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# The Road to Gang Membership: Characteristics of Male Gang and Nongang Members from Ages 10 to 14

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## Abstract

*This study examined the stability of belonging to a gang in early adolescence, the behaviour profiles, family characteristics, and friendships of nongang and gang members. The subjects in the present study were originally part of a larger sample of boys. One hundred and forty-two boys who had a complete data set at ages 11, 12, 13, and 14 were selected for the present study. Loglinear analyses indicated that gang membership was stable from ages 13 to 14, but not at earlier ages. Boys were divided into three groups: stable gang members (children who belonged to a gang at ages 13 and 14); unstable gang members (children who belonged to a gang at either age 13 or 14) and nongang members. Repeated analyses of variance indicated that stable gang members had significantly higher scores than nongang members on teacher ratings of fighting behaviour, hyperactivity, inattention and oppositional behaviour, and self-reported delinquent activities (drug and alcohol use, stealing and vandalism). Peers rated gang members as more aggressive than nongang members. The results are discussed from a developmental perspective.*

*Keywords:* gangs, delinquency, development, behaviour problems

Many researchers studying gangs have focused on adolescence when gang members' involvement in crime is particularly salient and perhaps most easily studied (e.g., Spengel, 1990). Consequently, the majority of research has neglected to provide a developmental perspective and understanding of the factors that begin before adolescence which may lead to gang membership. The purpose of this paper was to examine the frequency and stability of gang membership, family characteristics, concurrent behaviours, friendships, and school attitudes of stable and unstable gang members and nongang members in childhood and early adolescence.

Understanding the mechanism of or the catalyst for the initiation, continuation, or discontinuation of gang membership is an important issue, because youth gang

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members engage in more violent crimes and have more police contact than nongang members (Klien & Maxson, 1989). Furthermore, research suggests that gang members with arrest records are responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime (Bobrowski, 1988). Finally, gang criminal activity extends into adulthood (Spergel, 1989, 1987; Robin, 1967; Hagedorn, 1988). The cost to individuals (i.e., involvement in delinquent activities) and to society (i.e., serious and violent offenses, homicides, sale and distribution of drugs) necessitates further empirical investigation of the individual characteristics and processes associated with gang membership (Klien & Maxson, 1989).

Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, and Chard-Wierschem (1993) have tested three models to understand the relationship between gang membership and delinquency: a selection model, a social facilitation model, and an enhancement model. A selection model is consistent with social control theory (Hirschi, 1990) and the propensity theory of crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). According to this model, gangs recruit individuals who are already delinquent or have a propensity toward delinquency. Consequently, belonging to a gang would not impact significantly on delinquent activities since the propensity for that behaviour would already exist before belonging to a gang. In a social facilitation model individuals become delinquent when they are active members of a gang. Thus, gang membership results in increased antisocial behaviour due to the normative nature of rule breaking behaviour in gangs and the group processes of the gang. The enhancement model combines both the selection and social facilitation models. According to this model, gang members recruit individuals who have a history of aggressive and antisocial behaviour problems and these problem behaviours become augmented since gangs will continue to support the values of, and provide structure for engaging in deviant acts. This pattern of affiliation may also result in the escalation of delinquent acts.

The results of the Thornberry et al. (1993) study supported the social facilitation model. They found that gang members entering the gangs did not have higher rates of delinquency or drug use before entering the gang than nongang members. Once these individuals became gang members, their rates of delinquency and drug use significantly increased. But, once these gang members left the gang there was a significant reduction in these activities. While the results have important theoretical significance, they do not explain the process or causal mechanisms leading to gang membership. There is also no attempt made to identify family, peer, and school factors which may distinguish stable gang members, unstable gang members, and nongang members. Finally, the results are based on self-report information. The present research, using a multi-informant approach, examines family, peer, and school factors which may differentiate stable gang members from unstable and nongang members.

Although most research concurs that gang members have dysfunctional families, the family characteristics of gang and nongang members have not been well documented (Klien & Maxson, 1989). Based on adolescent self-reports, Hoyd (1985) found that alienation from parents was the initial cause of adolescents turning toward delinquent and gang activity. Other studies have related gang membership to harsh discipline (Friedman, Mann, & Friedman, 1975), a lack of a male role model in the home, unstable economic situations, and rejection by the family (Vigil, 1988). These family characteristics may result in children feeling alienated and isolated and consequently they may seek a peer group, such as a gang, that will be supportive of their behaviours. This process may be more intensified during preadolescence when

individuals are increasing in their autonomy and independence from the family environment and spending more time with peers. The present study investigates family characteristics such as the amount of communication, punishment, rules, parental monitoring, and other socio-family characteristics of gang and nongang members.

Hartup (1983) found that gang membership was predicted by not getting along with others. Hirschi (1969) suggested that gang members lack the ability to form effective, fulfilling relationships with others. Research on the friends of gang members indicates that gangs do not typically encourage active members to have friends, especially close ones outside the gang (Horowitz, 1983; Miller, 1977; Spergel, 1989). Gang members may be socially isolated from their age appropriate and/or a socially competent peer group. Gang members may tend to associate with individuals who will accept them and are like themselves, in terms of behaviours, values, and goals, as in the case of aggressive children (Hymel, Wagner, & Butler, 1990; Cairns & Cairns, 1991). As a result, their socialization experiences are imbalanced in the direction of negative interactions and they are at continued risk for learning aggressive behaviours. This process may be particularly heightened during early adolescence when individuals spend more time with their friends that is unsupervised by an adult (Cairns & Cairns, 1997). Children with aggressive behaviour tendencies during childhood, may be more likely than prosocial children to seek out a social context, such as a gang, where their antisocial behaviour is supported. Thus, we hypothesize that the stable gang members will have more behavioural problems than the transient or nongang members. In summary, the research on both family and friendships of gang members suggests that they experience some difficulties in their social relationships.

Participant-observer studies indicate that gang members are typically behind in their studies, or are school dropouts (Klien & Maxson, 1989). Horowitz (1983) suggested that the high dropout rate among gang members is due to the fact that school is a context in which individual inadequacies may become apparent. In this sense, gang members may be alienated from school. In addition, gang members do not believe that school is helpful to them (Klien & Maxson, 1989). One of the objectives of the present study is to examine early school behaviour. It is possible that children who are experiencing problems in school may engage in disruptive behaviors and be at risk of becoming gang members.

A variety of theoretical and methodological problems have hindered the development of adequate knowledge about gangs. For example, researchers have tended to employ small nonrandom samples, usually without comparison groups (Spergel, 1990), or have implemented participant observer methodology. Another methodological issue in gang research concerns the over-reliance on self-report data. The paucity of reliable, empirical research on preadolescent and early adolescent gang members may be a function of these methodological difficulties. The present research contributes to our understanding of individuals who belong to a gang by: the consideration of self, peer, parent and teacher reports; including a comparison group (nongang members); providing a developmental perspective; and examining behaviours in preadolescence and early adolescence, as well as friendships. Given that gang behaviour is primarily a male phenomenon (Bowker, Gross, & Klein, 1980), the present study focuses on preadolescent male gang members.

The specific objectives of the present research are: to describe the frequency of gang membership during the preadolescent and early adolescent periods (at ages 11, 12, 13, and 14); to examine the stability of belonging to a gang at ages 11, 12, 13, and 14; to

compare the family, behavioral, peer and school profiles of boys who belong to a gang and boys who do not belong to a gang, at ages 11, 12, 13, and 14. It is expected that boys who belong to a gang will have less supervision from their parents, poorer communication in the home, and fewer rules than those who do not belong to a gang. It is predicted that teachers and parents will report more externalizing behaviour problems for gang members than nongang members. Gang members will report more delinquency and alcohol use than nongang members. Another purpose of this study was to examine the peer relations of boys who belong to a gang and those who do not belong to a gang. It is expected that gang members will be more aggressive and less popular than nongang members. In addition, friends of gang members will be engaged in delinquent activities. Finally, there will be a higher frequency of gang members than nongang members who are behind in school.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

The subjects were originally part of a larger sample of 1,034 boys studied in kindergarten in 1984 in a longitudinal study. This study took place in a low socioeconomic area of a large metropolitan city in the province of Quebec. To control for culture, boys were only included in the sample if both parents were born in Canada and the parents' mother tongue was French. From this original sample, depending on the year and the informant source, there was gang membership information on between 640 and 1013 boys. These subjects were used in the loglinear analyses examining the stability of gang membership.

From that sample, a subsample of 142 boys was selected for the present study. These boys had complete data sets from parents, self, teachers, and peer ratings from ages 11 through 14. Based on self-report information, boys were divided into three groups: stable gang members (children who belonged to a gang at ages 13 and 14); unstable gang members (children who belonged to a gang at either age 13 or 14) and nongang members. Due to the disproportionate number of nongang subjects a random sample of 66 boys was selected for the group comparison tests. There were 25, 51, and 66 boys in the stable, unstable, and comparison groups, respectively. On kindergarten teacher ratings, there was no difference between those who were selected for the study and those who were not.

### *Instruments*

(i) *Social Behaviour Questionnaire (SBQ)* (Tremblay, Vitaro, Gagnon, Piché, & Royer, 1991). The SBQ comprise 28 items from the Preschool Behavior Questionnaire (Behar & Springfield, 1974) which is an adaptation of the Children's Behaviour Questionnaire (Rutter, 1967) and 10 items from the Prosocial Behavior Questionnaire (Weir, Stevenson, & Graham, 1980). This questionnaire measures appropriate and inappropriate behaviours of children. It is designed to identify maladjusted children. This scale examined the following: fighting (intimidates, fights, hits), oppositional behaviour (does not share, irritable, blames others, inconsiderate), inattention (unable to concentrate, easily distracted, is in the moon, gives up easily), hyperactivity (fidgets, restless), anxiety-withdrawal (sad, cries easily, worries, is alone, is afraid), and prosocial behaviour (comforts others, helps others who are sick, tries to help others who

are hurt, sympathetic to others, offers help to others who are in trouble, invites others to play, and helps clean up). The alpha reliability coefficients for each of the subscales ranged from .74 to .91, indicating high internal consistency. All items are scored on a 3-point scale: does not apply, sometimes, and frequently.

At ages 11, 12, 13, and 14 teachers and parents completed the SBQ. This scale was modified with age-appropriate items, which included aggressive and nonaggressive items such as theft, truancy, and gang membership.

(ii) *Self-Reported Delinquency Questionnaire (SRDQ)* (Biron, Caplan, & LeBlanc, 1975). This scale comprises of 27 items on a 3-point Likert scale ranging from never to sometimes. This scale has four subscales: fighting (7 items), stealing (10 items), vandalism (7 items), and alcohol and drug use (4 items). The instrument has been validated with a Montreal sample of male and female subjects from different socioeconomic strata (LeBlanc & Fréchette, 1989). The alphas for the subscales ranged from .54 to .87. Drug use at age 10 had the lowest alpha, while stealing (at age 14) had the highest alpha. Included in this questionnaire is the item which identifies gang members 'In the last 12 months did you belong to a group (gang) who did illegal things'. There are two important aspects of this definition. First, the individual had to belong to a group of individuals, and second, this group together performed illegal activities. The same question was asked of parents and teachers.

(iii) *Friend Characteristics Scale (FCS)*. This was a 7-item self-report scale on the activities of friends (i.e., has your friend been arrested by the police, does your best friend like school, do your parents like your best friend, does your best friend fight with others, does your best friend disobey his parents, do you have confidence in your best friend, do you talk about your problems with your best friend). Responses were based on a Likert scale, ranging from -2 to 2. Prosocial responses were scored positively, while nonprosocial responses were scored negatively. A negative score indicates that friends of the respondent engage in deviant activities frequently, whereas a positive score indicates that friends do not engage in deviant activities. The alpha coefficients for the FCS were .72 and .75 at ages 13 and 14, respectively.

(iv) *Behaviour and Attitudes to School (BAS)*. This was a 16-item self-report scale on the attitudes toward school (i.e., do you like school, how many hours do you spend doing homework, how often have you been a truant, how important is it to you to obtain good marks, how often have you been suspended from school, how often have you vandalised school property, how often have you cheated during a test, how often are you rude to the teacher, how far do you want to go in school, how often have you stolen something worth more than 10 dollars, have you missed school for no reason, have you skipped class, have you destroyed school equipment, do you feel capable at school, is it difficult to concentrate and apply what you learned in school to your homework, compared to others how well do you do in school). The scale was designed in the same manner as the FCS. High negative scores indicate that the respondent is experiencing many problems in school, whereas a positive score indicates that the respondent has a positive attitude to school and is not experiencing any significant problems. The reliabilities for ages 10 through 14 were .65, .74, .74, .84, and .85, respectively.

(v) *Self-Reported Parent-Child Relations (SPCR)*. This scale is designed to measure boys' reports of parental monitoring, communication, punishment, and number of

rules in the home. The alpha coefficients for these scales range from .61 to .82, depending on the year of evaluation and the scale. Parental supervision had the highest internal consistency, while the parental punishment scale had the lowest.

(vi) *Peer Evaluation Inventory (PEI)* (Pekarik, Prinz, Liebert, Weintraub, & Neale, 1976). A French version of this measure (translated by Ledingham, 1981 for a study with elementary aged students) was given to the classmates of the sample. Each child in the class was asked to nominate boys who best fit the description of each item on the questionnaire. In addition to others, children were asked to nominate themselves, if the item described them. There are 35 items in this questionnaire which load on 3 factors: aggressive behaviour (20 items such as 'those who always get in trouble'), social withdrawal (9 items such as 'those who are too shy'), and likeability (5 items such as 'those who help others'). Previous studies have reported high test-retest reliability and high internal consistency for this scale (Ledingham, Schwartzman, & Bergéron, 1982; Pekarik et al., 1976).

(vii) *Grade Level*. This information was obtained from teacher reports. Subjects were classified in an inappropriate grade level if they were behind in school or in a special classroom. Subjects were considered to be in an appropriate grade level if they were in an age-appropriate regular classroom.

### *Procedure*

Parents and teachers completed the SBQ for all boys in the study at ages 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14. Participants completed the SRDQ, FCS, and BAS at ages 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14. Peers completed the PEI at ages 10, 11, and 12. School information was collected at ages 10 through 14. Gang information was provided by the boys at ages 11 through 14, by the mother at ages 13 and 14, and by the teacher at age 14. All questionnaires were administered in French.

## **Results**

The results are divided into three sections. The first section describes the frequency of self, mother, and teacher reported gang membership. The second section examines the stability of gang membership from age 11 through 14. The final section describes the behaviours, family, peer, and school characteristics of stable, unstable and nongang members as rated by self, teacher, peer and parents.

### *Description of Gang Membership*

Table 1 presents the frequency and agreement of gang membership among self, mother, and teacher reports. There is an increase in the number of gang members from age 11 to 14 as reported by self (from 12.6% to 21.3%). Similarly, mothers report an increase in the number of boys who belong to a gang from age 13 to 14 (10.8% to 12.5%). Self-reports are highly congruent with mother and teacher reports for identifying those boys who do not belong to a gang, but incongruent in identifying those boys who do belong to a gang. Parents and teachers have low agreement on which boys belong to a gang suggesting they are identifying different gang members.

**Table 1. Frequency and Agreement of Gang Membership Among Self, Teacher, and Mother**

	Informant Source					
	Self	Mother	Teacher	Agreement between Self and Mother	Agreement between Self and Teacher	Agreement between Mother and Teacher
<i>Age 11</i>						
Gang member	12.6% (118)	—*	—	—	—	—
Non-gang member	87.4% (815)	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Age 12</i>						
Gang member	14.2% (130)	—	—	—	—	—
Non-gang member	85.8% (785)	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Age 13</i>						
Gang member	18% (164)	10.8% (68)	—	28.7% (23)**	—	—
Non-gang member	82% (722)	89.2% (574)	—	91.5% (485)***	—	—
<i>Age 14</i>						
Gang member	21.3% (184)	12.5% (80)	11.1% (88)	18.7% (23)**	20.3% (35)**	22% (13)**
Non-gang member	78.7% (676)	87.5% (560)	88.9% (703)	91.1% (452)***	91.4% (566)***	88.5% (470)***

\* Data were not collected.

\*\* Percentage based on total reported gang members.

\*\*\* Percentage based on total reported non-gang members.

*Stability of Gang Membership*

In order to examine the association between belonging to a gang one year and belonging to a gang the following year, four loglinear models were employed, using the self-report data. The first model examined the stability of gang membership from age 11 through 14. This model was non-significant. The second loglinear model examined the stability of gang membership from ages 11 to 12. This model was also non-significant indicating that there was no relationship between belonging to a gang at age 11 and belonging to a gang at age 12. Similarly, there was no relationship between belonging to a gang at age 12 and belonging to a gang at age 13. There was a significant association between belonging to a gang at age 13 and belonging to a gang at age 14. For gang members at age 13, the probability of belonging to a gang at age 14 was .49. For nongang members at age 13, the probability of not belonging to a gang at the following year was .86. The results of this analysis provided the rationale for the formation of the groups. Stable gang members were defined as belonging to a gang at ages 13 and 14 (when there was a significant association between belonging to a gang one year and the following year).

*Behavioural Description of Stable, Unstable and Non-gang Members*

Age by 3 (group) multivariate analyses of variance examined differences among stable, unstable, and nongang members on mother, self, teacher, and peer ratings. The results of these analyses are presented below.

(i) *Mother Ratings.* There was a significant multivariate main effect for group,  $F(112,270) = 2.38, p < .01$ . The significant associated univariate effect was on mother ratings of anxiety,  $F(2,139) = 4.37, p < .01$ . Post hoc testing indicated that, at all ages, the nongang members were more anxious than the stable and unstable gang members. There was no significant difference between stable and nongang members.

(ii) *Self Ratings.* Boys were asked to report on family characteristics (SPCR), involvement in delinquent activities (SRDQ), friendship characteristics (FCS), and attitudes towards school (BAS). Contrary to expectations, there was no significant main effect of group or interactions on the SPCR. There was a significant multivariate main effect of age,  $F(12,128) = 17.35, p < .001$ . The significant associated univariate effects were on parental communication, punishment, supervision, and rules. All groups reported a decrease over time in each of these factors.

Table 2 has the means for the self-reported delinquency scores. There was a significant group by age interaction, multivariate  $F(32,250) = 2.82, p < .001$ , and main effect for group, multivariate  $F(8,274) = 6.89, p < .001$ , on the SRDR. Post hoc testing indicated that at age 10 there were no group differences on fighting, vandalism, and drug use; however, gang members reported more stealing than nongang members. At age 11, the stable group scored higher than the nongang group on fighting behaviour, but there were no group differences on stealing, vandalism, and drug use. At ages 12, 13, and 14, the stable gang members scored higher than unstable and nongang members on fighting, stealing, and vandalism. There were no group differences at age 12 on drug use, however, at ages 13 and 14 the stable gang members reported more drug use than the nongang members. In summary, as stable and unstable members

**Table 2. Group Means and Standard Deviations for Self-Reported Delinquency, Friendship and School Deviance Scale, by Age**

Group Subscale Age	Age 10		Age 11		Age 12		Age 13		Age 14	
	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD
<i>Fighting</i>										
Stable gang members	10.87	2.79	10.13	3.00	11.65	4.05	12.35	3.80	13.32	4.70
Unstable gang members	10.91	2.58	9.53	2.35	8.76	1.86	9.56	2.73	9.67	2.49
Non-gang members	9.78	2.67	8.89	2.94	8.35	1.56	8.22	1.66	8.53	1.92
<i>Stealing</i>										
Stable gang members	13.96	4.13	13.39	3.60	14.39	3.53	14.83	4.10	17.40	5.56
Unstable gang members	13.18	2.10	12.66	2.80	12.49	2.54	13.44	3.00	14.40	3.96
Non-gang members	12.82	2.66	12.87	3.71	11.98	1.82	11.94	1.48	12.27	1.74
<i>Vandalism</i>										
Stable gang members	7.70	1.61	7.30	2.16	7.61	2.52	7.74	1.54	9.65	3.75
Unstable gang members	7.60	1.34	6.73	1.32	6.47	.99	7.09	1.70	7.09	1.87
Non-gang members	7.29	1.12	6.78	1.43	6.43	.96	6.70	1.49	6.65	1.01
<i>Alcohol and Drug Abuse</i>										
Stable gang members	3.65	.78	3.91	1.59	3.87	1.10	4.91	1.88	6.35	2.90
Unstable gang members	3.75	.85	3.69	1.26	3.71	.92	4.36	1.76	5.21	2.28
Non-gang members	3.71	1.06	3.57	1.40	3.33	.59	3.90	1.26	4.27	1.58
<i>Friendship Deviance</i>										
Stable gang members	—*	—	—	—	—	—	4.04	2.75	4.70	3.81
Unstable gang members	—	—	—	—	—	—	2.89	2.81	2.73	2.31
Non-gang members	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.29	2.08	1.12	2.30
<i>School Deviance</i>										
Stable gang members	3.79	5.99	4.06	6.50	3.25	6.51	3.01	3.80	-3.66	8.43
Unstable gang members	5.32	4.60	5.38	5.13	5.61	4.57	4.43	3.71	1.36	6.18
Non-gang members	6.46	3.77	7.44	3.80	7.65	4.05	6.31	2.32	5.07	5.19

aged, they engaged in wider range delinquent activities than nongang members, and the frequency of their delinquent acts increased over age.

Table 2 has the group means for the Friendship Characteristic (FCS) and Behavior and Attitudes towards School (BAS) scales. There was a significant main effect of group membership on the FCS, multivariate  $F(2,139) = 343.35, p < .001$ . Post hoc testing indicated that stable gang members reported more friend delinquency than unstable gang members and nongang members. Similarly, unstable gang members reported more friend delinquency than nongang members.

There was a significant group by age interaction on the BAS, multivariate  $F(2,139) = 7.41, p < .01$ . Post hoc testing indicated that at all ages the stable gang members reported more school deviance than the nongang members. From age 11 to 14, the stable gang members reported more school deviance than the unstable gang members. At ages 10 and 11, there were no significant differences between the unstable and nongang members. At ages 12, 13, and 14, the unstable gang members reported more school problems than the nongang members. In summary, the stable and unstable gang members reported more school problems as they aged.

(iii) *Teacher Ratings.* Table 3 has the group means for teacher ratings of behaviour problems. There was a significant main effect for group membership, multivariate  $F(2,270) = 3.54, p < .001$ , and age, multivariate  $F(24,116) = 9.39, p < .001$ . The significant univariate effects associated with the group effect were on teacher ratings of fighting,  $F(2,139) = 6.27, p < .01$ , anxiety,  $F(2,139) = 6.87, p < .001$ , hyperactivity,  $F(1,139) = 4.5, p < .01$ , inattention,  $F(2,139) = 3.24, p < .05$ , and oppositional behaviour,  $F(2,139) = 5.43, p < .01$ . There were no significant interactions. Post hoc testing indicated that stable gang members engage in more fighting behaviour, were less anxious, and more hyperactive than nongang members. Unstable gang members were more oppositional and inattentive than nongang members.

(iv) *Peer Ratings.* Table 4 has the means and standard deviations for the PEI. There was a significant group main effect on the PEI, multivariate  $F(6,160) = 3.54, p < .01$ . The significant associated univariate effects were on aggression,  $F(2,82) = 7.73, p < .001$ , and withdrawal,  $F(2,81) = 3.73, p < .05$ . Post hoc testing indicated that stable and unstable gang members were more aggressive and less withdrawn than nongang members. On self-ratings from the PEI, there was a significant effect of group membership,  $F(6,160) = 2.61, p < .05$ , on ratings of aggression,  $F(2,81) = 5.71, p < .01$ . Stable and unstable gang members rated themselves as significantly more aggressive than nongang members. There were no significant interactions or main effect for age.

#### *Grade Achievement*

Chi-square analyses examined the distributions of group membership by grade attainment. At ages 10, 11, 12, and 13 there was no significant relationship between group membership and grade achievement. 25%, 32%, 40%, and 45% of children in the study were behind in school at ages 10, 11, 12, and 13, respectively. At age 14, there was a significant relationship between these variables  $\chi^2(2,443) = 6.66, p = .03$ . As expected the proportion of stable gang members behind in school was greater than that of the nongang members (59% versus 41%). Forty-seven percent of unstable gang members were behind in school.

**Table 3. Group Means and Standard Deviations for Teacher Ratings of Behaviour**

Group Subscale Age	Age 10		Age 11		Age 12		Age 13		Age 14	
	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD
<i>Fighting</i>										
Stable gang members	1.76	1.76	1.72	2.11	1.01	1.30	.92	1.41	1.12	1.56
Unstable gang members	1.67	1.98	1.36	1.59	.94	1.29	1.05	1.47	.57	1.25
Non-gang members	.89	1.46	.76	1.38	.57	1.12	.42	1.15	.26	.77
<i>Anxiety</i>										
Stable gang members	1.72	1.70	1.68	1.65	1.20	1.53	1.56	1.78	1.08	1.35
Unstable gang members	2.55	2.13	2.48	2.30	2.33	2.38	2.20	1.96	2.26	1.83
Non-gang members	3.29	2.57	2.87	2.58	2.89	2.68	2.41	2.21	1.85	1.94
<i>Prosocial</i>										
Stable gang members	7.04	4.01	7.28	5.00	6.64	5.42	2.92	3.19	1.20	2.67
Unstable gang members	7.47	5.06	6.23	4.42	5.06	3.98	3.12	3.53	2.92	4.10
Non-gang members	8.11	5.12	6.89	4.92	5.61	4.20	3.84	4.20	3.36	4.16
<i>Hyperactivity</i>										
Stable gang members	1.56	1.42	1.20	1.35	1.28	1.31	1.24	.97	.84	1.03
Unstable gang members	1.67	1.37	1.37	1.28	1.22	1.46	.78	1.12	.51	.78
Non-gang members	.96	1.28	.82	1.15	.73	1.27	.64	.94	.62	1.12
<i>Inattention</i>										
Stable gang members	3.52	2.22	3.52	2.43	3.44	2.00	4.36	2.50	3.64	2.36
Unstable gang members	3.45	2.11	4.35	2.23	3.80	2.71	3.94	2.69	3.28	2.70
Non-gang members	3.44	2.45	2.88	2.61	2.68	2.67	3.06	2.43	2.97	2.54
<i>Oppositional</i>										
Stable gang members	3.40	2.71	3.12	2.58	2.56	2.50	2.72	2.05	2.12	2.44
Unstable gang members	3.43	2.72	3.29	3.04	2.61	2.78	2.24	2.53	1.86	2.25
Non-gang members	2.11	2.34	1.97	2.42	1.70	2.30	1.50	2.12	1.27	2.01

**Table 4. Group Means and Standard Deviations for Peer of Behaviour by Age**

Group Subscale Age	Age 10				Age 11				Age 12			
	Peer		Self		Peer		Self		Peer		Self	
	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD
<i>Aggression</i>												
Stable gang members	.19*	.69	.07	.68	.41	.84	.17	.89	.40	.84	.18	.80
Unstable gang members	.44	.97	.29	1.00	.13	.92	.18	.88	.41	.92	.26	.97
Non-gang members	-.17	.76	-.26	.88	-.37	.83	-.05	.93	-.32	.83	-.54	.80
<i>Withdrawal</i>												
Stable gang members	-.24	.83	-.11	.60	-.47	.63	-.26	.26	-.30	.74	-.34	.66
Unstable gang members	-.04	.74	.02	.99	-.30	.89	.05	.96	-.22	.97	-.20	.89
Non-gang members	.25	1.01	.001	1.08	.25	1.14	.23	1.07	.28	1.13	.23	.95
<i>Popularity</i>												
Stable gang members	-.07	.74	.26	.87	.14	.84	.12	1.09	.22	1.17	.36	.93
Unstable gang members	.09	.76	.13	.89	-.12	.83	.14	.92	-.11	.94	.75	1.13
Non-gang members	.26	.83	.02	.94	.31	.87	-.03	.77	-.03	.91	.06	.90

\* Standardized Scores.

## Discussion

This paper provided a developmental perspective on gangs and extended and replicated findings on the frequency and stability of gang membership, family characteristics, behaviours, friendships, and school attitudes of gang and nongang members. Not until age 13 was there a significant relationship between belonging to a gang one year and belonging to a gang the following year. Stable and unstable gang members, however, had antecedent behaviour problems in a variety of contexts as rated by parents, teachers, peers, and self. Although unstable gang members exhibited fewer problematic behaviours than stable gang members. However, with age, the antisocial behaviours of both stable and unstable gang members became more diversified.

The first goal of this study was to examine the stability of gang membership. Surveys of gang membership have generally assessed high school samples and field studies have assessed even older adolescents. The unique aspect of this research was the utilization of a younger sample and the demonstration that stability of gang membership occurred at age 13. The social context of the peer group may be one process that contributes to the stability of gang membership. Research has demonstrated that aggressive children form friends with other children who are similarly aggressive, by the age of 10 years old (Cairns & Cairns, 1991). For stable gang members, early behaviour problems may have contributed to their rejection by a prosocial peer group and acceptance by a similarly deviant peer group. In support of Selection Theory, the stable gang members were rated as having behaviour problems prior to their membership in gangs becoming stable (i.e., aggression, fighting, delinquency). Furthermore, stable gang members reported having friends who engaged in delinquent behaviours. Stable gang members may interact with others (individuals who are similar to themselves in terms of delinquency) and these patterns of affiliation may continue to support the values and the structure of engaging in deviant acts (Klien & Crawford, 1967). Cairns and Cairns (1991) propose four social processes through which this deviant socialization takes place. First, in early adolescence there is a sharp increase in behavioural synchrony. Second, in early adolescence the conditions for group entry become more delineated in terms of values and behaviour. Third, there are strong reciprocal forces for conformity, and lastly, there are powerful effects of reciprocal influence. The findings from this research, and other work that has utilized older samples (Lahey, Gorden, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, & Farrington, 1999; Thornberry et al., 1993), supports the proposition that the stability of gang membership may be maintained and facilitated through association with delinquent friends.

This pattern of affiliation may also contribute to the escalation of delinquent acts, as suggested by Cairns and Cairns (1991), through the social processes of conformity and reciprocal influence. Self and peer ratings of behaviours indicated that stable and unstable gang members are increasing and diversifying the types of antisocial acts which they engage in over time (e.g., alcohol and drug use by age 13). Although engagement in these behaviours does increase normatively in adolescence (Moffitt, 1993), the unstable and stable gang members may be initiated into these behaviours at a younger age than the majority of adolescents. Furthermore, problems at one age may be transformed into other problem behaviours, which act as catalysts for the continuation of other problem behaviours. Thus, there is both continuation and accumulation of deviant behaviour problems with development. This profile may be evident in the behaviour ratings of stable and unstable gang members. For both these groups by adolescence, the aggressive and noncompliant childhood problem behaviours

became compounded by alcohol and drug use as well as more serious delinquent acts such as stealing and vandalism. As the behaviour problems increased over time, other consequences such as school failure occurred, which further diminishes the probability of later success. In summary, the pathway to stable gang membership may comprise: (1) antecedent behaviour problems (e.g., externalizing problems) and low levels of anxiety; (2) failure to learn conventional prosocial alternatives to antisocial behaviour through association with delinquent friends; and (3) reciprocal influence with deviant peers.

Stable gang members had more problems than unstable gang members, suggesting that these two groups may have different developmental trajectories. These differing trajectories may be due to unstable gang members being on the periphery of the antisocial peer group of gang members. Agnew (1991) found that time spent with delinquent peers was a predictor of self delinquency and Warr and Stafford (1991) reported that knowledge of friends' delinquent activity was 2.5 to 5 times more important for self-delinquency than friends' attitudes about delinquency. In the present study, stable gang members reported that their friends engaged in more delinquent activity than both unstable and nongang members. Unstable gang members may spend less time with their delinquent peers and have less knowledge about their friends' delinquent activities than stable gang members. Thus, deviant social processes such as behavioural synchronicity, conformity, and reciprocal socialization may not be as strong. Presumably, once unstable gang members leave the gang, they will have even less knowledge about the gang's activities and hence, their involvement in delinquent acts will decrease.

Future research needs to examine the social networks, the stability, and function of friendships of stable and unstable gang members. This type of research may increase our ability to differentiate between stable and unstable gang members and understand what makes the latter leave the gang. In addition, longitudinal research is needed to determine if the discontinuous nature of gang member status for unstable members results in more positive outcomes (i.e., a short delinquent career and a desistance from a criminal career). Similarly, longitudinal research will clarify the mechanisms which escalate the delinquent careers of stable gang members.

The present prospective study provided a developmental perspective on stable, unstable, and nongang members from multiple perspectives (e.g., self, peers, parents, teachers). It is important however, to consider the results of this study in the context of its limitations. The groups were defined on the basis of a single item from self-report information. In order to compensate for this limitation, group assignment was based on two points in time (at ages 13 and 14) when gang membership was stable. Due to the low agreement among informants, it was not possible to use a multi-informant approach for group assignment. Although, it was a single item, the cross time approach as well as the replication of other findings with older samples support the utilization of this measurement technique. In future research, it would be interesting to ask and identify specific gangs and to examine more closely the quality of the friendships among gang members, as well as the characteristics of the specific gang members.

The low agreement among teachers, parents, and self ratings raises several issues. First, teachers and parents may not be aware of their boys' deviant activities and involvement in gangs, hence they are not able to provide reliable reports on gang membership. Gang membership may be a peer activity to which adults are not privy. Second, the low agreement between parents and teachers on gang membership

suggests that parents and teachers identified different boys as gang members. Gang members' behaviour problems may not be consistent from one context to another (i.e., home to school). Given that adults are not aware generally of who belongs to a gang, peers may be an important second source of information on gang membership and gang activities.

The results of this study suggest that the problem behaviours associated with becoming a gang member emerge before age 10. The societal and individual costs of belonging to a gang necessitate more longitudinal research with a developmental perspective to investigate the antecedent behaviours and the factors which initiate and maintain the road to gang membership. Knowledge of the youngest age at which youths join gangs could help shape policy as to when prevention programs could be successfully implemented.

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