UNDER THE HOOD:
UNDERSTANDING PATHWAYS IN AND OUT OF GANG LIFE FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF GANG MEMBERS’ EXPERIENCE

Submitted by:

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Bachelor of Arts, Major in Criminal Justice
June 2013
University of the Fraser Valley

GRADUATE THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

In the
School of Criminology and Criminal Justice

© Gurvir Brar
UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY

Winter 2017

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Abstract

This study used data collected from in-depth interviews with five male members of a B.C. Lower Mainland gang, who self-identified as growing up in a middle-class environment, to examine risk factors associated with gang involvement and barriers to exiting a gang. More specifically, the study compares risk factors associated with joining gangs and barriers to exiting gangs between youth who grow up in a middle-class “suburban” environment and the available research, which has predominantly been focused on youth who grow up in a “poor” underprivileged environment. The study found no distinguishing risk factors between the participants and the available data. In addition, the study also examined whether there are any unique risk factors encountered by youth who were raised in Canada by foreign born parents. The research found no unique risk factors associated with joining and obstacles to exiting among this group either.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who has helped me in the completion of this paper. I am particularly indebted to Yvon Dandurand without whose guidance this paper could not have been written. He consistently allowed this paper to be my own work, but steered me in the right direction when a course adjustment was necessary. I am also grateful for the support and assistance of Danijel Ristic whose merciless attention to detail led to valuable comments and observations during the editing process of this paper. I also owe thanks to the five participants who agreed to be interviewed. A study such as this would not be possible without participants who are willing to come forward and share their life stories. Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for their support and encouragement throughout this process.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Gang violence continues to be a pressing issue for criminal justice organizations, policy makers and communities. An analysis of data collected over a 14-year period, measuring trends related to gang prevalence in US cities, revealed that in 70% of cities with populations greater than 100,000 between 20% and 40% of homicides could be attributed to gang activities (Howell, Egley, Tita, & Griffiths, 2011). Moreover, Howell and his colleagues (2011) found that the level of gang activity was unaffected by anti-gang efforts in over two-thirds of those cities. The U.S. National Gang Center (n.d.) found similar results from national surveys, and estimated that from 2006 to 2012 the number of gangs increased by 15%, snowballing from 26,700 to more than 30,000. Likewise, in Canada, the number of gangs is growing. From 2002 to 2009, the estimated number of street gang members in Canada rose from 7,071 to 20,000 (National Crime Prevention Centre, 2010).

Although the prevalence of gangs is not new to Canada, the growing concern of how to most effectively respond to gangs is relatively recent (Carson & Vecchio, 2015). Unlike in the US, Canadian research on the phenomena of gangs is still in its early stages (Erickson, LaBoucane-Benson, & Grekul, 2007). Consequently, community understanding of Canadian gangs is often limited to media reports of gang activities, and entertainment media portrayals based on gangs in large US cities. However, these portrayals have little bearing on the situation in Canada, and leave Canadian communities with little knowledge to prepare for or respond to the problem (Erickson, et al., 2007).
This lack of understanding and inability to effectively respond is a serious concern, since being a member of a youth gang is a key predictor of future participation in criminal activity (Wortley, 2010). Involvement in criminal activity is not monopolized by youth gangs, but youth involved with gangs do commit more crime compared to other high-risk youth (Wortley, 2010). For instance, a study conducted in Toronto found that youth gang members are more than six times as likely to engage in criminal activities than other at-risk youth (Wortley & Tanner, 2006). Therefore, intervening early and preventing youth from associating with gangs is essential; however, determining the best approach and implementing the right program requires continued research and evidence gathering.

British Columbia is one of the most culturally diverse provinces in Canada (Province of British Columbia, 2017). This diversity is reflected in the B.C. gang scene, as well as in the membership of some B.C. gangs. In 2002, the results of the Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs estimated there were 1,027 youth gang members in B.C. (Astwood Strategy Corporation, 2003). Along with Saskatchewan and Manitoba, B.C. had the most number of jurisdictions reporting active youth gangs. However, the level of ethnic and cultural diversity reported among these youth gangs was very different in B.C. than in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. As depicted in Figure 1.1, B.C. youth gangs include members who are of African Canadian, Latino/Hispanic, Caucasian, South Asian, East Asian, Middle Eastern, and First Nations descent. Ontario and Quebec are the only other provinces with the same level of ethnic or cultural diversity in their youth gangs (Astwood Strategy Corporation, 2003).
The cities of Surrey and Abbotsford have been identified by the Abbotsford Police Department (APD) and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) as epicenters of gang activity and violence in B.C.’s Lower Mainland (Public Safety Canada, 2012; 2016). There are an estimated 10 to 20 South Asian gangs in this area, and the Integrated Gang Task Force has found these gangs to be involved in a significant level of gun violence (Public Safety Canada, 2016).

The literature on gang recruitment identifies several risk factors associated with gang involvement. However, there are gangs where the factors at play appear to be different from those that would normally be expected. For example, some youth who join gangs come from well-functioning families with abundant financial resources and community attachments (Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2011). These youths, known as “non-traditional” at-risk youth, are motivated to join gangs to garner...
power, protection, social status, and a sense of belonging, as well as to make money (Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2011). Law enforcement agencies have maintained that this is the case with several gangs in the Lower Mainland, but these claims have not yet been empirically established (Public Safety Canada, 2016). Similarly, the literature on gang exiting suggests that the patterns of leaving may be different for gang members with different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds (Carson & Vecchio, 2015).

The purpose of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of the pathways that led members of a B.C. Lower Mainland gang to choose this lifestyle and to become involved in related criminal activities. The members of this gang are predominately South Asian and grew up in a middle-class “suburban” environment: a characteristic that distinguishes them from subjects of most past gang-related research which generally studied youth who grew up in “poor” underprivileged environments. Learning about the attitudes, beliefs, events and circumstances that led these individuals to get involved in gang activities, as well as the role played by others in recruiting them into a gang, will be relevant to the development of interventions designed to prevent the recruitment of youth into gangs. In addition, since gang prevention also involves helping individuals desist from gang activities, the study will explore, with participants, their view about the feasibility of exiting the gang, the obstacles they would expect to encounter if they chose to do so, and under what circumstances they would consider doing so.

Chapter Two presents a detailed review of the current literature on the motives and risk factors that lead individuals to join gangs, as well as the motivations, barriers, and
consequences involved with exiting a gang. The following chapters explore the same concepts using data collected from interviews conducted with members of the aforementioned gang between November 1, 2016, and January 31, 2017. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology used to collect and analyze the data presented in this study, and identifies its limitations. Chapter Four provides a summary of the data analysis, and highlights key findings of the study. The chapter offers a discussion of the study’s main findings, and their implications for a better understanding of the motivation and process related to joining and exiting a gang. Chapter Five also explores the implications of these findings for crime prevention and public safety policy. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and closing comments.

1.2 Defining Key Terms

“Gang” is a loosely defined term that attempts to describe fluid groups that include individuals from many different cultural and economic backgrounds (Smith-Moncrieffe, 2014). Thus, there is currently no universally accepted definition of a gang in Canada (Smith-Moncrieffe, 2014). “Youth gang”, “gang”, and “street gang” are terms commonly and frequently interchangeably used in mainstream media (National Institute of Justice, 2011). In addition, motorcycle and prison gangs, radical hate groups, terrorist organizations, and other types of groups that pose a security threat are often, but not always, distinguished from gangs in both practice and academic research (National Institute of Justice, 2011). Various criteria have been suggested to more clearly define the differences between the many types of groups: age and size of membership, the existence of a group name and gang rules, the use of distinctive group symbols and initiation rituals
for new members, street orientation, group involvement in crime, violence or delinquency, a focus on territorial control as a key activity, and common ethnic or racial backgrounds (Wortley, 2010). The lack of a consensus around a definition for the concept of “gang” has made it difficult to measure and document the pervasiveness of gangs, and to analyze the relationship between gang membership and criminal behaviour (Wortley, 2010).

For the purposes of this study, a gang will be defined as “a group of three or more individuals that has existed for at least one month and engages in criminal activity on a regular basis. Gang-related crime can be conducted within the group context or by individual gang members in isolation -- if such criminal activity, directly or indirectly, benefits the gang” (Wortley, 2010, para.6). This definition distinguishes between gang characteristics, such as number of members and involvement in criminal activity, and gang descriptors, such as distinctive group symbols and tattoos. Not only does this definition help identify different types of gangs, it differentiates between gangs that exist for short periods of time and more permanent gangs with a long history. The definition also allows for the classification of gangs based on the size of their membership.

Furthermore, the definition is consistent with Canada’s Criminal Code definition of a “criminal organization” (Criminal Code, 1985) and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime definition of an “organized criminal group” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004). All three definitions include three key components: the group is composed of three or more persons, the individuals engage in criminal activity, and that their activities benefit the group. So, not only does this definition
allow for a more effective classification of gangs, it is legally acceptable, which is important for its practical application in the Canadian criminal justice system.

Additional terms that are relevant to the study and require clarification include “youth” and “gang involvement”. The study utilizes a definition of youth that is consistent with the interpretation of “young person” in the Youth Criminal Justice Act (2002), which refers to individuals who are between the ages of 12 and 17.

Much like gang, gang involvement is an obscure term that can mean many things based on who is defining the phrase. For the purposes of this study, gang involvement will refer to individuals who are actively participating in a gang, regardless of their present-day level of participation.
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Problem Statement

2.1 Overview

While the study of gangs has grown considerably in the last three decades, some of the literature suggests that the measurement of gang concepts is inconsistent (Decker, Melde, & Pyrooz, 2013). In other words, gangs are not being studied accurately due to variation in how the “gang” concept is being defined and flawed measurement techniques. This inconsistency, it has been suggested, stems from a “level of explanation problem” (Short, 1985). Short (1985) argues that there are different levels of explanation which influence theory development and research methods. Decker and his colleagues (2013) note that many theories related to gangs are rooted in the following three levels of explanation:

- Macro-level sociological explanations, such as social disorganization theory;
- Micro-level explanations that study the constantly changing practices in social interaction; and
- Individual-level explanations, such as social learning theory and self-control theory.

Decker and his colleagues (2013) maintain that each level of explanation produces distinct types of questions and provides varying components that help explain a phenomenon (e.g., theories). However, these levels of explanation are not meant to be merged, and doing so results in inconsistent measurement of the phenomena (i.e., gangs).
Individual-level research first became prevalent in the late 1980s with several panel studies on the causes and consequences of gang involvement (Decker, et al., 2013). This research led to a revival in focused, community-based and public health intervention approaches for youth who are at risk of gang involvement and for those who already are involved in gangs (Decker, et al., 2013). This review focuses on individual-level explanations and considers individual-level motivations and risk factors associated with gang membership, as well as motivations, barriers and consequences associated with exiting a gang.

2.2 Motivations and Risk Factors of Joining a Gang

While several studies have identified risk factors associated with general delinquency, crime and violence (O’Brien, Daffern, Chu, & Stuart, 2013), research highlighting specific risk factors associated with gang membership is limited (Esbensen, Peterson, Taylor, & Freng, 2009; Howell & Egley, 2005; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003). In other words, the current literature only examines risk factors that predict both gang membership and general crime (e.g., violence). So, there is no strong evidence of risk factors that specifically predict gang membership (Esbensen, et al., 2009).

In their review of longitudinal studies examining gang membership, Howell and Egley (2005) observed that researchers routinely organize risk factors for gang membership using developmental domains. These domains can be broken down into five levels: individual, family, school, peer group, and community. These levels are used to organize variables and to function as predictors of different antisocial outcomes, such as gang involvement, violence and delinquency. Howell and Egley’s (2005) review found
that risk factors in all five domains can increase the probability of an individual becoming
gang involved. Moreover, these risk factors have a cumulative effect, which means that
the more risk factors experienced by a youth, the greater the chance of that individual
becoming gang involved. Accordingly, gang theories need to be designed so they can
address several risk factors from each of the five developmental domains (Howell & Egley,
2005).

There is also a great deal of consensus in the literature suggesting that the
following five risk factors are the most commonly observed for youth: experiencing a
critical life event (e.g., an injury or death of a close relative); exhibiting antisocial
tendencies that may or may not be considered delinquent behaviours, such as impulsivity;
maintaining negative attitudes that are pro-delinquent; low levels of parental supervision;
and affiliating with delinquent peer groups (Maxson, 2011).

Echoing the findings of Howell and Egley (2005), Maxson (2011) also emphasizes
the increased probability of gang involvement when risk factors are accumulated across
several domains. Youth who join gangs consistently have a high number of risk factors
preceding their membership. However, as mentioned, the literature also indicates that
none of the observed risk factors can be used to exclusively predict gang involvement,
since they are also often associated with other anti-social outcomes (Maxson, 2011).

In their review of nearly 200 articles, books and governmental reports, O’Brien and
her colleagues (2013) came to similar conclusions. They found many studies that identified
friendship-based risk factors, such as joining the gang to make friends, as the strongest
motivators for gang membership. Additional risk factors that were prevalent in the
literature included: familial gang ties, aspirations of being someone important, and believing that the neighbourhood needs to be protected (O’ Brien, et al., 2013).

In his study examining pathways into and out of gangs for youth with an immigrant background, Ngo (2010) found that foreign-born youth and Canadian-born youth with foreign-born parents not only face the traditional risk factors, such as those referenced by Maxson (2011), but also face extenuating factors, such as maturing too fast due to growing up in a war zone, suffering from extreme poverty and hunger, having to manage culture shock effects on their parents, and dealing with racism or discrimination. Ngo’s study consisted of in-depth interviews with 30 gang-involved youth with immigrant backgrounds and low-income families who lived in Canada. The research suggests that the relationship between these youths and their families, schools and communities gradually disintegrated. Youths reported a wide range of child rearing styles employed by their parents. For instance, some parents were neglectful, whereas others were overly strict. These child rearing styles caused conflict and resulted in a lack of bonding between parent and child. As a result, many of the youths did not receive the necessary support to help overcome developmental and sociocultural challenges. These issues were compounded in school, where the youths experienced significant learning barriers and challenges in social interaction. Many of the participants also experienced being bullied in elementary and early high school years, which ranged from being excluded from peer groups to suffering racially motivated violence. Further, most of the participants grew up in low-income neighbourhoods, where they were exposed to illicit activities (e.g., drug use, drug dealing, and prostitution) at an early age, and did not have access to positive adult role models. Ngo
(2010) suggests that the lack of a connection to their families, schools and communities left these youths with a social void, which pushed them towards gang membership.

Decker and Van Winkle (1996) suggest that gang research has emphasized factors that negatively influence youth, also referred to as “push” factors, and drive them into gangs. Researchers have neglected the alluring and attractive aspects of the gang, also referred to as “pull” factors, which can influence prospective members, as well as those already committed to the gang (Decker, et al., 2013). For instance, Felson (2006) found that gang members often display their identity using signs and symbols in the form of tattoos or clothing to demonstrate membership status. The purpose of this display is connecting oneself with the gang, which is meant to intimidate others by linking the individual member to the group’s violent and criminal reputation (Felson, 2006).

Decker and his colleagues (2013) assert that this display establishes that a clear goal individuals have before joining a gang is to alter the way others view and treat them. In other words, these individuals are “pulled” towards gang membership with the goal of changing the way people see and perceive them. Some may be motivated by the desire to garner respect, whereas others prefer to elicit fear. Regardless of their specific reason for desiring change, this goal is clearly a strong motive that can lead individuals to joining a gang. However, more research is needed in this area, as the current literature on understanding the individual-level effects of this identity transformation remains limited (Decker, et al., 2013).
2.3 Motivations, Barriers and Consequences of Exiting the Gang

The research on the situation of gang members and their exit from gang life highlights three things; namely that there are numerous challenges or barriers facing these individuals towards a successful exit, that exiting can be a complex process with variable approaches and that there is still no universally accepted classification that defines being “exited” (Carson, Peterson, & Esbensen, 2013; Carson & Vecchio, 2015). Nonetheless, the literature also suggests that most youth gang members -between 48% to 69% of them - do not remain in a gang for more than one year (Carson & Vecchio, 2015). From those who remain involved with the gang for more than a year, between 17% to 48% leave before the two-year mark. Therefore, for most gang-involved youth, their gang membership is a temporary status that persists for less than two years, and can be changed (Carson & Vecchio, 2015).

2.3.1 Defining Exiting

The first issue with researching gang exiting, also referred to as gang desistance, is defining what “exiting” means. Researchers will often base their definition of “exited” on how a gang member self-identifies (Carson & Vecchio, 2015). In other words, individuals who at one time self-identified as being a gang member, and then later believe their membership to be terminated, would be considered to have exited. A weakness in this definition is that the literature on the cessation of criminal behaviours affirms that exiting is a process, while an individual changing the way they self-identify is more of an event (Carson & Vecchio, 2015). Still, there is a distinct difference between exiting a gang and
discontinuing any involvement in criminal activities, since the former is a state, and the latter is an act (Kissner & Pyrooz, 2009).

Carson and her colleagues (2013) examined the theoretical and methodological issues associated with defining gang exiting. The researchers drew data from a longitudinal panel study conducted between 2006 and 2012 that evaluated a school-based gang prevention program. Sixth and seventh-grade students from 26 schools were surveyed annually, but questions regarding the motivations, methods, and consequences of exiting were not added to the survey questionnaire until the third year of the study. As such, data collected during the first two years of the study was excluded. The researchers operationalized exiting based on survey responses to several questions. Participants who provided an “affirmative” response to any of the three exiting questions (“why did you leave the gang?”; “how did you leave the gang?”; and “were there any consequences for leaving the gang?”) were categorized into Group 1. This was the most inclusive group, which included 1,096 youth from the sample of 15,298 youth. In comparison, Group 2 was more exclusive and operationalized exiting based on responses to gang membership questions. This group included students who provided an affirmative response to “Have you ever been a gang member?”, and reported that they are no longer in a gang by stating “No” to the “Are you now in a gang?” question. 637 students met the criteria for Group 2. Group 3 was much more restrictive, excluding youth who specified they were “Never in a Gang” or are “Now in a gang” even if their answers to the two gang membership questions indicated former gang membership. This resulted in 473 youth in Group 3. The study found that 39% of the youth met all three of the operational definitions used to differentiate
the three groups, whereas 46% identified with just one of the operational definitions. In other words, the three definitions represent subsets of youth from the sample of 15,298 youth. The researchers found some variations across the three groups, but observed that the overall trends and outcomes related to exiting are comparable regardless of definition. Consequently, none of the operational definitions can be considered inherently “wrong” (Carson, et al., 2013).

Carson and her colleagues (2013) also emphasized the difficulty in identifying ex-gang members, since it can be difficult to make a clear distinction between active and inactive members. For example, some inactive gang members may continue to associate or do business with their former gang. Pyrooz, Decker, and Webb (2014) assert that the notion of gang membership needs to be viewed through a life-course framework. The researchers used data from a drug-abuse monitoring program to examine the enduring ties ex-gang members may maintain with their former gang peers. The study found that ex-gang members’ ties with their gang were strongest when gangs are present in the neighbourhood, but that ties weaken as time passes. It also appears that those with more gang ties (i.e., closer affiliations) faced higher rates of victimization after exiting the gang. Pyrooz and colleagues (2014) also highlight the difference between labelling an individual a “former” or “ex” gang member. The researchers suggest that using the term “ex-member” is superior as it does not imply the individual has no contacts with former gang peers. This is an important distinction since a significant portion of their sample, who had been exited for a long time, maintained emotional and social ties to former gang peers (Pyrooz, et al., 2014). Therefore, the best definition for gang exiting may be the process of
disengagement from gang membership, which puts an emphasis on the individual’s declining probability of involvement with the gang (Pyrooz & Decker, 2011).

Carson and Vecchio (2015) highlight how the process of exiting can cause issues with formulating a definition for exiting. For instance, a gang member may become disengaged with gang life and no longer self-identify as being a member, but that does not mean they stop all involvement in criminal activity or sever their social relationships with other members of the gang (Deane, Bracken, & Morrissette, 2007; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). In addition, gang members who self-identify as being exited sometimes continue to participate in gang behaviours, such as wearing clothing associated with the gang, flashing gang signs and maintaining social relationships, including participating in criminal behaviour with former gang peers (Carson & Vecchio, 2015). Pyrooz and Decker (2011) suggest that this behaviour can often be attributed to external factors. For example, even after they self-identify as no longer being members of the gang, individuals usually remain in the same neighbourhood as their former gang peers. These external factors can sometimes act as a barrier and hinder the exiting process. However, as time passes and individuals continue to self-identify as no longer being gang members, the social and emotional relationships connecting them to the gang significantly decrease (Pyrooz & Decker, 2011). Therefore, it is important to remain cognizant of these complexities when researching gang exiting, since individuals with persistent ties to the gang are likely to experience changing motivations and consequences related with the exiting process (Carson & Vecchio, 2015, p.6).
2.3.2 Motivations to Exit

Like motivations for joining gangs, push and pull factors affect motivations for exiting gangs (Carson & Vecchio, 2015). However, the push and pull factor classifications used in gang exiting are different from the ones discussed in Section 2.2. Push factors in exiting are internal thoughts and emotions that cause a gang member to want to leave the gang (Bjorgo, 2002; Carson & Vecchio, 2015; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011). For example, a gang member may witness a heinous act that makes gang life less appealing. This event may push the individual away from the gang, and accelerate their desire to exit (Decker & Pyrooz, 2011). Carson and Vecchio (2015) suggest that this concept of push factors is consistent with most theories of cognitive shift and development.

Pull factors are external influences that lead an individual away from the gang (Carson & Vecchio, 2015). For example, being arrested can sometimes result in an individual being pulled away from the gang. One study indicated that between 20% and 40% of former gang members stated they were motivated to exit after their involvement with the criminal justice system (Decker & Pyrooz, 2011). Pull factors, such as an arrest, can be considered turning points in the individual’s life, and are consistent with life-course theories (Carson & Vecchio, 2015). Yet, pull factors do not have to be negative. Pull factors can also include encouragement from positive role models, such as teachers, parents, or coaches who encourage a youth to leave their gang (Carson, et al., 2013; Carson & Vecchio, 2015; Decker, et al., 2014). Research has also highlighted the following pulls: meaningful employment (Bjorgo, 2002; Carson & Vecchio, 2015; Decker, et al., 2014; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996); spirituality and religious conversion (Carson & Vecchio,
Similar to push and pull factors associated with joining gangs, push and pull factors related with exiting are often interrelated (Carson & Vecchio, 2015). The exiting process typically requires more than one motive to drive an individual away from the gang. In other words, several push factors (e.g., burning out of the gang lifestyle, disillusionment) and pull factors (e.g., family responsibilities) are often necessary to initiate and maintain the exiting process. By accumulating push and pull factors, gang members can develop an awareness of the negative outcomes and harmful experiences associated with sustained gang affiliation (Carson & Vecchio, 2015). Berger, Abu-Raiya, Heineberg, and Zimbardo (2016) found this to be consistent even with core gang members. They conducted a qualitative study of 39 former gang members with an average length of 11.6 years’ gang membership. Their findings suggest that most of the participants decided to exit the gang because of a mixture of push and pull factors that developed over a period of time. Male participants tended to exit more often due to push factors, while female participants leaned more towards exiting based on pull factors (Berger, et al., 2016).

In their research review, Carson and Vecchio (2015) found that disillusionment is the most common push factor named by former gang members as their reason for exiting.
For instance, Carson and her colleagues (2013) found that disillusionment was the primary motive for exiting reported by 42% to 55% of youth, both males and females, formerly involved with a gang. Further, Ngo (2010) found disillusionment to be a primary motivator for exiting among immigrant youth involved in gangs. This research highlights four key reasons for disillusionment: learning how the inner workings of the gang function, recognizing that the violence has escalated to an unacceptable level, feeling like the gang is not adequately supporting their needs and believing that their gang peers are taking advantage of them (Bjorgo, 2002; Carson & Vecchio, 2015; Decker, Pyrooz, & Moule, 2014).

Decker and Pyrooz (2011) also noted that maturation can play a significant role in helping push gang members away from the gang. The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with 177 young adults, 97 of whom admitted to participating in gang activities, from three U.S. cities. Decker and Pyrooz (2011) used a purposive sampling method, which helped them speak to gang members on community supervision, those in prison, and those involved with a social service agency known for finding non-criminal work for gang members. The researchers found that 73% of their sample believed that they had grown out of gang life, and only 12% of the sample disclosed being physically harmed by members of their own gang due to their desire to exit (Decker & Pyrooz, 2011). These findings are supported by the results of Ngo’s (2010) study which also found maturation to be a leading motivation for gang exiting. Moreover, 74% of former gang members reported that after their exit police officers did not stop treating them as if they were members of the gang (Decker & Pyrooz, 2011). Though the study found a high rate of former gang members
being concerned about attacks by rival gangs who do not recognize their exited status, the police were perceived as being twice as likely to ignore the new status and continue treating exited gang members as active gang members (Decker & Pyrooz, 2011).

Building upon these findings, Decker and his colleagues (2014) found that disillusionment and maturation are interrelated pushes, which can lay the seeds of doubt in gang members and help start the process of exiting. They examined disengagement from gangs by conducting in-person interviews in four U.S. cities with 260 individuals who identified as exited from their gangs. The results indicate that the exiting process can be accelerated by pushes, specifically disillusionment and maturation, if paired in tandem with pull factors, such as criminal convictions. Further, based on the number of factors and influences that are involved with exiting a gang, it is clear that the process occurs over a period of time (Decker, et al., 2014).

2.3.3 Barriers to Exiting and Intervention Programming

Decker and his colleagues (2014) also found issues within the prevailing gang intervention program model used in the U.S, which focuses on disengagement. Millions of dollars in funding has been provided to social service agencies that administer disengagement-based gang intervention programming. However, many of the interviewees in Decker and his colleagues’ study reported that their decision to exit the gang was not influenced by either the criminal justice system or any social service agency. This is especially concerning, since the sample included individuals in a program that was specifically designed to help gang members exit gang life (Decker, et al., 2014). Likewise, Klein and Maxson (2006) found that most gang intervention programs in the U.S. failed to
help end an individual’s gang membership. Decker and his colleagues (2014) suggest that an effective gang intervention program must be able to identify a gang member’s early misgivings and improve the natural social processes that are pushing and pulling that individual towards exiting (p. 280). It is critical to expose the individual to prosocial ties, such as positive family members, while continually working to decrease ties with negative influences, such as those involved with the gang.

Weinrath, Donatelli, and Murchison (2016) suggest that mentorship is an effective intervention component and can be used to expose youth to prosocial peers. The researchers conducted interviews with clients of the Spotlight Serious Offender Services Unit in Canada, which is a program for high-risk gang-involved young offenders. In addition, they observed interactions between street mentors who worked directly with clients to better understand the effect of the mentor and mentee relationship. Recidivism outcomes between this sample were compared to a comparison group of high-risk youth who were not in a mentorship program. Youth in the mentorship program did considerably better than the comparison group on all measured recidivism outcomes measured in the study (Weinrath, et al., 2016).

Bolden (2013) examined pathways into and out of gangs by conducting in-depth interviews with 28 current and 20 former gang members in Texas and Florida. The sample consisted of males and females from underprivileged backgrounds, who ranged in age from 18 to 59, and from several racial and ethnic backgrounds, including White, Black, Latino, and mixed race and ethnicity. Akin to the findings of Berger and his colleagues (2016), Bolden (2013) found that ex-gang members often describe multiple causes that
motivate their exit from the gang rather than identifying any single event or aspect of gang life. Furthermore, only three of the former 20 gang member interviewees indicated suffering violence during the exiting process. Yet, some interviewees who no longer self-identified as being members of the gang suggested that it was impossible for them to leave their gang. Bolden (2013) asserts that individuals who feel they cannot leave their gang will often move to another city or state to successfully exit; this geographical distance is key to successfully exiting. If moving is not possible for a member, it is imperative that the gang be replaced by an alternate support structure. Bolden (2013) suggests providing those looking to exit a gang with access to environments that both address the need for geographical space and provide a support structure, such as vocational school or occupations like the military that provide legal income and relocation. Without at least one of these elements, the ex-gang member is at high risk of being drawn back into gang life because of enduring ties to their former gang peers (Bolden, 2013).

Chu, Daffern, Thomas, Ang, and Long (2014) conducted a study examining criminal attitudes of institutionalized gang involved youth in Singapore. Similar to the findings of Decker, Pyrooz, and Moule (2014), Chu and his colleagues' outcomes indicated that effective prevention programs need to be more focused on the target group (i.e., gang-involved youth). More specifically, in Singapore, a successful prevention program would require culturally sensitive gang prevention methods that could apply to non-Western countries. Further, the study results indicated that the average age at which members joined gangs was approximately 13 years, but some joined as early as age 10. So, it is not
enough to implement prevention programs in high school. Prevention programs need to be targeted at elementary school students as well.

Although the study found that most youth gang members spend less than two years in the gang, there are steps that can be taken to improve prevention programming to help more youth exit. The study results indicated that while youth in gangs did not possess notably more psychopathic personality traits, they did possess higher impulsive and irrational tendencies. As such, an effective prevention program may need to provide youth gang members with concentrated treatment to address their pro-violent attitudes and aid in behavioural control. Moreover, Chu and his colleagues (2014) found that exposing gang involved youth to prosocial ties while decreasing their ties to criminal associates is essential to reduce the risk of recidivism. Early intervention is also important, as youths’ personalities are potentially more malleable and will offer more promise of change as compared to adults with entrenched psychopathic personality traits (Chu, et al., 2014).

Gormally (2015) similarly emphasizes the importance of early intervention. However, he also calls for more support from the local community and broader society, arguing that they have a part to play in helping youth exit gangs by providing social recognition and identity-enhancement opportunities. By taking these steps the local community can help change the ex-gang member’s previous identification, which will improve their ability to resist being drawn back into gang life (Gormally, 2015).

Hennigan, Maxson, Sloane, Kolnick, and Vindel (2014) focused their research on developing the ability to support secondary gang prevention programs, which target individuals who have been identified as high-risk youth. The researchers created a gang
risk of entry factors assessment tool (GREF) using process-level data on a scored questionnaire. Gang prevention programs could use the tool to create effective entry for more intense secondary level prevention for youth who are genuinely at a higher risk for gang involvement. Their aim was to provide a way to segregate youth who may genuinely become involved in gang behaviour from youth who may possess only a few risk factors. Without using an assessment tool to gauge risk levels, youth who are at lower risk are often recruited into prevention programs. The researchers argued that using a research-based approach, such as the GREF, is much more reliable than a clinical approach in terms of identifying youth in need of more intensive gang prevention programming (Hennigan, et al., 2014).

Wu and Pyrooz (2016) used a school-based longitudinal sample of adolescents to examine pathways between gang membership and violent victimization. Their findings indicate that while gang members have a high rate of victimization, factors external and internal to gangs are mutually responsible for this result. In addition, admittance into a gang often corresponds with negative changes in an individual’s behaviours, including increased risk taking, rage, conceitedness, aggressive dispute resolution, decreased prosocial ties, delinquency, and decreased empathy. Wu and Pyrooz (2016) recommend that intervention programs targeting highly delinquent gang members need to be geared towards reducing delinquency and victimization.

Krohn, Ward, Thornberry, Lizotte, and Chu (2011) examined how the impact of gang membership in adolescence can influence an individual’s life in adulthood. The study results indicated an association between longer periods of gang membership during
adolescence and detrimental outcomes in early adulthood. For example, the more years an adolescent is involved with a gang, the higher the risk the individual will drop out of school. These negative outcomes often result in poverty and familial conflict during later adolescents and early adulthood, and become a barrier to exiting the gang and reinforcing continued criminal involvement (Krohn, et al., 2011). Levitt and Venkatesh’s (2001) findings reiterated these outcomes. Levitt and Venkatesh also found an association between long-term involvement in gangs and detrimental outcomes in early adulthood (e.g., lack of education, and legal income). In addition, they suggested that involvement with gangs during adolescence has a long-term impact on an individual’s economic future, which can be a significant barrier to exiting the gang (Levitt & Venkatesh, 2001).

Researchers also note that the risk factors associated with joining a gang are not always the factors that result in continued gang membership (Thornberry, et al., 2003). As an individual matures, their risk factors can change. As such, it is vital that further research be conducted to identify other characteristics or factors that may influence the decision-making of gang-involved individuals to exit (Thornberry, et al., 2003).

2.3.4 Consequences of Exiting

Carson and Vecchio (2015) contend that the consequences of exiting a gang (i.e., what happens to the individual after they leave the gang) are probably the least understood part of the exiting process. The lack of knowledge can even act as a barrier that hinders those who are in the process of exiting. Consequences most commonly occur due to former gang members continuing to be associated with their gang by outsiders, such as the police, members of rival gangs, and community members (Carson & Vecchio, 2015; Decker &
Pyrooz, 2011; Decker, et al., 2014). 74% of Pyrooz and Decker’s (2011) sample of former gang members experienced negative treatment from police who continued to view them as gang members even after they exited their gang. These individuals continued to be catalogued in a database of gang members, and had to deal with a relatively high amount of interaction with police (Pyrooze & Decker, 2011). Carson and Vecchio (2015) argue that this continued labelling as a gang member can act as another barrier to exiting, especially in the context of labeling theory. After all, persistently treating an individual like a gang member may strengthen their faltering gang values, and push them back into the gang (Carson & Vecchio, 2015).

The fear of reprisal from rival gangs is another serious consequence of the exiting process (Carson & Vecchio, 2015). Rival gangs do not forgive past transgressions based on an individual deciding they no longer want to be a member of a gang (Carson & Vecchio, 2015). Research also indicates that this fear of reprisal can also be a barrier to exiting and can draw a former gang member back into the fold, since they need the protection of the gang (Decker, et al., 2014; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996).

The literature also suggests that many gang-involved youth develop familial bonds with their gang, sometimes referred to as “enduring ties” (Decker, et al., 2014; Carson & Vecchio, 2015). The fear of losing these familial ties is a major barrier for the exiting process, since leaving the gang can feel like leaving family. However, the short-term loss of losing gang friends may be necessary to help support a successful exit (Carson & Vecchio, 2015).
Although some research has found negative effects associated with exiting a gang (e.g., being jumped or beaten out of their gang), many former gang members who self-identified as exited have reported that they did not face any consequences (Carson, et al., 2013; Carson & Vecchio, 2015; Ngo, 2010). For instance, Carson and her colleagues (2013) found that between 42% and 57% of their sample of former gang-involved youth reported that they did not experience any negative consequence during the exiting process. Decker and Pyrooz (2011) suggest that the lack of negative consequences may be due to gang members understanding or even supporting their peer’s decision to exit. These nonviolent exits are most common in situations where individuals exit due to disillusionment or maturation (Carson & Vecchio, 2015). These findings are echoed by the findings of Pyrooz and Decker (2011) who assert that when maturation is combined with pull motives (e.g., parenthood, marriage, and/or legitimate employment) there is a significantly lower risk of negative consequences. In comparison, 30% of former gang members who exit due to push factors, such as high levels of perceived violence, are expected to experience hostility during the exiting process (Pyrooz & Decker, 2011). Thus, the circumstances accompanying the decision to exit the gang have a significant influence on whether the gang will be supportive of or hinder the exiting process.

2.4 Youth Gangs and the link between Crime-Immigration in Canada

The 2002 Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs across Canada drew from data provided by 264 police agencies and found approximately 434 youth gangs across the country that included members from ethnically diverse backgrounds (Astwood Strategy Corporation, 2001). The survey indicated that youth gangs include members who are of
African Canadian, Latino/Hispanic, Caucasian, South Asian, East Asian, Middle Eastern, and First Nations decent. In other words, the majority of youth gang members in Canada are visible minorities (approximately 60%) and Aboriginal (22%) (Astwood Strategy Corporation, 2001). Totten (2008) asserts that more than one-third of Canadian youth gangs include two or more ethno-racial groups. Furthermore, British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec have a significantly higher level of ethnic and cultural diversity in their youth gangs (Astwood Strategy Corporation, 2001). In contrast, street gangs in Saskatchewan appear to have the most homogeneity (Totten, 2008). Totten (2008) suggests that this lack of diversity is due to most of the gangs in Saskatchewan being aboriginal gangs that do not embrace members of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

Totten (2008) also suggests that almost all gang members in Canada are male. However, the 2002 Canadian Police Survey indicated that the number of females becoming involved with gangs is on the rise in Canada (Astwood Strategy Corporation, 2001). Their findings suggested that females currently comprise an estimated 6% of youth gang membership in Canada.

The literature examining the crime-immigration connection in Canada is limited (Ngo, 2010). Wortley and Tanner (2006) conducted a study examining whether there is a connection between crime and immigration by surveying youth in Toronto. The sample consisted of 3,292 high school students, 46% of whom were not born in Canada, from 30 schools and 392 street youth who were all surveyed between 1998 and 2000. 4% of the high school students and 15% of the street youth were actively involved in gangs. Moreover, involvement in gangs was more likely among younger male students, youth
from low-income families or single-parent households, and youth who struggled in school both academically and socially. The researchers contended that delinquent and criminal behaviour among youths is not imported from other countries. The findings indicated that youth born in Canada are slightly more likely to report gang involvement than those who are born elsewhere and immigrate to Canada. Further, the possibility of immigrant youth becoming involved with gangs only increases the longer they are in Canada. Thus, youth gang involvement is not related to immigration status, but is a domestic phenomenon (Wortley & Tanner, 2006).

Likewise, McMullen (2009) also found that youth involved in gangs are no more likely to be immigrants than citizens. McMullen examined self-reported data from youth between 13 and 15 years of age who had at least one parent born outside of Canada (second generation), had both parents born in Canada (Canadian-born) or was born outside of Canada (first generation). Youth born in Canada reported the highest level of property related delinquency, whereas youth born in a foreign country who migrated to Canada after 5 years of age reported the lowest level. However, second-generation youth reported higher rates of violent delinquency than both first-generation and Canadian-born youth. First- and second-generation youth reported significantly greater rates of bullying in comparison to Canadian-born youth (McMullen, 2009).

Ngo (2010) identifies the most prevalent risk factors for immigrant youth as social relationships, family dynamics, academic challenges in school, lack of community attachments and socioeconomic status. More importantly, the literature supports the notion that immigration status does not affect the propensity of youth to join a gang (Ngo, 2010).
2.5 The Current Study

The current study employs a qualitative approach, using data collected from in-depth interviews with five male gang members of a B.C. Lower Mainland gang. The study aims to answer two research questions: (1) Is there any indication that youth who grow up in a middle-class “suburban” environment are affected by the same risk factors associated with joining gangs and barriers to exiting gangs as youth who grow up in a “poor” underprivileged environment?; and, (2) Are there unique risk factors associated with joining and obstacles to exiting -apparently encountered by- youth who were raised in Canada by foreign born parents in a middle-class environment? These questions are descriptive in nature and recognize the unique gang environment in B.C. The literature review highlighted key trends and patterns relating to the process of members joining and exiting a gang, and identified a number of risk factors usually at play in these decisions. There is limited research examining the relationship between the socio-cultural realities of youth from middle-class “suburban” environments and their involvement with gangs. Additionally, more research is necessary to explore the influence that being raised by foreign-born parents may have on youths born in Canada or immigrating to Canada who become involved with gangs. This study draws upon the lived experience of five male gang members, four of whom were raised by foreign-born parents, who self-reported as being raised in a middle-class “suburban” environment. The scope of the study is to learn about the attitudes, beliefs, events and circumstances that led them to get involved in gang activities, as well as the feasibility from their perspective of exiting the gang.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Method: Interviews with Gang Members

The study adopts a phenomenological approach, to move past preconceived notions in interpreting the phenomenon of gang recruitment and describing the experiences of participants as they are lived. The phenomenological approach has broadly defined methodological steps, which allows researchers to use their creativity (McDavid, Huse, & Hawthorn, 2013). The findings presented in this thesis are based on an analysis of data collected through interviews with five male members of a B.C. Lower Mainland gang. The interviews took place between November 1, 2016 and January 31, 2017. Table 3.1 provides a profile for each of the participants, who all identified as being raised in a middle-class “suburban” environment and ranged between 22 and 29 years of age. Four of the participants were born in Canada, and the fifth immigrated to Canada from India when he was five years old. The participant who was born in India stands out even further, since he is the only person to disclose being adopted. All four of the other participants were raised by their birth parents. Further, four participants were raised by foreign-born parents, while one was raised by parents who were born in Canada. The participants had varying levels of education. One was expelled from high school and never returned; one completed high school and did not pursue any post-secondary education; and the other three reported some university education. Three of the participants were working at the time of the interviews and the other two were not. These individuals have a special personal knowledge of gang recruitment activities and barriers to exiting a gang, and were prepared to participate in the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Code</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
<th>Country of Birth</th>
<th>Middleclass Environment</th>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
<th>Employment Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some University</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Grade 11</td>
<td>Not working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Not working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some University</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some University</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Overview of participant profiles

Participants were invited to join the study by a source who is a preeminent member of the gang. Rather than directly recruiting participants, the source provided members of the gang with an invitation. The source was briefed on key points that needed to be discussed when the invitation was transmitted to potential participants, and provided with a checklist to ensure there was a proper introduction to the study and its purpose (see Appendix B). The invitation to the members of the gang was provided by the source at a group meeting. It was critical that the invitation be shared in a fully transparent manner to ensure information was accurately shared with all members of the gang and to mitigate any risk of some gang members becoming paranoid about the study. The source explained to potential participants that every effort would be made to ensure that their identity is not revealed to the researcher. Further, the source clarified that the researcher would not be asking any questions related to the gang’s historical and/or current operations. The source explained that the focus of the study is on how they became involved with the gang, and emphasized the importance of not sharing any incriminating information.
While the source was conveying the invitation, the importance of voluntary participation was also emphasized. The researcher recognized the possibility that gang members of lower status than the source within the group could still somehow feel pressured to participate in the study, or that they might believe that their standing in the gang would improve in some way because of their willingness to participate. So, the source made it clear that no one was obligated to participate and that no one else would find out whether they participated. Moreover, other members of the gang being of similar rank to the source mitigated the potential ethical issues of the power relationship between the source and gang members. In addition, the source received no benefit from participating or from any other member of the gang participating, so there is no incentive to coerce gang members to participate. The source made it clear that there were no prizes for anyone who participated or punishments for those who chose not to.

The source then provided each person in attendance with a card listing an anonymous email address and a phone number. The email address was created for the study, and the phone was on a “pay as you go” plan. This implemented an extra layer of anonymity to protect the privacy of both the participants and the researcher. The source then recommended that anyone wishing to voluntarily participate in the study contact the researcher directly using the contact information on the card. The source also emphasized that if gang members were going to contact the researcher that they should not use their personal email or phone number, or mention their name.

When a potential participant made contact with the researcher, they were provided with an overview of the study. The researcher verified they met the recruitment criteria,
and confirmed that they would like to be interviewed. The researcher assured them of their anonymity, and their authority to refuse to answer any questions that make them feel uncomfortable or terminate their involvement in the study at any time. After the individual confirmed their willingness to participate, the researcher scheduled an interview at a safe public place that was mutually agreed upon.

Face to face interviews were conducted by the researcher between November 1, 2016, and January 31, 2017. The interviews had to be conducted face to face rather than over the phone to mitigate any fears participants may have had concerning the interview being recorded. The researcher only took paper notes during the interviews to further mitigate any fears participants may have had of their voice being recorded, as well as to ensure participant anonymity. The researcher began all interviews by giving participants the letter of informed consent approved by UFV’s Human Research Ethics Board (Appendix C). After the participant read the letter, the researcher verbally confirmed that the participant still desired to voluntarily participate in the study and consented to being interviewed. The researcher then conducted the interview, using an interview instrument (Appendix D) to guide the discussion. The interviews were semi-structured and incorporated open-ended questions that were meant to stimulate participants to provide more information that they believed is important. To ensure the anonymity of participants, at no point during the interview was information collected that would allow anyone, including the interviewer, to identify them. At the start of each interview, participants were assigned a number to represent them for analytical purposes.
3.2 Data Analysis

A thematic analysis (Thomas, 2006) was used to evaluate the interview data to help identify phrases or words that summarize ideas expressed in the interviews. The selected phrases or words helped establish themes and patterns related to the research questions. The analysis process involved deconstructing, penetrating, comparing and classifying the data, focusing on the circumstances and events relevant to both entering and exiting gangs. Further, the analysis examined whether any unique themes and patterns of risk factors associated with joining and obstacles to exiting gangs were identified for youth. The analysis allowed the interview data to be compared to findings described in the literature, which most often pertain to a sample of youth who grow up in an underprivileged environment. In addition, the data allows for future comparisons to other gangs in B.C. and beyond.

3.3 Limitations of the Study

The current study has several methodological limitations. Due to elevated tensions from high-levels of gang rivalry in the B.C. Lower Mainland, as well as media attention publicizing the Townline Hill conflict in the City of Abbotsford (Hopes, 2017), gang members may have been reluctant to come forward. As such, the study used a convenience sample, which is a non-probability sampling technique. The individuals who voluntarily chose to participate appeared to be sincere and forthright during the interview, but there is a chance that they censored or embellished their responses. The sampling method could also have resulted in a group of participants with similar behavioural dynamics, which
considerably hampers the generalizability of the study even to the rest of this gang. Moreover, the interviewees consisted of only male participants, which may be representative of this specific gang, but not of other gangs across Canada. The lack of female participation precludes any discussion of gender based differences in gang life.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Joining Gangs

Participants’ descriptions of motivations for joining the gang were quite similar. The risk factors identified from their responses fell into four of the five developmental domains established by Howell and Egley (2005): family, school, peer group and individual. Each of these domains encompassed several scenarios, some similar and some different, that led to the participant being at risk of gang involvement. Further, all five of the participants identified risk factors across several domains, supporting Maxson (2011) who found increased probability of gang involvement when risk factors are accumulated across several domains.

4.1.1 Family

Lack of parental attachment was identified among four of the five participants who all indicated that they currently have no relationship with their parents. Similar to the findings of Ngo (2010), it appears that the relationship between these individuals and their families disintegrated over time. The participants described a wide range of relationships with their parents through childhood and adolescences. Some reporting childrearing styles that they considered overly strict, with others believing they were neglected by their parents and left on their own. However, a common theme in all the responses was a high level of conflict that negatively affected attachment to their parents.

M1: Man, my parents would beat the shit out of me.

M2: We fought all the time… up until they just kicked me out.
M3: I would describe our relationship as BOOM! There was always a lot of yelling and fighting.

M5: The relationship was strenuous and complicated. They (parents) often fought and I would get caught in the crossfire of their conflicts.

Except for one of the participants who stated that he maintains a strong relationship with both parents. He described a relationship built on support that did not waver even after his parents learned about his gang involvement.

All five of the participants indicated that they did not spend very much time with their parents growing up. Maxson (2011) identified low levels of parental supervision as a common risk factor observed among gang-involved youth. While the participants were raised in a two-parent household and lived at home during childhood, they felt that the amount of time spent with their parents was not adequate. Two participants advised that while they spent significant time in their parents’ company, it was usually while doing some type of labour work. The participants did not view this time spent with their parents as something that helped bond them. Both participants had similar responses when asked about the time they spent with their parents, indicating apathy, and one stating that he never realized there was another option.

M1: Is what it is.

M5: It is what it is… never realized there was any other option. This is all I knew until recently.

Two other participants stated that they began intentionally avoiding their parents to avoid conflict, but provided very different reasons. One of them felt immense pressure from his parents, who he indicated never approved of his friends or academic aptitude. Their
disapproval caused constant conflict that he tried to avoid as much as possible until his parents kicked him out of their home when he was expelled from high school. The second participant who reported attempting to evade conflict by avoiding his parents, described a strenuous relationship, and suggested much of his family’s issues stemmed from his father’s alcohol abuse.

M3: (describing relationship with parents) Boom!

The fifth participant also felt he did not spend very much time with his parents growing up. However, this was not due to any type of conflict, but rather his father’s work schedule and mother’s duties around the house. The participant indicated that he believed this to be normal and explained he spent a lot of time with his siblings and friends. He had several older siblings who he would often go to for guidance rather than his parents.

Familial involvement in crime or gangs was common among the respondents with three participants reporting their first glimpse of gang life being through a family member. Ngo (2010) previously identified early exposure to illicit activities, such as drug dealing, and a lack access to positive adult role models as a common theme among immigrant youth who became gang-involved. One participant explained that his father and older brother were involved in crime and worked with gangs. He also reported that his father took him along on errands and exposed him to behaviours that normalized illicit activities and violence at a young age. Another participant was influenced by his older brother who he observed living the flashy gang lifestyle. The participant described how in middle school his older brother would provide him with large amounts of cash so he could buy anything he wanted. In addition, he saw the respect and fear his older brother garnered and envied it all. The participant also reported being exposed to illicit activities, such as drug
use and prostitution, at a young age through his older brother. The third participant who reported familial involvement in crime indicated that his father was involved in criminal activities, and incorporated him into his operations at an early age.

**M4: I saw the respect that my brother got. I wanted the same.**

### 4.1.2 School and Anti-Social Behaviour

Educational disengagement was another common theme identified among four of the five participants. “Educational disengagement” refers to behavior and learning problems that may eventually lead to dropout (Furlong & Christenson, 2008). Disengagement from classroom learning can result when a student’s feelings of competency are threatened, and/or when they do not feel connected to a valued peer group. Disengagement can present as internalized behavior, such as boredom or emotional distress, and/or externalized behavior, such as deviant behaviour (Furlong & Christenson, 2008). Moreover, research has highlighted the negative affect educational disengagement can have on youth (Howell & Egley, 2005; Ngo, 2010; Maxson, 2011).

Four participants reported struggling in academics and not participating in extracurricular activities. One participant disclosed that he was expelled from high school and never graduated. These four participants felt that they did not have sufficient academic support to help them catch up in areas where they were struggling. They also reported significant conflict with some teachers. As a result, they fell behind as early as middle school.

**M1: I never learned how to do long division. Still can’t do it. Just forced it.**
In high school, they began skipping classes, not completing any homework and participating in delinquent behaviours. In addition, several participants reported that their parents stressed academic success and often pressured them to “try hard”. However, their parents never provided any support, such as retaining a tutor or taking the time to check their homework. Nonetheless, three out of the four graduated from high school, and two of them went onto complete some post-secondary school. Both these individuals reported that their post-secondary careers did not last very long due to a bad habit of skipping class, not doing their homework as well as other illicit behaviours (e.g., recreational drug use) that resulted in academic failure.

Furthermore, four participants shared that they were involved in many fist fights during their youth, and identified middle school as the time when this negative behaviour manifested. Only one participant felt that he may have been bullied, while the other three remain adamant that they were not bullied in school. Moreover, a common theme among all four participants is a belief that they were not responsible for the fights.

**M2:** They (classmates) always started shit.

**M3:** Gave others as much a beating as I ever got.

These four participants also reported that, before getting a drivers licence, their primary place to “hang out” with their peer group was at school. Some were not able to have friends over to their home and others did not want to go home, so they would stay late after school or skip class and participate in delinquent activities.

**M2:** Mostly school, before I started sneaking out of the house.

**M3:** Early on it was school, but then I got my licence and could drive.
One participant reported academic success, extracurricular participation, and positive relationships with teachers in middle school and high school. Furthermore, he described similar experiences to the other participants as he also skipped many classes in high school and participated in delinquent behaviours (e.g., fist fights). The participant indicated that he completed some post-secondary education, but dropped out after two years. He did not provide an explanation for this decision.

4.1.3 Peer Group

All five participants reported that they met and began relationships with members of the gang in either middle school or high school. O’Brien and her colleagues (2013) found that friendship-based risk factors, such as joining the gang to make friends, is one of the strongest motivators for gang membership. Four participants became gang-involved during high school, while the fifth stated that he did not participate in any gang related activities until after high school. However, he made many connections and built relationships with individuals during high school that helped him with joining the gang later in life. Most participants described a gradual shift from friend group to gang. They were not sure when things changed, but felt that one day they were just “hanging out” and then things evolved into something else. Moreover, while some participants stated that they maintained relationships with some friends who were not gang-involved in high school, all five participants reported that those friendships have since withered. As such, they are isolated with members of the gang being their primary source of camaraderie and support.
Another common theme reported by all participants was that their peer group has continued to change due to the fluid nature of gang networks in B.C. Two participants indicated that they have shifted peer groups in the past based solely on business. In addition, another participant reported that from an early age he viewed his peer group as both friends and business partners. He described a fluid and changing system of networks with friendship and business connecting several different groups for a common goal (i.e., financial gain).

**M1:** This is not like with the mafia or in the movies, friends come and go.

**M2:** Friends have changed over the years, and like that, so has the gang.

Parental supervision and scrutiny of friends may have been quite low, as all five participants reported that their parents never had an issue with their friends, or that their parents never met their friends. Three participants described meetings between their parents and friends. In all these encounters their friends were respectful and well-mannered when meeting the participants’ parents. So, the parents believed them to be “good” youths and never expressed any concern with their son spending time with his chosen peer group.

**M4:** Friends were always respectful of my parents. Just common stuff for our culture.

### 4.1.4 Individual

Financial gain was the primary motivation provided by all five participants when asked what first led them towards gang life. Three of these individuals also mentioned how their parents put significant value on financial success, such as attributing success in life to an individual’s net worth. Several participants also reported earning a reputation of being someone who is “connected” as a leading motivation.
M3: Was just trying to make some easy and quick money in high school.

M4: It was fun. Made money and got a rep for being someone you don’t fuck with.

However, three participants reported that their motivations have changed over time. Supporting the findings of Thornberry and his colleagues (2003) who suggested that the risk factors associated with joining a gang are not always the factors that result in continued gang membership. In other words, as an individual matures, their risk factors can change. So, while these participants may have become gang-involved for financial reward, their primary motivation for continuing this path is to maintain a certain reputation and connection to the gang.

M1: Motivations change, so the favourite part of being involved with a gang changes with them. Used to be about making money. People assume it’s easy money, but it’s not. It is fast money though. It isn’t easy because a lot of paranoia comes with the job. Motives have shifted now… mostly care about having a reputation of being someone who is not to be fucked with.

M2: Things (motivations) always change.

M5: Of course, it has changed. Everything changes over time. Started with money and the connects, but have kind of gotten out. Trying to do things more legit.

M5: If someone wants to make a move, they must think twice. I don’t have to beg people for help if something happens. I have people who will jump in without hesitation. Does not matter if you are legitimate or illegitimate, there are people who will get pissed at you and try something.

Two participants maintained that while their activities have changed, and they now face more obstacles, financial gain continues to be their primary goal.

M4: More stress (now) than when younger, but still about making money.
4.2 Exiting the Gang

Carson and Vecchio (2015) found that most youth gang members exit before the two-year mark of their gang membership. So, all five participants of this study can be considered outliers as they have been each been gang-involved for over five years. Further, when asked whether they had ever thought about exiting the gang, all five participants reported never thinking about exiting.

4.2.1 Motivations to Exit

The common theme identified among responses to a question asking what could motivate participants’ exit from the gang were concerns related to disillusionment, which is consistent with findings previously presented by Carson and Vecchio (2015). The literature highlights four key reasons for disillusionment (Bjorgo, 2002; Carson & Vecchio, 2015; Decker, et al., 2014), and two participants’ responses corresponded with one of them: believing that their gang peers are taking advantage of them (i.e., not being able to trust the gang). Two participants reported that the only thing that would make him sever ties with the gang was if they could no longer trust their fellow gang members.

M1: Money may not change you, but it will change those around you.

M2: If something happened and they turned on me.

The other three participants all provided responses based on a variation of one of the four reasons presented in the literature: recognizing that the violence has escalated to an unacceptable level. However, rather than only being concerned about escalated conflict with other gangs, they expressed concern of police action and indicated if the risk outweighed the reward they would most likely exit.
M4: I guess if (the) risk beat reward.

M5: Extra paranoia not worth it.

Research has highlighted meaningful employment as a factor that can often pull an individual away from a gang (Bjorgo, 2002; Carson & Vecchio, 2015; Decker, et al., 2014; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). Three participants reported legitimate long-term employment with incomes ranging between $60,000 and $80,000 annually. Two of these participants indicated that while they have never considered severing ties with the gang, they currently have minimal involvement with the gang’s activities. Instead they have each been focusing on their legitimate job opportunities. In addition, one of these participants also mentioned that future involvement with the gang would depend on balancing the potential benefit with risk. The third participant who reported legitimate employment indicated that the income he earns from his legitimate job cannot support his lifestyle, so he continues to actively work with the gang.

M1: Getting this job made me want to distance myself (from the gang).

M5: Not involved in anything illegitimate right now. But am an opportunist, so things could change.

Ngo (2010) and Decker and Pyrooz (2011) found maturation, which includes legitimate employment, to be a powerful motivator in helping push gang members away from the gang. This may explain the steps taken by the two participants who reported distancing themselves from the gang’s activities. However, their lack of motivation to sever ties with the gang seems to support the findings of Bolden (2013), Berger and his colleagues (2016) and Decker and his colleagues (2014) who suggested that multiple pull and push factors
are necessary (e.g., disillusionment and maturation) to lay the seeds of doubt in gang members, and help them exit.

4.2.2 Barriers to Exiting

Three participants reported that they have developed familial bonds with fellow gang members, and do not feel as though they could sever these relationships. Decker and his colleagues (2014) previously discussed how the fear of losing these enduring ties is a major barrier for the exiting process, since leaving the gang can feel like leaving family.

M1: Even if I didn’t want to be fully involved, I would not cut these people out.

M2: Don’t have anyone else. I can’t rely on someone who isn’t fully committed to have my back. That’s how these guys would feel about me if I left.

Whereas, the other two participants described their connection to the gang as more of a business relationship. Both reported having little emotional attachment to other members, and stated that they would have no qualms about severing their connection to fellow gang members.

Financial reward was a barrier emphasized by four participants. One participant reported that he has spent significant time in prison because of his involvement with the gang, but has not thought about exiting as he has no other source of income. Similarly, another participant reported that he has no other recourse as his only income is from gang activities. The other two participants both have legitimate sources of income. One of them reported that as his legitimate job does not provide the necessary funds to support his chosen lifestyle, he needs the gang to supplement his income. Whereas, the second
participant stated he was more focused on earning through legitimate means, while not
closing the door on earning through the gang.

M3: Don’t have any other options. It’s too late at this point to make decent money
any other way… and I’m not moving to Alberta.

M5: Depends on the dollars and cents. I will probably try and combine both
legitimate and illegitimate work. Make the best/most money.

Research has found negative effects associated with exiting a gang, such as being
jumped or beaten out of the gang, and being attacked by rival gang members (Carson &
Vecchio, 2015). However, all five participants reported feeling no risk of violence if they
shared a desire to exit the gang with their fellow members. Participants also reported that
they have observed several individuals exit a gang without facing any type of reprisal.
These findings are consistent with literature that has debunked the blood-in, blood-out
myth based on the high rate of attrition faced by most gangs (Bolden, 2013). Instead,
participants suggested that the only negative consequence would be related to a loss of
respect and standing among their peers.

M2: I can’t rely on someone who isn’t fully committed to have my back, that’s how
the others would feel about me.

M3: They don’t want (to be) in (the gang), fuck’em.

Three participants explained that it is in the gang members’ own interest to let
those who are no longer committed to the gang leave as they can no longer be trusted. One
participant reported that youths may have a higher risk of experiencing violent reprisals
when exiting, and compared the practice to bullying. Another participant indicated that he
felt the gang should be supportive of fellow gang members even if they decide to exit.
M2: This isn’t a cartel. You don’t just turn on someone if they need out.”

M5: Leaving isn’t a big deal. Someone wants out they can go. Early on in high school someone exiting might catch a beating or two, but that is more bullying. No one would get killed over it.

Decker and Pyrooz’s (2011) also found that the lack of negative consequences faced by some gang members during the exiting process may be due to gang members understanding or even supporting their peer’s decision to exit. One of the participants who reported distancing himself from the gang’s activities indicated that he has received nothing but support and understanding for his decision to focus on his legitimate employment. However, he also emphasized the fact that he did not exit and how every situation is singular.

M5: Have not had any barriers (to exiting). Received nothing but support for decision. Support can mean a lot of things though. They know I will still support them as well. There are different levels to being out.

In addition, one participant reported a fear of possible reprisal from rival gang members. He felt by exiting the gang that he would be leaving himself vulnerable. Carson and Vecchio (2015) previously discussed how fear of reprisal can be a significant barrier to exiting, since rival gangs do not forgive past transgressions based on an individual deciding they no longer want to be a member of a gang.

M4: There are a people who would see me as weak.
4.3 Promising Interventions

When asked about possible forms of intervention, all the participants reported that they felt the onus is on the individual. Accordingly, they believed geographical relocation to be a trivial attempt at helping youth exit gang life, as youth can meet new delinquent peers almost anywhere. One participant provided an anecdote of a friend who was sent to India in high school as an attempt by his parents to get him away from delinquent peers, but rather than reforming, the individual started a new gang in India. Further, two participants suggested that due to advances in communication and social media programs it is very difficult to force a youth to sever ties with friends.

**M1:** You can find drugs and gangs everywhere, and access is easy.

**M3:** Changing schools is not a big deal. Could get into trouble anywhere.

These beliefs clash with findings from Bolden’s (2013) research that suggested geographical distance is key for a gang member to successfully exit. Another participant emphasized that it is up to the individual person, only he or she can decide whether they want to exit. The participant explained that until the individual decides they want to exit, it will be very difficult for an intervention method, such as geographical relocation, to have much of an effect on a youth or adult.

All five participants also reported feeling that their parents and family could have done little to intervene and pull them away from gang life. One participant indicated that parental interference can sometimes make matters worse.

**M5:** It’s up to the individual. Parents can have an adverse influence on their kids.

Especially teenagers who are rebelling and don’t want to listen. The kid needs to want
to change. Parents need to be supportive. Don’t villainize the kid. If the kid gets beat up a few times he will straighten out on his own. It’s the rare person who keeps going in this shit, but if you have no family to go back to, your options are limited. Don’t just kick the kid out.

These responses may be skewed by the high conflict relationships participants reported having with their parents, as well as the high rate of familial involvement in criminal activities reported by some participants. Decker and his colleagues (2014) suggested that it is critical to expose gang-involved youth to prosocial ties, such as positive family members, while continually working to decrease ties with negative influences, such as those involved with the gang. Further, in situations like these where prosocial ties cannot be found among family members, connecting the youth to a mentorship program is an effective method of exposing the youth to prosocial peers (Weinrath, et al., 2016). All five participants reported that they were not involved with any mentorship or gang intervention programs during their youth. Several participants indicated being reprimanded and one was even expelled. However, none of them were ever placed into any type of mentorship or intervention program.
Chapter 5: Implications and Recommended Next Steps

5.1 Summary of Findings

The analysis of lived experience data provided by five gang-involved participants has demonstrated that youth who are raised in a middle-class “suburban” environment may share many of the same complicated pathways toward and away from gang-involvement as those from “poor” underprivileged environments. The participants experienced significant conflict with parents, which largely stemmed from ineffective childrearing styles and lack of parental involvement during childhood. This conflict hampered any chance of parental attachment, and led to a gradual disintegration of the participants’ familial relationships. Moreover, participants became educationally disengaged after they did not receive essential supports to help manage their antisocial behaviours and succeed academically. As such, they were propelled towards delinquent peers who were also struggling academically and exhibited similar antisocial behaviours. Concurrently, participants were presented with opportunities for intrinsic (e.g., respect) and extrinsic (e.g., money) rewards, so their peer group gradually evolved into a gang. Though some participants shared that they have distanced themselves from the gang’s activities, none of them felt a desire to exit. Participants emphasized the enduring ties that bind them to the gang and felt only disillusionment (i.e., being betrayed by the gang) could push them toward exiting.

5.2 Implications

The current study explored the lived experience of five members of a B.C. Lower Mainland gang, which is approximately 25% of the entire group. By examining the
attitudes, beliefs, events and circumstances that led them to get involved in gang activities, as well as the feasibility from their perspective of exiting the gang, this study has established a new understanding of this gang and expanded the literature on gangs.

Several implications have emerged from the collected data. First, this data suggests that there is no indication that youth who grow up in a middle-class “suburban” environment are affected by any distinguishing risk factors associated with joining gangs and barriers to exiting gangs in comparison to youth who grow up in a “poor” underprivileged environment. While onlookers may perceive these youths as growing up in well-functioning families with abundant financial resources and community attachments, the participants felt that they were raised in a high conflict environment with minimal familial and community support.

Second, there were no unique risk factors associated with joining and obstacles to exiting identified among the four participants who were raised in Canada by foreign born parents in a middle-class environment. The responses provided by all four participants raised by immigrant parents were consistent with the traditional risk factors identified in the literature. None of the participants reported any of the extenuating risk factors identified by Ngo (2010) among foreign-born youth and Canadian-born youth with foreign-born parents, such as maturing too fast due to growing up in a war zone, suffering from extreme poverty and hunger, having to manage culture shock effects on their parents, and dealing with racism or discrimination.

Third, it is clear from this data, in combination with previous research, that early intervention is key. Intervening in high school is sometimes too late as youths become
entrenched in the gang lifestyle. Chu and his colleagues (2014) emphasized early intervention as youths’ personalities are potentially more malleable and will offer more promise of change as compared to adults with entrenched psychopathic personality traits. So, intervention and prevention programs need to be implemented as early as middle school. Programming should be geared towards identifying youths exhibiting anti-social behaviours early to improve the chance of reaching the youth and preventing gang-involvement. Further, incorporating ways to expose at-risk youth to prosocial ties, such as mentorship, needs to be a central component of intervention and prevention programs. Too often it is assumed that youths from middle-class families are surrounded by positive prosocial adults. However, that was not the case with any of the participants of this study.

5.3 Future Research Directions

The literature on “non-traditional” at-risk youth remains in its early stages, and further examination of this group is necessary. Especially in B.C., as law enforcement agencies have indicated that several gangs in the Lower Mainland are populated with “non-traditional” at-risk youth (Public Safety Canada, 2016). Future research may advance knowledge in this area by exploring the findings of this study through verifying or building upon the study findings; further exploring the risk factors associated with joining gangs and barriers to exiting gangs faced by “non-traditional” at-risk youth who grow up in a middle-class “suburban” environment. In addition, research is needed to study whether there are any distinguishing features of the South Asian diaspora that might explain the gang involvement of these “non-traditional” at-risk youth. More research is also necessary
to examine whether patterns of exiting may be different for gang members with different cultural backgrounds.

5.4 Concluding Remarks

The involvement of youth in gangs is not simply an issue for one individual, family, neighbourhood or racial/ethnic group, but a collective concern for the community. It is imperative that communities come together, and maintain thoughtful dialogue to develop a collaborative approach that can be used to assist gang-involved youth. Unfortunately, there is no definitive answer that explains why some youths become gang-involved, or why some decide to exit. To quote a participant (M2), “This shit is complicated. You will not find a one size fits all answer to any of it. Everyone has their own reasons and story.” Yet, there are some common themes that have been consistently identified in gang recruitment and exiting research. An important theme that was identified in this study is how negative familial relationships, particularly with parents, can adversely affect a person from a young age. These youths spiral downward without the right supports, developing negative identities, and finding a sense of belonging among delinquent peers. So, prevention and intervention programs need to not only provide at-risk and gang-involved youth with a sense of belonging in the community, but also at home.

Many prevention and intervention programs in the Lower Mainland are school-based, and there has been a movement to get parents involved with program activities. However, the programs remain primarily focused on supporting youths, when a holistic approach that supports the entire family is necessary. The experiences of the gang-involved participants in this study emphasized a high level of conflict with parents, which involved
a lot of verbal abuse that only worsened as they aged. Further, by strengthening their family unit, this holistic approach would help breakdown a major barrier to exiting, as the gang-involved participants in this study shared feelings of the gang being their only family as a leading barrier to leaving the gang. Therefore, it is not enough to provide at-risk youth with a little extra support while they are at school, programs need to integrate family outreach and mentorship components that are focused on supporting healthy family interaction in youths’ homes. Effective programs should also connect socially isolated families with community services, such as mentorship and tutoring programs, to help increase the youths’ exposure to prosocial ties. Through this holistic and collaborative approach, programs will be able to help provide at-risk youth with a sense of belonging in the community, as well as in their homes.
Appendices
Appendix A: Ethics Certificate of Approval

Certificate of Human Research Ethics Board Approval

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<th>Department</th>
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<td>Gurvir Brar</td>
<td>Criminology</td>
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<td>Dr. Yvon Dandurand (Supervisor)</td>
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Certification:

The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the UFV Human Research Ethics Board, and the procedures were found to be in compliance with accepted guidelines for ethical research.

Michelle Riedlinger, Chair, Human Research Ethics Board

NOTE: This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above noted term provided there is no change in the procedures or criteria given.

If the project will go beyond the approval term noted above, an extension of approval must be requested.
Appendix B: Invitation Discussion Points

- Explain the researcher’s proposal, study goals, and background:
  
  o Focus of study is on gang recruitment and hurdles to exiting;

  o Emphasize that no questions about the gangs past or present operations will be asked;

  o Disclose the researcher’s occupation as a municipal Bylaw Officer and explain how that is different from policing; and

  o Underscore that involvement is voluntary, so there will be no repercussions for not participating.

- Discuss steps taken by researcher and steps that potential participants can take to ensure anonymity and privacy:

  o Provide all potential participants with card displaying phone number and email that can be used to contact the researcher;

  o Explain that the number is for a private pay-as-you-go cell phone purchased for the research project;

  o Explain that the email has been created for the sole purpose of the project and has only been shared with them;

  o Recommend that anyone who chooses to participate not use their personal phone number or email to contact the researcher;

  o Recommend that anyone who chooses to participate not use their real name;

  o Reiterate that participation is voluntary and that there is no direct benefit for participating; and
- Emphasize the importance of not sharing any incriminating information during the interview.
Appendix C: Letter of Informed Consent

Criminology and Criminal Justice Department
University of the Fraser Valley
33844 King Road
Abbotsford BC V2S 7M8
604-504-7441

Date: October 17, 2016

Under the Hood: Understanding pathways in and out of gang life from the members’ experiences

Letter of Informed Consent

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before continuing, it is important that you understand the purpose of the research and what the process involves. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the interviewer to clarify anything that is not clear, and do not hesitate to ask questions if you need more information.

Purpose/Objectives of the Study

As a student in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of the Fraser Valley, I am conducting a study related to gangs. In this study we want to learn more about why individuals join gangs, and explore your views about possibly leaving the gang. I will be conducting all the interviews personally, and will be the only person with access to the research data.

Procedures involved in the Research

This study will involve an interview that will take approximately 90 minutes to complete, and be recorded using paper notes. In this interview, you will be asked to relate your experiences associated with being recruited into the gang, and explore the feasibility of exiting the gang. Discussing the obstacles you would expect to encounter if you chose to do leave the gang, as well as the circumstances that would lead you to consider doing so.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts to Participants

There are no major physical, psychological, or social risks involved in our procedures beyond what you would expect to encounter in everyday life. However, there is a potential risk from members of the gang who may oppose or worry about the study. Gang
culture is steeped in suspicion of policing organizations who are continually trying to find new ways to infiltrate gangs. Further, gangs have been known to take drastic measures against members who are perceived as disloyal or collaborating with law enforcement. So, you could be at risk of social and/or physical reprisal from gang members who perceive your involvement in the study as a threat to the gang’s safety, and security. In addition, you may feel that some questions are personal in nature and therefore, make you feel uncomfortable. You may refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, or terminate your involvement in the study at any time you choose.

**Potential Benefits**

There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, we hope that the information obtained from this study may benefit the research community by advancing knowledge related to gangs. Specifically, by contributing to a better understanding of the pathways that lead individuals to join and exit gangs.

**Confidentiality**

Any information that is obtained during this study will remain confidential and your privacy will be respected. Anything that you say or do during the interview will not be told to anyone else or published without your permission. The researcher will be the only person with access to the data. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Your name and contact information will not be collected. Code names/numbers will be assigned to all participants, and will be used on all research documents;
- All notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information will be kept locked in a file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher; and
- All raw data will be destroyed by April 2020.

**Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time during the study. You are also free to refuse to answer some questions but stay in the study. There are no penalties for declining to participate or withdrawing your participation. If you withdraw from the study, your data will not be used and your interview record will be destroyed immediately.

**Study Results**
If you wish to know the results of the study, please contact the University of the Fraser Valley Library at 604-854-4545 after June 1, 2017.

Questions

Please feel to ask any questions you may have about these procedures or the research study. You may also keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Dr. Yvon Dandurand at Yvon.Dandurand@ufv.ca. The ethics of this study have been reviewed and approved by the UFV Human Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns about the ethics of this study, please do not hesitate to contact the University of the Fraser Valley School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at (604) 854-4579.

Consent

By participating in this interview you are indicating your consent to have the information provided used in the study.
Appendix D: Interview Instrument

I am going to start the interview off by asking you some basic questions about yourself. Please remember to not mention any information that may incriminate you, or help anyone identify who you are.

1. What is your age?

2. What country were you born in?
   - Prompt:
     - When and how did you come to Canada?
     - Where were your parents born?

3. What kind of schooling have you done?
   - Prompts:
     - Some highschool?
     - Highschool Graduate/GED?
     - Some College?
     - College Graduate?
     - Graduate Degree?
     - How did you do in school?
     - What was your relationship like with teachers?
4. Were you raised in a two-parent household?

- Prompt:
  - How would you describe the relationship you had with your parent(s) growing up?
  - How much time did you spend with your parents?
  - How did you feel when you were younger about the amount of time you spent together?
  - What is your relationship like with your parent(s) now?
  - Would you describe your family as low-income, middleclass, or rich?
  - Have any of your family members been involved in criminal activity? Please remember to not mention any information that will identify the individual or details that would incriminate you.

5. Please do not mention the actual job title or company, but do you have a legitimate job?

- Prompts:
  - Again, without sharing the name of the job or company. What kind of job is it?
  - What is your estimated annual income from this position?
6. Would you mind telling me about when and how you first started hanging out with members of the gang?

- Prompts:
  
  - What attracted you to the gang?
  
  - Where did you hang out with members of the gang most?
  
  - What was your favourite part about hanging out with the gang?
  
  - How much did you hang out with people who were not involved with the gang?
  
  - How come you went the gang route rather than focus more on some of those other friendships?
  
  - How did your parents feel about your friends?
  
  - What role, if any, did family play in you joining the gang? Please remember to not mention any information that will identify the individual or details that would incriminate you.
  
  - How much did your parents know about your friends and what you were up to?
  
  - How would changing schools have affected your relationship with these guys?
  
  - What could your family have done to help stop you from getting involved with the gang?
7. Now I would really appreciate it if you could share a little bit about how the gang has affected your life?

- Prompts:
  - How has the gang affected your legitimate job?
  - Has there been any impact on the relationship with your family?
  - Has your favourite part of being with the gang changed? How?
  - Is there something else you could tell me about this? Please remember to not mention any incriminating information.

8. First question is the obvious one, have you ever thought about leaving?

- Prompts:
  - If you don’t mind sharing, can you tell me what made you want to leave?
  - How come you didn’t leave?
  - What would make you want to leave?
  - Was there a specific event or issue that made you want to leave? Please remember to not mention any incriminating information.
  - How did you feel at the time?
  - Have others left that gang in the past? Please remember to not mention any incriminating information.
  - How much does your legitimate job affect wanting to leave?
What would you do if you had a baby on the way, or your significant other really wanted you to leave?

What would be the hardest part of leaving?

Is there anything else you want to share about this?

9. If you chose to leave, what are some barriers you think would be in your way?

- Prompts:
  - How much of a role would money play in the decision?
  - Any fear of possible violence if you wanted to leave? Please remember to not mention any incriminating information.
  - How difficult would it be for you on a personal level to cut ties with members of the gang? Especially the ones you have been friends with for years.
  - What are the chances that you could maintain relationships with these friends, and also leave the gang?
  - Is there anything else you want to share about this?

Thanks for meeting with me, and sharing these experiences. I just want to confirm one more time that you are certain about me using this information in the study. So are you okay with me using the information you shared during this interview?
References


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