

The correctional melting pot: Race, ethnicity, citizenship, and prison violence

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Abstract

The United States prison population is becoming more diverse and comprised of increasingly more violent inmates. Although race has been cited as a risk factor for inmate violence, most prior research had narrowly investigated White/Black differences in inmate misconduct. Using a sample of 1,005 inmates from the southwestern U.S., the current study explored racial, ethnic, and citizenship correlates among male and female prisoners. Negative binomial regression models indicated that net of controls, Hispanics and Native Americans were the most violent male prisoners, while African Americans and Native Americans were the most violent female inmates. The current study was admittedly modest in scope; however, the findings were couched within a broader, imperative sociological framework that lamented the increasing interplay between communities and prison and the role of prison as a social institution.

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Introduction

The United States correctional population is viewed as a pressing societal problem with widespread sociological and social implications. The most obvious concern centers on the magnitude of America's inmate population, especially when compared to the correctional populations of peer nations. At midyear 2003, the most recent point of data collection, there were nearly 2.1 million people incarcerated in the United States. Nearly 1.4 million inmates were housed in state and federal prisons and the remaining 691,301 defendants were held in local jails (Harrison & Karberg, 2004). The result is an American imprisonment rate that has been estimated between six and twelve times the rate of other Western countries (Garland, 2001a; Mauer, 1997; Tonry,

1999). As the correctional population grows so too does a literature that documents the increased place of imprisonment in American society to such a degree that punishment has become a veritable social institution (e.g., Downes, 2001; Garland, 2001b; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Irwin & Austin, 1997; Mauer, 2001; Pattillo, Weiman, & Western, 2004; Pettit & Western, 2004; Uggen & Manza, 2002; Wacquant, 2001).

Sheer correctional numbers are only a part of the problem, however. Racial and ethnic minorities, specifically African Americans and Hispanics, have been bearing and continue to bear the brunt of increased incarceration. The numbers are unsettling. In 2003, the male imprisonment rate per 100,000 residents was 1,331. For White males, the rate was half that or 681 per 100,000. Among Black males, the rate was 4,834 per 100,000 and for Hispanic males, 1,778 per 100,000. Similar disparity exists among women. Overall, the female imprisonment rate was 119 per 100,000 residents in 2003. For White

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women, the rate was 75. For Black and Hispanic women, the rate was 352 and 148 per 100,000 respectively (Harrison & Karberg, 2004). According to a recent Bureau of Justice Statistics report, the number of Hispanics who had ever been imprisoned increased tenfold from 1974 to 2001. If current incarceration rates remain unchanged, about one in three Black males, one in six Hispanic males, and one in seventeen White males are expected to go to prison during their lifetime (Bonczar, 2003). This is nothing short of calamitous given the collateral consequences of imprisonment. For instance, Black children are nine times and Hispanic children three times more likely than White children to have a parent in prison (Mumola, 2000). According to Pettit and Western (2004, p. 164), “imprisonment now rivals or overshadows the frequency of military service and college graduation for recent cohorts of African American men.”

The enormity of the correctional population, its growth, and the racial and ethnic disparities that it conveys are distressing. Another by-product of the correctional boom is also problematic, namely, the sizeable proportion of inmates who are violent criminal offenders. Paralleling the expansion in the inmate population, the number of inmates incarcerated for violent offenses has also increased. Between 1995 and 2002, the number of violent offenders sentenced to state prison accounted for 64 percent of total state prison growth among male inmates and 49 percent among female inmates (Harrison & Beck, 2003). During the same time frame, federal prisons also experienced a 41 percent increase in violent offenders and a 68 percent increase in the number of inmates who were sentenced for weapons-related offenses. The influx of violent inmates has been unevenly distributed across racial and ethnic groups. For example, from 1995 to 2001, the number of inmates newly imprisoned for violent offenses increased 82 percent among Hispanics, 57 percent for Blacks, and 59 percent for Whites (Harrison & Beck, 2003).

In sum, the American correctional population is large and growing, diverse and disproportionately constituted by minority males, and increasingly comprised of defendants who were convicted of the most serious forms of criminal violence. Does the racial and ethnic composition of the correctional population influence prison violence? Although a large literature has explored the relationships between race, ethnicity, and prison violence, the preponderance of this work has been limited to White and Black inmates. Using a more heterogeneous sample of inmates that varied by race, ethnicity, and citizenship, the current study sought to empirically examine these correlates as they related to violent misconduct occurring within prison.

Theoretical and empirical background

Deprivation, importation, and their integration

Traditionally, investigations of inmate violence have been framed along two theoretical models, deprivation and importation. According to the deprivation model, inmate behavior including misconduct and violence was primarily a function of the oppressive structural features posed by the facility itself. In this sense, prison was a deadening, coercive, even criminogenic environment as depicted decades ago by Hayner and Ash (1940, p. 583), “A clear realization of the degenerating influence of our present prison system should encourage more experiments aiming to devise a community for offenders that will actually rehabilitate.”

The assorted pains and deprivations that prison structure, prison administration, and correctional officers imposed on inmates helped to create a micro-society of loosely bound subcultures constituted by values, beliefs, and norms to adapt to the conditions of imprisonment (Clemmer, 1940; Hayner & Ash, 1940; Sykes, 1958; Wheeler, 1961). Inmates who fully felt the deprivations of confinement had become “prisonized” (Clemmer, 1940). In the ensuing decades, investigators lent empirical support for the deprivation model and its variants (Akers, Hayner, & Gruninger, 1977; Jiang & Fisher-Giorlando, 2002; Poole & Regoli, 1983; Reisig & Lee, 2000; Smith & Hepburn, 1979; Thomas, Petersen, & Zingraff, 1978; Walters, 2003; Winfree, Mays, Crowley, & Peat, 1994). In keeping with the deprivation model, additional researchers found that correctional facilities characterized by custodial regimes of rigid social control experienced more inmate-related problems than facilities with a treatment focus or less repressive administrative controls (Berk, 1966; Poole & Regoli, 1980a, 1981, 1983; Winfree et al., 1994). Indeed, the ideas of deprivation and prisonization, concepts that were created in an American context, have been found to be applicable to inmate behavior in non-Western prisons (Reisig & Lee, 2000).

By comparison, the importation model posits that inmate behavior is best explained by offender characteristics that are imported into the institution (Irwin & Cressey, 1962). Accordingly, prisoners’ individual values, beliefs, and behaviors external to the institution remain important while they adjust or adapt to the prison environment. Theoretically, variables that are risk factors for offending in society at large should correspond to risk factors for prison misconduct. To date, criminologists have found that defendants with more extensive arrest and incarceration histories, prior

involvement with gangs or security threat groups, serious substance abuse problems, or previous use of violence were among the most difficult-to-manage inmates (Cao, Zhao, & Van Dine, 1997; DeLisi, 2003; DeLisi, Hochstetler, & Murphy, 2003; Flanagan, 1983; Gaes, Wallace, Gilman, Klein-Saffran, & Suppa, 2002; Gendreau, Goggin, & Law, 1997; Harer & Langan, 2001; McCorkle, 1995; Schrag, 1954; Thomas & Cage, 1977; Van Voorhis, 1993).

Although developed as rival explanations of inmate behavior, the deprivation and importation models have for some time been integrated (Cao et al., 1997; Jiang & Fisher-Giorlando, 2002; MacDonald, 1999; McCorkle, Miethe, & Drass, 1995; Tittle & Tittle, 1964) or supplemented by other models of inmate violence. For instance, penologists (e.g., DiIulio, 1987, 1991) have more recently pointed to the salience of prison administrative factors such as leadership styles, formalized rules and organization structure, effective management, and programming opportunities, as potentially fruitful determinants of inmate behavior. In some ways, these newer approaches serve to amplify the ideas of deprivation and importation. For example, empirical support for the administrative approach indicated that strongly controlled prisons create stifling conditions that exacerbate inmate violence. Rather than effectively controlling inmate violence, over-management contributed to deprivation-like conditions that resulted in deprivation-like effects (see, Huebner, 2003; McCorkle, 1995; Reisig, 1998, 2002).

Prison-community fluidity and race

From a broader sociological perspective, the deprivation and importation models of inmate behavior may be losing their viability given the increasing fluidity between prison and community life, particularly among segments of racial and ethnic minority populations. In this sense, prisons are no longer “total” institutions (Goffman, 1961) whose walls wholly isolate inmates from the community. Instead, the barriers between community and prison are porous and permit considerable transference of behaviors that influence inmate conduct. Indeed, this is the very thesis of the importation model of inmate behavior.

Episodically, penologists have explored the potentially dynamic interplay between community and prison life, and the ways that race influences these concepts. According to Jacobs (1979, p. 24), “The view of the prison as a primitive society, governed by its own norms and inhabited by its own distinctive social types, has always been somewhat exaggerated. Racial divisions are not the only cleavages that exist within the prisoner subculture, but in many contemporary prisons racial politics set the background

against which all prisoner activities are played out. Taking race relations into account will help correct the overemphasis on the uniqueness of prisons and will lead to a fuller understanding of the prison’s role as an institution of social control.” Jacobs’ (1977, 1979) research illustrated how race relations generally and Black urban street gangs specifically influenced inmate conduct within prisons. In some institutions, inmate gangs exerted such control that their assorted involvement in crime, violence, and misconduct were ostensibly unabated by prison officials. Based on their continued criminal involvement, these inmates simply behaved as if they were still in the community.

The nexus of community, crime, and prison has also been explored among Hispanic residents of economically disadvantaged communities (Moore, 1978, 1991; Zatz & Portillos, 2000). For both African Americans and Hispanics residing in economically disadvantaged communities, prison looms as a surrogate social institution that inflicts damaging collateral costs. As Hagan and Dinovitzer (1999, pp. 131–132) have noted, “Imprisonment can swiftly and irreparably alter the social networks and structures to which inmates, and those to whom they are connected, belong. When incarceration is a rare or infrequent event within a social group, the change in social networks caused by imprisonment may be mainly a problem for the individuals involved. When imprisonment becomes more common and widely expected in a social group, the changes in social networks and structures may often become damaging for the group more generally.” Since one in three Black males and one in six Hispanic males can expect to be incarcerated at some point during their lifetime, prison will continue to figure prominently in economically disadvantaged, minority communities. On the other hand, incarceration remains the “rare or infrequent event” among Whites and thus spares them from the damaging costs of prison.

While some have framed the meshing of community and prison in conflict theoretical terms (e.g., Wacquant, 2001), the most common line of research has examined the ways that imprisonment affects human and social capital among the minority residents of neighborhoods characterized by high crime rates. Although incarceration benefits communities by separating criminals from law-abiding citizens, it also produces negative consequences by damaging primary relationships (Clear, Rose, & Ryder, 2001; Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Rose & Clear, 1998, 2004). Interpersonal relationships are important sources of informal social controls that can insulate individuals from risk factors that are conducive to crime (Sampson & Laub, 1993). In short, one’s status as prisoner damages one’s status as family member and community resident.

There is, however, another important component of the prison-community/social capital relationship. Most inmates are short-term prisoners (Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Travis, 2000), thus communities affected by concentrated incarceration also experience disproportionately high numbers of ex-convicts returning to the community. Prisoner reentry can have a two-pronged negative effect of certain communities. First, offenders released from prison often recidivate, rendering their communities even more unsafe (Clear, Rose, Waring, & Scully, 2003; Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Travis, 2000). Second, the sudden reemergence of active criminal offenders bolsters negative sources of human and social capital or “criminal capital” (Reisig, Holtfreter, & Morash, 2002) and further damage the communities where criminal defendants reside.

Race, ethnicity, and prison violence

Investigators have produced mixed findings about the effects of race and ethnicity on inmate violence. On one hand, race and ethnicity have been found to be unrelated to inmate misconduct. For example, Camp, Gaes, Langan, and Saylor (2003) used the entire federal prisoner population (N = 121,051) to examine individual- and aggregate-level predictors of seven varieties of inmate misconduct such as violence, drug offending, and property misconduct. Overall, they found that most direct racial, ethnic, and citizenship measures were not significantly related to inmate misconduct with the exception of inmates who were Mexican Nationals. Similarly, with a sample of nearly 4,000 males released from the California Youth Authority, MacDonald (1999) examined correlates of violent and drug misconduct in juvenile detention centers and found that race and ethnicity were not significantly related to prison misconduct among White, Black, and Hispanic inmates. Additional null effects have been produced using disparate samples (e.g., Finn, 1995; Hewitt, Poole, & Regoli, 1984; Paterline & Petersen, 1999; Wright, 1989) suggesting that race and ethnicity are not meaningful predictors of inmate violence.

On the other hand, a larger literature has documented that inmates from racial and ethnic minority groups were significantly more violent inmates than Whites. For example, using a nationally representative sample derived from the U.S. Department of Justice’s Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities, Huebner (2003) found that African American inmates were significantly more likely than White or Hispanic inmates to not only assault staff but also victimize other inmates. Moreover, minority inmates have been found to be significantly more likely

than White inmates to engage in assorted forms of prison misconduct using data from New York, Washington, and Vermont (Wooldredge, Griffin, & Pratt, 2001), New York (Flanagan, 1983), North Carolina (Craddock, 1996), Missouri (Sorensen, Wrinkle, & Gutierrez, 1998), Ohio (Cao et al., 1997; Myers & Levy, 1978), national samples (Goetting & Howsen, 1986), and non-specific regional samples from the southwestern United States (Wooldredge, 1994).

Two additional studies are especially noteworthy because of the scope and richness of their samples. Harer and Steffensmeier (1996) used two samples of approximately 25,000 inmates selected from fifty-eight facilities in the federal Bureau of Prisons to explore racial differences in prison violence and prison drug use. Their statistical models contained twenty-five control variables that encompassed many known deprivation- and importation-based correlates of inmate misconduct, including community background. Overall, they found that Black inmates were more than twice as violent as White inmates, but that White inmates were nearly twice as involved in alcohol and drug misconduct as Black inmates. Harer and Steffensmeier (1996) concluded that significant subcultural differences existed between Whites and Blacks that explain their differential involvement in violence in both the community and prison. Gaes et al. (2002) recently conducted an even more methodologically sophisticated study of inmate violence using the entire male federal inmate population, a sample that exceeded 82,000 cases. Due to the magnitude of the study group, Gaes et al. (2002) were able to disaggregate the effects of race, ethnicity, citizenship, and prison gang, often an analog of race, on various forms of inmate misconduct. Several important findings emerged. First, in regard to citizenship, inmates who were Mexican Nationals were significantly more involved in violent and serious, violent infractions but negatively involved in drug infractions. Columbian Nationals were significantly less involved in violent, drug, and total offending. Second, regardless of nationality, citizenship, or country of origin, Hispanics were more violent prisoners than non-Hispanics. Thus, ethnicity appeared to be a powerful correlate of prisoner violence. Third, the effects of race on prison misconduct were inconsistent. Federal inmates of Asian descent were less likely than other federal prisoners to engage in serious violent and drug misconduct. African American inmates committed significantly more acts of total and violent infractions, but fewer acts of drug misconduct, the latter finding supported Harer and Steffensmeier (1996). Inmates of Native American descent engaged in more acts of prison violence and serious prison violence than non-Indian inmates. Finally, analysis of twenty-seven

gangs indicated that all prison gangs organized by race and ethnicity posed significant risks of violence and misconduct in the federal system. In other words, gang-affiliated inmates, whether they were White, Black, Asian, or Hispanic, were among the most problematic inmate groups.

Research purpose

The preponderance of research on inmate violence used state prisoner data and generally limited its analyses to White and Black inmates. Recent research (Camp et al., 2003; Gaes et al., 2002) that included more racial and ethnic groups employed federal prisoner data. Using a racially and ethnically heterogeneous sample of state prisoners, the current study sought to broaden the empirical understanding of inmate violence by exploring these correlates net the effects of other known correlates of prisoner misconduct.

Methods

Sample and data

Data were derived from publicly available information recorded by the offender classification system within the department of corrections of a large state located in the southwestern United States. The purpose of the offender classification system was to provide an appropriate classification and institutional placement to each inmate who was committed to correctional supervision by the criminal courts. To accomplish this, an objective administrative classification system quantified each inmate according to his or her social background, criminal history, substance abuse history, and related demographic information. Each area was scored within a risk range between 1 = very low risk, 2 = low risk, 3 = moderate risk, 4 = high risk, and 5 = very high risk. Finally and most pertinent to the current study, the classification system compiled an official disciplinary report chronicling the violations committed while offenders were in state custody.

In early 2001, a probability sample of 1005 inmates was randomly chosen from a population of 20,000 inmates incarcerated within the state's penal institutions. Of the inmates selected from the sampling frame, 83 percent ($n = 831$) were male and 17 percent ($n = 174$) were female. The sample was diverse by race, ethnicity, and citizenship status. A plurality of inmates or 46 percent were White ($n = 460$), 29 percent were Hispanic ($n = 294$), 16 percent were Black ($n = 160$), nearly 7 percent were Native American ($n = 66$), and 2 percent

were of Asian descent ($n = 25$). Ninety percent ($n = 901$) of the inmates were citizens of the United States, and the remaining 10 percent ($n = 104$) were foreign nationals. Of the foreign nationals, 73 percent ($n = 76$) were Mexican Nationals. The demographic parameters for the state correctional population were 45 percent White, 24 percent Hispanic, 15 percent Black, 5 percent Native American, and 1 percent Asian. The average inmate age was 33.2 years with standard deviation of 11.2 years and range of sixteen to seventy-eight years.

Variables and measurement

Race, ethnicity, and citizenship were used to assess the race-specific involvement in prison violence and dichotomous variables (no = 0, yes = 1) were created for Whites, Hispanics, African Americans, Native American, and Asian Americans. Whites served as the omitted reference group. Prior research indicated that foreign nationals were more violent than inmates who were American citizens (e.g., Camp et al., 2003; Gaes et al., 2002), thus, another dummy variable measured whether the inmate was an American citizen or foreign national (foreign national = 0, United States citizen = 1).

Age has consistently been found to be inversely related to prison misconduct and violence with younger inmates (late adolescents and early adult) posing significantly more problems than inmates who are older than approximately age thirty (Camp et al., 2003; Craddock, 1996; DeLisi, 2003; Flanagan, 1982, 1983; Goetting & Howsen, 1986; McCorkle, 1995; Simon, 1993; Sorensen et al., 1998). Age was coded as a ratio-level variable ranging from sixteen to seventy-eight.

Criminal history—in part, the importation model has maintained its theoretical relevance because of the robust effects of criminal history variables on inmate violence. An assortment of studies had found that inmates with more extensive arrest records, history of violence, gang involvement, and prior prison history tended to be the most violent and difficult-to-manage inmates (Craddock, 1996; DeLisi, Berg, & Hochstetler, 2004; DeLisi et al., 2003; Gaes et al., 2002; Goetting & Howsen, 1986; McCorkle, 1995; Myers & Levy, 1978; Schrag, 1954; Simon, 1993; Wooldredge, 1991, 1994). Risk scores based on substance abuse history ($M = 2$, $SD = .76$), offense severity ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.01$), violence history ($M = 1.57$, $SD = .87$), confinement history ($M = 1.72$, $SD = .83$), street gang history ($M = 1.22$, $SD = .60$), and security threat group history ($M = 1.96$, $SD = .22$) were used to operationalize criminal history.

Social demographics—involvement in the conventional social institutions of family, school, and work is an

important protective factor from crime and criminal justice system involvement (Hirschi, 1969; Pettit & Western, 2004; Wheeler, 1961). As such, inmates with weak attachments to social institutions tend to be more violent and problematic for prison order than inmates with greater social support (Cao et al., 1997; Flanagan, 1982; Jiang & Fisher-Giorlando, 2002; McCorkle, 1995; Myers & Levy, 1978; Reisig & Lee, 2000; Walters, 2003; Wheeler, 1961; Wright, 1991). Risk scores based on community ties/residency ($M = 1.31$, $SD = .66$), vocational background ($M = 3.39$, $SD = .85$), and educational background ($M = 2.53$, $SD = .75$) were used to operationalize social demographic background.

Penologists have produced discrepant findings about the relationship between time served, sentence length, and inmate violence. Some have found that short-term inmates are more problematic (Camp et al., 2003; Wright, 1991; Zamble, 1992) while others have found that long-term inmates are more prone to misconduct (Craddock, 1996; Flanagan, 1981a; Myers & Levy, 1978). Furthermore, there is evidence that inmates engage in misconduct initially upon confinement and then become more pliant (see Cao et al., 1997; Flanagan, 1981b; Zamble, 1992). To control for time served behind bars, a risk factor for time served ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.15$) was also specified.

Dependent variable—prison violence was operationalized by summing the incidence or counts of the five most serious forms of prison misconduct: rioting, hostage taking, homicide, rape, and aggravated assault ($M = .21$, $SD = .73$, Range = 0–10). Aggravated assault was defined as any interpersonal assault, with or without a weapon that resulted in serious bodily injury requiring medical treatment. Of these offenses, prison rape is the most susceptible to measurement error and criminologists have produced conflicting evidence about its prevalence (Beck & Hughes, 2005; Eigenberg, 2000a, 2000b; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 2000). Separate specifications with rape omitted from the dependent variable did not meaningfully affect the results, perhaps because only four inmates in the sample were cited for rape.

Analytical procedure

Incidents of violent prison misconduct are count data. For a variety of reasons, count data are not properly modeled using ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression because they assume only integer values, are bound by zero, are highly skewed, and have heteroskedastic error terms. These conditions suggest that Poisson regression is needed, however, goodness-of-fit of preliminary

Poisson regression models indicated a poor fit of the data due to overdispersion in the dependent variable where the variances exceeded the means (Dean & Lawless, 1989; Zorn, 1998). Thus, negative binomial regression was used.

Separate negative binomial regression models were created for male and female inmates for substantive reasons. Although male inmates have been found to be significantly more violent and antisocial than female inmates (Craddock, 1996; Farr, 2000; Goetting & Howsen, 1983; Harer & Langan, 2001), there is evidence that correctional staff may view female inmates as more demanding, annoying, and challenging inmates to supervise (see Farr, 2000). Consequently, female inmates may be subject to stricter social control than male inmates that could result in inflated official misconduct reports among female offenders (McClellan, 1994; McCorkle, 1995; Sargent, 1984).¹ Descriptive statistics of prison violence for all inmate groups were also provided.

Findings

As shown in Table 1, various inmate groups were differentially involved in prison violence and several trends could be gleaned from the results. First, for all racial and ethnic groups, male inmates averaged more infractions than female inmates. In the same way, male inmates demonstrated greater variability in prison violence demonstrated by their wider range of infraction

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for prison violence

| | Males (n = 831) | Females (n = 174) |
|-------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | Mean, SD, range, (n) | Mean, SD, range, (n) |
| Whites | 0.13, 0.55, | 0.09, 0.58, |
| (U.S., n = 456) | 0–7, (n = 382) | 0–4, (n = 74) |
| Whites (foreign, n = 4) | 0, (n = 4) | None, (n = 0) |
| Hispanics | 0.47, 1.13, | 0.09, 0.30, |
| (U.S., n = 218) | 0–10, (n = 165) | 0–1, (n = 53) |
| Hispanics | 0.39, 1.09, 0–8, | 0, (n = 10) |
| (foreign, n = 76) | (n = 66) | |
| Blacks | 0.22, 0.64, | 0.11, 0.32, |
| (U.S., n = 153) | 0–5, (n = 134) | 0–1, (n = 19) |
| Blacks | 0.17, 0.41, 0–1, | 0, (n = 1) |
| (foreign, n = 7) | (n = 6) | |
| American Indians | 0.28, 0.76, 0–3, | 0.19, 0.54, |
| (n = 66) | (n = 50) | 0–2, (n = 16) |
| American Indians | None, (n = 0) | None, (n = 0) |
| (foreign) | | |
| Asians | 0, (n = 7) | 0, (n = 1) |
| (U.S., n = 8) | | |
| Asians | 0, (n = 17) | None, (n = 0) |
| (foreign, n = 17) | | |

Table 2
Negative binomial regression model for male inmate violence

| Variable | b | z | p |
|-----------------------|----------------------|------|------|
| Black | .078 | 0.23 | .821 |
| Hispanic | 1.23 | 4.48 | .000 |
| Native American | 1.13 | 2.50 | .012 |
| Asian | — | | |
| Citizenship | -.352 | 0.94 | .347 |
| Age | -.018 | 1.42 | .155 |
| Substance abuse | .013 | 0.09 | .926 |
| Residency | .380 | 2.75 | .006 |
| Offense severity | -.068 | 0.46 | .642 |
| Violence history | .379 | 2.90 | .004 |
| Confinement history | .253 | 1.70 | .088 |
| Time served | .416 | 3.02 | .002 |
| Education | .320 | 2.04 | .041 |
| Security threat group | .237 | 0.36 | .722 |
| Street gang | -.069 | 0.41 | .681 |
| Vocation history | .053 | 0.34 | .735 |
| Constant | -5.73 | 3.72 | .000 |
| Model χ^2 | 86.69 ($p = .000$) | | |
| Pseudo R2 | .109 | | |

counts. Male inmates were those with the greatest number of serious infractions. Second, inmates who were American citizens accrued more serious infractions than foreign nationals across racial and ethnic groups. Third, Asian inmates, regardless of nationality or gender, were never officially cited for involvement in prison violence. Other groups with zero involvement in prison violence were White, foreign national males; Hispanic, foreign national females; and Black, foreign national females. By definition, Native Americans were only United States citizens and there were also no White, foreign national female inmates and Asian, foreign national female inmates. Fourth, Hispanic males amassed two to four times as many infractions for prison violence than other male inmate groups. Similarly, the two most violent inmate groups were U.S. and foreign national Hispanic males. Finally, American Indian female inmates accumulated more violent infractions than two male inmate groups, White American inmates and Black foreign nationals.

As shown in Table 2, racial and ethnic groups were differentially involved in serious prison violence among males. Compared to the White reference group, African American male inmates were no more or less involved in official forms of violent misconduct (estimate = .078, $z = 0.23$, $p = .821$). The dichotomous term for Asian male inmates was dropped from the model because it was a constant—all inmates had zero involvement in prison violence. The remaining racial and ethnic groups were significantly involved in prison violence. Hispanic males (estimate = 1.23, $z = 4.48$, $p = .000$) were the

strongest predictor of prison violence followed by Native American males (estimate = 1.13, $z = 2.50$, $p = .012$). Citizenship, whether an inmate was a United States or foreign national, was not predictive of prison violence (estimate = -.352, $z = 0.94$, $p = .347$). Among the criminal history variables and social demographic controls, five significant effects emerged. Male inmates with less familial and social support were more likely to engage in prison violence than males with greater social ties (estimate = .380, $z = 2.75$, $p = .006$). Inmates with more extensive histories of violence predictably were more likely than other inmates to commit violent misconduct (estimate = .379, $z = 2.90$, $p = .004$), as were offenders with multiple prior stints in prison (estimate = .253, $z = 1.70$, $p = .088$). Males with more time served (estimate = .416, $z = 3.02$, $p = .002$) and who had less education (estimate = .320, $z = 2.04$, $p = .041$) also engaged in more prison violence than short-term and better educated inmates. Age, substance abuse risk, offense severity, street and prison gang risk, and vocational risk were not significantly related to prison violence.

As shown in Table 3, some different effects emerged for female inmates. African American (estimate = 2.56, $z = 2.13$, $p = .033$) and Native American (estimate = 2.09, $z = 2.08$, $p = .038$) status were significantly predictive of official involvement in prison violence. Hispanic and citizenship statuses were not significantly related to prison violence. With only one female inmate with Asian heritage, the dummy term for that racial category was dropped from the model. Effects for the

Table 3
Negative binomial regression model for female inmate violence

| Variable | b | z | p |
|-----------------------|----------------------|------|------|
| Black | 2.56 | 2.13 | .033 |
| Hispanic | .900 | 0.89 | .372 |
| Native American | 2.09 | 2.08 | .038 |
| Asian | — | | |
| Citizenship | -17.08 | 0.00 | .999 |
| Age | -.031 | 0.77 | .440 |
| Substance abuse | -.614 | 0.75 | .454 |
| Residency | — | | |
| Offense severity | -1.91 | 2.99 | .003 |
| Violence history | -1.60 | 1.56 | .119 |
| Confinement history | 1.71 | 2.52 | .012 |
| Time served | 2.25 | 3.34 | .001 |
| Education | 1.86 | 2.09 | .037 |
| Security threat group | 5.04 | 3.29 | .001 |
| Street gang | -12.88 | 0.01 | .996 |
| Vocation history | .189 | 0.38 | .703 |
| Constant | -5.34 | 0.00 | .998 |
| Model χ^2 | 40.28 ($p = .001$) | | |
| Pseudo R2 | .421 | | |

remaining variables suggested that the correlates of inmate violence varied by gender. For example, offense severity was significantly related to prison violence among women but in an unexpected direction. Female inmates incarcerated for *less* serious felonies were more likely to commit prison violence than women imprisoned for more serious crimes (estimate = -1.91 , $z = 2.99$, $p = .003$). Female inmates with prior commitments to prison were more violent than their less recidivistic peers (estimate = 1.71 , $z = 2.52$, $p = .012$). Women who had spent long periods behind bars (estimate = 2.25 , $z = 3.34$, $p = .001$), had lower educational attainment (estimate = 1.86 , $z = 2.09$, $p = .037$), and were affiliated with security threat groups or prison gangs (estimate = 5.04 , $z = 3.29$, $p = .001$) amassed more tickets for serious prison violence than other female inmates. Age, substance abuse risk, violence history risk, street gang risk, and vocational risk were not predictive of prison violence. Finally, all female inmates were rated as the lowest risk for residency/social ties, thus the measure was dropped from the model because of collinearity.

Discussion and conclusion

This study empirically examined the effects of race, ethnicity, and citizenship on serious forms of prison violence while controlling for a variety of known correlates of institutional misconduct. Unlike much prior research that narrowly focused on White and Black inmates, the current study group was racially and ethnically heterogeneous and the analyses, disaggregated by gender, suggested that the effects of racial variables on prison violence were more complex than previously thought. In fact, far from being a White–Black issue, the most violent inmates were Hispanics and Native Americans among males and African Americans and Native Americans among females. That Hispanics and American Indians were among the most violent inmates was concordant with prior research (e.g., Camp et al., 2003; Gaes et al., 2002; Wooldredge, 1994). With zero infractions for official misconduct, Asian inmates were the least violent inmate group (also see Gaes et al., 2002, p. 375). Citizenship, whether an inmate was a United States citizen or foreign national or alien, was not predictive of prison violence among male or female inmates. Although the current research goal was quite modest, it contributed to an empirical base for an increasingly important research area, the intersections between criminal defendants, their racial and ethnic characteristics, and their effects on prison violence in an era of increasing fluidity between prison and community.

In a classic article, Tittle and Tittle (1964, p. 221) concluded that “The prison code does appear to be at least in part an institutional product expressive of the norms of a prisoner social organization, which serves to help inmates overcome the deprivations of prison living. Evidence also confirms that individual ties to the outside community, as well as individual expectations of possible legitimate rehabilitation, affect the solidarity of that prison social organization.” Thus for some time, penologists have recognized that individual-level and community-level variables were complementarily important explanations of inmate behavior. Today, this idea must be taken a step further given the increased visibility of prison among various racial groups living in concentrated disadvantage in the United States. Simply put, many phenomena that occur in prison, including inmate violence, are likely no longer limited to prison. The majority of inmates will be released from prison (Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Travis, 2000), thus, many of the problems that exist inside prisons will likely be exported back to the community. Within the context of the current findings, the most violent inmates were Hispanics and Native Americans, thus their community-of-origin faces the difficult challenge of reintegrating offenders so antisocial that they were noteworthy for their violent behavior even while imprisoned (Clear et al., 2003; Reisig et al., 2002).

An important potential limitation of the current study was its reliance on official misconduct reports that have been found to be susceptible to the racial biases and prejudices of correctional officers (Light, 1990; Poole & Regoli, 1980b; Van Voorhis, 1994; cf. Hewitt et al., 1984) which inflate estimates of minority inmates’ involvement in prison violence. Admittedly, it is unknown if a similar racial or ethnic bias contaminated the current results. There is reason to believe, however, that the current dependent variable was not necessarily prone to various sources of measurement error. For instance, Van Voorhis (1994, p. 704) assessed that “Most disciplinary infractions are for insubordination. Thus studies that combine all disciplinary infractions into a single indicator may be studying mostly insubordinate behaviors.” None of the five forms of prison violence contained in the summary measure related to insubordination. Moreover, given their high offense seriousness, the very nature of these crimes also did not grant correctional officers much latitude to exercise discretion. Of course, the use of multiple data sources is needed to fully answer the validity concerns centering on official records of crime (Hewitt et al., 1984; Light, 1990).

Put another way, there is every reason to believe that the current racial and ethnic effects were not spurious, but instead reflected real differences in criminal violence across racial groups (Goetting & Howsen, 1986; Harer & Steffensmeier, 1996; Rennison, 2001). If inmate violence is partly an extension of violence that exists in the community, then it should be expected that there would be significant differences in prison violence between racial groups. For example, Native Americans were significantly involved in prison violence among male and female inmates in the current study. Nationally, American Indians experience violent criminal victimization at twice the rate of other racial and ethnic groups (Greenfeld & Smith, 1999). Similarly, according to estimates from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), both Hispanics (Rennison, 2002) and African Americans (Fox & Zawitz, 2003) are significantly more likely than other racial groups to be the perpetrators and victims of violent crime. For example, Blacks are six times more likely than Whites to be murder victims and seven times more likely than Whites to commit murder (Fox & Zawitz, 2003). Similar imbalances exist across racial and ethnic groups for weapons use and weapons victimization (Perkins, 2003).

Unlike prior research (Gaes et al., 2002), citizenship was unrelated to prison violence among the current sample. It is possible that these discrepant findings emerged because Gaes and his colleagues used data derived from federal prisoners, whereas the current effort employed data from state prisoners. More research is needed to explore whether citizenship, nationality, or country of origin is meaningfully related to inmate violence among state prisoners. Unfortunately, the current study did not employ interaction variables (e.g., race or ethnicity by citizenship status) due to insufficient cell sizes. Future researchers should strive to sample adequate numbers of racial, ethnic, citizenship, and gender status groups to permit such analyses. This is important because citizenship is likely to become more salient to corrections and correctional research because of the growth of the nonresident inmate population. One in five federal prisoners is a noncitizen and foreign nationals constitute more than 10 percent of the prison populations in California and New York (Harrison & Karberg, 2004). Noncitizen inmates are an increasing component of the growing diversity of the correctional population.

Harer and Steffensmeier (1996) found that Black males were the most violent inmates and attributed these differences to the Black subculture of violence. Other researchers (DeLisi, 2001; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998), however, found that African Americans were less tolerant of violence than Whites. In fact, Sampson and

Bartusch (1998, p. 800) found that Blacks displayed elevated levels of legal cynicism and dissatisfaction with the police and overall “cognitive landscapes” where crime and criminal justice intrusion were expected. Thus, unlike Harer and Steffensmeier, the current authors believe that racial and ethnic differences in inmate violence should be understood in raw, empirical terms rather than through imputed cultural terms. Unfortunately, prison sits as a forbidding social institution in the lives of an increasing number of Americans and the specter of going to prison has become normative for some, namely young, minority males. As a result, entire communities are placed in a recursive cycle of violence. At the front end, prison disrupts peoples’ involvement in conventional social institutions while itself becoming a phase in their life course. While confined, some inmates continue to engage in serious forms of criminal violence that render prison an unstable and unsafe place. On the back end, fully 95 percent of state prisoners will be released at some point. Within three years, nearly 70 percent will be re-arrested and more than half will be returned to prison (Hughes & Wilson, 2004). As the correctional population grows more diverse and constituted by violent offenders, inmate violence will continue to be a pressing and important sociological and social concern.

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Note

1. Supplemental diagnostic tests were conducted to ensure that the variable effects did not differ between the models for male and female inmates. To test for equality of regression coefficients, the formula $Z = (b_1 - b_2) / [\text{square root } SEb_1^2 + SEb_2^2]$ was used (Clogg, Petkova, & Haritou, 1995; Paternoster, Brame, Mazerolle, & Piquero, 1998). Corresponding Z-scores for the study variables were Black ($z = -0.56$), Hispanic ($z = 0.34$), Native American ($z = -0.98$), Asian ($z = -0.00$), citizenship ($z = -0.00$), age ($z = -0.00$), substance abuse ($z = 0.35$), residency ($z = -0.00$), offense severity ($z = 4.09$), violence history ($z = -1.29$), confinement history ($z = -2.14$), time served ($z = -2.69$), education ($z = -.167$), security threat group ($z = -3.15$), street gang ($z = 25.66$), and vocation history ($z = -0.11$). The effects were similar for all racial, ethnic, and citizenship variables as well as social demographics. Significant differences existed for offense severity, confinement history, time served, security threat group, and street gang suggesting that criminality measures were significantly more pronounced for female inmates than male inmates. Furthermore, the female model had an explained variance (R^2) four-times greater than the male model. Other researchers (e.g., DeLisi, 2005; Nagin & Paternoster, 2000) also found that criminality based risk factors explained more variation

among samples that demonstrated lower criminality. This was likely the case here since female inmates had lower involvement than male inmates for every racial and ethnic group.

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