

**IN AND OUT OF ABORIGINAL GANG LIFE: PERSPECTIVES OF  
ABORIGINAL EX-GANG MEMBERS**

by

Alanaise O. Goodwill

B.Sc., Simon Fraser University, 1998  
M.A., The University of British Columbia, 2003

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIRMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies  
(Counselling Psychology)

THE UNIVERISITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
(Vancouver)

June 2009

© Alanaise O. Goodwill, 2009

## ABSTRACT

This research project generated a categorical scheme to describe the facilitation of gang entry and exit for Aboriginal ex-gang members using the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986) as a method of qualitative data analysis. Former gang members responded to the questions: (a) What facilitated gang entry for you? (b) What facilitated gang exit for you? Participants provided 103 and 136 critical incidents which were categorized into two separate category schemes each containing 13 different categories. The 13 categories for gang entry were; engaging in physical violence, proving one's worth, hanging around delinquent activity, family involved in gangs and following a family pattern; going to prison, gang becoming family and support system, looking up to gang members and admiring gang lifestyle, becoming dependant on gang, experiencing unsafe or unsupportive parenting practices, gaining respect by rank increase, reacting to authority, caught in a cycle of fear, and partying. The 13 categories for gang exit were; working in the legal workforce, accepting support from family or girlfriend, helping others stay out of or move away from gang life, not wanting to go back to jail, accepting responsibility for family, accepting guidance and protection, participating in ceremony, avoiding alcohol, publically expressing that you are out of the gang, wanting legitimate relationships outside gang life, experiencing a native brotherhood, stopping self from reacting like a gangster, and acknowledging the drawbacks of gang violence. Diverse methods of checking trustworthiness and credibility were applied to these category schemes, and it was found that both category schemes can be used confidently.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Table of Contents .....	iii
List of Tables .....	vii
Acknowledgements .....	viii
CHAPTER 1 Introduction.....	1
Research purpose .....	4
Rationale .....	4
Operationalization of constructs .....	6
Scope of the study .....	7
CHAPTER II Literature Review.....	11
Colonization practices in Canada.....	12
Aboriginal healing and resilience .....	14
Behavioural manifestations of delinquency .....	18
Theories of delinquency.....	22
Defining the term gang .....	28
Aboriginal gangs in Canada.....	30
Aboriginal community members’ perspectives .....	35
Gang entry research .....	37
Gang exit research.....	40
Sexual violence and masculinity development .....	44
Promising gang interventions .....	47
CHAPTER III Methodology.....	53
Identifying the field of inquiry.....	55
Interviews.....	57
Step one: Establishing the aim.....	59
Step two: Conducting criteria checks .....	59
Step three: Obtaining the context.....	60
Step four: Obtaining the incident.....	60
Data analysis .....	63
Researcher self-care .....	66

CHAPTER IV Results .....	68
Descriptions of categories for gang entry .....	68
Engaging in physical violence .....	70
Examples.....	70
Proving one's worth.....	71
Examples.....	71
Hanging around delinquent activities .....	72
Examples.....	73
Family involved in gangs and following a family pattern .....	74
Examples.....	74
Going to prison .....	75
Examples.....	75
Gang became a family or support system.....	76
Examples.....	77
Looking up to gangsters and admiring gang lifestyle.....	78
Examples.....	78
Becoming dependant on gang.....	79
Examples.....	79
Experiencing unsafe or unsupportive parenting practices .....	80
Examples.....	81
Gaining respect by rank increase .....	82
Examples.....	82
Reacting to authority.....	83
Examples.....	84
Caught in a cycle of fear .....	85
Examples.....	85
Partying.....	87
Examples.....	87
Descriptions of categories for gang exit .....	88
Working in legal workforce .....	89
Examples.....	90
Accepting support and guidance from family or girlfriend .....	91
Examples.....	91
Helping others stay out of or move away from gang life .....	93
Examples.....	93
Not wanting to go back to jail.....	94
Examples.....	95
Accepting responsibility for family .....	96
Examples.....	96
Accepting guidance and protection.....	97
Examples.....	97
Participating in ceremony .....	99
Examples.....	99
Avoiding alcohol.....	100
Examples.....	100

Publically expressing that you were out of a gang .....	101
Examples.....	102
Wanting legitimate relationships outside of gang life .....	103
Examples.....	103
Experiencing a native brotherhood .....	104
Examples.....	104
Stopping self from reacting like a gangster .....	106
Examples.....	106
Acknowledging the drawbacks of gang violence .....	107
Examples.....	107
Examination of the outcomes for gang entry .....	109
Validation.....	109
Examples.....	109
Dedication.....	110
Examples.....	110
Learning .....	111
Examples.....	112
Consequences.....	112
Examples.....	113
Examination of outcomes for gang exit.....	114
Accountability.....	114
Examples.....	114
Resistance .....	115
Examples.....	116
New life.....	116
Examples.....	117
Independence .....	118
Examples.....	118
Healing.....	119
Examples.....	119
Maturity.....	120
Examples.....	120
Validation of the categories .....	121
Summary .....	126
CHAPTER V Discussion.....	127
Support of the related literature for gang entry categories .....	127
Engaging in physical violence .....	127
Proving one's worth.....	128
Hanging around delinquent activities .....	129
Family involved in gangs and following a family pattern .....	130
Going to prison .....	131
Gang became family support system .....	131
Looking up to gangsters and admiring gang lifestyle.....	132
Becoming dependent on gang.....	133

Experiencing unsafe or unsupportive parenting practices .....	134
Gaining respect by rank increase .....	134
Reacting to authority .....	135
Caught in a cycle of fear .....	137
Partying .....	138
Support of related literature for gang exit categories.....	138
Working in legal workforce .....	138
Accepting support from family or girlfriend .....	139
Helping others stay out of or move away from gang life .....	139
Not wanting to go back to jail.....	141
Accepting responsibility for family .....	142
Participating in ceremony .....	143
Avoiding alcohol.....	144
Publically expressing that you were out of the gang .....	145
Wanting legitimate relationships outside of gang life .....	146
Experiencing a native brotherhood .....	146
Stopping self from reacting like a gangster .....	147
Acknowledging the drawbacks of gang violence .....	147
Recommendations for future research .....	148
Summary of the results .....	151
Implications for theory and research.....	152
Implications for counselling practices .....	154
Implications for social justice counselling.....	156
Prevention .....	157
Empowerment .....	158
Advocacy .....	159
Implications for counselling Aboriginal children, youth, and families .....	159
Cultural implications.....	163
Conclusion .....	165
Epilogue .....	166
References.....	167
Appendix I Letter of first contact.....	177
Appendix II Information sheet for research participants .....	178
Appendix III Counselling access information for participants .....	181
Appendix IV Certificate of UBC research ethics board approval .....	182

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1	Gang entry categories.....	69
Table 2	Gang exit categories.....	89
Table 3	Categorical agreement rates.....	122

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Gagizhewandizee wok inniniok oji Paapiiwak, Miigwetch. Dii baa jimowineno o wa maazinagun.*

I would also like to thank my wonderful family for your support throughout my studies. During my doctoral studies, my beautiful son Andrew came into this world, and my beloved father David, left this world. My continuation in this Ph.D. program during all these life changes couldn't have happened without the enduring support provided by my husband Fabian and my mother Vivian. Together with my children, Isaac and Andrew, we earned this degree as a family.

A special thanks also to my research committee, Dr. Ishu Ishiyama, Dr. Rod McCormick, and Dr. Jo-Ann Archibald. You have generously provided many important lessons and set high standards as scholars and as wonderful human beings. You have each been role models to me, and I am grateful that you agreed to work with me. *Giitchi Miigwetch.*

For the spelling and pronunciation of *Anishnaabemowin*, thanks again to my mother, Vivian Ferguson.

For the funding and support of my doctoral studies, I acknowledge the Sandy Bay Ojibway First Nation, the Network Environment for Aboriginal Health Research BC –

Western Arctic, and the Fraser Region Child and Youth Mental Health Pre-Doctoral Psychology Residency Program. Thank you for recognizing and valuing my work.

This work is dedicated to the good hearted men who bravely shared their stories with me.

Your stories are this manuscript.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This research explores the life experiences of Aboriginal adults who have experienced gang life as youth in Canada. The emergence of youth gangs in urban settings has spread out into rural and reservation communities and has attracted the attention of tribal leaders (Badger & Albright, 2003). The presence of street gangs and other Aboriginal gangs has received research attention from the Canada Corrections Research Branch (Jones, Roper, Stys, & Wilson, 2004; Mackenzie & Johnson, 2003; Nafekh, 2002) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (Goff, 2005). While there is varying community response to Aboriginal gang issues across Canada, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta have publicized programs designed specifically for gang prevention and intervention (Kimble, 2003; Sheremeta, 1999). Vancouver gang research (Gordon, 2000) has not represented Aboriginal ethnic gangs as an issue necessitating imminent researcher attention, however the Criminal Intelligence Service of Canada (CISC) reports that street gangs present themselves in smaller cities, rural areas, and on Aboriginal reserves (CISC, 2003). An objective of this research is to reveal and report the perspectives of Aboriginal people who have survived gang life in their community setting, whether it be on reserve or in the city. The participant selection process established a wide network of contacts throughout the four Western Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba in the attempts to capture the perspectives of Aboriginal ex-gang members.

Winnipeg is publicized as a well known Aboriginal gang centre (Sheremeta, 1999). Authorities from Winnipeg Police department have reported 1400-1500 active gang members in the city, 75% of these being of Aboriginal descent (Sheremeta). Winnipeg criminal intelligence reports that the most notorious perennial gangs are the Manitoba Warriors and Indian Posse who also have power in rural areas (Sheremeta) and other gangs attracting native youth are patterned after them.

The Alter-Natives to Non-Violence Report (Badger & Albright, 2003) is based on a year-long study including 400 Saskatchewan community representatives from law enforcement, First Nations government, community agencies, youths, and gang members. This report indicates that young people are attracted to what gangs provide, namely surrogate families, a place to fit in and identify with peers, protection, and money. Underlying issues of family conflict, poverty, and lack of alternative recreation and employment contribute to gang emergence in Saskatchewan. Youth justice systems and correctional facilities are breeding grounds for gang recruitment, as 20% of inmates have gang affiliations and youth face extreme pressures to join (Badger & Albright).

The underlying social issues reported in Badger and Albright's study are not exclusive to Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan, but are also present in First Nations communities across Canada (Lane, Bopp, Bopp, & Norris, 2002). Lane et al. (2002) conducted the research *Mapping the Healing Journey* exploring themes of healing from First Nations communities across Canada. Among participating First Nations communities in this study, there was a consensus that Aboriginal youth crises are growing out of control and few available models of comprehensive strategies addressing youth development are available (Lane et al., 2002). It was also found that youth are

often the first to initiate the change process, and community healing must involve extensive work with children. Adult focused healing results in a healthier adult population only to find the next generation of youth appearing to be more entrenched in crisis and addiction than the previous (Lane et al., 2002).

A hypothesis of this research project is that Aboriginal gang involvement is perpetuated by failures to protect children from social dangers of family/community crises, historical trauma, violence, and addiction. According to gang units in city police forces included in the *Alter-Natives to Non-Violence Report*, youth are conscripted into gang life to evade economic, community, and family maladies (Badger & Albright, 2003). This assumption about Aboriginal gang entry is supported from the related research focused on non-Aboriginal gang populations, prison populations, and within different psychological theories of delinquency (Goddard, Goff, Melancon, & Huebner 2000; Huff, 2002; Spergel & Curry, 1993; Virgil & Yun, 2002).

The theoretical implications of this study are based on framing Aboriginal gang entry and exit experiences as a community health issue rather than a criminal justice issue. This research and methodology is based in the discipline of Counselling Psychology and has a slightly different perspective from much of the seminal work in gang research such as Thrasher (1927), and Criminological theories of gang development (Goldstein, 1991; Shoemaker, 1996; Spergel, 1995). These works focus on different psychological theories of delinquency to explain gang development. This is important work to the field of gang inquiry and provides theoretical explanations for advancing research questions. For instance, Spergel's (1995) social disorganization theory stresses that gang formation is a normal response by normal individuals to abnormal social

situations. This research project inquires at the level of the individual within their own social context and does not emphasize group formation and behavior. These theories will be discussed in greater detail in later sections of the literature review.

### *Research purpose*

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and meaning of what events facilitate entry into and exit from gang life for Canadian Aboriginal ex-gang members. Previous theory postulates social abnormality as part of gang etiology. The social contexts are explored in this research when Aboriginal ex-gang members re-tell experiences that increased and decreased their levels of personal gang affiliation. Levels of personal gang affiliation are reflected by how personally invested an individual is with his gang. Categories of events obtained from this research will inform counsellors and mental health providers of culturally and socially defined concepts of gang entry and exit by Aboriginal people. By doing so, specific information is gained about where, when, and how to help gang-affected individuals and support their family members in a counselling setting.

### *Rationale*

Little is known about both paths an individual takes to become a gang member and to get out of gang life. Most importantly, less is known about how ex-gang members change and become integrated into non-violent aspects of society. There are limits on the counselling relationship which can prevent effective dialogue with clients affected by gangs directly or through their families due to ethical reporting obligations. Providing

counselling services to Aboriginal people who are actively engaged in gang life is fraught with difficulties. Lack of shared knowledge and awareness of the social pressures to join and remain in gangs (Joseph, 2003), an inability to access clients' experiences in sessions without placing them or their family members at harm by discussing gang related activities (Totten, 2001) and many other complicated *duty to warn* ethical dilemmas (Kearney, 1998) can make counselling and research a challenge. These are also barriers to providing counselling services to Aboriginal individuals at risk of joining gangs, or to those attempting to leave gangs. Compounding these barriers is poor knowledge and awareness of gang pressures in Aboriginal mental health service contexts, and many Aboriginal communities have limited access to culturally competent services (Lane et al., 2002).

This research explores from the participants' perspectives of their retrospective self-report how certain events in their lives were turning points affecting their level of personal gang affiliation. Both processes of entering and leaving gang life will receive attention as the entering process is most informative for preventative counselling, and the exiting process is most informative for interceptive counselling.

The Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954) adapted for Counselling Psychology research (Woolsey, 1986) is most appropriate for this study because it frames the language of experience within the individual instead of within the group (gang) experience. This reduces the risk of acquiring information resulting in ethical dilemmas and reporting obligations as the context of the events being reported are directly experienced by the individual participant. The participants were informed of the study purpose and uses for the data before reporting events, and discouraged from reporting any

identifying information of third parties. The research question was designed to help participants identify a personal frame of reference as the source of the event being reported. The identification of a context for events in the research process was a useful source of data as the context of an event reveals specific life areas for researcher awareness and attention. The events that were extracted as life turning point events are significant to counselling and therapy as people are most likely to present for help during life turning points (Rossi, 2002) and potentially shed some light on the life trajectories of Aboriginal people who join and subsequently leave gang life. These events were subject to categorization and the results have generated two reasonably comprehensive schemes of categories relating to gang entry and gang exit amongst Aboriginal people.

#### *Operationalization of constructs*

*Aboriginal:* Several terms are utilized in the literature to refer to indigenous North Americans. The term Aboriginal is inclusive of status, non-status, Métis, and Inuit individuals. First Nations, Native and Indian are terms used commonly in the literature and will be found in the text when quoting from other sources using these terms.

*Stages of gang affiliation:* A process that occurs gradually (Gordon, 2000) involving increasing personal investments into gang life that may begin with:

- (1) Fantasizing about gang activity, admiring what gang life is perceived to be.
- (2) Potential or wanna-be members are those who are in the stages of starting to associate with a gang and give serious consideration to joining.
- (3) Strikers, affiliate or associate members who are not fully initiated, hang out with the gang, participates in gang activities, and receives some gang benefits.

(4) Made members, who have completed initiation and have full membership and loyalty to a gang. They are privy to gang language, signals, colors and traditions. They will be active with the gang and associated with gang members to the exclusion of family and former friends.

(5) Hardcore members are full time gang members whose daily activity is furthering interests of the gangs. They have total commitment to the gang lifestyles and comprise a small percentage of the gang. They have significant influence on the gang and may be frequently incarcerated for criminal activity.

*Street gang:* Composed of three or more persons and one of its main purposes or main activities are to facilitate or commit one or more serious offences, that if committed, would likely result in the direct or indirect receipt of a material benefit, by the group or by any of the persons who constitute the group (Section 467.1 Criminal Code of Canada).

### *Scope of the study*

At the outset of this research project, the scope of the gang literature related counselling research was limited. The theoretical basis and work previous to this project came from other disciplines such as forensic psychology, criminology, and anthropology. This study attempted to link with previous theoretical contributions from other fields, contribute to the Aboriginal counselling literature, and advance awareness of gang phenomena in counselling psychology research and practice. These links are delineated in chapter five when support of related literature is discussed with respect to each of the categories.

This study utilized the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) and focused on concrete, observable behaviors collected through retrospective self-report of participants. These behaviors were varied, as events were psychological states or experiences. Ultimately, the events or critical incidents (CIs) got featured most prominently in the data analysis, and the contextual information of each CI aided the understanding of the meaning of CIs, and therefore assisted with thematic analysis and categorization processes. As the data were generated and the categorization process initiated, the methodological issue of category integrity and credibility checks was addressed to ensure adequate contextualization of the CIs. The scope of contextual information provided in a CIT study contributes to organized and credible categories of CIs.

A methodological requirement of CIT (see methodology chapter) requires that findings be subject to verification within previous scholarly inquiry, and scrutinized for new or novel findings. An asset of this research design was that it addressed the gap in the literature which presently has little representation of the perspectives of gang/ex-gang members for whom we attempt to create psychological interventions. The perspectives of Aboriginal ex-gang members featured most prominently in the generation of empirically supported categories and could be compared and contrasted to the contributions of other disciplines. This CIT credibility check was considered a strength of the research design and an important way to situate the research findings within the literature, as well as to verify the trustworthiness of the research results.

Redundancy of reported CIs was assessed during the research project after the first nine interviews and included a final total of 10 participants. The researchers

anticipated that the study design would require a broad range of perspectives to enhance rigor and information based on the diversity within Aboriginal peoples. In the CIT, the scope of the sample is determined by the number of incidents reported, rather than the number of participants included in the study. Pre-determining the number of participants to generate the data based on an estimated redundancy made no logical sense aside from planning participant contact and interviews. This aspect of the research design required review from the research team to ensure that steps were followed to attract a diverse participant basis for CI collection as well as monitoring category saturation.

Inconsistent definitions of the terms *street gang* was a problematic aspect of this research project making review or comparison of gang literature especially difficult. The Canadian criminal code definition of street gang was used as a reference point for this research, but was also broad and general, lacking the specific terms of conveying information about gang phenomena. Because of the changing dynamics of what represents gang over time, the definition from the criminal code was chosen to favor more inclusive research participant criteria. Because not all gangs are violent, fear inducing groups, attempting to objectively define this term can be misleading. Gangs have a typology useful for identifying group characteristics when facilitating the creation of prevention and intervention strategies (Goff, 2005; Spergel & Curry, 1990; Virgil & Yun, 2002). The participants in this research provided data rich in detail, context, and individual experiencing which were intended to help to bring the definition of *Aboriginal Gangs* to life. This aspect of the CIT was a favorable response to the issue of inconsistent gang definitions because of the systematic way of verifying CI's within an organized context. Additionally, the CIT was a good methodology to use in meeting an important

objective of this research; to represent the direct words and perspectives of Aboriginal ex-gang members as to contribute to a relevant understanding of Aboriginal gangs.

This research project was designed and supervised by researchers with significant scholarly experience in addressing research questions related to multicultural counselling, as well as Aboriginal mental health and education. The interviewing researcher is Aboriginal and a member of an Ojibway First Nation and a member of the academic research community. The amelioration of cross-cultural stress is important to the qualitative research aspects of field contacts and participant interviewing. Previous research with ethnic people by researchers of different ethnic backgrounds has been interpreted as an attempt to appropriate culture and knowledge (Sue, Ivey, & Pedersen, 1996). Extra care was taken to ensure that the interviewing researcher acknowledged that having shared ethnicity did not entitle her to insider status with participants of this study. An emphasis on acquiring a closer connection with this population, increasing contact, communication, familiarity, and trust was integral to this research project and discussed further in the methodology chapter.

Although this study analyzed contextual information in a more restricted manner than some other qualitative methodologies (e.g., ethnographic, phenomenological), this information was considered beyond the scope of the study. This research was designed to favor results that were summarized, organized, and verified for credibility.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter attempts to provide a scope of the literature to best convey the scholarly work surrounding the research questions of what facilitates gang entry and exit for Aboriginal people in Canada. The literature is presented in the following stages. First, the historical backdrop to provide the required understanding of Aboriginal people, families, and communities affected by gangs are discussed. A review of scholarly publications citing colonization practices in Canada is therefore presented first. The second section of the literature review presents Aboriginal approaches to healing and resiliency. This aspect of the literature is provided to balance the picture of harm created by representations of colonization. Aboriginal healing and resilience are essential responses to colonization signifying the rebuilding of indigenous nations. Therefore, the literature on Aboriginal healing and resilience is important to our understanding of Aboriginal people, families, and communities and reflects the scholarly evidence base that should inform our mental health and counselling practices.

Next, there is a review of the broader areas of the literature relating to gang entry and exit within multiple disciplines of inquiry. This literature relates to the behavioural manifestations and theories of delinquency. The former is a review of the literature in the fields of forensic and clinical psychology, while the latter is a theoretical review of literature based in sociology and criminology. The manner in which this literature relates to gang behaviours was examined in the following sections of the literature review, followed by a narrowing of the literature relating to Aboriginal gangs in Canada, and

Aboriginal community members' perspectives on gang issues. The next section of the literature reviews the research with broad populations examining gang entry and exit. As the penultimate point, a review of the research on masculine identity development for male survivors of childhood sexual abuse was covered. This was considered important literature relating to this research because of the observed sexual violence in Aboriginal gang life, as well as the profound effects of childhood abuses cited in the colonization practices section. Finally, the literature conveying promising gang interventions for a variety of communities affected by gangs was summarized to conclude the literature review.

#### *Colonization practices in Canada*

Theories of delinquency cannot be adequately understood in the context of Aboriginal gangs without first understanding the background and historical context of the colonial process in Canada. This study includes First Nations, Métis, Status, and Non-Status Indians. Conflating such diverse people under the blanket term *Aboriginal* suggests these groups share a common social, economic, and political predicament resultant of colonization. It is therefore important to describe colonial processes in light of the mental health issues observed in Aboriginal communities.

The soaring rates of suicide, substance abuse, chemical dependency, and violence are understood to be a direct consequence of colonial forces in Canada (Waldram, 1997; York, 1990). The Indigenous populations in the Americas were decimated by infectious disease, warfare, and active suppression of culture and identity. Stannard (1992)

employed the term *cultural genocide* to describe these processes that decimated an estimated population of 7 million to 70,000 (Trigger & Swagerty, 1996).

From 1879 to 1973, the Canadian government mandated church-run boarding schools to provide education for Aboriginal children (Report of the Royal Commission of Canada, 1996). Upwards of 100,000 children faced removal from their families, homes, and communities to be subjected to intense indoctrination practices that denigrated and suppressed language and culture (RCAP, 1996). The extent of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse perpetrated within those school walls has been acknowledged only recently (Chrisjohn, Young, and Maraun, 1997; Haig-Brown, 1988; Knockwood, 1992) followed by an official apology by the Canadian federal government occurring in the Ottawa legislature in 2008.

Residential schools were a component in the apparatus of social construction and control in Canada, as well as part of the process of nation building through assimilation of Aboriginal cultures into mainstream Euro-Christian Canada. The socializing power of education was part of the ministering of society's need for order, lawfulness, labour, and security of property. Senior official in the Department of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, stated that without education of Indian communities, they would produce an "undesirable and often dangerous element in society" (Department of Indian Affairs Annual Report, 1911, p. 273 as cited in RCAP, 1996). The late George Manuel, residential school graduate and Aboriginal leader, expressed:

We were the laboratory and production line of the colonial system...The colonial system that was designed to make room for European expansion into a vast, empty wilderness needed and Indian population that it could describe as lazy and

shiftless...the colonial system required such an Indian for casual labour (Manuel & Posluns, 1974, p. 63).

Residential schools in combination with the construction of the reserves, and the loss of land bases, resources, family members, community, and culture, were the colonial formula for Canada that proved disastrous for Aboriginal peoples.

Indigenous peoples around the world have varying social, cultural and political experiences; however colonial processes are the shared universals that likely create the striking parallels in mental health problems (Hunter, 1993; Kunitz, 1994; Spencer, 2000). One of the possible reasons for the high presence of mental health problems in Indigenous populations might be due to the legislated banning of Indigenous healing practices. These practices are rooted in spiritual rituals and ceremonies which were outlawed until 1978 in the United States (Deloria & Lytle, 1983) and 1985 in Canada (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1996). In spite of this, the ancient wisdom of indigenous healing has survived intact and is still practised today (Struthers, 2003). The next section of this literature summarizes some of the importance and meaning of these practices as a response to colonization and the rebuilding of indigenous nations.

#### *Aboriginal healing and resilience*

According to Struthers (2003), many aspects of Indigenous healing have not been put to paper and remain sacred and protected within the oral traditions of Indigenous knowledge. Although the author has knowledge of many of these practices, the sacred nature of this knowledge prohibits this information from being written. Instead, this

section attempts to introduce Indigenous concepts and epistemologies of healing and knowledge.

The first concept discussed here relates to the posture of the *patient*, or person in need of healing in relation to their own healing process. In an Anishnaabe (Ojibway) approach to healing, each person was their own primary helper in his or her own healing process. The person had an understanding of his/her own sickness and how to get well (Aitken & Haller, 1990). The discrepancy between Indigenous approaches to healing and the manner in which health care is provided today is that when somebody becomes ill, they no longer know what is wrong with them. What usually happens in today's health care system is a person will go to someone who will tell them what is wrong with them. An Anishnaabe approach to healing positions the individual in need of healing in a role where he/she participates in healing processes that incorporates elements of the seen and unseen world (Aitken & Haller, 1990). These elements are referred to in the medicine wheel as the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects.

Other authors describe Indigenous approaches to healing as incorporating the physical, social, psychological and spiritual being (Medicine Eagle, 1989). Hammerschlag (1988) writes more broadly about balance as being essential within a person, as the world itself is viewed as a balance among transcendental forces, human beings, and the natural environment. The concepts of knowledge, personal responsibility, balance, and multiple transcendental forces are mentioned here with the intention to introduce Indigenous concepts about healing. It is the intention to not refer to this information as "traditional healing" as Struthers wrote:

Recognizing a practice as “traditional” marks it off from the everyday practices of people or community. By use of this label, these practices are vulnerable to commodification which works against the recuperation of that which was suppressed (p. 340, Struthers, 2003).

Waldram (1997) writes prolifically about Aboriginal spirituality and healing practices and emphasizes that there are *mythic* underpinnings to which healing processes are attached. This includes understanding the healer’s role as a ritual expert, bearer of traditions, leader and teacher by developing commonalities in participants’ experiences and weaving them together, as a story, making coherent links to tradition. Waldram also writes that the healer fosters both interpersonal and spiritual dimensions of healing processes. The use of the term *mythic* is problematic because the limited lexicons of the Eurocentric word creates a difficult expression of Indigenous realities and worldview. The epistemology of Aboriginal approaches to healing allows for the validity of knowledge which gets discounted as *mythic* by a Eurocentric, technological world that defers to scientific authority (Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000).

Psychotherapy and other mental health interventions have inherent cultural concepts of clients which includes associated values of individualism and self-efficacy (Kirmayer et al., 2000). McCormick (1997) investigated healing processes as described by First Nations people in British Columbia and produced several findings of importance to counselling interventions with First Nations people. For example, in terms of counselling goals, interconnectedness between First Nations individuals and all living things was found to be more important than autonomy, differing from Western goals of therapy. Suggestions to counsellors were to develop techniques or interventions to help

First Nations clients by; (a) mobilizing resources for them and, (b) by referring them to culturally appropriate sources for help (McCormick). It was seen as desirable for the research participants in his study to connect with nature and spirituality, touching on broader issues such as the overwhelming need to be reconnected and reclaim that which was taken (McCormick).

McCormick (1994) interviewed 50 First Nations adults living in British Columbia in his exploratory research of what facilitates healing. Participants reported that healing was facilitated by the following: (a) participation in ceremony, (b) expression of emotion, (c) learning from a role model, (d) establishing a connection with nature, (e) exercise, (f) involvement in challenging activities, (g) establishing a social connection, (h) gaining an understanding of the problem, (i) establishing spiritual connection, (j) obtaining help/support from others, (k) self-care, (l) setting goals, (m) anchoring self in tradition, and (n) helping others.

Thematic analyses of healing outcomes suggested that effective healing programs for First Nations people would invoke empowerment, cleansing, balance, discipline, and belonging (McCormick, 1994). This research presents an excellent source of Indigenous knowledge and scholarship with respect to approaches to healing by contemporary First Nations people of British Columbia.

In spite of the experiences of colonial oppression and deprivation from Indigenous sources of knowledge and healing, Aboriginal people in Canada have demonstrated resilience. Factors contributing to resilience in British Columbia's First Nations people were studied by Chandler and Lalonde (1998). These authors identified six indicators they termed *cultural continuity* which are community control of health,

education, police and fire services, as well as local facilities for cultural activities, self-government, and involvement in land claims. Suicide rates were used as the health indicator in this study, and the presence of each variable in the community was associated with lower suicide rates when compared with communities that lacked such local control. The sum of these factors was strongly negatively correlated with suicide rates across the 196 British Columbian bands in the study, demonstrating a strong association between lack of community control and high suicide rates (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998). This research did not emphasize the role of Indigenous healing approaches yet it underscored the significance of assuming a posture of sovereignty in multiple life areas and the subsequent improved prognosis for First Nations affected by suicide in particular. The shared universal within this finding and Anishnaabe concepts of healing appears to be that the individual (person or community) is their own primary helper in his/her/their own healing process.

The following section of the literature focuses mainly on our observations of gang behaviours, which is delinquency. The previous review provides a background of some of the historical, social, political, and cultural forces acting on Aboriginal people in Canada today. Now that the context has been discussed, it is appropriate to examine the more overt issue of delinquency behaviours in gang life.

### *Behavioural manifestations of delinquency*

There are six empirically supported theories of delinquency reviewed later in this section. The construct of delinquency is relevant to the study of gang affiliation because deviant social behavior is commonly associated with gang related behaviors as a form of

delinquency (Spergel, 1990). Systemic and social psychological perspectives explain delinquency which is viewed as having different forms and manifestations. For instance, Goddard, Goff, Melancon, and Huebner (2000) profiled 1583 self-reported adolescent delinquents and reported six clusters of delinquent types on the basis of behaviour; (a) troubled students, (b) marginal delinquents, (c) general delinquents, (d) petty thieves, (e) violent extortionists, and (f) extreme delinquents. Of these delinquency clusters, violent extortionists and extreme delinquents were found to be active gang members, while troubled students tended to claim gang affiliation but rarely did things with gangs (Goddard et al., 2000).

The first, fifth and sixth clusters of delinquency representing individuals with personal gang investments reported three behavioural profiles entitled “troubled students”, “violent extortionists” and “extreme delinquents”. Some notable aspects of the violent extortionist behavioral profile in Goddard et al.’s (2000) findings are the following; an abuse history of significant, cumulative physical abuse over time by a teacher/authority figure and premature sexualization. They scored high on measures of excitement and in being well-respected but low in sense of belonging, warm relationships, self-fulfillment, fun and enjoyment, security, self-respect and sense of accomplishment. They described themselves as dishonest, cruel, bad, confident, and brave. They reported frequent sexual activity with unlikely use of condoms/birth control, drug abuse, high pregnancy rate, active gang membership, dislike for learning, low grades, and no plans to stay in school. Individuals with the violent extortionist behavioral profile reported experiencing feelings of disdain from teachers and an unwillingness to talk about personal problems with a boss, counsellor, parent/grandparent.

Goddard et al. (2000) determined the following behavioural profile for extreme delinquents; almost exclusively male, very active gang members, fathers under employed, high incidence of parental drug and alcohol abuse, extensive history and current experience of physical and sexual abuse, and drug abuse. Individuals with this behavioural profile viewed themselves as strong, and that people were insensitive to their needs and that teachers did not care about them. They tended to get depressed and attempt/consider suicide. They had frequent sexual activity beginning at an early age, as well as behaving in a sexually intrusive and violent manner. Cited reasons to engage in sexual activity were to forget problems, create a pregnancy, keep girl/boy friend, show independence, boost confidence, and to seem cool.

The behavioural profile of the troubled student cluster (Goddard et al., 2000) is noteworthy because fantasizing about gang-life reflects an initial stage of gang entry. Troubled students (Goddard, 2000) reported gang affiliations but no behaviours indicating gang involvement which may be a precursor to the early stages of gang entry. Troubled students had some strong social indicators such as a stable home life, well developed value systems, and mastery traits. The behavioural profile indicated some vulnerable life areas such as premature sexual activity, feelings of alienation, depression, anger, and destructiveness. They had a strong likelihood of being physically abused by a relative, and had a dislike of school and felt that their teachers cared less about them than others. If they had personal problems, these young people were reportedly willing to talk to a counsellor, parent, grandparent and friend.

These three behavioural profiles share commonalities in terms of the presence of high psychosocial stress, mental health concerns, as well as occupying opposing places

along the timeline of gang life trajectory. These concerns highlight the need to approach the presenting mental health issues in the lives of youth which are described within each of these behavioural profiles. Delinquency is a behaviour that attracts the attention of adult professionals, however youth expressing these behaviours also have mental and psychosocial health needs that are likely less observable and often untreated.

Each empirically supported theory of delinquency has a corresponding technique for intervention (Goddard et al., 2000). Causes of delinquency are theorized to be due to: (a) Denied access to legitimate means of achieving success (strain theory); (b) bond/attachment breaks between individual and society, individual and parent (social control theory); (c) higher rewards of delinquent behavior than alternative behaviors and modeling behavior from others (social learning theory); (d) poor self-image (containment theory); (e) dominant, overriding set of values and attitudes guiding the behaviors (general personality theory); and (e) learned behaviors occurring in small, informal groups deriving from collective experiences, specific, situational current events (differential association theory).

In light of the previously reviewed processes and impacts of colonization, the first three theories (e.g., strain, social control, and social learning theories) are reviewed in the next section in greater detail for the following reasons: (a) that these theories allow for the conceptualization of Aboriginal gang issues within social, relational, and environmental contexts of observed delinquency, therefore distributing less of the causes for delinquency within the individual, and more appropriately within a wider context; and (b) that there is some research basis with Indigenous youth populations with respect to testing the utility of these theories.

*Theories of delinquency*

Strain theory (Agnew, 1985) allows consideration of adverse conditions set up by larger social forces as sources of strain leading to serious and frequent delinquency. The enforced policies of the Indian Act and other colonial constructs habitually create poverty and annihilate sovereignty creating colonized, and oppressive spaces within reserve, urban, and rural communities across Canada (Blackstock, Trocmé, & Bennet, 2004; Lane, Bopp, Bopp, & Norris, 2002). Adolescents located in aversive environments from which they cannot escape are more likely to be delinquent (Agnew). Some of the variables of strain theory consider the presence of parental abuse of children, class origins and conditions, as well as the presence of parent and school conflicts (Agnew). Given the legacy of the Indian Residential School system on the educational, family, systemic, and economic experiences of Aboriginal children during the last 135 years, there is significant conflict in several life areas of Aboriginal children and youth, including with their families and schools (Chrisjohn, Young, & Maraun, 1997). Therefore, it is proposed that this theory fits with partly describing the ensuing legacy of the Residential schools, which includes Aboriginal gangs. Strain theory would require that the identified sources of strain receive interventions as a mechanism for addressing and reducing delinquency (Agnew).

As strain theory also predicts that individuals faced with stress and strain will be more likely to be deviant (Agnew, 1985) it is not surprising to discover in the literature that social disorganization can lead to substance use via stress and strain (Boardman, Finch, Ellison, Williams, & Jackson, 2001). This research provides a link between strain theory and social disorganization theory as tested by Sampson and Groves (1989). These

authors reported that when neighborhoods have higher levels of social and ecological disorder, adolescents who live within them have poorer outcomes on a variety of domains, including substance use.

In a recent study by Yabiku, Rayle, Okamoto, Marsiglia, and Kulis (2007), the mechanisms that linked social and ecological disorganization to substance use in Southwest American Indian youths were a lack of social control, a lack of positive role models, and psychological stress (Yabiku et al., 2007). In this study, American Indian youth were compared with non-American Indian youth with respect to drug and alcohol use in order to examine the universality of neighbourhood disorganization as a risk factor for substance use (Yabiku et al.). Results indicated that American Indian youth were not as adversely affected by these neighborhood factors (unemployment, poverty, education, and violent crime rate). These authors postulated that American Indian youth may possess cultural characteristics that protect them from adverse neighborhood effects. These cultural characteristics may include ethnic pride and familial relationships (Yabiku et al.). These authors have suggested that when using *social disorganization* theory to inform intervention, it should involve using culturally competent practices with Indigenous youth as a means of boosting resiliency. These may be implemented best through the enhancement of relational and cultural strengths as described in the literature (Yabiku et al.).

Using a strain theory informed approach to intervention requires identification of sources of strain for intervention as a mechanism for addressing and reducing delinquency (Agnew, 1985). Other authors, such as Lane et al., (2000) have identified sources of strain in Aboriginal populations generally, while understanding the sources of

strain in Aboriginal youth affected by gangs is not yet known specifically. A strain theory informed approach to preventative and interceptive interventions with gang affected youth requires further research examination.

Social control theory (Hirschi, 1969) has the main assumption that human deviance is intrinsic in human nature, and Hirschi suggests that it is “social conformity that must be explored” (Hirschi, 1969, p. 31). Conformity is stated to occur through socialization and create bonds between the individual and society in four main elements: (a) attachment and affective ties with family; (b) commitment, meaning having educational and career aspirations; (c) involvement or participation in conventional, socially valued activities, and; (d) acceptance of rules and values of the social value system. In research with teenage runaways, factors such as family breakdown, the absence of non-coercive parental control (neglect), the presence of coercive parental control (abuse) and parental rejection are proposed as causes for taking to the streets (Farber, McCoard, Kinast, & Falkner, 1984). Social control theory extends into this finding in terms of the element of attachments (parental and social) necessary for conformity to counter intrinsic human delinquency.

Social learning theorist, Akers (1985) proposed that human behavior is motivated by the self-interested pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. This notion gave rise to self-control theory, which is purported by some experts in criminology to be a predictor of crime and deviant behaviors (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Morris, Wood, & Dunaway, 2006). This theory states that the effects of self-control on behavioral outcomes should not vary by gender, age, race, or culture, supporting a more general theory of crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Those who disproportionately surrender

to their human nature exhibit low self-control. According to self-control theory, the influence of this on crime should be equal for all subcategories of individuals (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).

Morris, Wood, and Dunaway (2006) tested the cultural invariance of self-control theory using psychological measures of self control, Native traditionalism, and substance use with a sample of White and Native American high school students. In this research, these authors also examined a hypothesis that Native traditionalism is related to Native American substance use. Results supported that self-control significantly influenced all forms of substance use when controlling for race and in race-specific analyses (Morris et al., 2006). Z-tests conducted by race revealed self-control as a stronger predictor of marijuana and serious drug use among Native Americans, posing a challenge to the cultural invariance thesis of self-control theory (Morris, 2006). Additionally, results of this research suggest that those with higher scores of Native traditionalism on the measures implemented by the authors engaged in greater substance abuse. Based on the conclusions drawn by Morris and others, these authors made the disturbing postulation that those with a greater degree of Native enculturation generate strain, conflict, cultural dissonance, and anomie (Dana, 1993). The degree of traditionalism as measured by these authors led the authors to conclude that Native Americans are at a cultural disadvantage when competing for society's rewards, thus increasing the likelihood of deviance (Morris et al., 2006). This kind of logic and theorizing perpetuates the myth that Native American peoples are entirely responsible for their own problems and completely ignores the presence and role of an ongoing colonial process in the Americas. A possible argument to explain the cultural variance of self-control theory observed in this study are inadequate

measures of culture, and an inadequate scope of understanding human experience when considering something as complex as deviant substance use.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) explains that the frequency of human behaviors increases when they are more highly rewarded than alternative behaviors. This theory is a logical selection to inform psychological intervention with delinquent or gang affiliated individuals due to the emphasis this theory places on behaviors. From a social learning perspective, behaviors develop from modeling from others. Gang affiliation for instance, has material (money, possessions) reinforcement as well as social (identity, belonging) reinforcements. One example of a means to reduce gang behaviors would entail identifying mentors to model alternative behaviors that reinforce (pleasurable) or emphasize the costs (pain) associated with maintaining gang activities.

Goddard and others (2000) found that social learning theory explains the most serious types of delinquency. They found that familial socialization factors influence delinquency trajectories and provide support for the relationship between physical abuse and violence, and between sexual abuse and sexual crimes. Extreme delinquent groups were not found to be amenable to counselling. Goddard's findings suggest that barriers to counselling for these individuals are grounded in the individual not being *amenable* rather than to the maze of service delivery systems or poor infrastructure in the mental health system. Research with gang members specifically supplies multiples ways of understanding the opportunities to provide counselling in timely, and meaningful ways.

A very encouraging study found in the social learning theory literature provides an example of an empirically supported intervention with American Indian school children. The pathways curriculum and family interventions to promote healthful eating

and physical activity in American Indian school children is based on Social Learning Theory, American Indian concepts, and results from formative research (Davis, Clay, Smyth, Gittelsohn, Arviso, Flint-Wagner, et al. 2003). This intervention is aimed at promoting healthful eating and increasing physical activity. In a randomized field trial including 1704 American Indian third to fifth grade students from 41 schools, the results indicated that an intervention of this nature can promote positive changes in; (a) knowledge, (b) cultural identity, and (c) self-reported healthful eating and physical activity in American Indian children as well as environmental change in school food service (Davis et al., 2003).

The research including Indigenous youth populations relating to strain theory, social control theory, and social learning theory suggests similar things. Culture and familial relationships are posed as resiliency factors for Indigenous youth growing up with multiple sources of neighborhood strain (Yabiku et al., 2007). A health promotion intervention strategy based on social learning theory in combination with American Indian knowledge yielded positive health changes in the children receiving this intervention. Social control theory suggests that bonds between individuals, parents, family members, and community members are attachments that create conformity and decrease delinquency behaviours. Although these theories suggest different approaches to intervention with respect to delinquency, the parallel findings of importance are; familial relationships, culture, ethnic identity, and attachments to community and school. These results suggest the desired outcomes for intervention with respect to reducing delinquency. Now a more specific exploration of gang research is presented here to help understand some possible opportunities to create intervention.

### *Defining the term gang*

The meaning of the term *gang* changes depending on the social science lens in use during research and discussion. Most definitions leave much room for interpretation and cannot describe the gang phenomenon in a meaningful way. Thrasher's (1927) original analysis and research of gangs used a definition that does not reflect the complexity of today's street gangs. Thrasher's work initiated scholarly interest in gangs, and he has been viewed as the primary American scholar of gang research. He did not define gangs as delinquent because he did not believe gang members to be more delinquent than were others in the community. He focused on gang-formed communities and the internal processes and workings of those communities. His definition of gangs based on his early research was:

The gang is an interstitial group originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict. It is characterized by the following types of behavior: meeting face to face, milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict, and planning. The result of this collective behavior is the development of tradition, unreflective internal structure, esprit de corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness, and attachment to a local territory (Thrasher, 1936, p. 46).

Most police department gang definitions are variations of the Canadian Criminal Code definition. A Canadian academic perspective defines gangs as a semi-structured group of youth and young adults who engage in planned and profitable criminal behavior or organized violence against rival gangs (Gordon, 2000). Over the years, organized crime and gang activity were very distinct events motivated by different goals while today distinguishing between the two activities is difficult (Kenny & Finckenauer, 1995).

Researchers have reported that Aboriginal gangs focus recruitment on youth which facilitates inter-generational gang membership (Badger & Albright, 2003; Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Accord Initiative, 2005, p. 45). Lower-level criminal capabilities and a high propensity for violence are two additional *Aboriginal gang* group identifiers (EUA AI, 2005, p.45).

Canadian researchers have developed numerous gang typologies to facilitate the definition and recognition of distinct groups. Gordon's (2000) research in the Vancouver area specified five group identities that become categorized as *gangs*. These are; (a) youth groups, (b) criminal groups, (c) "wanna-be" groups, (d) street gangs, and (e) criminal business organizations which have a formal structure, a high degree of sophistication, and maintained by adults. Criminal business organizations keep a low profile while engaging in criminal activity for economic gain. Street gangs are groups of young people, mainly adults, and are semi-structured. Their main purpose as a group is planned and profitable criminal behavior or organized violence against rival groups. The individuals in these groups have identifiable clothing, colors, monikers, and a desire to be seen by others as gang members (Gordon, 2000, p. 48). "Wanna-be" groups are more spontaneous in their activity and structure formation which is usually very loose. They lack the enduring structure and organization of street gangs and criminal organizations (Gordon, 2000, p. 48). Addressing gang problems practically requires less inclusive, more specific definitions of the group(s) to be targeted (Public Safety Canada PSC, 2008, p. 7). For the purposes of this study, ex-gang members from all three groups attracting the gang label are considered.

In the introduction of this paper, the definition of street gang used by the Canadian criminal code was stated as the selected definition for the purposes of designing this study. This definition guides participant criteria for selection, and not intended to minimize the complexities of what being in a gang means for participants involved in the study. When reading and reviewing the literature, it is important to be mindful of the inconsistent definition and meaning of the term 'street gang'. Contextual information will be given when referring to other publications of gang research as an attempt to clarify inconsistencies.

### *Aboriginal gangs in Canada*

The first section of this literature introduced some of the empirically supported theories of delinquency, and the second and third sections attempted to provide the socio-historical contexts which shape the lives of Aboriginal Canadians today. This research focuses on the presence of Aboriginal gangs in Canada, which could not be discussed without the context of literature documenting the history and effects of colonialism, as well as Aboriginal culture, resilience, and healing. Aboriginal gangs have a presence in communities across the nation, and the scholarly literature informing our understanding of this is covered here.

The most recent report of an investigation into the formation and recruitment process of Aboriginal gangs in Western Canada state that Aboriginal gangs appear to have different causes and characteristics than other gangs. The author of this report wrote the following quote, which is a powerful statement of the unique nature of Aboriginal gangs in Canada:

Their recruitment processes are considerably more violent than other gangs.

Aboriginal gangs are more apt to follow the “standard” for gangs in the United States, where tattoos, hand symbols, and strict chains of command define gang membership and function. In this sense Aboriginal gangs are unlike other gangs in our country (Grekul, 2007, p.2).

In the context of the extreme poverty and legitimate economic barriers in many Canadian Aboriginal communities, joining a gang can be a means to increase one’s income significantly and expediently (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008). Aboriginal people are overrepresented in the prison system where the link between prisons and gangs becomes prominent. Aboriginal overrepresentation in the prison system is reportedly connected to the proliferation of Aboriginal gangs in Canada (Mercredi, 2000). This is a distinct area of Aboriginal gang life also requiring specific research inquiry.

Most Aboriginal gangs fall into the “Street Gang” group of Gordon’s (2000) gang typology cited earlier in this literature review. Members tend to be younger, less educated, and more economically disadvantaged in comparison to criminal organization members. The organization, leadership, and structure of Aboriginal gangs vary. However the peer group attraction and the promise of economic prosperity contribute to Aboriginal gang membership (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008). Gordon (2000) writes that individual members of the “street gang” typology join up due to ethnic marginalization, experience of domestic violence, ineffective parenting, poverty, an inability to obtain income, lack of a father figure, additional dependant siblings, and isolation from the larger community, which is similarly reported by participants in Deane, Bracken, and

Morrisette's (2007) research with Indian Posse male gang members. Ex-gang members who were interviewed by Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson endorsed descriptions of groups such as the Redd Alert, Indian Posse, Alberta Warriors, and the Native Syndicate. These descriptions seemed to indicate that Gordon's (2000) street gang definition was relevant to these Native gangs (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008). These gangs are usually involved in street level drug dealing, active in correctional institutions, and use fear, violence, and intimidation for recruitment and control procedures (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008).

Edmonton police services reported that most Aboriginal groups are ethnically homogenous yet the violence tends to be intra-racial. Aboriginal street gangs generally recruit youth who are poverty stricken and come from dysfunctional broken homes (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008). In Manitoba, organized Aboriginal gangs found in smaller urban centers and in First Nations communities may share names with gangs located in larger urban areas signifying a connection with a major urban Aboriginal organized crime gang (Goff, 2005). Recruitment processes in Manitoba Aboriginal gangs tend to be community specific and tend to be organized on a community-by-community basis as opposed to having one or two gangs controlling all of the illegal activities within a specific region (Goff, 2005).

Some reports on Aboriginal gangs illustrate the characteristic of age graded gang member composition, with most members being above the age of 18 (Goff, 2005). This finding is inconsistent with anecdotal and press reports of Aboriginal gang members being as young as age eight. This is an example within the literature where a typology of gangs should be applied to the types of gang/groups being compared. What seems most

realistic is that youth may consider gang membership at any developmental stage and begin personally investing or *affiliating* with other gang members before deciding to join at a later age. Pre-gang involvement or trajectory experiences, such as any internal decision making, family composition, and socio-cultural experiences/events, is not yet addressed in the literature.

Some of the consequences of gang lifestyles are physical and sexual victimization, criminal behavior and records, incarceration, injury and death. Additionally, there is a loss of childhood, nationhood and culture that accompanies gang life. The 2006 documentary “Gang Aftermath” visits the Cree community of Hobbema, Alberta. The uniqueness of the Aboriginal gang phenomenon in this community as an example is encapsulated in the following vignette by Detective Doug Reti, RCMP.

I have never witnessed gang activity so pronounced as I have seen it here, in the community I am in (Hobbema). At such a young age also. We are seeing kids young as nine and ten as runners, as young as 13 doing drive by shooting and carrying weapons and so forth.

When Aboriginal children, youth, and adults imitate a lifestyle illustrated through the American media within African American groups, there is a cultural loss manifested by a disconnection from their nationhood (e.g., Ojibway, Cree, Métis, Blackfoot). Researchers of Canadian Aboriginal gangs reported similar findings, highlighting that those who join gangs tend to lose their cultural identity signifiers and resort to using gang membership identifiers (Badger & Albright, 2003; Goff, 2005; Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008; Reid, 2004).

The role of social constructionism in the presence of Aboriginal gang issues is an area deserving more research attention in order to ascertain whether Aboriginal groups have been lumped together and referred to by society as “ethnic hoodlums” (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008). Incarcerated Aboriginal offenders are subject to institutional labeling within two broad categories of “gang member” and “non-gang member” (Mercredi, 2000). This implies that Aboriginal people are being labeled within the court process as a reaction to public pressure by White politicians who utilize the media to create an image of Aboriginal youth as dangerous and violent (Mercredi, 2000). This activity can serve to obscure our understanding of Aboriginal gang issues which can increase our collective ignorance and naivety (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008). We have yet to fully understand how this gang labeling and profiling by the courts, police, and prisons affects the perception of Aboriginal gangs. However, the erroneous labeling practices enacted on Aboriginal inmates as reported by Mercredi, has the potential to deprive them of valuable programming or transfer to lower security institutions (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008).

There is a popularization of gangster imagery by media and music and the resulting behavior of Aboriginal gangs in Canada is currently being documented and reported by police forces and Correctional Services Canada, and not by Aboriginal community researchers. In between the media and criminal justice perspectives is a chasm in the literature where the perspectives of community members are needed. It is important in understanding Aboriginal gang issues from community members’ perspectives because they have their fingers on the pulse of the problem as they live with

the effects of gangs in their communities on a daily basis. Some of these perspectives are documented in the literature reviewed in the following section.

*Aboriginal community members' perspectives*

The previous section made some references to the 2005 work of Dr. Colin Goff of the University of Manitoba. This research was conducted as an evaluation project for the RCMP and included Manitoban Aboriginal perspectives on organized crime in their communities. Research respondents included municipal police officers, Elders, Manitoba Justice personnel, Aboriginal community leaders and residents. Respondents indicated that youths in gangs are a central problem and contribute to the longevity and continuation of gangs in their communities. Gangs significantly influence serious violent crimes and have negative impacts on the developmental growth of Aboriginal Manitoban youths. Aboriginal gang activity continues to grow in spite of criminal justice suppression. Community members identified a cyclical nature of youth gang formation and dissolution which promotes the 'graduation' of adolescents into adult Aboriginal organized gangs as they age.

Community members participating in this research described gangs in their communities as organized, with recruitment processes and a hierarchical structure. These groups reportedly have strong ties and connections throughout the community(ies) and the potential to commit indiscriminate violent crimes at a moment's notice in the name of their gang. Respondents agreed that preventive and intervention programs for youths are needed to deal with gang issues in First Nations communities, with schools being consistently mentioned as an appropriate venue (Goff, 2005). Prevention programs seem

to have the most promise when introduced to children at eight or nine years of age (Virgil & Yun, 2002). This was also a major recommendation of Badger and Albright's *Alter-Natives to Non-violence* report (2003).

The *Youth Alliance Against Violence* is a group in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, who formed in response to the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations *Alter-natives to non-violence project*, as documented by Badger and Albright (2003). This group participates in gang awareness presentations, and in a 2004 Saskatchewan Sage newspaper article, their perspectives were published. The members of this youth alliance stated that Aboriginal youths "want to belong to something so bad, that they'll give up their whole lives for it" (Reid, 2004, p. 3). They also shared that once youths join gangs, they lose their families, their friends, and their identities. Some mentioned that a lot of gang members don't have grade ten, or that they can't even read or spell their own names (Reid, 2004). This underscores the importance of the roles of attachments to families, communities, schools, and education in the lives of youths vulnerable to gang life.

Winnipeg is the Canadian city with the highest proportion of individuals of Aboriginal identity (12%) and also has the highest degree of residential segregation of Aboriginal peoples of all Canadian cities (Maxim & Keane, 2003). To find a better life for themselves and their families, many Aboriginal peoples move to the city (Brown, Higgitt, Wingert, Miller, & Morrissette, 2005). The perspectives of the Aboriginal male Winnipeg residents participating in this study highlighted the roles of poverty in their growing up experiences as members of this urban community. They shared that as members of this community, they did what they had to survive and were required to supplement their families' incomes through illegal activities such as the drug trade. As a

consequence of this choice, many of the men interviewed in this research spent their formative teen years locked up. The research participants shared their challenges of reintegrating into their community following incarcerations (Brown et al., 2005). From the perspective of these community members, we can start to understand the sources of strain that partly contributes to gang activity.

### *Gang entry research*

Gangs foster and intensify delinquency (Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, & Chard-Wierschem, 1993) for both genders (Bjerregaard & Smith, 1993). Gang activity is related to some types of delinquency but not others (Goddard et al., 2000; Winfree, Backstrom, & Mays, 1994). The more violent the delinquent behaviour, the more likely gang behaviour seems to be related (Goddard et al., 2000). Different theories of delinquency were discussed in previous sections of this literature review, however these theories cannot explain non-delinquent aspects of gang behaviour.

Becoming a gang member can occur at the onset of puberty or even earlier in life (Goddard et al., 2000). By the time individuals reach high school years, risk factors have had their impact. One argument explaining gang entry was that gang members failed to experience parental guidance, care, and that they felt ignored in their childhood homes (Goddard et al.). In contrast, gang members are reported to feel emotionally supported through their gang life relationships. A Canadian perspective of the etiology of street gangs follows similar patterns of American street gangs. Ethnic differences, limited opportunities and economic interests were contributing factors in street gang membership in Canada (Covey, 2003). The limited amount of Canadian academic research addressing

gangs remains problematic in the analysis and discussion of this activity. Canadian gang data come predominantly from journalism reports and police communication. Street gangs are persistent in Canada and influenced by American culture, with related illegal activities such as swarmings, drug sales, assaults, extortion, and prostitution (Jones, Roper, Stys, & Wilson, 2004).

The Alter-Natives to Non-Violence report elaborated a distinct First Nation analysis of the issues of “youth gangs”. This report cited that police departments argue for the quantification of numbers of youth gang members for criminal justice responses. The effect of labeling youths as *gang* affiliates likely promotes the growth of gangs, and police database strategies falsifies the legitimacy of police gang surveillance practices involving labels cataloguing Aboriginal youth as gang members. Premature labeling of children may increase the likelihood that a child will affiliate with other children with the same label, and display further and increasingly problematic behaviors (Lemert, 1951; Tannenbaum, 1938).

A First Nations response attempts to ameliorate the wrongful belief that “youth gangs” are the problem and simple criminal justice measures solve the underlying problem (Badger and Albright, 2003). The consultations conducted between these researchers and the Saskatchewan First Nations youth participating in the study described a serious gang problem reaching crisis proportions (Badger & Albright). At-risk youths from Saskatchewan urban and rural communities reported several reasons for youth gang entry: (a) To obtain money, power and protection; (b) they have no attachment to school; (c) for excitement and glamorization; (d) are forced to join, especially those who are incarcerated; (e) for a sense of belonging; (f) for a sense of acceptance; and (g) because

of a sense of disenfranchisement from community and family (Badger & Albright). These findings are similar to Moore's (1998) who published reasons youth join gangs are for thrills, protection, and receipt of other illicit services (e.g., alcohol, drugs). Initiation processes usually follow the decision or pressure to join gang life. These entail committing crimes under the direction of a leader, being beaten or sexed in, prostitution, selling drugs, family connection, and muscling others (Badger & Albright, 2003).

Vulnerabilities to gang membership for Aboriginal youth were found under conditions of poverty, child powerlessness and abuse, minimal access to alternate recreation and employment (Badger & Albright, 2003). An inability to find personal and cultural belonging was hypothesized as a reason for youth to join gangs. Youth also faced extreme pressures to join gangs and may be conscripted into a gang through physical force or the promise to receive gang benefits. Undereducated Aboriginal youth experiencing disenfranchisement, violence, abuse and multiple sources of maltreatment, lack the resources for necessary basic needs, and the options for meeting these needs are few. Youth research participants reported survival as being the strongest motivational factor leading into gang life, and that gangs are only what we observe. The invisible expression of collective social ills is what needs to be studied and understood more clearly.

Moore (1998) wrote of three distinguishing characteristics of youths in criminal organizations. The first was self-definition of social structure and group norms that are not controlled by adults in any way. The second was street socialization occurring more effectively than conventional socializing agents, such as parents, schools, families, or religious organizations. The third characteristic of *quasi-institutionalization* (youths in

criminal organizations) mentioned makes reference to the constant gang recruitment processes. These characteristics indicate that conventional socializing agents were ineffective for youth in gangs, and that youths have large amounts of free time with few appealing conventional career paths (Moore, 1998).

Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson's (2008) research includes perspectives from two Aboriginal ex-gang members. These participants argue that the burden of discrimination and labeling based on race, in addition to the structural inequality and lack of opportunity are causal factors to gang involvement. Family dysfunction and the search for identity, family recruitment, peer support, protection, and loyalty are social factors that were found to contribute to gang entry for Aboriginal peoples (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008).

In summary, the research on gang entry suggests that the time frame for risk of entry starts at pubertal stages, and sometimes even pre-pubertal life stages. By the time these kids reach high school, risk factors have had profound impacts. These risk factors can be sorted into two main areas: (a) social pressures (e.g., recruitment processes, intergenerational family involvement, poverty, survival, societal labeling), and; (b) emotional needs (e.g., for belonging, acceptance, security, and safety). Gang exit research, a major focus of this study, requires attention and will be presented next.

### *Gang exit research*

Here, some of the scholarly work in gang exit research is examined. Processes and theories to explain gang exit are even fewer than those to explain gang entry. A collection of original research approaching gang exit as well as related areas, such as

crime desistance in gang members, is reviewed. The research exploring the *maturing out* hypothesis is presented. Previous research reviewed suggested that gangs are only what we see, and that hidden social ills require examination (Badger & Albright, 2003). As the literature on gang exit is scant, the literature on psychological factors such as the sequelae of childhood sexual abuse experiences is examined at the end of this section.

According to Spergel (1995), gang exit interventions can be categorized into three major areas: 1) community based (when communities mobilize and respond to gang issues, this response is best suited to situations where gangs are in emergent stages within the community); 2) prevention and school based programs (when gang problems are more chronic, prevention and school based interventions seem to have the most influence); and 3) suppression strategies. Suppression strategies have been found to aggravate gang problems (Badger & Albright, 2003; Spergel, 1995). It has been suggested that a reason suppression strategies increase gang problems is because it calls special attention to gangs and their leaders, inadvertently increasing the prestige and identity of the gangs therefore attracting more youths to join (Spergel, 1995).

A study by Badger and Albright (2003) asked Aboriginal youth in communities throughout Saskatchewan what the viable alternatives to replace gang activity were. The youth (gang members, non-gang members and ex-gang members) stated the following recommendations: (a) more structured activities, asking youth what they want first, non-competitive activities such as art classes, music lessons, affordable sport activities; (b) Aboriginal cultural camps, traditional pursuits such as hunting and trapping, cultural activities and ceremonies; (c) role modeling; (d) having adults become good parents; (e) employment opportunities; (f) having basics in life such as food to eat and safe place to

stay; (g) parental involvement and support. Voices of the most vulnerable youth need to be heard, and the most vulnerable children are those being raised in violence and inter-generational gang affiliation (Badger & Albright, 2003). These strategies seem to support Spergel's (1995) community based gang exit intervention, which is most suitable when the community's gang issues have hit crisis proportions as participants in this research indicated.

Deane, Bracken, and Morrissette (2007) published their participatory action research with members of the Indian Posse gang from Winnipeg who participated in the Ojijita Pimatiswin Kinamatwin program. These men learn carpentry skills as part of an urban housing renovation project. A major part of this program is the encouragement of prosocial values through Aboriginal cultural tradition and teachings. These men were required to desist from crime, however they were not required to drop out of their gang. What helped these men desist from crime was: (a) to not be required to drop out of their gang but earn a living through the carpentry skills program; (b) stay away from crime; (c) learn group values and gain social support; and (d) develop their Aboriginal identity through the participation in ceremony and Aboriginal cultural teachings. These interventions occur at the locus of financial strain and economic stress, however have their impacts seen elsewhere. This type of intervention fits with Spergel's (1995) community based interventions, and is the second example that gang exit interventions in Aboriginal communities should help mobilize communities in their responses to gangs.

A hypothesis to explain gang exit is to *mature out* due to the establishment of their own families, or due to grieving losses resulting from gang violence and a desire to protect family members from victimization (Jones et al., 2004). The most challenging

aspect of this research project is to identify scholarly inquiries into the processes of leaving gang life. Essentially, this is an unexamined area of human experience and therefore this research project cannot draw upon a research basis for this component of the study. In planning gang exit interventions, it is important to examine the other behaviours and experiences of gang members and plan interventions to address these as well.

The personality and behavioral profiles of gang affiliated youth delinquents (Goddard et al., 2000) noted experiences of addiction, parental neglect, and childhood abuse as important. The sequelae of these experiences were important factors to consider when approaching a holistic understanding of individuals involved in gang life. Gang affiliation behaviors are observable, however issues such as prior and ongoing childhood abuse are much more covert and insidious. Acknowledging the presence of childhood abuse and sexual exploitation as an integral part of youth gang life necessitated an examination of a childhood sexual abuse research base.

Childhood sexual abuse (CSA) and sexual dysfunction was cited throughout the literature explaining the psychological and social factors contributing to youth delinquency. The impact of CSA on the psychological and sexual development of humans is a well researched area. Parts of this literature that are most relevant to this study are the effects of CSA on developing sexuality, masculinity, and how these factors related to the subsequent sexual violence in gang life. The presence of sexual exploitation in Aboriginal gang life (Jones et al., 2004; Sheremeta, 1999) and in empirically derived behavioral profiles of delinquents with gang ties (Goddard et. al, 2000) suggested we examine CSA experience in males and its role on developing masculinity.

*Sexual violence and masculinity development*

There is a research basis from which to cite the impacts of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) of boys and how this significantly affects the development of their masculine identities (Bolton, Morris, & MacEachron, 1989; Lisak, 1994, 1995). The CSA research contributed to this research because a significant amount of literature supports the contention that child abuse in Aboriginal communities is staggering (RCAP, 1996). LaPrairie's (1995) study examining Aboriginal victimization and family violence across Canadian urban centres showed high rates of domestic violence. Experiences of family violence were reported by 74% of the 621 research informants and 49% revealed experiences of child sexual abuse (LaPrairie). The research of Kingsley and Mark (2000) examining Aboriginal child and youth sexual exploitation assisted the verification of sexual victimization in 22 communities across Canada. The offences reported in this study were at the hands of family friends, neighbors, and/or peers indicating a wider circle of sexual offenders other than immediate family members (Kingsley & Mark). An important link between the experience of family victimization and subsequent criminal activity in later life was also made by LaPrairie's research. The more severe the reported child abuse, the more likely the child becomes involved in juvenile delinquency, particularly among males (LaPrairie) and repeated towards future spouses (McGillivray & Comaskey, 1996). Conversely, it is also important to mention that not all who are victimized go on to become offenders (LaPrairie).

Although feminist perspectives in criminology have made associations between the experiences of childhood abuses and criminal activities (Fattah, 1991) the links between childhood abuse and sexual abuse in particular and subsequent gang activity are not clear. Psychological perspectives of gang activity are often consistent with the theories of delinquency straddling multiple disciplines of inquiry. The presence of sexual exploitation and sexual violence is pervasive in Aboriginal gang activity (Badger & Albright, 2003; Grekul, 2007) and also widely reported in the popular media. The likelihood of being victimized physically, mentally, sexually, economically, and emotionally is part of gang life (Badger & Albright, 2003; Grekul, 2007) and likely to occur during stages of child and adolescent development as most gang members are minors when they join (Nafekh, 2003). Any sort of traumatic experiences create excruciating and overwhelming feelings, and recovery requires learning to acknowledge and disclose these experiences to others. This poses difficulty to those engaged in groups who engage in many forms of violence, including sexual violence.

Early CSA experiences of victimization for males are contradictory with cultural expectations of masculinity. One path taken by abused men was to react by becoming hyper masculine, over controlled, unemotional, action oriented, and abusive to others (Gartner, 1999; Lisak, 1995) and can act as perpetrators of violence at some point in their life (Lisak, 1994). Male CSA survivors often experienced isolation during childhood due to perpetrators interfering with victims' access to protective figures, and to low social awareness of CSA in males (Lab et al., 2000; Lew, 1988). Masculine norms teach men that sexual activity validates their masculinity (Brooks, 2001) and that they are always to

be interested in seeking out sexual experiences in an assertive if not aggressive manner (Bolton et al., 1989).

Previous theories of gangs have largely ignored the crucial aspect of sexual access to females as being a motivation for joining gangs (Palmer & Tilley, 1995). These authors conducted a study of sexually transmitted disease outbreaks in Colorado Springs, Colorado between 1989 and 1991. They compared the average number of sex partners that male gang members had compared to non-gang members involved in the outbreak. They found that gang members reported a significantly greater average number of sex partners during the most recent 30 day period than did non gang members, and that gang members had more sex partners in one month than did non-gang members in one year (Palmer & Tilley, 1995).

Chettleburgh (2007) writes prolifically about the role of women, and the promise of sex for males during recruitment processes in Canadian street gangs. In the following quote, Chettleburgh describes the existence of females in gangs, and argues that they are brought into gangs to grow the size and strength of the male gang force.

To a great extent, especially in countries where street-gang activity is just beginning to emerge as it is here in Canada, girls and young women play a subservient role to the men. Sex - consensual, forced or otherwise-is an ever-present part of their reality...Just as in the media, sex truly does sell, and a prospective young male gangster must find the thought of ample, free sex within the gang to be virtually irresistible (Chettleburgh, 2007, p. 68).

Clearly, the research has demonstrated the strong role that sexuality plays in gang life and the potential role it plays in recruitment.

This section of the literature review started more specifically, citing the incidences of childhood abuses in Aboriginal communities including childhood sexual abuse patterns. Next, criminological perspectives on the links between CSA and delinquency were discussed, and the observations of sexual exploitations in Aboriginal gang life were explored in light of this literature. As a means of exploring the link between early experiences of CSA and delinquency, the literature on masculinity development were reviewed and compared to research examining the sexual behaviours of male gang members specifically. Presenting the multiple facets of this literature was a means to explore the ways CSA may help to understand the sexually intrusive and violent nature of gang life.

The next section of the literature review brings attention to the part of the literature where this study attempts to make the most contribution; promising gang interventions. Here, some of the main North American interventions are reviewed, followed by some of the published Aboriginal approaches to intervening with gang affected men.

#### *Promising gang interventions*

Strategies for addressing gang issues fall into three categories: gang prevention, intervention, and suppression. Various types of programs have been introduced throughout North American in response to gangs. Prevention strategies focus on preventing individuals from joining gangs in the first place. Intervention strategies attempt to redirect individuals involved in gangs through the use of programs and the provision of alternatives. Suppression strategies include law enforcement activities at the

level of the police and/or courts and involve the identification, punishment, and removal of gang members from a community (Goff, 2005). Each of these will be discussed in further detail.

Preventive programs introduced in Canada include a Montreal Preventive Treatment Program designed to prevent antisocial behaviour among low socio-economic boys aged seven to nine identified for intervention due to kindergarten behaviour disruptions (Tremblay, Mass, & Vitaro, 1996). This program emphasized coaching techniques, peer modeling, self-instruction, reinforcement contingencies, and role building (Tremblay et al., 1996). Follow ups with participants when they reached 15 years of age revealed reductions in delinquent behaviours, substance abuse, and gang involvement (Tremblay et al.).

One of the most cited gang prevention programs in the literature is the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program. This cognitive-behavioural low intensity program delivered to 12 to 15 year olds is taught in U.S. schools over a 13-week period and is presented by uniformed law enforcement personnel. The program provides information about the dangers and problems of gang involvement, and includes social skill development activities, refusal skills training, and conflict resolution techniques (Esbensen, Osgood, Taylor, Peterson, & Freng, 2001). Reduced victimization, more negative views about gangs, improved attitudes towards the police, more prosocial peers, and less risk taking were measured in a long-term program evaluation (Esbensen et al., 2001). Although the outcomes of the G.R.E.A.T. program appear positive, the design and implementation of gang preventative programs for Aboriginal people requires

identifying and responding to the structural conditions that make gangs an attractive option for them (Grekul & Laboucane-Benson, 2007).

The literature on gang intervention cited four main opportunities to intervene successfully with youth gang members (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002). The first opportunity was when the youth is socially involved with gang members but has not yet become a member. The second chance was when the youth is arrested for the first time. The third chance was after the individual's arrest for a property offense but before they commit a violent crime. The fourth and final recommended opportunity for intervention was when a youth experiences a violent event. The G.R.E.A.T. program also incorporates an intervention stage and involves parents and/or mentors (Ebsensen et al., 2001).

Suppression-based programs should target youths between the ages of 13 and 20 (Virgil & Yun, 2002) and in communities before gang issues rise into chronic stages (Spergel, 1995). The gang injunction procedure, which provides gang members facing arrest an option to refrain from certain activities such as hanging around schools, carrying pagers, or visiting certain sites in lieu of entering police custody (Goff, 2005). Civil gang injunctions in five U.S. sites have demonstrated promise for reducing gang activity and gang intimidation of local residents (Maxson, Hennigan, Sloane, & Kolrid, 2005). The goal of these kinds of procedures are to have community residents engage with police and crime control efforts and deepen the bonds between community members (Goff, 2005).

A traditional First Nations suppression strategy is banishment (Goff, 2005) and can entail a temporary or permanent removal of an individual or family from a community. This procedure is both deterrent and protective, and requires that Band Councillors and RCMP to work together to identify and communicate with active gang

members. There is no research on or evaluation of the effectiveness of this procedure when applied to gang members; however banishment of two gang members has reportedly occurred in the Manitoba community of Opaskwayak Cree Nation (Goff, 2005). A combined approach using prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies controlled at the level of the community are likely the most promising responses to community gang issues (Fearn, Decker, & Curry, 2001; Goff, 2005; Spergel & Curry, 1993).

A widely published gang prevention/intervention/suppression model by Spergel and Curry (1990) has mostly been implemented in Chicago's Hispanic low-income areas. The target ages for this program are 17 to 24 year old members of the areas most violent gangs. The intervention was designed to target and provide services to individual gang members outside the focus of their larger gang group (Spergel & Curry). What is most notable about this program design is that it required the coordinated efforts of police officers, probation officers, community youth workers from gang affected areas, and an additional organization from the community established specifically for the program (Spergel & Curry). The investment of the community and cooperation with justice and social support professionals led to a positive comprehensive evaluation of this program (Spergel & Grossman, 1997). Team cohesion was essential to providing the outcomes of lowering the rates of gang activity and violence (Spergel & Grossman). Based on this intervention, Spergel and Curry compiled four broad groups of strategies used by cities to deal with gang problems referred to as: community organization, social intervention, opportunities provision, and suppression/law enforcement actions.

Counselling intervention developments are most appropriate for community organization, social intervention and opportunities prevention. Linking human systems by strengthening individuals, families, and communities in the wake of mass trauma has philosophical and practical principles within marriage and family therapy approaches (Landau, Mittal, & Wieling, 2008). These authors published a model of this “Link” intervention for use in combating critical public health problems such as addiction, HIV/AIDS, and recovery from major trauma. This intervention provides direction for a community to construct a framework to help families cope with the consequences of traumas, endeavoring to engage the extended social support systems. This helps to empower and inspire individuals and families and communities to reconnect and identify resources for healing.

Paapiiwak safe haven and half way house for Aboriginal homeless men aged 19-30 provides housing, counselling, elder support, N/A, C/A and A/A groups, drum nights, and parenting classes, and a tattoo cover up program. Paapiiwak is Ojibway for *a gathering of many different spirits*. This organization is patterned after a treatment centre for men affected by gangs, addiction and with a need for safe and sober housing during their bail orders. This safe haven is a non-profit organization situated near the border of Winnipeg’s north and central neighborhoods. A unique feature of this program is that it is operated by Aboriginal ex-gang members who also provide gang awareness presentations to multiple reserves in Manitoba and Ontario (retrieved February 19, 2009 from [www.paapiiwak.org](http://www.paapiiwak.org)).

The most innovative of gang interventions is the Ogijita Pimatiswin Kinamatwin (OPK) program in Winnipeg’s north end. The name means *learning to become a*

*protector and provider for the community*. Ogiijita is the spirit of both a warrior and a provider. The original leaders of an Aboriginal Winnipeg street gang approached Morrissette and Bracken to ask for help for gang members coming out of the federal penitentiary. This program began in November 2001. This program never requires participants to sever their ties to their gang, but they are expected to desist from offending. Work opportunities coupled with cultural and spiritual guidance, ceremony, and mentorship became the basis of the work of OPK. By 2006, there were a total of 34 participants taking part in the program. During the four and a half years of program operation, there were no arrests among participants for gang related offences (Deane et al., 2007).

Promising gang interventions in Aboriginal communities seem to fall into three of Spergel and Curry's (1990) four broad groups of strategies used by cities to deal with gang problems. These are community organization, social intervention, and opportunities provision. The literature surrounding this research question suggests that these strategies may benefit from a health promotion goal orientation such as the *Link* approach (Landau et al., 2008). Linking human systems by strengthening individuals, families, and communities in the wake of recent and ongoing gang conflict requires research to construct a framework to help families cope with the consequences of strain and stress. It is here in the literature review where research informed practice is most necessary in order to meet the goals of helping individuals and families cope and respond to the presence of gangs in community life.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The critical incident technique (CIT) was utilized as the methodology for this study. The CIT was chosen for four reasons. First, because CIT utilized an interview, participants were given an opportunity to share their perspectives and voice their knowledge, feelings, and experiences. Second, this technique allowed for the exploratory nature of this study because it captured an exhaustive number of incidents. Third, this methodology was able to yield a detailed description and comprehensive map of what factors Aboriginal ex-gang members report as facilitating their gang entry and exit processes. Fourth and finally, the CIT fits well with the values of traditions of the counselling profession because the stance of the interviewing researcher is one of learning, reflection, perception checking, and open-ended responding. For example, the member checking protocols of the method especially fits with the professional practices and ethical conduct of Counselling Psychologists. The following is a detailed description of the CIT.

This research project examined Critical Incidents (CIs) that facilitated two aims; Gang entry and gang exit by Aboriginal men in Canada. These incidents were collected by the researcher in the natural setting (community) of the participants. Community policing agencies, friendship centres, treatment centres, and educational institutions in the greater Vancouver regional district and Fraser Valley were approached to raise awareness of this research project. Treatment centres in the interior of British Columbia and Alberta, and the Winnipeg homelessness initiative were also contacted with the goals of raising

the awareness of this research project, and advising professionals currently working in Aboriginal communities affected by gangs that research participants were needed. Details of the criterion for research participation were also articulated during these field contacts. This phase of the research spanned six months following the ethics board approval of the research project, and yielded a response from a Winnipeg corporation specializing in assisting Aboriginal men leaving gang life.

The researcher was the main instrument of data collection through verbal interviews in person or telephone. The interviews were conducted through qualitative open-ended questions specified later in this chapter, and in appendices B and D. The first nine participants from Winnipeg were interviewed in person during the months of February and July, 2008. These participants were advised of the research project by the corporation's operations manager, who also verified that the participants met the criteria for inclusion in the study. Participants provided informed consent on the day of their interview. The tenth participant was from Saskatchewan, and interviewed by telephone providing verbal and written informed consent. Five out of ten participants participated in a second interview, where they were provided with their interview transcripts for content verification, excerpts of all critical incidents extracted from their own interview, and given a presentation of the preliminary category scheme based on the initial eight interviews conducted in February. Those who participated in the second interview revisited process consent, whereby they consented to remain in the study and were advised of the emerging results. Participants also received copies of their interview transcripts and extracted CIs. No further data were collected during the second interviews. The remaining five Winnipeg participants were unavailable for a second

interview, and their new addresses/contact information were not released to the researcher at any point during the study.

### *Identifying the field of inquiry*

The ontological issue in this qualitative research project is the nature of the multiple realities constructed by all those involved in the study. Some of the ways these realities were revealed were through the use of: (a) extensive quotes to represent the voices traceable to audio recorded data and interpretations of participants; (b) categories of events to represent emergent themes reflected in the words of participants; and (c) written evidence of different perspectives on each emergent theme/category.

The epistemological issue in this research project was the relationship of the researcher to participants providing the CIs leading up to and away from Aboriginal gang affiliation. The researcher engaged the participants in the research process in the following ways: (a) spending time with resource people in the participant recruitment process, (b) identifying those communities and organizations with a vested interest in Aboriginal gang research, (c) describing the research process with identified stakeholders in the research process, and (d) shifting the investigator role towards that of an “insider” during the process of research and continuous connections within the field. Appendices A and B provide the documentation used to make initial contact with the field of inquiry. Health and social service organizations within rural and urban Aboriginal communities constitute a proportion of the field of inquiry. Open and closed custody provincial and federal correctional facilities are also identified stakeholders and resource people in this exploratory research project on the facilitation of gang entry and exit. The letter in

Appendix A of this document was distributed to helping professionals in each of these kinds of organizations, followed by telephone/email contact. Establishing a close proximity between researcher and participants has implications for the role of values, or axiological assumptions of the study (Creswell, 1998) which will be discussed in the data analysis section of this document.

Creating a relationship with the field of inquiry posed some difficult challenges in terms of the timeframe constructed around this research process. Although key stakeholders expressed enthusiasm and support for this research project, few eligible participants stepped forward to participate in the study. After several months leading up to February 2007, there had been no results from the field of inquiry that led to research interviews. After making a connection with a Winnipeg treatment centre that worked with several Anishnaabe men leaving gang life, participants came forward with their stories. The significance of this was the shared linguistic, cultural, and geographic origins of the participants with the researcher. Although the field of inquiry was originally wider than the resultant source of participants, the relationship between the interviewing researcher and participants allowed for a mutual appreciation for indigenous intelligence and lived knowledge.

One aspect of Anishnaabe worldview is that there is no universal truth, only *debwewin*, or the activity of convincing others (Restoule, 2003). The knowledge constructed by the participants in this research project is rooted in personal experience, which lays no claim to universality or generalizability (Castellano, 2000). During more developed stages of this research project, *debwewin* occurred between the researcher and wider circles in the field of inquiry. The preliminary findings of the research were being

shared with the Winnipeg participants. This knowledge was transmitted from this group to others and built some credibility due to the reciprocal nature of knowledge sharing. This likely created the safety and understanding needed between the interviewing researcher and subsequent eligible research participants who later presented as willing to be interviewed. The challenge here was with respect to the time restrictions for data collection and analysis which fell short of the timeframe required to connect with a broader and more diverse participant group.

In November, 2008, all employees of the BC Ministry of Child and Family Development in the Fraser Region were invited to attend a presentation of the preliminary results of this research. A second presentation was given in January of 2009 which included members of the Aboriginal community, community justice workers, and school district counsellors. These activities were the result of the reciprocal epistemology of the research design and contributed to refining the language of the category schemes.

### *Interviews*

Once individuals received the study information from field contacts, they were invited to contact the researcher if they wished to participate in the study. The participants met the following criterion for interview inclusion: Adult Aboriginal people with the experience of being in a gang in Canada, and experience of successful and sustained disengagement from all expressions of gang affiliation. Participants also had to be capable of verbally articulating their experiences of incidents facilitating their entry and exit from a gang in person or on the telephone with the researcher, and provide

community reference verification that they are no longer actively involved in gang life (for ethical and safety purposes).

Prior to the data collection interview, several points were clarified with the participants. First, participants were informed of the study's two main purposes, to inform gang entry prevention strategies among Canadian Aboriginal people, and to guide intervention strategies with those attempting to leave gang life. Second, the aim of the activities of gang entry and exit were stated and mutually understood between researcher and participant. Affiliating with a gang is defined as "a series of events leading up to the formal group and individual acknowledgement of belonging to a gang(s) within their community". The aim of exiting from a gang is defined as a series of events that led away from the formal group and individual acknowledgement of belonging to the gang(s)." This final aim must also include the cessation of all behaviors typically associated with the particular roles and responsibilities of a gang member (e.g., Criminal careers such as drug sales, prostitution, or "stryking"). Stryking refers to the activity of perpetrating violence on a rival to your superior, upon the direction of your superior(s) in the gang.

When a mutual understanding of the research purpose and activity aims was achieved and all participant criteria were met, the process of informed consent was initiated and signed. This ethical and logistical step could have been revisited by the researcher and/or participant at any stage of the study, however this did not become necessary during this research process. Appendix C contains the details of the proposed confidentiality agreement for the study. The following interview guide and questions were used in the interview.

*Step one: Establishing the aim*

“Please focus on the part of your life when you first came to know about gangs”.

At this stage, the researcher and participant have already agreed on the objective of the activity being researched, and what the person was expected to accomplish by engaging in the activity. The objective of any activity reported by participants should be to increase their level of personal involvement with a gang, and the expected accomplishments of these activities ranged from spending more time thinking about joining a gang to actually doing gang-related behaviors. Reported activities were in the context of the stage of gang affiliation as recalled by the participant. For example, if an activity which increases personal affiliation with a gang occurs within the *fantasy* stage of gang affiliation, a likely accomplishment of the activity would be spending more time thinking and talking about gang life, indicating an increased personal investment in gang life. An activity that increases a participant’s personal affiliation with a gang occurring within the stage of *active gang membership*, the accomplishment of this activity may likely result in a demonstration of commitment to the gang life. The reverse of this activity objective and accomplishment expectations is appropriate for the activity of gang exit.

*Step two: Conducting criteria checks*

This criterion was checked during the pre-interview verifying that the participant was indeed gang affiliated. Steps three and four related to the actual collection of the CI. Flanagan’s (1954) article states that four specifications need to be decided upon so that all researchers follow the same set of rules to achieve objectivity within and across participant observations. Each participant observer must respond to the above question to

the extent that the following criteria is met for a complete CI: (a) being able to define the type of situation being observed (e.g., source of the event), (b) being able to state how the situation is relevant to the general aim (e.g., action of gang entry), (c) being able to understand and articulate the extent to which the incident has on the general aim (e.g., how it facilitates the outcome), and (d) being able to state they are an Aboriginal adult who has successfully disengaged from his former gang affiliations.

*Step three: Obtaining the context*

The following question was posed to participants, asking them to recall a specific time and place in which to contextualize the event being reported: “Think of a particular time in your life when you were in the earliest stages of the path leading into gang life”.

*Step four: Obtaining the incident*

The following question was asked of the participants in order to assist their articulation of the first incident within this context, signifying the beginning of their gang entry: “Starting at the beginning of your path into gang life, please describe a particular incident when you did/experienced something that got you involved (mentally, physically, and/or emotionally) with gang life”. For subsequent incidences occurring at other stages of gang involvement, the question changed to: “Can you think of another incident when you did/experienced something that got you even more deeply involved with gang life?” Additional clarification questions were: (a) “In what ways did this contribute to your joining the gang?; (b) Was this a turning point for you?; (c) How did this affect your eventual involvement in gang life?” When the incident was collected in

its entirety and the outcome of this incident was clear between the researcher and the participant, additional incidents occurring at increasing stages of gang involvement were searched for and collected. These questions were clearly stated to participants during the participant recruitment process (see Appendix B) and verbally to participants in the pre-interview. These questions were repeated to the participants during the interview and data collection phase of research. Incidents were collected from participants until there were no more incidents facilitating gang entry to report.

Incidents facilitating gang exit were collected in the second part of the interview. With respect to this study, the following interview guide and sample questions were used in each interview: “Please focus on the part of your life in the gang when you first started on the path out of gang life.” (e.g. establishing the aim). Step two (e.g. conducting criteria checks) was ensured through both the community and individual verification that he is successfully disengaged from gang activities. Step three (e.g. obtaining the context) was ensured by participants responses to the following questions: “Think of a particular time in your life when you started on your path out of gang life.” For the fourth step, the incident is obtained by the question: “Please describe a particular incident when you did/experienced something that helped your process of leaving gang life.” For subsequent CIs facilitating gang exit, the former was changed to: “Please describe another incident when you did/experienced something that helped your process of leaving gang life.” These questions were repeated to the participants during this second phase of interview and data collection. Like the phase of the interview when incidents helping gang entry are collected, incidents facilitating gang exit were collected from participants until participants had no more incidents to report.

The interviews were completed in three phases. The first phase was completed in a community organization in a Winnipeg Aboriginal community agency. These interviews were conducted over two days in a private office within the site of the agency. Eight Aboriginal male ex-gang members were interviewed in phase one. Six were Ojibway, one was Ojibway-Métis, and one was Cree. They ranged in age from 20 to 40 with the average age being 28. Five reported being fathers and three reported being fluent speakers of their indigenous language. There were all out of their gangs for at least one year, some for as many as ten years. There was a range of experiences post gang exit as participants were in different stages of post-gang life. One participant who had only been out of Aboriginal gang life for one year reported struggling with his decision to remain out, while others who were out for several years already reported feeling “lucky” to be out of their gang(s). Seven out of this group of eight men joined their gangs on the street/reserve, while one individual joined his gang in prison. All of these men had varying years of experience in the criminal justice system at the provincial and/or federal levels. Three were gang members on their reserves, one of these men transitioning to city gang life. Seven of these men reported gang experiences within different neighborhoods of Winnipeg.

The second phase of the interview involved returning to this Winnipeg organization to complete follow-up interviews, and to interview one more participant, also an Ojibway male transitioning out of gang and prison life. During this second phase, results were presented to the organization staff and four of the previous participants. These individuals suggested no changes in response to being presented with their transcripts, the extracted incidents, and a preliminary category scheme.

The third phase of interviewing involved a phone call interview with an Aboriginal male ex-gang member from Regina, Saskatchewan. This interview lasted 60 minutes and was recorded over the telephone and produced the tenth and final source of data for the entire data set.

### *Data analysis*

Data analysis was done inductively focusing on participants' perspectives. The aforementioned procedures fit Creswell's (1998) definition of qualitative research (pp. 14-16). The CIT is an investigative tool used within the interpretive paradigm of researching what facilitates gang entry and exit amongst Aboriginal people in Canada.

The frame of reference for data analysis was determined by the researcher's intended uses for the data. The data were intended to generate a scheme of categories of behaviours/experiences to inform counselling prevention/intervention strategies and programs for Aboriginal gang affected individuals and families. There were no predetermined theoretical models used as a frame of reference for categorization in this study because of the potential limitations it could impose on the exploratory and heuristic uses of the method (Woolsey, 1986). The behaviors and experiences collected were analyzed without the intention of translating them within any of the theories summarized in this literature review.

Because the participants were Ojibway, Ojibway-Métis, Cree, and Dakota, the shared commonalities within their cultures emerged spontaneously during the heuristic process of categorization. Event sources and contexts for Aboriginal ex-gang members were social and cultural in nature so it is responsible practice for the researcher to draw

upon cultural understandings of behavior in the categorization of these reported events. This process involved understanding the uses of language, ceremony, family kinship connections, and means of healing, and help seeking.

Following all audio recorded interviews, each interview was transcribed verbatim by the interviewing researcher and incidents extracted and screened for completeness by the research committee; see step two of data collection. These incidents were analyzed using content analysis and incidents divided up in three parts; (a) the context of the CI or source of the event, (b) the action/event being reported, and (c) the outcome (e.g., facilitation of gang entry or exit). All three components of each incident were printed on 4 x 8 index cards. Categories were formed through thematic analysis and inductive reasoning by sorting incidents into clusters that seem to group together by using source and context information to make category distinctions (Woolsey, 1986). According to Flanagan (1954) category formation requires “insight, experience, and judgment” (p.344), and is unavoidably subjective.

Deciding the headings and subheadings under which the CI’s are reported establish the level of generality (Woolsey, 1986). Identifying different levels of categorization and some underlying structure is preferable to imposing an artificial order during this process. The categories headings used convey meaning in them and does not necessitate detailed definition, indicating logical organizations (Flanagan, 1954).

This research was based on the rhetorical assumption of qualitative research (Creswell, 1998) which means that specific terms were used to write purpose statements and research results. The CIT was initially very behaviorally grounded and developed during a period when the positivist approach to scientific investigation was dominant

(Chell, 1998). Qualitative research paradigms are commonly used and accepted today, therefore instead of referring to reliability and validity checks, trustworthiness and credibility checks were used to guide the research. There are a total of nine credibility checks in the CIT that were used in this research to ensure the soundness and usefulness of the category system. The results chapter describes the process and results of seven of these credibility checks, while two of these checks occurred at the stages occurring during the interview process, and after interview transcription and incident extraction. These two checks are summarized in the following paragraphs.

One credibility check was to ensure descriptive trustworthiness of the research (Maxwell, 1992) and that the accounts made by participants were accurately represented. This was achieved by doing the following: (a) tape recording interviews, (b) transcribing interviews verbatim, (c) attempting to engage with participants at their provided addresses in order to verify their transcripts, and (d) working directly from these transcripts after this verification step. Participants were also approached to cross-check the initial category scheme against their interview contents in order to confirm the soundness of the category scheme, descriptive titles used, and the extent to which the categories reflected their personal experiences (Alfonso, 1997).

Another check entailed asking an expert in the CIT research method to listen to the fifth and sixth interview tapes to ensure interview fidelity and rigorous adherence to the research design, and to check for leading questions (Butterfield et al., 2005). The results of this check indicated that the interviewing researcher conducted the interview in a rigorous and consistent manner in her application of the CIT.

The implications for the axiological assumption of this CIT study required the researcher to admit the value-laden nature of the study, actively report values/biases and the value laden nature of information gathered from the field (Creswell, 1998). The stories voiced in the results represent an interpretation and construction of categories based on the identified emergent themes. The category formation process of the CIT is unavoidably subjective (Flanagan, 1954) and required researcher reflexivity and systematic scrutiny during the interpretive process. The results can confirm previous research, or be new and novel as the CIT belongs to the discovery rather than verification stage of research (Rice & Greenberg, 1984). Results of a CI study serves to generate theoretical models, as a basis for writing questionnaire items for test construction, and as an aid in criterion development in counselling process research. This heuristic method of researching Aboriginal gang life fits within newly emerging academic literature on this relatively new research topic. The contributions to the practices of professionals in counselling psychology and to the research community will be enhanced dialogue, and empirically supported categories of experiences by Aboriginal people personally affected by gangs.

#### *Researcher self-care*

This research design required attention to participant experience and narrative and the interviewing researcher is likely to bear witness to tragic events. The ability to attend to participants' voices, stories, and experiences is crucial for event collection and analysis. Any risk to the ability of the interviewing researcher to achieve this in all interviews was dealt with through an anticipated self-care regimen including the use of a

personal therapist, spiritual guidance, and culturally based cleansing practices. The research team worked jointly to monitor the integrity of the interviews and adherence to the method. The risk of emotional fatigue and personal intrusion from the research process on the interviewing researcher was monitored throughout the research process.

The interviewing researcher is Aboriginal, and used multiple methods of self-care to elicit a *self-cleansing* related to her culture. The act of brushing oneself off following an emotionally charged encounter is a normal and accepted self-care practice in her cultural context. This act prevents an accumulation of emotional distress and fatigue within the individual. The brushing off process was achieved through bathing with traditional elements such as plants, water, and smoke.

The researcher had a personal therapist to provide counselling and life area planning and balance. This therapist was not part of research data collection or interpretation and only provided support to the interviewing researcher to prevent any research-related intrusions into her social, emotional, and mental well-being. In addition to these two self-care practices, the researcher incorporated regular physical activity several times each week as a method of stress reduction and health promotion. These combined practices helped the interviewing researcher cope with the anticipated and experienced personal difficulties associated with conducting this research project.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

Through interviews with 10 Aboriginal male former gang members, 103 critical incidents facilitating gang entry and 136 critical incidents facilitating gang exit were elicited. There were no attempts to obtain critical incidents hindering gang entry or exit as these behaviours seemed too complex to observe retrospectively within this methodology.

The 103 critical incidents facilitating gang entry were divided into 13 categories. The 136 critical incidents facilitating gang exit were also divided into its own distinct category scheme, also into 13 categories. Methods used to establish the trustworthiness and usefulness of the categories as reported in the methods chapter and elaborated further here.

#### *Description of the categories for gang entry*

This section will present a brief description of the 13 categories which have contributed to entering into a gang life. The formula used for presenting the following order of categories is to place categories with the highest participation rates first. Those categories with equal participation rates (p.r.) represent categories in order from the highest to lowest numbers of incidents (n). This ranking system is not intended to convey an order of importance, but rather to provide a logical system of understanding what facilitated gang entry experiences for the Aboriginal men. The statement of “increasing personal investment (mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical) in gang life” was used in

this study as an attempt to capture the behaviours and experiences contributing to a path into gang life. First, Table 1 is presented which represents reason for gang entry. Next, a brief description of each category is presented followed by examples of multiple participants' quotes which represent each category. Readers may be advised that the examples represent direct quotes from the participants and are not altered in any way.

Table 1

*Gang entry categories*

<u>Category title</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Participation rate (%)</u>
Incidents (n=103)		
1. Engaging in physical violence	15	60%
2. Proving one's worth	11	60%
3. Hanging around delinquent activities	11	50%
4. Family involved in gangs and following a family pattern	9	50%
5. Going to prison	7	50%
6. Gang becoming a family or support system	9	40%
7. Looking up to gang members/admiring gang lifestyle	8	40%
8. Becoming dependant on gang	5	40%
9. Experiencing unsafe or unsupportive parenting practices	9	30%
10. Gaining respect by rank increase	7	30%
11. Reacting to authority	6	20%
12. Caught in a cycle of fear	3	20%
13. Partying	3	20%

*Engaging in physical violence (n=15, p.r.=60%)*

This category of incidents was characterized by the presence of violence in the behaviours and in the environments of the individual. These events occurred before gang initiation, as gang initiation, or as a part of retaliatory gang violence. The violent events served to increase the individual's level of personal involvement in gang life, regardless of his stage of involvement.

*Examples*

- I like, I liked the physical violence. I liked hurting people, I like robbing people, I liked stabbin people, I liked shooting at people. When I was, it's like a person has to endure, like extend that rush when you do something, like uh, if you're doing a drive by, or you shoot somebody, you stab somebody, you gotta, its almost like that feeling isn't the same anymore, you gotta stab someone three more times. I was 14 years old. That's where I extended my peak. It's like, a peak rush, it was an adrenaline I hadn't felt. I got convicted of that crime already too.
- When I got stomped out by a bunch of IP. I had a patch on my hand, so a bunch of IP came along, fuckin' askin' me all these questions, and all of a sudden I got a shot from the side of the head, I was on the ground and they were kicking. So... it was like rage, and I wanted to get back.

- The guys on the (gang) range were tough, like wrestle and scrap and whatever. Like, whoever wants off, they can go off, whoever can't take it. I was already a pretty big boy then. [were you scared?] Yeah. Well, they threw a couple of people on like, like if they want someone off the range or whatever like, the other gang was the Indian Posse. We started a war with them because we didn't like red. Like, there was more of us, now in NS, we made the force stronger. Yeah, we didn't like red.

*Proving one's worth (n=11, p.r.=60%)*

The incidents in this category involved seeking validation of one's worth in the gang context by proving they are useful in gang life as a fighter, a money maker, or a ladies man, for example. Some of the terminology associated with proving one's worth to a gang group would sometimes include being a "stryker" or looking to gain initiation on the basis of intentional acts to attain the respect or approval from the gang. It was the intentionality of the actions attempting to *prove one's worth* that made incidents in this category distinct from more passive behaviours such as *hanging around*.

*Examples*

- I don't know, I just, I just wanted respect and I didn't know how to get it, so I figured, because every one would was always telling me, "I look at me and say you don't look like a threat, you don't look intimidating" or, "You don't look like the type of person to do this." And so I always wanted to be intimidating, just to do so I made sure that I was getting it. I was getting respect because I was going

around hurting people. These guys (gang members) liked it, liked it because of what I was doing.

- To have that respect, to be known, to be strong, to be, you know, I was there. I was doing things for instance, I would go fight, and I would win. I would get picked up in there, I was a really good fighter. I was good for things like that, I was one of the fighters.
- Like, in order to have, to hit my goal, to get respect from them, I had to do some things which I didn't want to do. I'm not going to say. A few, few, not so very bad, but kind of. I don't know, because I'm, I know I'm, I don't know, I just didn't, as soon as the years passed and I was in it (gang).

*Hanging around delinquent activities (n=11, p.r.=50%)*

This category of incidents was characterized by the experience of a delinquent social setting. The action of “hanging around” a delinquent (individual or group) setting served to introduce the individual to a set of pressures to conform to the crimes happening around them (including violence, underage drinking) which led an individual into gang life. “Hanging out” facilitated gang entry by the vicarious exposure to an entry trajectory where the social group could eventually grow into a gang entity, or exposed an individual to gangs that were already formed.

*Examples*

- I remember being with a lot of friends, hanging out, I was pretty young, about 14 years old, hangin out, doing a lot of things. Stealing. I wasn't involved in gangs at that point, I just knew, there was a lot of guys in one neighborhood, and we all grew up together. I can remember, it was like a neighborhood thing, how we grew to be a gang. We, uh, started scamming and stealing, I was pretty young at the time. It was, I never knew why, my friends would do'em, I would do'em. I got myself involved.
- I wasn't much of a leader either growing up I don't think, I mean, I was a silly kid. Whatever anybody'd want to go do I'd go do. Fights, I'd go to, I'd go check out a fight too. Things like that. When I was asked to do something I'd go head first, I wouldn't stop to think about how it would affect me. At a young age, I was pretty healthy. I liked, I just went for everything, whatever.
- I started hanging out with school friends and that, when I used to go to school. Not this school, but that was a long time ago, when I started hanging around with friends. I was 16 or 17. And I started hanging around with them and going places, and I don't know, there was this one time buddy asked me questions one day, he asked me if I, if I wanted to be a part of, be part of, part of their crew. And so, I kind of thought about it for about a week, and next week after that, I went to see them again, and I told them, "alright." I don't know. I decided that, to get

involved, whatever, kind of thing, because in a way I guess you could say I kind of liked it.

*Family involved in gangs and following a family pattern (n=9, p.r.=50%)*

The events in this category were also vicarious experiences of gang life, only there was less separation between the individual and the gang because the gang members were also family members. This created a unique experience of becoming affiliated with gang life because of the trans-generational and/or intergenerational nature of gangs “running in families”. It was only natural for an individual to look up to family members, or to connect with their own relatives, however when these relatives were in gangs, it created an additional and distinct vulnerability for gang entry.

*Examples*

- I lived with my dad, he was always drinking partying. We used to go there, a big bunch of us, he was always putting us down. I remember this one time, we just went “who does he think he is?” Like my dad used to know all their parents too, like they were one big gang too, they used to call us the cowboys. And then, we robbed them and they didn’t know it was us because we had bandanas over our faces and we faught them with bats and chains.
- When I first started getting involved with gangs, uh, with family. My cousins, my uncles, brothers. The whole works, they were involved in gangs. Except for my dad and my mom. Brothers, uncles, cousins, they were all affiliated and stuff.

They're everywhere, the Peg, here there, Puck, Granville, Leaf Rapids, Thompson. When I was 14-15 maybe? When I was turning 15. When I beat up that guy. My cousin told me to go do it. Go do him up, and he gave me a fuckin' quarter, so I went and did it. We started talking, he asked, "do you want to do more stuff?"

- When I knew I was going to end up in a gang? About, when somebody I knew, when someone in my family, when I knew that that they were going to start dealing drugs, that's how I got started dealing drugs, and in gang life, and, the person that brought it down, to my reserve is a full patch Manitoba Warrior, and that's why I joined them, get to know them.

*Going to prison (n=7, p.r.=50%)*

Events of becoming incarcerated increased the level of personal investment or rank in gang life. They also increased the pressure of and exposure to gang life as an individual became incarcerated.

*Examples*

- In Prison, I was one of the soldiers. Eventually I worked my way up the ranks to Sergeant of Arms, probably, all I wanted to exceed. I didn't wanna go any farther I had to make a name. I had to hurt a lot of people. That happened from going to jail, but I didn't actually hook up in jail, I hooked up on the street.

- We were getting into wars. We all got raised into the older jails. And that lead pretty much into bigger gangs. They thought we were beefing them. There was a lot of them in there. And we were just young punks going in there. We had a hard time. They threw us all on one range, all on one range. The gang unit. All the older guys that were coming down from the north from the pen, it was like payback. They were like, “who the fuck do you think you are?” and we’re fuckin’ like, “North central crips, what’s up?” They were like, “It was you guys causing all the heat in the city?” We’re like, “Yeah.” We all got rolled on by the fuckin’ IP. Most of my bro’s, my buddies, we all were wearing a different color. They said OK, you’re NS now. Our color was blue, now we’re black and white bandana. I think they (prison) made it worse, we got a lot more connections with that gang. Like we had to, we had to like...
- Yeah, it wasn’t the same crowd when I went in, it was different, and everything changed because the environment I was in, that was it. And I figured, oh well, if I was going to be in jail all the time, might as well join somebody.

*Gang became a family or support system (n=9, p.r.=40%)*

The important aspect of each of the events in this category was the attempt to experience connection and belonging. The gang group served as a support system, bringing security and comfort to the individual who may have had several experiences of loss or rejection from within his own family system. They may have referred to their gang group as “family” or “brothers” in these incidents and counted on the gang to

function as a surrogate family to “feel good” with or looked out for. They may have also expressed preference to experience belonging and/or security within the gang group than within other groups. Many times, incidents in this category were be rooted in a shared violent experience when gang members laid down their lives for each other in combat, and forged a close, family like connection.

### *Examples*

- And it’s more like a family thing to me eh? That’s the way I seen it, because I grew up without a mom and a baby sister I didn’t get to see or get to know. Same with my mom too. I was only two years old when I, when they passed away, in a car accident or something. And that’s what made me feel, feel, feel, lonely I guess you could say it made me feel down, like, ‘cause when I would go and hang out with friends and that and they had their mom’s there, and some of them were “Hey mom can you do my laundry for me eh? Can you cook this for me? Could you drive me here?” or whatever else, “Could you buy me this and that?” I’m sitting there and I heard people, I said I wish I could say that to my mom, and talk to my sister like that. And that’s why I went to that life. It made me feel more better, well not better, but made me feel more like family to me.
- Well, a lot of people, you know, my own sister won’t even talk to me. I don’t know how I’m gonna get her to believe me that I’m out of the gang, my own relatives won’t talk to me. When I was [hurting my family] I just thought, fuck, if they can’t accept me for who I am well fuck them too. That’s the way I thought of

it. It pushed me closer [to gangs], because, I didn't care about them, I thought, I'm going to do this, and gonna do that. And I started getting in deeper.

- Home boy was like, “really?” because we were selling dope out of that one house. And the dog started barking. And all of a sudden, boom boom boom boom boom boom (gunshots) and we hit the floor. Someone we knew. Because the dogs didn't bark. Yeah, it was someone we knew. Everybody has their own reasons, I guess, being in the gang. [And for you?] They were my brothers.

*Looking up to gangsters and admiring gang lifestyle (n=8, p.r.=40%)*

These incidents described experiences when the individual admired a gang member(s) lifestyle, culture, or financial and material trappings and decided they wanted this for themselves. These incidents may have referred to experiencing gang members and the lifestyle as “cool”, and beginning to spend more time copying or associating within the gang as a result.

*Examples*

- I liked, what I liked is, I liked the name of it eh? Because I'm and ex Indian Posse member. I just liked the clothes, I liked that, my buddies. But I had a lot of respect for them anyways, and I still got respect for it still today.
- I'd see their tattoos, that big star, so, I always thought I wanted that star too. Seeing that star on someone I look up to, if I had that star nobody could touch me,

that's what I thought. I kept that to myself. No one would have known I was thinking that. I just looked at that tattoo, I just wanted that star to be on me. But I thought that, if he had that star, no one could touch him. I was already starting to get into the game.

- I never really thought about it. They had lots of friends eh, 'cause I hardly had any friends. That's how I came to be with other guys with, with, to have friends, so they would be my friends. That's probably why. They had everything, eh? Cars and money, they had girlfriends and everything. And I had nothing. They told me, "you can be a part of all this eh." That's what they told me. I believed them.

*Becoming dependant on gang (n=5, p.r.=40%)*

These incidents described states of dependence on the gang group for money, material comforts, or survival in jail. They described events that fostered the belief that they could not survive economically or environmentally without the assistance of their gang. In many incidents, there was a sense of indebtedness or co dependency on the gang or on an individual in the gang group.

*Examples*

- My boss got older, and he died, so then when I tried to uh, I got into criminal activity and then went to jail, got out, hangin out. I had no way to make money and take care of my kids, I was basically hanging around, making money, that's how, back in the day, I got involved.

- That's my biggest thing. I need money, I don't like wearing these clothes, I got out of jail in these clothes, so I need money, and the only way I know how to make money is to go sell drugs. That's about it! But, I'm no good behind the counters and stuff. Like, I worked before, in commercial fishing and stuff like that, but, that, was like, but staying behind the counter and stuff like that, I'd end up in jail right away. All I can think about is the money, and that's where gang life is, that's where all the money is, if you can get going right? There's money there. I don't like looking like I fuckin' climbed out of a garbage can. I have no idea [if I can stay out] All I can think about is the money, right.
- That guy, the first time in there, he looked after me. Made sure that I had everything I needed at the canteen, made sure that no one picked on me. You couldn't touch certain people, so he was the one who got me to fight those people, the first time I went in there. I was indebted to him after. He just proved it to those guys, not to fuck with me, that I could stand my ground, stand my ground in jail, so, he wasn't going to be in that jail for much longer. So when I go back to jail, no one will push me around. Sure enough, I went back one month after. Pretty much the gang life I tried to live.

*Experiencing unsafe or unsupportive parenting practices (n=9, p.r.=30%)*

The incidents in this category occurred during developmental childhood or adolescence stages and constituted an abuse or neglect act by a guardian (e.g., parent,

foster parent, or child and family services). These kinds of invalidating experiences were connected to future gang life by the participants who reported them. Participants may have referred to a range of experiences with their parent(s)/caregivers as “not being there enough” to more overt experiences of abuse and neglect. These experiences were described as trajectory experiences, setting up the person for a future life of gang involvement and/or violence.

*Examples*

- And, even being left alone. I was in the hotel rooms, I was in the hotel right here on main street for a week while my mom was drinking down main street. I could remember a lot of times that, the day that I actually took off from there, after a number of years this had been happening to me. I just took off with my brothers, went to my grandmother’s place, and she brought me in. And still, I would feel lost without. But yet, I would go down Main street by myself as a kid, go looking down at the bars, looking for my mom. I did that for a number of years, eh? I suffered lots, till this day, I feel a little mad at my mom. There’s a lot of pain there, A lot of us (gang members) lived just like that.
- But that violence that I learned from those foster homes and those disciplinarian, when it came to being disciplined, those type people were, you know, they were effective on my future because that’s how I learned how to be adapted to anybody. That’s how I learned to, it’s almost like having a father beside you, and

him teaching you all those things, you know being adapted to that. I was very solid, very tough, I wouldn't back down for anyone.

- But then they passed away when I was 16. My mom and my grandpa, they passed away not even a month apart. So, that's like, that's when I just figured I must, I'm trying be there for my family, if I can't be there for myself. But then that's when I got placed on independent living, that was the last step, because I was placed in boys homes, group homes, foster homes. I kept getting kicked out of all of them.

*Gaining respect by rank increase (n=7, p.r.=30%)*

These incidents included the event of experiencing a rise in rank or stature within the hierarchical structure of a gang. This rank increase led to an increase in what was often referred to as “respect” by research participants. Participants acted with intentionality in order to rise in rank, which was what created the increase in personal investment in gang life. Street respect was often equated with running a certain part of the gang business (e.g., drug sales, personnel management, and being trusted with secrets) in these incidents.

*Examples*

- I just thought, I don't want to become a full patch member, and then I did become a full patch member, and then I was happy, and like, I just realized, I felt like the same way as I did when I first came to jail. That's what I wanted to do [be a full patch member] because I was thinking all dumb and crazy. I figured I could

boss around my own guys, I'd have authority, power, I thought maybe this way, because a lot of girls like gangsters, and I figured I'd like to do that too.

- I wanted to gain more membership, more respect amongst the brothers, more acknowledgement, more respect, be more curricula, more, you know, more assigned to events that are happening. That's what I liked, the lifestyle, knowing everybody, and everybody knowing me, and being scary and intimidating and threatening, I loved that, that's power. Like going to Central Park and dumping off whatever.
- Getting my patch. It's just like, let's put it this way again, if you made \$100,000, you get your patch. It's a money making player. Ten times stronger, more of a, you get full patch, you can just relax, sit back and make money. Make money, sit at home and wait for someone to come drop you off money. You can just sit there, sit there and relax, go shopping, guys working for you and you get your money. Relax, you're full patch, just sit back, little boys go through the same shit you went through to get there. Fuckin, workin out those guys and sittin' back and making more money.

*Reacting to authority (n=6, p.r.=20%)*

These incidents described the role that authority experiences, (police, school principals, incarcerations, probation officers) had on eliciting behavioural reactions from participants which led to more gang related activities. Experiencing pressures exerted by

community authorities who adopted a gang busting approach activated defiant reactions made in the incidents described in this category.

*Examples*

- That time there was about five high speed chases in Regina. We got into one of them, we were driving through yards, trying to shake off the cops. It just made us go farther and keep going. It was just like, getting away. I got arrested that night, because they found us walking. So they just arrested me and then... They knew me. They said, "Aren't you on probation?" I said, "Yeah." They laced me with a court date the next day, and I went to a good friend's that day, spent the whole day partying. They just caught me and they let the other guy go. We didn't get charged for the car chase. We just made up a big story that we were coming from a friend's place. And we didn't want to tell 'em which friends. We didn't want to tell 'em where. [so you did get away with it?] yeah. [so, getting away with it, did that push you farther into gang life?] yeah.
- When I was on the reserve. I brought it (gang life) down there, and I was in school. I got in trouble. They called a meeting about it. They called us wannabees that time and that just made it worse. They kicked me out of school. I just went back to Regina, stealing cars.
- When I was 15. You know, I actually tried to start my own gang when I was younger. That's what I tried to do. I did it, I did make a little gang on the reserve,

and that's when I ended up getting kicked out of school. It was around the same time, when I got kicked out, same time, same year I got expelled from that school and I couldn't come back there. I didn't really care. Because I figured, then I'll be a home, be there with my grandpa.

*Caught in a cycle of fear (n=3, p.r.=20%)*

The incidents in this category included events when the individual reported a sense of powerlessness or helplessness to make a move away from their gang life. The high level of threat or control evoked the most critical aspect of these events which was to be in a state of immobilization and remaining in the gang was the only option. The incidents may meet the criteria of category #8 (becoming dependant on gang) in terms of the safety aspect of needing to remain in the gang, however the risk to safety in these incidents were posed by the individual's gang itself, and not just rival gangs.

*Examples*

- When I was like 16. It was not up to me, to leave whenever I wanted. Not up to me, say, okay, I got your 1050. I'm thinking, I got \$500.00 profit for myself, and I got this 1050. And they come, get the money, and then they throw me another bag of crack and say, "ok, you owe me another \$1000.00 again. Like, they kept doing that. I must have done that for 4 or 5 months straight. I got kicked out of homes and stuff like that, just, just to protect myself, I started to think if I leave, they'll beat me up and shit. I was controlled.

- It was really hard for you to get out. You can't just say, oh, I'm going to quit this, or else, the other members, they resort to violence in the gang. They say, "if you leave us, we'll come after you." It was at the same house party as one of them, and they, I was, I wasn't even up for it anymore, and I told them I wanted out of this life, and they said, well, do what you want, but we're going to hurt you and your family, and you're going to regret it. They were threatening me. That's what I didn't want. My family hurt because of me, something stupid I did. I didn't know what to think, threatening to, they even threatened to burn my mother's house down. So I stayed. I didn't say nothing, I just walked away. I didn't bring it up again. I wasn't too sure, I wasn't sure if they were serious or not. It makes you wonder, if they really would do something like that. I was kind of thinking that they were serious, eh? And so I just went along with them, and didn't bother after that. I was young, I didn't know any better. Other times too, they, they keep reminding me, saying stuff like, what would happen if I leave them.
- I just felt, regret. Helpless. I felt I couldn't do nothing about it. They had me where they wanted me. We'd try and do stuff. Try this, do little jobs and that, it wasn't the same. I wasn't happy. It was nothing like I expected. I just wanted out of it. It's not like some of the bigger gangs, where some of them they'll kill you before they let you go. I've heard of that. I was lucky. It's a part of my life that I regret. It's really hard on family and friends that you do have, the ones that aren't in it. I was stuck in it for 5 years.

*Partying (n=3, p.r.=20%)*

The events in this category described partying and use of addictive substances as being responsible for gang entry pathways. This action had a similar outcome of entrenching a person in the gang, however it was through the action of using addictive substances that a person became more invested in gang life.

*Examples*

- To me, it was always partying. We hid it. I hid it from my grandma. I went out with my friends, smoke marijuana, when I'd come home I'd make sure I'd just walk right through. There'd be five, six of us, we'd go halfers on a gram of weed. Then, I was 15 years old. Then, there were older crew guys as well, just the same age as I am now. It has a way of going. They'd get whatever we needed. They didn't stress with us either. In the area, there are the younger ones. But all my time growing up was drinking, drugs, partying all the time.
- A lot of the guys really get trapped in it. Most of them can't get out of it. That's how it was. On the rez, you're so used to the same thing over and over. It's one big party on the rez. Especially. And, I think that's what kept me there. Just having fun all the time, and it wasn't fun after all. The good crowd or the bad crowd. That's how it was.
- Nobody forced me, I did it on my own. I don't think [there was an alternative] I mean, I, it was in my area, it was in the hood, they knew I was back, they'd come

and see me and say “let’s go do this” and I was out for nine months before I went back. And it seemed as though things grew even more. When I came back. The activity. Bigger parties, I just remember a lot partying, that’s what I know.

Each of the excerpts reflect the perspectives of different participants. The excerpts were not coded or identified as a particular participant here because many of the participants were known to one another. Allocating codes to each quote to signify a particular participant could decrease the anonymity amongst the participants themselves.

#### *Description of categories for gang exit*

This section will present a brief description of the 13 categories which have contributed to exiting out of a gang life. The formula used for presenting the following order of categories was to place categories with the highest participation rates (p.r.) first. Those categories with equal participation rates represent categories in order from the highest to lowest numbers of incidents (n). This ranking system was not intended to convey an order of importance, but rather to provide a logical system of understanding what facilitated gang exit experiences for the Aboriginal men. The statement of “decreasing personal investment (mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical) in gang life” was used in this study as an attempt to capture the behaviours and experiences contributing to a path out of gang life. First, Table 2 is presented which represents reason for gang exit. Next, a brief description of each is presented followed by examples of multiple participants’ quotes which represent each category. Readers should be advised that the examples represent direct quotes from the participants and were not altered in any way.

Table 2

*Gang exit categories*

<u>Category title</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Participation (%)</u>
Incidents (n=136)		
1. Working in the legal workforce	23	70%
2. Accepting support from family or girlfriend	15	70%
3. Helping others stay out of, or move away from gang life	18	60%
4. Not wanting to go back to jail	14	60%
5. Accepting responsibility for family	16	50%
6. Accepting guidance and protection	9	50%
7. Participating in ceremony	12	40%
8. Avoiding alcohol	8	40%
9. Publically expressing that you were out of the gang	6	40%
10. Wanting legit relationships outside gang life	4	30%
11. Experiencing a native brotherhood	4	30%
12. Stopping self from reacting like a gangster	4	20%
13. Acknowledging the drawbacks of gang violence	3	20%

*Working in the legal workforce (n=23, p.r.=70%)*

The events in this category were work related events when the individual was presented with an opportunity to work within a legal Canadian economy and was able to obtain and maintain that employment, or obtain training and education to support his

career path. There were various elements within this employment or training experience that contributed to getting out or staying out of gangs (e.g., role modelling, personal autonomy, and responsibility) but the common denominator of these events was that the person was provided with an opportunity to join and experience a career path that would not contribute to potential incarceration or legal charges.

### *Examples*

- The time when I started working. Because they would try to come and bother me at work too eh? My boss started getting on my case, about selling at work. He'd ask "why are people coming to see you at work?" I didn't want them messing with my work. Like I could tell you I wasn't selling, but to tell my boss that, how could? I don't know, I just respected him, eh? Because he was a religious guy. He was kind of a younger guy too, but he goes to church and that eh, and I respected him for that. I just wanted to get out if it [gangs]. Because I was hoping one day, I would have my own business, just to be like what he's doing. Because I could do all that work, autobody, mechanics.
- If I wanted that, I would have got the stuff the other guys had, the gold, the jewellery, the money, the star. If that was for me, I would have had that, because I worked hard for it. My whole life I worked hard for it. I'm 19, and I don't have nothing, I don't have none of that stuff. And when I worked legit, I started having money. You get more money, get away from drinking and all that. So that's what made me pull away, I made more money legit that I did with the gang.

- I wouldn't do that over again. Because, I didn't get me nowhere, look when I left the gang, and look where I am now! Look where I am now, since 2004, now I'm a manager, I figure I come this far, and we had a meeting and decided this is where I'm gonna be now, I thought, "holy smokes, right on" gives me the chance to show people I'm changing and stuff, it's hard to get that message out there eh? It's hard to get that message out there. That you're changing. A lot of people don't see it, I tell them, a lot of people don't believe me.

*Accepting support and guidance from family or girlfriend (n=15, p.r.=70%)*

The support and guidance provided by family members and girlfriends/partners was the helping action in the events included in this category. The role of family was important to having a life outside of the gang because it provided the support that was once a benefit of being part of a gang. These incidents included experiences of support to get out or stay out of gang life by family members and girlfriends/partners. The action of accepting support could have also occurred by a recalling supportive experience with a family member in the past, and subsequently using that memory as a support in the present day.

*Examples*

- She still phones me. I talk to her about it. We talk about gang life too, she talks about it too, that's what her brother died of, got beat up, I guess that's why she's trying to get me out of there, because her brother got beaten up by black gang

members, so. But I listen to her, because when I was in jail I was thinking about my family. I would stop thinking about my family when I got out, and start thinking about the gang again. And then, in jail, I see people get tortured in there, get picked on in there, and after that I started thinking, why did I leave my family for this? I seen people get tortured in there. It was a daily thing.

- I think that what helps the most is my mom. I love my mom. She's the most positive influence on me, like I got, anywhere. She's always telling what to get, and she helps me a lot right? Emotionally, whatever, physically. She helps me very well, she's, she's a good mother eh. She didn't do nothing wrong. It was my choices right? She's always there for me, right, like when I told her I was first going into gangs. She didn't like it at all, she wanted me out right away. But she couldn't do nothing because I wasn't living there at the time. I guess, she's still doing the same thing, like giving me a positive attitude, telling me I should get a job, go to school, something like that. I think it was my choice to do what I did, right? I think she was there to help me to make that choice, but yeah.
- When my granny was still alive she used to tell me not to be bad, not to hurt people, not to, I don't know, not to be bad. She used to tell me to be good and all that, to go to school, be good, be nice to people, because be nice to people, they'll be nice to you. If you do bad to people, it will come back to you. I thought about it one day. Thought about all these different things that, like my mom, my sister, and my granny, and I lost them. So that's the reason why I did it too, because I

thought about them too, if they were alive today, they'd tell me not to, not to do bad things, and stay, keep away from trouble.

*Helping others stay out of, or move away from gang life (n=18, p.r.=60%)*

This category scheme was characterized by actions and feeling states associated with using one's own experience for the benefit of another individual or group. Making meaning of previous life experiences as a survivor of gang life to help other people affected by gangs created purpose for these experiences and mutually shared understandings with others. These events could have both momentary and far reaching benefits as participants observed the long term benefits in others after helping them. The events in this category may have some overlap with category one if their helping role was a paid, employed role. However, the aspect that was highlighted by participants as helping the most with gang exit was the action of helping.

*Examples*

- Like these guys coming up from reserves, they need places to stay, they need help, you know, places to go for their addictions. Some of them want to go to sweats, they never been to sweats before, I take them. I show them how to go pick rocks, how to chop firewood, how to be a firekeeper. It's good to help these young guys out. I don't want everyone to go like this. Got all these young kids killing people. They see this, from the other people, what they hear in the news, when they show too much news, like that. There's always some younger buck that wants to be better, wants to be more 'encore' like that.

- You know, you hear all these things that are going on right now, killings and bad buys, and killings especially, I don't know, I just feel bad about all the shootings that's been happening within the Native people around here. It's like, oh no! It seems like the younger ones, they're bringing the younger ones in. Guys, like say, my age, a gang member, even older, will talk to the little ones, eh. And that's how it is. It's best to try and talk to them before they get to them. They won't come here but we'll get a call and it'll say, "my son wants to be a drug dealer and that" you know. We can talk to them. I like to just talk to them before anything. Like, I am a gifted person, we all have these gifts to talk, we'll share, because it helps.
- When I'm helping people I'm also helping myself. That healing phase, it's a very powerful feeling, when you see someone accomplishing what they are trying to achieve. I've seen many guys...one of the guys that goes to school brought about 4 certificates from the aboriginal centre, that's very successful, especially when academics are being credited like that, by certified educators. It's like saying a person needs to, it's like a vehicle, you always need those, you know, those vehicle tune-ups. A person needs those one on ones, a person needs those, uh, interactions.

*Not wanting to go back to jail (n=14, p.r.=60%)*

Incidents of not wanting to be in jail were included in this category. These incidents included an aversion to being in jail while incarcerated, or returning to jail after

experiencing it, and the accompanied desire to stay out of jail. Jail was an acknowledged consequence of a gang activity, and the main objective of wanting to stay out of jail, whether participants were incarcerated or not at the time, required the individual to decrease his level of commitment to his gang.

*Examples*

- Staying out of jail. Maybe going to jail [keeps me out of gang life]. The first time I've ever been to jail was not gang related. Because my life back home was getting out of hand, and I know even though I had a job, and I was out of it [gangs] that lifestyle was still there. Here now, I'm straight now. I've been sober for almost 6 months. I don't do any drugs. Gangs are behind me.
- Well I was trying to get a fuckin shield. But I changed my mind, I didn't want a big fuckin tattoo on my back. Nowadays they're giving it gang members, shit, more time for being a gang member. If you're a fuckin gang member, you get more time. I don't know, you don't want to go to jail anymore. I went into jail twice. The first time 3 months, I didn't mind it at first, the second time was for 16 months. When I finally decided I didn't want to be in, I didn't want this anymore, the jail, like I didn't mind fuckin' kickin' down doors and shit and going nuts and waving a gun around in the air and acting crazy. I got used to that, it got my adrenaline pumpin' eh, when I did that kind of stuff. I didn't like doing the time, eh? I did my time alright, like drawing and reading books, but I didn't want to go back. I chose to straighten my life out.

*Accepting responsibility for family (n=16, p.r.=50%)*

The incidents in this category included an element of behaving responsibly towards one's own family. Being a supportive family member, being a role model, showing appreciation towards family members, thinking about family and/or taking care of one's own children were motivational for getting or staying out of gang life. The increased feelings of responsibility, protectiveness, and appreciation towards one's own biological family decreased participants' connections to gang life.

*Examples*

- After putting in time, I wanted to work. My kids come first, so I needed to go the other way, go legit, and try to keep my kids clean, from a legit childhood, not hustling dope or gangs, or shit like that. Because, a Métis couldn't get a job in those days, and you're not bondable, and you've got a criminal record, and they do criminal checks, and it's harder for people like us to get a better job. Kind of, ex-gang member trying to do something right, he's got a family, you know what I mean. They kind of shut us down. It doesn't bother me, but I'm trying to do something right, I got my kids and that's my responsibility. It's hard to break out when you've been in so many years. I got choices, right, and the only time you can change is when you decide to change. I don't appreciate people telling me how to change or figure they shut me down. When I make the decisions, I make my own change, that's when I'll quit.

- I got a ten month son waiting outside right now. I just wanna better my life, that's the only thing that keeps my goal to, I know I can do better, I know I can do more with my life. Be a "legit" baller. A legitimate baller. Just like my dad.
- Right now, it's my dad's cancer. That's keeping me in line now; my dad is telling my family to back down on me now, so I can do my thing with my dad right now. Right now, I'm taking care of my dad, and I can turn around and tell this guy that I can't work for them again. I'd rather look after my family, that's my goal right now, because my dad's going to be going soon, they only gave him a few months, so I have to go back to my brothers and sisters. They don't want to go back and live with my mom, they want to stay with my dad, they want to stay with me or my sister. They know I'm the closest to them. I'm the third youngest. But, I'm old enough to look after my siblings.

*Accepting guidance and protection (n=9, p.r.=50%)*

These were incidents when the individual chose to accept the guidance and/or protection being offered to him from elders or spiritual support persons, therapy programs, or peer counsellors. The individuals took responsibility for the changes they made on their own, but accepting help facilitated part of this change.

*Examples*

- Well also, there was this elder always coming to see me. And then I didn't know why this elder kept coming. I don't know, it was alright, because it was someone

to talk to, and then they suggested I should leave the gang. And I kind of thought about it for a long time because it bugged me for 7 months straight. And then I finally just did, I did it right in the open when I was on the same range with them, and then, I don't know. I figured you know, I done so much, it's not appreciated, and if I can't be appreciated for this, why am I even doing this? Cause I'm a nice guy to people, and if they don't appreciate it I can end it. [you can cut your ties when?] because you can only be so nice to someone, when they don't really appreciate, don't see that you're being nice. What's the use of getting through to that person. You can only do it for so long.

- The guy who got me in (the gang), he's, he used to try and come here, and ask me to go with him, but I'm a 24/7 (curfew), I can't go nowhere without staff, this place is, keeps me like, when I came here, the first day I came here, I stopped worrying about it. The guys can't come here and get me. Because these are ex-gang members too, and they tell them to back off, for now, go away. They can help me out. But for now, I want to stay out of the gang.
- Around here, everybody's got a positive attitude. They don't talk about how much time they did, or what they did when they were in the gang, they just talk about positive stuff. Yesterday we were at, the staff here are always talking to me. Telling me about what I can do, all the things, they're helping me around here. They're helping me get a job and staying positive. I don't know, they're good talkers, I don't know how to talk like them.

*Participating in ceremony (n=12, p.r.=40%)*

These events encompassed a diverse set of ceremonial experiences which included sweating, smudging, searching for medicines, getting doctored by a traditional healer(s), singing, feasting, and drumkeeping. There were aspects of category #6 overlapping with this one in terms of the involvement of elders, however the context of the ceremony made these incidents distinct from other events when guidance or protection were provided.

*Examples*

- I think about it now, I remember. It was a sweat. It was a sweat that I went to. and, this sweat was so intense that I almost fainted. I almost fainted and, you know, because of the heat that absorbs in the air, I could see about 12 eagles flying in circles and enjoying that heat. And that was beautiful, and that's what made me drift off and think, beyond the gun towers, it made me think, there's a better lifestyle than this. And all I see are ex-gang members, gang members who are gang whores, jumping from this crew to that.
- Spiritually, I've been sick, a number of times. And I went to the sweat there, I told, because I just got sick and I made it out of town, and I had an attack, a big one, I thought, "Oh, I'm going to die!" And I let a few tears out. And from that, I went straight to the sweat. And it just happened that when I went there, there were all these elders there. There was my uncle, my cousin, and some of these other people from out of town as well as all these elders. And when they asked, "Does

anyone have anything to share here?” So I shared right away. I told them how sick I was, that I just came back from the hospital and was given these pills. And from there, he just stopped me, and said “Don’t take those pills” and all of them, like three four of them helped me. And that was it. And I stopped getting sick and gifts started coming to me to help myself, and I started using them, and eventually that sickness went away. If I didn’t go see them, I don’t know if I’d be still sick, or if I’d be alive or dead. I listen to them, I don’t go listen to anybody else.

*Avoiding alcohol (n=8, p.r.=40%)*

Avoiding alcohol through a variety of means (e.g., Getting help, Alcoholics Anonymous, and getting employment) was the main behaviour of the incidents in this category. Participants identified the links between alcohol and gang life, and how avoiding alcohol kept them on their path out of gang life.

*Examples*

- People want to know are you still in the game, out of the game? What’s going on? So, you don’t really want to be, but then you don’t know how to say no. It’s the chance you gotta take. The way I stay away from the liquor and what not is I says, I need a job, and that will keep me away from the liquor. If I didn’t have not job I’d be fuckin’ hustling and I’d be drinking away, crackin people. I don’t need that no more, I got a job, I got responsibility with my kids, and I do my best. I made a choice.

- And, when I got to places, like if I walk around the streets, I see people, people drinking there, and some of them are, “Hey want to go? Why don’t you come over?” I say, “Nah, I’m going to go eat in a restaurant or I’m going to go play bingo tonight, or whatever” like I do positive, what do you call it, like, how can you say that? You do, uh, do good things instead of bad. Doing good, not for anybody else but for myself. Like I can’t do good for anybody else, I can just do good for me. Sure I can help out people, talk whatever, but I just like to, I do good for myself, kind of thing. Like if I started doing this again [drinking] that would make me go back. I can just do good for me.
- Pretty much that picture. They’re all, most of them are dead. I see that picture (Photograph of offenders returned to jail hanging in interview room), I try to picture myself in the middle there, I wouldn’t want to be in that picture. The boss in the gang is in there too, they’re all in jail. They all said, “Let’s go have a beer or two” and then they all went back in. That’s why that picture is there. To show the guys. They all were out, and they all went back. All started going back one by one to jail, and the gang, yeah. I stay away, that’s why I try, look at my goals as an everyday thing. It works.

*Publically expressing that you were out of the gang (n=6, p.r.=40%)*

These incidents involved being true to a decision to drop out of gangs by conveying the message publically that you were committed to exiting out of gang life. The behaviours may have included removing outward indicators of gang affiliation, such

as tattoos, clothing styles, or following through with the ritual denunciation of gang membership. This public expression could be verbal or non-verbal, but the message was the same regardless of the mode of communication: that they were making their gang exit publicly known to others.

### *Examples*

- And I got out, I decided to drop out, and made a phone call, 'cause, I was part of them, I said, "I'm coming down there, I want to talk". I asked, is there any drinking going on there right now? They said, "No, nobody's drunk here right now". I said alright, I'm going to stop by, so I went there, talked to some buddies, and I told them I wanted out. And that's that eh. And a couple minutes, went outside, and that kind of thing you could say, like blood in, blood out kind of thing. I told them, "I'll still talk to you guys, but I don't want to be part of, part of with it anymore.
- I got my tattoo cover up too, but I then thought that it was a crappy tattoo though. They way they look at aboriginal people, if you have a tattoo on your neck or something visible, right away cops think you're a gang member. Or you're affiliated with a gang member. That's the way it goes.
- I didn't get the tattoo put on me then, and it was explained it to me right then and there that if I fucked up, he was going to take that away from me. And then, you know, if you end up leaving us, then if you end up leaving us, we'll have to take if

off you, if we end up catching you. So I said, “Alright” and at the time I thought of it, I told ‘em, “Alright, take it (off) right now!”

*Wanting legitimate relationships outside of gang life (n=4, p.r.=30%)*

The events in this category involved the individual missing out on having “legit” relationships. These relationships may have been already formed and neglected due to incarceration or gang life, or were not yet formed because gang life had prevented this. Ultimately, events in this category all included the aspects of wanting to have a relationship with a friend, mate, child, or other family member.

*Examples*

- I was once married. Wanting to have kids. I wanted to have kids that grew up right, not the way I grew up. Kids that are in, you know apprehended with CFS. Just wanting to change, change and help. I wanted to change and try something out. Sick and tired of living the same life, seemed like it never ends. A lot that people don’t realize is that those materialistic things mean nothing to you if you don’t have a family. You know? If you don’t have a mother, you know.
- I was controlled, got older, then I controlled the substance. But, I got controlled first, because the reason why is they're (gang) controlling the substance. They're controlling you too, because it's their substance, their money. That's when I started figuring out ways to get respect. So I started showing I wasn't scared...I

wanted legit friends too, like, friends that are not in gangs. That's what makes me wanna stay out.

- Like, even when I go to malls, shopping whatever, I see this guy pull up in a nice vehicle. It made me think, that's what I want, that's how I'm going to be someday, I'm going to have a nice vehicle and I'm going to have a nice wife and kids, and I look at her and say that's what I'm going to have one of these days. I'm going to try, I'm going to have that one of these days. Have a nice wife, have a nice family, nice vehicle, nice high paying job.

*Experiencing a native brotherhood (n=4, p.r.=30%)*

The helping aspect of these incidents was the social group connections amongst Native men that facilitated belonging and support to live a gang-free life. This brotherhood experience served to break down gangster identity and fostered bonds between individual Native people from various backgrounds, and instilled pride in being Native. There was an overlap of this category with Category #7 (Participating in Ceremony) because many of these incidents occurred in the context of ceremony. However, the group connection was emphasized in these incidents and featured more prominently as helping individuals decrease their investment in gang life.

*Examples*

- Guys that were in that native brotherhood culture, that's a very important, cause that helps, you know, that helps the brothers, you know, focus and, stay

motivated, and stay, uh preoccupied in a good sense, where that, that positivity is there that respect is there, that sincerity is there, that loyalty's there. Through my culture, the group belonging, the native brotherhood. That's why we have this house here, a person is allowed to stay here from 3 months to a year, and when a person is ready to begin that process, and become more interactive at the cultural activities here, and people begin their healing phases. And this corporation just started 5 years ago, and look at the results already. Like, look at me.

- The first drum practice that we had, I don't know, it was the first day I got here. Drum practice during the night eh. I jumped in there, started drumming with them, it felt pretty good to sit in there with average people, no gang members, like, no gang members. There is no gang members eh? It felt good just to be, just to be Aboriginal, just sitting around drumming, instead of fuckin' drumming on peoples' heads and shit. Yeah. It felt good, it just made me feel proud of my people right? I just felt real proud. I remember I'm Cree.
- I love being Indian, Native, Aboriginal, whatever. We're all the same. I feel proud of my people when they throw pow wows and stuff, and, I just, I don't know, I'm just very proud of my people, right? I wanna learn more about it, yeah. We can't be fightin' each other. It's how we think about it eh? Like, of getting, I don't know why we fight each other, just because we're wearing different colours and stuff. Because we have different symbols. We shouldn't have symbols or colours

or nothin'. We already got colours, we got four directions, right? That's the only colours we need, right? Being Cree is worth more [than money].

*Stopping self from reacting like a gangster (n=4, p.r.=20%)*

This category attempted to describe incidents when the individual had an experience that ordinarily elicited hatred, violence, or another form of gang expression and instead mindfully stopped or distracted himself from these reactive behaviours. This new stance stopped the reactionary stance of a "gangster" which normally perpetuated gang retaliation or activity.

*Examples*

- I think this place has changed me. It's taught me...when in jail, I don't know, the first couple months were pretty fucked up man. Fuckin' I don't know, my talking has gotten better. All of times, I was swearing and stuff, I don't know, fuckin' start arguing with people, over fuck all, and start trying to beef up in jail and stuff, and I don't know, somebody would say somethin' and like, I'd fuckin' start acting all fuckin' gangster and shit. Now, I fuckin' start to try straighten out after that. I don't really act like this in jail, right? Act all macho man gangster, fuckin' so, I just. I just relaxed.
- You feel relaxed, you clear your head, you think of what you did. I think of why it happened. Yeah, calm down and think about stuff, instead of acting out on the range, and throwing stuff around trying to fight again. If you calm down and think

about it, you realize what you did wrong. I went to bible study and stuff like that. It's just uh, thought about all the stuff I learned, I was seeing a therapist and shit like that. So, I thought about all the stuff that I learned, that I heard.

- When I was going to work, going doing demolishin' these people, drawin' on the walls, cops killing kids. You know what I mean? A couple of my cousins got shot by the cops for bunk reasons. Sometimes, I hurt, that puts a lot of burden in me. Makes me very bitter. But I try not to hate. [to cope with the bitterness] I phone family and see how they're doing, because I'm very protective of my family.

*Acknowledging the drawbacks of gang violence (n=3, p.r.=20%)*

The events in this category involved a reaction to an encounter with violence, or the aftermath of violence, and feeling distanced from the gang setting as a result. What may have previously drawn them into gang life (thrill of violence) was now the very thing that distanced them from gang life. Acknowledging the negative role of violence created by gang life was the factor that helped motivate individuals to leave gang life.

*Examples*

- It helps me, and that, when I'm walking, I walk through the hood, I see houses burnt down, and little kids running around. I don't like seeing that. Before I used to like walking by the hood, walking by and seeing. It bothers me now, just because the gang members are there. [you know why those houses are burnt] Yeah, I know why they're burnt, and there's nothing I can do about it.

- It put me farther away. I seen that, I seen those guys get tortured, and that one guy actually turned around and went to go stab him there, because he was getting picked on. He stabbed him in the neck, and I seen that and I was like, fear. What if that was me, if I was picking on someone, if that guy turned around and stabbed me, I'd be dead. [did that guy die?] No. he didn't die. That guy tried to cut his throat. We tied a rope around the door, because we couldn't get to him, he was behind bars. That was the way we tied that door, to keep that guy away from him. To this day, they're still looking for that guy, in jail and outside.
- I was there (Prison), there was politics whatever. And, I didn't accept them, and uh, you know, guys that went back, I didn't accept it, it was things like that. I already, my heart was beginning to be, leave things, like the gang setting, like, when I got out of the pen, I wanted to work, I wanted to do something different because I was so tired of my life, the way I lived my life, with all the pure violence.

This study addressed the questions for what has facilitated gang entry and gang exit for Aboriginal adult male survivors of gang life. For each focus, participants provided 239 critical incidents in total. Two separate category schemes were established to organize this data so that it could be of use to both scientists and practitioners. The following sections will briefly discuss the outcomes or results of those actions taken to facilitate gang entry and gang exit. The reason for examining outcomes along with the

events was to glean the general trend concerning the beliefs about gang life held by Aboriginal men. By examining the factors that participants stressed in the 239 events, and by organizing these outcomes as categories, it was possible to construct a framework of beliefs held by Aboriginal men about their paths in to gang life, and their paths out of gang life. Four categories capturing participants' beliefs representative of increasing personal investments into gang life (gang entry) are presented first, followed by six categories describing the participants' beliefs about decreasing personal investment in gang life (e.g. gang exit).

#### *Examination of the outcomes for gang entry*

##### *Validation (gang entry n=36)*

Increased personal level of investment in gangs were also described here as the presence of validation from gangsters towards individuals. Moving towards sources of validation or "payment" was the outcome of many events whereby the person described this currency as either financial, or feelings of increased capability, competency, acceptance, and inclusion in the context of gang life.

##### *Examples*

- My cousin come asked me to come and chill, and he said to me "what are you going to do? "I'm like "nothing." "Just come hang and bang, sell some drugs, sittin around, wait around for fuckin, wait around for fuckin druggies to come by and buy some drugs". And I went and sat with him, and the throws me a ten sack, and I was like, "well what do I do? Just sell the ten things?" "And get 150, and

give 150 keep \$50, but you get rid of those ten and make an easy \$50 right there”.

It just made me, money can get to your head. That's one thing, that all gang affiliation is really about. Making the money, making the money.

- I wanted to be part of something, you know, in my life, because I was having, because I was having kind of like, I guess you could say I was lonely in a way, because I lost my mother at an early age and I lost a sister at an early age. I was only two years old when they passed away. And that, that was kind of hard on my, and all I had was my dad, but he wasn't really helping much, he was mostly doing that most of the time eh? That's why I went to that life instead.

#### *Dedication (gang entry, n=29 )*

The outcomes of many critical events were often an increased dedication to the gang and the associated business and conflicts of the gangs. Several outcomes described the forging of bonds between gang members and a sense of commitment to improving the gang “force” either through a variety of actions. The by product of many violent acts and coordinated gang activities was an increased level of personal investment in gang life; described as an ever increasing willingness to lay down one's life for another gang member, or for survival within the gang context.

#### *Examples*

- I was just sitting there, watching the fight go on, and I seen it, and we were walking down the streets after that, and that guy asked me to fight another gang

member, and so I did. See how tough you are, to prove your point. I like proving my point, but I don't like hurting people. The thing for me is, I don't like hurting people. [but at that time?] it was the way. It wasn't a big thing for me, hurting people back then. It was about teaching them a lesson, not to bug you, not to mess around with my buddies. I proved my point, it just, it made me more solid to the gang. I started stryking.

- The guys on the (gang) range were tough, like wrestle and scrap and whatever. Like, whoever wants off, they can go off, whoever can't take it. I was already a pretty big boy then. [were you scared?] Yeah. Well, they threw a couple of people on like, like if they want someone off the range or whatever, like, the other gang was the Indian Posse. We started a war with them because we didn't like red. Like, there was more of us, now in NS, we made the force stronger. Yeah, we didn't like the red.

*Learning (gang entry, n=21)*

Learning the business of the gang was an indicator that gang entry was occurring in these incidents. Learning transferrable skills necessary for surviving and making it in gang life could occur at any stage of gang entry, including before a person ever entered a gang at all. This kind of learning was a necessary outcome of some events that facilitated gang entry. The following are two examples that first situate this learning before gang affiliation has occurred, and the second example situates this learning during the process of starting to be actively affiliated in gangs.

*Examples*

- But that violence that I learned from those foster homes and those disciplinarian, when it came to being disciplined, those type people were, you know, they were effective on my future because that's how I learned how to be adapted to anybody. That's how I learned to, it's almost like having a father beside you, and him teaching you all those things, you know being adapted to that. I was very solid, very tough, I wouldn't back down for anyone.
- And that was before we ever got into the hard stuff, the Coke. Before, there was never that. It was just, well I caught my dad selling my Ritalin, and I was like "What? To make money off of it?" So I just started picking up my own prescription and started selling it. There was this Russian guy, he said, "I'll trade you straight across, for one T." I called it fen. I said, "yeah." I was getting 55 bucks a fen, and I was only getting 20 bucks for my Ritalin. So I was like, whoa, this is the way it starts.

*Consequences (gang entry, n=17)*

Acknowledging that there were consequences and debts to be paid were indicators of increased personal investment in gang life. These consequences could happen in either the street or legal arenas and went hand in hand with getting deeper into gang life. More was required of the individual as a result of these incidents, and usually this was not experienced as a choice but as a pressure to endure these consequences as a gang

member. Rather than moving in the other direction, away from gang life, the individual's gang investments became much more pronounced.

*Examples*

- We were getting into wars. We all got raised into the older jails. And that lead pretty much into bigger gangs. They thought we were beefing them. There was a lot of them in there. And we were just young punks going in there. We had a hard time. They threw us all on one range, all on one range. The gang unit. All the older guys that were coming down from the north from the pen, it was like payback. They were like, "who the fuck do you think you are?" and we're fuckin' like, "North central crips, what's up?" They were like, "It was you guys causing all the heat in the city?" We're like, "Yeah". We all got rolled on by the fuckin' IP. Most of my bro's, my buddies, we all were wearing a different color. They said OK, you're NS now. Our color was blue, now we're black and white bandana. I think they (prison) made it worse, we got a lot more connections with that gang. Like we had to, we had to like...
- I was only on the reserve, and then I got older, and I came this way, after CFS put me here, placed me on independent living, [Winnipeg?] Yes Winnipeg, and I got more involved with the wrong people, and ended up in jail for robbery. And from there, that's were I ended up joining gangs.

These four themes attempted to describe the meaning of gang entry as described by participants who articulated events resulting in “increased levels of personal investment” in gang life. The next six themes attempt to describe the meaning of gang exit as described by participants who articulated events resulting in “decreasing levels of personal investment” in gang life.

#### *Examination of outcomes for gang exit*

##### *Accountability (gang exit, n=38)*

Other people outside of gang life became very important as an outcome of these incidents. Being accountable to children and other family members, community members, and contributing to the overall wellbeing of one’s people was equated to getting out of gang life. This pro social orientation of giving back to others positioned people farther away from gang life. When an individual experienced a spiritual connection for example, they may have had the opportunity to be accountable for their actions to the spirit world as well. Overall, this accountability towards others was accompanied by a positive feeling that reinforced the continuation on the path out of gang life.

##### *Examples*

- I’m the kind of person, if I go to do an honorarium, like for few people, I could sit there and chat with them, but if it’s a bunch of kids, I wanted to go and try to get that experience, break that stage fright, and talk to people. I believe I have a lot to offer and tell these young bucks, you know, the lifestyle I went through. That’s

why I'm working here now, I feel better, it's responsibility, it's, kids, gives you that motivation to keep going.

- Having friends that are not in gangs. That's what makes me wanna stay out, plus my little 10 month old son. And uh, everything makes me, I look at my friends, like my dad brought me up a good life, like, food on my back, everything. Like, I'm trying to be there for my son because my dad was there for me. I had a "legit" dad. Little guy out there, like I wanna be there and be a good role model for him like my dad was a good role model for me. That makes me want to stay out of gangs. My family, that's all I affiliate with.

*Resistance (gang exit, n=37)*

These outcomes referred to a state of resistance to the experiential spectrum of being in a gang. This included accompanying insights about how gang life was affecting their thinking, behaviour, and lifestyle trajectories (e.g., jail in particular). Adopting a posture of resisting all of these, such as resisting violence, crime, drinking and drugging, became the outcome of a diverse set of events that discouraged gang involvement.

Resistance to gang life was also the result of social action preventing the growth of gangs in one's own community. Achieving a stance of resistance towards gang life may have been exemplified by condemning the impacts of gangs on personal life, family life, and community life. The first example describes an outcome of personally condemning the impacts of gangs on communities, and the second example describes the stance of resistance towards the growth of gangs in one's community.

*Examples*

- It helps me, and that, when I'm walking, I walk through the hood, I see houses burnt down, and little kids running around. I don't like seeing that. Before I used to like walking by the hood, walking by and seeing. It bothers me now, just because the gang members are there. [you know why those houses are burnt] Yeah, I know why they're burnt, and there's nothing I can do about it.
- Now I like to share, that's what I do a lot, myself, I share. Now, for instance, we have little ones that come here, we get calls to do presentations and stuff. And we even get calls from a mom eh? Sayin' her son is, wants to be a drug dealer and a gang banger. And so, I tell her, bring him down, maybe we can talk to him. Have a smudge and talk, tell him whatever, share of our lives with him. I'd sit and talk to them, the best that I can, to help. I know what it's like to be there. I think it does [help me], somewhat. I think I know what it's like. It's better to be leaders than to be followers. That's the way I got to lead myself.

*New life (gang exit, n=31)*

The indications that one was moving out of gang life were that you actually changed your life path. This change in their regular, day to day living included an acknowledgement that one had choices to make a better life. Proving to oneself that they could change their lives by creating new goals and moving into actions to meet those goals was one way to describe gang exit. Here, a person described new ways of living,

new ways of being, and phrasing these in contrast to old ways of being/living. This served as confirmation that the individual was on a new path.

### *Examples*

- But some of them are like “how come you don’t stop by anymore” and I say “I already told you already” and then they say “right, then I’ll see you later” and I said, if I wanted to, I could live that lifestyle again, but I don’t want to live that lifestyle anymore because I’m doing good for myself right now, been out of jail for 5 years, going back to school, try to get, finish my education, go to university from there. And hopefully become a lawyer or counsellor, get married one of these days, have kids, have a nice vehicle, have a nice high paying job. That’s what I want, five years down the road or whatever, couple years down the road.
- Through that elder in jail. And that was the one that told me, “I already called there, everything’s arranged for you to go there.” And, I guess there was another elder, a female, she was a guard too. She was the one that phoned and set up everything for rent and stuff, and I don’t know, it was already set up when I got out. Everything was already in place. The only thing was to make it there, from there I started volunteering. Well I could, I didn’t have to come here, I could have did everything else. But I figured, this elder was giving me an opportunity to do this thing, I wanted to see what was available for me. And, now I’m glad that I took that opportunity, because I wouldn’t be here, I don’t know where I’d be.

*Independence (gang exit, n=13)*

Seeing one self as capable and competent to meet their own needs outside gang life was the outcome of the incidents here. This involved acknowledging their own ability to make it on their own, financially, mentally, emotionally, and socially. They may have also achieved a state of relief that they were no longer controlled by the gang influence and could become self-led instead. Observing independent achievements outside of gangs were indicators that gang exit was happening.

*Examples*

- What I started doing was, I started working eh? And I got a job, so working was, my buddies, they didn't like that. They didn't like that I wasn't as dependant. Because, I started, because we used to, I don't know, I used to sell drugs and that for them, and I just cut that all off, and wanted to go straight. I just did it anyways. My trade is auto body. I've been working on cars since I was 13. Since I was a kid. I found an employer, I just trained myself, mostly, because when I went to work, I knew how to do that stuff already. I started going to school for it after I got the job. The thing is too, if you start to stray from them that's when they let you go. If you don't associate with them anymore, if you don't hang with them, they decided they didn't want anything to do with me after that.
- When I got out, and I knew I wasn't involved in the gang anymore. It felt good because I knew I didn't have to go see someone right away and go, "Look, where do I start out?" And I knew then, I could do whatever I want now.

*Healing (gang exit, n=11)*

The state of feeling helped out of a problem that created mental, emotional, spiritual, or physical illness was equated with getting out of gangs here. For example, receiving support for addictions, anger experiencing, spiritual sicknesses, cultural alienation, or other ailments were descriptive of healing and ran parallel with articulations of what it meant to get out of gangs.

*Examples*

- A lot of people, they come here, they come to the drum practices, they come here, they appreciated it. When I'm helping people I'm also helping myself. That healing phase, it's a very powerful feeling, when you see someone accomplishing what they are trying to achieve.
- Yeah, I had that move. I said no first. You know, I said no, I could do my healing from here while staying right with the guys. And it didn't happen, they kept bugging me and [who kept bugging you?] The range, they really wanted me. So, I made that about a month later, I figured, yeah, I'll just go over there. And you know, it wasn't, it was still all about gangs still, I still had to watch my back because of who I was...Like, I pretty much too, made friends with all these other gang members and like, them too, they were on that path as well. Healing, heal themselves too. So, I wasn't actually walking alone where I was. You know, I felt that all the other guys were in it too. It was a healing path. And that's how it was,

it was all those guys on that healing path as well. I was getting out of gangs as well.

*Maturity (gang exit, n=6)*

Accepting the fact that one was getting older and more mature gave individual's the indication that they had been in the life long enough, and that they were now moving into the next phase which was leaving gang life. This outcome of maturing was an *aging out* which meant that there was an acknowledgement that gang life was temporary, and that they were experiencing the end to that life.

*Examples*

- I kind of knew I was getting ready to go out, because all my buddies were dying and all my buddies were going to jail for life. Pretty much, I was like the only one left.
- And I want to be better than my dad too, it's like a father and son challenge. My dad was like "Oh, you'll never be like me boy!" I look at that, he had this beautiful wife you know, I got a beautiful babies momma, she goes to school. Even better than them. To make it where, I want people to wanna be like me. It is a lot of work, it's not an act unless you don't mean it. This is me, I'm always like this, like, I talk like this to everybody. Whoever's there, that's who I am. I'm getting older, it's time to smarten up, snap out of it.

### *Validation of the categories*

In developing a scheme of categories there were several steps taken to ensure that the categories can confidently be acknowledged as categories. Assessments were conducted to determine the level of trustworthiness and usefulness, and to determine how sound or well formed each category was. These steps enhanced the credibility of both category schemes. The following summarizes the measures taken by the researcher to demonstrate an acceptable level of soundness and trustworthiness of the category schemes.

During the first credibility check, a person familiar with the CIT independently extracted 25% of the total critical incidents from the research transcripts. This person served as an *independent coder* and rated how many of these incidents were critical yielding a concordance rate between the researcher and the coder. A higher concordance rate indicates more credibility to the claim that the incidents cited are critical to the aim of the activity. The concordance rate between the researcher and the independent judge was 97%, well above the accepted 80% (Butterfield et al., 2005; Woolsey, 1986).

The second credibility check entailed a second interview with participants to allow for participant cross checking of interview transcripts, CI extraction, CI categorization, and confirmation that the categories made sense. Participants had a chance to confirm that their experiences are adequately represented by the categories and could either add, delete, or amend them as needed (Butterfield et al., 2005). This check enhanced interpretive validity of the category scheme and enhanced participant treatment as experts of their own experience (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Five out of the ten

participants participated in this credibility check and no changes or adaptations were suggested by any participant.

The third check required two independent judges to place 25% of randomly chosen CIs into a tentative category scheme. Both judges were knowledgeable in CIT methodology and had experience conducting CIT research at the magistral level. The higher the agreement rate between the researcher's placement of incidents into the categories and the independent judges', the more sound the categories were thought to be. Table 3 summarizes the agreement rates which surpass the required agreement rate of 85% and demonstrates a favorable level of agreement (Woolsey, 1986).

Table 3

*Categorical agreement rates*

---

	Gang Entry Categories	Gang Exit Categories
Judge #1	93%	91%
Judge #2	88%	91%
Average Inter-rater agreement	90.5%	91%

---

Note. The values represent percentages of correctly categorized incidents

The fourth check was to track the point at which redundancy was achieved (Flanagan 1954; Woolsey 1986). Adequate coverage of the domain was assumed when only two or three critical behaviours emerge from 100 CIs gathered (Flanagan, 1954). This research applied another redundancy check used in previous CIT research (McCormick, 1994). The researchers randomly choose 10% of the total CIs, withheld them for the categorization process, and then attempted to categorize the withheld

incidents into the category scheme. Easy categorization of these withheld CIs indicated redundancy of both gang entry and exit category schemes. The withheld gang entry CIs were easily categorized into categories four, six, seven, and nine, while the withheld gang exit CI's fit into categories one, two, three, four, seven, ten, and eleven. Difficulty of categorization would have necessitated further collection of incidents.

A second check for redundancy was to categorize incidents from the final tenth research participant's interview into the emergent category schemes based on interviews with the first nine participants. All five of the gang exit incidents extracted from this tenth participant's interview fit easily within two of the existing gang exit categories, providing evidence for redundancy for the gang exit category scheme. Seventeen of the twenty gang entry incidents extracted from the tenth participant's interview fit easily into four of the existing gang entry category schemes. A new gang entry category was formed at this stage and accommodated the remaining three gang entry incidents and more appropriately accommodated a previous incident extracted from participant five's interview.

The fifth check was to submit the tentative categories that result from data analysis to two experts in the field allowing for them to review the categories and state their usefulness, any surprises, or missing experiences (Butterfield et al., 2005). These experts were professional youth counsellors, band councilor, and teachers working with populations representative of Aboriginal people and gang affiliations.

One expert indicated that most categories reflect his experience in working with young offenders in a Saskatchewan reserve and rural communities. Categories that were of most interest to this professional were the family aspects of entering and exiting gang

life. This expert indicated that “most of these young guys are lacking a mother figure, or parent figure of some kind”. He noted that these young men could become dependant on “little things” as well as on each other. Most of them would get into trouble by partying. They would open up to their peers, but not to an authority figure. He stated that he believed that he was seen as an authority figure that they could “take advantage of” instead of opening up to him. This person also noted that the responsibility piece was most profound for exiting gang life. Being able and open to accepting guidance and support was a difficult stage to achieve for many of these young men, who have addictions issues and trust and authority problems.

An educator of ten years in a Saskatchewan First Nation also reviewed the category schemes. In her work and experience with family members and students who are in gangs, she noticed that gang members were often afraid of becoming statistics and being killed on the street. The violence that affects these young men was fear inducing not only for the gang member, but for the family members as well who have to live with the fear that gang reprisals could be visited on them. The gang entry categories triggered a memory of when a young member of her community was shot and nearly died as a result of his gang activity. She stated that many of the wake-up calls received by people in gangs are devastating, many resulting in death and losses of family members as well as injury. Many community members are not visibly in gangs or “repping”. It isn’t until “their homes get rushed” that community members become aware of their gang involvement. Both of these experts currently live and work with Aboriginal communities affected by gangs, and support both category schemes and have requested their use in their current work with Aboriginal youth.

The sixth check was the calculation of the participation rate by determining the numbers of participants who cited a specific category of CIs, then dividing that number by the total number of participants. A category participation rate of 25% is the minimum to consider the activity being reported valid to the aim of the study (Borgen & Amundson, 1984). The number of independent observers who reported the same incident quantifies how important the incident is to the aim of the study (Flanagan, 1954). This research produced three categories in the gang entry scheme with a 20% participation rate, and two categories in the gang exit scheme with a 20% participation rate. Although these rates are less than Borgen and Amundson's suggestion for activities to be considered valid to the aim of the study, these categories and the incidents contained in each were scrutinized by an Aboriginal man with experience in street life. He reported that these activities and their categories were recognizably distinct and should not be collapsed within other categories. This contributed respect for the uniqueness of each person's story as well as the diversity of experiences in male Aboriginal survivors of gang life.

The seventh check was to obtain agreement within the research community regarding the descriptive or interpretive terms used (Butterfield et al., 2005). The presence or absence of agreement with the study's underling assumptions and results indicates how theoretically valid it is (Maxwell, 1992). Assessing theoretical validity of the study's underlying assumptions took place in the literature review in chapter two. Another way of assessing theoretical validity of the study was to compare the categories, once formed, to the literature to see if there is support for them (Maxwell 1992; McCormick 1994). This was a means of checking for theoretical agreement (Maxwell,

1992) although a lack of support in the literature may indicate one of two conclusions; that the category(ies) may reflect the exploratory nature of the CIT and that something new has been uncovered, or the absence of theoretical agreement (Butterfield et al., 2005). All decisions were made about the theoretical validity of the category scheme only after careful and reasonable scrutiny. As there were two category schemes subject to theoretical scrutiny, the discussion of literature agreement or disagreement with respect to gang entry categories are presented in the discussion chapter. Following this, the discussion of literature agreement or disagreement with respect to the gang exit categories will be presented.

### *Summary*

In response to the questions addressed to Aboriginal male survivors of gang life: What facilitates gang entry for you? What facilitates gang exit for you? Participants responded with 103 and 136 critical incidents. These incidents were categorized into two separate category schemes each containing 13 different categories. Tests were employed to these category schemes to determine the level of support for the trustworthiness and soundness of the category systems. It was determined that both category systems can be used confidently. Finally, a framework of gang entry and gang exit markers was provided based on the analysis of participants' beliefs about the outcomes for incidents facilitating gang entry and exit. The markers for gang entry are; validation, dedication, learning, and consequences all within the context of gang life. The markers for gang exit are; independence, accountability, maturity, healing, new life, and resistance.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

In this chapter, several important points are discussed in the following order. First, the support of related literature for the gang entry and gang exit category schemes is presented. Second, the limitations/delimitations of the research project are discussed. Third, the summary of the results are reviewed, followed by a discussion of the implications for theory, research, counselling practice, and culture.

#### *Support of related literature for gang entry categories*

Each category of incidents facilitating gang entry are examined in the context of the existing literature reviewed in chapter two as well as other literature related to Aboriginal experience in Canada from the perspectives of education, counselling and mental health, and criminology.

#### *Engaging in physical violence*

The role of interpersonal violence is a widely understood aspect of Aboriginal gang life (Badger & Albright, 2003; Deane et al., 2007; Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008; Mercredi, 2000) and certainly has a place in increasing an individual's personal investments in gang life. Many of these CI's are consistent with family interaction and neighbourhood experiences which lends support to social learning theory as a theory for delinquency. Learning how to be violent and then subsequently engaging in physical violence becomes one of the trajectories into gang life. This category clearly has the

highest number and frequency of endorsements, suggesting that the street gangs where research participants formerly belonged have strong violence characterizations, much like Gordon's (2000) street gang typology.

### *Proving one's worth*

Although literature on gang entry and delinquency does not have this terminology, proving one's worth to the gang group is similar to steps taken to achieve validation (Ishiyama, 1995a). The term "cultural dislocation" refers to the subjective experience of feeling displaced or not at home in a particular socio cultural environment. This dislocation is a culmination of the invalidating experiences or a lack of validation of self and culture. Aboriginal men participating in this study report many invalidating events at the level of family life and community life in the context of the Canadian colonial process. This process includes child welfare removals, the reservations system and incarceration that may be the outcome, in part, of structural inequality (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008). The process of self-validation is a complex psycho-ecological process representing the individual's internal phenomenological world (e.g., pain, loneliness) and the external world (e.g., ghetto, crime, drug dealing, and coordinated violence). Although there is no literature to directly support this category, it may be regarded as a relevant new or novel finding because it can be supported within several models of cultural dislocation (Ishiyama, 1995a), cultural validation (Ishiyama, 1995b), and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). Bandura states that behaviours are most frequent when they are more highly rewarded than alternative behaviors. Because of the emphasis social learning theory places on behaviours, this is a logical theory to apply in

the understanding of the activity of *proving one's worth*. From a social learning perspective, engaging in behaviours to demonstrate personal worth to the gang develops from modeling from others. Gang affiliation has material reinforcement (e.g., money, possessions) as well as social reinforcement (e.g., identity, belonging). Grounded theory may be useful to test the durability of social learning theory to explain the experiences of *proving one's worth* to gang groups. One possible interpretation of the action of *proving one's worth* is that some Aboriginal youth who have joined gangs have experienced disenfranchisement, violence, abuse, and multiple sources of maltreatment and still have necessary basic needs with few options for meeting these needs (Badger & Albright, 2003). Aboriginal youth participating in Badger and Albright's research state that survival is the strong motivational factor leading into gang life, and that gangs are only what we observe. The invisible expression of collective social ills is what needs further understanding and intervention (Badger & Albright, 2003).

#### *Hanging around delinquent activities*

Other research with ex-gang members support the finding that the strongest link in a gang is when it is made up of people with whom someone has grown up with (Badger & Albright, 2003; Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson). Gangs originate from groups of ethnically homogenous friends, family members or acquaintances who grow larger as a response to alliances, enemy formations, and wars that all run as parallel processes to delinquency and crime (Gordon, 1998; Matthews, 2005). Vulnerabilities to gang membership for Saskatchewan Aboriginal youth are found under conditions of poverty and minimal alternate recreation and employment (Badger & Albright, 2003) creating

opportunities for delinquency. The participants in the current study reported incidents in this category shared several experiences of “growing to be a gang” within one’s own neighbourhood or community. References to strong allegiances to kids with whom they grew up with, “felt good with” elicited strong values for group loyalty and protection from the dangers of the ghetto playground they were all growing up in. Here, Zimbardo’s (2007) obedience theories that attempted to explain how ordinary people can do evil things suggest that social influences profoundly affect your behaviours. Winnipeg’s central and north end neighbourhoods, north central Regina, as well as impoverished reserves are the containers for poverty, delinquency, and crime among other social forces. Here, the intersection of social psychology and counselling psychology can provide valuable understanding of how to approach work with youth growing up in such communities.

*Family involved in gangs and following into a family pattern*

Badger and Albright (2003) and Grekul and LaBoucane Benson (2008) both reported that family dysfunction and intergenerational family gang involvement contributes to gang involvement. Family members who are already gang-involved pull out in the direction of gang involvement. Recruitment is not only along ethnic but along familial lines (Badger & Albright, Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson) and is reportedly a barrier to dealing with Aboriginal gangs from an enforcement perspective. A possible reason why this is described as a barrier for police enforcement is that family ties and loyalties can trump duty to report legal obligations and reduce cooperation with authorities during criminal investigations. These authors captured this result in their

report stating that the vulnerabilities of children being raised in violence and inter-generational gang affiliation are a root gang issue that is not being addressed.

*Going to prison*

This category reflects some support for previous findings of a link between Aboriginal street gangs and their prison counterparts (Gordon, 1998; Kelly & Caputo, 2005; Mercredi, 2000). Other research as identified the need to explore this link more thoroughly (Nafekh, 2002) however others (Deane et al., 2007; Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008) have found evidence to support the claim that going to prison contributes to the Aboriginal gang involvement through recruitment and retention processes. Mercredi (2000) also stated in his report that erroneous labeling practices enacted on Aboriginal inmates deprives them of valuable programming or transfer to lower security institutions, which may contribute to the retention of gang members in prison settings.

*Gang became family support system.*

There is literature to support the finding that gangs provide the thrill and sense of belonging that children crave, particularly when the contrast for these experiences are extreme poverty and dysfunction (Badger & Albright, 2003; Deane et al., 2007; Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008). Families with compromised bonds, grief, and loss of family members invariably contribute to individual's believing the promise that gangs can act as a substitute family. Gangs offer children without a sense of belonging or identity an opportunity for a sense of self-worth and validation (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson). A multi-dimensional model of self (Ishiyama, 1995a; Ishiyama & Kitayama, 1994) has five

interrelated dimensions in which self is experienced as; physical, familial, social-cultural, transcultural-existential, and transpersonal. One of the theoretical premises is that people seek to affirm a meaningful personal existence and strive for positive valuing of their personal and social existence. They seek environments where they can have rewarding, meaningful, familiar and non-chaotic experiences of self. A predictable behavioural outcome of this theory is for people to develop their own personally unique validation network (Ishiyama, 1995a). The access of gang organizations for meaningful structure, support, and belonging certainly fills this need for Aboriginal youth, who are in many cases culturally dislocated within Canada's colonial process.

*Looking up to gang members and admiring gang lifestyle*

For the participants in this study, early stages of their paths into gang life are supported by acts of admiration of gangsters, and the material aspects of this social hierarchy. Part of the construction of gangs in the media and by political figures is stereotyping by ethnic group (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008). For example, reading media reports about ethnic gang groupings such as Aboriginal gangs in the prairies and Jamaican Blacks in the east contrasts with the lack of information about Caucasian or white gangs. The under representation of healthy Aboriginal role models at all social levels (e.g., family, community, and province/nation as represented in media) leaves a gap for much needed role models for Aboriginal youth. The authors who conducted research with Aboriginal ex-gang members also reported that kids on reserves and kids within family services were really attractive to gang recruitment (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008). Gangs may provide the promise of validating experiences by the presence

of material trappings, social power, female attention, and structure to those who struggle with invalidating experiences such as systemic discrimination. How individuals are validated and what validates a person was closely connected with the socio-cultural context in which they make sense of their identity and their world (Ishiyama, 1995a). If an individual's only role model is a "gangster" role model, then the likelihood of admiring other lifestyles apart of gang life is significantly impaired. Some American research demonstrated that sexual access to females was a motivation for joining gangs (Palmer & Tilley, 1995), a similar argument posed by a Canadian gang researcher as well (Chettleburgh, 2007). Several incidents referenced "looking up to gang lifestyle" in the context of desire for girlfriends or relationships.

#### *Becoming dependant on gangs*

The dependency relationships between individuals and their gangs are chronicled in many different publications on gang experiences (Covey, 2003; Jones et al., 2004; Spergel, 1995). What "becoming dependant on gangs" has meant for the Aboriginal male survivors of gang life in this study was the belief state that one cannot make a living or even survive outside the context of gang life. This references the economic challenges they faced as kids growing up on some reserves with little economic opportunity or in large, poor families in cities. Aboriginal people face unemployment rates two to three times as high as the general Canadian population (Lindsey, Beach, & Ravelli, 2006) and legitimate money-making options are reduced in communities that function without the same luxuries and infrastructure that many other Canadian communities enjoy. In addition to financial dependency, Aboriginal gang members required the support of the

gang during incarceration. Other research with Aboriginal ex-gang members have identified that Aboriginal gang members stay in their gangs because sooner or later they will be back in prison and will need protection there (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008). Hagedorn (2002) and Sullivan (1989) portrayed gang activity as sustaining livelihood in communities without economic opportunities.

*Experiencing unsafe or unsupportive parenting practices*

Many participants shared experiences of violence, abuse and neglect during their formative years. These kinds of experiences were shared as contributing to the paths into gang life because of the skills they learned from surviving and tolerating such events. Participants made statements such as “becoming adapted to violence” and growing up with abuse and that gang life was a normal continuation of these experiences. Several authors make reference to the roles of intergenerational family violence and abuse as present in communities affected by gangs (Badger & Albright, 2003; Deane et al., 2007) however participants made direct comments about the role of learning these behaviours and adaptability, suggesting some support for Bandura’s social learning theory (1977) and how this related to the formation of delinquent behaviours (Goddard et al., 2000).

*Gaining respect by rank increase*

The hierarchical structure of the gang was considered a progression towards increased investment in gang life by the Winnipeg police gang unit. The desire to rise through the ranks of the gang group provided support for Ishiyama’s self-validation model that people are motivated to seek validation of self. The sense of self as *gangster*

was dictated by their membership once they were entrenched in gang life and superseded Aboriginal self-identification (Badger & Albright, 2003; Grekul & LaBoucane, 2008). For example, a person may no longer refer to himself as “Ojibway” or “Cree”, but rather “NS” or “IP”. Ishiyama (1995a, p. 135) wrote:

Symbolic and practical objects, and places and landmarks become irreplaceably important to them as significant sources of validation. Personal well-being is thus enhanced by the strength of one’s validation network, while the loss of a significant validation source could be profoundly upsetting and threatening to one’s well-being and identity.

Tattoos, patch vests and jackets, gang territory authority, street monikers, and gang force strength were reportedly targeted trappings for the progression up the ladder in gang life. These objects, roles, and places were likely to be sources of validation and well-being, thus sustaining an individual’s progression into gang life.

#### *Reacting to authority*

Although this was a small category, the incidents here were significant because the literature in this area of gang research had the most relevance to the Canadian Correctional Service of Canada’s (CSC) experiences of dealing with gang members behind bars (Grekul & La Boucane-Benson, 2008). Three stages of CSC’s dealing with the problem led to the proliferation of gang activities which included: (a) denying the gang problem and the absence of an official response to the situation; (b) cross country transfer of gang members which resulted in increased member recruitment and gang presence in cities; and (c) separating and segregating gang members, which sent the

message that gangs would be accommodated in prisons which encouraged gang members to assert their dominance. This history was an example of how institutions have unintentionally contributed to the growth of gangs by taking steps to deal with street and prison gangs without the benefit of academic scholarship to inform their practices (Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008).

Another example of poorly informed gang suppression efforts was documented in Badger and Albright's (2003) research which cited that police departments argued for the quantification of numbers of youth gang members for criminal justice responses. These authors concluded that the labeling of youth as "gang affiliates" by the police likely promoted the growth of gangs. Further, Badger and Albright argued that police database strategies falsified the legitimacy of police gang surveillance practices involving labels cataloguing Aboriginal youth as gang members.

Dichotomous labeling practices applied to Aboriginal federal inmates is argued to increase the growth of Aboriginal gangs (Mercredi, 2000). By raising the security levels of individuals in the "gang member" group, access to valuable rehabilitations services becomes limited (Mercredi). The incidents in this category mirrored Mercredi's report that suppression strategies by authorities can exacerbate gang growth, namely through the role that authority has in mobilizing active gang members into previously unaffected areas and segregating gang members prematurely. It did appear to be helpful for ex-gang members to remain out of gang life once they moved to different environments and social groups, providing it was part of the individual's own intentional goal to move away from gangs. The timing and role of authority seemed to make the greatest impact in facilitating gang exit for gang members who displayed readiness for change, rather than displaying

resistance and dominance. For example, Spergel (1995) asserted that when gang problems are more chronic, prevention and school based strategies seemed to have the most influence while suppression strategies were been found to aggravate gang problems. Spergel (1995) wrote that suppression strategies increased gang problems because authorities called special attention to gangs and their leaders, inadvertently increasing the prestige and identity of gangs, therefore attracting more youths to join.

*Caught in a cycle of fear*

Badger and Albright (2003) reported extensive examples of how gangs used intimidation and violence to control their members. These authors identified a need for on-reserve communities and urban centres to own gang issues locally, which included the participation in the development of responses to gang intimidation. This research supports Badger and Albright's recommendation that gang issues need to be researched locally, as the fear and control experience was not reported by ex-gang members from every gang. The induction of fear by more senior gang members to exert control over junior members was a unique process to each gang, but something that the public commonly associates with gang life. This cycle of fear also referenced the silencing of voices of children who were growing up in violence and inter-generational gang affiliation. There were broader social factors that contributed to this cycle of fear that need to be identified locally so that communities can begin to respond to the perpetuation of gang life.

### *Partying*

The types of actions subsumed under this category included partying, however the underlying message of health issues and addictions prevailed as the driving force behind this action. Aboriginal boys and men who found themselves involved in gang life often wound up working in the drug trade (Badger & Albright, 2003; Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008; Mercredi, 2000; Nafekh, 2003). The side-effects of this occupation were sometimes chemical dependency, which could be a version of dependency on gang life. For the men in this research, partying was a means of remaining stuck in gang life, or a way they become enticed into gang life. Chettleburgh (2007) reported extensively on the role that partying, substances, and women were directly used as lures for membership and recruitment processes. Participants in the current research reported that they were seeking all of these accoutrements and were promised these during their recruitment process.

### *Support of related literature for gang exit categories*

Each category of incidents facilitating gang exit were examined in the context of the existing literature reviewed in chapter two as well as other literature related to Aboriginal experience in Canada from the perspectives of education, counselling and mental health, and criminology. As there was even less literature on gang exit, research on desistance from crime was referenced

### *Working in legal workforce*

The research in crime desistance is the literature most relevant to this research on gang exit in light of the paucity of research in Aboriginal gang exit. Acquisition of stable

employment (Giordano et al., 2002; Hughes, 1998), and the opportunity to join in legal employment (Deane et al., 2007) were reported to be effective on crime desistance. These authors reported that working reduced the amount of time available to spend with delinquent peers (Giordano et al., 2002) which increased the likelihood that individuals will make use of opportunities in their environment.

*Accepting support from family or girlfriend*

The choice to accept support offered from family members and girlfriends/mates fit with Hughes' (1998) reports that participants in her research sample moved away from criminal activity by building social bonds or forms of social capital. She also reported that contemplation time, support, and modelling were important factors in facilitating turning points away from crime. The results of McCormick (1997) also confirmed the importance of connecting with family and community members for the facilitation of healing as told by First Nations adults in BC. As healing is one of the thematic outcomes of gang exit, this finding seems particularly relevant to this particular gang exit category. One of McCormick's (1994) categories of healing (obtaining help/support from others) was described in terms of receiving encouragement, acceptance, validation and/or reassurance from another person. The descriptions of these activities mirrored those in this gang exit research category as well.

*Helping others stay out or move out of gang life*

Deane and others (2007) were the only other study to report this finding in terms of research with Aboriginal male gang members. This similarity may be partly attributed

to the similar context of Deane's research project and this one. Both studies were conducted in the city of Winnipeg, and while Deane and other focussed mainly on the Indian Posse, this research included several gangs in Saskatchewan and Manitoba including the Indian Posse. Helping others like themselves avoid the pitfalls of gang life provided individuals with the opportunity to make meaning of their difficult experiences and to contribute to others in the communities they may have previously tormented. They had the opportunity to exercise an "ex-gang member" identity and provided a unique and valuable perspective to their communities. These pro social behaviours may become new sources of validation in terms of attaining self-worth and self-acceptance, identity and belonging, competence and autonomy (Ishiyama, 1995a). One of McCormick's (1994) categories for healing was also "helping others." He found that participants were empowered by the activity of helping others, a traditional value among many First Nations cultures and an activity that was seen as healthy. What was also observed in these actions of Aboriginal ex-gang members helping others stay out of or move out of gang life was the Anishnaabe grandfather teaching of love, or *zhaagiitooan*. This teaching means to love others in a claiming and protective way, to express compassion and commitment to your people in the spirit of service (Restoule, 2003). It takes bravery or *zhogitawin* which is a strong heart and courage to make a difference in one's own community (Restoule, 2003) and sticking with an agenda of preventing the growth of gangs.

*Not wanting to go back to jail*

It is this category that has the most encouraging support from the literature, however is likely to be experienced after much hardship and suffering has been endured. All three pieces of research including Aboriginal Canadian ex-gang members perspectives support the finding that an aversion to jail is part of the process of getting out of gangs (Badger & Albright, 2003; Deane et al., 2007; Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008). Valuing freedom was a similar activity that was found to facilitate a crime-free life in Aboriginal offenders (Howell, 2008). Not wanting to go back to jail would be a common sentiment among many gang members who fear re-incarceration; however the participants in these research projects were able to use their aversion to re-incarceration as motivation to leave gang life.

*Accepting responsibility for family*

There is literature on crime behaviour desistance that closely mirrored the finding that accepting responsibility for family facilitated gang exit. Laub and Sampson (1998) reported that a stable marriage has a significant influence on the crime desistance process. Hughes' (1998) research with males in American inner cities suggested that certain turning points away from crime pathways are aging out, as well as respect and concern for children. Deane et al. (2007) also reported evidence that Aboriginal male Indian Posse members began to stay away from crime out of consideration for their children. Accepting responsibility for one's family as a means of connection and building responsibility is supported within the literature provided by other counselling psychology

researchers with First Nations in the facilitation healing (McCormick, 1994) and journeys towards a crime-free life (Howell, 2008).

### *Accepting guidance and protection*

The act of being open to guidance and protection was significant to the process of gang exit for participants in this study who often articulated the point that “no one should take the credit” for their change. This makes reference to the helping style informed by *maanaajitoonin*, the Anishnaabe grandfather teaching of respect. Being helped by someone who acknowledges that a person’s choices have put that person where they are and therefore respecting where they are in their life is a meaningful form of guidance and protection. The act of accepting guidance and protection included the experience of being treated with a respect which implied that if a person wants to change, they will come to you for help (Restoule, 2003). However, the guidance, support, and protection sought from elders, therapists, peer counsellors and other quasi-professional roles have a place in the process of leaving gang life. Hughes (1998) suggested that based on her research sample, a period of contemplation time, away from the life on the street where addictions and opportunities for criminal activity were dominant, was helpful in reaching a decision to desist from crime. It was during this contemplative time when an individual may be first open to change (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982). Deane et al.’s (2007) research with Indian Posse members living in Winnipeg also suggested that there was a requisite readiness to accept guidance with respect to the Ojijita Pimatiswin Kinamatwin (OPK) program. OPK helps members of the Indian Posse attain construction jobs in Winnipeg and desist from crime while not requiring gang exit.

Participants in Deane et al.'s research who were part of OPK accepted guidance and pro social values through cultural teachings while demonstrating a commitment not to reoffend.

*Participating in ceremony*

The Alter-Natives to Non-violence program in Saskatchewan First Nations communities (Badger & Albright, 2003) and the Ogijita Pimatiswin Kinamatwin program in Winnipeg both reported that Aboriginal cultural teachings were central to their work. Both reported encouraging findings from the implementation of ceremony, teachings, and Aboriginal pro social values in order to build teamwork and commitment to abstain from violence (Badger & Albright, 2003) and desist from crime (Deane et al., 2007). The following quote from an elder at the Ogijita Pimatiswin Kinamatwin Program summarizes the importance of the ceremonies and the application of the underlying teachings. This quote was reported on p. 135 in Deane et al., 2007:

A lot of these guys are 'parent-less.' Their parents are the street. And then themselves second. So they make their money, and they survive from that... I know they've talked about growing up as early as five or six years old just hanging out basically living in garbage. Street kids. But always coming back to share. That whole idea of sharing has always been there. And those are in the ceremonies (e.g. pipe ceremony, naming ceremony, sweat lodge ceremony). The whole idea of a feast. You don't eat until everybody eats. You don't throw food out, because of hard times. You put the food by the water, by a tree, to acknowledge life.

Through participation in ceremonies there is vicarious learning of language, tradition, values, history and teachings. Some of the experiences of participating in ceremony forayed into both the seen and unseen world for participants, and allowed for assistance from the spirit world. This was particularly significant in terms of the repatriation of that which was taken throughout colonization. Participation in ceremony also required abandoning social hierarchies typically observed in gang life (Badger & Albright, 2003; Grekul & La-Boucane-Benson, 2007) and treating everyone as your equal. One of McCormick's (1994) categories for healing was also participation in ceremony. His research participants identified that participation in ceremony was a traditional form of healing used by First Nations people for thousands of years and was still recognized as an important approach to healing today. The Anishnaabe grandfather teaching of humility, or *daabaazandizowin*, is a very important teaching about leveling oneself and not talking down to others (Restoule, 2003). Each ceremony described in these incidents involved entering a circle where no one person was elevated above another, where the grandfather teaching of *daabaazandizowin* becomes embodied.

#### *Avoiding alcohol*

One doctoral dissertation exploring former gang members' experiences of transitioning out of gang life suggested that alcohol and other substances influenced the process of leaving the gang (Mandel, 2006). Her participants suggested that preventative as well as post-incarceration addictions treatment would be beneficial to gang members in terms of learning to live outside of gangs. The finding that avoiding alcohol helps gang exit indicated that health issues, addiction in particular, are in need of consideration when

working with Aboriginal men affected by gang life. As substance use and abuse was a reported factor that facilitated member recruitment and retention (Chettleburgh, 2007), then it is reasonable to conclude that avoiding alcohol would facilitate gang exit. The abstinence from alcohol was also a requisite for following a new life incorporating Aboriginal tradition, a theme which emerged as an outcome for gang exit behaviors. Alcohol use and avoidance proved to be important factors for Aboriginal men in their journeys towards a crime free life (Howell, 2008). The avoidance and experience of alcohol was often inextricably linked with decisions to resume a cultural or spiritual lifestyle (Howell, 2008) which made reference to the healing outcomes of some of the gang exit incidents in this study. The act of avoiding alcohol also refers to honesty or *kwekwadizin*, the Anishnaabe grandfather teaching for straight living. It means going beyond telling the truth and modeling for others a way that is much harder to live straight, or in a manner that is fully honest.

*Publically expressing that you are out of the gang*

This public expression was a reassertion of identity as non-gang member. This was found to be very important for desistance from crime as well as gang life for Aboriginal men who were in the Indian Posse in Winnipeg, Manitoba (Deane et al., 2007). This finding also related to the completion of a four stage cognitive transformation process that described the process of crime desistance: (a) being open to change; (b) exposure to hooks for change representing opportunity, accessibility, and a likely movement in a direction incompatible with criminal activity; (c) seeing self emerge differently than from what they once were; and (d) the individual no longer sees their

former criminal activity as a part of him, but is now irrelevant and counterproductive to his new identity thus becoming a part of his past (Giordano et al., 2002). Changing the way one presents himself and his identity is closely tied with public expressions of self. Removing gang signifiers (e.g., tattoo removals) and asserting new identities (jumping out process) are similar to the final stage of identity reorientation after crime desistance (Giordano et al., 2002). This signifies that the individual is wanting to live in truth or *debwewin*, an Anishnaabe grandfather teaching of convincing people, as it is not enough to claim something is true (out of gangs) if you cannot convince others that it is so (Restoule, 2003).

*Wanting legitimate relationships outside of gang*

In Mandel's (2006) dissertation research with individuals who had exited gang lifestyle, she found that relationships with non-parental family members and children influenced their transitions out of gang life. Additionally, non-judgemental post-gang adult relationships that acted like mentors facilitated this transition out of gang life. In terms of crime desistance, Laub and Sampson (2001) have suggested that spending more time in legitimate relationships and environments may be effective because it reduces the amount of time spent in illegal or delinquent relationships.

*Experiencing a native brotherhood.*

The strong, social cohesion between Aboriginal men draws on some of the gang ethics of loyalty and support to one another. The recognition of Aboriginal values and self-identification as Aboriginal played a role in crime desistance in members of the

Indian Posse (Deane et al., 2007). This native brotherhood provided group values and a group association with others who were also on the paths out of gang life, which also included desistance from crime.

*Stopping self from reacting like a gangster*

There was no literature to support or dispute this finding that stopping impulsive emotional reactions helped individuals exit from gang life. However, there are some theoretical models that may explain the manner in which relaxing instead of retaliating can facilitate gang exit in terms of affecting criminal behaviours. There is evidence that the male gender and a personality style characterized by low self-control/high impulsivity and a propensity for negative emotions increased the risk for impulsive aggression, antisocial and criminal behaviour (Strüber, Luck, & Roth, 2008). Neuropsychodynamic profiles of the delinquents are dominated by an inability to form a self-referential conceptual classification system thus predisposing them to behavioural disinhibition under conditions of stress or interpersonal conflict (Miller, 1998). Acquiring the skills to self-regulate strong and intense negative emotions such as anger, rage, or disgust, may be counter to the personality styles prone to antisocial and criminal behaviour.

*Acknowledging the drawbacks of gang violence*

Giordano et al.'s (2002) model of cognitive transformation mentioned previously provided the best support for understanding this category. The last cognitive transformation related to reaching a point when one no longer recognizes themselves as a person who, for example, used to be involved with gratuitous violence or aggression. The

perspective of rejecting violence created by gang life may be an outgrowth from other positive, pro social activities in their life outside of gangs. As this is the smallest category of events that facilitated gang exit, it is also reflected the most change behaviourally and cognitively from the path into gang life. Originally, these participants were lured or pressured into gangs with the application of violence. Then, these participants had walked out of gang life with a perspective on the drawbacks of violence and used this to maintain their exit from gang life. This new perspective is manifested by the wisdom, or *niibwaakawin*, the Anishnaabe grandfather teachings of knowledge and intelligence. Simply stated, wisdom refers to life experience and an appreciation for indigenous intelligence and lived knowledge (Restoule, 2003). This category “acknowledging the drawbacks of gang violence” also involved acknowledging the value of one’s own people and community and the appreciation that follows.

#### *Recommendations for future research*

There were a number of factors that were outside of the scope of this investigation that require further attention from researchers. First, the results of this research cannot be generalized at this time. In addition to only interviewing Aboriginal men from Manitoba and Saskatchewan, it should be noted that a high percentage of them are Ojibway (70%). It was anticipated that the two sets of categories formed by this research could only provide an initial structure for understanding gang entry and exit processes for counselling preventions and intervention practices. More research with other diverse Aboriginal cultural groups would enhance a national understanding of Aboriginal gangs in Canada.

Another factor outside the scope of the study was that categories were derived from self-reporting rather than by immediate observation. Retrospective accounts of critical incidents facilitating gang entry and exit are limited to the events that people were able to recall during the interview. It was likely that some events were not mentioned because they had been forgotten by participants. Another constraint of self report was that participants, who often could speak two languages (English and Ojibway) could only report what they could articulate in a one hour English language interview. This certainly contributed to excluding some events from being revealed. Future research should be designed to collect data reported during immediate observations, such as an ethnography or autoethnography. Additionally, if co-researchers or research participants can speak an Indigenous language, data should be collected to represent Indigenous linguistic expression.

The focus of this research was on gang entry/exit events instead of gang related relationships. Future research should collect data in the context of relationships specifically, because of the richness and durability of relationships in a person's life. This study did not focus on who was helpful in facilitating gang entry and exit, but rather the participants' actions taken on the paths in and out of gang life.

Future research should attempt to broaden participant selection processes. Selection bias may have been present in this research project as the participants who volunteered to be interviewed came from a singular Winnipeg treatment centre with the exception of one male from Saskatchewan. The criteria to participate required that Aboriginal men be out of gang life for at least 6 months and to also provide a community reference to verify this requirement. The Winnipeg treatment centre that did participate

was fully capable of meeting this requirement, more so than the other treatment centres that were approached, because of the longevity and specific nature of their relationship with their clients. With this research topic, it was difficult to overcome selection bias without the time and experience in the field to build up research contacts. Future research attempts from now on may overcome some of these challenges through developing the relationships between researcher(s) and Aboriginal (ex)gang members. With continued assistance from established research contacts, perhaps the likelihood of attracting female Aboriginal ex-gang members for interviews will increase.

Future research should also attempt to provide a variety of interview experiences for potential participants. In this study, all interviews were conducted by a 32 year-old female researcher, and with ten male participants ranging in age from 19 to 40. One possible challenge here was that males may not talk about some matters to a female or may embellish some topics to impress. This challenge can be addressed in future research involving multiple interviewing researchers from a variety of age, culture, and gender backgrounds.

The Critical Incident Technique, although useful for examining research questions in areas requiring exploratory research, has its own limitations. A great deal of information was lost when categorizing participants' narratives into themes. The focus of categorization was to find the threads that connect the narratives into generalized categories and resulted in losing some of the uniqueness of context. The Critical Incident Technique allowed for information about what facilitated gang entry and exit to come forward specifically, through the voices of the participants. Although this research technique allows for hindering events as well, they weren't collected because of the

nature of hindering events to gang entry is not likely to be observed by people who entered gang life. For the sake of clarity for research participants, questions were formulated to extract facilitating events only for both study aims; the examination of gang entry and exit. The scope of the study did not allow for the collection of events that hinder gang exit. For future research examining gang exit processes, the question of what hinders gang exit should also be addressed.

### *Summary of the results*

Through interviews with ten participants, 239 critical incidents were elicited. Of these 239, 103 incidents facilitated gang entry, and 136 facilitated gang exit. Gang entry was described as an increasing personal investment in gang life, while gang exit was described as a decreasing personal investment in gang life. Gang entry incidents were placed into 13 categories and gang exit incidents were also placed in what resulted in 13 categories. Both these category schemes were found to be reasonably sound, trustworthy, and useful.

The 13 categories for gang entry were; engaging in physical violence, proving one's worth, hanging around delinquent activity, family involved in gangs-following a family pattern; going to prison, gang becoming family/support system, looking up to gang members/admiring gang lifestyle, becoming dependant on gang, experiencing unsafe or unsupportive parenting practices, gaining respect by rank increase, reactions to authority intensifying gang-related behaviour, caught in a cycle of fear, and partying.

The 13 categories for gang exit were; working in the legal workforce, accepting support from family/girlfriend, helping others stay out or move away from gang life, not

wanting to go back to jail, accepting responsibility for family, accepting guidance and protection, participating in ceremony, avoiding alcohol, publically expressing that you are out of the gang, wanting 'legit' relationships outside gang life, experiencing a native brotherhood, stopping self from reacting like a 'gangster', and acknowledging the drawbacks of gang violence.

A preliminary examination of gang entry outcomes for Aboriginal men was thought to invoke a sense of validation, dedication, learning, and consequences all within the context of gang life. These outcomes would be healthier for the individual if they existed in a pro social framework instead of a violent street and prison context. A preliminary examination of gang exit outcomes for Aboriginal men was thought to create a sense of independence, accountability, maturity, healing, a new life, and resistance in the context of a new identity as an ex-gang member.

#### *Implications for theory and research*

The results of this study confirm findings from the research and theory about Aboriginal gang involvement in Canada. Because there are so few research publications involving Aboriginal ex-gang members in their data analysis, this project was unique to the field of social science inquiry, and likely the first of its kind in Canadian Counselling Psychology. As a result, many of the research findings could only be supported by previously published theory rather than empirically supported research with Aboriginal ex-gang members. As a consequence, this research supported several theories of delinquency, a theory of multicultural self-validation, and the research results of three Canadian studies involving Aboriginal male ex-gang members. From a theoretical

perspective, several of the theories of delinquency reviewed in Chapter Two may benefit from further investigation through grounded theory. Social learning theory, strain theory, social control theory, containment theory, and differential association theory as reviewed and compared in the Goddard et al. (2000) article provided ways of understanding delinquency that also seems relevant to understanding Aboriginal gang entry.

Recommendations for future scholarly inquiry emanated from the questions outside the scope of this particular research study. This includes the lack of information identifying the needs of Aboriginal people affected by gangs. The disparities in health, education and economic empowerment of Aboriginal survivors of gangs are reported in this research. What is needed to inform social justice counselling interventions is a needs assessment of what economic, educational, health, and legal resources would improve the prognosis for Aboriginal children and youth currently growing up in gang affected communities. This question should also be posed to Aboriginal survivors of gang life.

The social nature of gang affiliation calls for research that inquires about the specific relationships that facilitate gang entry and gang exit can provide necessary information about interpersonal dimensions of understanding gang life. Badger and Albright (2003) as well as Deane et al. (2007) recommended that Aboriginal gang issues need to be owned locally. This suggests that research projects should be replicated throughout different Aboriginal communities as a way of understanding local gang issues. This research project does not attempt to generalize however contributes to the investigation about how gangs function in the lives of ten Aboriginal male participants from various communities within Manitoba and Saskatchewan. This represents a start in

the growth of literature to inform gang intervention and prevention research with other Aboriginal communities.

Finally, research including the perspectives of female Aboriginal gang members and ex-gang members was glaringly absent from the literature including this study. The challenge faced by the researcher in identifying Aboriginal women survivors of gangs imposed this research limitation. The feminine perspective of Aboriginal gang life is necessary for constructing a holistic knowledge base to inform our understanding of gang phenomenon in Aboriginal communities. The development of research informed intervention strategies also requires the consideration of gender differences and knowledge.

#### *Implications for counselling practices*

Counselling services for gang prevention should foster a sense of validation in healthy social and community contexts. Counselling should also aspire to elicit dedication towards others or groups that clients can identify with that are non-delinquent, and provide them with new learning opportunities about legitimate labour market options. Finally, the consequences of a clients' choices should be made transparent, clear, and understood as this is a stage when (ex)gang members are true to themselves about what their activities have caused in terms of their freedom and their lives.

Counselling services for gang intervention should foster health in all aspects of the medicine wheel: (a) physical (e.g., financial, housing, protection, health); (b) emotional (e.g., support, validation, mattering); (c) cognitive (e.g., education, job training, distraction from negative influences); and (d) spiritual (e.g., ceremonies, elder

work, healing). Counselling goals should focus on helping individuals determine their readiness for change, and then move towards increased accountability to others outside the gang group. Maturity is a process that requires positive reinforcement, and this may be the role of the counsellor. Healing and drawing upon culturally informed practices through the revitalization of ceremonies and teachings is a manner of distancing oneself from gang life. Counselling to encourage resistance to the lures of gang life as well as condemning the parts of gang life that harm or destroy individuals, families and communities is another desired outcome. Finally, gaining the tools and supports to live a new life is another indicator that progression towards gang exit is occurring.

The findings of this research have implications on multiple areas within the discipline of counselling psychology. Findings are particularly relevant to the fourth force of psychological practice, multicultural counselling. Multicultural counselling scholars state the social justice counselling is the next logical outgrowth from the multicultural counselling movement (Lee & Hipolito-Delgado, 2007; Ratts, D'Andrea & Arredondo, 2004). Helping the experiences of collectively oppressed groups towards social actions with a goal of achieving social equity translates into actions of advocacy, empowerment, and prevention (Lee & Hipolito-Delgado, 2007). This chapter addresses the research findings implications for counselling for social justice, counselling Aboriginal children, youth, and families, career counselling, and directions for growth in multicultural counselling.

### *Implications for social justice counselling*

Social justice counselling relates to challenging systemic inequities within society. In counselling work with Aboriginal peoples affected by gangs, some objectives in advancing this quest for equity is working towards the eradication of gaps. These are gaps in the achievement of education, incarceration rates, social classes, and other systemic struggles experienced in Canadian Aboriginal communities, namely child welfare and health status.

Effective counselling practice with multicultural groups including Aboriginal peoples is to oppose forms of discrimination and oppression (Goodwill, 2003; Ishiyama, 1995; Lee, 2007; McCormick, 1994). This practice is promoted in the context of counsellor self-awareness as both people and individuals (Lee, 2007). In addition to the counsellor understanding of his/her personality on the counselling process, appreciation for client's perception of the world and the psychosocial context for that worldview is the essence of culturally competent counselling (Lee, 2007). For Aboriginal survivors of gang experiences, counsellors must be able to accurately perceive the environmental influences on client development and possess skills to intercede at that level thereby challenging systemic barriers blocking optimal psychosocial development (Katz, 1985; Lee, 1998; Lee, Armstrong, & Bridges, 1996). Based on the results of this research, counsellors must have competency in intervening at the level of family systems, health and addictions systems, legal and social work intersections, and work-related economic systems. Changes in terms of employment preparation, family support, and health services should be informed by further needs assessment research with Aboriginal families affected by gangs.

Counselling systemic awareness relating to the presence of gangs in Aboriginal communities forms the basis of counselling for social justice (Lee, 2007). Increasing counsellor competency for intervention in both: (a) the lives of a client to help with problem resolution and decision making; and (b) in the social context that affects clients' lives requires actions of prevention, advocacy, and empowerment. The following section illustrates ways in which counsellors can intervene with Aboriginal peoples from a social justice perspective.

### *Prevention*

The preventative aspect of promoting social justice in counselling Aboriginal people affected by gangs is to address the challenges of racism and systemic discrimination, as highlighted in some of the quotes from the gang entry categories. Although these quotes emphasize individual experiences, the contexts of these events describe challenges which negatively affect psychosocial development of Aboriginal children and youth. When counsellors can take a stand on social issues and work to eradicate ideologies that perpetuate discrimination and oppression we support a society that is more enlightened, just, and human (Lee & Sirch, 1994). Learning about the structural inequalities faced by Aboriginal people (ie. in education, child welfare, and prisons) and using this education helps to combat the stereotype that Aboriginal people are entirely responsible for the complex problem of gangs. The poor understandings of structural inequality and the Canadian colonial process acts to perpetuate the lies that are commonly held about Aboriginal peoples.

### *Empowerment*

Empowerment is:

The processes by which people, organizations, or groups who are powerless or marginalized (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining reasonable control over their lives, (c) which they exercise, (d) without infringing on the rights of others, and (e) which coincides with actively supporting the empowerment of others in their community (McWhirter, 1994, p. 12).

This excerpt encapsulates the findings of the gang exit categories themes of healing and independence. For the purposes of facilitating the empowerment of Aboriginal clients affected by gang life, counsellors should focus on environmental awareness, community action, and individual insight with clients (Lee, 2007). First Nations perspectives of empowerment suggest that a person must be provided with optimism, motivation, strength, self-confidence, self-respect, self-esteem, in the manner of helping people solve problems (McCormick, 1995). Empowerment interventions look beyond the individual level and identify key factors in the environment that determine client behaviours. Learning to view their problems as reactions to deep-seated problems in their social environment was a main finding of this research that supports empowerment counselling objectives (Lee, 2007; Lee & Sirch, 1994; McWhirter, 1997). Additionally, as counsellors, understanding that our clients are responsible for their own changes and respecting them in terms of their readiness for change needs to remain central in work with Aboriginal people affected by gangs.

### *Advocacy*

Social justice issues focus primarily on the need for advocacy and intervention in populations who continually experience discriminatory attitudes and practices.

Aboriginal ex-gang members speak candidly about events sourced by institutional powerlessness, racism, and traumatic victimizations in several of the categories. Learning about the microculture of Aboriginal ex-gang members and seeing clients affected by gangs in the context of their interpretations of the world around them is key to advocacy work (Lee, 2007). When considering advocacy as a social justice intervention, counsellors must be sure to be mindful of the ethical limits with clients, role clarity, and be mindful of fostering dependence in the counselling relationship. Participants in this research cite several examples of experiencing advocacy while accessing housing, cultural, educational, and health/healing rights. Advocacy as a counselling intervention must occur within the individual or group counselling context and be mutually planned between professional and client(s) (Lee, 2007).

### *Implications for counselling Aboriginal children, youth, and families*

Although research participants are adult Aboriginal men, they spoke from the perspective of their developmental years as children, youth, fathers, and family members. The findings of this research provide a rich cultural context which is particularly informative when considering developmental, cultural, and familial characteristics.

Although there are shared universals within the phenomenon of psychosocial development, the process of psychosocial development needs to be considered within distinct cultural groups (Phinney & Rotheram, 1987). One way of exploring these needs

with culturally unique individuals such as Aboriginal people is to examine their sources of self-validation. This counselling tool is useful for exploring a client's world of meaning, feelings and values, and for understanding the effects of significant life events and changes (Ishiyama, 1995a). Understanding the unique psychosocial development for Aboriginal clients also includes understanding the role of the social forces acting on them, their families, and their communities.

Counselling with Aboriginal children, youth, adults, and families should reflect the healing beliefs of Aboriginal people. In McCormick's (1994) research with First Nations adults living in BC, five themes emerged to describe what healing looks like, suggesting that counselling with First Nations people should aspire to invoke these themes. These themes are empowerment, cleansing, balance, discipline, and belonging. The categorical map that emerged in this research project is a framework of best healing practices for the First Nations adults participating in this study, and serves as a good starting point in formulating counselling approaches with Aboriginal peoples.

What this research indicates about Aboriginal men who survive gang life is that intergenerational family violence, gang affiliation, child welfare interaction, education denial, and incarceration happen during several stages of childhood development. Of the ten men involved in this research, eight reported being apprehended by CFS, and half of them reported having multiple family members in gangs. Only one reported graduating from the provincial school system. Half reported experiencing childhood traumas and abuses, seven reported mental health or addictions problems, half of them were orphans, and all of them incarcerated as young men or youths. Many of them learned *Anishnaabemowin* (Ojibway language) as adults or in jail. It is apparent that even with

such a small group of participants there are several significant psychosocial factors to take into consideration, especially when working to understand a group so profoundly affected by Canada's colonial process.

Categories referencing family and social relationships encapsulate notions of kinship and the importance of these as experienced during their adolescence. Cousins, uncles, siblings, peers, parents, and extended family are all important relationships that provide the social capital in the lives of the participants in this study. If someone is nine years old, and looks up to a cousin or uncle and later finds out they are in a gang, then the kinship tie becomes the catalyst for gang entry. The largest proportion of categories pays tribute to the role of relationships in either processes of entering and exiting gang life.

The social nature of this experience of gang life gives rise to the importance of the social values shared in this research. Trust, loyalty, respect, and sharing are all central tenets of the gang life experience, as well as some of the social themes present in relationships that facilitate gang exit. The seven Anishnaabe grandfather teachings were referenced in some of the gang exit categories, and some were even observed in a few of the gang entry categories. These teachings were meant to be enacted all at the same time or the effect of these would be reversed. For example, you cannot be really courageous in gang life, and show respect if you lack the necessary honesty, humility, truth, love, and wisdom to go with it. In fact, the opposite (e.g., disrespectful, fearful) would be and is observed amidst the lack of the other five teachings. It isn't until the other teachings are learned and identifiable in some of the gang exit categories that the intended effects of these grandfather teachings can be observed. Knowing about culturally defined social

values, and viewing these as resources and positive factors is necessary for doing culturally competent and relevant gang intervention/prevention work.

Based on the results of the analysis of gang entry and exit outcomes, we can say that effective gang entry prevention programs for Aboriginal males should invoke alternatives to the group validation, opportunities for dedication, and learning exercises offered by gangs. The consequences reported by the participants are markers for gang entry, and are also excellent opportunities for intervening and reorienting gang affected youth towards pro social sources of validation, dedication, and learning. Many of these outcomes are sensible given the developmental needs of youth, the critical events attached to these gang entry outcomes occur in an anti-social context. The presence of corruption, loss, cultural annihilation, and family breakdown decrease the opportunities for Aboriginal males to acquire safer sources of validation and personal dedication. The learning they receive in these environments make their skills more suitable for delinquent or harmful activities such as gang life, and result in ever increasing consequences that decrease their sense of choice and freedom to change direction.

Effective gang exit intervention programs for Aboriginal males would involve opportunities for individuals to experience themselves as accountable to groups other than their gang, as well as support for their individual growth towards independence. It isn't until the maturing process kicks in that some of the gang exit outcomes can be achieved, however resisting the old lifestyle of being in gangs and adopting a new lifestyle are markers for gang exit. Additionally, there are health and healing outcomes that are indicative of decreased investment in gang life. This suggests that poor health, and dependency issues must be addressed in the efforts to intervene with Aboriginal male

gang members. This lends support for social justice intervention to address factors marginalizing male Aboriginal gang members and to add positive reinforcements for increased accountability to others outside of gang life. Another method of engaging Aboriginal male gang members in the process of leaving gang life may also be to identify any dissonance they may experience towards gang life and invoke a stance of resistance towards this. Instead of trying to talk a person into changing, motivational interviewing may be useful to assess readiness for change as well as attitudes towards gang life.

### *Cultural implications*

Part of knowing the resources and positive factors available in the lives of Aboriginal children and youth is in learning about cultural resources. Some of the resources typically present in Indigenous cultures fostered identity, roles, and work for youths. The results of this research project reflected a need to focus on these areas of psychosocial development in Aboriginal children vulnerable to gang life. The traditional structures for these, as well as the centre of power for Indigenous livelihoods are Indigenous spirituality (Martin-Hill, 2003). Moving away from the Western tradition of the nuclear family and towards Indigenous kinship structures (e.g., clan systems) and collective responsibility reduces the isolation of children and families. The iterations of these systems go beyond the scope of this research; however, here is a discussion of the cultural implications for the construction of healthy Aboriginal identity, and work roles.

Validation, dedication, and learning were three emergent themes that indicated that gang entry was happening. Although these were markers of an unhealthy activity, they can all be part of healthy identity construction, if only they were occurring in a

healthy community context. As children have little control over the health of their environments, it is important to direct intervention and attention towards the environments of children.

The cultural implications of this stance would require working with the child in the context of their history, where they have come from, where they are going, and what their responsibilities are in the context of this history (Anderson, 2000). It is when we understand Aboriginal identities in this context that we can understand how it has gotten to this point today, “where violence is so commonplace, and where children are so disrespected” (Anderson, 2000, p. 56).

The availability of gangs to children cannot supersede the availability of Indigenous kinship structures if normal, healthy identities are to be attained. If these structures are for some reason unavailable to Aboriginal children, then it becomes the task to install knowledge and awareness of these structures. Too often, the importance of passing on Indigenous knowledge about how to construct healthy communities is minimized or neglected, perpetuating the annihilation of culture and identity.

One possible way to view gang affiliation is children’s attempts to fill the empty space where Indigenous kinship systems used to exist in community life. If gangs are the dominant system where validation is sought, dedication is focused, and where one increases their learning, then the cultural implication here is to revitalize Indigenous kinship systems to compete with gang systems for the attention of our kids.

There was impressive support for the role that work plays in the lives of Aboriginal men leaving gang life, which may speak to the importance of preparing children to work. Here, Indigenous knowledge regarding children’s roles and

responsibilities in the world of work becomes necessary and meaningful. Gathering this knowledge would be a fascinating area for future research attention. There are some First Nations approaches to career counselling (McCormick & France, 1995; McCormick & Neumann, 2000), however this is an area that requires further representation of Indigenous knowledge.

### *Conclusion*

It is the parting goal of this research project to incite some motivation within the academic community to address these research needs and reduce the marginalization of this issue which profoundly affects Aboriginal Canadians in their family lives, in their communities, and in their institutions. Scholarly activity and attention to this area can serve to diminish the reasonable requirements for research informed practices.

Attempting to create practices to address Aboriginal gang issues cannot continue without the benefit of scholarly research to reduce the risk of exacerbating problems, as reported by Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson (2008). Ultimately, making the decision to intervene with or without research informed practices becomes an ethical issue if practices that are not research informed demonstratively cause more harm than good. The results of this study can be translated into practice by use of the category system to identify meaningful events that facilitate gang entry and exit, as well as the markers of change when personal investment in gang life rises and falls.

*Epilogue*

I acknowledge that this research is much more than an academic exercise, as it examined a serious topic that affects the quality of life and mortality of so many people. During the writing of this study, the Lower Mainland experienced a violent streak of killing sprees within several communities affected by gangs. Out of respect for those who passed into the spirit world as a result of gang violence during the writing of this paper, I put down tobacco for those who are lost, who are in mourning, and to give strength to so many people who are reeling because of violence, death, and murder.

I conducted this research project out of love for my people. As an Anishnaabe woman, reaching out to my relations who are affected by violence was very meaningful to me as a researcher. I once heard Clöe Maddanes in a taped lecture from the 2005 evolution of psychotherapy conference state, “It is very easy to have compassion for the victims, but it is even more important to have compassion for the offenders. If we are to change the violence in our world, that is where our work and compassion should be pointed.” I was inspired by this statement and continue to hold on to those words in my work as a clinician and as a researcher. I have learned from this process that it is easier to appreciate those who are initially hard to love. I have a great deal of respect for the efforts and achievements of the men and women who dare to live in a way that is hard for us to understand. I am grateful that some have shared their stories with us. Meegwetch.

## References

- Agnew, R. (1985). A revised strain theory of delinquency. *Social Forces*, *64*, 151-167.
- Agnew, R. (1992). Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency. *Criminology*, *30*, 47-87.
- Alfonso, V. (1997). *Overcoming depressed moods after an HIV+ diagnosis: A critical incident analysis*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
- Anderson, K. (2000). *A recognition of being: Reconstructing native womanhood*. Toronto: Second Story Press.
- Badger, G., & Albright, C. (2003). *Alter-Natives to Non-Violence Report: Aboriginal Youth Gangs Exploration: A community development process*. Saskatoon, SK: Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bjerregaard, B. & Smith, C. (1993). Gender differences in gang participation, delinquency, and substance use. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, *9*, 329-355.
- Blackstock, C., Trocmé, N., & Bennet, M. (2004). Child maltreatment investigations among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families in Canada. *Violence Against Women*, *10*, 901-916.
- Boardman, J.D., Finch, B.K., Ellison, C.G., Williams, D.R., & Jackson, J.S. (2001). Neighborhood disadvantage, stress, and drug use among adults. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *43*, 151-165.
- Bolton, F.G., Morris, L.A., & MacEachron, A.E. (1989). *Males at risk: The other side of child sexual abuse*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Borgan, W.A., & Amundson, N.E. (1984). *The experience of unemployment*. Nelson, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada.
- Brooks, G.R. (2001). Masculinity and men's mental health. *Journal of American College Health*, *49*, 285-297.
- Brown, H., Higgitt, N., Wingert, S., Miller, C., & Morrisette, L. (2005). Challenges faced by Aboriginal youth in the inner city. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, *14*, 81-106.

- Butterfield, L.D., Borgen, W.A., Amundson, N.E., & Maglio, A.T. (2005). Fifty years of the critical incident technique: 1954-2004 and beyond. *Qualitative Research, 5*, 475-497.
- Castellano, M.B. (2000). Updating Aboriginal traditions of knowledge. In G.J. Sefa Dei, B.L. Hall, & D.Goldin Rosenberg (Eds.). *Indigenous knowledges in global contexts: Multiple readings of our world* (pp. 21-36). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Chandler, M.J., & Lalonde, C. (1998). Cultural continuity as a hedge against suicide in Canada's First Nations. *Transcultural Psychiatry, 35*, 191-219.
- Chell, E. (1998). Critical incident technique. In G. Symon & C.Cassell (Eds.), *Qualitative methods and analysis in organizations research: A practical guide*. (pp. 51-72). London: Sage.
- Chettleburgh, M. (2007). *Young Thugs: Inside the dangerous world of Canadian street gangs*. Toronto, ON: HarperCollins.
- Chrisjohn, R., Young, S., & Mauran, M. (1997). *The circle game: Shadows and substance in the Indian residential school experience in Canada*. Penticton, BC: Theytus Books Ltd.
- Covey, H.C. (2003). *Street gangs throughout the world*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
- Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five traditions*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, California.
- Criminal Intelligence Service Canada (2003). 2003 Annual Report on Organized Crime in Canada. Ottawa, ON: *Criminal Intelligence Service Canada* (ISBN no. 0-662-67479-0).
- Dana, R.H. (1993). *Multicultural assessment perspectives for professional psychology*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Davis, S.M., Clay, T., Smyth, M., Gittelsohn, J., Arviso, V., Flint-Wagner, B. et al. (2003). Pathways curriculum and family interventions to promote healthful eating and physical activity in American Indian schoolchildren. *Preventative Medicine, 37*, p. S24.
- Deane, L., Bracken, D.C., & Morrissette, L. (2007). Desistance within an urban Aboriginal gang. *Probation Journal, 54*, 125-141.

- Decker, S.H. & Lauritsen, J.L. (2002). Leaving the gang. In C.R. Huff (Ed.), *Gangs in America* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 51-67). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Deloria, V., & Lytle, C.M. (1983). *American Indians, American justice*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Department of Indian Affairs. (1996). Annual report. In *Report of the Royal commission on Aboriginal peoples. Part two: False assumptions and a failed relationship* (Original work published 1911).
- Dickson-Gilmore, E., & Whitehead, C. (2002). Aboriginal organized crime in Canada: Developing a typology for understanding and strategizing responses. *Trends in Organized Crime*, 7, 3-28.
- Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Accord Initiative (2005). *Aboriginal Edmonton: A Statistical Profile of the Aboriginal Population of the City of Edmonton*. December. City of Edmonton.
- Farberi, E., McCoard, W., Kinast, C., & Faulkner, P. (1984). Violence in families of adolescent runaways. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 8, 295-299.
- Fattah, E. (1991). *Understanding criminal victimization*. Ontario: Prentice-Hall.
- Flanagan, J.C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, 51, 327-358.
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J.H. (2000). The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 645-672). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- French, J. (2007, May 31). Gang members lose heritage: professor: [Final Edition]. *Leader Post*, p. A6. Retrieved August 23, 2007, from Canadian Newsstand Major Dailies database. (Document ID: 1281273051).
- French, J. (2007, May 31). Prison provides prime recruiting grounds for gangs: [Final Edition]. *Star – Phoenix*, p. A11. Retrieved August 24, 2007, from Canadian Newsstand Major Dailies database. (Document ID: 1281270361).
- Gerein, K. (2007). Glamour stripped from gangs; Former members of U of A put a human face to the problem [Final Edition]. *Edmonton Journal*, p. A14. Retrieved August 23, 2007, from Canadian Newsstand Major Dailies database. (Document ID: 1300051071).
- Giordano, P.C., Cernkovich, S.A., & Rudolph, J.L. (2002). Gender, crime and Desistance : Toward a theory of cognitive transformation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 107, 990-1064

- Goldstein, A.P. (1990). *Delinquent gangs: A psychological perspective*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.
- Goodwill, A. (2003) *Giibinenimidizomin: Owning ourselves. The facilitation of Aboriginal identity*. Unpublished masters thesis. University of British Columbia. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
- Goddard, H.W., Goff, B.G., Melancon, M.V., & Huebner, A.J. (2000). Profiles of delinquency: A comparison of delinquent behavioral groups. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 15, 19-50.
- Gordon, R.M. (1998). Street gangs and criminal business organizations: A Canadian perspective. In K. Hazelhurst and C. Hazelhurst (Eds.), *Gangs and youth subcultures: International explorations*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- Gordon, R.M. (2000). Criminal business organizations, street gangs and 'wanna-be' groups: A Vancouver perspective. *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 42, 39-60.
- Gottfriedson, M., & Hirschi, T. (1990). *A general theory of crime*. Standford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Grekul, J. (2007) *An investigation into the formation and recruitment processes of Aboriginal Gangs in Western Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Public Safety Canada. Retrieved April 1, 2008, from <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/umanitoba/Doc?id=10202276>.
- Grekul, J., & LaBoucane-Benson, P. (2008). Aboriginal gangs and their (dis)placement: Contextualizing recruitment, membership, and status. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 59-82.
- Haig-Brown, C. (1988). *Resistance and renewal: Surviving the Indian residential school*. Vancouver: Tilacum Library.
- Hammerschlag, C. (1988). *A doctor's journey of healing: The dancing healers*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.
- Howell, T. (2008). *The point of no return: Aboriginal offenders' journey towards a crime free life*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
- Hughes, M. (1998). Turning points in the lives of young inner-city men forgoing destructive criminal behaviours: A qualitative study. *Social Work Research*, 22, 143-51.

- Hunter, E. (1993). *Aboriginal health and history: Power and prejudice in remote Australia*. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Ishiyama, F.I. (1995a). Use of validationgram in counselling: Exploring sources of self-validation and impact of personal transition. *Canadian Journal of Counselling, 29*, 135-146.
- Ishiyama, F.I. (1995b). Culturally dislocated clients: Self-validation and cultural conflict issues and counselling implications. *Canadian Journal of Counselling, 29*, 262-275.
- Jones, D., Roper, V., Stys, Y., & Wilson, C. (2004). *Street gangs: A review of theory, interventions, and implications for corrections*. Research Branch Correctional Service Canada.
- Joseph, J. (2003). Native-American youth and gangs. *Journal of Gang Research, 10*, 45-53.
- Kearney, E. (1998). Ethical dilemmas in the treatment of adolescent gang members. *Ethics & Behavior, 8*, 49-57.
- Kelly, K., & Caputo, T. (2005). The linkages between street gangs and organized crime: The Canadian experience. *Journal of Gang Research, 13*, 17-30.
- Kenny, D.J., & Finckenauer, J.O. (1995). *Organized Crime in America*. Toronto, ON: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Kingsley, C., & Mark, M. (2000). *Sacred lives: Canadian Aboriginal children and youth speak out about sexual exploitation*. Vancouver, BC: Save the Children Canada. Retrieved April 28, 2008, from <http://www.savethechildren.ca/en/whatwedo/pdf/sacredlives.pdf>
- Kirmayer, M.D., Brass, G.M., & Tait, C.L. (2000). The mental health of Aboriginal peoples: Transformations of identity and community. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 45*, 607-616.
- Knockwood, I. *Out of the depths: the experiences of Mi'kmaw children at the Indian residential school at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia*. Lockeport: Roseway Publishing.
- Kunitz, S.D. (2000). *Disease and social diversity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lab. D.D., Feigenbaum, J.D., & De Silva, P. (2000). Mental health professionals' attitudes and practices towards male childhood sexual abuse. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 24*, 391-409.

- Lane, P., Bopp, M., Bopp, J., & Norris, J. (2002). *Mapping the healing journey: The final report of a First Nation research project on healing in Canadian Aboriginal communities*. Aboriginal Peoples Collection, Ottawa.
- LaPrairie, C. (1995). *Seen but not heard: Native people in the inner city*. Ottawa, ON: Ministry of Public Works and Government Services.
- Laub, J.H., & Sampson, R.J. (2001). Understanding desistance from crime, in M. Tonry (ed.) *Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of the Research*, 26, (pp. 1-68). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Laub, J.H., Nagin, D., & Sampson, R. (1998). Trajectories of change in criminal offending: Good marriages and the desistance process. *American Sociological Review*, 63, 225-38.
- Lew, M. (1988). *Victims no longer: Men recovering from incest and other sexual child abuse*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Lindsey, L., Beach, S., & Ravelli, B. (2006). *Core concepts in sociology*. Toronto: Pearson.
- Lisak, D. (1994). The psychological impact of sexual abuse: Content analysis of interviews with male survivors. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 7, 525-548.
- Lisak, D. (1995). Integrating a critique of gender in the treatment of male survivors of childhood abuse. *Psychotherapy*, 32, 258-269.
- Mackenzie, A., & Johnson, S.L. (2003). *A profile of women gang members in Canada*. Research Branch Correctional Service of Canada.
- Mandel, T. (2006). *A qualitative exploration of former gang member's experiences: Relationships and influences associated with transitioning out of gang life*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Alliant International University. San Diego, USA.
- Manual, G., & Posluns, M. (1974). *The Fourth World*. New York: The Free Press.
- Martin-Hill, D. (2003). She no speaks and other colonial constructs of "the traditional woman". In K. Anderson & B. Lawrence (Eds.), *Strong woman stories: Native vision and community survival* (pp. 106-120). Toronto: Sumach Press.
- Matthews, F. (2005). Youth gangs. In J.A. Winterdyk (Ed.) *Issues and perspectives on young offenders* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 203-223). Toronto: Thomson Nelson.

- Maxim, P., Keane, C., & White, J. (2003). Urban residential patterns of Aboriginal people in Canada. In D. Newhouse & E. Peters (Eds.), *Not strangers in these parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples* (pp. 79-92). Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative.
- Maxwell, J.A. (1992). Understanding and validity in qualitative research. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62, 279-300.
- McCormick, R. (1994). *The facilitation of healing for the First Nations people of British Columbia*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
- McCormick, R. (1997). Healing through interdependence: the role of connecting in First Nations healing practices. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, 31, 172-184.
- McCormick, R., & France, H. (1995). Counselling First Nations clients on career issues: Implications for the school counsellor. *Guidance and Counselling*, 10, 27-31.
- McCormick, R., Neumann, H., Amundson, N., & McLean, H. (1999). First Nations Career/Life Planning Model: Guidelines for practitioners. *Journal of Employment Counselling*, 36, 167-177.
- Medicine Eagle, B. (1989) The circle of healing. In R. Carlson, B. Shields, & J.Brugh (Eds.), *Healers on healing* (pp. 58-62). New York: JP Tarcher/Putnam.
- Mellor, B., MacRae, L., Pauls, M., & Hornick, J.P. (2005). *Youth gangs in Canada: A Preliminary review of programs and services*. Ottawa, ON: Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada.
- Mercredi, O. (2000). *Aboriginal Gangs: A Report to the Correctional Service of Canada on Aboriginal Youth Gang Members in the Federal Corrections System*. Retrieved March 16, 2009, from <http://www.csgv.ca/counselor/assets/AboriginalGangs.pdf>.
- Miller, L. (1998). Neuropsychological perspectives on delinquency. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 6, 409-428.
- Morris, G.D., Wood, P.B., & Dunaway, R.G. (2006). Self-control, native traditionalism, and Native American substance use: Testing the cultural invariance of a general theory of crime. *Crime & Delinquency*, 52, 572-598.
- Nafekh, M. (2002). *An examination of youth and gang affiliation within the federally sentenced Aboriginal population*. Research Branch Correctional Service of Canada.

- Neumann, H., McCormick, R., Amundson, N., & McLean, H. (2000). Career counselling First Nations youth: Applying the First Nations Career/Life Planning Model. *Canadian Journal of Counselling, 34*, 172-185.
- Palmer, C., & Tilley, C. (1995) Sexual access to females as a motivation for joining gangs: An evolutionary approach. *The Journal of Sex Research, 32*, 213-317.
- Paul, A. (2007, June 25). Native youths take course in beating stress, violence. *Winnipeg Free Press*, B.5. Retrieved August 23, 2007, from Canadian Newsstand Major Dailies database. (Document ID: 1294003591).
- Prochaska, J., & DiClemente, C. (1982). Transtheoretical therapy: Toward a more integrative model of change. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice, 19*, 276-288.
- Reid, D. (2004). Group warns kids to stay away from gangs. *Saskatchewan Sage*, p. 3.
- Restoule, J.P. (2003). *Using Anishnabe teachings to inform identity research*. In partnership: Proceedings of the annual conference, CINSA 2001, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (pp. 54-68). Available from department of Native Studies, University of Saskatchewan.
- Rice, L.N., & Greenberg, L.S. (1984). *Patterns of change: Intensive analysis of psychotherapy process*. New York: Guilford.
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996). *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples. Looking forward, looking back: Vol. 1, part two. False assumptions and a failed relationship*.
- Rossi, E.L. (2002). *The psychobiology of gene expression: Neuroscience and neurogenesis in hypnosis and the healing arts*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Sampson, R.J., & Groves, W.B. (1989). Community structure and crime: Testing social-disorganization theory. *American Journal of Sociology, 94*, 774-802.
- Sandberg, D. (2007, July 25). A native reserve in turmoil: St. Theresa Point First Nation Is a Microcosm of All That's Wrong With Canada's Aboriginal Policy [National Edition]. *National Post*, p. A12. Retrieved August 23, 2007, from Canadian Newsstand Major Dailies database. (Document ID: 1311306801).
- Sheremeta, D. (1999, March 1). Big bear meets Al Capone: Winnipeg's feared Native gangs bring their volatile mix of organized crime and Indian radicalism to wildrose country. *Alberta Report* (Online Newsmagazine), <http://albertareport.com/volume26/990301/story1.html>

- Shoemaker, D.J. (1996). *Theories of delinquency*. New York, NY: University Press.
- Spencer, D.J. (2000). Anomie and demoralization in transitional cultures: The Australian Aboriginal model. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 37, 5-10.
- Spergel, I.A. (1990). *Youth gangs: Problems and response*. Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration.
- Spergel, I.A. (1995). *The youth gang problem: A community approach*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Stannard, D.E. (1992). *American holocaust: The conquest of the New World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Strüber, D., Lück, M. & Roth, G. (2008). Sex, aggression and impulse control: An integrative account. *Neurocase*, 14, 93-121.
- Struthers, R. (2003). The artistry and ability of traditional women healers. *Health Care Women International*, 24, 340-354.
- Sullivan, M.L. (1989). *Getting paid: Youth crime and work in the inner city*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Thornberry, T.P., Krohn, M.D., Lizotte, A.J., & Chard-Wierschem, D.C. (1993). The role of juvenile gangs in facilitating delinquent behavior. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 30, 55-87.
- Totten, M. (2001). Legal, ethical and clinical implications of doing field work with youth gang members who engage in serious violence. *Journal of Gang Research*, 8(4).
- Trigger, B.G., & Swagerty, W.R. (1996). Entertaining strangers: North American in the sixteenth century. In B.G. Trigger, & W.E. Washburn (Eds.) *The Cambridge history of the native peoples of the Americas: Vol.1. North America* (pp.325-398). New York: University of Cambridge.
- Waldram, J.B. (1997). *The way of the pipe: Aboriginal spirituality and symbolic healing in Canadian prisons*. Peterborough, On: Broadview Press.
- Woolsey, L.K. (1986). The critical incident technique: An innovative qualitative method of research. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, 20, 242-253.
- Yabiku, S.T., Rayle, A.D., Okamoto, S.K., Marsiglia, F.F., & Kulis, S. (2005). The effect of neighborhood context on the drug use of American Indian Youth of the Southwest. *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse*, 6, 181-204.

York, G. (1990) *The dispossessed: Life and death in native Canada*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co.

Zimbardo, P. (2007). *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*. Random House.

**APPENDIX I**

**Department of Educational and Counselling  
Psychology, and Special Education**  
The University of British Columbia  
Faculty of Education  
2125 Main Mall  
Vancouver BC Canada V6T 1Z4  
Tel 604-822-8229 Fax 604-822-3302  
[www.ecps.educ.ubc.ca](http://www.ecps.educ.ubc.ca)

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Alanaise Goodwill and I am the interviewing researcher for the project examining gang entry and exit processes with Aboriginal ex-gang members. I am approaching you because you represent the stakeholders of this study through your work with Aboriginal community members affected by gangs.

I would appreciate your assistance in identifying potential research informants for a study examining critical turning points in the lives of ex-gang members. My research involves directly interviewing Aboriginal adult ex-gang members about the experiences they had that increased their personal affiliations with gangs, and the experiences that decreased their personal affiliations as they left gang life. If you have knowledge of any Aboriginal adult individuals who would like to gift their experiences in service to research to advance helping approaches to gang prevention and intervention, please provide them with the information sheet.

If you have any questions regarding this research project, please do not hesitate to contact me.

In the Spirit of Cooperation,

Alanaise Goodwill, Ojibway Nation  
Ph.D. Student  
Department of Counselling Psychology  
University of British Columbia.

Dr. Ishu Ishiyama, research supervisor  
Associate Professor  
Department of Counselling Psychology  
University of British Columbia.

**APPENDIX II**

**Department of Educational and Counselling  
Psychology, and Special Education**

The University of British Columbia

Faculty of Education

2125 Main Mall

Vancouver BC Canada V6T 1Z4

Tel 604-822-8229 Fax 604-822-3302

[www.ecps.educ.ubc.ca](http://www.ecps.educ.ubc.ca)

Information sheet for the research project: **IN AND OUT OF ABORIGINAL  
GANG LIFE: PERSPECTIVES OF ABORIGINAL EX-GANG MEMBERS**

My name is Alanaise Goodwill and I am the interviewing researcher for the project examining gang entry and exit processes with Aboriginal ex-gang members. I am a doctoral student in Counselling Psychology and a member of the Sandy Bay Ojibway First Nation. This study will help inform health professionals and educators assist Aboriginal gang affected individuals and their families. I appreciate the sensitivity of discussing this topic and would like to clearly state the questions you can expect to be asked should you consent to become a research informant. I will have some pre-interview questions that will serve to ensure that the aims of the activities (gang entry and exit) are understood, and to ensure that necessary criteria are met for the study purpose.

Pre-Interview Questions:

“Please focus on the part of your life when you first came to know about gangs”.

“What are some of the things you did or experienced that reflected your gang affiliation?”

The following are two sets of formal research questions and your answers to these will serve as the formal data set for research analysis. They may or may not be followed by additional clarification questions noted following the formal research questions. The first set of formal interview questions address gang entry. The second set of interview questions address gang exit.

#### Gang Entry Interview Questions:

“Think of a particular time in your life when you were in the earliest stages of the path leading into gang life”.

“Starting at the beginning of your path into gang life, please describe a particular incident when you did/experienced something that got you involved (mentally, physically and/or emotionally) with gang life”.

Additional clarification questions would be:

“In what ways did this contribute to the path you were on?”

“Was this a turning point for you?”

“How did this affect your eventual involvement in gang life?”

When the incident is collected in its entirety and the outcome of this incident is clear between me (the interviewing researcher) and you (the participant), additional incidents are searched for and collected. You will be asked the formal interview questions and clarifying questions multiple times. You will not be asked to reveal any identifying information about people or groups.

The second set of interview questions address gang exit. These questions are:

“Please focus on the part of your life in the gang when you first started on the path out of gang life”.

“Please describe a particular incident when you did/experienced something when you did/experienced something that helped your process of leaving gang life”.

You may be asked questions to clarify why a particular experienced helped you out of gang life. Additional incidents will be searched for and collected until you are not able to report any more. Any questions or concerns you have will be clarified before you provide consent to participate in the research.

Thank-you,

Alanaise O. Goodwill  
PhD. Student and interviewing researcher  
Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education  
Faculty of Education  
2125 Main Mall  
University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, BC Canada V6T 1Z4

Dr. Ishu Ishiyama,  
Research Supervisor and Associate Professor  
Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education  
Faculty of Education  
2125 Main Mall  
University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, BC Canada V6T 1Z4

**APPENDIX III****COUNSELLING ACCESS INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS**

First Nations and Inuit Health Branch Crisis Counselling Program  
(20 counselling sessions covered)

Pacific Region  
Non-Insured Health Benefits  
First Nations and Inuit Health Branch  
Health Canada  
757 West Hastings St., Suite 540  
Vancouver, BC  
V6C 3E6  
(604) 666-3331 or toll free 1-800-317-7878

Alberta Region  
Non-Insured Health Benefits  
First Nations and Inuit Health Branch  
Health Canada  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T5J 4C3  
(780) 495-2703 or toll free 1-800-232-7301

Saskatchewan Region  
Non-Insured Health Benefits  
First Nations and Inuit Health Branch  
Health Canada  
Regina, Saskatchewan  
S4P 3V2  
1-877-780-5458

Manitoba Region  
Non-Insured Health Benefits  
First Nations and Inuit Health Branch  
Health Canada  
391 York Ave., Suite 300  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3C 4W1  
(204) 983-8886 or toll free 1-800-665-8507

## APPENDIX IV



The University of British Columbia  
Office of Research Services  
**Behavioural Research Ethics Board**  
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road,  
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD

<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</b> Ishu Ishiyama	<b>INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT:</b> UBC/Education/Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education	<b>UBC BREB NUMBER:</b> H07-02245
<b>INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:</b>		
<b>Institution</b>	<b>Site</b>	
UBC	Vancouver (excludes UBC Hospital)	
<b>Other locations where the research will be conducted:</b> Community Centre, private practice counselling office.		
<b>CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):</b> Jo-ann Archibald Rod McCormick		
<b>SPONSORING AGENCIES:</b> N/A		
<b>PROJECT TITLE:</b> In and Out of Aboriginal Gang Life: Perspectives of Aboriginal Ex-Gang Members (34290)		
<b>REB MEETING DATE:</b> October 25, 2007	<b>CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE:</b> October 25, 2008	
<b>DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:</b>		<b>DATE APPROVED:</b> December 13, 2007
<b>Document Name</b>	<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Protocol:</b> In and Out of Aboriginal Gang Life: Perspectives of Aboriginal Ex-Gang Members	N/A	October 12, 2007
<b>Consent Forms:</b> Consent Form	December 7, 2007	December 7, 2007
<b>Advertisements:</b> Advertisement to recruit participants	November 23, 2007	November 23, 2007
<b>Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:</b> Interview questions	N/A	October 12, 2007
<b>Letter of Initial Contact:</b> Contact letter	November 23, 2007	November 23, 2007
<b>Other Documents:</b> Participant counselling resources	N/A	October 12, 2007
<b>Other:</b> n/a		
The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.		
<b>Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:</b>		
<hr/> Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair		