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### Leathers and Rolexes: The Symbolism and Values of the Motorcycle Club

James F. Quinn<sup>a</sup> & Craig J. Forsyth<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of North Texas, Denton, Texas, USA

<sup>b</sup> University of Louisiana, Lafayette, Lafayette, Louisiana, USA

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# leathers and rolexs: the symbolism and values of the motorcycle club

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**James F. Quinn**

*University of North Texas, Denton,  
Texas, USA*

**Craig J. Forsyth**

*University of Louisiana, Lafayette, Lafayette,  
Louisiana, USA*

The article describes the spectrum of motorcycling groups before focusing on the symbolism and values of modern outlaws or one percenters. Factors unique to the edgework of motorcycling are linked to the appearance and demeanor of bikers and their most extreme expression of American society's shadow side among one percenters. The persona of the largest one percent clubs are outlined using the aphorisms and symbols of the subculture. The values reflected in these symbols are linked to those of the larger society as is the evolution of the subculture. Also discussed are the nature of interclub alliances and rivalries.

## INTRODUCTION

One percent or outlaw motorcycle clubs have been explored by ethnographers (e.g., Montgomery 1977; Hopper and Moore 1990; Wolf 1991; Quinn 2001; Veno 2003, 2007),

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Address correspondence to James F. Quinn, Ph.D., University of North Texas, Addictions Program, P.O. Box 311456, Denton, TX 76203, USA. E-mail: jqquinn@unt.edu

police officials (e.g., Davis 1982; McGuire 1986; Tretheway and Katz 1998; Haut 1999; Smith 2002; Queen 2005), current and former members (Reynolds 1967; Barger 2000; Winterhalder 2005), and journalists (e.g., Thompson 1966; Lavigne 1995, 1997, 2000; Sher and Marsden 2003). These clubs have been characterized as secular sects (Watson 1982), façades for organized crime (Davis 1982; McGuire 1986; Tretheway and Katz 1998; Haut 1999; Barker 2005, 2007), collections of psychopathic misfits (McGuire 1986; McDermott 2006), and fraternal organizations (Barger 2000). Scholars have also explored the power of their rituals (Hopper and Moore 1983) and their treatment of women (Hopper and Moore 1990).

The spirit of the one percenter nonetheless dominates the majority of what police characterize as "outlaw motorcycle gangs" (OMGs), especially with regard to the bikers' penchant for crime (e.g. McGuire 1986:68; Barker 2004:37). The term OMG is avoided here, because (1) the Outlaws are a specific one percent club and (2) the term "gang" has distinctive definitions in law and social science that accurately describe only certain aspects of these clubs.

This article describes the range of motorcycling organizations and the experiential aspects of motorcycling before focusing on the symbolism of one percent clubs. Underlying the discussion is the irony that as one percenters attained wealth and tried to legitimize their organizations, many respectable American men bought Harleys and donned leathers. These "rich urban bikers" (RUBS) (Tretheway and Katz 1998:59) are sometimes derided as "rolex" riders by more experienced motorcyclists (Thompson 2009).

## METHODOLOGY

The first author has maintained contacts within the one percent subculture since the 1970s. The second author has spent three decades studying deviant behavior and is familiar with the saloon society in which the one percent subculture originated. We have distilled our conversations with club members, associates, and law enforcement personnel for insights into club values and symbols and their relationship with the mainstream. The insights of other writers are cited, those acquired through informants are not. These contacts

add unique insights to the published literature and are critical in organizing and interpreting it (Quinn and Forsyth 2007).

One percent clubs constitute secret societies with a reputation for violence that makes direct contact challenging. Information that might reveal new developments (e.g., planned territorial expansion) or criminality are as difficult to extract from club members as the details of current investigations are to obtain from law enforcement. Club members stress the fraternal aspects of these clubs, in part because it is the core of their lives. Only facts that are already known or "safe" in terms of legal liability and rivals' information-gathering efforts are easily procured. Police reveal only what is in the public record and their own beliefs about old investigations. Their legal responsibilities rivet their attention to the one percenters' criminality. The social distance between bikers and police is as enormous as their animosity for one another. Police accounts thus emphasize the most savage crimes committed by these bikers as does the testimony of former bikers who become informants. Most of the major journalistic sources (e.g., Lavigne 1995, 1997, 2000; Sher and Marsden 2003) rely mainly on police and their informants as do many recent academic sources (Grascia 2004; McDermott 2006; Barker 2004).

Each club and chapter is distinct and the subculture has moved from one largely dominated by countercultural gang members (purists) to a more subcultural focus in which older values share the stage with rational profiteering (entrepreneurs) and public relations (Quinn and Forsyth 2007). A valid analysis requires critical examination of each source in the context of its biases, thus merging aspects of ethnography with qualitative content analysis. Quantitative analyses are unlikely to possess sufficient validity for scholarship due to the biases of potential sources. One percenters are a very small fraction of organized motorcyclists and a basic understanding of the latter is required to place these clubs in context.

## **THE SPECTRUM OF MOTORCYCLING ORGANIZATIONS**

A "biker" is anyone who rides a motorcycle, but for most Americans the term suggests a tattooed, leather clad,

barroom brawling, criminal: in other words, a one percenter. One percenters are always club members: the distinctive "1%" symbol surrounded by a diamond is granted by only a few clubs and is restricted to men accepted into "full patch" membership. The one percent denotation applies only to the most dedicated and anti-social club bikers (Quinn 2001). The most powerful of these clubs are the Hells Angels (HA or HAMC), Bandidos, Mongols, Outlaws, and Pagans but the Sons of Silence, Vagos, Iron Horsemen, and Warlocks are also significant players in the subculture.

The advent of RUBs, such as talk show host Jay Leno, during the 1990s was based partly on the image created by these clubs. Many new Harley riders adopted aspects of the biker imagery set by club riders such as the display of Harley-Davidson logos in a manner reminiscent of club colors. This surge of interest in Harleys led to the debut of several cable TV shows focused on building custom bikes for rolex riders. Many of these new bikers created or joined organizations like the Harley Owners Groups (HOGs), which meet for group rides and social events. The Gold Wing Road Riders Association's (GWRRA) motto, "Friends of Fun, Safety and Knowledge" (GWRRA 2008), describes the values of its Honda riders. These groups are best described as associations, rather than clubs. Owning a certain type of bike is the central, if not sole, prerequisite for membership. Obligations to the group are minimal, and participation in the group is rarely the main theme of a member's life.

Motorcycle clubs (MCs) have stricter and more idiosyncratic membership criteria; some are hierarchically organized, and a few totally dominate their members' lives. Although neither a club nor association, Bikers Against Child Abuse (BACA) is also noteworthy. BACA uses biker imagery to support victims of child abuse as their cases progress through the courts. A few of its members were, nonetheless, implicated in a recent murder for hire case (Emily 2008).

Clubs may be loosely divided into five categories based on general adherence to one percenter norms. Riding clubs are much like associations with little or no criminal activity and fairly loose membership standards. They are fraternal organizations for riding enthusiasts. Some are composed of police officers and firefighters, members of others range from professional to blue collar. Some riding clubs have members

with minor criminal involvements, such as brawling or street-level drug sales, but most avoid crime. Thus, riding clubs form a broad continuum from strict conformity to tolerance of moderately serious crime.

One percent support clubs have minor to moderate criminal involvements and maintain a relationship with a larger club to protect them from other large clubs and bolster their reputation. Support clubs usually display the colors (e.g., red and gold for Bandidos), but not the insignia, of the one percent group with which they are affiliated. They claim status as part of, for example, the "Bandido Nation" or "red and gold world" (Bandidos MC 2008) (see Table 1). Support clubs often began as independent groups that gradually developed an affiliation with a large one percent group. Support club activities facilitate interaction between these groups and one percenters while promoting the idea of motorcycle clubs as fraternal organizations. They are often involved in the legitimate events hosted by one percenters such as drag races, bike shows, and charity events.

One percent "Satellite clubs" are created and controlled by members of larger clubs as proving grounds for prospective members. Their members perform many of the most dangerous tasks important to the larger club and its members' criminal enterprises as they are screened for one percent membership (Éxpatica News 2004). For example, HAMC satellite members built and placed most of the explosive devices in the Quebec war between the HA and Bandidos (Sher and Marsden 2003). Finally, at the highest level of club and criminal involvement are the one percent clubs themselves. Danner and Silverman's (1986) description of the criminal histories of bikers imprisoned in Virginia underscores the idea that violence is so endemic among 1 percenters that it statistically distinguished bikers from other inmates. That study is dated, however, and may over-represent violence among modern bikers. Eight-three percent of the known Canadian HA members have a criminal record, with over half of the convictions involving drugs, violence, and weapons (RCMP 1999:19). Criminality is not universal among one percenters, however. Wrestler turned politician, Jessie Ventura, was a full patch Mongol while serving as a Navy SEAL (Queen 2005) and Chuck Zito, star of HBO's "OZ" is a member of the Manhattan HAMC (RCMP

**TABLE 1** The Five Largest One Percent Clubs

Club and date of origin	Colors	Emblem	North American charters *indicates state of origin	World Charters
Bandidos 1969	Red & gold	Mexican bandit	Alabama (4), Arkansas (2), Colorado (4), Hawaii (1), Louisiana (5), Mississippi (2), Montana (2), New Mexico (12), Oklahoma (3), Nevada (2), South Dakota (4), Texas* (34), Utah (1), Washington (14), Wyoming (1) CANADA: Ontario (?), Manitoba (1?)	SCANDINAVIA: Denmark (12), Finland (4), Norway (5), Sweden (6), EUROPE: Germany (39), Belgium (2), France (8), Germany (40), Italy (5), AUSTRALASIA: (administered with European Charters) Australia (21), Singapore (1), Thailand (5), Malaysia (1)
Hells Angels 1948	Red & white Death's head head (Each chapter designs its own version)	Death's head (winged skull)	Alaska (2), Arizona (6), Colorado (1), California (19)*, Connecticut (3), Kentucky (1), Illinois (3), Indiana (1), Maryland (2), Massachusetts (5), Maine (2), Ohio (2), Michigan (1), Minnesota (1), New Hampshire (2), Nevada (3), New York (5), Nebraska (1), North Carolina (4), Pennsylvania (2), Rhode Island (1), South Carolina (3)	SCANDINAVIA: Denmark (10), Finland (4), Norway (6), Sweden (7) EUROPE: Belgium (5), Bohemia (Czech. Rep. & Slovakia) (2), Croatia (1), England (16), France (5), Greece (2), Germany (31), Holland (8), Italy (9), Liechtenstein (1), Portugal (2), Spain (7), Switzerland (6), Russia (1), Wales (1) AUSTRALASIA: Australia (10), New Zealand (3)

Mongols 1970?	Black & white	Profile of Genghis Khan (on a chopper)	CANADA: Alberta (3), British Columbia (7), Saskatchewan (2), Manitoba (1), Ontario (15), Quebec (5), Arizona (1), California* (49), Colorado (1), Florida (1), Georgia (1), Indiana (1), Illinois (1), Oklahoma (6), Maryland (1), Montana (1), Nevada (5), New York (1) North Carolina (1), CANADA: Ontario (2) Alabama (2), Arkansas (1), Colorado (1), Connecticut (1), Florida (16), Georgia (6), Illinois* (16), Indiana (4), Kentucky (5), Maine (1), Massachusetts (5), Michigan (5), New Hampshire (2), New York (2), North Carolina (5), Ohio (6), Oklahoma (1), Pennsylvania (6), Tennessee (7), Virginia (1), Wisconsin (10) CANADA: Ontario (6), Quebec (1) Virginia, West Virginia, Ohio, Maryland*, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Delaware, Florida	SOUTH AMERICA: Argentina (3), Brazil (5), Chile (1) AFRICA: South Africa (5)  Italy (2)
Outlaws 1935 (per club) &/or 1954 (per other sources)	Black & white	Skull & crossed pistons	SCANDINAVIA: Norway (6), Sweden (2) EUROPE: Belgium (11), England (22), France (4), Germany (34), Ireland (5), Italy (3), Poland (5), Russia (6), Wales (3) AUSTRALASIA: Australia (17), Philippines (1), Thailand (2), Japan (1)	
Pagans 1959	Blue & red	Norse God "Surt" or "Zeutar"	Australia (3)	

1999:58). In general, however, the larger the club, the more extensive the illicit networks of its members.

Both associations and clubs have a small national or global leadership structure that coordinates the activities of semi-autonomous local chapters. Other similarities between one percenters and RUBS are the superficial products of riding a large motorcycle and, perhaps, the RUB desire to emulate the iconography of the modern outlaw.

## **LIFE ON TWO WHEELS**

Mere reliance on a motorcycle for transportation exerts a powerful influence on a person's lifestyle and appearance that is crucial to the desire to be a biker. Wind, sweat, and dust conspire to assure that motorcyclists cannot remain as neat and clean as those in four-wheeled vehicles (derisively labeled cages by one percenters). Weather is also a chronic concern, as bikes slide easily on wet, oily pavement; icy manhole covers are deathtraps for a turning motorcycle; and sand or gravel on intersections can be lethal. Wind and sun burn are chronic sources of discomfort that can be reduced by facial hair. Bikers of all types wear leather because it provides the best protection from injury in falls and accidents, as well as from insects and debris kicked up by other vehicles. People who have never felt the impact of a pebble or raindrop at 70 miles an hour cannot fully appreciate this aspect of a biker's life.

Bikers also have to be somewhat paranoid of other drivers, because of the size differential and visibility problems. Large trucks produce aerodynamic turbulence that can destabilize most bikes at high speed; tankers can create enough suction to pull a lightweight bike toward them. Debris from a truck tire blowout can kill a biker. Worse yet, many drivers feel they can "crowd" a biker when passing because the bike does not "need" the entire breadth of the lane. Others act as though motorcycles can easily come to an instantaneous stop. These are dangerous misperceptions that inspire some bikers to hurl various objects at ignorant drivers in hopes of teaching them to respect motorcyclists. This is also typical of the retaliatory ethos of the one percent subculture—even a minor slight can call forth an annihilative response.

Bikes are less mechanically reliable than cars because their engines are made of lighter materials and therefore vibrate more. They require more maintenance, adjustment and repair, especially when ridden for long distances. Most bikers will stop to assist one another because of the frequency of mechanical problems. Similarly, they often wave at other bikes as they pass. One percenters, however, rarely feel any affinity for citizen-bikers, and rarely assist others unless they are members of a club aligned with their own.

One percenters will occasionally assist stranded motorists when the mood and opportunity strike together. By doing so they demonstrate their mechanical skills, build a positive image of their club or subculture, and enjoy the reaction their presence evokes in citizens (i.e., non-bikers). Four one percenters stopped for a family with an engine problem in the Virginia mountains in 1973. The panicked family dashed up the side of the mountain as the colors-clad bikers pulled to the shoulder. The bikers laughed hysterically as the citizens disappeared into the brush. They fixed the car, started it, and left.

The mechanical quality of bikes (Harleys) has vastly improved since the early days of the subculture. Chain-driven bikes required constant adjustment, but are increasingly rare as belt drive Harleys have come to dominate the market. (The major Japanese brands now use shaft drives, which are all but maintenance free; Harleys use only belts and chains.) The hand-crafted choppers typical of one percenters up until the 1980s generally required kick-starting, which involved exerting a great deal of force on a lever mounted to the crankshaft. A slip of the foot could easily gash the riders' lower leg, so boots and a lot of weight or physical strength were required merely to start these bikes.

Choppers are heavily modified bikes that, when built from miscellaneous parts, are usually stripped of parts not essential to power or steering. Thus, chain guards were rarely left in place on one percenters' bikes prior to the 1990s. If the chain broke, as is common, it could wrap itself around the passengers' right calf. The longer the bike has been running, the hotter the chain, so this almost always left a scar on the ankle or calf. Motorcycle mufflers also heat up very quickly and chopper mufflers were often placed dangerously close to the passenger's feet. Aficionados of the topless bars in the

1970s rightly joked that you could always tell the (one percent) biker women by the scars on their ankles.

## **ROMANCE, POWER, AND RIDING**

Only certain types of people possess a strong desire to ride, and even fewer persist in bad weather and/or for long distances. Many RUBs see their bikes as recreational vehicles, for use mainly on pleasant weekends. This is NOT the case for purist one percenters who pride themselves on riding whenever possible. Along with the raucous sort of men drawn to an "outlaw" lifestyle and communication issues prior to the advent of modern telecommunications, the contingencies of riding led to the autonomy of the local chapter in the early one percent clubs. Each area poses unique challenges that determine the degree to which a motorcycle can feasibly be used as transportation. Some chapters mandate year-round use of bikes to attend meetings, and prohibit the display of colors unless the member is on his bike. Others are more lenient because local climate precludes riding for part of the year.

Riding remains a predominantly masculine activity. This sort of macho demeanor combines with an appearance and wariness shaped by the demands of riding, to create an imagery that is evocative of the one percenter. The combination of vulnerability to weather, road conditions and other vehicles, and the masculine resilience that underlies the pleasure of riding, are major factors in the romantic imagery of the biker. The adversity with which motorcyclists contend leads to a penchant for edgework: the idea that respect for and disproportionate attention to risk taking is integral to the offender's life-world. Edgework can be vital in crystallizing commitment to some types of crime as well as symbolic of resistance to societal power (Lyng 2004). The constant risks engendered by interclub warfare, criminal activities, and bold, if not reckless, motorcycle operation are thus interrelated as methods by which powerful bonds between club members are developed.

The desperado image of the gang member adds a unique bit of American nostalgia as well, with its implications of rugged individualism and violent toughness that are imbued in our national character. RUBS find biker symbolism

attractive because it permits symbolic rebellion or escape from the over scheduled, segmented, and stressful life of the modern professional. The "outlaw" biker represents a shadow side of modern U.S. culture with vestiges of the old west, the anti-hero, and the rugged individualist apparent in its various manifestations.

C.G. Jung (1938:131) described the dangerous, dark, and anti-social "shadow" side of human nature and social organization as relevant to both deviant and legitimate behavior. Bikers represent the shadow side of U.S. society's historic and contemporary realities: the unacknowledged, socially unacceptable, but latently powerful aspects of social institutions and movements that have been synthesized into club life.

One percent clubs grew out of the fascination with cars and motorcycles born of the relative affluence of the 1950s. The rugged individualism of the libertarian anti-hero portrayed in many westerns and police films also contribute heavily to the biker belief system. Prior to the late 1970s, most one percenters lived a hand-to-mouth lifestyle dependent on small time criminal "hustles" and blue collar wages. The beat-hippie subcultures of the 1955-1975 era eschewed the trappings of material wealth and popularized egalitarian camaraderie, and hedonistic sexual and drug activity, providing models for these aspects of biker life even today. The 1970s saw the subculture expand rapidly across North America with a few clubs absorbing smaller ones. In the 1980s the remaining large clubs began working to legitimize their image and undertook various charitable efforts. Much of this activity can be defined as cynical impression management but with entrepreneurialism came maturity and stability that fostered compassion in some one percenters. It was also in the 1980s that clubs' attention turned to international expansion and one percent clubs became firmly entrenched in Europe, Australia, and other areas as they adopted a more exclusive focus on profits and power modeled on transnational corporations (Tretheway and Katz 1998; Quinn 2001; Veno, 2003, 2007). One percenters thus provide a mirror to society that isolates and magnifies the darker aspects of mainstream institutions and trends.

One percent bikers are guided by both the iconography of the collective (gang) and their own idiosyncracies (Montgomery 1977). Club organization provides them with large, ostensibly

trustworthy networks and support while permitting them a great deal of personal freedom. The themes of group loyalty and power, intensified by gang solidarity in the face of social rejection, are key to this image. These themes grew partly from the unique aspects of motorcycling and partly from the "combat" ethos of a unified set of barroom brawlers operating in "saloon society." The large proportion of combat veterans, especially at the inception of the subculture in 1947 and during the Vietnam era, add to lethality of one percenter violence. The violence and lawless hedonism characteristic of one percenters is part of the subculture's "saloon society" heritage.

### **SALOON SOCIETY**

This term was coined by Hunter Thompson (1966) in his seminal expose of the Hells Angels to describe a milieu of various subcultures based in the taverns and nightclubs of urban centers and the roadhouses on their outskirts. This is a violent and hedonistic nether-world on the boundary between conventional and criminal societies; a polyglot world of blue collar workers, adventurous citizens, mobsters, hustlers, and whores. The bars involved are not always overtly threatening, but many of their patrons are capable of murder. There is a raw animalistic, sexual quality to this milieu: The potential for sudden, lethal violence lurks in many of these taverns' restrooms and parking lots, alongside the promise of a promiscuous liaison.

Saloon society traditionally consisted of places where patrons and employees tended to be armed, and no one wanted to involve the police, regardless of what occurred (i.e., knife and gun clubs in which most patrons carry at least a knife and the bartender needs a gun). Social control is thus largely informal and coercive if not overtly violent. In the last twenty years, saloon society has come to include nightclubs and taverns where ordinary people occasionally come to unwind for an evening. Most topless and nude bars are part of this milieu, or at least on its fringes. So are many quiet, blue-collar taverns and fancy nightclubs. Crimes ranging from drug sales and prostitution to murder and extortion are endemic here, although their expression may be subtle or blatant.

The habitués of these establishments are more governed by the law of the street than the formal justice system.

Mobsters and hustlers hang out in these places, as do all variety of social misfits and serious offenders. Bikers are one distinct type that few regulars of this milieu challenge. The mobsters tend to have the most actual power and in many areas are the only members of saloon society who can exert any direct influence over one percenters.

The ease with which violence becomes the normative solution to any affront is a saloon society trait that is often taken to extremes by one percenters. In a setting where self-help social control predominates, demeanor, reputation, and image are the primary means of curtailing violence and assuring safety (Black 1984). Being alert to the potential for sudden violence is critical to survival in this milieu. Sudden attacks resulting from norm violations by those unaccustomed to saloon society (or one percenters) are seen as defense of one's standing, or as preempting anticipated violence. One percenter status usually discourages direct attacks because of the ethic of total annihilative retribution for which one percenters are famous.

Hierarchies are vitally important in saloon society because they organize participants' perceptions of potential contacts and interactions as they confer power. On a practical level, such unspoken hierarchies provide quick insights as to who must receive deference or cautious attention. For example, it is extremely unwise for a male to initiate conversation with a one percenter, especially when he is wearing his colors. (Colors are the vest with name, location, and insignia of the club that is received at initiation into membership. The term also refers to the club insignia, which is often displayed as jewelry or affixed to one's bike. Most clubs also associate two hues with their insignia.) Bikers respect only the hierarchies of their subculture and those of mobsters and police whose coercive power usually exceeds their own. Deference from others is an unspoken expectation that is perceived as a reflection of personal and club power.

Deference to the hierarchies of saloon society and the one percent subculture can be subtle or extreme, but because of their obsession with power, it is almost always enforced by one percenters. The subculture has its own distinct hierarchy based on the club's power, as measured in membership, territory, reputation, and most recently, the entrepreneurial success of its members. Many one percenters are at the hub

of criminal social networks and serve as a reference group for a large set of actors (e.g., wanna-bes, some associates). Thus, saloon society was the launching pad from which many one percenters entered the more sophisticated underworld of organized crime. Drug distribution, extortion, prostitution, and theft rings are the crimes most often attributed to members of these clubs (Davis 1982; McGuire 1986; Barker 2007) but white collar crimes are increasingly common (Culbert et al. 2005; Sher and Marsden 2003:306–309; Tuohy 2001).

### **DISTINCTIVE ATTRIBUTES OF THE ONE PERCENT CLUB**

It is difficult to distinguish a modern one percenter from other bikers unless the insignia is present. Further, the core traits of one percenters and their clubs are merely the extreme of a continuum that runs from law-abiding to crime immersed and from the countercultural gang member to the sophisticated subcultural entrepreneur (Quinn and Forsyth 2007). The criminal extreme can be present in either the spontaneous expressive acts of a purist gang member or the ruthless entrepreneurship of a crime syndicate. Both types of criminality are embedded in the dynamics of the subculture and occur in both pure and mixed forms among club members, their chapters, and clubs. Beyond their penchant for extreme behaviors that flout convention, few generalities can be applied to one percenters. Even the use of the term one percenter evokes some controversy.

Some HAMC satellites claim one percent status, despite Sonny Barger's (reputedly the most "influential" member of the HAMC, known as "the chief" to his brothers) rejection of the symbol's implication of equality or brotherhood across clubs. He asserts that the HAMC is distinct from these groups (Barger 2000:41). The club's website, however, describes them as the "oldest, and biggest original 1% motorcycle club in the world" (HAMC 2007). The club has, in many ways, been the epitome of the term for decades but is only one of over 30 such groups.

Members of any group using or affiliated with the one percent label should be considered very capable of expressive violence, and probably have at least some members with organized crime involvements (Quinn and Koch 2003).

Links to prison gangs, ethnic mobs, and racist groups are also common among these clubs (Queen 2005; Lavigne 2000). Nonetheless, many one percenters are gainfully employed or operate legitimate businesses.

Along with a blatant ferocity and hedonism, most one percenters are immersed in their bikes, brothers, and club. Fascination with power is evident in all of their concerns, from personal strength and motorcycle performance to turf wars and profiteering. Although drawn from the mainstream culture, their love of power lacks any semblance of the moderation that, at least theoretically, counterbalances its influence in conventional society (Quinn and Koch 2003).

Modern one percenters retain the traditional fascination with motorcycles, often well-accessorized and somewhat customized, generally kept in superb aesthetic and mechanical condition. However, an increasing proportion seem to prefer SUVs and luxury cars. These one percenters are among the most entrepreneurial and many of the chapters to which they belong lack the gang-like loyalty of the purist biker, focusing instead on acquiring underworld power. Most of these expansion franchises (Quinn and Forsyth 2007) were formed after 1985 in Canada and western Europe by the HAMC and Bandidos, largely to extend territorial claims and criminal enterprises. Driven by greed, status-seeking, and interpersonal rivalries with members of rival clubs, these franchise bikers are often similar to RUBS in their view of motorcycles as recreational vehicles. The need to penalize members for not riding at least once a month during good weather suggests a serious departure from the subculture's original, purist values. The sanction's existence points to the club's awareness of the need to link their name to the romantic imagery of riding while the leniency of the fine—\$25 per month—suggests they do not take the rule's violation very seriously (Lavigne 1997). Purist bikers pride themselves on their almost exclusive reliance on two-wheeled transportation: their lives and the imagery of the biker are shaped by the vagaries of riding.

## **BIKER VALUES**

One percenters are traditionally defined in terms of mechanical skills, hyper-masculinity, and outrageous nonconformity

(Watson 1982; Wolf 1991:82). They are men who cannot or will not fit in to mainstream society, are alienated enough to exalt in the outlaw status the symbol infers, and fearless enough to defend that status against all challenges (Quinn 1987). In the early days of the subculture (c. 1955–1975), some even made a point of publicly french kissing one another to outrage both mainstream niceties and their own hyper-masculinity! This was as much a part of the rebellious spirit that characterized the beat–hippie era as it was an indicator of the bikers’ inversion of mainstream norms.

Swift, annihilative retribution is the normative response to any affront to a club or member. The intention of the offender is of marginal relevance and only large amounts of money can even be considered as compensation in lieu of injury. Although not exclusive to one percenters, concern with upholding group honor is a long standing biker value critical to group dynamics and individual behavior. Bay (1989) notes that bikers’ pursuit of honor usually occurs at the expense of others, especially those from other clubs. Interpersonal rivalries thus often overlap with inter-group animosities to produce especially bitter conflicts.

These bitter rivalries deepen over time, as insults to honor are traded with increasing frequency and virulence (Bay 1989). One biker strikes out at a rival to enhance his own status in his group but his victim, or the victim’s brothers, must return the offense at a higher level to appease their sense of honor. Interclub warfare is thus a relatively normal state for most one percenters. The resulting escalation of hostilities is ameliorated only by perceived threats to the clubs’ welfare. Hopper and Moore (1983) note that when clubs or chapters dissolve, it is usually from dissension within; outside forces have had little success in trying to suppress them. The ferocity with which honor is defended also makes these clubs a formidable force in the underworld that has allowed them to threaten Canada’s more staid ethnic mobs (Humphreys 2001). Ironically, one percenters expect their behavior to deter their foes but are proud that legal efforts at deterrence have little impact on them.

Despite their anti-mainstream demeanor, these clubs are powerfully impacted by both the symbolic and practical aspects of the surrounding society. Their emphasis on mechanical expertise easily expanded into the realm of

electronics and computer skills, with webmasters and hackers becoming recognized roles within some clubs. Vengeance-seeking has also become less direct and immediate, and is increasingly driven by rational concerns over the last two decades. Power has become as much an instrument of commerce as it is a form of status-seeking among modern one percenters in the larger, "international" clubs.

## **DOMINANT ONE PERCENT CLUBS**

The subculture was born in the late 1940s but most modern clubs emerged between 1955 and 1970. Until approximately 1970, the subculture was composed of a plethora of small clubs, usually local or regional in nature. In the late 1960s, the two most established clubs—the HAMC and the Outlaws—came to focus on deliberate expansion, largely by taking over small, local groups (Quinn 2001). The California-based HAMC quickly established bases in the Northeast United States whereas the Outlaws moved south from their Chicago headquarters to dominate much of the south and Midwest. The Pagans' attempt to expand south from Virginia ultimately failed but the club retained hegemony in the mid-Atlantic until the 1990s when serious challenges from the HAMC began. The Bandidos, now a subcultural superpower, emerged from southeast Texas in 1969 and took power along the Gulf Coast after vanquishing the New Orleans-based Galloping Gooses who had maintained a loose alliance with the HAMC.

Dominance of the one percent subculture is traditionally discussed in terms of these Big Four clubs—the Hells Angels, the Outlaws, the Bandidos, and the Pagans. The Big Four term dates to the early 1970s, and is equated with one percenters by some observers (e.g., Lavigne 1995:164). The term, and especially its equation with the one percent subculture, is extremely problematic. The Angels, Bandidos, Outlaws, and Pagans have been the largest, most powerful groups in the subculture for many years, so the appellation is historical-traditional. The attribution of subcultural power to these four clubs is increasingly anachronistic: its validity depending on whether trend-setting, membership, geographic spread, reputation, or sophistication are focal. Valid arguments can be made for the "Big Three" or the "Big Six"

(Barker 2004:41–45), but neither of these groupings is widely accepted. Some speak of two superpowers, the HAMC and the Bandidos. Others include the Outlaws MC as part of the big three, thus excluding the Pagans, while some want to add the Mongols or Sons of Silence to the Big Five. Size, power, reputation, and geographic spread result in different groupings.

The Big Four clubs are the trend-setters in the larger one percent subculture, with the HAMC being the most influential (RCMP 1999, 2002; Smith 2002). For the most part it is the HAMC with which the others must contend if they are to survive. More important, however, is the fact that the HAMC bears the brunt of federal prosecutions so their adaptations to police investigations are used by other clubs seeking to avoid similar problems. This combination of factors gives the HAMC a large, albeit indirect and often unwelcome, influence over subcultural evolution. Many organizational aspects of other clubs alleged to be imitations of the HAMC are simply the product of the bikers' raucous nature, legal pressures, and internecine rivalries, which lead to a modal form of organization for the subculture.

The Pagans are significantly smaller, and lack many traits of the other three (e.g., less conventionalized, little public relations), whereas the HAMC is larger, wealthier, and more sophisticated than the rest of the subculture. On the other hand, the Mongols and Sons of Silence share many traits with the so-called big four, especially the more purist Pagans and Outlaws. The Sons have a large geographic spread, but a fairly small membership that tends to keep a low profile. The Mongols recently (2006–2008) expanded across North America and acquired footholds in Europe and Canada. They have gained much in sophistication while retaining a reputation rivaled only by the HAMC.

Table 1 provides basic information about the five largest, most powerful one percent clubs. Clubs compete to claim that they are the oldest, largest, and most widespread. Most, but not all, provide their versions of their history but these must be interpreted carefully and supplemented with less formal data. Counting charters, like any effort to quantify an aspect of this subculture, is inherently problematic and error-prone. Clubs may claim non-existent chapters and deny other, active ones. A "charter" grants a group of men

in a specific area the right to claim affiliation with a club, to become a chapter. A chapter may consist of anywhere from six to more than thirty full patch members. Being chartered is no guarantee of activity. Both the Outlaws and Bandidos claim Canadian chapters but these groups, if they still exist, keep a very low profile. Simultaneously, the Mongols have made inroads in the southeastern United States and Canada that are not yet formally acknowledged by the club. Therefore the numerical data provided here can be taken only as a relative measure of the breadth of territorial claims made by each club in 2007. Even the descriptive data (e.g., dates) is sometimes arguable but provide an approximate time line for the appearance of various clubs in the subculture.

Other clubs, such as the Vagos, Warlocks, Gypsy Jokers, and Scorpions have loose and often tentative alliances with one or more of these large clubs and are arguably more purist one percenters than many superpower bikers. There are also regional groups such as the Renegades in the southeast, the Galloping Geese in the Midwest, and California's Vagos. The lines of demarcation between these groupings have always been vague but increasing entrepreneurialism, and the resultant decline of gang-like loyalty, have, it seems, led to the decline of the Pagans and the ascent of Mongols.

Club persona are constantly evolving, but their basic features were fixed early in each club's history. They tend to be self-perpetuating because they are critical in the selection and socialization of new members. Regional differences often add to the group's persona, and some adulteration inevitably occurs with international growth, if only because of cultural differences. Each club is unified around its own set of symbols—insignia or colors and aphorisms and their acronyms. Whereas insignia and colors are unique to each group, aphorism use reflects both the group's unique persona as well as more general subcultural norms.

Each club's unique persona underlies membership selection criteria, influences the structure of club leadership, and guide its priorities. A club's persona is embodied in its symbols and manifested in the collective interpretation of subcultural norms and values. These persona are essentially a collective definition of biker values and priorities that subtly distinguish one club from another. Although one percenters appear remarkably similar to an outsider, their clubs are

as distinct as one democracy is from another to their members. Each persona represents a different variation of the subculture's basic norm structure. Club persona underlies many of the events and symbols that shape the subculture but are neglected in most analyses offered by non-bikers. The interaction of these persona with one another, with mainstream forces such as law enforcement and technology, and with other influences (e.g., the drug trade) have been critical to shaping the subculture.

### **CLUB PERSONA AND SYMBOLISM**

The Hells Angels insignia is a winged skull (death's head) customized by each chapter but always with horizontal wings in red and white. The Angels are so closely identified with this color combination that red and white (like HA) is a common synonym for the group. The Mongols' brief use of this color combination in 1977 is said to have precipitated warfare between these two California-based groups (Lavigne 1995:75). However, anti-Mexican sentiments among the HAMC undoubtedly made a major contribution to the animus between these clubs. The HAMC claims origins in both San Bernardino and Oakland, CA but has long had a presence in the NYC–Boston area. It is governed by officers' councils that meet weekly on the east and west coasts but the Oakland chapter guides much of the club's corporate affairs.

The Angels are especially known for their lethal violence and arrogance. Their trademark weapon is a ball peen hammer, commonly used by auto body shops. The HAMC coined the motto, "Angels Forever, Forever Angels" (HAMC 2007) that has been adapted by most other clubs (e.g., Pagans Forever, Forever Pagan). These and similar mottos are often expressed as acronyms (e.g., AFFA). The expression was derived from the HAMC's (c. 1967) party motto, "Dope Forever, Forever Loaded," which has since been largely abandoned.

The Angels make every effort to guarantee that only the toughest, smartest, most committed bikers even approach the club. It is arguably the largest one percent club in the world with chapters on six continents. No matter what sort of activity is referred to, the Angels do everything in their

power to do more of it, or take it to a greater extreme than other clubs. This extremism makes them one of the most formidable forces in the subculture, but has also bred an arrogance among their members that has earned them the hatred of other one percent clubs. The HAMC's reputation has been earned, however, with consistent ferocity and superior tactics. The club rarely allows even the smallest slight from a rival to go unchallenged.

After a dozen or so members of the (now defunct) Breed jumped a similar number of Angels in a Cleveland bar in 1970, the HAMC retaliated by sending a contingent of members to a motorcycle show where many local Breed were expected to be present. Four Breed and one Angel died in the melee, even though the Angels were outnumbered by about 6 to 1. A similar outcome obtained at Laughlin, NV in 2001 when the Angels struck the Mongols with frenetic intensity inside a casino during a motorcycle rally. Both the Laughlin and Cleveland incidents were clearly premeditated. While the Cleveland attack was a local matter decided by chapter officers, the Laughlin action may have been planned by a faction (e.g., southern California chapters) or the club's regional leadership council (which is dominated by northern California chapters.) As is typical, the Laughlin attack occurred in the early hours of the morning when few non-bikers were present in the casino.

The Bandidos emblem is a Mexican bandit in sombrero with pistols, depicted in red and gold, a color combination as sacred to this club as "red and white" is to the HAMC. Founded in 1969 in southeast Texas with a distinctly entrepreneurial spirit, the Bandidos were latecomers to the one percent subculture but have grown to rival the HAMC in territory and membership. Their 1960s origins are revealed by the adoption of the title of Nicholas von Hoffman's 1968 novel as their motto: "We are the people our parents warned us about" (Von Hoffman 1968). However, this growth has come at a price. The national hierarchy does not appear to have as much control over their far flung chapters as do other clubs (Brown 1999). It would also appear that some aspects of their unique persona have been diluted by rapid global expansion (e.g., use of Spanish terms). Their national leader is referred to as "El Presidente" rather than "prez" as in most clubs. Ironically, the club accepts anglicized

Hispanics but discourages stereotypical “fat Mexicans” from joining. The Bandidos have chapters across the south and west as well as in Mexico, Canada, Australia, Southeast Asia, and Europe (Haut 1999:475) There are also several regional U.S. vice presidents. European, Asian, and Australian leaders theoretically answer to the U.S. Presidente.

The Outlaws originated in Chicago, IL and are known for their nearly idolatrous affection for their black and white skull and pistons patch, known as Charlie. Lavigne (1995:201) claims that Charlie is copied from Marlon Brando’s jacket in the 1954 movie *The Wild One*, but the Outlaws have documented its evolution from precursors that predate the film by almost twenty years (Outlaws MC 2006). (The contiguity of the modern club with its 1935 forebears is considered arguable by many one percenters.) Outlaws claim that it is Charlie who watches their back when they ride alone (members nonetheless usually operate in pairs).

The Outlaws espouse an egalitarian view of being a one percenter but are as vengeful a group as can be found in the subculture, living by the motto “God forgives, Outlaws don’t” (Outlaws MC 2006). Prior to the 2001 conviction of Taco Bowman, the club’s National President, the club was governed by a single elected leader and three to five regional vice presidents. After Bowman’s conviction the club decided that a single leader created too obvious a target for police and rivals. A small group of regional leaders governed the club’s affairs for several years until another president was willing to be instated.

The Pagans use a portrait of a Norse God with a flaming staff (often referred to as the woolly beast) rendered in brown, orange, and red as their insignia. They originally mounted their colors on white vests, rather than the black leather or blue denim that typified other clubs in the 1955–1970 era. The club name is generally printed in blue or black. Heavy canes and modified baseball bats are their trademark weapon. The Pagans predominate in the mid-Atlantic despite growing pressure from the HAMC and Outlaws. They also have three active chapters in Australia.

Pagans are known for their calculating coldness, impulsiveness, and lethal violence. A popular Pagan acronym, LPDP, “Live Pagan Die Pagan” highlights the fatalism that

pervades the subculture and its (purist) symbols. "Hit hard, Split fast" describes their preferred method of avenging themselves or carrying out other club business. They are the most nomadic of all the big four clubs, rarely having even a local chapter clubhouse. Pagan fondness for the number 13 exceeds that of other clubs. They use it to set the minimum membership of their mother chapter (i.e., national leadership council of former presidents) and the size of the elite black t-shirt group that enforces club rules and deals with the most serious threats to the national organization. While the Bandidos, Mongols, and Outlaws have shown limited solidarity in their animosity towards the Hells Angels, the Pagans are relatively isolated within the subculture, but have strong ties to mid-Atlantic area ethnic mobs.

Although rivals, the Outlaws and the Pagans retain a more purist approach to club life than the Bandidos and HAMC. They have been slower to embrace the entrepreneurially driven efforts at legitimization that have characterized the Angels and Bandidos for the last quarter century. This is also the case with the Mongols.

Like the Bandidos and Outlaws, the Mongols refer to their club as a nation (e.g., Bandido Nation). The Mongols wear black and white patches with a likeness of Genghis Khan astride a chopper. The club has ties to *La Eme* or the Mexican Mafia, a large Chicano prison gang. Their motto, "Respect few, Fear none" (Cavasos and Meisler 2008:1) epitomizes their bellicose nature. Most, but certainly not all, Mongols are of Mexican ancestry. They have begun to maintain clubhouses but some chapters still meet in members' homes or favorite bars. Each chapter has a flag with its own insignia. They are quick to anger, but relatively impoverished compared to the other major groups.

The Mongols are rapidly expanding by absorbing smaller clubs and recruiting from Hispanic street gangs. Their power base lies in central and southern California but the club has charters in the southeast United States, Canada, Mexico, and Italy. Their ascendance is based partly on their ability to successfully hold their own against HAMC but may be buttressed by growing Mexican involvement in methamphetamine production.

The Sons of Silence are much smaller in overall numbers but have chapters spread from Minnesota to Colorado and

**TABLE 2** Smaller One Percent Clubs

Club	Date of origin	Colors	Emblem	North American charters * indicates state of origin	World charters
Iron Horsemen	1969	Yellow & grey	Winged horsehead	Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, New York, Tennessee	None known
Renegades	1970	Purple & gray	Indian skull with embedded tomahawk	Indiana (2), Florida (7), Georgia (1), Ohio* (4), North Carolina (1), Tennessee (1), Virginia (2)	None Known
Sons of Silence	1966	Black & red	Bald eagle with club name & Latin motto	Arkansas (1), Colorado* (3), Kansas (?), Minnesota (1)	Germany (4)
Scorpions	1966	Black & white	Scorpion	Michigan*, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia	(A German club uses the same name but different insignia and has no known affiliation)
Vagos	1966	Green	Norse God Loki	California	Claim to be international but no charters outside U.S. can be identified
Warlocks	1967-8	Orange, gold, red	Blazing eagle	Florida (7)*, South Carolina (4), Virginia (1), West Virginia (1)	England (1), Germany (1)

from Florida to Kansas. Their main bases of operation are in Colorado, Minnesota, and Florida, and they claim a German chapter as well. The quietest of the large clubs, their egalitarianism has a purist warmth that the Outlaws sometimes lack. Their Latin motto *Donec Mors Non Separa* (tr. "Death does not separate") appears on a white circle with black lettering with a realistic eagle. The circle is usually mounted on a red rectangle. They appear to actively encourage interaction with men in, or recently separated from, military service. The Sons are too small and far flung a club to maintain long standing hostilities with Big Four groups, but have fought each of them (and the Mongols) on occasion.

The core of the original Warlocks MC were Vietnam era Navy veterans located in central Florida. They now have chapters in several southern states, Germany, and England. (Members of a club by the same name in the mid-Atlantic area abandoned their affiliation with the Pagans and took Outlaw colors in 2005. It is unclear whether remaining members were able to maintain this Warlock group [McGarvey 2006]). Like the Sons, the Florida-based Warlocks actively encourage interaction with military personnel. Their colors employ a stylized red, orange, and yellow blazing eagle. The club is widely reputed to have ties to the HAMC.

Table 2 describes some of the less well known one percent clubs. These clubs have complex relations with one another as well as with the larger, more dominant clubs. They are, however, independent entities that often reflect the purist values of the subculture's origin in less diluted form than do the more entrepreneurial groups. However, all club-level generalizations are tenuous because each chapter is semi-autonomous. Links to other groups, as well as tolerance for various forms of crime, vary widely across members and chapters of the same club.

## CLUB RIVALRIES AND ALLIANCES

Interclub alliances are often the product of rivalries with a common enemy. The Detroit-based Scorpions had a long bitter rivalry with the Outlaws that drove them into alignment with the HAMC (CISC 2002) just as the Warlocks chose to align with the HAMC to fend off the Pagans and Outlaws. Such affiliations are unstable, however, and often have

multiple facets. The Scorpions are identified as an HAMC-affiliated drug ring by the Canadian Intelligence Service (1999), an oversimplification common among law enforcement. The Outlaws, Bandidos, and Mongols are united by their intense hatred of the Angels, but Mongol–Bandido access to high-quality methamphetamine produced in Mexico probably also plays a role. A cycle of warfare, mounting losses, public outrage, and prosecutions, followed by lulls and truces, has persisted between the HAMC and these other clubs for over twenty years (Quinn and Forsyth 2007; Brown 1999).

The idea that my enemy's enemy is my friend creates quick alliances in both biker and cold war settings but rarely produces trusting, long-lived partnerships. Members and cliques from different clubs do, at times, create joint enterprises for anywhere from a few days to a lifetime, however. The Mongols, Outlaws, and Bandidos maintain reasonably civil relations and have linked to one another's websites, but increasingly encroach on each others' territory. Any civility among them derives mainly from their hatred of the Hells Angels and tensions are ever-present.

Animosity between the Angels and Outlaws goes back to at least the early 1960s but became a major issue in the 1970s when expansion placed the clubs in close proximity to one another. The Outlaws were the main rivals of the HAMC for many years, but international losses, leadership changes, and federal prosecutions have weakened them. The conflict between the Bandidos and Angels was most apparent in Canada and Scandinavia in the 1990s, but tension between the clubs is cyclical in the United States. The Bandidos, now the second most powerful one percent club, founded a new chapter in Washington that violated a treaty with the HAMC that resolved the Scandinavian war of the late 1990s. In 2000 the HAMC held a world run in Montana (Jamison 2000a), a state claimed by the Bandidos, In 2007 the Bandidos held a national rally in northern Arizona (Coconino Co. Sheriff's Office 2007), a state claimed by the rival HAMC, for which no Bandidos charter has ever been issued. A similar growth of tension between the Pagans and HAMC has already been described.

Rivalries run deep among these clubs, and hatred of the Angels has become widespread in the last fifteen years.

The Outlaws and Bandidos were sister clubs in the 1980s when they shared some basic structural features (e.g., a single national president rather than council governance) and seriously discussed merging. Organizational problems among the Bandidos, especially between the U.S. leadership and foreign chapters (Brown 1999; Haut 1999), made the Outlaws hesitant to merge. There were also serious local conflicts over members' involvement in drug distribution (e.g., Winterhalder 2005). A series of setbacks in the Outlaws' bid to move into eastern Canada, due to the police efforts as well as the animosity of the HAMC, discouraged merger, as did leadership changes in both clubs. Club presidents are rarely powerful enough to be described as crime bosses (e.g., Davis 1982), but their diplomatic intentions can be crucial to interclub relations and the general tone of club behavior. The loss of personal power that always accompanies organizational mergers was also a factor.

## CONCLUSIONS

One percenters rely heavily on symbols set deeply in the consciousness of western civilization. The Outlaws patch is clearly derived from the skull and crossbones of the pirate flag. Mongol colors utilize the same color scheme with an ancient Asian leader whose reputation is as ferocious as that of any pirate. Most one percent clubs use red, indicative of blood, fraternal bonds, and courage, and/or black, which connotes danger, evil, and death. Norse themes are also common in these clubs and predate their linkage with white supremacy by decades. The HAMC's name and death's head was adapted from American military history (Jamison 2000b; HAMC 2007).

The subculture is an amalgam of subterranean values drawn from other entities (e.g., hippies, transnational corporations) with little regard for the larger system of values in which those activities were nested. The independence and machismo associated with motorcycling is exacerbated by the edgework of one percent bikers seeking personal status and group honor. The violence of the lower class street gang reached new extremes in the diverse, but socially isolated, saloon society environment. Once established in that milieu, some one percenters used their reputation for ferocity

and solidarity to follow American corporations around the globe.

Superficially most one percenter values, behaviors, and symbols are indicative of their countercultural origins. Once the demands of motorcycling are accounted for, however, the modern one percenter is less alien than he first appears. The subculture is more thoroughly grounded in Anglo-American culture and its symbols than many would like to admit. One percenters borrow freely from the mainstream as they simultaneously react against its constraints in search of a sense of safety born in power. Although much of their behavior is reprehensible, their values provide a dark mirror that reflects the shadow side of American culture.

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**JAMES F. QUINN** is a Professor and serves as Director of the Addictions program at the University of North Texas. He is a criminologist who has authored more than 25 scholarly articles and five books on topics including sex offending/addiction, gangs, corrections, offender treatment, and the drugs–crime connection. Dr. Quinn has worked with various entities on community participation in corrections, offender reintegration, and criminal justice planning issues. His efforts have been officially commended by the Center for Gang Research, the Texas Legislature, and the Texas Parole division.

**CRAIG J. FORSYTH** is Professor and the Head of the Department of Criminal Justice and Professor of Sociology at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. He received his Ph.D. from Louisiana State University in 1983. He is the author of over 180 journal articles, books, and book chapters. His principle research interests are in the areas of deviance and crime.