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Youth Gangs in International Perspective

Results from the Eurogang Program of Research

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Chapter 8
Gang Dynamics Through the Lens of Social Identity Theory

Karen Hennigan* **and Marija Spanovic**

> The gang as a form of human association and a social problem, an object of curiosity and commentary is at once ancient and contemporary ... reports suggest that collective forms of delinquency have become cause for alarm in such widely separated areas as Western Europe and the Iron Curtain countries, the Far East, in Australia, and in such rapidly changing underdeveloped countries as Ghana and Kenya. Picturesque names establish the public identity of these young people ... names like "zoot-suiters" and "boppers" in the U.S., "Teddy boys" in England, "blousons noir" in France, "vitelloni" in Italy, "Halbstarke" in Germany, "bodgies" (boys) and "widgies" (girls) in Australia and New Zealand, "tsotsio" in South Africa, "mambo" boys and girls in Japan, "hooligans" in Poland and Russia, the "tap-karoschi" of Yugoslavia, and the "lui-mang" and "tai-pau" of Taiwan (Short and Strodtbeck 1965, p. 1).

This is the opening paragraph of one of the first detailed studies of group processes observed in street gangs.[1] Published in 1965, Short and Strodtbeck's work documents the ubiquitous nature of delinquent adolescent groups in many parts of the world, now going back five decades or more. Over the years, the descriptors used to depict such groups have changed, but their presence has been continuous and expanding. Efforts to understand the impact of street gangs have been continuous and expanding as well. A street gang is foremost a group. Young men and women all over the world attach importance to becoming part of such a group, gaining part of their identity from belonging to it. Relatively little academic and

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professional work on street gangs has taken advantage of the development of social psychological theories on social identity to understand how the street gang as a group influences its members.

The purpose of this chapter is to use the framework of social identity theory (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986), self-categorization theory (Turner 1985, 1987), and related work (Brewer 1991; Hogg 2001; Pickett et al. 2002; Postmes and Spears 1998) to enrich our understanding of group processes in adolescent street gangs. The hope is to stimulate further exploration of gang group processes through the lens of these theories that have been developed over the last several decades by social psychologists in many parts of the world, especially in Europe, the United States, and Australia. We argue that this particular framework, mostly ignored in recent gang research and applied practice, holds promise for furthering our understanding of the dynamics of these groups and may also bring new insights to the work of formulating effective prevention and intervention strategies that heretofore have had disappointingly little impact on the continuity and growth of street gangs (see Klein and Maxson 2006, Chap. 3 for a review). We begin by laying out key theoretical components that we use to derive hypotheses about group-based mediators of gang violence. We test these hypotheses using data from a recent study of gang social identity among the youth living in Los Angeles, California (Hennigan and Sloane 2011).

Social identity theory is quite distinct from other identity-based theories (e.g., Erikson 1963; Stryker 1987; Stryker and Burke 2000) because of its focus on *intergroup* dynamics rather than *interpersonal* dynamics. Several authors have reviewed these differences in detail[2] which we will not repeat here. The common ground among these theories is a focus on the self in general, but the processes described are quite different and operate at different levels. Social identity theory is based on the model of a layered self-concept that includes layers defined by social characteristics that arise from identification with social groups or categories that are distinct from personal or individual characteristics. The personal layer of one's self-concept is defined in the context of *interpersonal* relations. In contrast, the social layers of one's self-concept are defined in the context of *intergroup* relations.

Gang ethnographers use working definitions of the concept of identity or gang identity that may or may not overlap with the social identity model discussed below. For example, much of Vigil's (1988a, 1988b) discussion on gang identity is conceptualized through an interpersonal lens from the point of view of Erikson's (1963) work and others (Wallace and Fogelson 1965; Whiting 1980). However, he explicitly develops his discussion beyond personal identity to encompass the notion of group identity. His description of group processes highlights aspects of the group context of gang membership that overlaps with the social identity perspective, though he does not explicitly refer to this theoretical orientation. In his treatise, Vigil (1988b) emphasizes the contribution that gang membership makes on one's self-definition. He observes that "to gain acceptance from peers, an individual will adopt behavior patterns that initially have little intrinsic meaning to him, and perhaps might even be repugnant, but nevertheless are requisites for gang membership: for example, showing that one can feel, act, and look hard and uncaring" (pp. 427–428).

"Growing up in the barrio and becoming socialized and enculturated to street peer networks and beliefs makes an individual *group-oriented* (emphasis added) early in life" (p. 435). "A person learns to feel what the group feels," and he must "learn the expectations of the group" (p. 437). "The barrio group … provides [its own] norms and patterns for emotional stability, social interaction and friendship, protection and street survival" (Vigil 1988b, p. 432). Overall, "for those who become members, the gang norms help shape what a person thinks about himself and others and provides models for how to look and act" (Vigil 1988b, p. 421).

8.1 The Social Identity Perspective

Social identity theory focuses on the way people think about themselves and others in an intergroup context. By identifying oneself as a member of a particular group (like a sports team, a school band, or a street-oriented group such as a street gang), one is accepting or taking on a social identity that has powerful implications *cognitively* for how an individual views himself and others and *behaviorally* for how an individual acts within his group and toward members of other groups. Tajfel (1978) defined social identity as "that *part* of an individual's self concept which derives from knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the emotional value and significance attached to that membership" (p. 63). His definition is deliberately more specific and more limited than a general definition of identity which typically refers to an overall concept of self from an individual or interpersonal point of view. Social identities are specific to intergroup contexts as opposed to interpersonal ones. In the discussion below, social identity is defined in reference to a particular group or social category. Most individuals have multiple social identities related to multiple social categories or groups with which the person identifies, all of which may become part of the individual's overall self-concept.

Tajfel and Turner's (1979, 1986) work was in the context of intergroup relations involving real or perceived competition or conflict between social groups and categories. Studies have documented that even the simple awareness that there are two groups or categories, including one that I belong to and another that I do not, gives rise to ingroup favoritism and often outgroup derogation in terms of stereotyping and distributing rewards (Allport 1954; Billig and Tajfel 1973; Brewer 1999; Tajfel et al. 1971; Turner 1975). Research on social identity and related theories describe the dynamics by which we commonly perceive that our own group is better and more deserving than other groups, a perception that is continually reinforced by selectively comparing one's ingroup with an outgroup on whichever evaluative criteria come to mind. Research has documented that the criteria that typically come to mind are those by which the outgroup falls short in relation to the ingroup (and not vice versa). In short, we are motivated to make comparisons that support the perception that our ingroup is superior to an outgroup in important ways because it promotes a sense of positive distinctiveness, self-definition, and self-esteem.

8.1.1 Continuum of Behavior: From Individual-Level to Group-Level Behavior

From the point of view of social identity theory, an individual's social behavior falls between two extremes defined as interpersonal or intergroup behavior. At the interpersonal end of the continuum, the behavior between two or more individuals is fully determined by their interpersonal relationships and individual characteristics, where social identity has little or no influence. At the intergroup end of the continuum, the behavior between two or more individuals is fully determined by their membership in a particular social group or category; here, personal values and characteristics are not influential. Social behavior rarely actually falls at one extreme or the other, but varies somewhere in between these two extremes, depending on the salience of group (intergroup) or individual (interpersonal) concerns. Tajfel (1978, p. 41) used soldiers at war as an example of behavior at the intergroup end of the continuum. A poem written by an American infantryman, James Lenihan, provides a poignant example of this. His poem expresses his shift from the group end of the continuum to the individual end of the continuum after he shot and killed a German soldier during World War II[3]. The poem begins:

I shot a man yesterday
And much to my surprise,
The strangest thing happened to me
I began to cry.
    He was so young, so very young
And Fear was in his eyes,
He had left his home in Germany
And came to Holland to die.
    And what about his Family
Were they not praying for him?
Thank God they couldn't see their son
And the man that had murdered him.

Murdered is a powerful word and it conveys perspective from the individual end of the continuum. Viewed from the group end of the continuum, the soldier's action was likely viewed as duty:

It was the War
And he was the enemy
If I hadn't shot him
He would have shot me.
    I saw he was dying
And I called him "Brother"
But he gasped out one word
And that word was "Mother."

His "surprise" is based on switching perspectives from the group end of the continuum (it was my duty as much as it was his duty) to the individual end (I saw him dying and called him brother). A soldier's training is meant to support "group

Individual -Level Behavior	*Group-Level Behavior*
Personally responsible	Personally anonymous (not responsible)
Further personal goals	Further group goals

Fig. 8.1 Tajfel's continuum of behavior

behavior" and avoid the individual end of the continuum. The notion of a continuum is a heuristic that conveys how behavior toward another person may be controlled or influenced by the social identity-relevant aspects of an interaction Fig. 8.1.

One of the corollary predictions of this model is that when a given social identity is controlling (at the group end of the continuum), the individual avoids feeling personally responsible for his actions. This is accomplished by depersonalizing the outgroup individuals involved as well as depersonalizing oneself, viewing each generically as a prototype of their group (Postmes and Spears 1998; Reicher et al. 1995). In this depersonalized state, the influence exerted by the social group through its normative expectations is paramount, meaning that the group-level expectations or norms outweigh one's own individual behavioral preferences.

It is interesting to reflect on stories that speculate as to how a person who showed no signs of aggression growing up became involved in group-based violence. From a social identity point of view, even persons who would be unlikely to be involved in violent acts at an interpersonal level, may well be influenced to do so at the intergroup level. This is consistent with the finding in longitudinal studies that criminal activities heighten when the youth become involved in street gangs and recede after they leave the gang (Esbensen and Huizinga 1993; Gordon et al. 2004; Thornberry et al. 2003). There also is evidence that persons with aggressive tendencies are more likely to be drawn to join a street gang group (Thornberry et al. 2003), presumably in the same way that empathic persons are more likely to be drawn to groups involved in community service. However, the collective norms of street gangs support and expect aggressive action when the gang is challenged and individuals that identify with a street gang can be expected to increase this type of behavior above levels motivated by individual proclivities.

Gang members and members of other groups are clearly not behaving near the group end of the continuum all of the time. A comment made by one respondent in a recent study illustrates this point.[4] This respondent related an incident where he had helped a friend that was jumped (beat-up) on the playground at school, even though the friend was involved with a rival gang. Then he cautioned the interviewer, "please don't tell anyone this because if my homies knew they would kill me." This young man engaged in interpersonal behavior (at the individual end of Tajfel's continuum) to help a friend and was concerned that the incident not be viewed in an intergroup context because if it was, there would be consequences for violating his group's normative expectations.

What factors mediate shifts in focus along this hypothetical continuum from interpersonal behavior to intergroup behavior? In short, the salience of interpersonal versus intergroup aspects in any given situation are affected *externally* by the particulars of the social context (including a history of intergroup conflict or competition, the location, who is present, etc.), but also *internally* by the individual's strength of identification with his relevant ingroup, as well as his level of ingroup cohesion or perceived "groupness." In the next sections, we will briefly review the literature on these concepts as they relate to internal or psychological factors that affect the consistency and extremity of intergroup behavior in general and gang behavior in particular.

8.1.2 Strength of Social Identity

Most of us are involved in various groups or social activities, yet not all of these inform our social identity. We identify strongly with some groups and less so with others, and this calculus may shift over time in reaction to circumstances and events. For example, there are those for whom identification with a political party strengthens around election time but otherwise remains relatively weak or unimportant. As a result, most of the time the normative expectations associated with political activism are inconsequential with little or no routine influence on behavior. For others, this social identity may be front and center and influential much of the time.

One way to understand how strongly a person actively identifies with one particular social group or another is to consider what one gains from doing so, a concept called social identity value (Sherman et al. 1999). Research supports the notion that social identities are assimilated because (1) they help one feel good about oneself and achieve positive self-esteem (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986); (2) they help reduce the uncertainty about who you are and who you are not, based on a generic or prototypical understanding of the characteristics and behavioral norms of members of specific groups or categories[5] (Hogg 2000, 2007); and (3) they help fulfill basic human needs (i.e., needs to both fit in socially and at the same time be distinct or stand out in some unique way; Brewer 1991). Brewer maintains that both of these seemly contradictory needs can be achieved through social identity. Being part of a group or category allows each of us to fit in or belong, and at the same time, we are motivated to view our own group, and by extension ourselves, as being unique or distinctive in some positive way. Other things being equal, the strength of identification with a particular social group predicts or explains the extent to which an individual's behavior is consonant with the normative expectations of that particular social group or category (Hogg and Abrams 1988; Hogg and Reid 2006; Smith et al. 2007). In other words, groups with which one is weakly identified (chronically or in certain situations) will have little normative influence. Among gang members, one would expect to find more correspondence between an individual's behavior and the gang's behavioral norms when social identification with the gang is high. Individuals that strongly identify with a group are expected to operate toward the group end of Tajfel's behavioral continuum much more frequently than individuals with weaker group identification.

8.2 Ingroup Cohesion and Intergroup Conflict

Other factors that affect how much group membership influences one's behavior include group cohesion and intergroup conflict. Early research in the area of group dynamics (c.f., Cartwright and Zander 1968; Gerard and Miller 1967) identified key processes that support group cohesion. Group cohesion, conceptualized as an attribute of the group, has been defined as "the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group" (Festinger et al. 1950, p. 164). A group may be more or less cohesive depending on the interconnectedness of the individuals involved. The level of group cohesion has important implications for a group's capacity for effectively responding to intergroup challenges. Research supports the view that group cohesion facilitates concerted action and aggressive response to conflict with another group. The reverse, that intergroup conflict promotes cohesion, is also empirically supported (Brewer 1999; Dion 1979; Grant and Brown 1995; Sherif 1967). As early as 1906, Sumner observed that "intergroup conflict and in-group solidarity may form a mutually reinforcing feedback system in which hostility between groups becomes a self-sustaining cycle" (Sumner, 1906 as cited in Dion 1979).

Early on, gang researchers focused on this aspect of group processes. Klein and Crawford (1967) and Short and Strodtbeck (1965) observed that street gangs were not highly cohesive groups. They observed that gang membership and gang leadership were generally relatively unstable. Maintaining a focus on group behavior was difficult. To be effective, leaders needed to direct the members focus toward threats or challenges from outside of the group. Outside threats or challenges motivated participation in violent and criminal activities directed toward defending the group's turf or honor and at the same time played a central role in maintaining the group's cohesion as well as a leader's own status. Spergel (1995), Klein (1995), and Decker (1996; Decker and Van Winkle 1996) have all made similar observations. They observed that it is competition with nearby street gangs that draws local gang members together and gang cohesiveness thrives on gang-on-gang hostility. Consistent with social psychological research, conflict or threats from the outside increases a group's cohesion. In turn, strong group cohesion supports increased hostility toward persons outside the group. For street gang members, both group cohesion and intergroup conflict can be expected to strengthen identification with the gang and thereby increase the likelihood that gang members will behave near the group end of Tajfel's continuum.

8.3 Ingroup Entitativity or "Groupness"

A related but separate line of research also sheds light on factors that support a shift toward group behavior. This research focuses on whether or not a collection of individuals is perceived to be a group (a social entity) or merely an aggregate of people. For example, if the youth are gathered in a local park, impressions and reactions to the gathering (made by onlookers and by the participants themselves) may well depend on the extent to which the gathering is perceived to be a group or just a gathering. Campbell (1958) used the term "entitativity" to denote the degree of "groupness" inferred for an aggregate of people.[6]

Several cues have been found to underlie the inference that a collection of people is a group. Brewer et al. (2004) suggest that two general types of cues are often used to make inferences about groupness. One type of cue has to do with essence. A collection of individuals is more likely to be perceived as a group if they have similar traits or trait-related behaviors that define an essence for the group. Another aspect that conveys an essence is the sense that there are clear boundaries as to who is or is not part of the group. A second type of cue has to do with factors related to agency. Confirmation of a group's agency includes indications of interdependence, interaction, or coordinated efforts among the individuals involved. Group cohesion is a key attribute of this type of entitativity. The more a collection of persons gather together, interact in concert, or convey a sense of interdependence, the higher the perceived groupness of that collection of people. In a recent study, Ip et al. (2006) characterized these two approaches to making inferences about groupness as being based on "birds of a feather" (essence) or on "flocking together" (agency). And other dichotomies have been suggested.[7] Whichever approach is used, the degree of groupness a person infers for their own ingroup has implications for just where on Tajfel's continuum their behavior is likely to fall. This inference of groupness underlies the basis for intergroup behavior linked to a social identity because behavior at the group end of his continuum requires that at least a minimal degree of groupness be perceived. An individual's strength of identification with a collection of people is predicated in part by the extent to which that individual infers some level of groupness among the individuals involved. Spears et al. (2004) argue that both "group distinctiveness and entitativity play an important role in creating social identity and putting it to use" (p. 293).

Outside observers generally infer that street gangs have a high level of entitativity or group cohesion (see Lickel et al. 2000),[8] but research findings on inside observations are at odds with this (Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Klein and Crawford 1967). Inside observers document relatively low levels of cohesion among traditional street gang members themselves (i.e., low ingroup entitativity). We can speculate that some of the reasons for this have to do with a street orientation common among traditional street gangs that is open to a variety of youth hanging out together. Like most adolescents, street gang youth spend most of their time hanging out, engaged in activities that are not uncommon among adolescents such as drinking, using recreational drugs, trespassing, loitering, and vandalism. Violence is rare in proportion to all gang activities (Battin et al. 1998; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Esbensen et al. 1993; Klein 1995; Short and Strodtbeck 1965). And not all of the youth hanging out together will join in the violent gang activities. In fact, it is sometimes difficult for researchers to determine just who is or is not a member of a street gang. Ethnographers, including Vigil (1988a), have categorized gang-involved youth as regularly, peripherally, situationally, or temporarily engaged in gang activities (p. 99). Similarly, other gang researchers categorize gang-involved youth at various levels of commitment to gang life, such as hardcore, associates, fringe, or wannabe (Klein 1971, 1995). The point we are making is that despite an easy consensus among observers that street gangs have high entitativity or groupness (from an outgroup perspective), there is less consensus among the youth hanging out themselves (from an ingroup perspective) just how cohesive the membership is or even how clear the boundaries of the gang are. Vigil (1988b, p. 429) offers these perspectives from two youth who were fringe members for a short time during high school. One said that he joined to "feel good because someone is behind you," but "I never made it as a true gang member." The other youth said that he became part of the gang to blend in to the social environment. He would "dress and act like a cholo" and "act cool and not stare at anybody" to avoid being in fights. He stated that he left the group in high school as the coping strategy of gang identification brought more problems than it solved.

8.4 Can a Social Identity Perspective Help Explain Involvement in Group-Level Behaviors?

Our review of a mix of social psychological and gang research findings suggests that two factors contribute to the influence that an ingroup such as a street gang has on an individual's behavior. These are the strength of identification with one's group (How integral is this group in a person's definition of who he is?) and perceptions of the groupness (How strongly defined is the group to that person?). Both of these factors promote depersonalization (i.e., seeing oneself as a prototypical member of the ingroup which facilitates compliance with ingroup norms). We expect that ingroup identification and ingroup entitativity are among key mediators of group behavior (i.e., behavior that is consistent with the group's normative expectations—the group end of Tajfel's continuum).

If our goal is to understand the behavior of gang members in social situations, we should find that an individual's level of identification with his gang as well as his perception of gang's groupness (e.g., cohesion and clarity of the gang's boundary) help explain or predict group behavior defined as behaviors that are consistent with the gang's normative expectations. For most street gangs, normative group behavior includes involvement in criminal and violent activities. The same principle should be true for nongang youth, but in their case, criminal and violent activities are generally not part of the normative expectations for their peer group. So no relationship between these types of behaviors and markers of group identification or group entitativity with in nongang peer groups is expected.

Other variables studied by criminologists may explain an individual's involvement in criminal activities and violence. A large body of research has focused on the deterrent value of individually held perceptions of the likelihood of getting caught and punished for delinquent or criminal activities. All things being equal, the more likely an individual believes it is that he may be caught and punished, the less likely he is to engage in criminal or violent activity (see Pratt et al. 2006 for a meta-analytic review; see also Maxson et al. 2011). These deterrence-related factors should be negatively associated with participation in delinquent and criminal activities when personal interests are salient (i.e., when the person is behaving close to the individual end of Tajfel's continuum). Because serious delinquency and violence are generally not normative behavior within nongang peer groups, we predict that individually held beliefs about the likelihood of getting caught and punished will be associated with participation in these activities and strength of identification with the peer group should have nothing to do with it. One the other hand, for gang-involved youth, we make the opposite prediction. Criminal and violent activities are strongly normative for gang members (see Decker 1996; Klein 1995). We predict that gang members, participation in these highly normative behaviors should be more strongly related to ingroup identification and group cohesion than to individual-level concerns such as the likelihood of getting caught and punished. In short, group-level expectations are expected to trump any individual-level concerns gang members may have for getting caught, but not so for the nongang youth.

8.5 Methods

Hennigan and Sloane (2011) interviewed the youth in areas claimed by local street gangs to study their reactions to civil gang injunctions in Los Angeles, California. The youth were interviewed in areas that were roughly matched on gang prevalence and sociodemographics. Some of the areas were involved in gang injunction efforts and some were not. Over a 10-month period, interviewers recruited male youth between the ages of 14 and 21 in designated gang neighborhoods in Los Angeles, California, by going door to door initially, then by engaging the youth hanging out on the street. Informed consent was obtained for all respondents and also from a parent for those who were less than 18 years old. As intended, this sampling approach resulted in oversampling street-oriented youth in the selected gang neighborhoods.

Of the 416 respondents, 97% were Hispanic, and 87% were born in the United States. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of the gang-involved youth had been held in custody overnight relative to 7% of the nongang respondents. Eighty-four percent of the gang and 59% of nongang youth had been the victim of violence.[9] Early in the interview, each respondent was asked to name various types of groups in which someone his age could become involved in his neighborhood including leadership groups, competitive teams, other organized clubs or activity groups, street gangs, tagger or skater groups, or party posses or crews. The interviewer then asked each respondent to list his own important peer groups. Interviewers were instructed to work with each youth to identify the respondent's primary unconventional (i.e., not adult organized or sponsored) informal peer group in addition to one or more conventional groups.[10]

The analyses here are organized solely around the primary unconventional informal peer group that each respondent identified, which included street gangs (27%), other crews or posses (27%), or informal groups of friends (46%). In the middle part of the interview, respondents answered a series of questions about their group. Social identity was measured using four items from the Identity Subscale of Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Scale of Collective Self-Esteem.[11] The four items were highly correlated (alpha=0.79) and were combined to form a scale score with higher scores indicating stronger identification with one's group. Focusing on the same construct used by Klein in his work (Klein and Crawford 1967; Klein 1971), cohesion with a peer group was operationalized as the frequency of meeting or getting together. Group cohesion was measured with a single item. "In some groups, the members meet or get together frequently, but in other groups the members rarely meet or get together at all. Recently, how often do you meet or get together with members of <your group>?"[12] Perception of group boundaries was also measured with a single question. "For some groups it is really clear who is in the group and who is not. These groups have clear boundaries. In others, it is not very clear just who is in the group and who is not. These have fuzzy boundaries. How clear or fuzzy are the boundaries in <your group>?"[13]

In the second half of the interview, each respondent's involvement in criminal activities and violence was measured with a frequently used self-report protocol based on the one developed for the National Youth Study (Huizinga and Delbert 1986) that was subsequently revised and used in the Causes and Correlates studies (see Esbensen and Huizinga 1993; Loeber et al. 1998; Thornberry et al. 2003). For the analyses presented here, level of involvement in criminal activities was defined using the same list of activities employed by Thornberry et al. (2003, Appendix A), except that the index of 31 items here which includes two rather than four items for theft, sexual assault, and prostitution were omitted, and questions about tagging, intimidation, and extortion were added. The subset of six violent activities included here were the same as those used by Thornberry et al. (2003), except that sexual assault was omitted and witness intimidation was added. A variety index of criminal activities was formed by counting how many activities on the list the youth admitted doing in the last 6 months. Similarly, a variety index of violence was created by counting how many violent activities the youth did in the last 6 months. (See Thornberry and Krohn 2000 for a discussion of the validity of this measurement approach.)

Views of deterrence were measured by asking the youth to estimate how many times they would be caught and punished if they were to commit various types of crimes in their neighborhood on ten different occasions. The youth made estimates for 11 different criminal activities including three violent ones.[14] For each activity, the youth indicated his expectation of being caught and punished—from zero to ten times. While the level of consequences expected varied for different kinds of criminal activities, across respondents there were significant correlations among these estimates (Pearson's values were all statistically significant ranging from 0.22 to 0.60). This indicates that the youth who estimated a higher likelihood (relative to other respondents) on one type of crime tended to do the same for other crimes, even though the absolute level of their expectations varied across crimes. For this reason, we chose to combine these estimates to form a general scale of expected consequences across a variety of 11 criminal activities and for the subset of three violent activities. There was a high correspondence in the responses across these 11 items (alpha = 0.86) and the subset of aggressive or violent items (alpha = 0.72).

8.6 Results

8.6.1 *Means and Standard Deviations of Criminal and Violent Activities and Proposed Mediators*

The means and standard deviations of the indices of criminal behavior and of the subset of violent activities self-reported by gang and nongang youth are given in Table 8.1. Involvement in these types of behaviors is significantly higher for gang-involved youth than nongang youth. This is consistent with the supposition that these types of behaviors are normative for gang-involved youth but much less so for nongang youth Table 8.1.

Further, as suggested by our review of gang-related ethnographic and empirical research, on average gang-involved youth have weaker ingroup identification and more diffuse inferences about groupness, measured here as group cohesion and clear boundaries, than the youth involved in nongang peer groups. Nonetheless, there is considerable variability within both types of groups. Similarly, the means for deterrence-related expectations associated with criminal and violent activities vary by gang status. Higher expectations for being caught and punished are expressed by the nongang than by the gang respondents. However, considerable variation in perceived deterrence is evident within both groups.

8.6.2 *Correlations Among Criminal and Violent Activities and Proposed Explanatory Variables*

The bivariate correlations between the proposed explanatory variables and criminal and violent behavior of gang and nongang respondents are given in Table 8.2. As predicted, the table shows that both group identification and cohesion were significantly related to criminal activity in general (0.32, $p<0.01$, and 0.22, $p<0.05$, respectively) and with violent activities in particular (0.49, $p<0.01$ and 0.22, $p<0.05$) among gang members but not among nongang members where none of these correlations were statistically significant (−0.04 and −0.06 for criminal activity and −0.05 and 0.03 for violence). The measure of clear boundaries was not related to these behaviors for either group. The data confirm that despite overall lower levels of group identification and cohesion among gang respondents relative to nongang respondents, these ingroup characteristics were significantly related to between deterrence concerns and violence (−0.16, ns). The data were then tested using structural equation modeling to take the multivariate relationships into account to determine the best fitting model.

8.6.3 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

SEM was used to simultaneously test the relationships between cohesion, clear boundaries, deterrence, identification, and criminal and violent activity. Models were fit separately for gang-involved and nongang respondents to determine the best fitting models for each. Goodness-of-fit was evaluated using criteria recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999).[15]

Gang Models. In the first model shown in Fig. 8.2, we predicted the index of general criminal activity using the proposed explanatory variables. The model was an excellent fit to the data: $\chi^2(3)=2.94$, $p=0.40$, RMSEA$=0.00$, CFI$=1.00$.[16] Cohesion was related to identification, and identification was related to criminal activity. The clear boundaries variable was associated with cohesion, but not related to identification or the criminal index. As predicted, deterrence-related concerns were not significantly related to criminal activity in this model.

Figure 8.3 shows that the best fitting model predicting violence as a dependent variable yielded a similar structure, with cohesion related to identification which was related to violence. It was also an excellent fit to the data: $\chi^2(3)=1.96$, $p=0.58$, RMSEA$=0.00$, CFI$=1.00$.[17] In this model however, a weak but statistically significant relationship with deterrence concerns was also indicated. Preacher and Hayes' (2004) SPSS macro was used to assess the extent to which identification mediated the relationship between cohesiveness and criminal activities among gang members as suggested in these models. This analysis indicated that full mediation occurred for both the criminal activity index (Sobel $Z=2.49$, $p<0.05$) and for violence (Sobel $Z=3.96$, $p<0.001$). Models wherein identification was entered as an independent variable and cohesiveness as a mediator were not significant, indicating that all of the influence gang cohesion had on these dependent variables was mediated through social identification and not vice versa.

Nongang Models. The same models were tested with nongang respondents. The resulting models provided an excellent fit to the data for criminal activity in Fig. 8.4: $\chi^2(3)=2.07$, $p=0.56$, RMSEA$=0.00$, CFI$=1.00$;[18] and violence in Fig. 8.5: $\chi^2(3)=0.87$, $p=0.83$, RMSEA$=0.00$, CFI$=1.00$.[19] Among the nongang respondents, groupness variables (clear boundaries and cohesion) were related to group identification but group identification was not related to criminal or violent activities. Instead, we observed that the criminal activity index (see Fig. 8.3) and the violence index (see Fig. 8.4) were negatively related to the personal estimates of the likelihood of getting caught and punished for such activities (deterrence). Deterrence had a strong negative relationship with both dependent variables among the nongang youth (Fig. 8.4 and Fig. 8.5) and only a weak relationship with violence among the gang-involved respondents (Fig. 8.3).

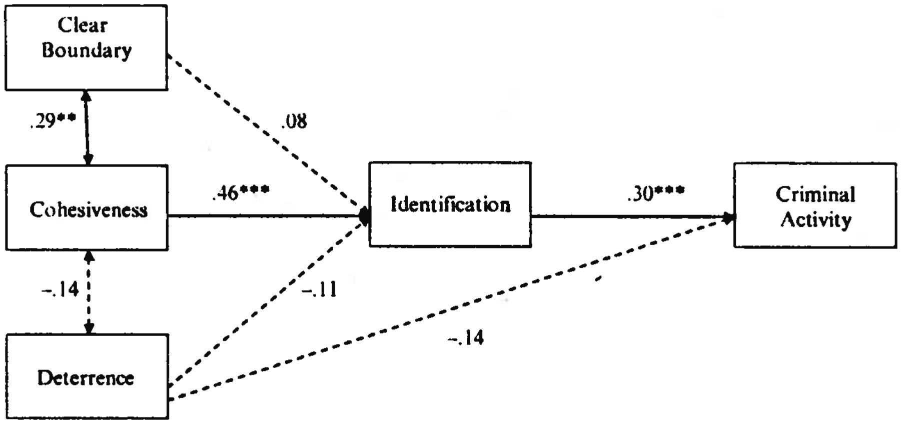
Clear Boundary
.29**
Cohesiveness
−.14
Deterrence
.08
.46***
−.11
Identification
.30***
−.14
Criminal Activity

Fig. 8.2 Gang-involved respondents only: this structural equation model tests predictors of criminal activity among gang-involved youth. Paths with *single-headed arrows* represent directional effects, and paths with *double-headed arrows* represent nondirectional correlations. The model reports standardized regression weights. Bolded paths are significant ($p<.05$)

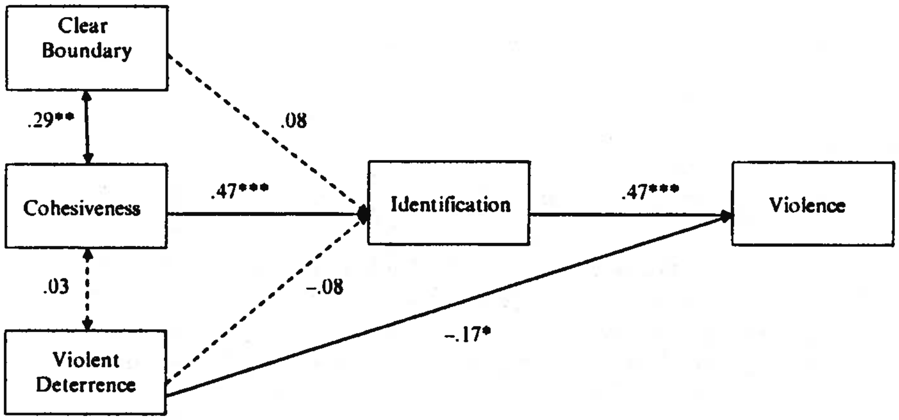
Clear Boundary
.29**
Cohesiveness
.03
Violent Deterrence
.08
.47***
−.08
Identification
.47***
−.17*
Violence

Fig. 8.3 Gang-involved respondents only: this structural equation model tests predictors of violent activities among gang-involved youth. Paths with *single-headed arrows* represent directional effects, and paths with *double-headed arrows* represent nondirectional correlations. The model reports standardized regression weights. Bolded paths are significant ($p<.05$)

8.7 Discussion and Conclusions

We found support for the notion that groupness defined as group cohesion (frequency of getting together) and group identification (or strength of social identity) are associated with criminal and violent behavior among gang members, but not among members of other kinds of peer groups in the same neighborhoods. In the SEM models with gang-involved respondents, the association between group cohesion and

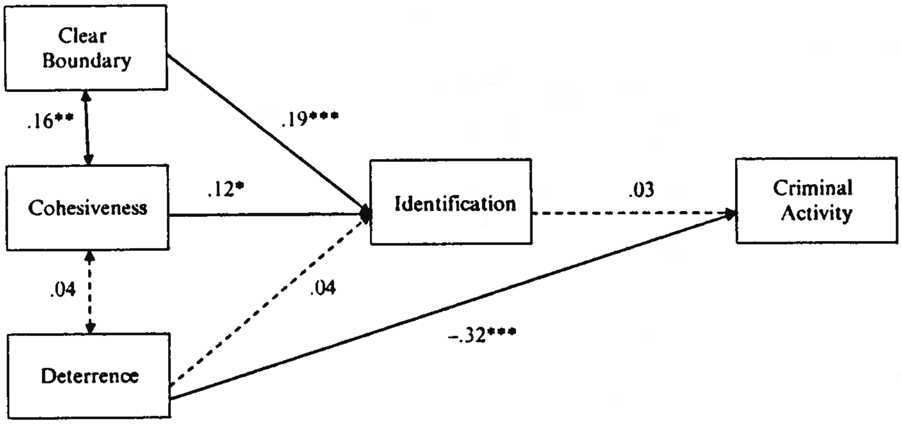
Clear Boundary
.16**
Cohesiveness
.04
Deterrence
.19***
.12*
.04
Identification
.03
-.32***
Criminal Activity

Fig. 8.4 Nongang respondents only: this structural equation model tests predictors of criminal activity among youth involved in nongang peer groups. Paths with *single-headed arrows* represent directional effects, and paths with *double-headed arrows* represent nondirectional correlations. The model reports standardized regression weights. Bolded paths are significant ($p < .05$)

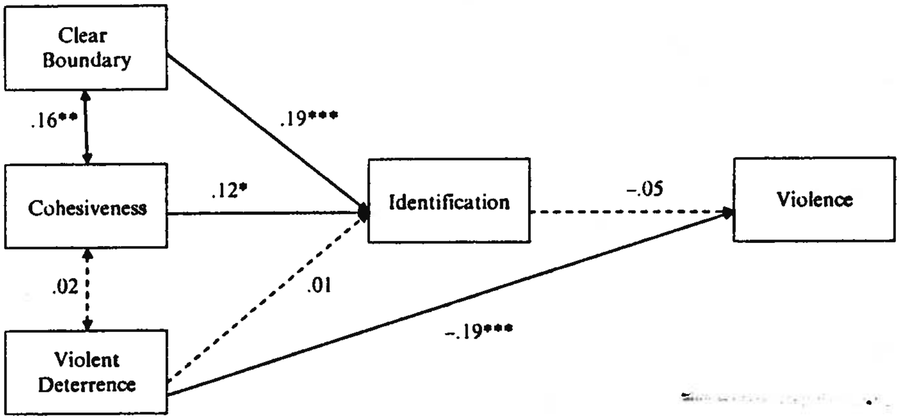
Clear Boundary
.16**
Cohesiveness
.02
Violent Deterrence
.19***
.12*
.01
Identification
-.05
-.19***
Violence

Fig. 8.5 Nongang respondents only: this structural equation model tests predictors of violent activities among youth involved in nongang peer groups. Paths with *single-headed arrows* represent directional effects, and paths with *double-headed arrows* represent nondirectional correlations. The model reports standardized regression weights. Bolded paths are significant ($p < .05$)

both crime and violence was fully mediated by strength of social identity. These relationships were not found in the models with nongang respondents. We maintain that this disparity is due to widely different normative expectations within street gangs versus within nongang peer groups. Based on the tenets of social identity theory, we interpret criminal and violent behavior among gang members as a group-based phenomenon, not in terms of engaging in these behaviors together at the same time (which may or may not happen), but rather in terms of one's motivation to act. The stronger one's identification with the gang, the stronger the individual is focused on the gang's normative expectations (i.e., behavior at the group end of Tajfel's continuum), regardless of individual concerns. Research suggests that a person engaged in group behavior depersonalizes himself and his victims, seeing each more in terms of a generic representative or prototype of their respective group than as individuals. These findings support the value of using this theoretical framework as a model in future research and strategic thinking about gang violence reduction and gang reduction strategies. The findings support framing the motivational context for gang violence in terms of social identity theory in general and Tajfel's continuum in particular.

This study also contributes to our understanding of why the process of weighing the likelihood of personal costs for engaging in illegal activities[20] does less to deter gang members than it appears to for nongang youth. Among the nongang respondents, the data suggest that the higher a respondent's estimate of the likelihood of getting caught and punished, the less involvement in criminal and violent activities. However, among the gang-involved youth, the data suggest that identification with the gang can trump or drastically reduce personal interests such as concerns about getting caught and punished when the behaviors in question are normative and group identification is strong. Since crime and violence are normative among gang-involved youth, personal estimates of getting caught and punished have little or no influence on their criminal and violent behaviors. Among nongang youth, however, serious crime and violence are rarely part of their groups' normative expectations, so personal interests such as avoiding risks of punishment carry more weight.

Gang researchers have observed that gang cohesion is less a function of internal factors such as affective ties or individual similarities than external factors that spawn social interaction in reaction to gang rivalries (Decker 1996; Klein and Crawford 1967). The findings for gang-involved youth in this study are consistent with this view.[21] This preoccupation with group rivalries has been described as a unique characteristic of street gangs, even as one example of ways that street gangs are qualitatively different from other groups. It is our contention that this and other aspects of group dynamics in gangs may be largely predicted or explained through the lens of social identity and related theories. Below, we present examples of approaches that researchers might take toward using social identity and related theories to generate explanations that may extend our understanding of gang dynamics in ways that could be useful for gang prevention and intervention.

Instead of treating social identity as a unitary concept, Leach et al. (2008) demonstrated that there may be value in examining multiple aspects of social identity. They confirmed a two-component model of group identification: self-definition and self-investment that predicted different reactions to ingroup transgressions. Specifically, when facing apparent misdeeds undertaken by group members, the ***self-investment component*** was prospectively associated with cognitively legitimizing the role of the group to the point of denying apparent incriminating evidence that the group's actions were wrong and embracing interpretations that their group's actions were just and warranted. Self-investment was associated with defending the group and supporting the group's actions, regardless of the objective circumstances. Three of the four items in the measure of social identity used in the study presented here were included in the self-investment component of the Leach et al. model. We suspect that it is the self-investment component of gang identification that is strongly related to violence and intergang rivalries. In contrast, the stronger the *self-definition component* of social identity, the more likely it was that individuals viewed apparent misdeeds by their group as unfortunate and even felt guilty about their own (indirect) association with it. Leach et al. reasoned that when a person identifies with his group primarily on the basis of being similar to others in the group, then the person may feel personal guilt or misgivings about the group's misbehavior and is less likely to defend the group's questionable actions. We wonder if this might describe the reactions of former gang members who now work with programs to discourage gang violence and help prevent the youth from joining or help the youth leave the gang. Is it possible that these former gang members have transitioned from a self-investment style of social identity to a self-definitional style and their reactions to gang violence have evolved accordingly? If so, future research could examine the possibility of creating intervention strategies that minimize the self-investment component among gang members without being concerned about a lasting self-definition component of social identification.

A second line of research undertaken to test social identity-related hypotheses that may be relevant to street gang dynamics has focused on which rival outgroups are likely to command the most attention or concern. Based on the reactive distinctiveness hypothesis (see Tajfel and Turner 1979; Jetten et al. 2004), it is predicted that a group will be highly motivated to distinguish itself from other relevant groups that are minimally distinct from (i.e., are very similar to) the ingroup. The implication is that the most serious conflict for a street gang should be directed toward objectively similar groups (i.e., nearby local street gangs), because this kind of outgroup threatens the ingroup's reputed superiority on valued characteristics (e.g., toughness and hardness). In other words, driven by competition for the superior social identity, the outgroups that would be predicted to elicit the most competition (and galvanize ingroup cohesion) are nearby street gangs seen as having similar attributes (close to equals). Striving for a superior social identity (reputation, status), gangs engage in delinquent or violent activities to distinguish themselves from similar rival outgroups. Could this motive for positive distinctiveness be met in some more socially appropriate ways?[22]

A third example of the way a social identity framework could be useful is suggested by research on conflicting social identities. Consider the case of conflicting social identities articulated by Lien (2005) in her interviews with a young emerging gang member in Oslo. Lien describes the internal conflict a young man felt as he committed robbery with other gang members for the first time. He explained how he had acted with steely resolve together with others in his group and assumed the role of ruthless criminal well enough to scare the victim and obtain the victim's money. But later, at home and out of the group context, he felt remorse and feared that his family or school buddies would find out how he obtained the money. He continued his gang affiliation by compartmentalizing the activities, stealing from victims (expected in the gang context), and generously treating his friends and family to gifts (respected within his family and conventional group of friends). He told the interviewer, "I would die of shame if my girl friend and friends knew." From a social identity perspective, opposing or conflicting social identities (e.g., antisocial versus prosocial) may be unstable. Social identities are conceptualized as layers of one's self-definition. While many people have multiple layers of social definitions of themselves, identities with opposing normative expectations such as those with antisocial versus prosocial or conventional norms may be difficult to sustain. Recent work by Brook et al. (2008) suggests that incompatibility among the normative expectations of multiple identities *that are strongly held and important to the individual* is related to depression, anxiety, and unhappiness. We suspect that maintaining strong opposing social identities is not tenable for most people. This suggests that gang prevention programs that find a way to assist the youth in developing strong identification[23] with a peer group that has conventional normative expectations could offer some protection against the temptations of gang involvement. If group affiliation is driven by social identity value as argued by social psychologists (Sherman et al. 1999), then the affiliation that brings the greater value should dominate.

In closing, we are optimistic that using the theoretical framework and empirical knowledge accumulated on the cognitive and behavioral implications of social identity and related theories can contribute new ideas to the challenge of gang reduction.

Notes

1. Here, we will use the term "street gangs," following Malcolm Klein's lead (Klein 1995). In this discussion, we will be referring primarily to traditional street gangs that are structured around a territory or turf that is claimed by the gang. This discussion may or may not apply to other types of gangs such as prison gangs, drug gangs, or other gangs.
2. See Brewer (2001), Hogg et al. (1995), and Stets and Burke (2000).
3. Written after he returned home, the poem was found by James Lenihan's children after his death. They shared the poem with CNN on May 28, 2010. To view the complete poem, use the link http://articles.cnn.com/2010-05-28/us/soldier.poem_1_poem-soldier-holland?_s=PM:US.
4. Documented by an interviewer in the Hennigan and Sloane (2011) study.
5. Though clearly relevant to social identity, we have excluded from this discussion identification with social categories such as male or female, gay or straight, and broad groups based on wealth, political affiliation, country of residence or origin, etc. and focused in this article on groups of people, such as peer groups, teams, activity groups, and street gangs.
6. In this chapter, we will use the word "groupness" in place of the somewhat awkward term entitativity.
7. Other researchers have defined the mechanisms that characterize groups in different ways including dynamic and categorical (Wilder and Simon 1998), inductive or deductive (Postmes et al. 2005), and common bond versus common identity (Prentice et al. 1994).
8. Brian Lickel and his colleagues (Lickel et al. 2000) found in separate studies that college students in the United States and in Poland rated the level of entitativity or groupness of "a local street gang" as being quite high, near the top of the scale, similar to the levels rated for a rock band or a professional sports team. This is consistent with the "Westside Story" stereotype prevalent in the USA that gangs are highly cohesive groups.
9. For additional methodological details, see Hennigan and Sloane (2011).
10. Conventional peer groups were defined as youth groups sponsored or organized by adults in the context of school, community, or religious organizations. "Unconventional" peer groups

were defined as a clique of crew that was part of the street gang, a tagger or skater or party group, or some other informal group of peers (friends).

11. The items included were the following: "Overall <group> has very little to do with how I feel about myself. <Group> is an important reflection of who I am. <Group> is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am. In general, belonging to <group> is an important part of my self-image. Six response options ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree."
12. Response options used were the following: 6=almost every day, 5=two to five times a week, 4=about once a week, 3=two or three times a month, 2=about once a month, or 1=less than that.
13. Five response options ranged from very fuzzy to very clear.
14. The activities were drinking in public, shoplifting, driving while drunk or high, tagging or writing graffiti, stealing a car, breaking into a building to steal something, trespassing on private property, selling drugs in your neighborhood, hitting someone in a fight, seriously beating someone up, intimidating or challenging someone that might tell authorities about something illegal that they or a friend did.
15. A chi-square value that is nonsignificant, an $\text{RMSEA} < 0.08$, and a $\text{CFI} > 0.95$ represents a good fit (Hu and Bentler 1999).
16. Alternative models were also tested. Specifically, identification was entered as an independent variable and cohesion, clear boundaries, and deterrence were entered as mediators. This model provided a poor fit, $\chi^2(3)=7.87$, $p=0.05$, $\text{RMSEA}=0.12$, $\text{CFI}=0.90$. It also seemed plausible that delinquency predicted cohesion which in turn predicted identification. This model was not a good fit for the data, $\chi^2(3)=7.97$, $p=0.05$, $\text{RMSEA}=0.14$, $\text{CFI}=0.68$.
17. Entering identification as an independent variable and cohesion, clear boundaries, and deterrence as mediators provided a worse fit compared to the fit of the model presented in Fig. 8.2, $\chi^2(3)=5.27$, $p=0.15$, $\text{RMSEA}=0.08$, $\text{CFI}=0.96$. An alternative model wherein violence was entered as an independent variable and identification as a dependent variable did not fit the data well, $\chi^2(3)=7.11$, $p=0.07$, $\text{RMSEA}=0.13$, $\text{CFI}=0.88$.
18. Reversing the order of independent and dependent variable also resulted in a good fit, $\chi^2(2)=.22$, $p=0.89$, $\text{RMSEA}=0.00$, $\text{CFI}=1.00$.
19. Reversing the order of independent and dependent variable also provided a good fit, $\chi^2(2)=0.38$, $p=0.83$, $\text{RMSEA}=0.00$, $\text{CFI}=1.00$.
20. Note that studies that include measures of the social costs of criminal offending blur the distinction made here between individual estimates of the likelihood of getting caught and punished and social identity (i.e., the social costs bleed into group identification). Presumably, the stronger one's identification with a social group, the more likely concerns about a comember's views of offending will be correlated with shared normative expectations.
21. The findings are consistent though not all of the alternative definitions were tested here.
22. This observation should not be confused with the kind of organizing that street workers used in the past to attempt to guide gang members toward more conventional activities (see Klein 1995). Clearly, this kind of approach would have to be undertaken in ways that would avoid increasing gang cohesion and avoid fueling traditional gang rivalries.
23. With emphasis on "strong" because Brook et al. (2008) found that social identities that were not strongly held had little or no influence on psychological well-being at all.

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