The Involvement of Students with Learning Disabilities and Emotional-Behavioral Disorders In Gang Membership

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The Involvement of Students with Learning Disabilities and Emotional-Behavioral Disorders In Gang Membership

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Date Approved: May 1, 1995

Running Head: INVOLVEMENT IN GANGS
Abstract

Commonalities exist between gang members and individuals with learning disabilities and/or emotional-behavioral disorders. These characteristics are low self-esteem, poor social skills, difficulty maintaining personal relationships, and behavioral problems. Through a series of interviews conducted at a private facility for individuals with behavioral disorders, this study investigated the involvement of students with learning disabilities and/or emotional-behavioral disorders in gang membership.
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Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank my Mommom and Poppop for their continued support throughout all five years at Longwood. I am not talking about the financial assistance though it did help, but for every phone call and letter. I love you both very much.

To my parents who did not think I was going to graduate from high school, look at me now! I thank you for your love and support. You two are the best in the world.

Next I want to thank Dr. Meese, Dr. Mathews, Dr. Hlad, and Dr. Young. Your assistance and support is greatly appreciated. I could not have done it without you.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends. Becky, thank you for making my college career fun and making my life better. Jason, we have come a long way from high school chemistry class. Thank you for being strong when I could not. Jeff, I miss you.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Leslie Beach, a man who inspired many with his love and humor.
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The Involvement of Students with Learning Disabilities and Emotional-Behavioral Disorders In Gang Membership

A gang can be identified as a group of organized individuals who participate in illegal or antisocial activities (Lockwood, 1993). Another definition refers to the illegal or antisocial activities of groups involving drug trafficking and violence (Cantrell, 1992). In a report to Congress, Ponce (1990) reported examples of gang activities to include drive-by shootings, graffiti, robbery, aggravated assault, and drug usage. According to Cantrell (1992) about 800 gangs and 90,000 gang members are in the United States today. The actual total population cannot be determined accurately due to the fact that members of gangs join daily and discreetly throughout the country.

Many different kinds of gangs are prevalent in the United States. Gangs usually form from different ethnic groups including Latino, African American, Asian, and White gangs. In addition, several types of gangs exist such as social gangs, delinquent gangs, and violent gangs. The social gang is a relatively permanent group that gathers in a certain place such as a street corner. Members develop a sense of belonging and engage in organized social activities. The members of this gang do not usually
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participate in serious delinquent activity and will not engage in violent activity unless it is an act of retaliation. On the other hand, the delinquent gang is a group which thrives from the principle of monetary gain from delinquent activities. This type of gang exists to satisfy present needs. Similarly, violent gangs develop to enable members to obtain emotional gratification through violent acts. Leaders tend to be emotionally unstable with a need to control and direct (Siegel & Senna, 1988). Each gang has its own characteristics, but all can be defined with the descriptions suggested by Ponce (1990).

Many reasons are offered for an individual joining a gang. Identity, protection, fellowship, and intimidation are among the reasons presented by Ponce in his report to Congress in 1990. For example, identity can be achieved within the gang culture more easily than in the dominant culture. Protection from rival gangs can also be assured from joining a gang and fellowship indicates a structure that may be lacking elsewhere. When a gang is recruiting, current members may also use intimidation as a device for gaining new members (Ponce, 1990). Cantrell (1992) suggests that gangs offer identity, belonging, protection, excitement, money, and sex. Clark (1992) agreed with Cantrell by commenting that joining a gang offers an instant family.
which provides companionship loyalty, identity, and status. Also suggested is the idea that young persons are born into a gang with some members reportedly being third or fourth generation gang members (Stepakoff, 1987).

Characteristics of Gang Members

Ponce (1990) reviewed the characteristics representative of gang youth. These include a host of family, community, and school-related factors. Family related characteristics refer to dysfunctional families and stressful home lives. Parents in these homes are not involved with the child's life or education. The expectations set by the parent for the child may be low. In addition, parents may use ineffective parenting techniques or they may be neglectful and/or abusive. Finally, morals and ethics may not be emphasized at home.

The community can also have characteristics that lead to the formation of gangs. These characteristics involve lack of support for schools or recreation activities, lack of commitment to solve the problem, and unemployment. Schools can contribute to the gang problem with low teacher expectations, lack of student responsibility, and lack of an effective attendance and discipline system.

Describing the characteristics of persons who join a gang, Baron and Tindall (1993) commented that these individuals are often characterized as having low
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self-control. People with low self-control can be described as unreliable, thoughtless, selfish, and untrustworthy. The authors also concluded that individuals with low self-control dislike settings such as school, work, or home which require discipline, supervision, and behavioral constraints.

Similarly, Rhodes and Fischer (1993) suggested that low self-esteem is a characteristic of a gang member. Ponce (1990) also described personal indicators of gang youth. These personal indicators include low motivation, low educational aspirations, behavior problems, drug abuse, poor social relations, lack of direction or goals in life, and most commonly, low self-esteem. According to Clark (1992), common traits found in gang members are poor academic performance, poor vocational training, and once again low self-esteem. Felgar (1992) also reported gang members hold themselves in very low self-esteem.

Eisenman (1993) found a large majority of gang members have suffered physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse in childhood. Also reported by Eisenman was a gang member's willingness to hurt people and feel no remorse for his or her actions.

From the research presented above several conclusions can be made about gang members. Clearly, gang members typically have low self-esteem and low self-discipline.
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These problems are accompanied in school by poor academic performance and behavior problems. Socially, gang members may have poor interpersonal relationships and frequently they have drug abuse problems. In addition, gang members may have experienced some form of abuse and they may have very little direction in their lives.

Characteristics of Students with Learning Disabilities and Emotional-Behavioral Disorders

Students with an emotional-behavioral disorder demonstrate an inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors. They are unable to maintain interpersonal relationships with peers and authority figures, have inappropriate types of behavior or feelings in normal circumstances, and exhibit a general mood of unhappiness or depression (Virginia Department of Education, 1994). Kauffman, Cullinan, and Epstein (1987) reported that these students tend to display out-of-control and aggressive behaviors. Also reported by Kauffman et al. (1987) is underachievement in school, with a majority of students scoring at two years or below grade level on achievement tests. Students with an emotional-behavioral disorder associate with deviant peers and display behaviors that are disruptive and aggressive. These characteristics are often stable throughout life for these individuals (Kauffman et al. 1987).
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Students with learning disabilities often have behavioral, emotional, and social problems (Forbes, 1987). Bryan, Pearl, and Herzog (1989) reported that students with learning disabilities have difficulties with achieving social status, self-esteem, and deficits with social skills. Also they are reported to have communicative incompetence, particularly with pragmatic language skills.

Authorities have expressed concern recently regarding higher rates of delinquency among youth with learning disabilities than among their non-disabled peers (Keilitz & Dunivant, 1986). One theory described by Keilitz and Dunivant (1986) is the susceptibility theory. This theory explains that children with a learning disability possess certain cognitive and personality characteristics that make them more susceptible to opportunities for engaging in delinquent activities. These characteristics include lack of control, inability to anticipate the future consequences of actions, poor perception of social cues, irritability, suggestibility, and the tendency to act aggressively. Bryan et al. (1989) agreed by suggesting intellectual and personality problems may play a role in the delinquent activity of students with learning disabilities. Also, Podboy and Mallory (1978) suggested that youth with learning disabilities become prone to "act out" in a delinquent manner which will compensate for lack of recognition through
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more normal channels. Research conducted to investigate a link between students with learning disabilities and delinquent activities indicated that students with learning disabilities self-report participating in criminal and delinquent activities more so than their non-disabled peers. These activities include stealing, selling drugs, vandalizing property, and drug usage (Keilitz & Dunivant, 1986).

Bryan et al. (1989) suggested students with learning disabilities have difficulties in expressive language and, therefore, have difficulties "talking their way out of trouble". Thus, students with learning disabilities are arrested and adjudicated more often than their socially skilled peers.

Students with Learning Disabilities and Emotional-Behavioral Disorders' Involvement in Gang Membership

Students with learning disabilities and students with an emotional-behavioral disorder share many characteristics. Adolescents in both groups reportedly have behavioral problems, difficulty in maintaining appropriate interpersonal relationships, and low self-esteem. In addition these individuals have difficulties both in academic performance and intellectual functioning. Students with learning disabilities, students with an emotional-behavioral disorder, and gang members all share the characteristic of being more likely to participate in delinquent and criminal activities.
Also, gangs offer a sense of belonging in which the member can gain feelings of attachment missing in other parts of his or her life.

Gangs and Schools

One final point that needs to be investigated is the relationship between gangs and schools. Felgar (1992) commented that schools are a meeting ground for gangs. In school, gang members can meet, discuss plans, and increase their drug market. The intimidation of other students by gang members in the school may cause truancy from school and fear among teachers (Felgar, 1992). Large increases in the drop out rate have been associated with the widespread development of gangs within schools. Schools also serve the purpose of a recruitment facility for gang members (Felgar, 1992).

Recently, special education students have been the target of recruitment for gangs because of their special status. This special status refers to the legal requirement that a special education student cannot be removed from school for discipline problems if the source of the discipline problem is related to their diagnosed disability or disorder (Virginia Department of Education, 1994). Special education students provide an insulation for gangs to keep their drug market in school because placing a special education student in homebound instruction is rare (Avery, 1994).
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Statement of the Problem

With the growing gang population in America, teachers are concerned that certain groups may be vulnerable to gang membership. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to investigate the degree to which students with learning disabilities and emotional-behavioral disorders are involved in gang membership. Gang membership is defined as a group of organized individuals who participate in gang activities. Gang activities include organized social activities, drug usage and dealing, acts of violence, delinquency, and other illegal activities.
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Method

Subjects

Subjects were students living in a residential treatment center for individuals with behavioral disorders. Residents of the facility were from different states in the Mid-Atlantic region. The number of individuals in the sample was over ten percent of the population at the facility. The sample was limited to subjects between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two. Both males and females were selected. Students were selected randomly by files for the research. Information that was gathered from the subjects' files included age, special education category, the number of arrests, reported delinquent activities not resulting in arrest and race. Each subject was given a pseudonym and number coded the same as the interview number to protect the individual's confidentiality. All participation in this research was voluntary.

Instrument

The research was conducted using an interview format that lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Thirteen open ended questions constructed by the researcher were used (See Appendix F) and follow up questions were asked to clarify subjects' responses. The questions were pilot tested among ten to fifteen professionals in special education for clarity. The questions covered participation
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in different activities and feelings towards these activities.

The interview was completely voluntary and each subject was briefed of his or her right to refrain from answering any questions he or she felt uncomfortable about answering. After conducting the interview, any answer that specified an illegal activity that was not directly related to the topic was discarded.

Procedure

Permission to conduct research was obtained from the appropriate administrator at the residential treatment center for students with emotional-behavioral disorders in Virginia (See Appendix A & B). The request included permission to view the residents' files and confidentiality and anonymity was assured. After permission was granted by the appropriate administrator, permission to interview particular individuals was requested from the legal guardians or from the "of age" residents themselves. (See Appendix C, D, & E). Again confidentiality and anonymity were assured. Before the interview the subject was told that his or her answers would be tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher; however, the subject was also told that all material would be destroyed at the conclusion of the research project. Also to ensure confidentiality in reporting the research, fictional names were used. No information was presented
which linked the subject to his or her responses. All interviews were conducted by the principal researcher in a private setting away from distractions.

Data Analysis

Means were computed for demographic information such as age, number of arrests, and number of delinquent activities and were corresponded to gender. In addition, percentages were computed for number of arrests and number of delinquent activities for the total group by gender. Percentages for the special education status of all subjects were computed. As this research study is qualitative in nature answers to the questions were analyzed for recurring themes. Themes were analyzed by two individuals who had no association with the research to verify the reliability of themes determined by the researcher.
Results

During the time in which the interviews were conducted, the total population at the facility was between 40 residents and 30 residents. Since the facility protects the identity of all the residents, the facility does not allow any recording devices in the facility. The interviews, therefore, were not recorded. Accurate transcripts of the interviews were written by the interviewer.

The total sample of interviewees exceeded ten percent of the total population at the facility. The subjects totaled nine residents, six male and three female. The male and female ratio in the sample corresponded to the male and female ratio in the facility. In addition, the sample was representative of the facility's race ratio. Six subjects were African American subjects and three subjects were Caucasian. The subjects who had been diagnosed with both a learning disability and emotional-behavioral disorder comprised 56% (n=5) of the sample and 44% (n=4) had been diagnosed only with an emotional-behavioral disorder. The average age of the subjects was 18 years, with the average age for males also at 18. The females average age was 17.5 years.

In order to confirm the accuracy of the subject's answers to questions investigating the number of activities resulting
in arrest and the number of activities not resulting in arrest the interviewer used the subjects' personal files. The combined arrests for all the subjects was 56, with males accounting for 38 arrests (67%) and females 18 arrests (33% of the arrests). The number of illegal activities the subjects participated in that did not result in arrest amounted to 114 activities. The male subjects accounted for 80 activities not resulting in arrest and the females accounted for 34 activities not resulting in arrest.

Profile of the Subjects

The subject identified as number one, "Billy," has been at the facility for one and one-half years and his discharge date is coming up soon. Billy was primarily placed in the facility for his continued drug usage and school truancy. He is a 17-year-old Caucasian male who has been diagnosed with an emotional-behavioral disorder.

The subject identified as number two, "Selena", is an 18-year-old Caucasian female with an emotional-behavioral disorder. Her placement in the facility stems from her excessive sexual deviations, behavior problems at home and school, and school truancy. Although she is of legal age, she will not be leaving the facility in the near future.

The next subject, number three, will be called, "Eric". He is a 20-year-old African American male who has been
convicted of three counts of grand theft auto. In addition, Eric has a record for assault and battery and drug possession with intention to sell. He has been at the facility for two years and three months. During this period he was charged with another count of automobile theft. Eric's discharge date has not been established.

Subject number four will be called, "Sabrina." She is a 16-year-old African American female. Sabrina has both a learning disability and an emotional-behavioral disorder. She was placed in the facility nine months ago because of her hostile and aggressive behavior in school. Also, she has been found guilty of assault with a deadly weapon, several counts of vandalism, and shoplifting, and she has been an accomplice in a drive-by shooting. She is planned to be discharged in one year.

"Rex", the subject identified as number five, is a 17-year-old African American male. He was placed in the facility five months ago for continued problems with authorities. He has been found guilty of arson, assault and battery, robbery, and drug possession. In addition he is awaiting trial for another count of assault and battery and shoplifting. Rex has been diagnosed with both a learning disability and an emotional-behavioral disorder. His remaining time at the facility is one year and seven months.
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The subject identified as number six will be called "Joseph". He is a 21-year-old Caucasian male who has been at the facility for one year and is intended to leave in six months. He has been diagnosed with an emotional-behavioral disorder. Joseph has been arrested and convicted of three counts of assault and battery and two counts of assault with a deadly weapon. He has been in several detention homes for school truancy.

"Paul", the subject identified as subject number seven, is a 19-year-old African American male who has been diagnosed with both a learning disability and an emotional-behavioral disorder. He has been at the facility for eight months and will be there another eleven months depending on the outcome of his trial for a murder arrest. He has been convicted of several counts of assault and battery, breaking and entering, and vandalism.

The subject called "Patricia", subject number eight, is an 19-year-old African American. She was placed in the facility for her several arrests of soliciting an officer and possession of narcotics with intent to sell. She is the only subject with any children. She has three children between the ages of six months to four years old. Patricia has been at the facility for almost two years and is planned to be discharged in three months. She has been diagnosed
with a learning disability and an emotional-behavioral disorder.

Subject number nine, "Gerald", is a 16-year-old African American male. He has both a learning disability and an emotional-behavioral disorder. Gerald has been convicted of three counts of grand theft auto, two counts of drug possession, one count of armed robbery, and one count of assault and battery. Gerald will be remaining at the facility for another year and has been there for eleven months.

Establishing Reliability In The Recurring Themes

From the responses of the subjects many different themes were apparent. The different themes were discovered by listing the responses without their corresponding questions and examining these responses to place them in categories that described the recurring themes. After the responses had been categorized by themes, the list of responses was presented in random order to two individuals in a graduate program for special education. With a list of the different categories, the selected individuals designated which response was appropriate for a particular category. Percentages were then established for agreement between the researcher and each individual and between the two individuals themselves. A 76% agreement rate was established in the assignment of responses to different
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categories between one individual and the researcher. Between the researcher and the other individual there was a 72% agreement rate. The two individuals had an agreement of 64% in assigning the responses to the categories (See Table 1).

Introduction of The Recurring Themes

In establishing involvement in gang membership, the confirmation of gang activity must be clear. Gang activity was defined as any organized social activity, drug usage and dealing, acts of violence, delinquency, and other illegal activities. Gang membership was explained as a group of organized individuals who participate in gang activities. Through the interviews it can be established that all of the subjects participated in some form of gang activity. They all stated they had a particular group of friends at home with whom they spend a lot of time. Also the question that refers to initiation into a group of friends is a characteristic of being involved in gang membership. All subjects except one had participated in some kind of initiation activity. In total there were 28 responses verifying gang activity (See Appendix G).

From the remaining responses recurring themes can be established with the verification of the gang activities. These themes included pressure through initiation and
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activities (responses= 20), strong feelings about gang membership (responses= 16), a sense of importance, security, and belonging (responses= 15), lack of importance of school (responses= 10), unstable home life (responses= 8), unrealistic ideas (responses 9), and acceptance of adult roles (responses= 8).

Pressure And Intimidation Through Activities and Initiation

The responses showed all the subjects faced pressure from their friends. They discussed having to perform certain criminal activities to join the group and indicated that if they did not perform certain activities they would be unaccepted or their safety would be threatened. This pressure was exemplified by statements such as "To be blunt, I had to sleep with everyone then I could be part of their group. I had to prove I wasn't a snob" and "I got the shit beat out of me. It's called tough love. I got to be able to take a beat down and still stand when it's all over."
The statements above refer to initiation activities and imply the pressure an individual feels in a gang situation. Other statements such as "Yeah, they give you a lot of shit if you don't want to do something" and "I don't care. It has to be done because if you don't you get your ass kicked" refer to activities in which the subject was somewhat hesitant to participate (See Appendix H).
Strong Feelings About Gang Membership

When presented with the question referring to giving advice to a friend who wants to join a gang, none of the subjects responded negatively regarding gang membership. Some subjects did offer advice that expressed caution and others gave advice on which gang to join. No subject, however, discouraged gang membership. Responses included "Have fun and be careful," "Go for it, but don't get caught, watch your back and don't let you mom know" and "As long as he don't join no pussy gang then I don't care. He better hope it ain't one that I jump though".

Strong feelings about gang membership were also indicated by the subjects about reuniting with their particular friends after their discharge. Most of the subjects said they were going to reunite with their friends because they wanted to be with them, and in most cases, they participate in the same activities (See Appendix I).

A Sense of Importance, Security, and Belonging

Overall it can be concluded from the responses that the subjects gain some sense of importance, security, or belonging from their association with their group of friends. In some cases, they gain all three feelings. The idea of "importance" is described a certain status of respect within the group and with people who are aware of the group but who are not necessarily in the group. Responses indicated
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the subjects feel important because they are accepted for who they are, for what they have, or for their abilities. Example responses representative of this theme include "I feel important because they accept me for what I am," "Center of attention, I have what they want" and "Oh yeah, sometimes they drive me crazy, but I keep them from going crazy" Security from authorities and other groups was also given from the gang. In addition, security can be described as a sense of family, "Yes, because they are my world. They gave me security when I had no other place to go."

A sense of belonging means the subjects honestly believe their friends are the only people with whom they are destined to be associated. In one case the subject felt like he belonged because his speech problem was overlooked, "I feel good. They don't say nothing about my speech problem." "Good, important, wanted, you know," describes a feeling of being wanted by the group, which could contribute to a sense of belonging (See Appendix J).

Lack of Importance of School

This particular theme was quite apparent throughout the analysis of the responses. The subjects did not view school as a part of their lives, and all were still of school age for special education students. Only one subject made some reference about obtaining a form of a diploma. There were other subjects who had continued schooling but only up until
a certain point in their lives. One subject confessed that he had not been to school since the fifth grade. Different reasons for not attending school included "School is too constrictive," "School has too many people telling me what to do," "School has no purpose," and "I'm not challenged at school" (See Appendix K).

Unstable Home Life

When talking about their families, the subjects indicated an instability at their homes. Instability means the home is not serving its purpose as a stable, neutral ground for the subject. Only two subjects, however, showed outright resentment for their home life and parents. Some reported "not really having a home" and others said "there was too much going on at home" or "it was too busy." One subject wanted to be at home to take care of her children. All subjects except one wanted to be with their friends rather than with their family at home. (See Appendix L)

Unrealistic Ideas

The subjects had unrealistic ideas about the consequences of their actions. They did not believe these ideas are unrealistic, even though they are already in the facility for these same actions. Examples of unrealistic ideas include "When I'm with my friends I'm protected" and "Because with your friends you can do anything and not get caught." (See Appendix M)
Acceptance of Adult Roles

Acceptance of adult roles involves the subjects realizing and accepting the work and family responsibilities inherent in the adult world. This realization can be forced by the demands of raising children or by authorities giving the subject no more chances to straighten up their lives. This usually means obtaining a legal form of employment. A few subjects reported having a job at some point and wanting to return to the work force. One subject displayed an acceptance of an adult role by taking care of her children (See Appendix N).
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Discussion

The interviews examined the involvement in gang membership of nine subjects who have been diagnosed with either a learning disability or an emotional-behavioral disorder. Involvement is seen as participating in certain activities and sharing the same characteristics as those of other members of the gang. From the responses given by the subjects, involvement in gang membership is apparent.

Shown in the responses is a strong need for a feeling of self-worth. The subjects lacked self-esteem and, therefore, seek group situations for acceptance. Acceptance into a group gives a sense of belongingness and importance. Responses indicated that these individuals are willing to participate in any activity to gain acceptance. Also the subjects claimed to gain an identity from the group. The lack of self-esteem is a characteristic of both a gang member and an individual with a learning disability or emotional-behavioral disorder.

The lack of self-esteem may also be a major reason why these individuals are susceptible to the pressure their friends place upon them. They have no inner strength to stand up to what they feel is right. In some cases, though, they might be honestly scared to oppose their friends.

Low self-esteem is a characteristic that is frequently identified in individuals with a learning disability and
an emotional-behavioral disorder. Other characteristics from the literature included having a difficult time maintaining relationships, displaying behavior problems which are unacceptable in society or school, and having difficulty in achieving social status. One might wonder if the lack of self-esteem contributes to these other difficulties or if the difficulties result in low self-esteem within the individual. Regardless, the individuals want to be accepted by others because they do not accept themselves and are not accepted in society. Therefore, they seek acceptance from others who have low self-perception and seek the same outlets to gain acceptance.

With the feelings of low self-worth individually and feelings of importance through gang membership, these individuals have strong positive feelings towards gang membership. The responses from the subjects indicated that gang members encouraged individuals to become involved in gang membership because of the benefit of being accepted for who they are and for what they can do. The responses also indicated that no consideration should be given for the activities in which the gang participates. This reflected the strength of their feelings about being in a gang. Another benefit from gang membership is a false sense of security. The responses showed the subjects felt protection and safety from the police and other gangs because
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of their association with their friends. Protection and safety involve a fellow member giving false information to the police or offering defense when others threaten their well-being.

As reported, the gang member's home life is characteristically dysfunctional and stressful. This was reflected in the responses given by the participants. Their homes are not a place of familiarity or stability, instead they contained instability, hostility, and often criminal activity. This may have contributed to their need to belong. These students seek a place to gain stability and familiarity and find it through gang membership.

Very few subjects reported they had actually attempted to work or wanted to have a job. Typically, individuals who share the characteristics of gang members and individuals with learning disabilities and emotional-behavioral disorders tend to dislike settings of structure and behavioral constraints such as work, home, and school. This also could be a strong reason why the subjects disregarded school as important. In school there are rules and consequences which must be upheld, causing a constraint on behavior. Also, the subjects view these rules as having no purpose and they do not understand why the rules have been established. The subjects have never succeeded at school and they feel they could not even if they tried.
One expected outcome was the overall need for group acceptance and importance. For individuals who are not self-confident and who do not know how to feel good about themselves, then group acceptance facilitates the good feeling. Another theme that was expected was the disregard for the importance of school. These individuals see no purpose in school because it gives no immediate rewards. The instability of the home life was also predicted in the literature and proved true in the interviews.

Since the individuals are currently receiving treatment with coping with peer pressure and developing self-worth and rehabilitation if they suffer a chemical dependency, the positive feeling for gang membership was surprising. No subjects directly responded in the negative sense about joining a gang. The responses indicated gang or group membership is an important part of their lives. Since they offered advice and recommended caution, they admitted there are bad aspects about being in a gang. Still, the positiveness of being in a gang which offers security, belongingness, and importance outweighed the negative for these students.

Some individual responses reflected a sense of guilt about their actions. One individual responded that now he felt guilty about participating in activities that might
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lead to trouble and he would not want to be part of a group who did participate in those activities. His guilt may have stemmed from the consequences of his actions. This could be interpreted to mean that he is realizing that his actions hurt him as well as others and that he is beginning to learn the difference between right and wrong.

Another individual response that was unexpected was from the subject who is awaiting trial in June for a murder. He explains that now after being at the facility, he is upset about things he has done. He also displayed a sense of hopelessness for his future by commenting that if he goes home, even though he does not want to, he will reunite with his friends and eventually go to jail. These responses can be analyzed in two ways. He could be honestly telling the truth and feeling great remorse for what he has done and great hopelessness about his future. Conversely, he could be "putting on a show" because his murder trial decision has a lot to do with his behavior at the facility.

Overall, the literature and the themes generated by the responses were parallel. Due to the small and exclusive sample size, though, the results may not be generalizable to the total population. Another limitation to the study was the assumption that the subjects were speaking honestly about their experiences and feelings. The files were used
to verify number of arrests, but there are still many incidents not reported in the files.

Recommendations for future research would include a more sophisticated study, possibly nationwide, if money and time permitted. If that is not an option, then research in different facilities statewide might allow for more generalizations. Also, in a larger more generalizable study possible variables could be established to designate certain conditions that would lead a student with learning disabilities and emotional-behavioral disorders into gang membership. Since this project was small in nature these conditions could not be met. In addition, the usage of a standardized measurement tool regarding this particular subject, if there is one, might yield more generalizable data.
Involvement in Gangs

References


Involvement in Gangs

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Appendix A

Cover Letter to the Facility
Involvement in Gangs

Longwood College
Farmville, Va. 23909

Address
of the
Facility

Dear Administrator,

My name is Melinda L. Kates. I am a graduate student at Longwood College in Farmville, Virginia. I am enrolled in a Psychology/Special Education curriculum completing my Master's of Science degree.

Currently I am working on my thesis concerning the degree to which students with an emotional-behavioral disorder and/or learning disability are involved in gang membership. I am writing you to request permission to conduct research at your facility. I do realize this is a sensitive issue and I assure you that I will practice strict confidentiality when conducting the research. I am also requesting to have access to the residents' files. Once again the strictest confidentiality will be practiced in using the files.

The research will be conducted in an interview format. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. An audio recorder will be used and responses will be recorded on paper. At the conclusion of the research all material will be destroyed. Any responses from the residents that do not directly relate to the research will be discarded. When presenting the research fictional names will be used to maintain anonymity.

Once again I would like to stress the measure I will take to ensure confidentiality of the residents at your facility. No information will be included in the thesis which may identify the facility or any of its residents.

Thank you for your consideration concerning my thesis research. If possible could you respond to this request within a week of receiving this letter.

Sincerely,

Melinda L. Kates
Appendix B
Facility Consent Form
Involvement in Gangs

Longwood College
Consent for Participation in Social and Behavioral Research

I, ______________________, consent to the participation of the facility in the research entitled: The Involvement of Students with Learning Disabilities and Emotional-Behavioral Disorders in Gang Membership.

I acknowledge that the purpose of this study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of the participation have been explained to me. Possible benefits of this project have been described to me, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding this research project, and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Further, I understand that the participation of the facility is voluntary, and is free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in this project without prejudice. I understand that no information will be presented to identify the facility unless permission is given in writing.

I understand that if I have any concerns or complaints about the treatment in this study, I am encouraged to contact the Office of Academic Affairs at Longwood College at (804) 395-2010.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand this consent form, I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ___________ Signed: __________________________

(Administrator from Facility)
Appendix C

Cover Letter to the Resident
Dear Resident,

My name is Melinda L. Kates. I am a graduate student working on my Master's of Science degree.
Currently I am working on my thesis concerning the degree to which some students are involved in gang membership. I am requesting your participation in this thesis research. The research will be conducted in an interview format lasting approximately 30-45 minutes. There will be an audio recorder in use and notes will be taken from your responses if you agree to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer any of the questions presented to you and the right to terminate your participation freely at any time. Also your name will never be disclosed through the interview and all materials will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research.

Thank you for your consideration concerning this matter.

Sincerely,

Melinda L. Kates
Appendix D

Cover Letter to the Legal Guardian
Dear Legal guardian of the resident,

My name is Melinda L. Kates. I am graduate student working on my Master's of Science degree.
Currently I am working on my thesis concerning the degree to which some students are involved in gang membership.
I am requesting your permission for participation of your child/legal subject in this thesis research. The research will be conducted using an interview format lasting approximately 30-45 minutes. There will be an audio recorder in use and notes will be taken from the responses if you agree to the participation. Your resident will have the right to refuse to answer any of the questions presented and the right to terminate the participation freely at any time. Also the resident's name will never be disclosed through the interview and all materials will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research.

Thank you for your consideration concerning this matter.

Sincerely,

Melinda L. Kates
Appendix E

Resident Consent Form
Involvement in Gangs

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Longwood College
Consent for Participation in
Social and Behavioral Research

I,________________________, consent to participation (or to allow my child or legal subject to participate) in the research project entitled: The Involvement of Students with Learning Disabilities and Emotional- Behavioral Disorders in Gang Membership.

I acknowledge that the purpose of this study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation have been explained to me. Possible benefits of this project have been described to me, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding this research project, and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Further, I understand that my (or my child's or legal subject's) participation in this research is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw my consent at any time and to discontinue participation in this project without prejudice. I understand that no information will be presented which will identify me (or my child or legal subject) as the subject of this unless I give my permission in writing.

I understand that if I have concerns or complaints about my (or my child's or legal subject's) treatment in this study, I am encouraged to contact the Office of Academic Affairs at Longwood College at (804) 395-2010.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date:_________ Signed:___________________________ (Participant)
Date:_________ Signed:___________________________ (Witness)
Date:_________ Signed:___________________________ (Parent)
Date:_________ Signed:___________________________ (Legal Guardian)
Involvement In Gangs

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Appendix F
Table of Questions
Involvement in Gangs

Table of Questions  Number____

1. Is there a group of friends at home that you spend a lot of time with?

_____________________________________________________________________

2. What do you get out of being a part of your friends or how do you feel when you are around them?

_____________________________________________________________________

3. Do you have a sense of belonging when you are with your friends?

_____________________________________________________________________

4. Would you rather be with them than at school or at home? Why or Why not?

_____________________________________________________________________

5. When you decided to join this group of friends did you have to be initiated? What did you do?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

6. Do you and your friends go to school together?

_____________________________________________________________________
Involvement in Gangs

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a. When you are not at school are you with your friends and if so what are you doing?

7. Do you and your friends work together? Where? What? do you work well together?

8. What are some other things you and your friends do together?

9. Have you ever gotten in trouble for something you have done with your friends? What happened and what kind of trouble?

10. Are there any activities your friends do that you are not sure you want to do?

a. Do you feel your group of friends is more accepting of you when you participate in different activities?

b. Have you ever participated in these activities to impress your friends in the group?
c. How do you feel after you have participated in different activities that might get you in trouble?

______________________________________________________________________

11. When you leave the facility are you going to reunite with these friends and continue to participate in the same activities? Why or Why not?

______________________________________________________________________

12. Suppose a group of people approached you to be a part of their group, they offered a total sense of brotherhood or sisterhood and you would be considered very important among the group, but you had to participate in activities that might get you in serious trouble. How would you respond to their offer?

______________________________________________________________________

13. Suppose a person you care about wants to join a gang what advice would you give this friend?

______________________________________________________________________
Involvement in Gangs

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Number: ___

Age: 16 17 18 19 20 21 22

Gender: Male Female

Diagnostic Category: LD EBD Both

Number of activities resulting in arrests: _____

Number of activities not resulting in arrests: _____
Appendix G

Verification of Gang Activities
Involvement In Gangs

1. I was in a drive-by. (Drive-by shooting?) Yeah, I was just an accomplice and I ended up here. I've done some other petty shit like shoplifting and vandalism, you know. Nothing much happened they just added it to my record.

2. No, not what do you call it, legally. (What do you mean?) We work together jacking people and places. (Do you mean "robbing"?) Yeah.

3. They're just people to get high with.

4. We run parts and sell parts of cars that we stole. We make nice money.

5. I got into an ecstasy party.

6. Yes, I've done some pretty vulgar things.

7. Shoplifting, beat the shit out of people if we feel like it, find the ladies, smoke a lot of dope, and drink a lot of liquor.

8. Getting high, getting laid, hanging out, tripping, dealing drugs, and kicking ass.

9. Partying, you know getting high and drunk, taking care of business. (What do you mean?) Making sure everyone was taken care of.

10. I was busted for shoplifting and got banned from the mall. I was also charged with reckless driving.

11. Hell no, I don't got a job. I can get money whenever and wherever I want.
12. I never got caught dealing, but I got caught fighting and skipping. I went to a few detention homes.
13. Sitting on the front stoop figuring out how we going to fuck people up.
14. I got busted stealing a car for them and some other shit like beating up people and robbing a store. It all got put on my report and got sent here.
15. Smoke a lot of dope. We cruise around and check out people.
16. I'm always with them. We usually are stealing cars and getting drunk.
17. Same as when I was skipping school. We were getting high and getting off, kicking the shit out of people, and dealing.
18. I stole too many cars and ended up here.
19. We run drugs together and make a whole shit load of money.
20. I stole a lady's purse when I was 10, they tries to scare me by putting me in a cop car. I torched a school and they kicked me out.
21. Yeah, I got caught breaking into my uncle's house and he pressed charges. For that I got 30 days at a local detention home. I've been caught shoplifting and skipping school. It all added up and I was sent here.
Involvement In Gangs

22. I got caught killing someone who fucked with us. Got a couple counts of assault and battery, I broke into a few places. I don't find out what happens with the murder rap until June.

23. Why get a real job when I can make a hell of a lot more money dealing drugs and yes my friends and me deal drugs good.

24. We all went to an ecstasy party and I didn't like the idea of the cocaine bang. (Why?) Because everyone was having sex in front of everyone it was gross.

25. Play hoops, drink a lot, get high, jack people if we need money. (Does that mean "jump"?) It means beat the shit out of people until they give us what we want.

26. We drive around smoking weed and chill at the park. We steal a lot of cars and if the guy don't give it up we beat the shit out of him.

27. I got caught running a few drugs and selling tricks. (Do you mean prostitution?) Yeah, I think you know selling myself. (What happened?) They just sent me here.

28. I guess, we all like to get stoned together.
Appendix H

Responses Indicating Intimidation and Pressure Through Activities and Initiation
Involvement In Gangs

1. Yeah, I stole a pair of sunglasses from a department store and I got caught.
2. I had to steal a car and I did it without getting caught.
3. I don't care about it. It has to be done. (Why?)
   Because if you don't you get your ass kicked.
4. I robbed a liquor store and got busted. I was only 12 though, so I got out of it. (Did your friends still accept you even though you did get caught?) Yeah.
5. To be blunt, I had to sleep with everyone then I could be a part of their group. I had to prove I wasn't a snob.
6. The brothers don't want pussies near them.
7. I got the shit beat out of me. It's called tough love. I got to be able to take a beat down and still stand when it's all over.
8. Oh yeah, if you act like a pussy, they will dog you for it.
9. Yes, no one wants to hang around a tease.
10. Yeah, I had to shoot up a liquor store.
11. Yeah. (What did you do, if you don't mind saying?) I had to have sex with them.
12. Yeah, they give you a lot of shit if you don't want to do something.
13. They would give me shit and put the pressure on.
14. Yeah to impress them, but if I don't they'll kick my ass.
Involvement In Gangs

15. Now after being here yeah because I know it's acting
crazy, but then I would have done anything.
16. Yeah, I don't know. I just do what they say. They
like me that way, I just do what they say.
17. Sure, but I do them anyway. (Why?) Cause I don't
want to look like an asshole.
18. What does that mean? (Did you have to do something
that showed your friends that you wanted to be a part of
their group?) I had to run some drugs without getting
busted.
19. What's that? (Did you have to do something to prove
yourself to your friends?) I know what you are talking
about. I had to rob a person at gunpoint with a .45 Magnum.
20. Especially when it comes to trying new kinds of drugs,
like I would have never tried heroin if it weren't for
them.
Appendix I
Responses Indicating Strong Feelings
About Gang Membership
1. As long as he don't join no pussy ass gang than I don't care. He better hope it ain't one that I jump though.
2. Yes, I'd join their group. It sounds like a lot of fun.
3. No, I'm already in a gang, but if it lead to more money then of course.
4. Check it out first, like the gang's cashflow and it's members.
5. Do what you want. (What else?) Don't be stupid about it. (What do you mean?) Don't get with the wrong gang.
6. Depends on the situation, if you're parents have thrown you out and you have no way to provide for yourself than do of because it is like another family.
7. Yeah, I ain't got nothing better to do, I ain't going to school and I want to see them.
8. Find a gang away from the home place. (Why?) Because then your parents won't find out.
9. Have fun and be careful.
10. Rather be with my friends because my parents are too strict.
11. I wouldn't want it because I'm happy where I am at. I mean that's what I have already.
12. Go for it but don't get caught, watch your back and don't let you mom know.
13. I'd make my own group and find people. No one comes to me I go to them.

14. I feel good, I got away with one more thing. I'm better than anyone that got caught.

15. Yes, every night because we have a lot of fun and I need it just as bad as they do.

16. Think about it and make sure it's what you want.
Appendix J

Responses Indicating A Sense of Importance, Security, and Belonging
1. I feel tough and important. (Important with everyone or important just with them?) Important with everyone because no one will mess with me and important with them because they want to be with me.

2. Yes. (Why?) Cause what we do, we do together.

3. I'm cool with the brothers, they like me and I like them sometimes. (Sometimes?) Yeah, sometimes they get on my nerves.

4. I feel important because they accept me for what I am.

5. Yes, because they are my world. They gave me security when I had no other place to go.

6. Good, important, wanted you know.

7. What's belonging? (Do you feel wanted by your friends?) Oh yeah, oh yeah.

8. Center of attention. I have what they want.

9. I feel good. They don't say nothing about my speech problem.

10. Oh yeah, sometimes they drive me crazy, but I keep them from going crazy.

11. Yes, they make me feel good.

12. Do you mean do I feel like I am suppose to be with them? Well, of course.

13. Secure, nobody can fuck with me.

14. Yeah, I belong with them.

15. I feel like I'm smart and important.
Appendix K

Responses Indicating The Lack of Importance of School
1. I haven't been to school since the fifth grade.
2. School is too constrictive.
3. I don't go to school.
4. School has too many people telling me what to do.
5. School has no purpose.
6. No, I dropped out when I was sixteen.
7. I'm not challenged at school.
8. School I don't go to.
9. With them. I don't go too school to much and my home is always got shit going down in it.
10. (What about school or your home?) I just go to school for gym and that's in the morning, so I don't got to stay too long.
Appendix L

Responses Indicating An Unstable Home Life
Involvement In Gangs

1. I don't have a home really, so I would rather be with my friends.
2. Home's okay. My mother is always messed up.
3. Home is too busy. Too many people in and out and too many people.
4. My parents are assholes cause they are too strict besides I ain't allowed in their house anyway.
5. She's a bitch and ain't never met him.
6. With them. I don't go to school too much and my house is always got shit going down in it.
7. My home is where my mom does her business.
8. Which home? (Either, which ever you consider home.) I hang out with a lot of people in both places.
Appendix M

Responses Indicating Unrealistic Ideas
Involvement In Gangs

1. When I'm with my friends I'm protected.
2. Sure, why not. (Well why?) Because with your friends you can do anything and not get caught.
3. Yes, they are waiting for me and we are going to road trip to Florida.
4. Didn't give a fuck, what are they going to do give me the death penalty for dealing drugs.
5. I don't care as long as I don't get caught.
6. Secure, nobody can fuck with me.
7. What? (Do your friends accept you more if you do certain things?) Shit, they want me to accept them. I tell them what to do.
8. I'd jump on it. (Without any thought to the activities you would have to participate in?) Trust me when I say I've probably done it all to begin with. (I'm not really talking about sexual acts more along the lines of crime.) Well, girls usually just get to drive the get away car.
9. Do I try to impress my friends? I ain't got to impress anyone.
Appendix N

Responses Indicating An Acceptance of Adult Roles
Involvement In Gangs

1. I'm getting my G.E.D., so I don't go to school.
2. Yeah, but this time I'm getting a real job. (Why?) Cause I want to work.
3. My friends don't work, but I worked for a couple days at a gas station, but I got more money from having babies.
4. I have worked as a waitress with some female friends. We all had a good time.
5. I want to be at home because of my babies.
6. We design tattoos together. I still do even though I am locked up.
7. We just hang out and have a lot of fun. I don't hang with them too much now when I go home. I got to take care of my babies.
8. I don't want to because of my babies. I want to take care of them. (Has the state threatened to take them if you get in any more trouble?) That's none of your business.
Table One
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