

Finn-Aage Esbensen  
Cheryl L. Maxson *Editors*

# Youth Gangs in International Perspective

Results from the Eurogang Program  
of Research

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Finn-Aage Esbensen  
Department of Criminology  
and Criminal Justice  
University of Missouri-St. Louis  
St. Louis, MO, USA  
esbensen@umsl.edu

Cheryl L. Maxson  
Department of Criminology  
Law and Society  
University of California  
Irvine, CA, USA  
cmaxson@uci.edu

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*We dedicate this volume of original  
research to our fearless leader,  
the individual who had the foresight  
to identify the need for, and importance of,  
multi-site, multi-method gang research:  
Old Silverback – Malcolm “Mac” Klein.*



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# Contributors

**Judith Aldridge** Centre for Criminology and Criminal Justice, School of Law, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

**Emma Alleyne** School of Psychology, Keynes College, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent, UK

**Rachel Armitage** Applied Criminology Centre, University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, UK

**Dena C. Carson** Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Missouri-St. Louis, St. Louis, MO, USA

**Scott H. Decker** School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ, USA

**Finn-Aage Esbensen** Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Missouri-St. Louis, St. Louis, MO, USA

**Andrew M. Fox** School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ, USA

**Frank van Gemert** Criminology Department, VU University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

**Karen Hennigan** Department of Psychology, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA

**Jan Dirk de Jong** Criminology Department, VU University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

**Charles M. Katz** School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ, USA

**Malcolm W. Klein** Department of Psychology, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA

**Fredrik Leinfelt** Stockholm Gang Intervention and Prevention Project, Stockholm County Police Department & Linnaeus University, Stockholm, Sweden

**Jonas Markus Lindstad** Danish Ministry of Justice, Copenhagen, Denmark

**Kristy N. Matsuda** Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Missouri-St. Louis, St. Louis, MO, USA

**Cheryl L. Maxson** Department of Criminology, Law and Society, University of California, Irvine, CA, USA

**Juanjo Medina-Ariz** Centre for Criminology and Criminal Justice, School of Law, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

**Chris Melde** School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, USA

**Leanne Monchuk** Applied Criminology Centre, University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, UK

**Maria Libak Pedersen** Danish Ministry of Justice, Copenhagen, Denmark

**Dana Peterson** School of Criminal Justice, University at Albany, Albany, NY, USA

**David C. Pyrooz** School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ, USA

**Robert Ralphs** Department of Sociology, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

**Amir Rostami** Stockholm Gang Intervention and Prevention Project, Stockholm County Police Department & Linnaeus University, Stockholm, Sweden

**Revital Sela-Shayovitz** David Yellin Academic College, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel

**Hannah Smithson** Department of Sociology, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

**Marija Spanovic** Department of Psychology, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA

**Frank M. Weerman** Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR), Amsterdam, The Netherlands

**Jane L. Wood** School of Psychology, Keynes College, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent, UK

# Chapter 1

## The Eurogang Program of Research and Multimethod Comparative Gang Research: Introduction

Finn-Aage Esbensen and Cheryl L. Maxson

The topic of youth gangs has received considerable scholarly attention in the United States as well as in other nations. Numerous publications have addressed the prevalence of, trends in, and responses to youth gangs within specific national contexts. Relatively missing from this field, however, is examination of the youth gang phenomenon across multiple societal and cultural contexts, although several notable exceptions exist (e.g., Covey 2003; Decker and Weerman 2005; Hagedorn 2008; Klein et al. 2001; van Gemert et al. 2008). In this edited volume, we hope to contribute to this evolving body of research. Specifically, this volume addresses important issues in gang research and represents work by a number of youth gang scholars from a variety of countries and disciplines. The chapters in this book (1) provide unique insights into definitional and measurement issues, (2) investigate group processes that distinguish youth gangs from other law-violating youth groups, and (3) describe interesting and contemporary gang research conducted in seven different nations (Denmark, Israel, the Netherlands, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Kingdom, and the United States).

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F.-A. Esbensen (✉)

Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Missouri-St. Louis,  
St. Louis, MO, USA

e-mail: esbensen@umsl.edu

C.L. Maxson

Department of Criminology, Law and Society, University of California, Irvine, CA, USA  
e-mail: cmaxson@uci.edu

This book is the fourth in a series of edited volumes produced by the Eurogang Network, a cross-national collaboration of researchers, including European and American scholars, devoted to comparative and multimethod research on youth gangs and troublesome youth groups. The Eurogang web site (<http://www.umsl.edu/~ccj/eurogang/euroganghome.htm>) notes three primary objectives of this network:

1. To build a foundation of knowledge regarding the socioeconomic conditions and institutional processes that foster or curtail the emergence and persistence/dissolution of youth gangs and problematic groups.
2. To construct an infrastructure for comparative, multimethod, cross-national research on youth violence in group contexts.
3. To disseminate and effectively utilize knowledge to inform the development of effective local, national, and international responses to emerging youth crime and violence issues (retrieved 7/26/11).

Throughout our series of workshops, certain themes surface again and again in our discussions of definitional and methodological issues. We also engage in repeated discussions about the group processes that occur within youth gangs and how these might contribute to high levels of offending. As such, we devoted our tenth Eurogang meeting (June 2010) in Neustadt an der Weinstrasse, Germany, to presentations and discussions of these core issues associated with comparative research on youth gangs as well as site-specific descriptions of gang research in a variety of European settings. The presentations at that workshop provide the foundation for this book, supplemented by a few contributions from nonattending Eurogang members. All of the chapters represent original contributions to the field.

Some of the chapter authors are well-known scholars in the field, while others are breaking new ground by being the first in their countries to raise interest in and conduct research on youth gang issues. Authors come from a variety of scholarly disciplines as well as cultural perspectives, providing rich and diverse views of the youth gang phenomenon. The works presented in the chapters also represent various and rich research traditions, including ethnographic methods, self-report surveys or interviews of youth, surveys or interviews with law enforcement, official records data, and victim interviews. Importantly, and unique among the few books that address gangs outside the United States, all of the authors utilize the Eurogang Program's definition of a youth gang so that while the groups they describe are located in different countries, comparisons may be drawn between them.

## **1.1 Some Background Information on the Eurogang Program of Research<sup>1</sup>**

The Eurogang Program was conceived during a small meeting in the *béguinage*<sup>2</sup> in Leuven, Belgium, following a conference on restorative justice held in 1997. After publishing an exploratory article about the presence of gangs in Europe (Klein 1996), Malcolm Klein convened a small group of scholars to discuss how the study

of street gangs in Europe might be fostered, and instigated another exploratory meeting later that year in San Diego, California.

Following the enthusiastic response of researchers who were present at these meetings, and from others who were unable to attend, several of us organized the first Eurogang workshop in Schmitten, Germany, in September 1998. More than 40 people from 13 nations attended Eurogang I. Guided by the presentations of prepared papers, meeting participants learned about state-of-the-art gang research in the United States and Europe, as well as a number of European studies of other youth groups that might or might not be called street gangs. These presentations acted as a catalyst for the first of many lengthy discussions about gang definitions and research methods. Perhaps, the primary issue at this meeting was the sensitivity to the topic of gang existence in Europe: whether gangs existed in Europe. Some observers did not see the entities they expected based on sensationalized, media-driven accounts of gangs in the United States of America. Adding to that were the understandable concerns that acknowledgement of European gangs might cause a “moral panic” that could stimulate a suppressive overreaction to the phenomenon. Nevertheless, there were many reports about troublesome youth groups that were recognized as clear examples of street gangs by the American gang researchers present at the meeting.

Two important outcomes resulted from the Schmitten workshop. First was a spirit of enthusiasm for fostering systematic research on gangs in Europe. The second major product was the agreement to compile the presented papers and a few others into a published volume (Klein et al. 2001). The energy and intellectual curiosity of participants attending this initial gathering helped to establish a multinational collaborative that resulted in the Eurogang Program of Research. Since the Schmitten meeting, the group has engaged in a number of coordinated activities, including ten formal workshops (an 11th, known as EG XI, was convened in September 2011 in Hillerod, Denmark, and EG XII is scheduled in Stockholm, Sweden, during May 2012), numerous informal meetings and panels at professional conferences, the collaborative development of a package of instruments, two additional published volumes of research, and several funding applications for systematic, cross-national, multimethod studies of street gangs in Europe.

An initial research design emerged from this first workshop that embraced multiple methods of gathering information about gangs, a commitment to implementing standardized designs across multiple sites, and a multilayered design structure that could provide city- and neighborhood-level contextual information to the more detailed accounts of gangs and youth groups. The fundamental characteristics of the Eurogang group process were also evident at this first workshop: numerous intense discussions of core issues in research and policy, respect for different perspectives, and a furtherance of social integration and communication among researchers.

The second workshop convened in September 1999 in Oslo, Norway. This meeting proved pivotal in producing the organizational framework that would propel the methodological development of the instrument packages. Five instrument-based working groups were formed: city level descriptors, expert survey, youth survey, ethnography, and a program inventory. An additional group agreed to hammer out

the thorny definitional issues, and another took responsibility for seeking out funding opportunities for further meetings and research. There was little enthusiasm for a proposed workgroup on archival methods (using police or judicial data), and subsequent attempts to promote interest have not been successful.

Oslo meeting participants aligned themselves with at least one, and sometimes several, working groups. Group facilitators volunteered to guide the groups toward draft instruments. We recruited others interested in participating that were not in attendance at the Oslo meeting. Within each working group, between 10 and 18 individuals participated in the instrument development discussions during the most active periods. It was understood that although much of the work would be accomplished within the working groups, it was critical to adopt common measures across different instruments. Therefore, the final decisions were made in plenary sessions. The work of the groups was provided extra momentum by the convening of the third Eurogang workshop in Leuven, Belgium, held only a month after the Oslo meeting. Substantial discussion revolved around the question of whether multi-investigator, multisite, systematic ethnography was possible or desirable. The ethnography working group tentatively agreed to draft guidelines for ethnographic researchers rather than the more specific instruments that were in development in the city, expert, and youth working groups. After this meeting, we used electronic communication to further refine instrument contents.

Initial drafts of most of the instruments were introduced and discussed at the fourth Eurogang workshop that was held in the autumn of 2000 in the Netherlands, at the North Sea resort town of Egmond aan Zee. During this meeting, attention focused on the content of the instruments. Each instrument working group proposed a series of topics to be discussed by the larger group. Furthermore, a first attempt was made to arrive at a common definition of gangs/troublesome youth groups, the subject of study within the Eurogang Program.

The following workshops, the fifth and the sixth Eurogang meetings, were very intensive. Both were held at the Correctional Training Facility of Bavaria in Straubing, Germany, in the summers of 2002 and 2003. During the fifth Eurogang meeting, we reached consensus after lengthy discussions on a Eurogang definition to be adopted in Eurogang work. The first drafts of the instruments were elaborated into complete questionnaires and protocols.

The sixth Eurogang meeting served as a platform to (1) review the results of pretests of the instruments, (2) discuss translation issues, (3) coordinate common measures across different instruments, and (4) refine the content of the instruments. In addition, a draft of a gang prevention or intervention program inventory was introduced. During these meetings, participants began to address the issue of use policies for the instruments. Would use be limited to the Eurogang participants who had worked so hard to develop them, or would we make the instruments available to all who might want to use them? If there was free access, how could we learn from others' experiences to refine the instruments? Another topic of discussion concerned the way in which different research traditions and different locations might handle informed consent procedures. Finally, we formalized the creation of the Eurogang electronic Listserv (currently there are over 235 subscribers) and the Eurogang web site.

Both meetings in Straubing included presentations on the first research studies which employed the Eurogang definition of gang/troublesome youth group and early versions of the proposed instruments. A number of these presentations, together with a few additional chapters, comprise the second volume of Eurogang research (Decker and Weerman 2005).

We convened the seventh Eurogang workshop in 2004, for the first time in the United States in the city of Albany, New York. This meeting focused on a substantive issue: the role of violence in street gangs. Findings presented at this meeting were published in the *European Journal of Criminology* (Klein et al. 2006). Also, we discussed the results of a final round of pretests. The participants concluded that the instruments should be deemed “final” and made available to any interested researcher. Subsequently, the five instruments and the definitions essay were posted on the Eurogang web site, but electronic access remains contingent upon contact with the Eurogang’s “Use Master” so that the experience with the instruments can be tracked.

The Albany workshop marked the close of the instrument development phase of the Eurogang Research Program and the beginning of Phase II, wherein Eurogang participants shifted focus to the conceptual and empirical issues that engage us as researchers and scholars. This change was evident in the eighth Eurogang workshop held in May 2005 in the Basque City of Oñati in Spain. This meeting included substantive presentations that addressed the issues of migration and ethnicity. Many of these presentations, together with others, comprise the third volume of Eurogang research (van Gemert et al. 2008).

A ninth Eurogang workshop was convened in Los Angeles, California, in May 2008. This workshop had the purpose of raising the visibility of the Eurogang Program to US researchers and engaging a new generation of young scholars with Eurogang activities. To support these aims, Malcolm Klein produced a monograph which imagines a Eurogang study of the fictional community of Euroburg and illustrates many of the issues encountered while conducting cross-national, multimethod research on youth gangs (Klein 2009).

## 1.2 The Eurogang Definition of Gang Membership

Underlying all of the other instruments is the consensus Eurogang definition of a street gang/troublesome youth group. During the second Eurogang meeting in Oslo, a separate working group was established, called the Definitions group. This group was charged with the task of accomplishing what 70 years of American gang research had not been able to accomplish—providing a consensus definition of what constitutes a gang. Malcolm Klein spearheaded this daunting task. Following 3 years of discussions and a number of draft definitions, consensus was reached on the definitive wording of the definition during a plenary session at the fifth Eurogang meeting: A street gang is “any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity.”



### 1.2.1 *Development of the Definition: Definers and Descriptors*

The process of developing a consensus definition began with agreement that the definition would have to be one that would attract widespread acceptance and one that would be suitable in multiple cultural contexts. Early in the deliberations, we made the important distinction between gang *definers* and gang *descriptors*. This distinction proved to be a significant step toward reaching agreement on a definition. Gang *definers* are those elements that are absolutely essential to characterize the group as a gang, while *descriptors* refer to those elements that help to describe specific characteristics of a particular group. For example, group names, colors, or symbols, and the use of tattoos are elements that are often ascribed to gangs and their members. However, does a group have to use a name to be considered a gang? Does a group have to adopt specific colors or symbols to make it a gang? And is it essential to have a tattoo in order to be a gang member? The answer to these questions is no. Although these characteristics might help to *describe* a gang or gang members, they are not essential elements of a gang.

What then are the key components that *define* a gang? In the working group, the focus turned to such elements as size, age composition, location, stability, and group identity. To start with, it is clear that a gang is a group. Therefore, a gang must consist of more than one person. Although some law enforcement agencies consider two members sufficient to be a gang, most gang scholars agree that to constitute a gang, there must be at least three members. Given that our interest is in youth gangs, we must also place parameters on the age range of members. A group composed primarily of 20- and 30-year-olds would not fit well within the category of youth. Also, the types of behavior that evoke public and law enforcement concern need to be considered. We do not dispute the fact that many groups (primarily middle class and/or suburban youths) may be involved in troublesome and illegal behavior from time to time; however, the street-oriented aspect of gangs is what elicits fear and concern. In addition to this street-oriented nature of gangs, what other criteria help to differentiate a gang from other street-oriented groups such as mobs? One defining criterion is that gangs persist over some period of time. They do not assemble for just one day or one event. Groups that endure over time and those that dissipate virtually upon formation are qualitatively different. One other defining element of gangs is that they have a sense of “we-ness” or group identity. Without such an identity, we cannot speak of gang membership or gang activity.

One persistent debate in the gang literature is the relevance of involvement in illegal activity. The working group was unanimous in its assessment that group involvement in illegal activity is a critical distinguishing element of youth gangs. Without this illegal activity, the group would not generate the policy interest that gangs currently and historically have. These defining elements, then, were combined to establish the Eurogang definition of a gang: “A street gang (or troublesome youth group corresponding to a street gang elsewhere) is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity.”

In addition to the defining elements described above, we also included a phrase (“troublesome youth group corresponding to a street gang elsewhere”) that could be substituted for the word gang. We included this phrase because some researchers

are concerned that the word “gang,” or more specifically, its translation in their own language, like “bande” or “jeugdbende,” may not convey the same meaning as the word “gang.” It is possible that the public in one country has strong stereotypes or associations in mind that are connected to these words. The discussion about this problem was resolved by allowing local researchers to use the phrase “troublesome youth group,” or its translation, instead of the word “gang” if they want to prevent misconceptions by the general public. During Eurogang meetings and other conferences, however, researchers commonly refer to “gangs” as their subject of research.

The defining elements just reviewed constitute what we refer to as the core or Level I measures. These should be incorporated into all of the methods of data collection. In addition to these elements, there are a number of descriptive characteristics that would be desirable to include in a study of street gangs. These descriptive items provide additional information about individual gang members and the gang as a group. We divided these descriptors into two additional categories, cleverly referred to as Level II and Level III, in which we ranked the desirability of their inclusion in a study of gangs or gang members. In other words, Level I consists of indicators that are required in all instruments, Level II are measures that are very desirable to collect but not strictly necessary, and Level III is a list of suggestions for interesting additional measures that can be included in a comparative gang study. We further grouped these variables as individual-level or group-level characteristics.

### ***1.2.2 Individual-Level Characteristics***

- Level I: Demographics
- Level II: Family background, parental schooling, employment, prevention, intervention, suppression experiences, victimization history outside of gang, self-reported delinquency, illiteracy, parental monitoring and supervision, girl/boyfriends, legal status/immigrant, proportion close friends in gang, ex-gang status, and siblings
- Level III: SES background, personal networks beyond the gang, mental health, school and family attachment, and residence of family

### ***1.2.3 Group-Level Characteristics***

- Level I: Age, common group crimes, drug, alcohol use, duration, ethnic composition, gang or not, negative peer commitment, sex, group size, illegal activity, immigrant composition, name (what is it and who gave it), reasons for joining, street orientation, subgroups, term used, and territory
- Level II: Attachment to group, entry and exit criteria, external antagonists, other groups that are present in location, fights with other groups, group values, history of gang, key events/incidents, roles, symbols and colors, and structured narratives
- Level III: Class composition of gang, hanging out together, kinship, political orientation, and proportion of members colocated

### ***1.2.4 Eurogang Instruments***

As described in the preceding sections, each of the Eurogang working groups produced an instrument to be used in comparative gang research. Contributors to this volume rely on one or more of the following three instruments in their research: the expert survey, the youth survey, and the ethnography guidelines. Each of these instruments is described below.

*Expert survey.* This compact questionnaire was developed to survey or interview (telephone or in person) local experts on the presence of street gangs/troublesome youth groups. These experts may be police officers, youth workers, or anybody else who has sound knowledge about the gangs in a neighborhood or city. The questionnaire covers the existence of gangs according to the Eurogang definition, information about the demographics and other characteristics of these gangs, and the gang type to which they belong. It provides a general picture of the amount and nature of gangs in a certain area.

*Youth survey.* This questionnaire is intended to collect quantitative individual data from young people. The youth survey is designed to be administered in classrooms in secondary schools using paper-and-pencil methods, but it can also be administered in other settings as well (e.g., community or institutional samples). Several items determine whether respondents belong to a gang/troublesome youth group according to the Eurogang definition. Additional items cover structural and cultural characteristics of the group to which respondents belong.

*Ethnography guidelines.* This is a set of guidelines and advice on how to collect qualitative information on one or more street gangs/troublesome youth groups employing ethnographic approaches. The guidelines are flexible, as researchers may prefer different methods (observational methods and/or in-depth interviews with gang members or key informants). Another part of the document offers a list of topics that needs to be addressed in a Eurogang ethnographic research project. These topics are focused on group characteristics, gang culture, individual members, and the historical and local context of the gang under study.

## **1.3 Overview of the Book**

### ***1.3.1 Definitional Issues in Comparative Context***

The first section of the book consists of six chapters that focus on definitional and methodological issues. Matsuda, Esbensen, and Carson's chapter, "Putting the 'Gang' in 'Eurogang': Characteristics of Delinquent Youth Groups by Different Definitional Approaches," offers a descriptive analysis of gang members resulting from different definitions of gang membership. They compare and contrast the qualities of gang members as defined by (1) self-nomination as a gang member, (2) the

Eurogang definition of gang membership, and (3) youth who report that their friends are gang members. Of particular interest in their research is the lack of overlap (or concurrence) in classifying survey participants as gang members. However, regardless of the definition used, gang members comprise a qualitatively different group than those not identified as gang-involved, suggesting a considerable robustness in each of these measures.

Two of the chapters in this section provide a critique of the Eurogang definition, maintaining that it includes some groups that are “not gang like.” Aldridge, Medina-Ariz, and Ralphs’ (“Counting Gangs: Conceptual and Validity Problems with the Eurogang Definition”) chapter reflects on the utility of the Eurogang definition across a number of British research projects. They suggest that “street orientation” should more properly be considered a descriptive—rather than defining—criterion for the categorization of gang members, and they raise validity concerns in relation to the key aspect of the Eurogang definition: that the group’s involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity. Specifically, they cast doubt on the utility of this criterion as it would include classification of three groups included in their studies as gangs that the authors argue would be falsely identified as such, including a group of pot-smoking adolescents, clubbers, and illegal ravers. Along a similar vein, Smithson, Monchuk, and Armitage (“Gang Member: Who Says? Definitional and Structural Issues”) question whether experts can accurately identify gang and non-gang groups. They provide a discussion of the structure and formation of gangs in Great Britain’s “North City” from the point of view of the young people identified as gang members. Based on interviews with the young people as well as those individuals responsible for the classification of these young people as gang members (i.e., police officers and multiagency panels), the authors question the extent to which the youth groups could or should be labeled as gangs. Findings demonstrated that few of the young people viewed themselves as belonging to a gang. In fact, many of the youth were resistant to the application of the label to their group.

The next two chapters tackle the role of group organization as a defining feature of gangs. In the chapter by van Gemert, “Five Decades of Defining Gangs in the Netherlands: The Eurogang Paradox in Practice,” the author reviews five decades of publications on gangs in the Netherlands, with a focus on the manner in which gangs are conceptualized and described. Utilizing police reports and academic research, van Gemert examines the qualities and group characteristics that are used to classify groups as gangs, including, for example, members’ age, whether or not the group is territorial, whether or not the group has leaders, and group size and duration. He notes that the tendency among the police to emphasize the role of structure (i.e., leaders, hierarchy, formal rules, etc.) in conjunction with reliance upon American gang stereotypes has resulted in a lack of recognition of gang problems in the Netherlands.

Pyrooz, Fox, Katz, and Decker examine the extent to which gang organization is related to individual levels of offending and victimization. Utilizing data from three studies (two from the United States and one from Trinidad and Tobago), the authors are able to explore the role of organizational characteristics on behavior within different national contexts. Among the findings reported in their chapter, “Gang

Organization, Offending, and Victimization: A Cross-National Analysis,” is the fact that youth gangs in the United States tend to exhibit more organizational features than the groups in Trinidad and Tobago. They also report that “while gang organization was associated with increased levels of delinquency and victimization, the findings were mixed across the research contexts,” thereby highlighting the importance of continued cross-national research to examine the interplay of cultural context and group structure.

The last chapter in this section, “Betwixt and Between Street and Prison Gangs: Defining Gangs and Structures in Youth Correctional Settings,” Maxson describes her effort to gather systematic depictions of gangs in correctional institutions by utilizing the Eurogang research framework. The Eurogang definition and methods needed minimal alteration to make them useful in this context. In contrast with previous research, she finds that gangs in these institutional settings are more similar to street gangs than prison gangs.

### ***1.3.2 Group Processes in the Comparative Context***

Hennigan and Spanovic (“Gang Dynamics Through the Lens of Social Identity Theory”) describe how the influence of group norms can be magnified or marginalized by variations in an individual’s social identification and perception of the entitativity (the degree of “groupness”) of his/her own group. They explore the implications for behavioral choices made by gang- and non-gang-affiliated youth.

Following the social psychological framework proposed in the Hennigan and Spanovic chapter, Alleyne and Wood argue that the study of gangs, which has been largely restricted to criminological or sociological perspectives, would benefit by incorporation of group psychological processes. In their chapter, “Gang Membership: The Psychological Evidence,” the authors examine the specific roles of moral disengagement and antiauthority orientations on behavior. They utilize a sample of London students to compare gang members, peripheral youth, and nongang youth to assess the social-cognitive processes associated with gang membership and varying rates of involvement in delinquency. Their findings suggest a developmental process whereby youth who become more gang-involved gradually adopt gang norms in terms of language and attitudes that facilitate offending. For instance, consistent with moral disengagement theory, gang members are more likely to assign blame to victims or to displace responsibility.

Melde and Esbensen employ a life-course perspective to examine the effect of gang joining on attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral outcomes. Their chapter, “The Onset of (Euro)Gang Membership as a Turning Point in the Life Course,” views gang joining as a turning point in the adolescent experience that is associated with a change in life-course trajectories. They suggest that it is the change in attitudes, emotions, and routine activities associated with gang membership that account for the documented increase in offending among members. Utilizing prospective longitudinal data from a three-wave, multisite sample of over 1,400 youth,

the authors use the Eurogang definition of gang membership to replicate their earlier findings based on a different measure of gang membership (i.e., consider their group of friends to be a gang). Their findings lend further support to the robustness of the Eurogang definition of gang membership.

The chapter by Peterson and Carson, "Group Sex Composition and Youths' Delinquency: A Comparison of Gang and Non-gang Peer Groups," examines the role of the sex composition of gangs and non-gang groups. Prior research has found that group sex composition may be a stronger predictor of delinquency than individual sex. In an earlier study, Peterson and colleagues, for instance, found that the delinquency of girls in sex-balanced gangs is suppressed by boys in those gangs. Boys in those gangs seek to maintain their dominant standing by excluding females from the activities that confer status in the gang. On the other hand, girls in majority-male gangs were found to commit crime at levels comparable to the boys. In the current chapter, Peterson and Carson extend this earlier study by employing the Eurogang definition of gang membership and by examining the effect of group sex composition of non-gang groups. They suggest that gender dynamics prevalent in youth gangs should be a reflection of those found in the larger society: that is, in non-gang peer groups. To test their hypotheses, they rely on self-report data from a multisite longitudinal study of 3,820 youths in the United States.

In the next chapter, "The Impact of Globalization, Migration, and Social Group Processes on Neo-Nazi Youth Gangs," Sela-Shayovitz reports on her study of a neo-Nazi group in Israel. Drawing on her in-depth interviews with gang members, their mothers, social workers, and police officers, Sela-Shayovitz examines the extent to which migration and the associated marginalization of these Russian born youths help to explain the emergence of their neo-Nazi beliefs. She concludes that "the experience of enduring social rejection as non-Jewish immigrants in a Jewish country generated a *reaction formation* and *cultural resistance identity*, namely the neo-Nazi ideology." A galvanizing element for these young men was their exposure to neo-Nazi music and ideology via the internet. Sela-Shayovitz suggests that the role of the Internet was a central feature in the shaping of their gang identity and illegal activity.

In the last chapter in this section, "Typically Moroccan? A Group Dynamic Explanation of Nuisance and Criminal Behavior," de Jong tackles an important question regarding the labeling of Moroccan youth in the Netherlands as gang members. Over the course of the past 20 years, Moroccan immigrants, especially young males, have been targeted as the source of a disproportionate amount of juvenile crime and "nuisance" behavior. They congregate in public places and intimidate passersby. Relying upon one particularly widely publicized case, de Jong assesses the extent to which the group of Moroccan boys participating in the event could be classified as a gang. He further examines two competing explanations for the emergence of the behavior in question: a cultural perspective (the media portrayed the behavior as "typically Moroccan" and no further explanation would be required) and group dynamic/identity perspective (a collective need to protect themselves from outsiders contributes to a shared group identity). De Jong conducted years of ethnographic research with Moroccan youth in Amsterdam and is thereby able to provide intriguing insights into this particular case and other "typically Moroccan" events.

### ***1.3.3 Gang Depictions in Non-American Contexts***

The first chapter in this section, “The Danish Gang Joining Project: Methodological Issues and Preliminary Findings,” presents interesting research conducted by researchers at the Danish Ministry of Justice. Responding to concerns among citizens and politicians that motorcycle gangs were recruiting young adolescents into gangs, the ministry was commissioned to assess recruitment strategies into adult gangs. To achieve this objective, Pedersen and Lindstad adopted the Eurogang definition and methodologies to survey youths attending 18 schools in greater Copenhagen and also used the expert survey to interview more than 40 individuals knowledgeable about youth issues, including street workers, police officers, teachers, and youth workers. Findings reported in this chapter reveal remarkable similarities with regard to gang prevalence and gang characteristics to studies conducted in the United States and several other nations. Of significance is their finding that the youth identified as gang-involved using the Eurogang methodology were statistically and substantively more delinquent than youth classified as serious criminals (but not gang-involved).

The second chapter in this section also hails from Scandinavia, a part of Europe that appears to be experiencing significant gang problems. In their chapter (“The Stockholm Gang Intervention Project: Introducing a Holistic Approach to Gang Enforcement”), Rostami and Leinfelt rely on police data to describe the recent development of gangs in Sweden. Interestingly, there has been a tendency among Swedish sociologists and criminologists to deny the presence of street gangs in their country, yet the police data suggest that local youth gangs in Stockholm (the capital city) have posed a problem at least since the late 1990s. In 1999, for example, the Stockholm County Police established a “gang commission” to address the growing gang problem in the city. This early attempt to respond to gangs was largely suppressive in nature, but it did lay the ground work for the eventual development in 2009 of a more balanced police response to gangs, the Stockholm Gang Intervention Program (SGIP). This strategy is based upon three core elements (1) research and science, (2) policing, and (3) collaboration with other authorities. The authors conclude their chapter with a detailed description of a central component of the SGIP, the PANTHER (Preventive Analysis about Network Targets for a Holistic Enforcement Response) model for gang intervention, which incorporates police suppression and enforcement with the various social science intervention and prevention concepts into one fully operational model against gang crime.

The concluding chapter in this section provides an examination of the extent to which biological sex influences the gang experience. While a number of studies conducted in the United States have examined the role of sex and sex composition on gang behavior, this is an area that has not been subject to much empirical work in Europe. In his chapter, “Are the Correlates and Effects of Gang Membership Sex-Specific? Troublesome Youth Groups and Delinquency among Dutch Girls,” Weerman replicates findings from the American studies. Among the findings from a study involving survey data from 1,830 Dutch adolescents are the following: risk



factors for gang membership are similar for boys and girls; gang girls are active in a variety of delinquent activities, similar to gang boys; and the sex composition of the gang appears to influence the extent to which both gang boys and gang girls engage in illegal activity.

### ***1.3.4 Future Directions for the Eurogang Program***

Prior to the concluding/summary chapter by Maxson and Esbensen, there is an invited chapter written by Malcolm Klein, “The Next Decade of Eurogang Program Research,” in which he reviews the short history of the Eurogang Program, discusses obstacles confronting truly comparative gang research, and identifies areas of emphasis for future research. He acknowledges that the Eurogang project has come a long way: from a small exploratory group of a handful of interested individuals to a multinational group of researchers and policymakers. The group has grown in size, has been durable, has a group identity, and, with this volume, has produced four edited volumes of gang research. But the underlying goal of the Eurogang program has not yet been met. The research to date, while using the Eurogang definition and methods, continues to be primarily single-site, single-method studies conducted in only one nation. Missing are multisite, multimethod, cross-national collaborations. Klein encourages such large-scale efforts that continue to utilize a common definition and also includes an evaluative component of gang policies and programs.

## **Notes**

1. Portions of the following sections were previously drafted by the coeditors for publication of the Eurogang Manual Weerman et al. (2009). *Eurogang Program Manual: Background, development, and use of the Eurogang instruments in multisite, multi-method comparative research*. <http://www.umsl.edu/~ccj/eurogang/euroganghome.htm>.
2. Lacking suitable men following the Crusades, single women chose to live in communities called beguinages.

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**Part 1**  
**Definitional Issues**  
**in the Comparative Context**

## Chapter 2

# Putting the “Gang” in “Eurogang”: Characteristics of Delinquent Youth Groups by Different Definitional Approaches

Kristy N. Matsuda, Finn-Aage Esbensen, and Dena C. Carson\*

### 2.1 Introduction

While there seems to be consensus that gangs are distinct from other groups, there is less agreement on the characteristics necessary or sufficient to define a gang. Despite decades of attention, policymakers, researchers, and law enforcement have not agreed on a universal definition of a “street gang” (Ball and Curry 1995; Esbensen et al. 2001; Klein 1969; Klein and Maxson 2006; Miller 1975). A recent review of state policies by Barrows and Huff (2009) revealed that only two states used the same definition of a “gang member.” Gang researchers have long lamented that the lack of a consensus definition leads to overestimations, underestimations, and depictions of gangs that may not be comparable (Klein and Maxson 2006). The implication of the definitional issue for law enforcement and policymakers is not trivial. It is not possible to identify and respond to gangs if one cannot identify gangs and gang members.

Social scientists have been putting forth gang definitions since the 1920s (Thrasher 1963), but the discourse around definitions remains timely (Curry and Decker 1998; Esbensen et al. 2010; Klein 1971). Scholars have assessed the degree to which changing definitional criteria affects the depiction of gang members (Esbensen et al.

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K.N. Matsuda • F.-A. Esbensen (✉) • D.C. Carson  
Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Missouri-St. Louis,  
St. Louis, MO, USA  
e-mail: esbensen@umsl.edu

2001; Winfree et al. 1992). Research suggests that as the gang definition changes, the qualities of the gang and gang members also shift. One study (Winfree et al. 1992) showed that an inclusive question like “Do you belong to a gang?” captures individuals at all levels of gang membership (i.e., wannabes, active members, and former gang members). A more restrictive definition of gangs, one that requires details or characteristics about the gang, yields more fringe or “wannabe” members. In contrast, a study by Esbensen et al. (2001) applied increasingly restrictive definitions to a sample of youth. They began with a global measure of “have you ever been in a gang” and narrowed down to youth that reported being current, core members in more structured gangs. They found that as focus narrowed to more central gang members, the demographic characteristics of the group did not change, but the level of delinquency and risk factors increased significantly.

It is often not possible to collect in-depth detail about an individual’s gang history or extensive characteristics about their gangs. Acquiring a response to a simple question like “Are you a gang member?” may be an achievement. Alternatively, individuals may be willing to give extensive information on their peer group, but be reluctant to admit to being in a “gang.” The result of relying on one source of data as opposed to another has not been adequately examined despite the frequent use of variant methods of defining gang membership. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the depiction of gang members that results from different definitions of gang membership. This research should help inform whether different methods of identifying gang members result in similar or dissimilar depictions of youth, and importantly, whether gangs can reliably be identified without the use of the term “gang.”

### ***2.1.1 Different Definitional Approaches***

American gang researchers often use the self-nomination approach to identify gang members (e.g., “Have you ever been a gang member?” or “Are you currently a gang member?”) (Esbensen et al. 2001; Thornberry et al. 2003). This method is both parsimonious and straightforward. It does, however, hinge on each respondent’s unique perception of what constitutes a “gang member.” The notion of a “gang member” may evoke stereotypical images of necessary characteristics that may or may not be grounded in reality. Respondents may be reluctant to admit to being or considering themselves like those depictions.

Alternatively, some researchers have asked respondents if their friends are gang members (Melde et al. 2009; Melde and Esbensen 2011). This approach removes the individual’s own personal investment (either stigma or posturing) and allows for a measure of a group dynamic. A gang is, after all, a group, and the dynamics associated with such a delinquent entity is generally of central interest. This method, however, still relies on a respondent’s own gang definition and assumes that youth who associate with gangs are gang-involved. While prior research has shown that peer groups typically consist of a mix of prosocial and antisocial youth, the studies do not specifically examine gang youth (Elliott and Menard 1996; Haynie 2002;

Warr 1993). The current study will provide a better understanding of whether youth who consider their group of friends to be a gang also report the same attitudes and behaviors as other gang youth.

Issues related to gang definitions further complicate the likelihood of cross-national gang research. The word “gang” appears to be a concept with a shared understanding across the United States and in other English-speaking countries (though geographical, national, and cultural differences may influence results). The term “gang,” however, may not translate well (or at all) in other languages, even if groups that share similar characteristics to American gangs are present in the culture. The Eurogang definition was created in response to this issue (for a history see Sect. 1 in this volume and Klein et al. 2001). The Eurogang definition defines and measures gang membership without using the term “gang.” Instead, the definition includes qualities believed to reflect the central gang characteristics (i.e., factors that are necessary definers of a gang).<sup>1</sup> Earlier work utilizing this approach found predictive and discriminant validity of the Eurogang approach (Esbensen et al. 2008a; Weerman and Esbensen 2005) in both European and American samples.

These three approaches to defining gang membership (i.e., self-nomination, friends are gang, and Eurogang) have produced similar depictions of youth involved in gangs, but, to date, the effect of employing these different definitional criteria has not been adequately explored. Regardless of gang definition used, some behavioral characteristics have been consistently shown to distinguish gang members from non-gang youth. For example, gang members are more delinquent than non-gang youth (Esbensen and Winfree 1998; Miller 2001; Thornberry 1998). Gang members are also more delinquent than non-gang youth with delinquent friends (e.g., Battin et al. 1998). Gang-involved youth are also more likely to experience increased victimization (Taylor et al. 2007). In addition, these three definitional approaches have identified gang members who score significantly higher than non-gang youth on a variety of risk factors that have been theoretically and empirically associated with gang membership and delinquent offending, including commitment to negative peers (Burgess and Akers 1966; Sutherland 1947), techniques of neutralization (Sykes and Matza 1957), and parental monitoring (Klein and Maxson 2006). To date, research has been restricted to studies utilizing one of these definitional approaches. In this chapter, we compare gang youth defined by the three approaches discussed above (1) the self-nomination approach (i.e., “Are you currently a gang member?”), (2) the friends are a gang method (i.e., “Do you consider your group of friends to be a gang?”), and (3) the Eurogang approach (i.e., the application of a set of criteria to determine whether the group is a gang). We explore similarities and differences associated with employing all three definitional standards to the same set of respondents. We will thereby be able to address the following questions:

1. Are gang members identified by different gang definitions similarly or dissimilarly situated along behavioral and attitudinal dimensions believed to be associated with gang membership?
2. Does each definition produce the same gang sample; that is, regardless of definition, do we identify the same youths as gang members?

To address the questions posed above, we will compare the demographic characteristics, risk factors associated with gang membership, and the behavioral responses of individuals in each of the three gang groups. We will also examine the extent to which these definitional approaches identify the same individuals and the extent to which there is overlap between and consistency across the three definitional approaches.

## **2.2 Methods**

Data for this study originate from the national evaluation of the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program (Esbensen et al. 2011). The G.R.E.A.T. program is a national school-based gang prevention program taught by local law enforcement to (primarily) middle school classrooms. The evaluation is a longitudinal, panel design study that followed a cohort of students in seven diverse cities across the United States for 5 years.<sup>2</sup> The seven cities are Albuquerque, New Mexico; Chicago, Illinois; a Dallas–Fort Worth area, Texas; Greeley, Colorado; Nashville, Tennessee; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Portland, Oregon.

### **2.2.1 Sample Selection**

School districts and police departments (that teach the G.R.E.A.T. program) in each of the seven cities agreed to be included in the evaluation. The process produced a final sample of 31 schools and 195 classrooms, and 4,905 students during the 2006–2007 school year. Sixth grade students were included from 26 schools; seventh grade students comprised the sample in the remaining five schools. Classrooms in the participating schools were randomly assigned to receive or not receive the G.R.E.A.T. program.

Active parental consent was required for student participation (for a more detailed description of the active consent process, consult Esbensen et al. 2008b). Overall, 89.1% of youths ( $N=4,372$ ) returned a completed consent form, with 77.9% of parents/guardians ( $N=3,820$ ) allowing their child's participation.<sup>3</sup>

### **2.2.2 Methods**

Students in this research completed a confidential group-administered pretest questionnaire, a posttest survey after program administration, and annual follow-up surveys. The completion rate for the 1-year follow-up was 87% and for the 2-year follow-up was 83%. In the current study, we rely primarily on data from Wave 4 (or the 2-year follow-up) but also draw on cross-sectional results from Wave 1 and Wave 3 (pretest and 1-year follow-up) when illustrative.