THE GANG ALTERNATIVE:
A PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVE

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By
Robert Graham Mills
Regina, Saskatchewan
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Robert Graham Mills, candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in Police Studies, has presented a thesis titled, *The Gang Alternative: A Participant Perspective*, in an oral examination held on November 29, 2012. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

External Examiner: *Dr. Mark Douglas Totten, Totten & Associates*

Supervisor: Dr. Nicholas Jones, Department of Justice Studies

Committee Member: Dr. Richard Ruddell, Department of Justice Studies

Committee Member: Dr. Allan Patenaude, Department of Justice Studies

Chair of Defense: Dr. Kyle Hodder, Department of Geography

*via Teleconference*
ABSTRACT

Gang activity has increased in Regina over the past ten to fifteen years and has attracted considerable attention ostensibly contributing to higher crime rates and the abundance of drugs. As a result the public pressure on government to slow and reverse this proliferation of gangs is also growing. This is not a phenomenon unique to Regina yet the factors leading to gang proliferation in Regina among Aboriginal youth are vaguely understood at best. This results in an increased likelihood of faulty theorizing as to what are these risk factors and ineffective prevention and intervention programs.

Through interviews with gang involved individuals, an understanding of why youth in Regina find the gang lifestyle an attractive option was developed. While this alone will not delineate the blueprint of custom-made programming to address this proliferation, it has added to the body of knowledge with respect to risk factors in Regina. In doing so, this work can ultimately contribute to the development of more effective and defendable gang reduction strategies in Regina.

Keywords: gangs; gang involvement; risk factors; Regina; aboriginal; youth
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The efforts necessary in an endeavour of this type go well beyond that of the researcher. Adding to the body of knowledge on a topic such as this requires and reveals the help of the many passionate advocates for ridding the city of Regina of the scourge of gangs, as well as the array of supportive people and organizations behind the researcher. This combination is what made this undertaking successful.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, gangs have assumed a much more prominent role in the minds of Canadians. Both the number of new gangs and the number of gang-involved individuals are rising throughout Canada. The cities of Regina, Prince Albert, and Saskatoon in Saskatchewan boast some of the highest per capita rates in Canada for gang membership (Criminal Intelligence Service Saskatchewan, hereafter CISS, 2004). While the evidence is somewhat anecdotal street gangs appear to be expanding both territorially and in terms of the numbers of identified gangs (Criminal Intelligence Service Canada, hereafter CISC, 2008). This should not be surprising since the US experience demonstrates that once established gangs tend to proliferate rapidly (Astwood Strategy Corporation, 2004). With this reported rise in gang activity, gangs have become synonymous in the minds of Canadians with drugs, violence, and an assortment of other crimes, especially with a focus of journalistic attention on incidents defined as gang-related. The entertainment media has also increased our fascination with gangs and gang culture through movies featuring bikers, urban street gangs, and ethnic-based gangs.

The reality is that gangs are not a new phenomenon. They have been present in one form or another for hundreds of years. According to Pearson (1983, p.188):

Youth gangs have existed in Western and Eastern societies for centuries. As early as the 1600's, London was terrorized by a series of organized gangs calling themselves the Mims, Hectors, Bugles, Dead Boys... who found amusement in breaking windows, demolishing taverns, [and] assaulting the watch ... The gangs also fought pitched battles among themselves dressed with colored ribbons to distinguish the different factions.

The modern era of gang research emerged with a ground breaking study by Thrasher in 1927. Thrasher (1927) identified 1313 Chicago gangs and sorted them into categories ranging from play groups to those focused on criminal activity. If gangs are not new,
then why is it important to devote time to studying and ultimately dismantling their influence on our youth?

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, and Chard-Wierschem (1993) found that while gangs do not normally cause otherwise well-adjusted youth to turn to a life of crime, gangs do facilitate the criminal activities of youth predisposed to delinquency and, in turn, increase the frequency of their criminal activity while in the gang. Once they leave the gang these same individuals revert to a lower level of criminal activity (see Pfeifer & Mills, 2006).

The apparent reduction in crime associated with individuals leaving gangs makes this topic worthy of our attention. But what is an appropriate response by society? For the most part the public policy response to gangs appears to be largely focused on the suppression efforts of the justice system after crimes have occurred. Increasingly stringent controls on sentencing in the courts and the growing number of police officers devoted to gang suppression demonstrates the centrality of the justice system in Canada’s response to gang proliferation.

Contrary to this approach, O’Kane (1992) suggested a much broader strategy is essential to reduce gang proliferation. He argued that over dependence on arrest and prosecutions is ineffective in isolation because social factors such as ethnic discrimination, poverty, and lack of opportunity would continue to fuel the wave of gang involvement within vulnerable populations. Rather he argued for community action as essential to addressing these factors, in partnership with police and prosecutions, before any meaningful progress could be made towards reducing gangs and the resulting crime. He further suggested that over dependence on prisons encourages the gang lifestyle
because of the inmate's need for affiliation, support, and protection within the institutions, something he indicated prison officials have been ineffective at addressing.

Clearly, we must enforce the laws. However, we must also direct prevention and intervention programs at the problem coincidental to the suppressive role of the police. While certainly not an issue unique to Aboriginal people, gangs are growing in influence and numbers, and in Saskatchewan they largely (but not exclusively) have ethnic foundations; which for the most part means they are Aboriginal based (CISC, 2004). In their inquiry into the gang challenges facing aboriginal youth in Saskatchewan, the First Nations and Métis Justice Reform Commission (2003, p. 2-35) were quite explicit in their recommendations.

This Commission recommends that the governments of Canada and Saskatchewan, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, and Métis Nation Saskatchewan build strategies to respond to gangs that includes: education, prevention and intervention, and that information about gangs be provided to parents, schools and communities. This thesis will inform and support these efforts by expanding on our knowledge of why Aboriginal youth in Regina embrace the gang lifestyle, and why they find it so difficult to leave that lifestyle when it is so clearly a path to self-destruction.

If gangs have been around for as long as stated by Pearson (1983), then those factors that drive people to this collective behaviour have been with us for at least that long. Furthermore, if they have been around for five centuries we need to be realistic about society's ability and interest in completely eliminating or controlling them. As noted by William Davison (2006 p. 5), the Community Program Coordinator at the Christian Fellowship Centre in Regina, "Gangs are not going away. Perhaps we need to put the structure of a harm reduction gang together and start recruiting."
1.2 Characteristics of Regina Gangs

Regina is a city located on the Trans-Canada highway approximately 160 kilometers north of the Canada US border in the center of the Saskatchewan prairie. As of the 2011 census it boasts a population of 193,000 people (Statistics Canada, 2012) of which 17,000 identified themselves as having Aboriginal ancestry (Statistics Canada, 2012). Many of these peoples live in a number of neighbourhoods, such as north central, that are characterized with high crime rates and are heavily patrolled by the Regina City Police.

There is considerable value in researching risk factors for the gang involvement of Aboriginal youth in Regina, if the data supports the prevalence of that group within Regina gangs. This makes for a somewhat challenging inquiry because much of the data with respect to gang demographics and geographic dispersal comes from police and corrections databases. Publications such as the Canadian Youth Gang Survey (2002), Youth Gangs and Guns (RCMP Feature Focus 2006); A Situational Overview of Street Gangs in Canada (CISC, 2006); Territorial Expansion of Street Gangs: An Analysis of the Canadian Context (CISC, 2008) all provide important information in this regard. Virtually all of this information originates with police or corrections databases. Reliance on these data sources has led to the criticism of being overly dependent on police data as a sole source of information on gang characteristics.

Sullivan (2005) explored the pitfalls of depending upon gang data from police and correctional databases and questioned whether self-serving definitions of gangs and gang members may have distorted our understanding of the makeup and growth of gangs over the last 10 to 15 years. He contended that ambiguity over what constitutes gangs and
gang behaviour has led to questionable labeling of activities, individuals, and groups under the gang moniker that serves the interests of those gathering the data. Sullivan challenged the practice of equating group delinquency with youth gangs, pointing out that this practice tends to divert our attention from the criminal actions of these youth in favour of the more ambiguous concept of gangs. Sullivan cautions that this takes our attention away from the actions of youth and focuses it instead on their association. In support of this, he highlights an apparent inconsistency between the rapid growth of gangs in the United States, as reported by police sources in the early 1990’s, and a corresponding, albeit slight, drop in youth crime during this same period. Sullivan contended that this partly arose from media sensationalism leading to new labels attached to ongoing patterns of youth criminality.

Mercredi (2000) seems to have anticipated Sullivan’s (2005) thoughts in proposing that labeling throughout the Canadian justice system may actually be creating a self-fulfilling prophecy leading to an exaggeration of the extent of Aboriginal gang numbers and a distortion of their ethnic makeup. Despite the ambiguity about what a gang is and the definitions of gang membership, he suggested that the effect of Aboriginal youths labeled gang-involved has been to bring the full force of the law down on them. He further suggested that because of the subjective nature of labeling either people or activities as gang related, the justice system is more likely to label Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal groups. This practice of institutional labeling, which can follow these individuals long after gang allegiances have ceased, further distorts the numbers and ethnic nature of gangs. As such, Mercredi (2000) cautioned that:

The rush to accept the labeling by police and the courts should not aggravate the assessment of the true nature of the crime and the offender. In fact, the practice of
adopting the criteria of police, the findings of courts and guilt by associations all need to be reviewed (p. 8).

Notwithstanding these concerns, the justice system, including police and corrections databases, contain important, albeit incomplete, data on the gang landscape in Canada. In many cases, these remain our only sources of information. With these qualifications in mind, CISC (2004) reported that gangs in Saskatchewan emerged in the early 1990s, primarily through the dispersal of gang members from Manitoba. In an effort to break up gang affiliations within Manitoba’s correctional system, officials distributed gang members throughout western Canada, resulting in the eventual formation of and support for gangs in Saskatchewan’s provincial correctional centers, youth facilities, and communities.

CISC (2004) reported that gangs are growing in influence and numbers and that in Saskatchewan they largely (but not exclusively) have Aboriginal foundations and are male dominated. The link to the Aboriginal community is reflected in the names of many of the 21 gangs identified in Saskatchewan such as Indian Posse, Red Alert, Native Syndicate and Native Syndicate Killers which are present in some of Regina's higher crime, lower socio economic neighborhoods (CISC 2006). Saskatchewan was apparently fertile ground because both the Canadian Youth Gang Survey (2002) and the CISC (2004) described Saskatchewan as having the distinction of one of the highest per capita rates of gang involvement in Canada with 1.34 youth gang members, primarily male, per 1,000 population; with Prince Albert, Saskatoon, and Regina being at the center of gang activity within the province. The 2006 RCMP Feature Focus on Gangs and Guns is careful to point out that gangs are not a uniquely urban issue with rural communities also experiencing gang-related challenges.
Curiously, since their 2002 publication, CISC have ceased to report youth gang numbers. There appears to be a reluctance, or at least a dearth of recent information, on youth gang numbers as pointed out by the CISC Feature Focus on *Youth Gangs and Guns* (2006) which suggested that a “general lack of reliable data on current numbers of youth gangs and membership, as well as nature and scope of activities” (p. 24). Within these limitations it is apparent that gangs in Regina are composed primarily, although not exclusively, of aboriginal males.

1.3 **Gangs and Crime**

Although not the central focus of this thesis, a discussion on crime as it relates to gangs is an important aspect of this inquiry. This link was explored by Thornberry, Krohn and Lizotte (1993) when they observed an increase in delinquency with the onset of gang involvement, facilitating delinquency and encouraging antisocial behaviour, and a decrease after gang involvement ceased. Bendixen, Endresen and Olweus (2006) found similar patterns and further explored the question of whether or not the selection process for gang membership was partly to blame for higher delinquency rates, by attracting individuals with a propensity for delinquency. In other words, while gang members commit more crimes, they might have committed these crimes regardless of whether or not they were gang-involved. Their study found that selection was a factor in the relationship between gangs and crime because gang members had higher than average delinquency rates prior to gang involvement. However, the finding that, at an individual level, delinquency increases with gang involvement supported the findings of Thornberry et al (1993) whereby gang involvement facilitates delinquency. Those predisposed to
delinquency seem to be vulnerable gang involvement, and while involved with gangs, their delinquency levels increase.

Tita and Ridgeway (2007) explored the connection between gangs and crime by studying changing crime patterns in cities with emerging gang problems. Their findings also supported the facilitation model and further demonstrated that higher levels of crime result from gang proliferation within territorial spaces. Aggregate crime rates were not impacted significantly, but crime became increasingly concentrated in areas dominated by gangs. Furthermore, violent crimes as well as weapons offences became more frequent within those same areas. There is, therefore, the potential for a demonstrable link between general theories of crime, and theories of gang involvement. This is particularly relevant to this inquiry because Regina boasts the highest crime rate in Canada among census metropolitan areas with a population over 100,000 (Brennan, 2012). While there is no data that empirically links this crime pattern with gang activity in Regina, the confluence of high crime rates and high levels of gang activity cannot be ignored.

1.4 Research Questions

Regina, Saskatchewan clearly has a gang presence and these gangs are reportedly primarily composed of males of Aboriginal ancestry (CISC 2002, 2004 and 2006). There is evidently a link between gangs and crime and, at an individual level, the amount and type of crime a gang-involved person is likely to engage in. The mere existence of the problem is, however, only part of the picture. The questions surrounding why this phenomena is so pervasive remain unanswered.
1.4.1 Primary Research Question

Why do Aboriginal youth in Regina become involved in gangs and what conditions prevents them from leaving?

1.4.2 Secondary Research Questions

a. What risk factors influence Aboriginal youth in Regina to consider involvement with gangs?

b. What are the protective factors that prevent Aboriginal youth from becoming gang involved?

c. What factors inhibit gang-involved individuals from exiting a gang?

1.5 Operational Definitions

1.5.1 Gangs

Thrasher (1927) was one of the earliest social scientists to look closely at the phenomenon of gangs. He found that “... the gang is a protean manifestation: no two gangs are just alike; some are good; some are bad; and each has to be considered on its own merits” (p.1). This reflected Thrasher's (1927) conclusion that gangs were not necessarily bad. He regarded them as a natural aspect of society forming and evolving in response to societal pressures, and noted that:

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 local territory. (Thrasher, 1927, p. 18)

Building on Thrasher's work, Klein (1971, p.13) constructed a criterion-based definition of gangs:

Any denotable adolescent group of youngsters who:
a. are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood,

b. recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost invariably with a group name), and

c. have been involved in a sufficient number of delinquent incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or law enforcement agencies.

One problem with Klein’s approach, as pointed out by Bursik and Grasmick (1993), is that Klein (1971) did not give sufficient weight to delinquency in his definition. This definition could be applicable to many social organizations, and the interpretation of the criteria in differentiating gangs from other organizations such as college fraternities becomes subjective, weakening the objectivity and thus the usefulness of the definition (Pfeifer & Mills, 2006). Curry and Decker (1998) included the display of symbols of ‘gangness’ such as signing, clothing, and criminal activity as a prerequisite for being labelled as a gang.

Ironically Thrasher (1927, p.15) may well have identified the challenges in defining the concept of gangs in his original research:

No two gangs are just alike. The cases investigated present an endless variety of forms, and everyone is in some sense unique. In this respect the gang exhibits the principle, universal throughout the natural world, that although like begets like, the single instance is variable.

Weisheit and Wells (2001) supported a subjective notion of gang constituency. They argued that we might not be able to provide the decisive description differentiating gangs from other marginal social groups:

This approach, variously termed social reaction, interactionalist, or constructionist, makes the definition of gang relative to the viewpoint of formal or informal social audiences that may include neighborhood residents, community leaders, police officials, school officials, the youths themselves, their peers, or researchers. (Weisheit & Wells, 2001, p.173)
For the purpose of this thesis, Klein’s definition is adopted as it recognizes that delinquency and gang symbolism are central aspects leading to societal disapproval. The absence of disapproval of other less destructive groups, such as playgroups as discussed by Thrasher, places these non-criminal groups outside the focus of this research. Therefore, the characteristics Klein outlines must be predominant among the characteristics of the group under study in this thesis. To ensure delinquency is sufficiently engrained in the groups and individuals considered in this study, conflict with the justice system would be essential to the identification of a group as a gang.

1.5.2 Gang Involvement

Understanding what is meant by gang involvement or gang membership is pivotal to understanding how prevention and intervention programs should be structured. Thrasher (1927) began the debate in this area when he provided a typology of gang involvement. He described gang-involved youth as occupying concentric circles with the “inner circle” occupied by individuals who form the leadership of the gang. Next is the “rank and file” who are members of the gang in good standing. Last are the “fringers” or “hangers on” in the outer rings. They are not regular members of the gang and are not yet fully trusted to carry out the business of the gang.

Discussions with community outreach workers (Davidson, 2006; Sutherland, 2006; Wasacase, 2006) and the youth involved in these programs have produced a picture of modern gang involvement much like Thrasher described. They also described concentric circles with “leaders” or "higher ups" occupying the center of the circle. Next are “soldiers” who are fully invested gang members followed by “wannabees” who are
aspiring gang members. Lastly, “look-a-likes” occupy the outer ring and are not active
gang members but for a variety of reasons emulate gang members.

The Criminal Intelligence Service Canada (2006, p. 8) addressed the matter of
membership with the following criteria based definition:

(1) Reliable source information (inside gang member/rival gang member,
legitimate community resources, i.e. schools, business, citizen).

(2) Police information provided as a result of observed association with
other known gang members, i.e. surveillance.

(3) Admission of gang membership.

(4) Involvement (direct/indirect) in gang motivated crime.

(5) Previous court findings that a person was a gang member.

(6) Common and/or symbolic gang definition, i.e. gang paraphernalia
(tattoos, weapons, poems, induction rituals, clothing.

The minimum standard to be met when classifying persons as a youth
gang member is the combination of the fourth criteria, with any two other
criteria.

This definition is reflective of the importance of criminal activity and resulting
disapproval of society in the identification of gangs of concern to the justice
system.

Esbensen, Winfree, He, and Taylor (2001) concluded that as a basis for gang
involvement, self-nomination seems to be a valid screening tool and "...is a particularly
robust measure of gang membership capable of distinguishing gang from non-gang
youth" (p.124). In their research self-declared gang involved youth were found to be
more antisocial than self-declared, non-gang youth. Gang-involved youth who self-
declared to be closer to the core of the gang displayed more extreme anti-social attitudes
and fell within the more restrictive existing definitions for gang involvement.
Furthermore, gang-involved youth who no longer claim gang status were substantially more pro-social in both attitudes and behaviours than those persisting in their membership. This may indicate that gang involvement definitions should focus on identifying an individual’s position relative to the core of a gang rather than simply declaring them to be either in a gang or not in a gang (Pfeifer & Mills, 2006).

Many of the concerns regarding defining gang membership or gang involvement are centered on the dangers of labeling youth as gang-involved. While it is important to this thesis that it is clearly understood who is being targeted by intervention, prevention, or education strategies; no individual will be labeled as a gang member or as being gang-involved. As such, the reference to gang-involved youth is directed to an undefined group of people who generally speaking meet the criteria laid out in the CISC (2006) definition or self-declare as a gang member.

1.5.3 Prevention

Esbensen (2000, p. 6) described two aspects of prevention. The first, referred to as primary prevention, involves addressing broad social factors by engaging communities, or large components of communities, in addressing generalized causal factors. This might include programs aimed at the reduction of poverty or family dysfunction. Secondary prevention, on the other hand, is focused on the at-risk population and either addresses risk factors directly or separates the population from the risk factors. This may involve assisting a specific family with at-risk youth or perhaps placing an at-risk youth in foster care to prevent the temptation of gang involvement.

The distinction between primary and secondary prevention is an important one with respect to gang involvement because risk and preventative factors exist within the
context of these two categories. Understanding the context of the risk factors will help define its impact on the at-risk population. Poverty may be systemic and require primary prevention whereas family dysfunction is specific to a family and secondary prevention is more appropriate.

1.5.4 Intervention

Intervention refers to those efforts that become necessary when prevention fails. The necessity to intervene presents itself when primary and secondary efforts at prevention have failed; and a particular individual or group has become gang-involved. Intervention is the process by which social support networks attempt to interfere with and halt gang involvement or affiliation. While strategies to remove an individual from gang involvement may include rehabilitation, they also involve suppressive efforts such as law enforcement and incarceration (Esbensen, 2000).

For the purposes of this thesis, intervention will refer to efforts to impede an individual or group of individuals from continued gang affiliation. It may involve the removal of risk factors such as helping a family become more functional and supportive, or improving an individual's financial circumstances. Alternatively, it may mean the removal of the individual from conditions that may also be correlates of gang involvement, such as the apprehension of children from a dysfunctional home. Lastly, it will include strategies designed to provide support for those individuals making self-initiated efforts to exit gang involvement.
1.5.5 Suppression

Arguably, some explanations of suppression might include aspects of prevention and intervention when more generic definitions, including references to stopping or preventing, are employed (Paikeday, 1976).

In this regard, O'Kane (1992) differentiated "Arrest, prosecution, imprisonment, and close supervision of gang youth..." from "...other community-oriented strategies to achieve long-term impact on the problem." Spergel and Curry (1990) were more specific in defining how suppressive tactics are applied to gangs by denoting "tactical patrols by law enforcement, vertical prosecution by district attorneys, and intensive supervision by probation departments. Suppression involves the arrest, prosecution, and incarceration of gang members" (p.297).

For the purposes of this research, suppression will include tactics other than those long-term community-oriented strategies as noted by O'Kane (1992), including the specific activities described as suppressive by Spergel and Curry (1990). This use of the term implies a more coercive approach utilizing the authority of the state rather than the more indirect approach of addressing the risk factors underlying gang involvement and supporting exit strategies.

1.6 Organization of the Thesis

This chapter outlined the research topic and framed the discussion of gangs within both modern and historical contexts. Chapter 1 discussed the literature relevant to both what gangs are and how they are positioned within society. The research questions were introduced to provide a framework for the inquiry to follow. Lastly, chapter 1 discussed
key terms and phrases that are critical to this research yet are used in a variety of contexts within the gang or criminological literature.

Chapter 2 focuses on a discussion of the risk and protective factors for gang involvement. This review will be framed by the supposition that social disorganization (Shaw and McKay, 1969) combined with sub-cultural theories (Kornhauser, 1978) can contribute to our understanding of why Aboriginal males in Regina become involved in this lifestyle and what prevents them from exiting.

Chapter 3 presents the Attride-Sterling’s (2001) thematic network analysis, which was employed to explore the relationship between this theoretical framework and the reality facing Aboriginal youth in Regina. Within a qualitative paradigm, interviews with young Aboriginal men who have been and, in many ways, still are gang-involved were conducted to explore their perspectives as to why they became gang involved, what kept them involved, and ultimately why they turned away from the gang lifestyle.

Chapter 4 presents the results of these interviews using thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). This analysis of the interviews conducted build an increased understanding of what risk and protective factors have been experienced by the participants in their journey from engagement and involvement in gangs to their experience in exiting.

Chapter 5 begins with a discussion of what the data and analysis from chapter 4 reveals with regard to the research questions. This will be followed by an exploration of the relationship of these risk and protective factors within Social Disorganisation and Sub-cultural theories. Chapter 5 concludes with discussion on the public policy implications of this research, what this research has revealed with respect to gaps in our
knowledge and where might future research be focused to achieve a fuller understanding of this phenomenon.
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

The extant literature contains a significant body of gang-related research that informs and guides this study. Of the utmost significance to this research is the work in the areas of risk and protective factors associated to gang involvement and gender as it relates to gang involvement. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of a number of theoretical approaches to understanding gangs. General theories are often focused on delinquency rather than specifically addressing the pathways to gang involvement. In some cases, the connection to gang involvement is strong and obvious. However, in other cases important theories are: 1) not well defined in terms of gang involvement, and 2) depend on an assumption that delinquency and gang involvement are closely related.

2.1 Risk and Protective Factors

The concept of looking at early delinquency and later gang involvement from the perspective of risk and protective factors emerged from the field of epidemiology in health care management. The assumption that factors at the individual and group levels can influence susceptibility to disease provided the foundation upon which the epidemiological approach was predicated (Sharp, 2003). Social scientists adopted this approach to help explain human behaviour. Current studies by social scientists of risk and protective factors relating to delinquency and gangs then evolved from more generalized studies of individual and group adaptation and development in the discipline of psychology (Stouthamer-Loeber, Loeber, & Masten, 2004).

The identification and validation of the risk and protective factors related to gang involvement is often closely associated to theoretical discussions on delinquency and gang proliferation. While an understanding of risk factors can certainly help to position
more broadly based theoretical discussions, they also have a very practical purpose in helping to focus preventative and intervention policy on those factors with the greatest likelihood of success. Therefore, any discussion as to the applicability of more general theories must begin with a review of the literature on these risk and protective factors.

Hill, Howell, Hawkins and Battin-Pearson (1999) identified predictors of gang involvement in six categories using longitudinal data from the Seattle Social Development project:

1. **Demographics:** Males represented the majority of gang involved individuals with ethnic minorities, primarily African-American, constituting a significantly higher level of gang involvement than non-ethnic youth.

2. **Neighborhood:** Youth from neighborhoods with high availability of marihuana and where youth were frequently in conflict with the law were three times more likely to be associated with a gang than youth from other neighborhoods.

3. **Family:** The authors reported strong correlations between gang involvement and single or no-parent families, especially where there was parental or sibling anti-social behaviour.

4. **School:** Learning disabilities, poor academic achievement, low attachment to school, low commitment to school and low educational aspirations also demonstrated strong correlations with gang involvement.

5. **Peer:** These factors were associated with gang involvement although to a lesser degree than some of the other indicators were, and included antisocial activities and drinking in social groups.
Individual: These factors demonstrated strong correlations with gang involvement and included drug use, violence, externalized behaviour, rejection of conventional beliefs, drinking and poor refusal skills.

Hill et al (1999) emphasized that exposure to these risk factors at the elementary school level increased the likelihood of gang involvement, as did the cumulative effect of multiple risk factors. Of specific interest to this inquiry, this study included individuals of Native-American descent; however, there were no reported distinctions between Native-American youth and others.

Esbensen, Huizinga, and Weiher (1993) used longitudinal data on families from the Denver youth study to explore risk factors for gang involvement and delinquency. They found significant similarities between delinquent behaviour and gang-involved youth and reported a lack of support from schools as well as strong attachment to their peer subculture as factors contributing to both delinquency and gang involvement.

Esbensen, Peterson, Taylor and Freng (2009) also emphasized the cumulative effect of risk factors using four major groupings encompassing 18 specific risk factors:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Risk Groups:</th>
<th>Specific Risk Factors:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Individual</td>
<td>1. Impulsivity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Risk Seeking</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Low Guilt</td>
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<td>4. Neutralisations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Social isolation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6. Low self-esteem</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Family</td>
<td>7. Low parental monitoring</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8. Low maternal attachment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Low paternal attachment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Peer</td>
<td>10. Few prosocial peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Delinquent peers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Low prosocial peer commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Delinquent peer commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. School</td>
<td>14. Time without adults</td>
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<td>15. Time with drugs/alcohol</td>
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<td>16. Low school commitment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>17. Limited educational opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18. Negative school environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Their review of the cumulative effect of these risk factors suggested that individuals generally have a cumulative tipping point of seven risk factors; at which point the likelihood of gang involvement increases substantially: “…youths may be resilient to the disadvantage posed by several individual risk factors, but as these accumulate, this resiliency may deteriorate and delinquency may result” (Esbensen et al., 2009, p. 4).

Thompson and Braaten-Antrim (1998) found that the odds of gang involvement increases by a factor of four with physical and/or sexual maltreatment especially when they occur together. While not focused specifically on gang involvement, McGee (2003) found that direct exposure to violence is associated with problem behaviour. The observation that physical abuse is a risk factor was supported by Belitz and Valdez (1994) who reported that severe abuse, rejection by a father figure, family disintegration, and cultural dissolution are strongly connected to gang involvement. In respect to the importance of family, Adler et al (1984) found that gang members were more likely to come from families who put less emphasis on intra-familial socialization, supervision of youth, and expressions of affection.

Studying African-American youth in Detroit, Brown (1998) examined the issue of racial discrimination in the context of gangs, an issue highly relevant to this inquiry. He suggested that many of the commonly identified risk factors for delinquency and gang affiliation were amplified within minority populations, and therefore, more predominant:
For many of the families in this study, it is not a question of comparing what they have and don't have relative to educated whites. Rather, it is a question of survival in American society with as few racist scars as possible. (p. 9)

Brown believed that African-Americans perceived some commonly held aspirations of the ‘American Dream’ to be out of reach. This perception of inaccessibility resulted in a general lack of interest in pursuing the education needed to attain equal economic and social status. The resulting poverty leads to an inclination to meet basic survival needs as well as seek respect and status, through gang involvement.

Freng and Esbensen (2007) took this inquiry further looking at race as a key variable in gang involvement. They examined the issue of ethnicity through the lens of Vigil’s (1988, 2002) Multiple Marginality Framework to determine how social and economic circumstances such as the level of parental education, cultural identity and the degree of social isolation, can disrupt important elements of social control such as family, education, school commitment, attitudes towards law enforcement, peer groups, exposure to addictions and cultural sensitivity. This inquiry revealed significant differences between ethnic groups, with ecological and economic factors more significant for Whites, and the resulting social control/ street socialization elements more important for African-Americans and Hispanics.

While little empirical research has been done on risk and protective factors pertaining to delinquency specifically for Aboriginal people in Canada, Mmari, Blum and Teufel-Shone (2010) studied the issue from an American Indian perspective. They found racism and the loss of language and culture to be important cultural risk factors. The investigators identified knowledge of tribal language, which enables teaching of culture and tradition, as critical protective factors. The role of schools was also identified as
critical with lack of teacher support and peer pressure presenting the greatest risks; while mentorship presented an important protective function. Lastly, the authors identified families as critical with family disintegration, the availability of drugs and alcohol and lack of parental discipline presenting the most significant risks while parental support was identified as a strong protective factor.

There is a gap in our understanding of protective factors and their role in inhibiting gang involvement. Howell and Egley (2005) acknowledged the lack of research in this area. They speculated that the opposite of some risk factors could be protective factors. However, they acknowledged that some factors carry risk but no protective function, such as drug use. Stouthamer-Loeber et al (2004) found that employment, school, family and peer factors could perform important protective functions.

Carlie (2002) organized and defined general risk factors associated with gang formation. He emphasized the widely held view that gang involvement develops from the confluence of a series of risk factors.

1. **Social discrimination and rejection:** "Gangs form in response to racial, ethnic, and other forms of discrimination in order to provide their members with feelings of acceptance and belonging otherwise denied them" (part 8 - topic 1, NP).

2. **The absence of a family and its unconditional love, positive adult role models, and proper discipline:** "Gangs form as a substitute for having no family or for having a dysfunctional family which failed to provide unconditional love, positive adult role models, and proper discipline (not too lenient and not excessive)" (part 8 - topic 2, NP).
3. **Feelings of powerlessness**: "Gangs form as a result of youths feeling powerless over their lives. Some youths are desperate about their current life situation (i.e., being abused, failing in school, addicted to drugs) and feel powerless to gain control over it. They form a gang in order to gain power or control" (part 8 - topic 3, NP).

4. **Gangs form due to abuse, fear, and a lack of security**: "Gangs form because some children fear abuse and a lack of sense of security. The forms of abuse to which they are exposed include neglect, emotional and psychological abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. The sources of abuse are many and include, but are not limited to, family members, strangers, peers, gang members, school personnel, and police" (part 8 - topic 4, NP).

5. **Gangs form due to economic deprivation**: "Gangs form as a mechanism for earning money or obtaining goods and services not available through legitimate means" (part 8 - topic 5, NP).

6. **Gangs form due to school failure and low self-esteem**: "Poor academic performance for some children may lead to low self-esteem which may lead to truancy and dropping out of school. This, in turn, may lead to the formation of a gang to regain a sense of self-esteem" (part 8 - topic 6, NP).

7. **Gangs form due to a lack of self-esteem**: "Gangs form in order to provide youths with low self-esteem an opportunity to build self-esteem through the reputation of the gang, positive association with one another in the gang, gang-related accomplishments, and by gaining power over others as a result of their gang affiliation" (part 8 - topic 7, NP).
8. **Gangs form due to the lack of acceptable rites of passage into adulthood:** "Gangs form in response to a lack of acceptable rites of passage from childhood to adulthood and offer alternative rites of passage to adulthood for their members" (part 8 - topic 8, NP).

9. **Gangs form due to a lack of legitimate free-time activities:** "Gangs form in response to a lack of legitimate free-time activities for neighborhood youth" (part 8 - topic 9, NP).

10. **Gangs form by building upon a pathological offender's needs:** "Gangs form as a result of recruitment by pathological offenders or as a result of their attraction to disaffected youth" (part 8 - topic 10, NP).

11. **Gangs form due to the influence of migrating gang members:** “Gangs form as a result of recruitment by migrating gang members” (part 8 - topic 11, NP).

12. **Gangs form due to the influence of the media:** “Gangs form as a result of media portrayals of gangs, gang members, and gang-related attitudes, ideas, fashions, and behaviours” (part 8 - topic 12, NP).

13. **Following in the footsteps of others:** “Gangs form as a result of emulation of existing gang members by their children, siblings, or peers/friends. Some people join a gang because their parents, siblings, or peers are members and they wish to follow in their footsteps. It is a tradition. It is expected of them” (part 8 - topic 13, NP).

14. **Gangs form because they can:** “Gangs form when non-gang delinquents and delinquent groups are left unmonitored” (part 8 - topic 14, NP).

Carlie's list of 14 risk factors provides a comprehensive summary of the risk factors that have emerged from the literature, if not specifically by name, they are all clearly present.
within his descriptions. Having explored the concept of risk factors the discussion will briefly touch on the matter of gender which has also emerged as an important variable in understanding gang involvement.

2.2 Gender Considerations

In examining the question of risk factors for gang involvement, the matter of gender adds an important dimension. Earlier discussions revealed that assessments of the gang situation in Saskatchewan strongly suggested male domination both in terms of numbers as well as influence (Canadian Youth Gang Survey, 2002; CISC 2004). Esbensen et al (1999) however argued that both female gangs and female involvement in male gangs is underestimated because of gender bias in the methods for gathering and interpreting gang data by the justice system. According to Esbensen, basic assumptions about female roles in crime and the gangs themselves may not be accurate leading to subsequent data errors. Esbensen went on to acknowledge significant differences in female gang member attitudes within their answers to questions relating to social isolation perceptions, self-esteem, and emotional fulfillment by the gang.

Curry (1998) looked at female gang involvement from a feminist perspective. He argued that some of the seminal works relating to gangs, including Thrasher's 1927 study of gangs in Chicago, were from a male perspective limiting females to pseudo-male roles rather than a distinctly female role. Two important questions that remained unanswered emerged from his discussion: can assumptions about male gang involvement be applied to females; and what are the differences between males and females with respect to crime and delinquency?
Totten (2007) addressed these questions and suggested that female offenders have unique risk factors compared to males. They reported higher rates of sexual violence in childhood, and their criminal behavior in adolescence and adulthood was strongly linked to abuse and trauma in the home. In comparison, male criminal behaviour was more definitively linked to peer influence. Females tend to enter the justice system through non-violent crimes and subsequent breaches of court imposed conditions results in their placement in custody. Totten also argued that females are treated differently within the gang and often have tertiary roles in support of male activities. He strongly suggested that intervention and prevention strategies for women should be based on unique female risk factors, genders should never be mixed in these programs, and female programs should not be replicas of male programs.

It is clear that the study of female gang involvement both from a risk factor perspective and theoretically is a unique and divergent field of study within gang research. Gang risk factors for males cannot be assumed to apply to females and inquiry within this research must reflect that reality.

An examination of theoretical explanations of gang involvement is an important aspect of this inquiry. With risk factors emerging from the literature, and an improved understanding of how this impacts society on both an individual and geographic basis, further exploration from a theoretical perspective will help to position this discussion within the larger social order.

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

While the earlier discussions on risk and protective factors as well as their impacts at an individual and group levels is non-exhaustive, it nonetheless demonstrates
the expanse of factors associated with gang involvement and antisocial behaviour as well as what might inhibit gang involvement. What is lacking in the literature is whether those factors are valid for the focal group of this research: Aboriginal males in Regina. If it were possible to identify a relatively consistent pattern of these risk factors demonstrably linked to this segment of society, it may be possible to apply these factors to an existing theoretical framework. By identifying the prevailing risk factors and viewing them through the lens of established theory, we can expand our understanding of what leads young Aboriginal men to become gang-involved. Additionally, it will provide important contextual information surrounding the circumstances of young Aboriginal men in Regina, which may assist in the development and application of public policy.

One difficulty with this approach is that general theories are often focused on delinquency rather than specifically addressing the pathways to gang involvement. In some cases, the connection to gang involvement is strong and obvious; however, in other cases it is not well defined; and depends on an implied assumption that delinquency and gang involvement are closely related theoretically. The theories of differential association, social learning, strain, differential opportunity, sub-cultural, and social disorganization provide the theoretical framework guiding this research. After identifying their strengths and limitations, this chapter concludes by identifying social disorganization theory as the primary theory explaining the process by which individuals become gang involved and sub-cultural theory as the primary theory explaining how gang involvement is sustained.
In his original theory of differential association, Sutherland (1937) proposed that delinquency is a learned behaviour rather than a reaction to the environment and Sutherland and Cressy (1978) observed that:

1. Criminal behaviour is learned.
2. Criminal behaviour is learned in interaction with other persons in a process of communication.
3. The principle part of the learning of criminal behaviour occurs within intimate personal groups.
4. When criminal behaviour is learned, the learning includes (a) techniques of committing the crime, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes simple; (b) the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes.
5. The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal codes as favorable or unfavorable.
6. A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of the law over definitions unfavorable to violation of law.
7. Differential associations may vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity.
8. The process of learning criminal behavior by association with criminal and anticriminal patterns involves all of the mechanisms that are involved in other learning.
9. While criminal behavior is an expression of general needs and values, it is not explained by those general needs and values, since noncriminal behavior is an expression of the same needs and values. (Sutherland & Cressy, 1978, p. 80-82)

As this list suggests delinquent attitudes are cultivated in young people through their association with individuals who have delinquent attitudes. When people they love and respect expose youth to criminal rather than pro-social attitudes early in life and for a prolonged period of time, criminal attitudes are fostered and develop. Of particular interest to this research, is Sutherland’s suggestion that this learning process takes place in small social groups such as gangs.
Akers (1997) expanded on Sutherland's work by explaining learning unfolds through a process of operant conditioning. He reduced Sutherland’s nine points to seven and refocused on the techniques rather than the motivations of the learning process:

1. Deviant behavior is learned according to the principles of operant conditioning.
2. Deviant behavior is learned both in nonsocial and social situations that are reinforcing or discriminating and through that social interaction in which the behavior of other persons is reinforcing or discriminating for such behavior.
3. The principle part of the learning of deviant behavior occurs in those groups which comprise or control the individual’s major source of reinforcements.
4. The learning of deviant behavior, including specific techniques, attitudes, and avoidance procedures, is a function of the effective and available reinforcers and the existing reinforcement contingencies.
5. The specific class of behavior learned and its frequency of occurrence are a function of the effective and available reinforcers, and the deviant or nondeviant direction of the norms, rules, and definitions which in the past have accompanied the reinforcement.
6. The probability that a person will commit deviant behavior is increased in the presence of normative statements, definitions, and verbalizations which, in the process of differential reinforcement of such behavior over conforming behavior, have acquired discriminative value.
7. The strength of deviant behavior is a direct function of the amount, frequency, and probability of its reinforcement. The modalities of association with deviant patterns are important insofar as they affect the source, amount, and scheduling of reinforcement. (Akers, 1985, p. 45)

Akers (1985, 1997) further suggested that individuals develop a belief that delinquent behavior is acceptable in some circumstances. Individuals then imitate the delinquent behavior of others and receive positive reinforcement for their actions.

Winfree, Mays and Vigil-Backstrom (1994) found that social learning measures distinguished gang members from non-gang members more consistently than did demographic characteristics such as ethnicity and gender. These measures included subject responses to questions relating to:
1. Differential association, such as proportion of best friends who are gang involved and the perceived values of significant others and parents;

2. Differential reinforcement including reinforcing and punishing reactions from others;

3. Differential definitions indicating pro-gang attitudes.

The findings of Winfree et al (1994) positions learning as an important consideration in the theoretical framework explaining gang involvement.

In building the elements of strain theory Durkheim (1893/1934) proposed that norm saturation, norm confusion, and/or norm dissonance resulted in the commission of crimes. Merton (1938) believed that social class differences in goals and the means to attain them exerted pressure leading to strain and non-conformist conduct. Although focussed on sub-cultural effects rather than solely strain, Cohen (1955) argued that delinquent behaviour was a response to the inability of working class youth to achieve middle class goals through legitimate means. Building on the work of Durkheim (1893) and Merton (1938), Cohen provided support to strain theory when he proposed that the gang was an environment deliberately created to reflect social values and norms comfortable to the working class delinquent, but often in conflict with the dominant middle class. Later work by Farnworth, Thornberry, Krohn and Lizotte (1994) found a positive relationship between class and crime by modernizing the definition of class, suggesting it should include the chronically disadvantaged rather than relying on historic social understandings of the term.

As sub-cultural theorists, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) agreed with the fundamental assumptions of strain theory. However, they diverged from it by arguing that the reason working class youth were more likely to use illegitimate means to achieve their goals as it
was a norm within their milieu. As a result, working class youth have more opportunities to learn and emulate illegitimate behaviour in support of their goals. This theory of differential opportunity proposes that these illegitimate means are not a middle class norm and the middle class youth would not have had the opportunity to learn and apply these skills in pursuit of their aspirations. The result is a differential in the opportunity to offend between working and middle class youth leading to increase likelihood of offending behaviour.

Social disorganization theory emerged from the work of Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1969). In their study of delinquency within urban environments in the United States, they observed a relationship between local community conditions and rates of delinquency and criminal behaviour.

Figure 2.1 Shaw and McKay's theory of community systemic structure and rates of crime and delinquency (adapted from Sampson & Groves, 1989)

Communities with high rates of delinquency had different social and economic conditions than did communities with low rates of delinquency. As a result, they
concluded that the causes of delinquency, particularly group delinquency, were embedded in the community itself.

Shaw and McKay (1969) observed that social norms and values in low-income areas appeared to support pro-delinquent attitudes in children. These delinquent attitudes became the norm, particularly when adopted by delinquent groups such as gangs and criminal organizations, and provided incentives and mechanisms that perpetuated delinquent behaviour. In support of this finding, they observed that delinquency in these communities seemed to remain relatively consistent over time, despite the fact that the population turned over. Conversely, these delinquent attitudes did not seem to exist in more affluent neighborhoods.

These conditions combined to block opportunities for employment, training, education and the acquisition of economic goods indicative of success, leading to the perpetuation of delinquent attitudes within the community.

Bursik (1984) pointed out that social disorganization should not be viewed as predictive of individual behaviour but rather group oriented in the style of Thrasher's (1927) work on gangs. Bursik also urged caution in how social disorganization is defined and measured. He argued that using one-dimensional characteristics such as delinquency rates in isolation may not accurately represent the level of social disorganization within a community.

Barnet and Mencken (2002) proposed that key influences to society's ability to minimize crime are residential stability, economic inequity, racial/ethnic heterogeneity and family structure. These factors will affect crime rates because communities with high levels of social organization are able to work collectively to solve community
problems, including crime, while those with low levels of social organization cannot work collectively resulting in high crime rates. They found support for social disorganization models in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas although they cautioned that within these two areas there were differences in how the model worked.

Jacob (2006) examined whether social disorganization theory can explain youth crime in Canadian communities. He found that while low socio-economic, educational, and occupational status were associated with higher rates of delinquency, these factors in isolation could not predict higher crime rates. Residential instability was correlated with higher crime rates although not for violent crime. Jacob did not find support for ethnic heterogeneity as a determining factor for social disorganization. Moreover, Jacob found urbanization to be a weak determining factor while the lack of supervision of youth within the community was found to be strongly associated with high delinquency rates.

Also testing for the impact of social disorganization factors on crime rates, Kingston et al (2009) found that communities with the greatest racial mix have less effective social support mechanisms leading to poverty, perceptions of limited opportunities and higher crime rates. Lanier and Huff-Corzine (2006) found that family disruption and ethnic heterogeneity were strongly associated with homicides in American Indian communities leading them to conclude that social disorganization does help explain high incidents of these crimes.

In attempting to explain gangs from a theoretical perspective, Sanchez-Janowski (2003) speculated that gangs formed in response to societal inequities. He argued that these inequities are worse for lower classes within society and that gangs are a structured response to these inequities. While not referencing social disorganization by name,
Sanchez-Janowski does touch on many of the principles of social disorganization theory in describing these inequities. Factors such as immigration patterns, socio-economic status and neighborhood stability play important roles in the formation of gangs as well as the resulting delinquent behaviour including violence and drug trafficking.

Social disorganization does appear to be theoretically linked to gang formation; however, this research is not solely about why gangs form, it also investigates what keeps Aboriginal men and boys involved in gangs despite a realization that it is self-destructive. Kornhauser (1978) further refined the relationship between social disorganization and the culture of crime. She proposed that social disorganization does lead to delinquency, but the creation of self-sustaining sub-cultures with shared delinquent values and norms is more influential over time than social disorganization itself. This approach is consistent with our inventory of risk factors and supports Thrasher's (1927) observations around the construct and evolution of gangs.

Miller (1958) suggested that gangs, or in Miller’s words “adolescent street corner groups” (p. 5), are merely a reflection of lower class moralities, and are perceived negatively because they are largely judged through higher class values. Spergel (1961) investigated these “sociocultural variables” (p. 33). He portrayed the traditions behind understanding delinquent or gang behaviour as learned cultures that are constructed and transmitted within lower class environments. He pointed to the work of Shaw (1938), Shaw and McKay (1942) and Sutherland (1937) in defining our understanding of the cultural tradition which focused on environmental factors associated with delinquency in lower-class communities, including the culture of conflict, dispersal of culture, the process of learning criminal behaviour, and the distribution of this behaviour as an
outline for describing delinquent cultures. He went on to discuss the work of Durkheim (1951) and Merton (1957) which proposed that class distinctions were at the root of delinquent sub-cultures. Spergel’s (1961) research ultimately found aspects of both traditions at work depending on the type of delinquency and the specific circumstances of the neighborhoods studied.

Terpstra (2006) in her investigation in the Netherlands revealed a similarly integrated process leading to a sub-culture designed to define and protect their place in society:

First, they try to withdraw into their own social milieu, where they develop an identity in which local life, place and community are more important than the norms and expectations of dominant society and the risk of being viewed as a ‘failure’. Second, an informal, illegal economy has arisen, partly connected to the drug economy, offering alternative opportunities many of these boys decide to use. (p. 97)

Terpstra’s (2006) focus was on “lifestyles and sub-cultural adaptations of today’s socially-excluded youth” (p. 84) in her research on young boys within a disadvantaged neighborhood in the Netherlands. She ultimately found four relevant influences to their way of life: (1) prestige; (2) relations with dominant institutions; (3) relations between the boys; and (4) the reactions of adults to their behaviour.

Alissi (1970) positioned delinquent sub-cultures as social systems within a larger configuration of subsystems. He discouraged the view that neighborhoods are isolated homogenous subsystems of larger geographic areas, but rather a complex mixture of environmental subsystems, and it is within those subsystems that delinquent sub-cultures are found. This suggests that a risk factor, or more likely some combination of risk factors, may constitute a subsystem sufficient to sustain gang involvement and that the focus should be on the subsystems arising from these variables rather than defining
problems exclusively by geography or socio-economic status. Baron, Kennedy and Ford (2001) supported this contention in finding that abusive backgrounds, anger, violent peers and the successful use of violence within conflicts are sub-cultural values that can shape the way individuals and groups interact with their environment.

Oberwittler (2004) found support for both social disorganization and sub-cultural effects in his study of 61 neighborhoods in two German cities. He pointed out that competing subsystems within these neighborhoods exert multiple influences at the individual level making it difficult to predict behaviour based on these models. In other words, sub-cultures exist but are a dynamic mixture of influences that should not be viewed so much as predictive but rather as descriptive; an important distinction reflective of Spergel’s (1961) perspective with important implications for gang and delinquency programs.

2.4 Theoretical “Best-fit”

In searching for the best theoretical fit for the challenges facing Aboriginal youth in Regina, it is important to have an understanding of the challenges faced by this segment of society. In other words, rather than imposing theory on circumstance, a more inductive approach should be taken by letting the circumstance discover the theory.

Cultural changes within Aboriginal society have also contributed to the challenges faced by Aboriginal youth in contemporary Saskatchewan. Grekul (2006) suggested that the structure and supportive capacity of Aboriginal families has suffered given the disruptive influences arising from historical involvement in residential schools as well as other related challenges such as addictions in Aboriginal society.

In the case of Aboriginal gangs many of the functions served by gangs exist because of the dysfunction or absence in function of other critical social
institutions. Gangs jump in to fulfill the role of families, school and work, institutions which have been weakened in Aboriginal communities as a result of structural inequality, discrimination, and labeling. (p.90)

Dickason (2009) proposed that given the traditional matriarchal nature of Aboriginal families, the movement to urban environments may have further disrupted these supportive structures. The above noted importance of family as both a risk and protective factor makes this a particularly important observation from a theoretical perspective. Mercredi (2000) pointed out the damaging effects the colonial process has had on critical aspects of Aboriginal society:

For more than a century now, the destruction of Indigenous customs, traditions, spirituality and social institutions (e.g. family unit) that were formerly successful in maintaining orderly and peaceful Indigenous societies - has resulted in weakening the inherent capacity of the Aboriginal Peoples to deal effectively with their social problems, needs and development. (p. 4)

Smandych et al (1993) looked at the over-representation of Aboriginals in the criminal and youth justice systems of Canada and Australia suggesting the need for more research in the development of a cross-cultural theory to explain Aboriginal criminality. They acknowledged an important component of this research is the applicability of the Durkheimian-Modernization perspective integrating the relatively recent rural-urban migration of Aboriginal people. They proposed that this migration may have led to the weakening of historic social institutions and norms as described in a number of broad theories including social disorganization. While admittedly Smandych et al reached no unassailable conclusions, their suggestion that the colonial history of Aboriginal people, up to and including modern migration patterns, may have had a role in Aboriginal over-representation in the justice system is intriguing.
Theriot and Parker (2007) suggested weakened pro-social influences in Aboriginal communities have led to social disorganization, leaving these communities vulnerable to criminality. They argued that many of the tenets of social disorganization have been traditionally identified in inner city environments. They proposed that these same circumstances are also present in rural Aboriginal communities. While acknowledging the influences of Sutherland's (1937) theory of Differential Association, Theriot and Parker proposed that the damage done to social support structures in Aboriginal communities has made them vulnerable to more urban-based problems such as gangs. This leads to the movement of vulnerable individuals to urban environments in furtherance of the gang's agenda.

The pattern forming from the confluence of risk factors previously described and the discussion and observances of both researchers and, perhaps more importantly, Aboriginal leaders encourages further exploration of social disorganization and sub-cultural influences as the predominant theories in explaining gang proliferation.

This concept of risk factors contributing to a theoretical framework for gang involvement from both a causal and a sustaining perspective is attractive; however, it is clearly important to also remember that gangs are made up of individuals. Each individual has his or her own values and norms and it is that individuality that, in turn, defines the gang. Short (1968) may have articulated this best:

it is clear, from these findings and from studies which have directed attention specifically to gangs, that in most cases gangs and subcultures are not coterminous and that among boy gangs most delinquencies do not involve the total group. That the gang is an important referent for many youngsters is equally clear, however. Both social or interactional components and sub cultural components must be recognized in behaviour causation; and the behaviour of gang members is a function not only of participation in the subculture of a gang,
but of other subcultures as well, e.g., social class and ethnicity associated with neighborhood residence. (p.11)

This discussion has provided convincing arguments that social disorganization within communities can set the stage for gang involvement and that Aboriginal communities appear to be particularly vulnerable to these circumstances. This combination of circumstances presents challenges for Aboriginal people that appear to be closely linked to Aboriginal youth becoming gang involved, sustaining that involvement and potentially exiting the gang. Once gangs take root in a community, they become self-sustaining through the adoption of sub-cultural value systems that support anti-social activities including crime. Furthermore, how this paradigm influences people appears to be gender dependent and women ultimately play distinctive roles within the gang. While the literature on both risk factors and theory is expansive, it is not focused on Aboriginal men specifically nor does it speak expressly to the circumstances within the city of Regina. In the next chapter, the methodology for exploring the application of this theoretical framework in this environment will be discussed.
CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

Researchers have extensively examined the societal phenomenon of gangs since Thrasher’s (1927) examination of Chicago gangs. Studies since then have used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research approaches resulting in an ever-increasing understanding of what leads to gang proliferation and, by extension, the prevention or reversal of gang involvement. Although these studies are informative in a general sense, their application to the specific environment and at risk population in Regina, Saskatchewan remains unknown.

According to the Canadian Youth Gang Survey (2002) and CISC (2004), Saskatchewan has a significant and growing gang presence, dominated by Aboriginal men, with Regina emerging as having one of the highest prevalence of gangs and gang members within the province. It is not surprising, therefore, that this phenomenon has led to questions and concerns about how this state of affairs developed, and what might be done to reverse the trend. In attempting to answer these questions, the challenge for this inquiry is that while theories abound, a comprehensive understanding of the factors behind the proliferation of gangs in the specific context of Regina has yet to emerge. As a result, public policy on this important topic is not well informed when attempting to confront this issue.

3.1 Quantitative or Qualitative Methodologies?

The qualitative methodology underpinning this research as well as the specific methods used to gather the relevant data are discussed in this chapter. While these two terms are often used synonymously, they actually refer to two different aspects of the research paradigm. According to Neuman (2006) methodology is a broad reference to the social, political, ethical and philosophical underpinnings of research. Research
methodology encompasses a variety of methods for collecting data. While
interdependent, methodology is nonetheless a distinct concept from method. To fully
investigate the appropriate methodology it will be important to understand the ontological
and epistemological assumptions associated with the quantitative and qualitative
paradigms.

Ontology is concerned with what is real, "Ontology is the search for what is held
to exist in itself, rather than what should exist in relation to something else, such as a
theory or paradigm" (Scruton, 1982, p. 332). In the context of gang research, it involves
understanding what a gang is and which perspective is most relevant. Epistemology is
cconcerned with how knowledge is constructed, what constitutes evidence. According to
Scruton (1982, p. 333), epistemology is "more concerned with the construction than the
validation of knowledge and may be defined as the study of the process by which humans
acquire knowledge of the external world." This inquiry utilized the existing body of
knowledge supplemented by localized investigation to expand our understanding of the
risk factors leading to, and sustaining, Aboriginal gang involvement in Regina.

3.1.1 Quantitative Research Paradigm

In their examination of the “Subjective-Objective Debate within Social Science"
Morgan and Smircich (1980, p. 492) discussed the core ontological assumptions of
quantitative research as highly objective, with reality emerging as something that is fixed
and measurable in empirical ways. This, according to Morgan and Smircich, gives rise to
a positivist epistemology that emphasizes ‘social facts’ (p. 493) rather than subjective
human interpretations. They continued by stating that this approach tends to ignore the
influence humans have on the social world, reducing the effectiveness of the quantitative approach in cases where reality is a construct of people rather than a fixed structure.

According to Creswell (1994, p. 2), a quantitative study “is an inquiry into a social or human problem, based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers, and analyzed with statistical procedures, in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of the theory hold true.” The objective of most investigators who use quantitative research designs is to test a theory and find numerical support for a priori assumptions.

In the context of this research gangs, and the risk factors that appear to drive them, are the construct of the community and therefore the humans comprising that community. From an objective positivist perspective, a survey could test the assumptions regarding the relationships between a variety of risk factors and gang involvement, or possibly, to test the applicability of more broadly based social theories of gang proliferation. Certainly, an extensive inventory of risk factors has already emerged from previous gang research. However, this approach ignores the interpretive reality of these risk factors as cautioned by Morgan and Smircich (1980). Demonstrating the subjectivity of these factors, a number of scholars have used this framework to provide a variety of possible explanations as to why people join street gangs and what keeps them involved. Furthermore, there is comparatively little prior scholarship that has examined the risk factors for Aboriginal peoples to be gang-involved. Given that the current study was based on an exploration of the phenomenon of pathways to gang involvement, a qualitative approach was the most methodologically appropriate strategy, especially since quantitative data relating to those issues do not exist.
Existing gang prevention and intervention programs may provide opportunities for incorporating a quantitative approach if this were an impact or outcomes evaluation. However, the objective of this study was to expand our understanding of the factors contributing to Aboriginal youth in Regina becoming gang-involved, and the evaluation of a current program was not consistent with that objective.

3.1.2 Qualitative Research Paradigm

According to Morgan and Smircich (1980), as we move away from the positivist ontology, we begin to see the world as both created and interpreted by the people in it. Therefore, this assumption influences our epistemological assumptions as well. Morgan and Smircich contend that knowledge is comprised of understanding and interpreting subjective experiences rather than social facts. Creswell (1994, p. 1) described a qualitative study as “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting.”

A qualitative approach employs inductive logic where relationships and patterns emerge from the data (Creswell, 1994). Rather than testing a theory, the researcher strives to build a more comprehensive understanding of a social phenomenon through a flexible, exploratory framework of dialogue and observation. Stebbins (2001) clarifies the distinction between "exploration and confirmation" (p. 9), suggesting that exploration is designed to generate new ideas allowing theory to emerge from these observations. In contrast, he describes confirmation as focused on hypothesis testing. He cautions that exploration is not necessarily synonymous with qualitative methods, but it does not lend itself well to the quantitative approach.
3.2 The Method

In determining the appropriate method, the researcher must consider data gathering, interpretation and ultimately presentation. According to Neuman (2006), the emic approach analyses and presents the unique elements of a culture as understood and interpreted by an ‘insider’ or ‘native’ of the cultural setting under investigation. Pelto and Pelto (1978) described the emic approach as seeking the native's meaning by subjectively understanding systems, patterns and interactions through their eyes.

Alternatively, Neuman (2006) described the more interpretive étic approach as analyzing and presenting these elements from a more widely accepted scientific perspective. Pelto and Pelto (1978) described the étic approach as impersonal, where systems and patterns are interpreted by comparisons across cultures arriving at generalizable conclusions. They suggested that emic approaches employ interviews and direct interaction with the natives in their environment whereas étic approaches are more observational. Neuman (2006) cautioned that a true holistic understanding of any culture must incorporate aspects of both étic and emic viewpoints.

Malinowski (1922) advocated that to truly understand a society the insider perspective is critical. The acceptance of this suggestion pushes this research decidedly towards an emic perspective. This implies that it is the voice and understanding of gang involvement from the insider point of view that will best inform the research questions posed in this inquiry. It is the participant’s interpretation of their own life experiences that will generate a broader understanding of what leads young Aboriginal males in Regina to embrace the gang lifestyle. However, this does not preclude positioning these
understandings within a broader theoretical discussion thereby moving towards an etic approach in the manner suggested by Neuman (2006).

Ethnographic methods seek to understand cultural groups through a combination of interviews and observations in a natural setting (Creswell, 1994). This approach emerged from the field of anthropology (Creswell, 1994), and is a highly interpretive method of building understanding of social groups (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Although it is not difficult to see the value of an ethnographic approach in the study of gangs, the challenges of conducting observational research in the natural environment of a gang may be insurmountable. The first challenge is the violence-prone and illegal nature of gang activity and the dangers that these observations present to a researcher makes immersion in the gang impossible (Ferrell, 1997). Gangs operate outside of normal social parameters in a world beset by conflict with each other, as well as with society. Immersion in this environment could require the researcher to compromise ethical guidelines and legal constraints or it is unlikely a researcher could ever observe the authentic natural environment of a gang. The second challenge of an ethnographic approach is that this has emerged as a study of risk factors such as poverty, family dysfunction, and poor education (Carlie, 2002). These factors have their impact over lengthy periods of time, often long before an individual becomes gang-involved. As a result, this venue of research does not lend itself to such a longitudinal approach. These factors eliminate the more étic inclined observational aspects of ethnographic research, while the interview approach remains an attractive option for extracting that insider perspective critical to the emic inquiry (Pelto & Pelto, 1978).
Phenomenological methods provide another approach wherein the research seeks to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of gang-involved individuals (Creswell, 1994). Once again, the strength of this approach is the probing and flexible face-to-face interview which assists in achieving that understanding from an emic perspective. However, the ethical issues associated with the observational aspect of phenomenology are less attractive. The shortcomings of proposing to allow youths to experience these risk factors and become gang-involved, while subject to observation in order to validate a theory, are self-evident and, in all likelihood, would preclude a purely phenomenological approach. Once again, the emic strategy of in-depth face-to-face interviews remains the most viable option.

Although long-term observations in natural settings are not realistic in the context of this inquiry, interviews with gang members emerged as a viable approach and formed the basis of the methodology in this thesis. The purpose of this research was to increase our understanding of the reasons why young Aboriginal men in Regina become involved in gangs and the reasons they get trapped in this lifestyle. By utilizing the flexible interview method inherent in both ethnographic and phenomenological approaches, a deeper understanding of the risk factors associated with gang involvement was garnered. The data produced by the interviews facilitated an inductive analytical process that allowed the experiences described in the interviews to broaden our understanding of gang involvement. A review of the extant literature grounded the interviews within the broader spectrum of theory, assisted in their interpretation, and led to a deeper understanding of risk factors associated to gang involvement in Regina, Saskatchewan.
3.3 The Research Participants

The qualitative approach employed in this research incorporates a non-probability sampling technique as described by Neuman (2006). He proposed the use of a specific type of non-probability sampling referred to as purposive or judgmental sampling. This approach is useful where the researcher is attempting to access difficult to reach and highly specialized populations with the goal of gaining a deep understanding of the subject matter. Purposive sampling involves the non-random selection of participants, also known as key informants, based on the individual's ability to answer the research questions posed (Neuman, 2006).

This research focuses on risk and protective factors for Aboriginal males in Regina to become gang-involved and for sustaining that involvement over time. Gang-involved individuals clearly represent a difficult-to-reach, specialized population as described by Neuman (2006) and the research questions in this study seek a deeper understanding of the risk factors associated with gang involvement in Regina, thereby validating the use of purposive sampling in this case.

The structure and interconnected nature of gangs lends itself to snowball sampling also referred to as chain referral or reputational sampling (Neuman, 2006). Snowball sampling acknowledges that social groups, such as gangs, exist as direct and indirect networks and that through referrals and references the sample size can expand much more than a direct approach to each individual would allow. Gangs are generally structured in a way that snowball sampling is feasible and in this case did assist in developing a viable sample group. There is a precedent to this type of sampling strategy
with gang members. Decker and van Winkle (1996) used this approach with St. Louis, Missouri gang members.

The sample size for this research was limited due to the complexities of accessing this difficult to reach population while screening for age, gender, ethnicity and gang involvement. The important reference point used in this case was the concept of theory-saturation as described by Mason (2002). This is the point at which the researcher is confident they have a complete picture and that further interviews will not present new information. While subjective, this approach nevertheless allows the data gathered to determine the sample size rather than based solely on an arbitrary minimum.

A number of local outreach programs were the gateway to contacting potential participants. These programs include Regina Anti-Gang Services (RAGS), the YMCA Street Culturz program, and the North Central Community Association. There were some notable advantages to accessing individuals through these community-based programs. First, the participants in these programs had already openly declared their intent to exit the gang lifestyle, thereby minimizing the unintentional outing of someone who may not have previously disclosed their intentions to friends, family or other gang members. Secondly, through participating in these programs, gang-involved individuals had already considered what led them to embrace and stay involved in a gang lifestyle, thereby enhancing the information they were able to provide in an interview. Although some of these programs provide services to both youth and adult clients, the participants in this research were restricted to those over the age of 18 years. While the primary concern in this regard was avoiding any danger of victimizing youth by participating in
these interviews, there was also the practical consideration of their maturity and the increased opportunity for a retrospective viewpoint.

While access to the participants was through community outreach programs focused on gangs, self-declaration provided the means for confirmation of the participant’s involvement in gangs. Esbensen, Winfree, and Taylor (2001) found that self-nomination was a valid screening approach and their subjects tended to provide a more expansive and inclusive picture of gang involvement. Winfree, Fuller, Backstrom, and Mays (1992) argued that self-nomination may be more accurate than most police gang databases, and that self-nominated gang members also do a better job contextualizing their involvement within the structure of the gang itself. Since gang involvement is essential to inclusion in this purposive sample, self-declaration of potential participants as gang-involved was deemed sufficient to ensure they meet that key criterion.

The RAGS program was the source for all of the subjects that participated in the research. This is not altogether surprising since this researcher was far more familiar to both clients and gatekeepers in this organization than was the case with the other two community organizations. This appeared to facilitate a greater degree of trust and comfort with the researcher. However, many of the subjects that came forward belonged to more than one of the organizations initially contacted. Since the group of participants targeted for this research comprise a very close network of people, it should not necessarily be assumed that RAGS was the sole organization that made initial contact with the participants. A total of fourteen subjects came forward, of whom 11 were of Aboriginal descent, male and self-declared their gang involvement. The interviews took
place throughout the month of April of 2011. One individual was clearly under the influence of drugs during the interview. As a result, only ten of the eleven interviews conducted were transcribed and used in this research.

The CISC and RCMP material cited does not articulate how the ethnicity or age range of gang members was determined in their information. For the purpose of this thesis, the ethnicity of participants was determined through self-declaration, combined with inquiry as to their home community and extended family. Similarly, age was screened primarily through self-declaration supplemented by the fact that the RAGS program deals exclusively with adults. The age ranges for the research subjects was from 23 to 34 years.

3.4 The Interviews

Choosing an appropriate venue for the interviews was important. Using a safe and neutral space within the RAGS facilities minimized the risk of reprisal on the participants while also providing safety for the researcher. The participants were familiar with the facility based on their participation in the RAGS program. The researcher discussed the potential risks with all participants, ensured they had considered these risks and were satisfied with the reasonable accommodations prior to any interviews taking place.

An additional somewhat unique issue is that as a police officer, this researcher could potentially have had a duty to act on information disclosed during the interview. For example, a result of his professional and legal obligations, the researcher would be required to act should the interviewee have disclosed information of a crime, past or present during the interview. The researcher's status and obligations as a police officer
was balanced against the need for objective research in this case. The researcher clearly and unambiguously communicated this to the participants prior to the interviews and established an understanding with the subjects as to where the boundaries were and what would happen if they were exceeded. Additionally, the research questions were designed in a manner that did not require the disclosure of the types of information that might have obliged a police officer to act. Finally, the subjects were informed what would happen should such a disclosure take place. As a result of these measures, no issues arose in this regard.

Interestingly, the subjects made no effort to hide the fact they were taking part in this research. In fact, they often announced it, suggesting some level of pride in the act of relaying their life story in support of this research. Although the interviews took place in a private office, there were frequent interruptions by phones ringing and people knocking at the door. Surprisingly this did not interrupt the flow of the interview, perhaps because it was the norm within the RAGS environment.

3.5 The Data

The data used in this study is comprised of ten digitally recorded and transcribed interviews and the researcher’s notes. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and provided approximately 126 pages of verbatim transcripts. The recording of the interviews was accompanied by extensive note taking which allowed the researcher to note aspects of the interviews not captured adequately by audio recordings. This included descriptions of emotions, body language, tone of voice, positioning within the room, and so forth.
The researcher used an interview guide to ensure the exploration of all topics of inquiry (see Appendix 1). This content of this guide was drawn from a number of sources. Winterdyk (2010) provided a framework for the questionnaire including reference questions for a number of the identified risk factors. Discussions with Wasacase (2006), Davidson (2006) and Sutherland (2006) likewise provided important reference points but also assisted with how the questions should be posed to avoid conflict or excessively emotional responses. Finally, the guide was focused primarily on building an understanding of the risk factors as identified in the literature, while providing the flexibility to probe beyond the scope of the guide in those instances new data emerged. While referenced during the interviews, the guide did not dictate the flow of the interview. For the most part, the first few questions led to a life narrative by the subject which often continued throughout most of the interview. This approach was extremely conducive to probing and follow-up questions by the interviewer, facilitating very in-depth and revealing conversations. While it is certainly possible that participants withheld information, all probes and follow-up questions were met with openness and apparent full disclosure. This may be because these individuals have had to openly talk about their lives and experiences as part of their healing process. Programming within all the community-based organizations contacted included various iterations of full disclosure to facilitate better understanding of what must change in their lives to avoid repetition of past mistakes.

Given the sampling procedure, the participants had already reached out for help from community outreach programs. This may have exposed them to literature and programming that created preconceived notions within their thinking. This could have
potentially caused them to provide answers during the interviews based on ideas they have learned in these venues rather than their personal experiences. The ability to probe their answers to achieve that deeper understanding of background, motives and biases were the primary tool for overcoming these possible limitations, coupled with the careful selection of participants.

Furthermore, while they had no obvious motive to manipulate their answers, the street survival skills these individuals may have acquired while gang-involved could have motivated them to give answers based on considerations other than their life experiences. The research participants were not provided compensation. However, they may have anticipated sympathy, assistance, or respect through misleading or false answers. It is difficult to eliminate this eventuality entirely; however, asking probing follow-up questions and looking for consistencies in the data during analysis were employed to minimize the impact.

As a result of the open and dynamic interview structure used, there were occasions where relevant questions were not asked during the initial interview. While follow-up with these subjects was done, this proved to be a challenging undertaking. Some of the participants were well along on the road to recovery while others were in the midst of resolving addictions and legal troubles from their past and they were making significant lifestyle changes. These dynamics often made connecting with them for follow-up difficult and, in some cases, impossible. This did not present a major impediment to the research since the initial interviews were recorded and transcribed. However, additional clarification might have been helpful in some cases and supplement the overall body of knowledge.
3.6 Analyzing the Data

It is important to view this data in the context suggested by Davidson (2006). He argued that gang-involved individuals can talk about their lives, but can't necessarily assign causation to any given risk factor. In other words, they know what happened to them but don't necessarily understand which factor or group of factors pushed them towards a gang lifestyle. This suggests that the analysis of this data must look for common patterns among a confluence of risk factors as suggested by Carlie (2002) and Esbensen (1993).

As noted by Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) qualitative data is composed of words and observations. The goal of qualitative research is to extract meaning and understanding from this data. Accomplishing this demands "creativity, discipline and a systematic approach" (p. 1). To achieve this they suggested a three-step process:

i) thoroughly understanding the data;

ii) keeping the analysis focused on the research questions; and,

iii) organizing the information to reveal coherent themes.

Recognizing that these organizational efforts may start with predetermined categories based on pre-existing knowledge, they also emphasized the importance of emerging themes to protect the iterative nature of qualitative research.

Attride-Stirling (2001) argued that qualitative methods are growing in both popularity and acceptance; however, methodical and disciplined analysis processes must accompany them in order to yield meaningful and useful results. Furthermore, the researcher must fully describe and disclose the research process if the results of research are to be widely accepted. In that light, she described a system of 

*thematic network analysis* which graphically depicts a map illustrating emergent themes and their
interconnected nature. This approach successfully achieves the goals of discipline and disclosure. To ensure the analysis and presentation of the data gathered in this investigation was subject to both discipline and full disclosure, this research employed Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network analysis.

Table 3.1 Steps in analyses employing thematic networks (adaptation from Attride-Sterling, 2001)
The first step of Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network analysis, involves developing a coding framework and dissecting the text into text segments using that framework (p. 391). Although different approaches are possible, it should result in a "set of theoretical constructs" (p. 391) that facilitates the systematic analysis of the data. This framework provides the foundation upon which to dissect the text into manageable segments. Importantly, Attride-Stirling (2001) did not see this as an inflexible tool and pointed out that the constructs within the coding framework may also emerge from the data through the appearance of recurrent themes.

The second step in Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network analysis involves the identification of themes by first abstracting them from the coded text, then refining them. The coded material is organized into related conceptual content, or basic themes. She pointed out that these themes should be specific and non-repetitive, and broad enough to include a number of text segments.

The third step is the construction of the thematic networks. By similarly organizing the basic themes around "related conceptual content" (p. 395), organizing themes emerge. These groupings provide further refinement of the underlying meanings that unite clusters of basic themes. By identifying the common threads uniting these groups of basic themes, our understanding of them is enhanced. In a similar manner, the global themes emerge from the organizing themes. Attride-Stirling (2001) suggests global themes are "like a claim in that it is a concluding or final tenet" (p. 389). She also stated that the data might result in more than one global theme depending on the complexity of the data and the purpose of the research. However, she proposed that each of these global themes should be at the center of its own thematic network. Finally,
illustration of these networks as thematic maps helps readers visualize and fully understand the relationships between basic, organizing and global themes (Attride-Stirling 2001).

**Figure 3.1 Sample Thematic map (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 388)**

With the basic, organizing and global themes identified and defined, and the text segments interpreted and organized under these themes, the fourth step in Attride-Stirling's (2001) process is to describe and explore the thematic networks. The links between the basic, organizing and global themes are examined to reveal and explain the thematic maps. The data is now interpreted through the lens of the thematic map to reveal the patterns formed through the interaction of the themes.

The last step in this process is to interpret the patterns in light of theory and to return to the research question. If more than one thematic map emerges they are first tied together to reveal a cohesive story. This story is then tied to the theoretical underpinnings of the research and, then, to the research questions to complete the analysis.
Simmons, Lathlean and Squire (2008) pointed out the fundamental role played by thematic analysis in avoiding the pitfalls of looking simply at the frequency of words or phrases within qualitative data, (i.e., content analysis) without understanding and illustrating them in a broader context. Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network analysis addresses these challenges in a systematic and transparent manner.

3.7 Research Bias

The potential for researcher bias in a semi-structured, interview-based method such as this must be acknowledged. The subject matter expertise of the gang-involved individuals is what makes this study important and unique with respect to both Regina and Aboriginal gang research. However, what the participants said was also filtered through the life experiences of the researcher despite the overall emic approach taken. In other words, while the goal of this research was to present the voices of the participants, a certain amount of interpretation by the researcher of what is said is inevitable. That interpretation may be affected by the researcher's own biases. Since the objective of this research was to identify and explore why Aboriginal youth in Regina become gang-involved, this bias presents a significant danger of misinterpretation resulting in incorrect conclusions. Well-planned interviews followed by systematic analysis and follow-up clarification of interpretations and conclusions did mitigate, but can never completely eliminate, the potential for researcher bias.

3.8 Anonymity and Confidentiality

It is likely that others were aware of who volunteered to participate as participants in this research since it was impossible to provide the participants with guarantees of anonymity given the sampling process and the physical environment of the various
Protecting the integrity of the information they provided and ensuring they were aware of their rights to confidentiality and of the methods employed to guarantee this were critical. To provide confidentiality within writing of the thesis, the researcher employed pseudonyms for all participants and any documented concordance between the pseudonyms and their real names will be within the secured files.

This research complied with the requirements of the University of Regina Research Ethics Board (see Appendix 2) regarding the storage and safekeeping of data from human research subjects. All data including electronic recordings of the interviews were saved in a secure password protected environment during the data collection and analysis phases; this provided additional confidentiality. Similarly, any resulting paper documents including interview transcripts were locked in a secure cabinet to which only the researcher and the thesis advisor had access. The researcher ensured the participants that, until these files are appropriately destroyed (after five years), they will remain secured.

The next chapter presents the data obtained from these interviews. Using Attride-Sterling's (2001) systematic approach, this data was analyzed and a thematic map provided to help better understand gang involvement through the eyes of those most impacted.
CHAPTER 4 - DATA AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the results of the analytical process outlined in chapter 3. It describes the coding framework utilized in the detailed examination of the interviews using Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network analysis process. This is followed by the development of basic, organizing and global themes culminating in the illustration and exploration of the relationships between these themes and the research questions using thematic maps.

4.1 Coding the Data

To begin the process of coding, Attride-Stirling (2001) suggests the development of a coding framework based on the theoretical interests of the research and the salient issues arising in the data. Since the research questions for this thesis focused on risk and protective factors associated with gang involvement, these factors provided the foundation for the coding framework. Attride-Stirling stresses the importance of these codes having explicit definitions to ensure they are not redundant and are related to the focus of the research. While a review of the extant literature revealed a number of risk factors organized in a variety of ways, Carlie's (2002) organization and summary of the risk factors presented a balanced and comprehensive basis for the development of the coding framework illustrated in Table 4.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Risk or Protective Factor</th>
<th>Parameters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Social discrimination or rejection</td>
<td>Racial, ethnic, and other forms of discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The absence of a family and its unconditional love, positive adult role models, and proper discipline</td>
<td>Substitute for having no family or for having a dysfunctional family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Feelings of powerlessness</td>
<td>They form a gang in order to gain power or control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Abuse, fear, and a lack of security</td>
<td>Some children fear abuse and a lack of sense of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next step in Attride-Stirling's (2001) process is the dissection of the text. The codes are applied to the text, breaking the data down into smaller manageable pieces. These pieces may consist of single words or entire passages providing they contribute to the focus of the research. In keeping with this approach, the researcher dissected the data to expose segmented portions of text that revealed insights with respect to risk and protective factors. This involved reading the verbatim transcripts line by line, within the context of the larger conversation, to reveal those segments of text that spoke to specific risk or protective factors. The 810 segments (or codes) emerging from this process were then highlighted, assigned an identification number and end noted on the transcript.

A spreadsheet was used to track and organize the coded text segments, an example of which is illustrated in Table 4.2. Each segment of text and its associated code were recorded sequentially in the spreadsheet and linked to a specific risk or protective
factor. For example in Table 4.2, code 7 is linked to Material Gains while code 9 is linked to Family. Table 4.2 does not illustrate all codes or factors, therefore blank spaces represent codes associated with factors not illustrated in the sample. This process not only facilitated the coding process, but also provided an effective method of tracking the specific segments of text back to the original participants. This was to become particularly important during the analysis phase when it was critical that the true meaning of each of these segments was understood in the context of the overall conversation.

Table 4.2 Coding Spreadsheet Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Discrimination</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Security</th>
<th>Material Gains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>I grew up with my grandparents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anything, any little petty score I could do to get money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>After stealing a couple of cars I got thrown out… thrown out to Vancouver to my mother, well my uncle and auntie.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Then my mother took me in. My mother was a prostitute</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Identifying the Themes

The next step in Attride-Stirling's (2001) process involves the abstraction and refinement of themes from the coded text segments. Attride-Stirling acknowledged that this step is interpretive and that the emergent themes should be specific and well defined
while not being redundant. For the most part, the coding of text and the identification of themes occurred concurrently, which is why Table 4.2 contains terminology consistent with the themes rather than the initial coding framework. In the context of the interviews and the researcher's field notes, text segments were read, understood, and assessed for meaning. Of Carlie's (2002) identified risk factors, neither number 8, *lack of acceptable rites of passage into adulthood*, nor number 14, *gangs form because they can*, revealed themselves in the data. As the coded text segments were read and interpreted, new factors were revealed. Specifically the importance of prevention and intervention programs, the influence of the justice system, addictions and the neighborhood did emerge from the data. Furthermore, in some cases the participant's descriptions of the twelve risk factors that were supported in the data revealed new or slightly divergent descriptions of how they applied to the participants. As a result, the themes that emerged have titles and parameters that reflect but are not exactly the same as the coding framework in Table 4.1. This combination of theory and emergent data is consistent with the approach suggested by Attride-Stirling when she pointed out that the emergent themes must be "moulded and worked" (p. 392) to accommodate the text segments to reveal succinct, non-repetitive themes.

Table 4.3 illustrates the culmination of this process. In the first column, the coded text is organized into related conceptual content. While not all codes are presented in this table, samples from the transcripts are included as is a breakdown of how many coded text segments were revealed within each theme. The second column provides a summary of the issues discussed as revealed in the entirety of the coded text segments under each theme. Finally, the third column illustrates the label assigned to the themes.
Table 4.3: From Codes to Basic Themes (Adapted from Attride-Stirling, 2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes (810 coded text segments)</th>
<th>Issues Discussed</th>
<th>Themes Identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(total of 4 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td>Well there was a little bit of racism. It's very very hard to get a job nowadays for a young aboriginal youth cause a lot of us have tattoos and a lot of the gang markings.</td>
<td>Racism, ageism, and socio-economic generalizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(total of 122 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td>Then my mother took me in. My mother was a prostitute. My mom was an alcoholic, my dad wasn't there.</td>
<td>Families provided positive and negative experiences within traditional, extended, foster and single parent families. Negative experiences included neglect, abuse and family dissolution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(total of 90 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td>Then one of my friends died, he got hit by a car. I kind of just, it literally stopped my life you know. Yeah, they thought I was a member cause I was hanging out with them.</td>
<td>Circumstances where participants felt basic aspects of their lives were outside of their control. Multiple, often tragic, deaths of loved ones, the inability to manage challenging social situations, lack of knowledge or understanding of their environment leading to poor decision making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(total of 96 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td>I think it's a lot to do with fear, they can't admit it that they are scared.</td>
<td>Feelings of vulnerability and the degree participants felt protected or attacked. This included feelings of security for both themselves and their loved ones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We all kind of grew up knowing we're going to have to protect ourselves.</td>
<td>(total of 47 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td>Material Gains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... walked into the door and was greeted with some money.</td>
<td>The degree to which the acquisition of material wealth, beyond the basic survival needs, motivated the participants.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well I didn't have nothing, I didn't have nothing and they offered me, you know they gave me a TV.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(total of 27 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td>Positive and negative influences of education, the educational system, or individuals working within the system. This included both conflicts with teachers and other students as well as positive role modeling.</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yah I was going to school, I got kicked out of school, out of 3 schools in Saskatoon for fighting ... yah for fighting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I got up to grade four, then they kicked me out.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(total of 88 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td>The degree to which the participants needed validation of their self-worth. This included feelings of/or desire for: fear, comradery, power over others and the need for a sense of belonging.</td>
<td>Self Esteem and Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I just liked the fact that I was in the gang. You know and I thought I was cool and shit. I found out that I'm not.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And who do you run away to, somebody that's going to show you love and respect and show you that they care for you.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(total of 31 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td>The influence of sports, hobbies and other socially acceptable leisure activities. This includes positive and</td>
<td>Leisure Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I would open a facility where they could go play basket ball you know whatever floor hockey. There nothing really to do out here at all.</td>
<td>negative influences resulting from participation in these activities, as well as the consequences of being unable to participate.</td>
<td>Behaviour Support System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(total of 28 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeah when I joined NS like I said things got more higher and everything and I started doing a whole lot of things. A bunch of boys all together and we used to steal cars.</td>
<td>Gang involvement arose because the participants understood that pre-existing tendencies including criminal activity, hanging out in the neighbourhood, and their preferred social environment would be supported by the gang.</td>
<td>Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(total of 4 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always thought it was off the movies, but it's not. Pretty much like what you see on TV, like on those rap videos, you know that's what we had you know.</td>
<td>This included attempts emulate their interpretation of media including news, music, movies and other forms of popular media.</td>
<td>Influence of Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(total of 98 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think the younger guys don't have no guidance. Like I said I grew up with these guys so I already knew how to live it.</td>
<td>The influence of a particular person in their lives.</td>
<td>Neighbourhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(total of 15 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regina is so run down.</td>
<td>The influences of living in a the particular locale. This may include neighbourhoods, provinces or regions but not specific addresses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well, it all started when I moved from the reserve back to the city.</td>
<td>This was more than the mere presence of addiction in themselves or their environment, but rather the degree to which it was an influencing factor.</td>
<td>Addictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(total of 42 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was always a lot of drinking and partying going on, a lot of drugs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... and they're supposed to be soldiers they're not supposed to be high, it's pathetic and I got caught up in it too.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(total of 50 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td>Influences of the justice system as a result of interacting directly with the justice system, or indirectly in the case close family or friends. This included incarceration experiences, interactions with the police and the courts, as well as fear of these institutions.</td>
<td>Justice System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I was an adult in Saskatoon Correctional I was affiliated with the Indian Posse.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's because at 20 years old I was sitting in the penitentiary and watching my life fly by.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(total of 39 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td>The positive or negative influence of programs directed at gangs, addictions and delinquency. This included programming through the justice system as well as community based programs addressing addictions, gangs and dysfunctional families.</td>
<td>Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That's one thing with all these guys here; we're all willing to face that noise together. You know, one on one.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There's no programming where the whole family is one dealing with the problems all together.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(total of 28 coded text segments – sample segments provided)*</td>
<td>The ability to meet the basic needs of the participants and their families</td>
<td>Survival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I started out stealing bikes and stealing what we can to make sure we’re fed.

I figured well we gotta, I’ve got to support my family somehow.

specifically; food, shelter and safety. This did not include the desire for more money once basic needs had been met.

* The full description of all coded segments included is stored with the author.

4.3 Constructing the Networks

As suggested by Attride-Stirling (2001), the themes that emerged are adopted as basic themes. These themes must now be considered in terms of "larger, shared issues" (p. 392) to reveal the organizing and global themes.

In this case, by reviewing the basic themes and the issues discussed, two common and important threads were identified. Whether or not the participants could exercise control over a basic theme, and whether the primary impact of the theme was the individual, his immediate environment, or society in general.

Further refinement of the organizing themes was aided by the coding process as illustrated in Table 4.3. The process of examining and understanding the basic themes in the context of the data as a whole facilitated the emergent definitions of the organizing themes in the inductive manner described by Attride-Stirling. It is important to acknowledge that these organizing themes emerged not only from these shared threads, but also from the participant's understanding of these threads. In other words, it was as much about whether the participants stated they could exercise control over a basic theme as it was about whether in fact they could exercise that control. Similarly, their perception of what segment of society was impacted was the determining factor with
respect to where they were placed within the global themes. These emergent organizing themes and their parameters are illustrated in Table 4.4.

In deducing the global theme, Attride-Stirling acknowledges that more than one global theme may emerge from the data and that the global themes should be summaries of the "main claim, proposition, argument, assertion or assumption of the organizing themes" (p. 393) in light of the basic themes. This suggests a flow from the basic themes through the organizing themes to arrive at a global theme that encapsulates the main point of the text. In this case, the global theme could, in its simplest form, be factors leading to and sustaining gang involvement. The challenge this presents is that some of the basic themes have a differential impact depending on whether they influenced a participant to join a gang, or to remain in a gang. Furthermore, survival, media and material gains were influential factors in joining gangs but were not influential in sustaining gang involvement. This differential impact suggested two global themes; one centered on factors related to initiating gang involvement and the second on factors that sustained gang involvement. Table 4.4. illustrates the how each of the sixteen basic themes are linked to one of the three organizing themes. It also illustrates that all three organizing themes are linked to both global themes.

Table 4.4: From Basic Themes to Organizing and Global Themes (Adapted from Attride-Stirling, 2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Themes</th>
<th>Organizing Themes</th>
<th>Global Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>Societal: Themes common to all or most of society.</td>
<td>Joining: Themes commonly found to have influenced the participant's decisions to becoming gang involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Generally not within the control of the participants.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice System</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survival</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Personal: Themes that affected participants at an</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material Gains</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Esteem and Empowerment</td>
<td>individual level and was generally within their control.</td>
<td>Staying: Themes commonly found to have influenced the participant's decision to remain gang involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour Support System</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addictions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Environmental: Themes that affect only specific groups within society and may or may not be within the participant's control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure Activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having identified the basic, organizing and global themes, Attride-Stirling (2001) suggests they next be illustrated as a "non-hierarchical, web-like" (p. 393) thematic map with each global theme having its own thematic network. In this case, the two global themes are closely related and illustrated in a single thematic map with each global theme at the center of its own thematic network as suggested by Attride-Stirling.
Figure 4.1: Thematic Map (Adapted from Attride-Stirling, 2001)
4.4 Describing and Exploring the Networks

The basic, organizing and global themes are systematically described and explored in the manner suggested by Attride-Stirling (2001). This step involves viewing the data through the thematic map to reveal the underlying patterns that exist, linking them to each other.

Attride-Stirling (2001) suggests this be done systematically and in a sequential order to assist in the presentation and understanding of the material. This material will be presented starting with the basic themes associated with the environmental organizing theme. Each of the six basic themes is discussed in order moving clockwise around the thematic map beginning with education and ending with family. Following the environmental organizing theme, a similar process is employed with the personal organizing theme followed by the societal organizing theme. After the exploration of the organizing themes, each global theme is discussed in relation to the contributions of the three organizing themes.

4.4.1 Environmental Organizing Theme

The environmental organizing theme is explained and understood as a function of the contributions of six basic themes:

1. Education
2. Influence of Others
3. Leisure Activity
4. Neighbourhood
5. Security
6. Family

4.4.1.1 Education

Four of the participants described school as a positive experience.

It was good; we attended every day with my friend. (Participant #2)
I was actually a smart kid when I was...I was...when I lived in Ontario and when I lived in Saskatchewan here I was always an A - B student, I was always kind of a smart kid. (Participant #4)

Four other participants described school as a negative experience. However, where school was viewed as negative it was due to challenges primarily involving family breakdowns, behavioural issues and conflict with the criminal justice system arising both within and outside of the school environment.

Yeah, [the youth detention center] lost everything so I got out and I took (unintelligible) I was just like yeah whatever, it was free money, it was like whatever, next thing you know I'm in grade 11 or 10 or 9 one of them. I was like fuck I'm not doing this shit again. You know, I just did it all, just went through it all man I just completed all this shit. I just did all these tests and everything. (Participant #1)

My grades started falling when my mom and dad started fighting. (Participant #4)

I can remember fighting teachers left, right and center. The School that used to be over here. I remember that teacher Mr Jones (Pseudonym) he was choking me out, I must have been like 7, 8 years old. I hit him square in the nuts and he dropped, I just seen my opportunity. I lost it on him and I got him fired. Cause all the kids there and my aunty was walking in the building and she seen me getting choked out by this grown man. (Participant #6)

There was acknowledgement by the participants that a focus on school, especially at a younger age, may function as what the literature refers to as a protective factor:

...I asked this one person, actually this one time I said how come you never get caught up in this shit. He just basically told me ‘like I stayed away from all that you know, I wasn't around with you guys.’ I said yeah well how did you do it you know? He said I just stayed focused on my school. (Participant #3)

I never really had a chance to go to school. Because I was so caught up in everything, I never really tried to go to school. I went a few times but high school I didn't really go at all... you know trying or be out with my friends. (Participant #5)

In linking education to the appropriate organizing theme, two criteria were examined. First, whether the participants felt they had control over this theme, and
second, whether it impacted them individually, as part of a particular segment of society or more generally impacts everyone at a societal level.

The participants positioned their experiences with education as something they controlled; however, they also discussed the factors that lead to their educational experiences as things they could not control, making it consistent with the criteria for the environmental organizing theme as something that disproportionately affected specific segments of society. These uncontrollable circumstances included their family situation and their socio-economic status. From the perspective of impact, the participants indicated they were affected in unique ways because of their socio-economic or family status.

When I was young, I wanted to be on a basketball team in school and shit but fuck I just ended up going to foster home and switching schools all the time. (Participant #2)

My attendance was next to nil because I was out there making money. (Participant #3)

Well, my attitude changed after my parents split up. I kind of didn't give a fuck after you know. (Participant #7)

I just stopped going to school. I was three months into grade 12 and then I just decided to quit. (Participant #9)

Collectively, the examination of the criteria of impact and control leads to the conclusion that the basic theme of education is aligned with the environmental organizing theme.

4.4.1.2 Influence of Others

Most of the participants pointed to a person, or in some cases groups of people, that strongly influenced them with respect to becoming gang involved. These were usually individuals they had frequent contact with and, all too often, were family
members. Where gang involvement was considered to be the norm within a family environment, it seemed to be almost inevitable that these impressionable young men eventually followed in their family's footsteps. This type of family influence emerged repeatedly as a powerful impetus for gang involvement, especially where the influence began at a young age. Importantly, the family influence included the extended family as well:

My older cousin was the first one to get me high off oil on the stove and I was 10 years old. It was like a whole bunch of boys he used to hang out with. I was just a young kid and I started hanging out with him. Now he's like in a top position in NS [Native Syndicate]. (Participant #2)

My brother, he was my higher up. I wanted to be like him, yeah looked up to him a lot. (Participant #3)

Well my dad was always; my real dad was a gang member. So seeing him kind of growing up, I remember seeing him hanging out with his buddies and it didn't seem like they had any cares in the world. They had everything they needed, they had money, if they wanted a new car they got a new car, if they wanted a new bike they got a new bike. I remember seeing my dad sell drugs and stuff like that. I remember when I was a kid watching my dad, and people would come up to him and they'd give him money and he'd give them some tin foil. I thought wow that's the business I want to get in selling tin foil; there must be good money selling tin foil. I remember seeing my dad sell drugs and stuff so. (Participant #4)

I was born into it. My family, my mom and brothers, my older brother was NS. I grew up around the gang scene as a kid so I already knew all about it. (Interview Subject #5)

My earliest memory was probably when I was with my dad's father and all his brothers. That's when I learned the aspect of a gang. (Participant #6)

I found out that a few of my relatives, cousins were part of a gang back then that was called the Crips and I hung around for a while. I finally got jumped in, jumped in is where you get brought in to the gang. (Participant #8)

No my older brother, he came to the reserve with a blue bandana, I was 13 years old. But within that time I already knew what a gang was you know, because I just, but I felt like you know I was like okay well, the gangs, I was like okay well what is the gang you know I wanted to get more intell about it I wanted to know more of the details of it, the protocols of it all and so my brother came through as he started staying with us again. He filled it in with everything, handed me a blue bandana you know he told me what it comes with, what the
consequences are. You know and I took it and that's (unintelligible), I took an oath to it I guess you could say, and I took it with honour and you know that's the life I lived right then you know since then it's like I never looked back always went forward with what I done, and yah growing up I was a Crip....Crip.

(Participant #10)

Family members unquestionably emerged as a powerful influence; however, friends and acquaintances could be equally influential. Frequently the influence was not a matter of deliberately pushing the subject into a gang. Instead, it was influence by example, which appears to have been especially powerful when it was someone admired and respected by the individual.

David [Pseudonym] was one of my good friends. We were gang banging. Starting like 96 yeah, yeah like the little group we called in the crew back in the day. Just a group of friends that were in and out of [the youth detention center].

(Participant #8)

And my sister was 13 and she had a boyfriend that was 18 so it was all good with my mom, he was always in and out of the house. He'd always bring stolen stuff to the house. Like stolen property and then he like made the house look good with stolen stuff. So my sister liked him and I started to like him because he made the house look good and he always gave me cash and shit... Mark [pseudonym] was his name, he's like uhm so what's your gang called? I didn't know what a gang was, so I said what's a gang you know? So he started explaining what a gang was you know you look out for each other you know. (Participant #10)

The influence of these people was gradual in the sense that gang involvement was something that slowly evolved within the social dynamics of the group. Sometimes individuals were aware of it, other times they were part of a gang before they realized it:

You know I'm in school and (unintelligible) and ever since then I started hanging out with badder people and getting high right away... my friends and they ended up in NSK [Native Syndicate Killers] decked out in red all the time and I was wearing it and like, I remember I was standing in front of the [bar] with all these boys ... I didn't realize this color would fucken change my whole life and my whole perspective. (Participant #2)

So I was always going to school with gang members or people that were affiliated with gang members. So I started hanging out with them you know and then ... Eventually I started like learning all about the streets. (Participant #3)
Started hanging out with guys from North Central, Martin [Pseudonym] you know, those (unintelligible) and we all kind of grew up together. (Participant #4)

Once labeled as a gang member by either themselves or others, these individuals quickly moved into more mainstream gang life by switching to more established gangs.

This little gang started off with four or five boys and it escalated to like fucken 60. (Participant #2)

I found out that a few of my relatives, cousins were part of a gang back then that was called the Crips and I hung around for a while. I finally got jumped in, jumped in is where you get brought in to the gang. After I started hanging around with like older people, like much too old for myself. They were part of NS, from there I patched over and at the age of 12 I was NS. (Participant #9)

The final way the influence of others led to gang involvement was through direct and deliberate recruitment. Bringing in new members is an expectation of every gang member and a way to move up the hierarchy of the gang. It is clear that these prospects are valued because they serve the interests of the gang:

I first noticed that the Warriors came around first and people were starting to get recruited into the Warriors. Then I got put into the Correctional Center and he got put into the Correctional Center. That's when NS really kind of got involved in Regina because he started recruiting guys in the Corrections Center. I ended up getting recruited. (Participant #4)

What happens is, you get, you find out, like he'll get brought in by somebody ... Say if I was already NS and you were a friend of mine, and I thought you would have enough parts to be in, you know enough heart to be in the same gang as I was in. I would bring you to my higher up and introduce you. What my higher up would do is send you on some missions to kind of see where your heads at, where your minds at, where your hearts at, and see how far he can push you, what kinds of orders you would take and actually to it. If he liked you and you did everything you were told to do you would be brought in as a striker. If you were smart enough and you were intelligent enough and you had enough heart, and you know big balls you know you would go up the ladder. (Participant #4)

They try to brainwash young ones. They tell them you can get away with this, that's why they get little kids to do stuff. (Participant #7)

In one case, the participant viewed recruitment as an act of kindness, something that would make life easier for a young person:
There's little kids just coming up, exactly the same situations sometimes and you know how it is to be low at that level. So you don't want to see that guy go through the same thing you do, so you try to lend your hand out. Show him what you know then he can fend for himself out there to keep himself fed. Like that's really all it is, you just bring the boy around you don't bring him down. It's not like your taking advantage of him you know. Cause your just giving him the help that you were taught from the other guy you were looking up to, that's how it really is. (Participant #5)

While this kind of influence clearly attracts young men to the gang lifestyle, it can also be a powerful influence in getting them out. These former gang members see themselves as having the credibility and experience to be able to break through to individuals contemplating joining a gang, as well as those fully immersed in gang lifestyle:

I kind of showed him we can't be doing that kind of life style. He actually joined up NS with me for a while. Then when I got out he got out with me. (Interview Subject #1)

I'm sharing my experiences and the reality of what it's really like with other people, you know with strangers with kids you know with the youth and it's like I'm making an impact on their lives. I'm helping communities all across Canada; you know it's like communities with gang problems and stuff. So to be able to go from being an active gang member to being a youth mentor you could say. It's a big sigh of relief and I feel it's an accomplishment. (Participant #3)

I always put myself in places where I can meet youth. So I can start trying to make something of myself. Not just myself but just trying to show a lot of kids what life really is. (Participant #5)

Someone to try to lead them the right way I guess you could say. Like when we go out to talk to people we actually try to sit there and listen. Like if I'd had that when I was younger in the 80s or early 90s, might have been something different. (Participant #8)

I'd just tell him you know, give him a heads up. What's out there, what to expect. Like I tell my little brother I guess you know you keep going the way you're going you're gonna up in jail for the rest of your life, or end up dead. Or you're just going to end up living on the streets living day by day, stealing for your day, stealing for your meals. If that's the life you want to live, then choose it. But it's going to be hard man, you're going to have to live hard to survive. I've been there you know done that and witnessed it. It took me years to realize, to actually kick back into reality. (Participant #10)
In determining which organizing theme the basic theme *influence of others* belongs, the criteria of control and impact are once again examined. It is clear from the data that in some cases gang members can control this factor, especially in their comments around using their experience to exert positive influences over young people. Alternatively, they appeared to have little control when experiencing the influence of others when they were young. Immersion in a family with gang ties also appears to reduce the level of influence of the participants.

The impact of this theme appears to be differentially focused on segments of society that are vulnerable and have limited means to escape this influence. It may be their family status, their neighbourhood or their social group but it clearly impacted these participants in ways other aspects of society did not experience. The combination of limited control and differential impact places *influence of others* within the *environmental* organizing theme.

4.4.1.3 Leisure Activity

The idea that a lack of legitimate leisure activities may lead to gang involvement presented itself in a rather unique way. Only two of the participants identified it directly as a contributing factor to gang involvement:

When I was young, I wanted to be on a basketball team in school and shit but fuck I just ended up going to foster home and switching schools all the time. (Participant #2)

...at least I would have been doing positive things you know. Playing basketball every day, doing something you know. That would have been better than sitting on the block with your friends. Going around stealing cars with your friends actually keeping occupied playing basketball or going out places. (Participant #5)

The relatively few individuals that highlighted leisure activities as a significant issue in their lives might be an indication that this particular factor is not strongly linked to gang
involvement. However, when asked what they would suggest might keep young kids out of gangs, most of them strongly endorsed leisure activities as a preventative measure:

A little rec center with a basketball gym you could practice and shit in. That's what I'll do ‘cause I've got my little brother now. (Participant #2)

Open an after school program right in the hood, because that's where the problem is originating from. And I would open a facility where they could go play basketball you know whatever floor hockey. And even make a studio too; you know we got a studio here. Open up a studio so that way, those that are musically talented can make their own music. (Participant #3)

Find stuff to do, find stuff to go out and do. There's a lot of stuff you can do. You know stuff you don't got to pay for. You can go to the park and have fun there. (Participant #7)

Keeping kids out would be like having like activities like gym they have around town here, go catch a movie. Even take them to a game of pool, if they're teenagers that are already drinking take them to a pool hall and show them there is actually fun behind pool without a beer. Keep them busy for young people. (Participant #8)

These comments suggest that a lack of leisure activities was a contributing factor in joining a gang, even though they don't explicitly state that relationship. Furthermore, legitimate leisure activities were also raised as something they pursued as part of their gang exit strategies. While not explicitly linking lack of legitimate leisure activities to their initial decision to become gang involved, it was understood to be a gap in their lives and in their efforts to exit the gang.

… What helps me is sitting in that studio putting those earphones on and shutting the world out and just having some me time. (Participant #1)

I like going to play basketball and actually doing something to keep me busy away from everything all this and actually feel normal. (Participant #5)

I actually skipped out like a year cause for a whole year I was dancing Pow Wow too with my auntie. (Participant #10)
In considering which organizing theme leisure activity is most closely related to, once again the matter of control and impact are examined. Whether or not leisure activities were offered, and whether or not the participants were able to access them are factors largely outside of the control of each participant. This is particularly true when they were very young. Furthermore, it tends to affect people based on the geographic area and socio-economic group to which they belong. Suggestions by the participants that more leisure activities would help curtail gang activity indicates that there is a dearth of legitimate leisure activities in the neighbourhoods the participants frequented. Therefore, the impact was neither limited individually to them or equally to all aspects of society. As a result leisure activities fall within the environmental organizing theme.

4.4.1.4 Neighbourhood

All of the former gang members interviewed had a connection to Regina and, in most cases, to the city’s less desirable neighbourhoods. Only two of them were born and raised in Regina. Two others moved to Regina from other provinces, and six moved to Regina from rural communities in Saskatchewan. The question explored is whether their neighbourhoods were influential in their decisions with respect to gang involvement. Although this analysis is not necessarily linked only to their neighbourhood experiences in Regina, that is where most of the comments by the participants were focused.

In Regina there are two areas which these individuals seemed to frequent during their gang involvement. These areas are referred to as the core and north central Regina. Both the core and north central neighbourhoods are older, located at the periphery of the downtown area, and characterized as primarily lower-income areas with the highest crime rates in the city.
I was right in the hood, north central of Regina. (Participant #3)

Every time I'd run away from home, of course I was going to run to North Central because there was kids there that were going through the same problems as I was going through and it just seemed like I connected with these guys you know I just connected with these type of people. Even though my parents never really lived in North Central I'd always end up running there and I'd always end up getting picked up there by the cops. (Participant #4)

It appears these individuals moved into these neighbourhoods and began to associate with other displaced young people, eventually forming social bonds with them.

So I was always going to school with gang members or people that were affiliated with gang members. So I started hanging out with them you know and then ... Eventually I started like learning all about the streets. (Participant #3)

I wanted to be like the guys that I seen on the street you know. (Participant #5)

Well, it all started when I moved from the reserve back to the city. I hung around with kids from the neighbourhood I wasn't even familiar with, because I just moved here. (Participant #9)

It is important to note that many of these individuals still call these areas home even after leaving the gangs. Following their departure from the gang, two participants discussed the fulfillment they found in working to help repair the damage they feel they did to these neighbourhoods while they were active in the gang:

Like the house I built, I sweat, like that's one positive thing. I like to use that every now and then. (Participant #1)

Why I like going there is because, it's for people in that neighbourhood to bring their bikes in, or the kids if their bike's wrecked we can fix it. To me to do that is to feel good because I never had that when I was younger, in that neighbourhood especially. I actually feel like I'm giving back to something I wrecked, helped destroy. So it's a little bike; makes me feel better, so I enjoy it. (Participant #8)

These neighbourhoods did appear to facilitate gang involvement; if for no other reason than these vulnerable individuals came together there. The atmosphere created by lower socio-economic status combined with a concentration of at-risk young people
created an environment favourable to the formation of gangs. It did not function as a protective factor because these vulnerable individuals migrated to these neighbourhoods even if they didn't necessarily live there. Working to make these neighbourhoods better after gang involvement appears to provide fulfillment and satisfaction thereby potentially supporting their exit strategies.

The environmental organizing theme is characterized by partial control over the theme as well as impact that affects particular segments of society. While it might be argued that these individuals had control over their neighbourhood because they could simply move, in fact they often moved to these neighbourhoods as young children or because of their socio-economic situation. As a result, they had some, but not complete control over where they lived. Furthermore, by living primarily in these neighbourhoods they were differentially impacted by the conditions in the neighborhood. As a result, the basic theme of *neighbourhood* falls within the environmental organizing theme.

**4.4.1.5 Security**

Somewhat surprisingly, security did not emerge as a strong factor in promoting gang involvement. Although some individuals did suggest they were afraid of the gang members within their community and found solace in having the protection of their own association with a gang, it was not strongly indicated as a motive to join.

Some people died. My auntie's nephew her son Richard [pseudonym] got shot with a shot gun and he died. Then my dad's brother got shot by the same people and he died. And then after that man, I don't know, I started fucken, they are ended up in jail and shit, I started hanging out with my family Lonnie and Curtis, then they died. I was like holy fuck man, I was like, I joined NL because I didn't want to be labelled NSK. (Participant #2)

I think it's a lot to do with fear, they can't admit it that they are scared. (Participant #3)
We pretty much had to fend for ourselves. We all kind of grew up knowing we're going to have to protect ourselves. (Participant #4)

Security does appear to have had a strong connection with sustaining gang involvement after they joined. Involvement with gangs appeared to generate a paranoia causing them to conclude they were safer in the gang than if they were to leave:

Police brutality and racism. So we'd always get pulled over, always something with the cops like, they were always beating us up. (Participant #1)

I remember one of those guys were like, it's hard being NSK. Then the next guy in front of him was like, so what you want to quit, like that. He's like man it's hard, he's like everyone around us wants to kill us. (Participant #2)

I think they're scared. I was kind of scared when I dropped I was like well what's going to happen to me. You know like, but I mean like I think most of them that go in and out of jail and when they go to jail they get you know protection from the gang, they get you know they get respect, backing and stuff like that. That's a big prevention right there. (Participant #3)

So it just kind of came together because you had a common beef. (Participant #5)

Uhm, what's going to happen, it's not knowing. Yeah that's it, it's not knowing what's going to happen. Are you going to be able to walk around after? Are you going to be able to face the noise? That's one thing with all these guys here; we're all willing to face that noise together. You know, one on one. (Participant #6)

This fear of the outside world also included a fear of what their own gang would do to them if they left. Gang culture dictates that gang members must suffer some form of physical beating if they wish to exit the gang, often referred to as taking their minutes (Wasacase, 2006). However, this does not necessarily guarantee that the gang will leave them alone. The fear of secondary retaliation, combined with the ingrained fear of other gangs, left them with significant personal safety concerns after deciding to leave.

When you stopped hanging out with the NSK guys, was there retaliation? Yeah, I could tell man. Mean mugs, gunning me off, just staring at me shit like that. Fucken threatening me. (Participant #2)
They're always going to hold a grudge, like I couldn't go see some of my old bros. Like if I ever seen my bros, he'd probably shoot me, stab me, whatever he has. (Participant #6)

There is gang members that want to get man out, but they're just stuck with that fear man. (Participant #9)

Wrote a letter to my higher up whose, well you know how they, in jail provincial here and mailed it to him wrote him a letter told him what's up. That day on he's like you know James [Pseudonym] is like a dead man walking to our gang now. Because of what he did you know because he didn't follow orders you know he didn't show honour you know with what he's supposed to do with his role. (Participant #10)

Fear is not something unique to this group of participants. However, the violent reality their fears are based on differentiates them from most segments of society. These kinds of fears are focused on a small segment of society, many of which are already in a gang. These individuals did demonstrate some level of control over their security because they were able to exit the gangs despite their concerns. Regardless, the environment they occupied, and in some cases their youth, made control fleeting at best. They saw few alternatives to gang involvement in attempting to address these security concerns. The basic theme of security functions within the environmental organizing theme.

4.4.1.6 Family

Family clearly emerged as one of the more powerful influences on the lives of the participants both as a risk and as a protective factor. With the exception of one participant, all reported coming from broken homes. In some cases, they grew up in foster families, while others were raised in single-parent families, or a combination of the two. In virtually all cases, there was a consistent theme of caregivers being ill-equipped to address the challenges of raising children.
Yeah so I was out there for a bit, and then I was there with my mom again, I went back there. And then ah, my mom couldn't handle me, my step dad couldn't handle me my uncles and aunts and brothers were all getting fed up with me. (Participant #1)

My mom was an alcoholic, my dad wasn't there. (Participant #2)

...it put a lot of pressure on me to support the family. I figured the only way I could do that was the way these other guys were doing it. You know selling drugs you know, putting out hookers stuff like that. (Participant #3)

My home life wasn't so great when I was a kid. My mom and dad were severe drug addicts and alcoholics. Growing up, it wasn't a very good home to be living in. (Participant #4)

My family was very broken up, very heavily into drug use. My mom was dealing my mom has dealt for a long time. (Participant #5)

I had no real support, no real guidelines, no parents; I came from a broken home. (Participant #6)

One of the participants described a relatively healthy home environment that degenerated as a result of family break up or emerging addiction issues.

I stayed at my moms and pretty much ... I was raised in a good family. I had everything given to me but I wasn't listening. Yeah my dad gave up on me too and he dropped me off at my uncles. I took off from there as soon as my dad did that. And then I was pretty much a runaway I guess. (Participant #7)

Participant #10 described the impact of a pivotal moment with his mother when she first smoked drugs with him:

And I smoked those joints, and I remember that day like it was yesterday because it was the first time my mom sat down with me and got me high. I felt good about it, it made me feel like, right on, you know. I actually feel cool now, you know what I mean, I am accepted into their little group that their getting high and everything. (Participant #10)

This participant goes on to explain how his drug use became more open resulting in a group of friends frequenting his house to use drugs, evolving into the core of what might be called a small street gang.
I felt good about it, it made me feel like, right on you know. I actually feel cool now you know what I mean I am accepted into their little group that their getting high and everything with, and then I had friends coming and going and getting high in the house in the basement where my room was... like I said I was trying to represent for my little group cause I was the one always making moves. They liked it so it kind of gave me the adrenalin to go hard and go to higher measures and see what else I could to at a young age you know. (Participant #10)

Abuse within the family was suggested as something that pushed children toward delinquency and gang involvement. A participant described his feelings after experiencing abuse at the hands of his father:

I didn't feel no self worth I just felt like a punching bag you know. So when I started feeling like that, my self-confidence and self-esteem started to go down and so did my grades. (Participant #4)

This participant elaborated how gang involvement helped build and foster a sense of self-confidence and self-esteem as well as isolating him from the physical abuse.

When I did decide enough was enough, I ran away from home. I started hanging out with guys from North Central... their families weren't any different than my family, their mom and dads were just as messed up as my mom and dad. So who am I going to connect with, I'm going to connect with these guys. (Participant #4)

The last and perhaps most powerful negative role played by the gang within the discussion on dysfunctional families was that of pseudo-family. Where individuals did not feel the love and support they expected from their biological or extended family, they found a substitute among gang members.

It really separated me from my real family, like I'd see them but you know it was like, I wouldn't be able to have a conversation with them. I'd be sitting there, it's like ‘kay well I got this on my mind you know fuckin ... I'd start to talk about it right. Because like whatever was happening in the gang I didn't want to expose it to them and have them dwell on it and shit like that. Whatever happened I just kept it to myself and then you know it was like I had nothing to talk about with them you know like, nothing at all. (Participant #3)

I felt like these guys love me and they cared for me. And they would be there for me whenever I needed them. I think for a lot of people and a lot of guys, that's part of the reasons why a lot of these young people join gangs is because they were never shown too much love and respect growing up. But if you're not
getting shown that at home you're going to be shown that in a gang. (Participant #4)

There's a lot of aboriginal youth, and non-aboriginal youth that don't have that father figure. They're looking for it but they end up finding it in the wrong places. You know because growing up in a home, growing up the way we grew up, that's the only thing we actually wanted. Cause we never really grew up because a lot of people that grew up out here in Regina, there's a lot of the youth the young men didn't have that father figure what so ever. (Participant #5)

Interestingly, while these negative family experiences had a powerful influence on the participants with respect to becoming gang involved, family also emerged as a powerful factor in encouraging these individuals to leave the gang lifestyle. Almost without exception, the pivotal reason for exiting the gang was related to their desire to create a better family environment for their own children or, in some cases, siblings.

I wasn't spending enough time at home with my kids. I wasn't prioritizing them. (Participant #1)

I don't want my kids taken away like my mom. (Participant #2)

I wanted to have an honest life, you know 'cause my father wasn't there for me. I only seen my dad twice in my life once driving by and once at my grandfather's funeral, you know and then then he committed suicide in 92. So, I was like well I gotta be a better father than he was. (Participant #3)

I had a 5-year-old son and I spent most of my son's time while I was in prison. I just didn't want to live like that and I opened up my eyes. It took me a while. (Participant #5)

I have an 8-year-old daughter and she's seen me go through everything. I've had her since she was three weeks old. Her mother is, sad to say, on her death bed today. Like she used to come visit me in jail. It came to the point where I had one Christmas visit and I wanted to hold my daughter ... Then after that I got out, she like daddy no more glass visits, no more phone calls. She was four years old man, that's pretty powerful for a kid to say that. I haven't been in jail since. (Participant # 6)

This powerful influence as a result of the participant's desire for family support and love was perhaps best articulated by one particular participant when discussing his motivation for continuing the day-to-day challenges of leaving the gang:
Yeah and that was an awesome dream. Just sitting across from my son and him talking to me. And his mom saying oh you know like your son's here you know visiting us whatever. We're in our own house and he's coming over to visit us, that was a sweet-ass dream. It was awesome man, it's amazing where my mind is going now, what I care about more. You know I don't care about all that color shit, I don't want to be in jail. I want to be out here watching my son grow up. You know I want to be there to rely on you know, him to come to me when he has girl problems. I strive for that every day. Once I'm done here I'm going home; family time. You know wake up tomorrow and do it all over again. (Participant #1)

The analyses suggest that, the level and frequency of family dysfunction the participants experienced appears to disproportionally impact the segment of society inhabited by these individuals. The interviews strongly indicated that the family dysfunction that initially leads to gang involvement occurred within their immediate and extended family when they were children. Alternatively, later in life their families functioned as more of a protective factor assisting and motivating them to disengage with gangs. This suggests that family is not entirely within their control. As children, they have little control over their family; however, as adults their ability to control the circumstances of their family life tends to grow. As a result, family is linked to the environmental organizing theme as both a risk and protective factor.

4.4.2. Personal Organizing Theme

The personal organizing theme is composed of five basic themes:

1. Behaviour support system
2. Self Esteem and Empowerment
3. Addictions
4. Material Gains
5. Control
4.4.2.1 Behaviour Support System

Gang involvement, as something that intensifies antisocial behaviour, presented itself in two different ways within these interviews. First, there were those that were involved with crime prior to gang involvement. The connection with a gang served to facilitate the continuation of that delinquent lifestyle. These individuals were not attracted to the gang lifestyle in the beginning. They simply saw it as a way of making them better and more efficient at their criminal activity:

And I joined them, and they were just doing the same thing I was doing sling drugs and shit out there.  (Participant #1)

Like when I got out here this last time I got into money laundering and all this other stuff so I learned how to do that which was pretty good.  (Participant #1)

I started stealing cars, robbing people, doing break and enters.  Like I was oblivious to the gang situation that time.  (Participant #2)

I started like learning all about the streets... how to sell coke and how to weigh coke and you know stuff like that.  How to sell weed, weigh weed and shit and bag it.  Then it went from selling drugs to doing missions with them.  Like doing home invasions, robberies stuff like that.  I didn't actually become a gang member until I was 18.  (Participant #3)

For others, the gang seemed to have evolved out of their social group. Criminal activity may or may not have been part of their social group, but it was the social circle rather than the criminal behaviour that attracted them to the gang:

The social network like, I noticed when I dropped and I got out I was like where the fuck did all my bros go, you know like where's all my friends.  It took me a while to get to gain friends, you know real friends to get back to normal.  (Participant #3)

So I was always the leader, all the time I was number ... while I was a follower that's what made me take the steps I took was being a follower but in my own way I was a leader you know.  Growing up with the group I hung with I was always leading...so I got friends over like and uhm would always hang at my house you know in the garage.  (Participant #10)
In both cases, gang involvement supported and intensified pre-existing behaviour. It also clearly sustained gang involvement as long as the social or criminal behaviour was still attractive. The realization that the gang was using him to make money was pointed to as the reason one participant elected to leave the gang:

When somebody would come around I'd break ‘em off a little bit it, just give ‘em something you know. I wasn't going to give ‘em it all, that was my work, they didn't do that. (Participant #9)

For other participants attracted by the social aspects of gang involvement, personal crisis preceded decisions to leave the gang. This opened the eyes of two participants to the unpleasant reality of their relationships within the gang:

I remember sitting in the hospital and thinking okay these guys are going to come visit me you know these guys are going to come see how I'm doing and stuff like that. No one ever come. The only person that come to visit me was my girlfriend and my family. (Participant #4)

When the time came down to it, no one was there, no one was by my bedside when I was in the hospital. I was in rough shape. No one came; they get no cards, nothing like that. What the hell am I doing with these people if they're not going to support me or come to my bedside, or come ask me how I'm doing. That's what hurt me the most, made me cry. I put everything, all I had into this, that lifestyle and here I am you know. (Participant #7)

These realizations appear to have been instrumental in pushing these gang-involved individuals to leave the gang and to change their lives for the better. In reality, the majority of them continued their criminal activity after leaving the gang without the benefit of gang involvement. In three cases, participants left one gang only to join another.

*Behavioural support* as a factor in gang involvement manifests its impacts on a very personal level. Among the participants, those with a predisposition to criminal lifestyles and those seeking the comfort of a particular social environment appeared to be vulnerable. As such, it does not appear to affect society in general. It also appears to be
highly controllable at an individual level. Individuals demonstrated an ability to join
gangs and subsequently to leave them. Since the primary impact of this factor appears to
be on a very personal level and the participants were able to exercise substantial control
to enter a gang, change gangs and leave gangs on the basis of this factor, it falls within
the *personal* organizing theme.

**4.4.2.2 Self-Esteem and Empowerment**

A consistent theme throughout the interviews was the power and prestige that
gangs offered when the participants were young and impressionable. In a majority of
cases, it was family members, in other cases it was while in jail and in one case it was
just seeing these gang members in the neighbourhood. In all instances, however, the
participants were left with the impression that these were powerful self-confident
individuals who commanded respect. The respect and power they observed and then later
felt as gang members seemed to replace some of the dignity they could not otherwise
obtain in their lives.

They didn't learn right away. I think too much was given to them. I think the
power kind of got to some of the young guy's heads and they ended up
committing murders and shit. (Participant #1)

Yeah even other people. Yeah like people would come up to us and like yeah I
heard this shit you know. Treat you different. Yeah, it's like they would bow
down to us, it's just like, you know for what. (Participant #3)

I'm going to be respected here. (Participant #4)

You get a power when you have that bandana. When I wore that bandana, I felt
like nothing can stop me. ‘Cause you can walk down the street and you see
people running away from you. You know driving and you see guys running. It's
a different feeling. It is the best feeling you can get when you're that age, the
adrenalin is so, you know your blood gets pumping, it's something different.
(Participant #5)

I walked into this house; we were supposed to go shut it down. I had my mask on
and I was going in there and all of a sudden (imitated the sound of a gun being
worked) that's all I heard, I heard that Mossman pump. Then (sound of gun being
fired), got scared, really scared I didn't want to move. My brother took off his mask, took his head around the corner. Buddy dropped the gun, dumped his pockets, opened the safe and ran out the door. I was just like, that's what I want to be. (Participant #6)

There was also an attraction more akin to the attributes of a pseudo-family than respect and intimidation:

I think the reason why I joined the Native Syndicate was, you know I needed to be ... I actually felt like these guys cared about me, and I actually felt like these guys loved me as a brother. Things back then were a lot different than they are now. All the guys that joined NS at that time were all guys that I grew up with. (Participant #4)

It's about the money, the family, the camaraderie. (Participant #1)

I liked the feeling of actually being a part of a family because my mom and everything were all fucked up. I actually felt like I actually had a family even though we were a bunch of boys. (Participant #5)

No one wanted me, my mom didn't want me, I wanted that belonging feeling so I was introduced to some of my old friends, such as like NS. There's a bunch of us, you know. (Participant #8)

Whether it was the respect and intimidation or the pseudo-family, or both, the dynamics of the gang satisfied a need for camaraderie and power otherwise lacking in their lives.

Once affiliated, the hierarchical structure of the gang further encouraged that need for recognition and power by allowing these individuals to move up the ranks of the organization and gain even more power and control, thus entrenching their commitment to the gang even more:

Yeah, well there is different levels obviously like there's being a Striker, Captain, you know Lieutenant, Sgt at Arms shit like that. Like negotiator ... peace talker yeah there's different aspects of it. (Participant #1)

Pretty much when you're an associate you can go anywhere you want, do anything you want. What I would do is I'd go back and tell the higher ups like hey this is what's going on. You know like I'd give them information about other gangs. That's how I gained their trust, because I was dedicated to one set and loyal to them. (Participant #3)
If you were smart enough and you were intelligent enough and you had enough heart and you know big balls you know you would go up the ladder. From striker you know there's soldier striker and then higher up, then captains you know, then vice president, president but no one ever gets to those unless you been in from the beginning. Most times no one ever gets past soldier, maybe if you've went to the penitentiary and you've done some pretty big missions in the penitentiary and taken out a few enemies you'll become a higher up. (Participant #4)

My role, I was a higher up, I was one of the boys because I been around for such a long time. (Participant #5)

While these elements were clearly a powerful influence on these gang members, the illusion of camaraderie and power could also cause them to have doubts about gang involvement. One individual was suddenly faced with what he was doing to other people:

She gave me her last $200 for a couple grams of coke. Not even two hours later I see her kid sitting in front of Paradise over here on the east side. Just hungry, just hungry and he was sitting there and I'm eating. I was like ‘are you hungry little man’? And he said ‘yeah I haven't eaten in days’. I said what, I just seen you're mom. I grabbed a bunch of groceries for him, took him to his house, put him in his room, told him ‘to keep it for yourself’. Yeah, that really opened my eyes though when he said that to me, because I realized what I just did. I took the food right out of his fridge because his mom wanted to get high. (Participant #6)

Another individual described a pivotal moment in his life during a health crisis wherein the gang failed to live up to his expectations:

When the time came down to it, no one was there, no one was by my bedside when I was in the hospital. I was in rough shape. No one came; they get no cards, nothing like that. What the hell am I doing with these people if they're not going to support me or come to my bedside, or come ask me how I'm doing. That's what hurt me the most, made me cry. I put everything, all I had into this, that lifestyle and here I am you know. (Participant #7)

These epiphanies appear to be a powerful factor in their final decision to leave the gang lifestyle. One subject described that moment for him resulting in the removal of his gang tattoo:

I just grabbed a hot knife and I just burned it both sides of the knife, grabbed the other knife burned it. Yeah it was all white. The next day I just slit it off with a razor blade. (Participant #10)
Self-esteem and empowerment was another factor that impacted these individuals on a very personal level and in more than one way. The influence of this factor on the participants was dependent on them responding to and being sustained by, the pseudo family or power and prestige enticements gangs had to offer. It was a powerful factor for some participants with respect to the initial decision to become gang involved. Furthermore it appears to have sustained involvement through the rewards inherent to the hierarchical structure of the gangs. Ironically, however, this was a double-edged sword, because the failure of the gang to live up to expectations in this regard also led to conclusive decisions to leave the gang. This suggests a significant degree of control over when and how this factor is interpreted and applied by each individual. As such, self-esteem and empowerment falls within the personal organizing theme.

4.4.2.3 Addictions

Seventy percent of the participants were exposed to the addiction issues of family members at an early age:

My mom was an alcoholic; my dad wasn't there. My mom just drank all the time. (Participant #1)

From what I've noticed a lot of the guys that were in gangs, they never had a great home, you know upbringing. Their mom and dad were alcoholics or drug addicts; mom was a prostitute. They were involved, their mom and dad were cocaine addicts or morphine addicts or stuff like. (Participant #4)

She raised me right from two months, she raised me so from there my parents were, my dad he was an alcoholic, my grandma was, my grandpa was too back in the day. (Participant #8)

There was always a lot of drinking and partying going on, a lot of drugs. (Participant #9)

Like I said I came from a broken home, my mom had addictions. (Participant #10)
Whether or not the participant's addictions were a result of a family history or gang involvement that served to facilitate their own addictions:

When I started hitting about 9, 10, 11, 12 I started slipping into the street life with drugs and alcohol. (Participant #1)

You know I don't want to be an alcoholic. (Participant #2)

Eventually we became alcoholics when we started drinking ourselves. I notice now that as our addictions got greater, as we became more addicted to drinking and getting high, I noticed that our crimes became worse. We started off stealing bikes and stuff, and doing those kind of petty crimes, to starting to do break and enters and things like that, and stealing cars and stealing stuff, stealing car stereos and whatever we could you know because we needed more money to feed our addictions. (Participant #4)

I just got sick of it because everyone is out here chasing the same dollar, the same high. And they're supposed to be soldiers they're not supposed to be high, it's pathetic and I got caught up in it too. (Participant #6)

Like I said I was a runaway... used to just get high. (Participant #7)

I started smoking hash at an early age. (Participant #8)

Once in the gang, drugs and alcohol abuse made it very difficult for an individual to leave. Very few of these individuals had the means to sustain their addictions other than through selling drugs. Knowing this, gang leaders ensured their new members were addicted, and thereby controllable:

All those top guys are probably just giving them drugs and getting them high giving them junk. (Participant #2)

I started selling drugs and I started you know doing; you know I started ended up being addicted to drugs and stuff like that. It was all because of being involved in NS [Native Syndicate] and stuff like that. (Participant #4)

Gangs not only facilitated addictions and drug dealing for the participants, but members took a very harsh view of anyone leaving the gang and continuing to sell drugs or involve themselves in criminal activity in which the gang believed that it had a
proprietary interest. These circumstances made it challenging, perhaps even impossible, for people with addictions to leave the gang. In the majority of the interviews, the decision to exit the gang preceded the decision to address their substance abuse problems.

The hardest thing for me do to was, one of the hardest things I've learned from this program is be truthful to myself and how I felt and be truthful to the ones I loved right. I had to admit to my common law that I was addicted to coke. (Participant #1)

All that life skills and shit. So that fucken, all those life skills made me really think and really see what's going on, what I'm doing, what my family is doing. You know I don't want to be an alcoholic. (Participant #2)

Damn it was like I gotta clean up the life I'm living, start walking the right path. Since then it's been a struggle, but you know look at me I'm actually doing good for myself. (Participant #10)

In applying the criteria for which organizing theme the basic theme of addictions best reflects, the apparent ability to recognize and address addictions is important. Furthermore, the participants chose to leave the gang and then address their addictions, as opposed to addressing their addictions then leaving. As a result, while still struggling with addictions they were able to retain some degree control over their gang involvement. The evidence suggests that addictions impacted these individuals at a very personal level with two of the participants indicating they never became alcohol or drug dependent. As a result addictions clearly functions within the boundaries of the personal organizational theme.

4.4.2.4 Material Gains

The theme of material gains for the purpose of this research goes beyond survival or the subject’s basic needs. In other words, this basic theme was not about food and shelter; instead, it was about using gang involvement as a way of obtaining wealth.

Wealth, however, is a relative term; and the participants that were motivated by the desire
for material gains were not necessarily looking for the opulence often associated with media portrayals of the gang lifestyle. Instead, they were often focused on their interpretation of parity with society.

Every day was like a struggle because it was like sitting on couches with no legs you know missing pillows and torn up floors. It was just like shit, there's got to be something better. (Participant #1)

Well I didn't have nothing, I didn't have nothing and they offered me, you know they gave me a TV. (Participant #7)

The challenge for these individuals is they didn't know how else to achieve this goal. Their immediate environment revealed options to them such as drug dealing and theft, and they did not see beyond these alternatives. Gangs presented what appears to be a safe, readymade system for achieving these objectives, through delinquent activity:

...robbing people, ripping off arcade machines, anything, any little petty score I could do to get money. ‘Cause I never had any. (Participant #1)

I guess my main motive why I joined the gang was the money for one. I seen how these guys always have money so I figured okay well I might as well go and make money how these guys were making money. (Participant #3)

... so I figured well nobody wants to be out there hurting people, nobody wants to be out there selling drugs, because when you're selling drugs you have a goal. Your goal is to become rich, have a nice house have a nice family and stuff like that. Really that's the same goal everyone else in the world has. But it's how you're getting there that's wrong. (Participant #4)

Interestingly, once in the gang, this was not a strong factor in sustaining involvement. Although the participants recognized the challenges of making money legitimately, they appeared to view it as a challenge they could manage. The desire for material wealth seemed to decline with long-term gang involvement.

So the money was there, the cloths were there, the hats, the jewelry, everything I worked for ... I remember seeing people get punched out because they didn't do something. But my friends were killing my family behind my back ... made me
really think and really see what's going on, what I'm doing, what my family is doing. (Participant #2)

Researcher: Was the money there that you thought would be there? No because in every situation you gotta spend money to make money. So you have to have the money before you even start, it wasn't what I thought. (Participant #5)

I just got sick of it because everyone is out here chasing the same dollar, the same high. (Participant #6)

You know I used to be hard into hard drugs, selling them ... That's when I found out the consequences you know well what happens to a gang member. That's kind of ... it made me think lots, and I didn't like the fact of looking over my shoulder. (Participant #7)

It's like I just recently I just got paid for all the stuff I was doing. I just paid off all my bills and it made me feel good, at least my bills are paid, and it's legit and I won't get chased down about it. (Participant #8)

It could be argued that this factor falls within the environmental organizing theme because it affected them as part of the lower socio-economic segment of society. However, that over simplifies the impact of the desire for material gain. The interviews revealed that the desire for material gain was not focused on how much money they had, instead it was about their understanding of the mechanisms available to them to achieve material gains. The choices they made were undoubtedly influenced by other risk factors, but were still within their control and affecting them on a highly personal level. Therefore, the desire for material gains functions within the *personal* organizing theme.

4.4.2.5 Control

A second recurring basic theme that emerged in the interviews was an overriding need to exercise some degree of control over their environment. It was not universally prevalent in the way family was, but was revealed as a powerful influence for a majority of the participants. There were individuals who experienced a significant moment in
their lives which illustrated their lack of control over their circumstances. One participant discussed how the death of a close friend made him feel vulnerable:

Then one of my friends died, he got hit by a car. I kind of just, it literally stopped my life you know. I felt different because he wasn't there anymore. (Participant #2)

This individual went on to explain that the loss of his friend combined with feelings of vulnerability caused him to look for ways he could exert power over his life. In retrospect he recognized he was trying to control uncontrollable aspects of his life such as loss of loved ones. While not necessarily looking to become affiliated with a gang, his search for control led him in that direction none the less:

Like I was oblivious to the gang situation that time. I didn't know I was hanging out with NSK [Native Syndicate Killers]. (Participant #2)

The concept of control also included circumstances that lead to the perception that there was no other alternative. Where gangs were a persistent and predominant feature in their environment they felt compelled to join:

So that's why I joined that gang because I didn't want a bunch of NS guys asking me to become NSK. (Participant #2)

I grew up in the system, foster homes until I turned about 14 when I really got involved in the streets. I was gang banging, I was already a part of a gang at 14. (Participant #5)

It was just decent, it seemed decent it seemed like that's the only thing to do. (Participant #6)

I never really thought about...you know I didn't really think it was bad to join. (Participant #7)

Ironically, the need to exercise control over their lives was frequently also the reason they chose to leave the gang. It appears that the need to regain control of their lives from the gang led them to look for other avenues of control:
A lot of it need to change. Like I'm trying to do that right now with the music. (Participant #1)

I think I just grown up to the fact that I don't want to go to jail and waste my life away like I see all those guys. (Participant #2)

I seen a lot of guys backstabbing guys. You know and they were supposed to be bros, like they're supposed to be part of the same clique. So I'm seeing all this happen and I'm asking myself well whose next, whose going to be next to rat on who, on me. Back when I was doing time before, it wasn't like that. We sat back and fucken, we ran it. But then when all the politicking and shit started happening, everything fell apart. So I'm watching all this shit happen and actually I got on the phone and my higher up dropped. So I was going to go under someone else from the pen. I thought about it but then I decided one day, no I didn't want this lifestyle anymore. (Participant #4)

I had to do a lot of things that I ain't proud of, I hurt a lot of people and if I could take that all back I would you know, like because I done some serious stuff that I ain't proud of man. It's crazy when I think back on it you know. Things like that make me like holy cow you know I gotta change, change my life man. (Participant #10)

Control appeared to function on a highly personal level affecting each individual quite differently. In some cases the need for control led to gang involvement, in other instances it resulted in leaving the gang and in some cases it facilitated both entering and leaving the gang. While there were circumstances in the participant's lives that they had little influence over, they did have some ability to manage their response. Furthermore, the need for control was revealed as highly individualized. Some understood gangs and made conscious choices to assert control through them. Others became involved with gangs without recognizing it was happening, implying a highly differentiated impact. As a result, control falls within the personal organizing theme, functioning as both a risk and protective factor.

4.4.3 Societal Organizing Theme

The societal organizing theme is composed of five basic themes:
1. Survival
2. Programs
3. Justice System
4. Media
5. Discrimination

4.4.3.1 Survival

Four of the subjects indicated that crime and gang involvement was initially a survival strategy. Many of them related testimonials of learning to steal and sell drugs as a way of getting food and shelter.

...yeah cause welfare like, we lived, I grew up on welfare eh, never had no money living off food banks and shit, eating rotten apples, rotten vegetables. (Participant #1)

If I was to to rely on my mom I would starve, I wouldn't eat for days. The older guys showed me what I had to do in order to keep myself fed. (Participant #5)

I took off from there as soon as my dad did that. And then I was pretty much a runaway I guess. I lived on the streets, wherever I could take my shoes off and stay. (Participant #7)

And we used to take a cab to school and so I started stealing from the cab that used to take us to school. I started going in to OK Economy on 20th stealing from there like to eat, like for me and my little brother to eat. I'd have him waiting outside, like at almost 2 years old....waiting at the exits for me as I'd go in, get bread, bologna, I'd just squish the bread store it in my pants, whatever, leave out the store, pick him up, yah we had something to eat. (Participant #10)

It was not much of a leap for these participants to go from committing crimes individually to meet their basic needs (food, clothing, shelter), to committing crime within the safety and security of a group.

That's when my mom split up with her ex, it was just me at the house, you know, me and my sister. I figured well we gotta, I've got to support my family somehow. I had to take care of both of them... started selling more drugs and with all that came the gang activity. (Participant #3)

We pretty much had to fend for ourselves. We all kind of grew up knowing we're going to have to protect ourselves, we're going to have to feed ourselves. I started
out stealing bikes and stealing what we can to make sure we're fed. (Interview Subject #4)

So right there I had that attitude screw the world, my mom screwed me over, my grandma screwed me over. That just pushed me more into the gang life I feel I belonged to. (Unintelligible) I always had a dollar out there somewhere, always had a home out there somewhere. (Participant #8)

From the rez. I moved to Regina lived the Crypt life, anything to get my high, anything to pay the rent, anything to get me by...sold drugs. ( Participant #10)

Once the decision was made to leave the gang, returning to crime to provide for basic needs remained predominant in one participant's mind:

Within the first month of me dropping and quitting NS, I was on the doorstep of going back because with the little money that I did save up from selling drugs and stuff, it didn't last too long. Within the first month my rent was due, you know my cable bills were coming in. So now I'm on the doorstep of going back to selling coke. First of all, I never worked anywhere in my life at that time. I didn't have no work experience. (Participant #4)

The inability to provide for themselves not only led people to delinquency and gang involvement as a way of obtaining the most basic of human needs, but it also encouraged them to remain in the gang. Those basic needs still needed to be met even with the realization they wanted to change their lives.

Survival, however, was not a strong motivation to remain in the gang.

Participants frequently indicated that if they had they would probably be dead. More than one individual related that pivotal realization in his life:

I'm diagnosed with MS, I had a stroke, I have three blood clots in my brain. So you could tell me I'm a wounded ex gang member. (Participant #8)

I think I just, I dummied right up because fuck if I go to jail there's all these big guys in there and they all want to kill me. (Participant #2)

That same day that I got out of the Correctional Center and the same day that I met these guys, I was told I had to stab somebody. I ended up you know not wanting to, but having to because these guys told me either you stab this guy or
we're going to stab you. I think for the first time I didn't want to be in NS anymore. (Participant #4)

Anyways we got into it and then ah I got stabbed and had to be resuscitated. And my grandmother was standing over me when I came to and she said you got to change your life before you end up dead. When the standoff happened and everything I thought I was going to be dead again too. (Participant #3)

Survival in latter instance dictated that the individual should not stay in the gang which overrode any immediate concerns as to how he was going to get food and shelter. It was, therefore, both a powerful risk and protective factor.

The participants linked their need for survival to a wide variety of factors. Personal safety, hunger and shelter all formed the motivation for them to seek the perceived sanctuary of gang involvement. By their very nature, these needs are predominate throughout society and well beyond the control of any of these individuals. Therefore, the impact is a societal one, even if the individual responses to it vary. Consequently, survival functions within the societal organizing theme.

4.4.3.2 Programs

These participants were selected because of their involvement with both gangs and community outreach programs. Therefore, it would have been surprising if they had not vocalized their support for programmed approaches to inhibiting gang involvement. Notwithstanding, in discussions with the participants some interesting observations were made. The members of the RAGS program expressed that they now were part of a new gang, albeit a positive one. They used similar language in referring to them as they did when referring to their former gang colleagues:

People from RAGS here that's the only people I hang out with. And like everybody from RAGS knows where I am like if they need to really find me they'll go scoot over to my cousins or something. (Participant #1)
You know when I heard about this place and I came here and I seen all the faces that were heavy into the gang, that were part of this program, I was like holy shit like look how far we've come. There was even one of the founders that used to work here, as a staff. I was like holy shit, six years ago we were loading up shotguns together. (Participant #3)

That's one thing with all these guys here; we're all willing to face that noise together. You know, one on one. (Participant #6)

The language implies an *us against them* mutual support expressed in their descriptions of their initial attraction to gangs:

They told me okay if anything ever happens to you we'll help you, we'll get the people that try hurting you. (Participant #7)

Yeah, just having friends by your side. (Participant #9)

Some people join like I said this morning to have that role where they felt accepted. That's kind of what I kind of wanted too because I was alone and didn't have family and I was looking for acceptance. A role where I could play, and that's what I got into. (Participant #10)

Their words were reminiscent of William Davidson (2006) who suggested there may be merit in putting together positive social gangs as an alternative rather than trying to eliminate gangs. It is possible, for instance, that participating in RAGS, and similar community programs, increases the social capital of these individuals, which, in turn, leads to a greater likelihood of becoming involved in positive and legitimate opportunities.

A second observation is that programs must meet the needs of each individual. The participants each pointed to different aspects of the RAGS program that they found helpful: mentorship, camaraderie, and life-skills training. It was also often the case that the subjects didn't have a clear understanding what the program was doing for them, yet they knew it was invaluable to their lives:
All that life skills and shit. So that fucken, all those life skills made me really think and really see what's going on, what I'm doing, what my family is doing. (Participant #2)

I think in the back of every gang member's mind, nobody really wants to be there, so how to get them out is have more programming like this, more life skills programming, more addictions programming, and more access to programs like this. (Participant #4)

I was sitting there and there was a couple of here just like (unintelligible) and these cops showed up... There was a few of them but the next day was funny because this cop just came up with this 2 X 4 he started hitting his hand and said you know how many times I been waiting for this. I wanted to hit you with this stick. I just started laughing and I said you're not going to arrest me, you're not going to arrest me. So I tried the attitude right from the start, right there man it's kind of like you're a cop, I saw that attitude I would tell you in my head. But you'll be surprised the second day all hanging out and everything, I bought him dinner, I bought him coffee. (Participant #8)

They must have something good to offer because you know I'm not dead or I'm not in jail. (Participant #9)

Then like I said when I wrote all that stuff back in ‘08 and you know reality started kicking in. I was like okay, you know I sat down with Jacqui plenty of times you know she's like this is, you don't see what's out there for you, you should open your eyes really. I guess you could say kicked me in the ass told me you know smarten up or you know. So I took that at that time, this is where I am today you know. RAGS is a good place. I've learned a lot about myself, they've worked on me lots. (Participant #10)

All of the participants discussed what kinds of primary prevention could be employed to divert young people from gang involvement. Without exception, they endorsed the idea that young people can be diverted from gangs if intervention is done at an early age, and if it is focused on the issues affecting each individual. Responding to family dysfunction, providing leisure activities, and diverting them from addictions were the most common factors in their suggestions for primary prevention.

Using the music, the RAGS program I am showing them hard work, like there's just a few of us doing this we don't even get paid right now you know what I mean. This is hard work but I know in the end its going to pay off. (Participant #1)
... more family addiction groups where mom, dad, and kids are all involved in something like that, more programs that have to do with family life. For people to know how to bring up kids, more family addiction groups where mom, dad, and kids are all involved in something like that. (Participant #4)

Somewhere they can go to when they got nowhere else to turn and they need somebody, if they can't talk to their parents or whatever. (Participant #9)

Yeah, drop in center, you can come, chill out. There's computers, there's games you know. Do something constructive with your time. Take them out do a lot of activities with them you know. (Participant #10)

Aside from their informed speculation, programming clearly had a positive impact on these individual's goals to exit gang life and move forward in a more positive way. The participants’ comments noted above suggest that the programs they see having value are those which focus on individual needs rather than the concept of gangs.

Programs function at an individual level but are envisioned and delivered based on broad societal gaps. Participants choose to take part or not to, however their purpose, design, accessibility and availability are not necessarily within their control. For example, there may be no programs at all, programs that deal with gangs but not addictions, or programs that deal with addictions but not family violence, and so forth. As such, the decision to take part is an individual one but everything else is influenced and decided by the circumstances in which they live. Programs, therefore, function within the societal organizing theme.

4.4.3.3 The Justice System

Among the participants interviewed for this research, four indicated they were recruited into a gang while incarcerated in a youth or adult correctional facility:

Then I got put into the Correctional Center and he got put into the Correctional Center. That's when NS really kind of got involved in Regina because he started
recruiting guys in the Corrections Center. I ended up getting recruited. (Participant #4)

How did you hook up with NSK or whatever your first gang involvement, did they recruit you? Subject: Through the jail system. (Participant #5)

When I was an adult in Correctional I got affiliated with the Indian Posse. (Participant #7)

Starting like ’96 yeah, yeah like the little group we called in the crew back in the day. Just a group of friends that were in and out of [the youth detention center]. (Participant #8)

The remaining six participants were gang involved prior to any formal contact with the justice system. In either case, once labelled as a gang member the participants felt they were treated more harshly by the justice system including the police, courts, and corrections:

I was like, fucken I didn't even do nothing and these cops come to my house and arrest me and they say I done that. And I go to jail for 6 months and I spend my time on remand. (Participant #2)

I was pretty much locked up in my cell. I spent most of my time, I did three years but I did sign up for two and a half and I did three to four years and I spent most of my time locked up in a cell, confined. (Participant #7)

These kinds of negative interactions tended to make the justice system their enemy and consolidated the view that they needed the gang to protect them both while on the street and while incarcerated.

I had the City Police pretty much in the bag. I had my baby moma's, my baby moma's friends, well they're escorts, pillow talking. You know asking about me, I pay them for information ... I'm safe, I know what to avoid that day. (Participant #1)

It put a lot of surveillance on me. I noticed like every time I left my house I was being surveilled. I was always being watched in jail, I couldn't make a move without the guards watching me. I was just trying to do my time. It really gave me a bad reputation I guess, a bad name, being registered as a gang member. Even to the courts, the prosecutors and everything. They would always say no
he's a gang member like let's give him time. So I mean like it was like ah, it was a constant battle. (Participant #3)

I just told my Grandma I have money out there just give it to this guard. I want to hold my daughter; I want to give her something. (Participant #6)

I always thought a cop was being a prick trying to take me away from my family my kids, my siblings everything. I thought they were pricks man. (Participant #8)

Interestingly, four of the participants also credited their contact with the justice system for helping them make the decision to leave the gang. The participants were even split between those that suggested programming such as education and life skills motivated them to leave the gang and those who were motivated because they became tired of incarceration:

I thought about my kids, well my kid at the time. I had my first born while I was in jail. I couldn't go see her because I was a gang member, red carded. So that affected me a lot not being able to see my first child being born. (Participant #3)

Then went I started going back to school when I was in the correctional center. (Participant #4)

It's because at 20 years old I was sitting in the penitentiary and watching my life fly by. (Participant #5)

I was always in and out of jail you know I was, I've never been I've never been out this long actually I could say, like this bit right now since I was probably 16 this is the longest I've been out for and its good making steps to. (Participant #10)

However, once the decision to leave the gang was made, three of the participants indicated that the justice system became a hindrance to moving forward with their lives:

Yeah, I just got picked up and released yesterday. For a breach when I was in jail. (Unintelligible) it's funny man ... It's a slap in the face. It kind of makes you lose your momentum your drive. Like, I still want to do this. (Participant #1)

I was going up on charges I'd get sentenced and then I'd see another guy, just like a regular joe and he'd be like getting out half the time. So you know it's like what the fuck. Yeah it makes a huge difference when you're registered as a gang member to the courts. (Participant #3)
When I went in there I had a lot of incompatibles so they tried to keep me away from them at all times. But whenever I went there, there was always somebody I fought and sometimes we'd just leave it at that you know what I mean. (Participant #10)

Even past contact with the justice system tended to haunt them as one participant described his efforts to enter mainstream society:

When you go and fill out job applications it tells you to be honest you know, have you been part of ... have you ever been charged with an offence. And you have to be honest and when they put you through whatever when they look up your name they're going to find a list of shit. It's very hard for a guy to get a job with robbery charges. (Participant #5)

It is clear that incarceration influenced some of these individuals to join gangs while others were gang involved before they came in contact with the justice system. In either case, the justice system served as a common enemy that served as a rationalization for gang involvement in the minds of many of the participants. Furthermore, their past and present involvement with the justice system continues to be a significant barrier to making meaningful changes in their lives. As was the case with other risk factors, this affects all of society even though it impacts people in different ways. Once again, the deciding point may be the lack of control over the justice system and the longer-term repercussions of that involvement at an individual level, especially once they are gang involved. This places the justice system within the societal organizing theme.

4.4.3.4 Media

The interviews revealed very few indications connecting popular or journalistic media to gang involvement. Two individuals did express their attraction to their preconceived notions of the gang lifestyle based largely on the hip-hop music scene.
They admitted to disappointment with the realization that gang lifestyle was nothing like they assumed it would be:

I was wearing my little brother's dad's pants, his jeans I mean, cause I seen it growing up, the music, the Hip Hop and everything else came with it. (Participant #10)

Like for me I thought when I, the music itself kind of played the role you know. I mean gangs, hip hop, it's who I wanted to be. (Participant #10)

(Researcher) When you got into the gang, was it what you thought it would be? (Participant) No, no cause I always thought it was off the movies, but it's not. (Participant #9)

While not particularly strong, there appears to have been limited attraction to the gang lifestyle depicted in hip hop music and movies. It appears that this attraction was quickly replaced with the realization that reality does not reflect these preconceived notions. The media is not limited to any particular subset of society giving it the potential to be one of the most universal of influences. Individuals have very little ability to control the media although they can make choices that have differing outcomes. As a result, this factor falls within the societal organizing theme.

4.4.3.5 Discrimination

While the subject of this research is centered on Aboriginal males, this basic theme was not restricted to racial discrimination. It was interpreted to include any form of discrimination that leads to feelings of isolation resulting in the need to form social bonds with other like-minded individuals. Interpretation of the text, therefore, had to be mindful that this sense of isolation could emerge from almost any feature of an individual's life including social, economic, racial, sexual, or gender related characteristics. It is also important to recognize that it is largely irrelevant whether or not these feelings were real or imagined for them to have impacted the decisions these
individuals made relative to gang involvement. It was sufficient that the participant deemed them to have had an impact.

While discrimination clearly was not a predominant risk factor in the minds of the majority of the interview subjects, it was central to Participant #1.

...like the bias beliefs of us as native people; of who we are and where we come from. Like we're all pipe carriers or bullshit like that or ... Like we're people too we're human beings, but they don't see that. You're either a gang banger or else you're somebody like on the traditional side. They don't see us out here trying to work a nine to five you know. (Participant #1)

He not only pointed to it as something predominant in his thinking, but also referenced it as a dynamic within other risk factors:

You know little white kids always acting like they're more...richer or ‘oh my dad has this’...or they come to school with their doors swinging upwards you know what I mean. (Participant #1)

One participant supported Brown's (1998) perspective when he linked racial discrimination to economic hardship and pointed to the difficulty he experienced integrating with mainstream society.

It's very, very hard to get a job nowadays for a young aboriginal youth cause a lot of us have tattoos and a lot of the gang markings. It's very, very hard to find a 9 to 5 job that's actually willing to take you on, because there's a lot of discrimination and judgmental people out here. (Participant #5)

This participant suggests that this factor is not within the control of any one individual or the affected group. Furthermore, these two individuals talked about racial as well as socio-economic discrimination but also identified discrimination based on features such as tattoos, gang markings, and the way they dressed. This suggests it may not only have initiated gang involvement, but may have served to sustain gang involvement by restricting their ability to reintegrate with society.
Participant #1 made a clear and definitive link between broadly-based discrimination and his gang involvement. Participant #5 identified a number of discriminatory experiences that formed at least part of the confluence of factors that pushed him towards gang involvement. Together, these two individuals experienced discriminatory practices that cannot be restricted to single definable segment of society. They were judged based on their race, their socio-economic status, as well as other less definable criteria (e.g., such as how they dressed). Furthermore, they had little control over how others saw them or how they were treated. This places discrimination within the societal organizing theme and links it to both initiating and sustaining gang involvement.

To this point, the basic themes have been examined and their links to the organizing themes revealed. These organizing themes will now be discussed with respect to how they are linked with the global themes.

4.4.4 Joining Global Theme

The discussion around joining is grounded in the influence environmental, personal and societal organizational themes have on the decision to become gang involved. The discussion of the basic themes has revealed they are linked to each other based on the degree of control participants have over them, and how these factors impact them, their community and society. The organization of the basic themes in this manner assist in understanding how they interact to influence the participant's decision to become gang involved and provides suggestions as to how to prevent gang involvement. These two issues are discussed as they relate to joining gangs.
All six environmental basic themes were identified as either risk factors for becoming gang involved, or protective factors that may inhibit gang involvement. This perspective is consistent with the current literature suggesting that the risk of gang involvement goes up with a confluence of risk factors (Carlie, 2002; Esbensen et al. 2009; Thompson and Braaten-Antrim, 1998). However, environmental factors were not broad influences that impacted everyone equally. For example, the challenges with respect to family are not unique to gang involved individuals, but were particularly prevalent within this group, with most participants reporting dysfunctional conditions. Similarly, negative influence of others is not unique to this group, but these participants seem to have been exposed to more negative influences than positive ones. In other words, these factors were influential, at least in part, because they appear to be wider social issues that this group feels disproportionately impacts them.

Without suggesting it is an easy task, the participants did see the ability to influence environmental risk factors as central to this theme. Gangs manipulate and leverage these risk factors to encourage joining through the themes of influence of others, leisure activities and family. The participants suggested these same influences could be leveraged to prevent gang involvement.

So, and the other brothers like they got into the... they got the like GEDs so they're doing whatever they want. You know what I mean so...I mean once you get that GED you can pretty much do whatever you want. (Participant #1)

I just stayed away from all the places that could make me get hurt. So I don't go walking around in that area. (Participant #2)

Other suggested solutions were cleaning up neighbourhoods, offering positive role models, building healthier families, better education, and making legitimate leisure activities available. Because they may be controlled, or at least influenced by the
individual, the playing field can potentially be leveled so these individuals or groups are not overwhelmed in a negative way by environmental influences.

The next organizing theme that emerged with links to the joining global theme is personal. Once again, the personal organizing theme will be viewed through the lens of control and impact.

These factors were seen by the participants as personal choices. The personal choices made by each individual may be influenced by other factors, but in the end they are still personal choices and therefore controllable at the individual level. The basic themes that comprised the personal organizing theme were highly individualized. It is safe to say that of all the organizing themes, the personal theme had the most diverse impact on the participants because the influences were individualized. For example, the theme behaviour support system focused on the individual behaviours and circumstances of each participant thus would impact each person differently.

The participants distinguished between negative personal choices unrelated to gang involvement that would not have a preventative function, and negative personal choices that led to gang involvement and could have a preventative function. An example of the former is addictions. It was observed that drug and alcohol abuse typically occurred both before and after gang involvement. The implication to the participants was that while addictions may have been inherent to their experience with gang lifestyle and may even have preceded gang involvement, it did not necessarily lead them to gang involvement. Furthermore, even if it did lead to gang involvement, controlling the addiction would not necessarily have prevented gang involvement. An example of the latter is material gains which was also a basic theme linked to joining
because these individuals saw few options outside of gang involvement to acquire material wealth. However, if presented with an option for positive alternatives to legitimately acquire wealth, the participants strongly suggested they would have been less inclined to see the options offered by gangs, such as selling drugs, as attractive. Material gains, therefore, does present options for prevention.

When examined with respect to impact, the personal organizing theme represents gaps in the lives of gang involved individuals on a highly personal and individualized level. Therefore, to function as preventative factors, these gaps must be addressed. Participants did make some generalizations around programming that might fill these some of these gaps such as their outreach work and providing positive employment opportunities. However, their most common suggestions were life skills training. It was apparent, however, that without addressing the environmental challenges facing these individuals, resolving personal issues would have a limited impact on their potential for gang involvement.

The societal organizing theme by nature tends to have the widest span of impact and is the least controllable. These might be described as those factors that affect everyone to some degree and are very slow to change requiring large broad based policy changes. Of the five basic themes comprising the societal organizing theme, four were suggested by the participants as risk factors for gang involvement. The justice system, survival, media, and discrimination all emerged as contributing factors. That is to say, these themes constituted negative influences in the lives of the participants collectively and have retrospectively been linked to gang involvement. Only the theme of programs was viewed by these individuals as potentially effective in preventing gang involvement.
The participants conveyed a sense of inevitability around discrimination, media, the justice system and survival. The participants suggested that these factors may impact certain segments of society disproportionately. Low socio-economic status made some individuals more vulnerable to survival issues, and predominantly aboriginal communities made them vulnerable to discrimination. Consistent with what Brown (1998) suggested, the participants saw a confluence of these factors causing segments of their communities to be in conflict with the justice system more often than mainstream society. These themes were viewed as broad societal challenges that could not easily be fixed. As a result, there was a sense that little could be done to address them. Therefore, the only practical way to offset them was seen to be through programming. There were no suggestions that basic themes such as discrimination and survival cannot or should not, be addressed within society, only that they seemed inevitable.

The sense of inevitability in the minds of the participants made societal factors particularly powerful risk factors. The feeling that nothing could be done to prevent these negative societal influences generated a sense of hopelessness that left them vulnerable to other risk factors. This sense of inevitability made the societal theme a weak protective influence; it also made it significant from a risk perspective.

4.4.5 Staying Global Theme

The discussion around staying is focused on the influence environmental, personal and societal organizational themes have on sustaining gang involvement. While references to motivating factors for leaving the gang are inevitable, that was not the focus of this research. The discussion of the basic themes has revealed they are linked to each other based on the degree of control participants have over them, as well as how these
factors impact them. These clusters assist in understanding how they interacted to sustain gang involvement.

Once again, environmental themes emerged as pivotal factors that can be controlled, and therefore do present options as protective factors as well. All of the basic environmental themes, family, security, neighbourhood, leisure activity, influence of others and education appeared to be central to their continued involvement with gangs. As was the case with joining, the key to the influence of the environmental organizing theme is the degree of control that each participant exercised over the component factors, combined with the differential impact. The participants reported that the neighbourhoods in which they resided combined with family, racial and economic circumstances led to a significant and disproportionate negative impact of environmental factors. In other words, the environment they were surrounded by was vulnerable to continued gang involvement because of a combination of societal, personal, and environmental factors. Regardless of what action is taken by the participants, they found that returning to the same environment tended to encourage continued gang activity.

It really separated me from my real family, like I'd see them but you know it was like, I wouldn't be able to have a conversation with them. I'd be sitting there it's like 'kay well I got this on my mind you know fuckin... I'd start to talk about it right. Because like whatever was happening in the gang I didn't want to expose it to them and have them dwell on it and shit like that. Whatever happened I just kept it to myself and then you know it was like I had nothing to talk about with them you know like, nothing at all. (Participant #3)

My mom and dad always drinking; and mom and dad always fighting. (Participant #4)

An emphasis on ameliorating these environmental factors would therefore appear essential to interrupting gang involvement.
Personal themes were influential with respect to staying in the gang with the exception of *material gains*. Perhaps the most critical difference with personal factors is that they are largely within the control of the individual and tend to impact them in very specific ways. While collectively they do contribute to staying in a gang, each individual has different circumstances as well as strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, it is not necessary to wait for someone else to fix these gaps, as is the case with their neighbourhood, or the justice system. That is not to suggest the participants found they were easy factors to fix. Addictions, for example, can be extremely challenging and in some cases almost impossible to confront without significant help. The loss of status and self-esteem that was sometimes experienced by the participants also had a powerful influence. The reason they were not as influential in sustaining gang involvement is that either these factors lost their appeal prior to exiting the gang, or they realized the gang was not essential to them after all. For example, the participants reported that as the influence of *environmental* risk factors waned through programming, they became more aware of their ability to either conquer their addictions, or sustain them with or without the gang's help. In fact, many of the participants were struggling with addictions when the interviews occurred. Others found self-esteem and empowerment through counseling young people, while programs such as RAGS assisted by reducing family risks.

Within the *societal* organizing theme, three basic themes; the *justice system programs* and *discrimination*, emerged as either risk or protective factors with respect to *staying*. As was the case with *joining* risk factors, these basic themes were viewed as inevitable. This lack of control alone is viewed by the participants as validation of their initial decision to become gang involved. For example, they disclosed having
experienced discrimination periodically which reinforced their decision to metaphorically “thumb their nose at society” by joining a gang. Similarly, even when survival was no longer an urgent issue in their own lives, they continued to see it in the lives of others. As a result, they continued to experience the frustration that they felt as a young person. Often the societal factor that initially set the stage for their gang involvement also sustained their involvement.

Even as these participants were extricating themselves from gangs, they remained bitter in their attitudes towards those societal factors. They did not see these factors as something they could fix, nor did they forgive society for their existence, they simply learned how to live with their frustration. The justice system was viewed with particular frustration, often cited as the reason they could not walk away entirely from gang life. Labels attached to them continued to haunt them as did their criminal records and in some cases their past involvements in gang activities. Thus while societal factors are not unique to the participants, they saw themselves as being impacted by them significantly more than the rest of society.

4.6 Interpretation of the Patterns

The research question examined in this thesis is: why do Aboriginal youth in Regina become involved in gangs and what conditions prevent them from leaving? Some discussion with respect to what motivates them to leave is unavoidable; however, it is not the focus of this research. The data from the interviews with ten former gang members revealed a confluence of personal, societal and environmental risk factors making this segment of Regina's population vulnerable to becoming affiliated with and remaining in a gang lifestyle.
The most influential of these risk factors are the societal and environmental conditions which are the most difficult for an individual to control; this is especially the case when experienced early in life as described by the participants. The collective influence of these risk factors leads to feelings of alienation and a sense of separation from society. Personal factors such as low socio-economic status, unhealthy family environments, and addictions fail to either provide healthy alternatives, or actually exacerbate their feelings of alienation. As a result, young Aboriginal men in Regina become vulnerable to gang enticements. These enticements are ostensibly focused on establishing the individual’s rightful place in society and correcting the deficiencies in their environment. Aboriginal youth may be particularly susceptible to these influences because of the general disruption of historic support structures within Aboriginal communities. In other words, the gang promises to provide protective enticements to compensate for societal and environmental shortcomings.

Why, then, do these intelligent self-aware individuals stay in such a dangerous and unhealthy environment? Unfortunately, society's response to gang proliferation has been to further alienate this group by failing to address the larger societal and environmental shortcomings that drove them to gangs in the first place. Instead, society employs reactive strategies that rely on the suppressive tactics of the justice system (e.g., incarceration). Even when this approach does lead to attitudinal changes in gang members, these affected individuals eventually return to the same environments that led them to gangs in the first place. In the end, they are unable to overcome these persistent influences and they surrender to the gang life once more.
Changing the environmental conditions presents the most promising opportunities for preventing gang involvement. While these influences were controllable to some extent by the individual, the community needs to play a larger role in leveraging positive environmental influences. Areas such as family, education, healthy leisure activities and positive role models were reported by the participants as having the greatest potential to divert youth from gang involvement. They were less optimistic with respect to societal issues such as discrimination and inequities in the justice system, which were seen as somewhat immutable. However, this group was optimistic regarding the potential for individualized prevention and intervention programming such as life skills training to help build defenses to these shortcomings even if they could not be corrected.

This picture helps to better understand and appreciate the forces that shape this vulnerable group and exposes their very human responses to these pressures. It also revealed how individualistic their circumstances are. There is no universal path to gang involvement; rather, it is a multifaceted response to a complex array of influences that combine in a variety of ways to cause and sustain gang involvement.

Having explored this complex question and exposed the overarching influences leading to gang involvement, questions as to how this fits within a wider theoretical context remain. At this point, the discussion returns to those theoretical questions that underpin this research, the policy implications arising from the findings, and possible directions for future research.
CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The concept of gangs was examined from two theoretical perspectives described in Chapter 2. The first question for discussion was whether or not the formation of gangs among Aboriginal males in Regina could be explained from a social disorganization perspective. While there has been no clear unassailable conclusion to that question, there were some interesting observations by the participants that are consistent with a social disorganization explanation for gang involvement.

The second theoretical question posed was whether theories suggesting the influence of sub-cultures could offer any explanation for sustaining gang involvement by Aboriginal males in Regina. There are some interesting parallels between the data from the participants and the characteristics of sub-cultural influences as described in the literature.

5.1.1 Social Disorganization Theory

Mercredi (2000), Grekul (2006) and Dickason (2009) have made convincing arguments that the long-term consequences of European colonization in Canada have had a disruptive influence on Aboriginal society. Specifically, Grekul and Dickason discussed how the traditional structure of Aboriginal families has been disrupted, and Mercredi contended that as a result, families no longer play their traditionally pivotal role in making children resilient to social problems.

The analysis of the interview data conclusively demonstrated the central role family played on both the risk and protective side of the environmental organizing theme. Dysfunctional families were strongly linked to the decision to become gang involved, and
played a significant role in sustaining affiliation with the gang. Families also proved to be a powerful incentive to leave the gang, and played an important role in supporting individuals when they did leave. Furthermore, the participants indicated that the family dysfunction was often multigenerational. In other words, the broken families that preceded gang involvement were not an aberration. Therefore, it can be stated with some degree of certainty that the long-term dysfunctionality of the families of these participants contributed to their subsequent gang involvement. Alternatively, when these dysfunctional family environments were replaced by healthier family environments, these same individuals made decisions to leave the gang lifestyle.

Smandyche et al (1993) discussed the impact of the urban migration of Aboriginal people in weakening their social institutions. Interestingly, there were only two participants that migrated to Regina from a rural environment. However, the majority of them indicated their parents did migrate from a rural Aboriginal community to the city. On the one hand, two of them described a brief reprieve from gangs and crime when family members encouraged them to return to their rural home communities to take part in more traditional activities such as hunting, cultural activities and participating in pow-wows. On the other hand, some participants indicated they were first exposed to the concept of gangs in these rural Aboriginal communities. Some suggested they found companionship with other displaced or disaffected young people in urban environments, while others suggested the lack of opportunity in rural environments might have led to their interest in the gang lifestyle. There are no discernible patterns in the data that suggest urban migration by these individuals or their parents led to gang involvement.
Figure 2.1 (adapted from Sampson & Groves, 1989) on page 32 of this thesis outlines the characteristics of Shaw and McKay's (1969) theory of community systemic structure and rates of crime and delinquency. They identified six characteristics of a disorganized community:

1. Low economic status
2. Ethnic heterogeneity
3. Residential mobility
4. Family disruption
5. Urbanization
6. Low educational attainment

As a result of these characteristics, they proposed communities demonstrate three outcomes:

7. Sparse local friendship networks
8. Unsupervised teen-age peer groups
9. Low organizational participation

Low economic status was a consistent theme within the narratives of the participants. The desire for material gain and the need for food and shelter were linked to gang involvement. Even where participants indicated material gain was not a factor in their decision to become gang involved, they still described poverty as a consistent circumstance during their formative years. It was also interesting that they tended to congregate with other individuals who came from similar socio-economic backgrounds. In some cases, these groups either evolved into gangs, or joined existing gangs as a group.
The second characteristic of Shaw and McKay's (1969) disorganized community is ethnic heterogeneity. There was little in the way of data that supported or refuted heterogeneity as a characteristic of the neighbourhoods where these individuals resided or spent the majority of their time. If anything, their experiences suggest that most of their time was spent in relatively homogenous Aboriginal neighbourhoods. However, this raises the question of what the relevant point of view is when assessing heterogeneity.

Most of the participants indicted they felt their homogenous neighbourhood was a small sub-set of a larger heterogeneous community. In other words, they felt their community was heterogeneous even if their neighbourhood was not. This presented challenges such as discrimination that emphasized the differences between them and the larger community population. While perhaps not directly related to their gang involvement, it is clear that this characteristic presented challenges for the participants.

Residential mobility was not reported by them as a significant factor in their decisions to become gang involved, but it was present in their experiences. They repeatedly referred to a transient lifestyle, in some cases moving from city to city, in other cases moving frequently within the city. Two of the subjects discussed how they would often leave their new neighbourhoods and return to more familiar territory in North Central Regina. Others discussed the disruptive influence moving between foster homes had on them socially and with respect to their education and family relationships.

Family disruption was certainly a consistent theme in the interviews. All but two of the participants reported family disruption including physical abuse, addictions, criminal activities within the family and neglect. These individuals also made the link between their family environment and subsequent gang involvement. The majority of
them suggested addressing family issues was critical to a successful gang reduction strategy.

Urbanization did not surface as a significant factor in the interviews. Six of the participants reported they moved to Regina from rural communities, for the most part First Nations. Interestingly, they did not make a connection between this and their subsequent gang involvement. They did suggest that when they were looking to get away, they would return to their home communities implying they were escaping the city's negative influences.

Low educational attainment was a common characteristic of the participants but the majority of them did not make a direct link between that and gang involvement. Instead, they discussed the challenges a lack of education presented in their efforts to gain legitimate employment after they chose to leave the gang. One participant described an acquaintance that avoided gang involvement by focusing on his education. Nonetheless, it is a common characteristic among the participants.

The following three characteristics can only be addressed insofar as the participants described them. There was little discussion of local friendship networks. The participants described extended family networks and in some cases networks of friends but the data does not speak to whether these were sparse. In fact, a majority of the participants suggested their initial gang involvement was through their existing network of friends.

There was certainly a recurring theme of being unsupervised. This was often described by the participants as resulting from family disruptions leaving them to hang out while unsupervised, and in four cases, they described having run away from home.
Their descriptions of their gang activities not surprisingly were facilitated by a lack of supervision from any parents or responsible adult figures. In fact, when an adult was present it was not a positive influence.

The last characteristic was low organizational participation. This was often described as a lack of leisure activities. Participants repeatedly suggested increased leisure activities would be an effective way of diverting youth from gang involvement. The only activities these youth appeared to be involved in while in the gang were gang related activities. A majority of the participants, however, were actively involved in a variety of community activities as part of their efforts to exit gang life. This ranged from counselling other youth, to participating in neighbourhood improvement projects.

Barnet and Mancken (2002) suggested four strikingly similar features of a community are an indication of its ability to solve social problems:

1. residential stability
2. economic inequality
3. racial and ethnic heterogeneity
4. and family structure.

It is easy to see both the similarity to Shaw and McKay's (1969) characteristics of a disorganized community and the narratives of these participants. Influential factors such as neighbourhood and family on both the risk and protective definitions of this research fell within the environmental organizing theme and are closely linked to both Shaw and McKay (1969), and Barnet and Mancken's (2002) descriptions of disorganized communities.
5.1.2 Sub-cultural Influences

Kornhauser (1978) described self-sustaining sub-cultures with shared delinquent values. Alissi (1970) discussed the complexity of these sub-systems suggesting they resulted from a complex interplay of variables. Figure 4.4 illustrates those factors that serve to sustain gang involvement. A key feature of Kornhauser's sub-cultures is that they are self-sustaining. In other words, they do not depend on outside influences to maintain membership in the group. This would appear to eliminate societal factors that originate outside the gang. However, both environmental and personal themes do have self-sustaining aspects. For example, gangs tend to occupy set geographical spaces (Tita & Ridgeway, 2007), thus creating their own neighbourhoods. The participants were strongly connected to specific neighbourhoods generally returning to these communities even after they had relocated elsewhere.

One of the influences sustaining gang involvement was that of security. The participants discussed how the fear generated within the gang tended to strengthen their bonds and was a protective measure against what they perceived to be the hostile external environment. This internal bond was often described as a brotherhood, the violation of which was interpreted by the gang as a betrayal. The gang was viewed as their new family. It was not only the fear of the outside world that bonded them, it was the illusion that this group was their support structure, and that their relationship with each other somehow went beyond the fact that they were involved in common activities.

Kornhauser (1978) also pointed out that participants must have shared delinquent values. Interestingly, a consistent theme within the participant's stories was the evidence that they came to adopt the values of the gang and willingly engaged in violent activities,
drug dealing, and intimidation, even when these activities were contrary to their own personal values. It seemed that only when they had an epiphany that brought to light this contradiction, that they were inspired to reassert their own values and began the process of moving away from the values of the gang.

While Terpstra (2006) was describing the concept of sub-culture in the context of gangs, the narratives of the participants provided support for her views. The participants described how they descended into the gang milieu because of a very personal and complex mixture of risk factors. They developed or adopted an identity associated with the gang that became an integral part of their sense of self. The manner in which they earned income, accumulated wealth and survived became completely integrated with their gang. For example, if they sold drugs it was with the tacit permission of the gang and they had to provide part of their earnings to the gang in return.

Terpstra (2006, p. 97) identified four relevant influences on them resulting in gang sub-cultures: prestige, relations with dominant institutions, relations between boys and the reaction of adults. Prestige, as described by Terpstra, closely resembles self-esteem and empowerment within the personal organizing theme of this research. This is the interpretation that membership in this group has elevated their personal worth both in their eyes and from the perspective of the outside world. The influence of relations with dominant institutions was illustrated by the participants in their exclusion of their traditional families as well as their views of the justice system and society in general. The influence of relations between males in the gang is described by the majority of the participants as a brotherhood, closer than family. Lastly, this is not a culture that seeks to please adults other than those who are also gang involved. The participants described
their actions as rebellious and a demonstration of their own power over those who had placed them in this disadvantaged role. At best, they had little regard for other adults; at worst did everything in their power to destroy the vestiges of this adult world.

5.1.3 Conclusions

The findings that emerged from this research suggest a strong link between social disorganization as described in the literature, and gang involvement. Mercredi (2000), Smandych et al (1993) and Dickason (2009) observations about Aboriginal communities closely resembles the challenges and environment described by the participants in this research. These descriptions of family and neighbourhood influences closely resemble the characteristics of disorganized communities described by Shaw and McKay (1969) as well as Barnet and Mancken (2002). Although population heterogeneity and migration were not directly apparent in the participant's stories, other environmental factors contributed to both causing and sustaining gang involvement. Furthermore, economic factors described by Shaw and McKay as well as Barnet and Mancken are also predominant in the participants’ accounts with the ability to make money within a gang as a risk factor that led to and sustained gang involvement.

It is important to acknowledge the very personal level at which this weakening of social institutions influenced these individuals. In fact, it may be more accurate to describe their lives, rather than their communities or their cultures as socially disorganized. Each individual described a complex and unique set of circumstances that cumulatively drew him towards a gang lifestyle. Although they resided in the same community, social institutions influenced them in very different ways. Social disorganization appears to create the circumstances for gangs to emerge, but it is a
complex array of individual circumstances that leads an individual to become gang involved.

Once formed, gangs are a sub-culture by definition, one clearly and deliberately created and which is self-sustaining. Much of the struggle to leave gang life described by the participants relates to the desire to break these sub-cultural bonds. These bonds are both corporeal such as their ability to make money, and visceral such as re-establishing their personal value system. It is clear that a key attraction to the gang lifestyle, as well as a significant barrier to leaving the gang is the dominant sub-culture of the gang. They are self-sustaining and have shared delinquent values as described by Kornhauser (1978) and closely resemble the characteristics described by Terpstra (2006). It should not be surprising that the creation of alternative sub-cultures in RAGS was effective in breaking those sub-cultural bonds and establishing positive social capital. The bonds of the gang sub-culture are apparent in the data and consistent with the literature describing sub-cultural influences.

5.2 Implications for Future Research

This research has served to build a more comprehensive understanding of risk and protective factors with respect to gang involvement among Aboriginal males in Regina. However, it does not provide conclusions that can be generalized to the extent necessary to truly drive national public policy. This relatively small group has revealed much about how they have been influenced, but there is much left to learn with respect to how these influential factors interact with each other and how broadly applicable these findings are among Aboriginal males in Regina. Furthermore, understanding these factors from the perspective of Aboriginal males who did not become gang involved is an important piece
of knowledge not addressed by this research. Such research would help inform the discussion as to how these factors influence a wider population and would help position our understanding of the protective factors from a new perspective.

An important, but ever present, group not studied in this research are females. Women are an integral part of every gang and present in the lives of the subjects interviewed for this research. They play an important role that cannot be completely extricated from the environment of the males. How that role differs from males and how they interact with males before, during, and after gang involvement is an important gap in understanding of gang dynamics.

Lastly, and perhaps most fundamentally, a better understanding of the size, distribution, and construct of gangs in Regina should be undertaken. While there is no reason to doubt the information from police and corrections databases, it is gathered from the perspective of organizations generally in conflict with gangs. As suggested by Sullivan (2005), the assessment of the size and nature of gangs by these groups should be utilized with caution since no other alternative sources of information are available. Thrasher (1927) began our understanding of gangs by pointing out that not all gangs are bad. Additionally, there are a variety of factors that shape each gang and these get manifested in different ways. A better understanding of the true prevalence and nature of gangs is critical to achieving a comprehensive understanding of how they work.

5.3 Policy Implications

Public policy with respect to gang proliferation has historically focused on suppression. Gangs are viewed as a scourge that necessitates strong decisive responses from society, primarily through the justice system. This research has exposed a far more
human picture of individual gang members suggesting public policy focusing on individuals and their environment rather than the nebulous concept of gang might better address the underlying causes of gang involvement by addressing societal, environmental and personal risk factors.

This research revealed the important role played by societal factors in leading these individuals to, and supporting gang involvement. It was clear that many of these societal factors do not tend to have universal protective functions, but they can create the atmosphere necessary to the formation of gangs. Public policies that ensure that the basic survival needs of young people are met, such as providing food and shelter, would take away much of the attractiveness of gangs and delinquency in meeting these needs. A greater emphasis during early school years on the damaging effects of societal influences, such as discrimination and inaccurate media portrayals of gangs, would inform young people about the reality of gangs and help them to manage the feelings of social alienation that can influence vulnerable individuals. Lastly, while the justice system clearly has a role in suppression and punishment, it must not become the object of scorn that unites these individuals in gangs and thereby sustains gang involvement. Ensuring that all aspects of the justice system treat people as individuals, avoiding practices such as labelling and stereotyping, would go far in that regard. The justice system must also avoid being an impediment to those trying to leave gangs. The practice of dragging individuals back into conflict with the justice system when they are endeavouring to break the bonds to their former life, only serves to reinforce their alienation from society.

From a public policy perspective, significantly more attention should be paid to the environmental factors that influence these individuals to join gangs and then make it
challenging for them to leave. Neighbourhoods must provide healthy environments with alternatives to gang activities available to these individuals at very early ages. Cultural activities, sports, and safe places to congregate will provide better and more productive options for these individuals minimizing the migration towards gangs. The influence of others emerged as a powerful factor on both the protective and risk sides. Minimizing exposure to negative influences combined with the support of early, personal and intense mentorship would be effective in preventing youth from viewing gangs as an attractive option.

Personal factors also emerged as important risk and protective factors. Mentorship can also be leveraged to enhance the self-esteem of these individuals highlighting their strengths and showing them there are peer groups available to them that are not involved in destructive activities. This could be through introduction to the arts, sports or, as was the case with these participants, helping other vulnerable individuals.

For those who are involved with gangs, both preventative and intervention programs addressing risk factors for gang involvement can be helpful in responding to the challenges in personal, environmental and societal themes. This includes meeting very basic food, shelter and security needs as well as the more complex environmental and personal needs these individuals struggle with, such as self-esteem, control, and education.

Four subjects also reported that they joined gangs after being placed in youth or adult facilities, although some of these respondents had already been headed in that direction. These results were similar to what Winterdyk and Ruddell (2010) found in their analyses of gang proliferation in US prison systems. Given those findings,
correctional officials should be called upon to develop programs that reduce the likelihood of unaffiliated inmates on remand or sentenced offenders joining a gang while incarcerated. These interventions might be more fruitful if directed within youth facilities.

Collectively public policy must use prevention, intervention, and suppression to make it difficult for people to join and remain in gangs, and easy for them to leave. The justice system has an important role; but should not be seen as the only tool available. Addressing societal and environmental factors will require the collaboration of very diverse social support structures. Education, health, justice, and local governments must recognize and acknowledge their roles in addressing the personal and environmental factors that lead to gang involvement, and supporting those protective factors that minimize gang involvement.

5.4 Final Remarks

This inquiry has exposed gangs not merely as entities that can be studied and categorized, but as groups of individuals that move and respond to their environments in varying and complex ways. This presents a challenge to the application of theories of crime and gang proliferation. While general patterns of behaviour can be viewed through the lens of more universal theories, individual gang members cannot be so easily branded. One particular participant expressed his amazement at what he saw when he started to look at the people around him after the blinders of gang involvement were removed:

... You're eyes open up it's like, wow I missed out on a lot. Because I was so tunnel-visioned and confined into that lifestyle, it's like nothing else mattered to me. Like I never seen people walking down the street that look upset, you know or that look happy. Thought about it and wow that person is going through some
rough times or whatever. Like now I take that into consideration as opposed to back when I was you know driving around I seen people like that, I'd be pulling over and asking them if they want to you know buy dope and stuff. You know so I mean like you see life in a whole new light when you're out of that lifestyle. (Participant #3)

Gangs represent an unhealthy and uninformed response to the dysfunctional aspects of the environment to which individuals are exposed. Gang members are neither evil nor defective people. They are, in some cases, very impressive, intelligent individuals who have become pariahs to society through an adaptive process. In adapting to their environment, they look and act in ways that imply they are an entity. In order to better see the faces of the individuals involved in gangs, perhaps society's blinders need to be removed. Until society understands their individuality, appreciates the influences of their environments and acknowledges society's role in creating gangs, it is unlikely the scourge of gangs will be defeated.
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TO: Robert Mills  
3356 Essex Cr.  
Regina, SK S4V 2T8

FROM: Dr. Bruce Plouffe  
Chair, Research Ethics Board

Re: The Gang Alternative: A Participant’s Perspective (File #76S1011)

Please be advised that the University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed your proposal and found it to be:

☑ 1. APPROVED AS SUBMITTED. Only applicants with this designation have ethical approval to proceed with their research as described in their applications. For research lasting more than one year (Section 1F), ETHICAL APPROVAL MUST BE RENEWED BY SUBMITTING A BRIEF STATUS REPORT EVERY TWELVE MONTHS. Approval will be revoked unless a satisfactory status report is received. Any substantive changes in methodology or instrumentation must also be approved prior to their implementation.

☐ 2. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO MINOR CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB. **Do not submit a new application.** Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 3. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB. **Do not submit a new application.** Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 4. UNACCEPTABLE AS SUBMITTED. The proposal requires substantial additions or redesign. Please contact the Chair of the REB for advice on how the project proposal might be revised.

Dr. Bruce Plouffe

cc: Dr. Nick Jones – Justice Studies

**supplementary memo should be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the Office of Research Services (Research and Innovation Centre, Room 109) or by e-mail to research.ethics@uregina.ca**
Appendix B

The Gang Alternative: A Participant Perspective

Participant Consent Form

Purpose of this study:

The purpose of this study is to learn more about street gangs in Regina. Specifically who joins gangs, why they choose to join gangs, and why they stay in gangs. I will ask questions about your opinions as to what influenced you to become involved with gangs, as well as some general questions regarding your age, education, and family situation.

Contact Information:

This research is being conducted by Bob Mills as part of a Masters in Police Studies program at the University of Regina, Department of Justice Studies. If you have any questions, feedback or comments about the research study or the results of the research study, please feel free to contact the researcher at phone number (306) 535-0689 or email mills11r@uregina.ca, or his supervisor Dr. Nick Jones at phone number (306) 585-4862 or email nick.jones@uregina.ca.

This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Regina Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee at [585-4775 or research.ethics@uregina.ca]. Out of town participants may call collect.

Procedures:

- Self-declared current or former gang members will be interviewed.
- Each person will be interviewed by a researcher for approximately 45 minutes.
- Some questions are structured, while others are open-ended.
- Participants do not have to answer any questions they find uncomfortable.
- This research project is not focussed on criminal activity and no such questions will be posed to the participant. Should you make any specific admissions to criminal activity, or comments suggesting a risk of harm to yourself or others, they must be reported.

Confidentiality:

- Answers to the questions posed will not be shared outside of the research team and will be used only for the stated purpose of the research. Specific admissions of criminal activity or comments suggesting a risk of harm to yourself or others must be disclosed. The matter will be discussed directly with you by the primary researcher before any other steps are taken.
Only the primary researcher and his thesis supervisor will have access to any of the answers you provide.

The information provided will be kept in a secure manner (i.e. locked cabinet, storage room, password-protected computer).

Neither your name nor any other characteristics that may potentially identify you will be used in the final report.

**Potential Benefits:**

By providing this information you are giving the researchers valuable insights available from no other source. Understanding this issue from the point of view of those closest to it will enable communities to respond to this problem in the most effective manner possible, leading to truly helpful prevention and intervention strategies for young people.

**Potential Risks and Discomforts:**

There are no significant physical or psychological risks to you by participating in this study.

You should be aware that this researcher is currently chairman of the advisory committee for the Regina Anti-Gang Services program. This research is in no way connected to RAGS and whether or not you choose to participate in this interview will have no impact on your participation in this program.

You should also be aware that this researcher is a police officer with the RCMP. This research is in no way connected to his duties as a police officer; however, admission of criminal acts to the researcher may necessitate disclosure to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

**Participation and Withdrawal:**

Participation is entirely voluntary and there will be no consequences to you should you choose not to participate. If you do choose to participate you may withdraw your consent at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any specific questions without withdrawing from the study.

**Signature of Participant:**

I understand the information provided for the study as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

______________________________________________________________
Name of Participant

______________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant Date
Interview Guide

The following questions are intended as the general list of questions to be asked. The purpose of the questions is to elicit information on why subjects become and remained gang involved.

1. Background information:
   a. Tell me about your experience in school.
      i. How far did you go and was it positive?
   b. Tell me about your family growing up.
      1. What was your life at home like?
   c. Tell me about the community you grew up in.
      i. Did you grow up in more than one community?

2. Gang involvement:
   a. What does it mean to be a member of a gang?
      i. Are there different levels and roles for members of gangs?
   b. What was going on in your life when you become involved with gangs?
   c. Tell me about the gang or gangs you were involved in.
   d. Tell me about your role within the gang(s).
   e. How did becoming involved with gangs affect your life?
      i. Was it what you expected?
   f. Are you still involved with the gang?
      i. What was going on in your life when you decided to leave the gang?

3. Risk Factors
   a. What kinds of things attracted you to gangs?
   b. Why do you think others become involved with gangs?
   c. Why do you think some kids don't become involved with gangs?
   d. Tell me about your attempts to leave the gang?
      i. What are some of the things that prevented you from leaving the gang?
      ii. What are some of the things that prevented others from leaving the gang?
   e. What were the advantages of being in a gang?
      i. How did it make your life better?
   f. What are the drawbacks of being in a gang?
      i. What was the cost to you and your family?

4. Can I talk to you again to clarify your answers or ask you new questions?
5. Do you have any other questions or comments?
6. Can you think of anyone else I could interview on this topic?