1
Rule-driven	1			Unpredictable	1
Self-disciplined	1			Uptight	1
Social obligations	1				

Stoic	1				
Suggestive	1				
Swift	1				
Tactical	1				
Thorough	1				
Unit	1				
Total	**217**	**Total**	**59**	**Total**	**114**

Table 2. Characteristics of Gangs

Positive	Total	Neutral	Total	Negative	Total
Family	9	Tattoos	6	Violent	46
Organized	8	Minorities	5	Drug-related	26
Unit	8	Black	4	Dangerous	20
Brotherhood	4	Colors	4	Murderers	10
Loyal	4	Weapons	4	Criminals	9
Protect community	3	Clothes	2	Bad	8
Similar beliefs	3	Gang-related terminology	2	Scary	7
Committed	2	Juveniles	2	Mean	6
Strong	2	Large numbers	2	Illegal	5
Can fight	1	Males	2	Intimidating	5
Communal	1	Mexican	2	Trouble	5
Community-driven	1	Money	2	Fear	4
Defensive	1	Territorial	2	Gang	4
Experienced	1	A way of life	1	Pointless	4
Honest	1	Attitude	1	Angry	3
Interesting	1	Baggy clothers	1	Arrogance	3

Motivated	1	Big cities	1	Disrespectful	3
Purposeful	1	Bloods	1	Ignorance	3
Reliable	1	Crips	1	Reckless	3
Respect	1	Exclusive	1	Thugs	3
Rich	1	Extended adolescence	1	Anti-police	2
Sheltered	1	Gang signs	1	Corrupt	2
Showy	1	Hand gestures	1	Cruel	2
Willing to do anything	1	Hood	1	Deadly	2
		Initiation steps	1	Desperate	2
		Lit	1	Egotistic	2
		Matter of circumstance	1	Greedy	2
		Music	1	Prejudice	2
		Not as common as they seem	1	Mislead	2
		Old cars	1	Problem-causing	2
		Poor areas	1	Rash	2
		Rough	1	Ruthless	2
		Serious	1	Terrible	2
		Sex	1	Thieves	2
		Stern	1	Uneducated	2
		Young	1	Assault	1
		4 and up members	1	Bossy	1
				Careless	1
				Chaos	1
				Childish	1
				Foolish	1
				Forceful	1
				Graffiti	1
				Immaturity	1

				Insecure	1
				Irresponsible	1
				Judged	1
				Lack perspective	1
				Liars	1
				Low-class	1
				Loud	1
				Media-stricken	1
				Militant	1
				Need to be arrested	1
				Negative	1
				No remorse	1
				Not protective	1
				Nothing else better to do with their lives	1
				Pathetic	1
				Peer pressure	1
				Poor	1
				Power-hungry	1
				Prey on youth	1
				Prone to imprisonment	1
				Rape	1
				Sagging pants	1
				Shootings	1
				Stereotyped	1
				Stressed	1
				Trigger-happy	1
				Unintelligent	1
				Unpredictable	1

				Unprogressive	1
				Unwanted	1
				Useless	1
				Usually more than	1
				Weak-minded	1
Total	**58**	**Total**	**62**	**Total**	**248**

Positive and Negative Characteristics of Police and Gangs

Table 3

	Yes (%)	**No (%)**
+ Police words	79.2	20.8
- Police words	62.5	37.5
+ Gang words	35.4	64.6
- Gang words	88.5	11.5