

Not Just Another Thug: The Implications of Defining Youth Gangs in a Prairie City

A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Education
In the Department of Educational Foundations
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

By

Robert Henry

Copyright, Robert D. Henry, April 2009. All Rights Reserved.

Abstract

Urban centers and smaller centers across Canada are witnessing an increase in youth gang activity. But, determining both the level and nature of youth gang involvement/activity is problematic, in part because of varied interpretations of what it means to be a gang. Many Canadians believe that a gang is a structured organization with crime as their main objective. However, youth gangs can range from associations involving a loosely organized collective of friends that come together to protect their neighborhood to that of the hardcore gangs who have political agendas and are structurally organized. It is much more difficult to determine the level and nature of youth gang activity because they are ever changing entities depending on factors such as race, socio-economic status, and community. Youth gangs become a burden to society financially, emotionally, and mentally. Costs are incurred due to vandalism and an increase in crime: while anguish and a heightened sense of fear/anxiety speak to the emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects resulting from gang activities.

This study is a qualitative analysis that focuses on how agencies in Saskatoon define youth gang activities and behaviours. The agencies involved constitute community based organizations, permanent and part-time holding residences, justice and city officials. Grounded theory analysis was utilized to maintain the original interviewees own voices from interviews to the final product. The final analysis is divided into three sections that focus on: characteristics of Saskatoon youth gangs, implications of defining, and programming. By analyzing these themes we begin to see that defining youth gangs becomes a very political issue and that agencies who work with youth have difficulty in coming to terms in creating a common definition of youth gangs for Saskatoon.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE

ABSTRACT.....i

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....ii

CHAPTER ONE.....1

 Introduction.....1

 Chapter Summaries9

CHAPTER TWO.....11

 Literature Review.....11

 History of Youth Gangs in North America.....13

 Theories on Gangs.....17

 The Politicization of Defining Youth Gangs.....21

 Five Definitions of Gangs.....22

 Youth Gang Continuum Chart.....28

CHAPTER THREE.....32

 Research Methodologies.....32

 Grounded Theory.....32

 Statement of Research Study.....33

 Significance/Rationale - Why Should Youth Gangs be Studied in
Saskatoon?.....34

 Interviewees.....35

 Data Collection.....35

 Data Coding.....37

 Memo Writing.....40

 Ethics.....41

 Conclusion.....41

CHAPTER FOUR.....43

 Data Analysis.....43

 The Challenges of Identifying, Defining and Working to Prevent and
Intervene in Youth Gang Culture.....43

 Identifying Characteristics of Saskatoon Youth Gangs.....44

 The Intrigue of a Life of Pressures: What a Gang Life Offers Youth Within
Saskatoon.....45

 Gangs: The Social Void Filler.....45

 A Blinded Future: How Gangs are Able to Blind a Youth's Perspective of
Life.....49

 Saskatoon Agencies Perspectives of Youth Gangs.....53

Recognizing Youth Gang Activities and Behaviours in Saskatoon.....	55
Implications of Defining Saskatoon Youth as Gang Members.....	59
Labeling Theory.....	60
Definitions: More Harm Than Good.....	62
The Power to Define: Who Should Have the Power to Define Youth as Gang Members?.....	63
Youth Gang Programs in Saskatoon.....	71
Pillar One: Prevention.....	72
Pillar Two: Intervention.....	74
Pillar Three: Suppression.....	76
Assessment Tools for Youth At-Risk.....	78
Holistic Healing: Focusing on the Whole Child.....	79
The Importance of Meaningful Relationships.....	83
Summary.....	85
 CHAPTER FIVE.....	 87
Conclusion, Implications and Suggestions for Future Research.....	87
Compare and Contrast.....	88
The Elephant in the Room.....	93
Future Research Recommendations.....	96
 REFERENCES.....	 99
 APPENDIX A.....	 105
 APPENDIX B.....	 106
 APPENDIX C.....	 108
 APPENDIX D.....	 110

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I first became interested in youths at-risk for gang involvement when I was an educational assistant in a community school in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada. The school was located in an area which consisted of a high percentage of families living in poverty, low English educational literacy, and Aboriginal ancestry. It was within this school that I began to see an influx of youth (particularly male) partaking in what I, and other co-workers, believed to be a gang lifestyle. School administration brought in city police officers to help teachers and staff to begin to understand the behaviours and activities of Prince Albert youth gangs. The police officers explained the different colours, clothing, and signs that gangs were used to identify themselves from other gangs. The one thing that the police did not do, however, was provide a definition, or allow the staff to come up with a working definition, of a youth gang for the Prince Albert context. Rather, the police presented and explained to the teachers and staff the criteria they used to identify youth gang activities within the community. The police officers did not expand specifically from where the criteria derived, only that what they were presenting what the police officers had observed in Prince Albert. Because of this, I believe that many teachers began to label male youth as gang members solely because of particular clothing worn. As a result, teachers were able to remove these youth from their classrooms with more ease. The labeling of youth as gang members was misused on more than one occasion to remove youth from classrooms.

Removing youth through the use of a 'gangster' label intrigued me throughout my undergrad and graduate school years. During these years, I spent as much time as

possible trying to understand gangs and youth's roles within these organizations. Through a preliminary literature review and talking with police and youth themselves, I began to see a contrast in the way Prince Albert residents viewed gangs compared to that of larger urban centres. The one major recurring in these discussions was that no one could really define a youth gang. There was no trouble in defining biker gangs, the Mafia, or adult prison gangs, but few could commit to a definition of a youth gang. When I began this thesis, I refocused my attention from Prince Albert male youth gangs to a Saskatoon context. Two reasons for informed this change. First, Saskatoon is the largest city in Saskatchewan, with a surrounding population of approximately 250,000. Second, I wanted to understand why a definition of male youth gangs had not been created in Saskatoon, and furthermore, whether a definition could be created. I also wanted to understand whether it was possible for different agencies who work with troubled youth, albeit from different perspectives, to come together to create a unified working definition for male youth gangs.

My understanding of gangs, and youth gangs in particular, derives from the relationships that I have developed with youth in Prince Albert and Saskatoon, along with literature on gangs that I have read and gathered through different projects. I soon realized that there is a limited amount of literature that addresses male youth gangs in Canada, and even less on female youth gangs. This literature is limited even more when it comes to that of the Prairie provinces and Saskatchewan in particular. The purpose of this research is to begin to understand the behaviours and activities of male youth gangs in Saskatoon in order to implement effective programming. This understanding will also help limit the mislabeling of youth as gang members.

Youth gangs have been primarily researched in larger centres, specifically in the United States of America. Such research focuses on large super-gangs which are often portrayed in the media as the archetype for gang appearance and activities (Vigil, 2002, Klein, 1995, 2002; Klein & Maxson, 2006; Huff (edt.), 2002). Examples of these gangs include the Crips, Bloodz, Vice Lords, M-S 13, and Latin Kings (Vigil, 2002). According to this research many urban and rural centers and their organizations who work with deviant youth, define youth street gangs similarly to that of larger metropolises, and view gangs as organized groups who are involved in many different areas of crime (Chettleburgh, 2007; Klein, 1995).

Much of how Canadian society has come to understand gangs and gang culture has been derived from American media (Richter-White, 2003). Canadian communities identify gang membership and activities largely through the media press, movies, and video games, much of which are created in America. Through different media types a “typical child will have witnessed 30,000 violent acts and 8,000 murders on television” (Richter-White, 2003, p.28). Public fear of gangs is due to this media portrayal especially of the types of violence associated with youth gangs. In her report for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Richter-White (2003) explains that the information gathered gangs by the public is “almost exclusively secondary sources comprising mainly hearsay and the media” (p.29). She expands on this by referencing Warren (1998), who states that “underlying the issue of media reportage is the power vested in media organizations to shape community perceptions over social issues through the selective discursive interpretation and presentation of such information as ‘news’” (p.29). Apart from a skewed representation of gangs in general, youth gangs are especially misrepresented

within the media (Dubois, 2003). These misconceptions are used to create stereotypes of particular youth perceived to be associated to gangs. Youth marginalized through race and class are further marginalized through stereotypical images that influence public perceptions about gangs, such as the belief that gang violence is an epidemic (Richter-White, 2003; Schissel, 1997). These media representations help to generate and create a space and identity for marginalized youth to embrace. Therefore, media has played and continues to play a vital role in the identity formation of youth gangs by manipulating society's perception of youth gangs.

In 1999, the National Youth Gang Centre (NYGC), which is a part of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, conducted its first national survey on youth gangs. In an effort to understand the problem of youth gangs, the NYGC asked law enforcement officials to identify youth gangs as, "a group of youths or young adults in your jurisdiction that you or other responsible persons in your agency or community are willing to identify or classify as a 'gang'" (NYGC, 1999, p.45; Klein & Maxson, 2006, p.5). This definition encouraged officials and other "responsible" persons and agencies to identify a potentially very broad range of individuals who participated in supposed gang-related activities. Because of the vagueness of the original definition, NYGC altered the definition in its third annual national survey:

A group of youths or young adults in your jurisdiction whose involvement in illegal activities over months or years marks them in their own view and in the view of the community and police as different from most other youthful groups. Do not include motorcycle gangs, hate or ideology groups, prison gangs, or other exclusively adult gangs. (NYGC, n.d., p.7; Klein & Maxson, 2006, p.5-6)

By narrowing the definition, the NYGC was able to exclude specific groups that some participants may have included in previous surveys. After incorporating this change, the numbers from the previous survey dropped dramatically. Some jurisdictions stated that youth gang activities dropped by 12 percent and the number of active gangs by 26 percent (Klein & Maxson, 2006, p.6). The definitional change within these surveys allowed researchers to begin to acknowledge the disparities of how youth gang definitions can be created urban and rural centres.

A similar survey and study was conducted in Canada in 2002 by the Solicitor General of Canada, which asked 264 police agencies across Canada questions about youth gangs within their jurisdiction (Chettleburgh, 2002). The definition used for this survey followed very closely to that of the second definition created by NYGC. The participants in the Canadian survey were asked to define youth gangs and their members under the following parameters:

A group of youth or young adults in your jurisdiction, under the age of 21, that you or other responsible persons in your agency or community are willing to identify or classify as gangs. As part of this definition, we ask you to *exclude* motorcycle gangs, hate or ideology groups, prison gangs, and other exclusively adult groups. (Chettleburgh, 2002, p.5, emphasis in original)

Unlike the NYGC definition, Chettleburgh's left out illegal activities as part of its criteria. However, Chettleburgh's definition considered youth to be those under 21 years of age. This definition, like the NYGC definition, follows very broad criteria that can be interpreted widely by different individuals according to what they view as gang behaviours within a jurisdiction. The definition is specific to the maximum age that is to be considered and also limits the scope to only consider those gangs that are not part of "motorcycle gangs, hate or ideology groups, prison gangs, or other exclusively adult

groups” (p.5). However, the definition leaves much to the subjective assessment of participants’ relationships and interactions, which may have been influenced by media-generated perceptions of gangs.

According to the solicitor general’s study, Saskatoon had the highest per capita of youth gangs and youth gang activity in Canada – 2.57 per 1000 (Chettleburgh, 2007, p.22). The danger of such a broad definition is the role subjectivity plays in determining which youth are to be considered a youth gang member in the different urban centers. Such a subjective definition allowed those people in positions of power to define and manipulate statistics based on the individual’s subjective understanding and political concerns of the subject. This power to alter statistics becomes a political tool that can be used to help foster political agendas. Juxtapose this way of defining youth gangs with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) concern that labeling and defining of youth as gang members puts them at greater risk of police scrutiny and surveillance (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations [FSIN], 2003). A gang label especially marginalizes Aboriginal youth because of its negative connotations (FSIN, 2003; Richter-White, 2003). Although the FSIN is against the labeling of youth, it is also trying to create a definition of youth gangs so that the mislabeling of Aboriginal youth in rural and urban settings does not occur.

As stated earlier, available research on youth gangs in Saskatoon is limited. The need to understand youth gangs in both rural and urban contexts because the natures of youth gangs are unique to the specific center to where they reside (Klein & Maxson, 2006). Although there may be similarities between different rural and urban Canadian settings, the factors that create or inhibit the creation and growth of youth gangs varies,

and therefore changes one's understanding and definition of youth gangs. Vigil (2002) has stated the importance of understanding policies and behaviour patterns of youth gangs "begin to put to rest the contemporary politically tainted dialogue that interferes with a balanced consideration of the problem. Society needs objective, investigations and evidence, not 'moral panic' – in short, facts, not fears" (p.14). Creating common criteria to assess youth gangs specifically for Saskatoon, will allow local agencies to better identify youth gangs collectively using the same criteria. With the use of common criteria rather than subjective perceptions there is less of a chance of mislabeling youth.

As neither the province of Saskatchewan nor the city of Saskatoon has a lexical definition. Therefore, subjective definitions and understandings of male youth gangs are used when prevention and intervention programs are created for male youth regarded as at-risk for joining gangs (FSIN, 2003; Gang Strategy Saskatoon, 2006). Klein (2002) expresses that due to this subjectivity communities create definitions which they can use to understand not only the activities that youth gangs are involved in, but also those who are seen as more at-risk to join gangs because of the societal factors unique to each community. With research conducted in Europe, Klein (2002) emphasizes the need for rural and urban settings to create a definition unique to their locale in order to create meaningful programs that deal with youth gangs and youth at-risk. What Klein discovered while working with European stakeholders was their concern to create a common definition of youth gangs that "appl[ied] to a variety of such groups as well as distinguishing them from other groups" (p.239). The creation of a definition unique to European settings allowed the stakeholders in the Eurogang Program to begin to not only understand who was involved in gangs, but that the definition was able to distinguish

between youth gangs in Europe from those in the United States. Upon the creation of a common definition, the stakeholders of the Eurogang Program created effective prevention and intervention programs whose effectiveness could be critically evaluated. The common definition also allowed European jurisdictions to gain an understanding of the social factors that marginalized specific youth. Through this research, Klein shows how varying agencies can come together to agree upon a definition of youth gangs that can be used to evaluate programs and assess their effectiveness. Agencies in Saskatoon must look to Klein's work, in order to work more cohesively to create unique and meaningful programs specifically for youth in Saskatoon.

The participants involved in the research conducted for the present study play different roles with the youth and therefore have different parameters within which they must work. The five participants who participated in this research range from community based organizations, to permanent or part-time holding facilities, to city and justice officials. The one commonality between all the participants' is their direct one-on-one contact and relationship with youth. The information for the research here was gathered through two separate interview sessions that were approximately thirty minutes in length.

The participants involved within this research stated that a definition is not important because it can be used to limit the mobility of particular youth within the community. Limited mobility due to a gang label marginalizes youth to specific spaces in their neighborhoods. Another reason that the participants expressed concern about a single lexical definition was that it would take away from the holistic programming that is used to work with youth. The programming would focus on gangs rather than other sociological factors influencing youth to partake in a gang lifestyle. This study focuses on

why participants are resistant to a lexical definition of youth gangs, and how they have created programs to deal with the issue of gangs without addressing the definition issue directly.

This study sought to explore the possibility of creating a common definition of youth gangs for Saskatoon. I explored this possibility by first trying to understand why a definition had not been created, and second to see if it were possible to create a common definition of youth gangs that was unique to Saskatoon and one that all participants would agree was relevant to the issue. This common definition is important because it can begin to erase the subjective notions of community and media, gives stakeholders and program developers a common basis for creating programs for prevention and intervention, and would reduce the numbers of youth mislabeled as gang members.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter Two focuses on the existing literature of youth gangs. It begins by outlining how youth gangs have changed, mobilized, and expanded through the United States and then Canada. Understanding how gangs have not only changed over time and place, one can better understand the different groups of people who have been marginalized by society who see the gang as their only option for survival. I have also emphasized how definitions of youth gangs have changed throughout the last century, from Thrasher's (1927) original definition of youth gangs in Chicago, to the justice system defines youth gangs today.

Chapter Three deals with the methodology that was used to analyze data generated through the interview process. The relevance of grounded theory is examined

and how it was utilized throughout the data analysis. This chapter also explains the step-by-step process of how the interview data was coded and organized.

Chapter Four is dominated by an analysis of the data gathered from the interviews of the five interviewees. The themes within the analysis deal with the harm of definitions and labels, how participants and agencies view gangs and a gang lifestyle, relationships between agencies and youth, and how holistic programming is able to move away from the use of labels and definitions. Throughout this chapter the audience will begin to create a picture as to the different parameters within which agencies in Saskatoon must work in order to maintain positive relationships with youth.

Chapter Five summarizes the data gathered through the analysis and explains why a definition is still needed to understand what it is to be a youth gang member. With this I reiterate the importance of understanding what is happening in Saskatoon so that organizations and their agents can begin to create prevention and intervention programs that are effective in reducing the impact that gangs have on youth. Reducing the number of youth who view the gang as their only option to escape particular social voids will help reduce violent youth crime. I also address ways as to how this can be accomplished, notably with youth playing a larger role in this process. Chapter Five also addresses the limitations in this research, and the different directions it can take due to these limitations.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

It takes a certain desperation for a young person to walk our streets with a gun. The sense of nothing to lose and no way out that roils within such youth creates an ever-present danger. That danger arises from the impulsiveness of youth and the lack of foresight with which they often act. The unfortunate — and often tragic — reality is that it often takes very little provocation or incentive to trigger that latent violence once we have let the immediate risk factors develop. This most often puts other youth in danger's way, but can do the same for any of us, because it creates a reality in which violence is unpredictable — unpredictable in location, unpredictable in cause and unpredictable in consequences.

Alvin Curling in the Executive Summary (2008, p.5)

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief history of the development of gangs, summarize how gang behaviour is studied, and outline the changing social dynamics faced by those youth most at-risk to join youth gangs in North America. The five different theories historically used to describe the causes of youth gangs will also be presented. For the purpose of this research, “youth gang” will refer specifically to male youth gangs. The need for specifics between male and female is required because, although female youth gangs may show similar characteristics as male youth gangs, their respective social history and agendas differ. As such, female youth gangs should not be defined by their male counterparts, but rather studied independently. The final part of this chapter looks at a continuum chart that some Canadian agencies use to identify the particular stages of youth gang involvement.

This study also seeks to understand how different agencies that work with youth at-risk and youth gang members create criteria used to identify youth as gang members or associates. Understanding the criteria used by agencies to identify youth gang

involvement will help to create a common lexical definition, which would help alleviate the misconceptions and stereotypes about youth gangs (Chettleburgh, 2007; Maxson and Klein, 2006; Vigil, 2002). It is hypothesized here that a common lexical definition would help in the evaluation of prevention, intervention, and suppression programs targeted towards youth gangs. I postulate that through a common lexical definition, community agencies may begin to evaluate the criteria that they have used to identify youth at-risk or youth gang members. By understanding these criteria, programs may be created that address the unique risk factors affecting youth in Saskatoon.

The second section of this chapter examines cross-cultural, cultural deviance, labeling, and control theories and how they have been used by researchers to examine and understand youth gangs. These four theories provide an insight into the reasons that theorists have derived influence youth too join or associate in gang activities and behaviors.

The third section focuses on five definitions that have been created to guide researchers, law enforcement agencies, and program developers to identify particular youth as being involved in gangs and gang activity. These five influential definitions have been constructed to analyze and define youth gang activities and behaviours. An analysis of these definitions is important so that one can begin to understand how youth gangs have changed over time, from a group of loosely organized youth coming together to partake in deviant behaviour, to today, where youth gangs are seen to be more organized and structured to increase economic profits through illegal activities.

History of Youth Gangs in North America

The historical social phenomenon of youth gangs is important to understand because it shows where these social organizations originated, how youth gangs have changed or morphed, and how youth gangs differ from prison gangs, hate groups, and other deviant social groups. This history reveals some of the reasons why youth join gangs. One is also able to understand how gangs were defined in the past by researchers, theorists, and policymakers, and how youth gangs adhered to particular social political agendas at various historical times.

Vigil and Yun (2002) describe the historical creation of street gangs, of which youth gangs are a byproduct, as:

...the result of complex processes that stem from the multiple levels and forces over a long period of time. Macrohistorical and macrostructural forces lead to economic insecurity and lack of opportunity, fragmented social control institutions, poverty, and psychological and emotional barriers in broad segments of ethnic minority communities... (p.65)

Vigil and Yun suggest that society has created specific places and spaces for youth to become involved in youth gangs within their communities. They argue that macro structural forces within society actually encouraged gangs to flourish and grow within communities of marginalized people.

The history of youth gangs in North America is rooted in the first Irish gangs that began to form in the early nineteenth century. These youth gangs were primarily formed from orphaned Irish adolescents who banded together after they lost their parents in the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean from Ireland to the United States (Delaney, 2006). These groups of Irish youth needed to organize themselves in order to survive in a new environment that saw them not only as a burden, but their bodies were worth less than

that of slaves (Roediger, 1991). This notion of the Irish being inferior to that of the rest of the white American population came from a British sense of superiority with the colonization of Ireland (Roediger, 1991). Hence, early youth gangs were a byproduct of the marginalization of Irish youth attempting to survive in a hostile society.

As immigrants began to migrate westward, so, too, did a gang mentality. With this expansion and migration, different cultural groups, such as Hispanic and African Americans, began to constitute a majority of those who comprised youth gangs. Numerous social groups became marginalized due to notions of white superiority, which fostered a social environment conducive to gang formation was able to develop (Delaney, 2006; Roediger, 1991; Spergel, 1995). The marginalization of more and different cultural ethnic groups in the early twentieth century allowed youth gangs to become more diverse. However, youth gangs still maintained their ethnic ties (Delaney, 2006). Mexican youth gangs became prevalent in California because of an increase in Mexican immigrants to fill positions of low-paying, manual labour work (Delaney, 2006). After emancipation black youth gangs began to form in midwestern cities like Chicago and Milwaukee as their families sought to escape the racial segregation which arose from Jim Crow laws in the southern United States (Delaney, 2006). Jim Crow laws segregated black from white, where black youth could not attend public schools and could be excluded from restaurants, washrooms, water-fountains, movie theatres, and other community sites.

Forced migration of people seeking work in the north, helped create a need for youth to join together because they were seen as outsiders within their new community. Because Mexican and black families had to resort to low-paying manual labour, it was fairly easy to force these families into small “ghettos” apart from the dominant white

middle class society (Delaney, 2006). The youth in these new ghetto communities needed to join together, just as the Irish youth had a century earlier, to protect themselves from those who did not want them around. It was within these social groups that youth were able to assert power amongst them and protect their territory from those who they saw as outsiders (Delaney, 2006).

With an increase in immigration after World War II, youth gangs began to move into larger territories and did not limit themselves to the particular block where they lived (Delaney, 2006). It was due to this expansion out of traditional gang territories that researchers began to look at Thrasher's (1927) previous work on youth gangs and began to make modifications to the criteria Thrasher used to assess youth gang activities and behaviours. These modifications began to focus more on crime and the organizational structure that gangs began to form. Through an adaption of narrowing the criteria, researchers were able to understand how gangs were changing not only in the dynamics of who was more likely to join, but also the types of activities of these new youth gangs. The definition of youth gangs began to change from just protecting their geographic territory (Thrasher, 1927) to becoming more economically driven through different criminal aspects (Miller, 1980; Short, 1996). This change in definition was introduced because of the particular criminal activities that youth gangs had become involved with such as theft, prostitution, and the drug trade. Through these activities, gangs increased in size and needed to expand into larger territories in order to gain more wealth. With an expansion into larger territories, gangs were also able to recruit more individuals, thus creating a foothold within almost all communities across the United States.

At this point, youth gangs that originated within the United States also began to emerge in other countries around the world. In a study conducted in Europe in 2000, Klein discovered that American-style youth gang cultures were beginning to appear in youth gangs in European countries and elsewhere. In America, as in Europe and Canada, the youth who makeup and are the most at-risk to join are primarily from marginalized populations (Klein, 2002).

In Saskatchewan, the emergence of youth gangs is seen as a more recent occurrence. Although there may have been groups of youth whom today would be considered youth gangs, from a justice perspective youth gangs are a fairly recent phenomenon sprouting from the prison riots at Stoney Mountain Federal Penitentiary in Manitoba (Criminal Intelligence Service Saskatchewan [CISS], 2005). After these riots, the government of Canada separated the main participants involved into other federal and provincial penitentiaries across Canada. This redistribution of gang members into other prisons ironically facilitated widespread recruiting, therefore expanding their territory and control (Contenta, 2008; CISS, 2005). There are a number of rural and urban centres in both southern and northern Saskatchewan that have reported youth gangs and their activities. According to the CISS winter report of 2005:

In southern Saskatchewan, the impact of gang activity is most pronounced in the following areas: Regina, Fort Qu'Appelle, Broadview, Indian Head, Yorkton, Carlyle, Moose Jaw, and Kamsack. At this point, it is unclear as to the degree of cooperation or control that gang members from urban communities have over other gang associates in the rural communities. Although gang alliances and networks are formed from time to time, it appears as if there is a certain degree of autonomy between gang members in the cities and those operating out of the rural areas. In northern Saskatchewan, gang-related activity and crimes have affected the following communities: Saskatoon, Prince Albert, North Battleford, Pelican Narrows, Stanley Mission, Pierceland, Meadow Lake, and La Ronge. (p.3)

This information was comprised primarily from quantitative research gathered from the types of gang criminal activity gang, along with some qualitative data gained through interviews (CISS, 2005). These gangs, as with those found elsewhere, are comprised primarily of marginalized individuals within their home community. In Saskatchewan, it is primarily First Nations and Metis youth who are marginalized (FSIN, 2003). As with marginalized youth from other rural and urban communities in Canada and other countries, Saskatchewan youth have also sought gang membership to fill particular needs that their community, school, and families have been unable to provide.

Theories on Gangs

There are many theories that researchers have developed to explain both why youth join gangs and the social factors that cause particular youth to be more at-risk than others. In the 1990s, Vigil and Yun (2002) created a cross-cultural theory to explain why youth from different cultural groups join gangs in Los Angeles. Cross-cultural theory describes how disruptions in family, school, and community lead “some low-income, ethnic minority youth” to street socialization and gang involvement (Vigil & Yun, 2002, p.161). This theory allowed Vigil and Yun to explore how gangs focus on racially marginalized youth because of the low social space that they occupy in urban and rural settings. Findings show that many of the youth who are involved in youth gangs and gang activities are racially marginalized by society (Vigil & Yun, 2002; Huff, 2002; Klein 1994, 2002; Klein & Maxson, 2006, Mathews, 1993; Chettleburgh, 2007). In Saskatoon, youth of Aboriginal ancestry disproportionately become racially marginalized into a lower social class. Due to this racial marginalization, gangs meet the economic and

supportive needs of their members, along with an access to power gained through gang association. In essence, the gang fills a void for the youth that school, family and community fails to do (Vigil & Yun, 2002). In return, the youth gives the gang what it needs in order to maintain their membership and privileges.

Cureton (2002) uses marginalization to describe how gangs are created. He argues that gangs counteract the oppression that their members feel outside of their home community. Cureton describes this as part of cultural deviance theory, where “marginalized populations respond to isolation and alienation by creating subcultures with values, attitudes, and special norms of conduct” (p. 90). Because of the isolation and alienation already present, either through systemic or overt oppression, gangs are able to influence youth by becoming their support system within the community. Thus the gang establishes the norms of conduct, along with particular values and attitudes. These two respective theories presented by Vigil and Yun (2002) and Cureton (2002) are similar in that they focus on the social factors that inhibit and exclude marginalized populations and thus create spaces where gangs can move into a youth’s life to fill voids left by family, schools, and community.

A third possible explanation of why youth join gangs is found in control theory. Control theory focuses on the morals and relationships of people in their respected neighborhoods (Bursick, 2002). It argues that everyone has the potential to become a criminal. However, most people do not because they have a stronger bond with moral order, and therefore will not conform to the gang mentality (Jones, Roper, Stys & Wilson, 2004). Separated from societal morals, gang members do not take into regard the acts of violence and pain that they impose upon their victims. Control theory looks at how

outside influences such as school, family, community, police, peers, and gangs can either push or pull people into crime without the youth ever realizing that this process has occurred.

Labeling theory is another means of analysis that must be considered when trying to understand why youth join or become a part of a gang lifestyle. Labeling theory argues that “people assume and accept the labels that have been placed upon them” (Kontos & Botherton, 2008, p.148) by society. The social construction of labels typecasts youth into social positions due to their race and economic status. Labeling theory enables theorists to comprehend how the marginalization dictates who society considers to be a part of a gang. Therefore, communities label specific youth as gang-connected because of racial and economic stereotypes. Further, more youth are drawn into a gang lifestyle because they have been labeled as gang members by the community. Labeling theory also suggests that gangs are not formed until society has labeled them as such. Through the process of labeling youth as gang members, they will move into the roles already placed upon them.

We're not doing anything we just wanted to kick back... We don't gangbang, we don't have a name... But [the police] want us to have a name. Well, we just said, “Alpine, Alpine Kids.” Yeah, that sounds good. That's the funny part – the police setting up, helping us build. (Vigil, 2002, p.123)

Labeling theory means that youth do not necessarily see themselves in as gang members, but because other members of the community have labeled them as such, they see the need to continue with that identity. Through such labeling, society-at-large has allowed gangs to exert power and control within the community. With an identifiable name, youth gangs are able to recruit others to join them, using their name as protection through

affiliation, creating symbols to mark their territory, and establishing a reputation within their community and neighborhood. Because of the negative connotations that the term “gang” carries, the labeling of youth as gang members can also be detrimental if it is applied to youth who have no association to a gang, yet belong to a particular ethnic or cultural group and live in a particular area of the community.

The four theories discussed here are intertwined more than they differ. All four look at how outside forces play integral roles in determining whether a youth will become involved in youth gang activities. These macro-structural forces include community, police, peers, schools, and family. The differences between the theories are largely the focus of the theories themselves. Vigil and Yun’s (2002) cross-cultural theory argues that gangs gain influence over youth’s life because of the voids created through marginalization. Cureton (2002) focuses on the creation of subcultures by marginalized youth to fit within the community. Control theory looks at micro-structures or one’s own moral value, to explain why some youth enter a gang life, yet others do not. Finally, labeling theory looks at how a community ostracizes youth through labels, and it is because of these labels that youth begin to see themselves as part of a gang subculture.

These four theories have aided rural and urban organizations creating gang prevention, intervention, and suppression programs. By understanding why youth join gangs, rural and urban communities can better understand the specific social factors that should be explored to help deter youth from partaking in youth gangs. Again, it should be noted that these four theories are extremely intertwined in that they focus on the marginalization of youth within the community and how gangs fill particular voids in certain youth’s lives.

The Politicization of Defining Youth Gangs

Researchers, theorists, and policy-makers have had a difficult time coming together to try to understand what is a youth gang. Researchers, theorists, and policy-makers have differed on the definitions that have been used in the past, and continue to differ on the best ways to assess youth gang involvement and behaviour (Chettleburgh, 2007; Maxson & Klein, 2006; Mellor, MacRae, Pauls, & Hornick, 2005; Bjerregard, 2003; Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001; Short, 1996; Spergel, 1995). Depending on who is trying to gather the data, the criteria used to assess youth gangs might change when assessing youth gangs. Through a manipulation of the criteria used in the assessments of youth gangs, political agendas can be met in order to privilege the needs of those conducting the study.

Researchers are concerned with the measurements in any study of youth gangs. A researcher's philosophy is that the more rigid and defined the criteria, the greater reliability that the research can be reproduced in other social settings (Esbensen et al., 2001). Theorists are concerned with the social factors that contribute to youth becoming involved with youth gangs. They are not as concerned about the measurements used in a study, but rather focus on whether the theory being tested or created is relevant to social situations (Esbensen et al., 2001). Policy-makers are concerned with the extent and nature of the youth gang in the rural and urban settings. Through this understanding of youth gangs, policy-makers are able to create programs designed for prevention, intervention, or suppression of youth gang activities (Esbensen et al., 2001).

Gangs – and for this research, specifically youth gangs – “problems and behaviours vary widely from city to city as well as within cities (Weisel & Painter, 1997).

Therefore, “it is unlikely that one strategy will be effective across and within all jurisdictions” (Fritsch, Caeti, and Taylor, 1999, p. 124). Because of this diversity, it is imperative that researchers, theorists, and policy-makers begin to work together to try to understand not only the behaviours that youth gangs exhibit, but also create or implement the best possible prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies targeted toward youth gangs. To understand the criteria that researchers, theorists, and policy-makers use to assess youth gangs, one must first look at those definitions and criteria that have been the most influential in their understandings of youth gangs.

Five Definitions of Gangs

There have been five definitions that have been instrumental in helping researchers, theorists, and policy-makers identify the activities and behaviours attributed to youth gangs. One study that focused on the issues of defining youth gangs was conducted in 2001 by Esbensen, Winfree Jr., He, and Taylor, in their work *Youth Gangs and Definitional Issues: When is a Gang a Gang, and why does it matter?* They used five different definitions, moving from a broad spectrum definition to more restrictive or narrow definition. The authors’ intent was to reveal the political implications that definitions may carry for research.

With a broad definition of gangs and gang membership, we are left with the impression that demographic characteristics are significant predictors (older, male, and minority youth) of gang membership. However, as we invoke conceptual restrictions on those youth claiming gang status, the theoretical predictors from social learning theory (especially association with delinquent peers, perceptions of guilt, and neutralizations for fighting) supersede the importance of demographic characteristics. (2001, p.124)

As the definition began to narrow, it focused on those behaviors exhibited by the youth who claimed gang membership. “By restricting gang membership status to gangs that are involved in delinquent activity and have some level of organization, we reduce the size of the gang problem substantially” (Esbensen et al., 2001, p.124). The researchers involved were able to uncover how definitions can be altered in order to achieve specific results. Thus the definition and criteria used to assess youth gang activities and their behaviours may have a significant impact on the results of a study.

In *Street Gang Patterns and Policies*, Klein and Maxson (2006) looked at five influential definitions that have been used by researchers, theorists, and policy-makers in, *Street Gang Patterns and Policies*. The authors broke down research that has been conducted on gangs, and how different outcomes are created by the definitions because of the external and internal ideologies associated with the definitions. The authors state, “It can be difficult to compare one self-report study to the next to get an overall picture of what proportion of youth join gangs because studies often capture different types of samples and use somewhat different research procedures and definitions” (p.21).

Frederic Thrasher constructed the first definition on youth gangs in 1927, when he completed one of the first studies on youth gangs in Chicago. Thrasher’s definition focuses on the marginalization, organizational informality, and the violence of youth gang members. He defines a gang as:

...an interstitial group originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict. It is characterized by the following types of behaviour: meeting face to face, milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict, and planning. The result of this collective behaviour is the development of tradition, unreflective internal structure, *esprit de corps* (italics original), solidarity, morale, group awareness, and attachment to local territory. (Thrasher, 1927, 1963, p.46; Klein & Maxson, 2006)

This definition focuses on the natural history of the gang, the characteristics that make them unique, and how they differ from other social groups (Esbensen et al., 2001). Of interest here is that although Thrasher acknowledges that the youth might partake in some deviant behaviour such as fights, assaults, and theft, these were not major criteria within the definition (Thrasher, 1927). “Certainly, he acknowledged that the criminal gang was one type, but he [Thrasher] also stressed that among his 1,313 gangs were some that were good and some that were bad (Esbensen et al., 2001, p.108). The difference that Thrasher makes between good and bad gangs is the amount of violence that they exhibit between themselves, the community, and rival gangs (Thrasher, 1927). “Good” gangs are more defensive and look at non-violent approaches to protect themselves and their territory, whereas “bad” gangs use violent tendencies to protect themselves and their territory. It was in later attempts by researchers to define youth gangs that deviant or criminal behaviour became a major factor in the criteria. The definition introduced by Thrasher was created as part of a theoretical framework so that others could understand the particular social behaviours that gangs exhibited unlike other social groups.

The second influential definition of youth gangs was created in 1971 by Malcolm Klein. He looked at five large clusters of gangs in Los Angeles and stressed a social-psychological framework to identify and assess gangs:

[A juvenile gang is] any denotable adolescent group of youngsters who (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood, (b) recognize themselves as denotable group (almost invariably with a group name), and (c) have been involved in a sufficient number of delinquent incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or enforcement agencies. (Klein, 1971, p.13)

A major focus of Klein's criteria is on the recognition by the community and the youth themselves as a distinct group within the community. This self-recognition is similar to Thrasher's definition, where members of youth gangs had identifiable names that were recognized in rural and urban centres (Thrasher, 1927). However, Klein focuses on the criminal aspect as the significant component of a youth gang. From a research point of view, this definition focuses on the criteria for the make up of a gang and how neighbourhood residents view these youth gangs in their rural or urban centers.

The third definition examined here was also created in the 1970's by Walter Miller (1980). His definition is based on research that was conducted with different police officials, media, and other agencies that had contact with gangs across the United States, and combines all of the most popular traits that were discovered through the research:

A youth gang is a self-formed association of peers, bound together by mutual interests, with identifiable leadership, well-developed lines of authority, and other organizational features, who act in concert to achieve a specific purpose or purposes which generally include the conduct of illegal activity and control over a particular territory, facility, or type of enterprise. (p.121)

Miller's definition narrows the criteria used to identify and assess youth gangs. It focuses on four notions that include (a) the youth gang is self-formed by the youth themselves, (b) the organizational structure becomes more defined where there is a definitive leader with lines of authority, (c) the over-arching purpose is for benefit of the gang and less for the person, and (d) the deviant behaviour becomes illegal behaviour for the purpose of protecting territory or an economic enterprise such as drugs or prostitution. By narrowing the definition, Miller limits the frame for determining who belongs to a youth gang.

The fourth influential definition for understanding youth gangs was created by James F. Short (1996). Short extends the self-determination aspect of the previous three definitions. However, he does not focus on the labeling of a gang or its members through criminal activity. He states,

Gangs are groups whose members meet together with some regularity, over time, on the basis of group-defined criteria of membership and group-defined organizational characteristics; that is, gangs are non-adult sponsored, self-determining groups that demonstrate continuity over time.
(p.5)

Short moves away from the criminal criteria used to define youth gangs by Klein (1971) and Miller (1980). Rather than focus primarily on criminal activity, Short focuses on peer membership and continuity of the group without adult supervision. Short still uses social organization as a major criterion to assess youth gangs but, unlike Miller's definition, the structure of the organization does not have to be as developed or clear. Short explains that while this definition lacks precision, it differentiates youth gangs from other youth groups or subcultures. Short uses this definition within his research to show the process of how youth groups move towards more violent tendencies, that is, become "street gangs".

The fifth definition that has influenced the way that people understand youth gangs was introduced in the late 1980s by justice officials to help law enforcement officers and justice systems suppress gang activity and incarcerate gang members. The California Penal Code created a definition which it uses to help its justice officials and systems work together to understand what constitutes a gang:

Any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as one of its primary activities the commission of one or more of the criminal acts enumerated in paragraphs (1) to (8), inclusive, of subdivision (E), which has a common name or common identifying sign or symbol, whose members individually or

collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal activity.
(California Penal Code section 186.22)

Since this definition was posed, Canada has also created a legal definition outlining the criteria to be used in the assessment of gang membership. According to the Canadian Criminal Code, a gang

is composed of three or more persons in or outside Canada; and has as one of its main purposes or main activities the facilitation or commission of one or more serious offences that, if committed, would likely result in the direct or indirect receipt of a material benefit, including a financial benefit, by the group or by any of the persons who constitute the group (Section 467.1). (quoted in Jones et. al., 2004)

The criteria of these two definitions focus primarily on illegal activity. Because the focus is on illegal activity, the criteria of the definition are set up to determine whether the activity is individualistic or intended for the benefit of the gang. Another criterion on which these legal definitions focus is the organizational structure of the group. To be considered a gang, the group must have a hierarchal order, a name, and along with other common symbols or signs. This definition follows closely Miller's (1980) earlier definition, where the focus is on the criminal activity of the gang.

These five definitions have allowed researchers, theorists, and policy-makers to understand the criteria that have been used to describe youth gang members and their activities across communities and over time. Although these definitions have evolved to reflect changes in gang culture, there are still disagreements as to what constitutes a youth gang in diverse locales. This stems from the different social histories that have been constructed in the varied neighbourhoods where youth gangs reside.

Because the social histories of the neighbourhoods differ, youth themselves, depending on where they reside, may not see themselves as youth gangs. The problem is,

is that the residents within these rural and urban centers do consider the youth to be a part of a gang because of these social histories. Therefore, the youth are labeled as gang members, even if they may not see themselves or their group as such.

Like for myself, when I was in a gang, there was a lot of us. I really didn't see it as a gang. I saw it as a bunch of friends. In the eyes of society I guess people see it as a gang because whenever there is a whole bunch of young people joining together doing crime or beating up on people and taking over territories and stuff like that the society calls that a gang. But most young people don't see it as a gang. They see it as a group of friends. (Mathews, 1993, p.18)

As some youth may not consider themselves to be youth gang members, it is difficult based on these definitions to determine what comprises a youth gang.

Youth Gang Continuum Chart

Instead of creating a concrete definition of what a youth gang is, frontline workers in some communities have begun to use a continuum chart of criteria based on types of activities (illegal activities, structure, visibility in community) in which youth are engaged in (Richter-White, 2003; Gordon, 2000). With this chart, frontline workers address the changing social conditions that youth face as they become more entrenched in a gang lifestyle. One continuum chart that uses these criteria to assess different levels of gangs involvement comes from *Youth Gangs in Canada: A Preliminary Review of Programs and Services* conducted by Brian Mellor, Leslie MacRae, Monica Pauls, and Joseph P. Hornick in 2005. This report identifies five types of involvement determined by the amount of criminal activity that a group displays, recruitment strategies, and the structures that are in place to support the gang.

- Type A: A group of friends who tend to be interest-based (e.g., sports teams, skateboarders) and usually do not engage in criminal activity. They pose no threat to the community and therefore should be encouraged.
- Type B: Spontaneous criminal activity gangs are social in nature and gather their power and status through their numbers. Criminal activity is situationally motivated and can be categorized as gratuitous violence and bullying due to a lack of supervision. These youth usually do not move to the next level because they have other options, either economically or socially outside the gang.
- Type C: Purposive gangs come together for a specific purpose. Whether stealing cars, engaging in vigilante-type violence, or spontaneous mob activity, these gangs can emerge from larger gangs and usually disband once the purpose has been accomplished.
- Type D: Youth street gangs are highly visible hardcore groups that come together primarily for profit-driven criminal activity. These street gangs identify themselves as such through the adoption of a gang name, common brands, styles, clothing, colours, jewellery, and tattoos. These gangs do not seem to be part of a larger criminal organization and often have a territory or “turf” that they claim and defend as their own.
- Type E: Structured criminal organizations are criminal networks that tend to be led by criminally experienced adults for the purpose of economic or financial gain. The criminal activity of these types of gangs tends to be severe in nature and premeditated. Youth are often used for specific purposes to further the gang’s activities. Examples of these types of gangs in Saskatchewan include the Indian

Posse, Saskatchewan Warriors, Native Syndicate, and Hells Angels (Mellor et al., 2005, p.vi).

This, too, is still a criteria-based definition. However, as youth move through the different levels of gang involvement, the continuum chart begins to narrow the criteria, such as the type and amount of illegal activity, along with the degree of organizational structure. By narrowing the criteria, researchers, theorists, and policy-makers can assess the particular areas of programming (prevention, intervention, and suppression) needed to curtail youth from becoming involved in a gang lifestyle.

Definitions are useful in allowing researchers, policy-makers, and theorists to understand youth gangs as a whole. However, it is also important to note that agencies in rural and urban settings that work with youth gang members and youth at-risk to gang membership need to create a definition that is unique to its youth gang situation. Due to the differing social histories between locales, some youth have been marginalized within their neighbourhoods because of their race and economic status. The social history of the neighbourhood influences whether a particular youth is more at-risk to enter a gang lifestyle because of limited opportunities. A second reason for agencies to create a definition is because communities may differ in their interpretation of what constitutes a gang. As discussed in Chapter 1, national studies can be misleading if communities do not share an understanding of what defines youth gangs, or the criteria used to define a gang. By understanding how researchers, theorists, and policy-makers narrow or broaden the criteria used to assess youth gangs, we can see how politicking becomes a major factor in designing and assessing programs designed for youth gangs. Therefore to understand and assess the youth gang phenomenon, researchers, theorists, and policy-

makers must work together to derive a set of criteria upon which they can come to agree to assess youth gang activities and behaviours.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This qualitative study draws on the principles of grounded theory. The data were gathered from five participants from five different agencies that work with youth gang members in the city of Saskatoon. The first part of this chapter examines the applications for researching youth gangs in Saskatoon. This is followed by descriptions of the agencies involved in the study, how data collection was organized, and the format used in the data analysis.

Grounded Theory

Qualitative research is as much about gathering information as it is about building and creating relationships between the researcher and the interviewees of a study (Charmaz 2002, 2006; Marvasti, 2004). When proper qualitative research and careful analysis are applied, researchers have the capability of retaining the voice(s) of the participant(s), which may otherwise be lost within the analysis. Grounded theory allows participants' actions to be analyzed critically without that loss.

Grounded theory is a longitudinal method of analyzing qualitative research. It allows a researcher to understand and ask analytical questions of the data that have been gathered (Charmaz, 2002, 2006; Marvasti, 2004). Grounded theory allows the researcher to begin to “generate concepts and theories based on observational data” (Marvasti, 2004, p.84). This observational data is gathered through continual observations of the text. These observations allow the researcher to create categories when analyzing the data. Marvasti refers to Strauss and Corbin when he states that

A grounded theory that is faithful to everyday realities of a substantive area is one that has been carefully *induced* from diverse data...Only in this way will the theory be closely related to the daily realities (what is actually going on) of substantive areas, and so be highly applicable to dealing with them. (Marvasti, 2004, pg.84; Strauss and Corbin, 1994, pp.238-39. Emphasis added in original)

There are three stages that grounded theorists use to process and analyze the data gathered (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These are data reduction, data display, and verification of conclusions. During these three steps, there are three operations that are applied, including: “coding, memoing and the development of propositions” (Punch, 2005, p.199). Through these processes, the researcher is able to uphold in the final product the stories, actions, and voices of the research participants, along with the theories and observations derived through the data analysis.

Statement of Research Study

This research explored the criteria used in assessing involvement with youth gangs from a frontline worker’s perspective. The frontline workers were selected from five agencies in the city of Saskatoon. These agencies included community-based organizations, permanent and part-time holding facilities, and justice officials with the city of Saskatoon. It is important to identify the commonalities in the criteria that the interviewees have constructed when defining and assessing youth gang behaviours and activities. Negotiating the common areas may allow agencies and individuals better work together, which may strengthen prevention, intervention, and suppression programs targeted specifically for youth gangs within Saskatoon.

To explore the youth gang phenomena in any urban centre, the first step is to make inquiries and observe different or emerging social trends in neighbourhoods.

Frontline workers are an important source of information on youth gangs and youth at-risk given their breadth and depth of contact with the young people. Through daily observations and interactions with youth, frontline workers develop an understanding of the social factors that lead some youth to join gangs. Research of the criteria-based assessments of youth gangs created by frontline workers and their agencies will be helpful to Saskatoon for determining the different types of youth gang activity and behaviours. By determining the types of youth gang activity and behaviours, programs can be designed that are specific to the needs of youth at-risk and youth gang members in Saskatoon.

Significance/Rationale: Why Should Youth Gangs be Studied in Saskatoon?

Developing criteria to define male youth gangs is essential if Saskatoon agencies are to begin to put effective deterrence programs in place. Saskatoon agencies that deal with youth gangs should not rely on criteria that other researchers, theorists, and policy-makers have developed in and for other communities. As discussed previously, this is due to the unique social make-up of each locale. Policy-makers in Saskatoon should be encouraged to realize that due to Saskatoon's own composition and history, youth gang programs effective in other urban centres may be ineffective in Saskatoon. Saskatoon policy-makers, theorists, researchers, and other agents who work with youth can then work cohesively to help deter youth from embracing a gang lifestyle. If Saskatoon agencies work together, policies can be created that will benefit Saskatoon's youth.

Interviewees

The interviewees for this study come from five different agencies in Saskatoon that have direct contact with youth gang members and youth at-risk. The agencies chosen range from community-based organizations, and permanent and part-time holding facilities, to Saskatoon city officials and justice officials. I interviewed one individual from each agency and gained a greater understanding of the criteria that are used to assess youth gangs. The agencies that were asked to participate in this research have a history of dealing with youth gang members and youth at-risk of joining youth gangs. At the time of the study, these agencies were engaged in the development of programs aimed at preventing, intervening, and suppressing Saskatoon youth gangs and their activities. Through observations and interactions, youth can be labeled as gang members by any organization. There are many other agencies and organizations that work with youth gang members, but for the purpose of this research the agencies were chosen because of their direct contact with youth gang members through controlled prevention and intervention programming. These agencies were also chosen because the researcher was referred by individuals of the justice community to the agencies and had also developed previous relationships with some of the agencies.

Data Collection

The collected data for this study is based on the experiences and knowledge of frontline workers. Prior to research, I contacted the five agencies via email, phone, and a personal introduction. During initial meetings with the directors, I explained the purpose of my research (see Appendix A). Once the agencies agreed to be a part of the study, I

was referred to individuals in the organization that who had extensive knowledge on youth gangs. According to Charmaz (2002, 2006) and Marvasti (2004), relationships are the foundation of grounded theory and it was through this initial contact that a relationship began to form between the participants and myself. The information for this research was collected using two individual interview sessions with each interviewee.

Each of the two interviews conducted were approximately half an hour in length. Questions in the first interview explored how particular agencies deal with youth gang members, the observations or perceptions of youth gangs, and the criteria used to assess youth gang activities and behaviours. The interviewees were also asked which assessment tools they used to assess youth gang activities and behaviours. The first set of interview questions (Appendix B) were created to shed light on the participants' views of youth gang activities and issues, and whether the creation of a common definition would be of value for Saskatoon's agencies. These questions were also used to establish a relationship the interviewees. This was accomplished by reinforcing the purpose of the research, as well as conversations unrelated to the research. Responses were transcribed and analyzed to create a second set of questions.

The second set of interview questions focused on why the creation of a definition was/is not important to the overall programming of youth within the agencies. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions in order to try to understand the criteria that agencies and individuals use when identifying youth gangs and how the agencies came to their conclusions. Through the use of open-ended questioning, I was able to gather the stories and experiences that have shaped participants' views of youth gangs in Saskatoon.

The second interview was designed to accomplish three tasks. The first was to have participants review the information gathered during the initial interview to confirm its accuracy. The second task was for me to help agencies see the factors that are influencing not only their decision-making over of what a youth gang is, but also the factors that influence other agencies and their decisions. I did this by showing the interviewees the criteria used by other interviewees to identify youth gangs, and what influenced the agencies to use particular criteria for identifying youth gang activities and behaviours. The third task of the second interview was to incorporate bring back data gathered from the first interview to develop a definition that best describes Saskatoon's youth gang phenomenon.

The importance of this final task was to try to gather feedback from the interviewees as to whether they agree/disagree with the definitions created through this process. The participants agreed that a definition would be helpful in preventing the mislabeling of some youth. However, all participants were concerned that a lexical definition might actually lead to youth who are already identified or labeled to become more entrenched in a gang lifestyle. Because of this concern, I was better able to understand the possible further detrimental effect of a common lexical definition on marginalized youth in Saskatoon.

Data Coding

The data gathered for this study were coded according to the methods that Charmaz (2006) describes in *Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. Charmaz describes three levels of coding: (a) initial, (b) focused, and (c) axial

coding. I created and analyzed these codes and developed particular themes from the responses in the interviews. Data also included communication between the participants.

Initial coding allows researchers to “categorize segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p.52). The initial coding allows a researcher to explore and identify the interviewee’s point of view with regards to the research questions. During the initial coding, I began to see some of the concerns that the interviewees had towards a lexical definition or common set of criteria for assessment. After the initial coding of the first interviews, I created a second set of interview questions that related to themes that emerged from the first set of interviews. In *Qualitative Research Sociology*, Amir Marvasti (2004) explains that “during *initial coding*, the goal is to peruse the data for meaningful categories or themes” (2004, p.86. Emphasis in original). The main themes that emerged from the initial coding of both interviews addressed the importance of relationships, gang lifestyles, negative aspects of labeling, subjectivity, use of denial, holistic healing, programming, and suppression. After assembling significant themes, I moved on to focused coding.

The second step of grounded theory is to move to focused coding. Focused coding allows researchers to “use the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p.57). Because a majority of interviews lasted longer than twenty minutes, some questions were added, changed, or altered, in order to gain a better understanding of participants’ responses. By using focused coding, I was able to analyze large segments of text that were gathered through the interviews. Charmaz (2002), states, that in selective or focused coding, the researcher adopts

frequently reappearing initial codes in sorting and synthesizing large amounts of data. Through focused coding, I was able to compare the interviewees' experiences, actions, and interpretations throughout the separate individual interviews (Charmaz, 2006). I was also able to determine particular themes that had the greatest concern or impact on the participants. From the subcategories of the initial coding, focused coding allowed me to break down and combine the themes that made sense from the initial coding. The themes or categories that became even more apparent throughout the data were programming, relationships, holistic healing, suppression, risk factors, and lifestyle. After creating these themes, I moved to axial coding.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) explain axial coding as the “strategy for bringing data back together again in a coherent whole” (quoted in Charmaz, 2006, p.60). Axial coding allows researchers to reveal how categories or themes are related, which further encourage the creation of a theory or action (Charmaz, 2006). Researchers are able to create a framework from which to explain the data collection process. I was able to use axial codes to create clusters that determined how all the gathered data related. Using the clusters, I identified the themes that began to stand out as categories. The clusters that did not have enough strength to become categories on their own merit were used as sub-categories that strengthened the findings of the main categories. The four categories or themes that became the foundation of the data analysis were: (a) the risk factors or intrigue of gang life, (b) the negative aspects of labeling youth as gang members, (c) gang activities and behaviours present in Saskatoon, and (d) how programs and relationships are utilized to help deter youth from joining gangs.

Memo-Writing

Memo-writing is an important step in analyzing the data. Memo writing is “the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” (Charmaz, 2006, p.72). I constructed memos throughout the entire coding phase so as to relate the data in a manner that allowed for further and deeper insight of the transcribed data.

Through memo-writing I was able to create clusters that eased the move from initial coding, to focused coding, and then axial coding. Throughout these steps, I better understood which participants focused on particular themes over other themes, and how the initial codes could be combined to create axial codes. As Charmaz (2006) states

...clustering gives you a non-linear, visual, and flexible technique to understand and organize your material...a major objective of clustering is to liberate your creativity. You write your central ideas, category, or process; then circle it and draw spokes from it to smaller circles to show its defining properties, and their relationships and relative significance.
(p.86)

I used clustering to not only construct different categories to analyze the data, but also to construct a visual aid to determine how the transcribed data could be connected.

Memo-writing enabled me to create my own voice and rhythm while writing data drafts. Marvasti (2004) recommends “the use of ‘memo-writing’ as a way of elaborating on your analytical categories and actually beginning the task of writing the research report” (p.87). These drafts were usually open-ended during the initial coding stage so that I could change or move away from an idea if it began to move away from the data. Memos enabled me to begin the process of comparing and contrasting themes found in the literature, and this exercise allowed for a higher level of data analysis (Wellington, 2000). As a result of this process, three themes that emerged through the axial codes were: (a) the characteristics of youth gangs in Saskatoon, (b) the issues of defining youth

gangs, and (c) the types of programming that are used to help deter youth from joining or continuing their youth gang involvement. From these themes, I also began to understand the political implications that both agencies, and rural and urban centres face when trying to identify and assess youth gangs and their activities/behaviours.

Ethics

The ethics involved in the research was minimal to the interviewees that participated. However, the names of the agencies along with the names of the individual interviewees are withheld. This was established in the application to the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and the approval letter for ethics is attached as appendix C. The interviewees were also asked to sign a consent form (appendix D) which explained to the interviewees the minimal risks that may arise with the release of the data, along with details as to how the data will be stored.

Conclusion

In conclusion, grounded theory was utilized throughout the data analysis because it allows researchers to progress and sift through large amounts of data.

[G]rounded theory progresses from a broad categorization of data (initial coding) to more abstract concepts (focused codes) using research memos, which provide the raw material for the final report. (Marvasti, 2004, p.88)

Through the processes of coding and memoing, I sought to keep as much of the interviewees' voice through to the final process. Other qualitative methodologies, such as content analysis, data analysis, and narrative analysis, were not used because of the effectiveness of grounded theory to build from the ground up general concepts through

data analysis. Grounded theory also facilitated the creation of memos that can be used for future research areas of youth gangs.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Analysis

If everything is constantly moving and changing then one has to look at the whole to begin to see patterns

Leroy Little Bear (2000, p.77)

The Challenges of Identifying, Defining and Working to Prevent and Intervene in Youth Gang Culture

When I began this thesis, I was trying to understand why no definition existed for a male youth gangs in Saskatoon. I was also trying to understand how different agencies that work with troubled male youth, coming from different perspectives, could come together to create a single lexical definition that could be used for creating or critiquing programs that involve youth gang members. What I discovered was that the agencies within Saskatoon have tried to stay away from such a definition because of the negative impacts that definitions and labels have on youth. The participants in this study expressed concerns about labels that may further marginalize youth from what is considered the societal norm.

I have broken down the interview data gathered from the participants into three discrete yet integrated sections. Throughout the sections the interviewees' names are not used to protect their identity of the individual. Instead the interview participants are randomly numbered P.1, P.2, P.3, P.4, and P.5. The data from the two interviews are similarly identified as I.1 or I.2.

The first section of data analysis focuses on the characteristics or behaviours portrayed by youth gang members in Saskatoon, why Saskatoon youth are intrigued by a gang culture, and why youth gangs seem to appeal to particular young individuals. This

section also looks at agency perceptions of youth gangs in relation to how gangs recruit youth.

The second section focuses on labeling theory and how participants expressed concern about who should and should not have the power to label. This section also explores concerns about the negative effect that labeling has on the youth within Saskatoon. These concerns include the stereotyping that results when individuals or institutions that lack professional experience or knowledge about youth gangs apply labels.

The third section focuses on approaches to programming in relation to at-risk and/or gang youth. Participants describe the tools and criteria that agencies use for assessing youth gang activities and behaviours, their philosophy for working with youth at-risk and youth gang members, and the importance of creating meaningful relationships with youth for effective programming.

To understand the different definitions of youth gangs in use in Saskatoon, we must identify the different characteristics and behaviours that are unique to Saskatoon's youth gangs. What activities do they partake in? Do they show different types of behaviours? How do we separate groups of youth from gangs of youth? These are some of the questions that need to be answered to create criteria needed to assess youth gangs within Saskatoon.

Identifying Characteristics of Saskatoon Youth Gangs

Researchers, theorists, and policy-makers agree that the characteristics of youth gangs vary from location to location, including the reasons for youth to join gangs differs

(Esbensen et al., 2001). This section is intended to show how Saskatoon agencies view youth gangs along, with the reasons that participants believe gangs are able to attract impressionable young males. The different social factors that entice youth to join gangs, as explained by participants, are brought to light. This involves the participants' personal views on youth gangs and descriptions of activities that participants associate with youth gangs in Saskatoon. Understanding what entices individuals to join gangs enables Saskatoon agencies to determine what a gang offers along with the risk factors interview participants believe influence whether male youth join a gang. By understanding what gangs offer youth, effective programs may be created to limit those pressures that encourage youth to join a gang.

The Intrigue of a Life of Pressures: What Gang Life Offers Saskatoon Youth

Throughout the interviews, each interviewee explained particular attributes of gang life that they believe appeals to Saskatoon youth. The interviewees also described how youth gangs are able to effectively recruit Saskatoon youth. Gangs are able to offer particular social commodities that may be missing from a young person's life such as money, protection, belonging, an identity, or a space/place within society. The interview participants explained that youth gangs offer these things but expect something in return for the gang.

“Because gang members give you what it is that you want? If you are looking for something to eat, they will give you twenty bucks as long as you do the things that they ask you to do. Well here is somebody that portrays to be your family figure concept. They give you what you want as long as you do something. But they still have control over you.” (P.4, I.1, p.1)

“...that is where the gangs come in and say, ‘I care bro. I will help you out, a place to live, want to get high, drunk, want to eat, want to do whatever. We will look after all of

those needs. You will be styling. You will be bling bling, you will have everything happening.’’ (P.1, I.1, p.8)

Youth gangs show youth that they care, that they understand, and that they are there for them when no one else is. Because youth gangs have the ability to offer particular youth something in their lives, the participants explained a need to understand what the youth gangs offer as a first step to prevent youth from a gang lifestyle.

Gangs: The Social Void Filler

The interview participants explained that youth gangs seem appealing to youth is because of the economic benefits that a gang can offer. Many of the youth that the participants see as vulnerable to a gang lifestyle live in lower socio-economic parts of Saskatoon. Living in a low socio-economic neighbourhood is one risk factor that many sociologists and criminologists believe lead youth to join gangs.

Sociologists and criminologists have argued that the concentration of poverty creates an environment within which criminal behavior becomes normative, leading impressionable youth to adopt criminal lifestyles.
(Jargowsky & Park, 2008, p.1)

The interview participants stated that youth who live within the inner core of Saskatoon have little possibility of escaping the poverty that they face every day.

“And we are seeing more, more families getting out of those areas to protect, really better opportunities for their kids. But they are struggling, because they can’t really afford to live in the shitty housing in the inner city neighbourhoods, never mind getting to another place so... it is tough for those families, that are, even those First Nations and Metis family that are living in the area, that are functional, contributing members of the community, they are overwhelmed with it.”(P. 1, I.1, p.5-6)

Canadian society is based on capitalism, and many individuals will never be able to access sufficient financial resources to escape a life of poverty because they do not have the opportunities to accumulate wealth (Swanson, 2001). Impeded from moving up the

social ladder, some individuals turn to deviant behaviours to gain access to money.

Chettleburgh (2007) explains that only particular individuals are able to gather material riches:

The irony is that we criticize the same aspiration if it is held by the poor, uneducated, disenfranchised inner-city immigrant youths with few opportunities when they give it meaning through their apparently only viable option, a drug-dealing street gang. (pp.40-41)

Given the difficulty that some individuals face in inner-city neighborhoods, youth residing in these neighbourhoods face daily pressures to join youth gangs in order to increase their economic status.

With some youth may join gangs for economic advancement, many are unable to identify the negative implications that arise from their activities and behaviours. One interviewee explained that youth who partake in this lifestyle change do not fully understand what they are getting themselves into, especially if their families are or have been actively involved in a gang lifestyle. The youth is only able to see the economic outcome and a way to escape economic barriers.

“And they don’t realize the impact that it has on them and their lives, if they are going to participate with what they see with their mothers, or fathers, or relatives who are part of the gangs. And they just look at what the gang does and what it brings for them. And for them they are bringing something home or making money...” (P.4, I.1, p.5)

Therefore, youth are drawn into a gang culture for financial gains and to accumulate material goods to which they would otherwise have no access.

Another factor addressed by the interview participants as to why youth join gangs was for the sense of protection that gangs offer. Statistics have shown that inner-city communities appear to have greater amounts of violent crime (Jargowsky & Park, 2008).

Indeed, Saskatoon has one of the highest crime rates and youth gang rates in Canada (Chettleburgh, 2007), so many youth look for protection by joining a gang.

“More from the west side it is about inflicting pain, or serious damage to individuals, whether it is kids that are walking into a turf area, or looking at something that kids wear: clothing, shoes, jacket. That is the difference from the east side and the west side. Now gangs from the west side how they intimidate people, or the difference is explaining of the activities of the 4 or 5 individuals. This is a test of their own, what they admire about someone else. ‘Oh he has our colors on, let’s get his shoes, or his jacket, or his hat, lets go get it.’” (P.4, I.1, p.8)

“So you grew up in a certain area and there is a lot of delinquent behavior going on. It is kind of expected of you to survive in that environment. You may need to keep up with the Jones’s, or you may need to throw that rock through that window, or mug the person, you might need to do that or you are going to be beat up or other things happen.” (P.5, I.2, p.2-3)

With a sense of protection in their neighbourhood youth become bolder because they believe that there are others who will be there to help them in a time of need. One interviewee explained how the mentality of an individual changes once they become a part of a deviant group or gang.

“We also know sociologically people are bolder in groups, there is protection in the herd, and they will do things that they would never dream of doing on their own.”(P.3, I.1, p.4)

The problem is that youth do not understand that the protection offered by gangs is false. In reality, one’s involvement in gangs increases exponentially their chances of being assaulted (Chettleburgh, 2007; Klein & Maxson, 2006; Vigil, 2002; Fritsche, Caeti, & Taylor, 1999). With an increase in deviant behaviour, a youth’s life expectancy is shortened because those behaviours are more frequent and volatile.

Another factor that participants believed attracts youth to a gang life is a sense of belonging or stability. Much like financial gains and protection, this sense of

belonging/stability is seen as something that some youth are not afforded because of the social dynamics that they face within their families and community.

“But if you take a look at the social functions or dynamics within the family, family background, the majority of these kids that are in this gang life come from dysfunctional groups and there is no support mechanism there. There is no stability. There are no figures that they can talk to. Say a single mother. ‘My mother works hard, but she is doing the best to raise me.’ That’s the role model side that the parents, single parents play. But when you have kids that have unstable homes, or the mother is addicted to activities that involve a gang, or prostitution or it can be whatever, that home environment the adults are not supervising the kids, they are basically raising themselves. So it is always a question of basic survival. Well where do they get those basic survivals from? Well associating with gang members, right.” (P.4, I.1, p.1)

The interview participants stated that the most appealing factors to joining gangs are the economic factors, protection, and a sense of identity. These factors, however, actually blind the youth into believing that the gang is their best and only option out of their current situation.

A Blinded Future: How Gangs are Able to Blind a Youth’s Perspective of Life

The interview participants acknowledged how families and friends are an important part of a youth’s identity. However, if a youth has family members or friends who are affiliated with or are hardcore members in gangs, male youth become more likely to join a gang because it is acknowledged as normal behaviour.

“Well my opinion is, is that if you have family members in the gang there would be more pressure for you to join the gang.” (P.2, I.1, p.8)

Family influence can be seen as affecting youth as early as five years old in Saskatoon.

“I have actually worked with kids from kindergarten to grade 5 and they can tell you what they see on a daily basis. Their family members are part of the gangs, and what they see their brothers or other people carry. Or people come up to their faces and say, ‘Where are the kids at.’ I have seen them carrying guns or knives...” (P.4, I.1, p.2)

Due to pressures within families, many youth find it difficult to escape from gangs. To break free from the gang, means leaving the only comfort zone that the youth have come to know.

“The majority of them are wannabes but I mean there is a family dynamics for many of these kids as much as they want to pull away from it, how do you pull away from it because in the end what we are asking these kids to do is pull away from their families... But for the most part you still want that connectivity to your family, that love. It is a comfort zone. And as dysfunctional as some of these families are for these kids it is a comfort zone it is what they know or come to know. So they struggle with that. If I don’t gang up then I am a wuss. The one fellow who talked about getting out of the gang at the presentation, one of the fortunate kids, he has got a higher up relative who sits higher up in the gang so he didn’t have to take a beating out. Those are far and few between. You know yet if you listen to him, even though he is not doing gang activity, he can’t get away from it because it is part of his family.” (P.1, I.2, p.11-12)

Families have an important role to fill for all youth, not just those who are at-risk.

However, because of the added social pressures that many of these families face due to their socio-economic status, youth look to gangs for a sense of belonging or support.

They most often look towards their peers for a sense of belonging or identity that they feel they cannot ascertain from their families.

Peers have a strong influence on the lives of other youth. Through peer interaction, adolescents, create a sense of identity within their social networks. The identity created often follows similar characteristics to that of their peers (Neufeld and Mate, 2004). One interviewee explained that the pressures applied upon youth by their peers may be negative, and that this pressure is magnified within.

“Negative peers are negative peers. They put the same pressures on you, they picked on other youth as gangs do. Now it may be that the gangs would, having gang involvement would make that pressure or risk magnified, but I don’t think that it is a new pressure or a new risk.” (P.2, I.1, p.7)

Youth may have also had earlier pressure to commit deviant behaviours prior to their association with a particular gang or peers.

“Especially for certain type of risk that are high risk susceptible to negative peer pressure, and some people the negative peer pressure will be gangs. But those people would have been susceptible to other criminalized people before they...the gang problem started... I can’t answer if it was coincidence or not or if they were affiliated with gangs, because it would seem older brothers, sisters, cousins, mothers, fathers who are affiliated with gangs would follow that they were in gangs. But if you think about it before the gangs were here, if they were criminalized it was more likely that you were criminalized so the cycle happened anyways before the gangs.” (P.2, I.1, p.7)

In *A Rainbow of Gangs*, James Diego Vigil (2002) addresses how gangs become role models or parents for youth. The Youth sees the gang as his identity or aligns himself with the gang because of activities youth are a part of on a daily basis (Vigil, 2002). As many youth at-risk are subjected to nothing else but a gang identity, they are further entrenched into a gang lifestyle with few opportunities for escape.

Participants expressed that families and peers were two significant reasons why gangs are able to blind youth at-risk to the negative ramifications of joining a gang. Given such influential individuals pressuring youth to join gangs, some participants expressed concern that youth were unable to look towards their future goals. Because of this, the youth is unable to see the negative impacts gangs have and will have on his life.

“I think of even from the school presentations when I talk to them I always try to look at the downfalls of being in a gang life. What happens that limits your future goals? What you would like to go after. What you would like to be. By being in a gang life you can’t think of things like that because you are being controlled by individuals who are at a higher level than you, especially the youth.” (P.4, I.1, p.1)

By entering a gang life, youth are unable to think for themselves or even control their own lives. This is because the gang becomes the focus of a youth’s daily life (Miller, 1980). The interview participants find that it is difficult to discuss this with some youth because older gang members are also role models within their shared social circles.

“But is scary in a sense because it is what these kids see. It is who their role models are. In some cases it is intertwined with some of the families in this community. And it is...it is glorified. They don’t see the negative side. They think that it is cool to do some of the time

because their brother or their cousin or somebody has talked about how cool they were. But they don't realize, like really realize the full extent or impact of what that lifestyle holds." (P.1, I.1, p.2)

By glorifying a gang culture, older members are able to manipulate or mold younger members or associates into having a stronger allegiance to the gang. However, one interviewee expressed that every child who joins a gang has some understanding of what they are entering.

"And kids know that to a degree at some point, I believe that about every kid who goes into this knows that to a certain degree it is going to cost them. What its going to cost them they don't know, but at the point of time in where they are at it is survival. And for today to survive I have to join up, and that is what is going to keep me alive, that is what is going to feed me, then that is what is going to keep me moving. Then that is my choice." (P.1, I.2, p.7)

It is imperative, then, that effective prevention and intervention programs be created and implemented so that youth do not see the gang as their only option.

The interview participants felt that youth who join gangs are further led into a downward social spiral because of the degree of (violent) criminal involvement.

"Some are extremely high level of organization, and some are just loosely based where people are able to flow freely out. Now the higher up you are in an organizational ladder you get, the less likely you are to flow in and out of that group. Because the crimes are more serious more intense and more or higher frequency." (P.3, I.1, p.3)

A higher frequency of violent criminal involvement further increases the likelihood of premature death.

"I don't know if you read the story a couple of years ago about a young individual, or a few years back. On a school bus here in Saskatoon or I think it was in Edmonton, can't really remember the story to well. But it was 2 boys had no ties to any gangs, no ties or anything. But just too intimidated the other guys on the bus, 16-17 year olds, he was 16 himself. Feeling fear he shot out a name saying who he was a part of, IP, he said IP. And the guys that were on the bus were Syndicate, and at the first stop he tried to jump off of the bus and he got shot in the back, and he didn't quite make it. Incidents like that, those are the things that I try and tell the kids, even in the schools." (P.4, I.1, p.6)

The story of which the interviewee spoke of was about a youth named “Beeper”, who was asked with whom he was riding. Beeper gave the IP (Indian Posse) sign and was shot in the street by a Manitoba Warrior. Beeper, however, was not affiliated with the IP. He had learned the sign from older youth in his neighbourhood. He was only thirteen years old at the time (FSIN, 2003). The story of Beeper shows how gangs and their members not only become role models, but also gives a false sense of protection. Unfortunately, Beeper was blinded from the danger.

The interview participants have demonstrated how gangs appeal to youth’s needs by filling economic, security, and identity voids. Because of this, youth become entrenched into a gang lifestyle without opportunities to escape. This entrenchment into a gang lifestyle is possible even though some youth understand that there are risk factors to be faced by becoming a gang member. The interviewees also described how they perceive or view youth gangs in Saskatoon, and how youth gangs are able to prey on and recruit youth into becoming gang members. The next step is to understand the criteria used by the agencies to assess youth gang activities and behaviours. In other words, from an agency’s perspective what does a gang look like?

Saskatoon Agencies Perspectives of Youth Gangs

The interviewees stated that gangs are able to gain influence into the life of a youth through other variables besides family dysfunction. One interviewee explained that one way that youth gangs gain trust to recruit new members is by not judging the youth. The gang welcomes youth openly without judgment.

“But the upper hand that the gangs have on the rest of right now is that they don’t judge. They accept everybody for who they are. And it is pretty damn hard to compete against that after awhile.” (P.1, I.1, p.2)

The same interviewee also viewed gangs as terrorist organizations that prey on a youth’s fears as a means of control.

“Because the gangs really need, really gangs are terrorists in my mind. You know in the sense that they prey off of people’s fears, both outside the gang and inside the gang. That is how they get their control. That is what terrorists do.” (P.1, I.1, p.4)

By instilling a sense of fear into prospective members, youth gangs recruit by promising protection against other youth and gangs in the community.

Most participants agreed that youth gangs in Saskatoon instill fear either to recruit or control members of the community in order to increase gang’s power.

“On the other hand if you had one file where people were intimidated not to go to trial because of gangs then you have a problem. We have a few of those where they didn’t proceed because of gang intimidation. And that is probably one of the worst things that gangs do. They don’t allow the justice system to play out because of their street power. For the most part that has not been the case, in my experience. Citizens will stand up especially if we back them up, especially if the prosecutors back them up and do their job well, and the courts do their job well... And I think when we have a gang problem we will have a lot of files falling through the cracks where we can’t get people to testify.” (P.3, I.1, p.5)

Through the use of fear to control its members and the community, youth gangs are able to conduct their activities freely in their territory.

One interviewee explained a problem arising from an attempt to define youth gangs is that aspects of a gang lifestyle can be attributed to all members of society.

However, some individuals become burdened by certain social pressures, which lead the youth to victimize others rather than be victims. This movement from victim to offender is where participants separate youth gangs from other youth social groups.

“But what is a gangster lifestyle? Drinking and doping, that is a lifestyle that is reflective of middle and upper class people in our society. And again compound that even farther.

The victimization of others. White collar criminals do that, but I mean for the sake of the gang aspect, for sure we look at that and we do that with some of the girls on the street, and we go ok. When you have gone from being a victim to victimizing others then you begin to fall inside those realms. And in the gang world it is, like you said the wannabe or the kid that's just fresh to it, compared to the hardcore member where it is second nature to them, without batting an eye to go out and rob somebody to cause just damage for the sake of causing damage as a jerk. Not contributing to a meaningful way in their own lives or to a family life or a community.” (P.1, I.2, p.13)

All members of society may embrace some elements of a youth gang lifestyle, but, as this interviewee has expressed, it is when youth groups move from victims to offenders that they form a stronger youth gang identity. This movement from victim to offender gives researchers, theorists, and policy-makers to a broader picture as to the types of deviant behaviours that youth gangs display in Saskatoon.

Recognizing Youth Gang Activities and Behaviours in Saskatoon

What are the activities and behaviours that youth gangs exhibit within Saskatoon?

What separates youth gangs from a group of friends? How do youth gangs use fear to control or mark their turf? As one participant stated, it is when the group and group members move from being victims of a crime to offenders. But moving from victim to offender is only a part of it. There is also a sub-culture of which youth gang members become a part once they join the gang.

One of the most important and influential parts of youth gangs is the dress or colours that gang members wear to identify themselves from other groups. Through the use of colours, wearers announce what gang they are affiliated with and the turf in which they are controlling. Interview participants explained that an individual's dress allows frontline workers to make certain assessments. Frontline workers are able to gain an

understanding of the types, the number of youth gangs, and the amount of gang activity occurring in the facility and Saskatoon with this assessment.

Gang colours can be shown through the use of bandanas.

“Or if it is from a number of years back that we set a policy right from the on set about flying colours in here like bandanas and stuff, to try and stem any type of recruitment or gang activity sort of taking a foothold in this facility, not making it safe for the kids.” (P.1, I.1, p.1)

In addition to a specific colour, some youth gangs also wear a specific brand or type of clothing.

“All we have banned is G-Unit clothing and hats, that has been something we haven’t allowed here at this site, because this summer when we opened up, we had a number of kids that transferred in who had hats and shirts who were talking lots about gangs in the classrooms and were trash talking and we pulled them out right away and we saw a drastic reduction just by doing that.” (P.5, I.1, p.2)

Still other gangs may use both the colours and the specific clothes, but also incorporate specific accessories to further distinguish themselves in Saskatoon.

“And I think what are they doing, is the first things that you have to take a look at, is how do they look, or what are they doing? The majority of the time when you see gang members when they walk is, what they wear within their collars, within their wristbands, or in their pockets, or legs of pants. Are there a couple of people dressed the same. Are there a couple of people wearing the same hats. At least a couple, are they wearing it the same way... And one of the certain things that you always look for is the colour of the shoelaces, shoelaces, what they wear for earrings. Crazy Cree have different types of earrings of what they wear, you know, and where they wear it, and the colour patches within their clothes.” (P.4, I.1, p.10)

One problem that arises from the reliance of assessing youth gangs through clothing alone is that the clothing may change over time making youth gangs become recognizable.

“You know it got extended to durags, and that is about as far as it has gone. Because the gangs now have gone to wearing black Nike pants, white Nike pants, whatever, you know. So you can’t ask them to change their entire wardrobe style. And again, we keep a pretty good ear on what is going on.” (P.1, I.1, p.1)

Styles of dress change over time, and that includes the attire worn by youth gang members. Changing dress also enables youth gangs to blend in with other residents of easier, so as to carry out their activities more inconspicuously.

Given this issue of changing dress, Jessica Castanon (2008) suggests that if people were assessed as a gang member by the way they are dressed anyone might appear to be constituted as a gang member.

Individuals are stereotyped as gang members by the way they dress. It is not true that gang members always wear their hats backward in particular ways, or wear baggy clothing, etc. Essentially, anyone can appear to be a gang member. (p.60)

Because youth change their attire to stay within society's norms and to be less noticeable, it is difficult to label them as gang members by clothing alone.

If youth are labeled only through the clothes they wear, there is a greater chance of mislabeling youth. Two of the interviewees reported first-hand experiences where a youth had been mislabeled as gang member simply by his clothing.

"You know we have had school social workers here in meetings with us and they bring up a kids name and they say, 'Oh that kid is gang affiliated.' How do you know that? 'Well we heard it from other kids.' And I happen to know that that kid is carrying 3 rags. Why? Because he doesn't want to get his ass kicked, and he is not even gang affiliated at all." (P.1, I.1, p.7)

"Because you will run into that where one person thinks that cause they where their hat sideways they are gangster, and another person says that they are wearing their hat sideways because they saw another person wearing their hat sideways." (P.5, I.1, p.5)

The interview participants agreed that clothing is an important identity marker, but it is far from conclusive evidence of youth gang membership.

Some other aspects that participants said that they looked for as evidence of gang involvement were tattoos, graffiti, and hand signs.

“One of the things that I try and tell the teachers to look for is, what are they drawing? Significant graphic designs, graffiti in their books and that kind of shows you the affiliation that they are trying to get into, or the family members that are tied into certain groups.” (P.4, I.1, p.3)

Once again, even if youth were displaying any of these characteristics, the interview participants were adamant that it still would be insufficient proof of youth gang involvement.

“Sometimes we would notice that they would have a gang tattoo or number, and there are other signs like their clothing. But that doesn’t mean that they are in a gang though... Yeah we look for the colours, tattoos, self-identification, behaviours, gang signs, interest in other gang members. None of these define who is a gang member though. These are just signs that they know about gangs somewhat had contact with gangs.” (P.2, I.1, p.1)

The conscious concern of labeling a youth as a gang member is addressed in greater detail in the following section.

Another way that participants assessed youth as gang members was by looking for any changes in behaviour. Because the gang is the life of an involved youth, interviewees explained that youth will begin to exhibit particular characteristics or behaviours. For proper assessment, agency personnel who work with youth must be aware of any dramatic changes in character or behaviour.

“...when I talk to the teachers and I say to look for certain behaviours. School X, a group of four girls ok. Grade 8 I worked with the teacher. They called me in after the presentation and said we had a group discussion with the teacher and the principal, and here is what we have noticed. The bullying, who are they bullying, and how many are there? There are 4 of them and they are the same individuals. Ok what makes it that makes you think that they are part of something? Well one of the things that they noticed was using erasers to rub on their skin until they bleed. Well that is a pattern... And that is one of the things that I try and work with, especially with teachers, look for possible signs, who is consistently showing, and if there are drugs being pushed within the schools, you have to look at the behaviours from the time of when they were in school in the morning till the time in the afternoon. Is there a pattern?” (P.4, I.1, p.6-7)

Through constant observation and tracking certain behaviours, an individual who works with youth at-risk can recognize changes in youth behaviour indicative of a gang lifestyle. Through observations, frontline workers are also able to open up conversations to understand why a youth is acting in a particular way. This, in turn leads, to the importance of creating a relationship between the frontline worker and youths.

The idea of relationship building is an important factor, which all the interview participants stated is a key element to breaking down particular labels or stereotypes about gang youth. Relationships are also necessary for creating effective prevention, intervention, and suppression programs targeted towards youth gangs. The importance of relationships will be addressed in the third section.

By exploring how youth gangs are portrayed or identified, we can gain a better understanding of not only what gangs offer youth, but the activities and behaviours that are associated with youth gangs. The interview participants and their agencies have shown that they can characterize youth gang behaviour and assess the involvement of youth gangs. Yet, why are agencies unable to create common criteria with other agencies? And why do the interview participants feel that common criteria or definition of youth gangs is actually detrimental to youth? To begin to answer these questions, labeling theory needs to be employed so as to understand the concerns that participants with regards to the developing a common lexical definition of youth gangs.

Implications of Defining Saskatoon Youth as Gang Members

Participants expressed concerns that labels limit a youth's mobility within their social settings and within the larger community of Saskatoon. Labeling stereotypes can

be created in order to lump particular individuals into the same category, and this can have a marginalizing effect on youth which further distances them from the community. Because marginalization inhibits social mobility, mislabeled youth may actually become more likely to engage in a gang lifestyle. To understand how labels can be used to marginalize a group of individuals labeling theory will be addressed in greater detail.

Labeling Theory

Labeling theory has a strong history within crime and deviance research. Early research by Cooley in 1902, looked at labeling as a “looking-glass-self,” where one’s identity is constructed through the opinions of his/her peers and community.

We define ourselves in response to the ways that others have labeled, defined, and reacted to us. We come to learn that we are friends or enemies, attractive or ugly, funny or serious, and overweight, skinny, or just right, and often treat ourselves accordingly. We view ourselves from the perspectives of others and we take into account how they have treated us to develop a sense of who and what we are as a result. (Kubrin, Stucky, & Krohn, 2009, p.200)

The creation of one’s identity through the eyes of others allows individuals to determine not only how they are consciously perceived, but also one’s assumed position in society.

In 1938, Frank Tannenbaum used labeling theory to describe how “juveniles do not define their deviant behaviors in a negative light, rather negative perceptions of their deviant behaviors are imposed on them by society” (Weide, 2008, p.149). Tannenbaum finds that the youth themselves manifest and morph into what the community views them to be rather than how they view themselves. This leads to an understanding of how communities stereotype particular individuals to fit their own political agendas and social hierarchies.

Howard Becker also uses labeling theory to explore youth delinquency (Weide, 2008). Becker focuses on the idea that “certain behaviours are labeled as being deviant by moral entrepreneurs who have an interest in doing so” (Weide, 2008, p.150). Becker describes how publicly labeling an individual as a deviant permanently cuts the labeled individual off from socially accepted roles previously available to him. With this new status, the individual must find a place where he is accepted.

This difference leads most deviants who have been so labeled to accept and embrace their deviant roles, thereby rejecting and devaluing societal norms. The final step in assuming a deviant career is entry into a deviant subculture or group, where the behaviour that has led to one’s deviant label has a positive perception. (Weide, 2008, p.150)

In this sense, youth labeled as “deviant” are forced to look to gangs as means of surviving in their neighbourhood and community. The gang fills the void that society has created in its labeling of an individual as “deviant”.

As stated previously, labels are created and applied by the dominant group within the community in order to separate themselves from those whom they view as different from themselves (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Vigil (2002) addresses how labeling can create and/or solidify an individual’s role within a gang:

We’re not doing anything we just wanted to kick back...We don’t gangbang, we don’t have a name...But [the police] want us to have a name. Well, we just said, “Alpine, Alpine Kids.” Yeah, that sounds good. That’s the funny part – the police setting up, helping us build. (p.123)

Through the creation of a gang label, communities define which individuals are identified as youth gang members, even if the individuals in question do not regard themselves as such. Because members of society, and particularly youth, define themselves by how their communities and peers view them (Neufeld & Mate, 2004), it is imperative that, as a society, we move away from labeling youth as gang members, thereby reducing the

likelihood that youth will view the gang as their only source of self-identification. The problem, however, is that society has created the gang label to apply only to particular youth living in specific neighbourhoods. Therefore, only specific youth who fit particular characteristics are regarded as youth gang members.

Definitions: More Harm Than Good

During the interviews, all the participants showed great concern over the implications of placing labels on youth. The participants stated that labeling often leads individuals to stereotyping youth. This directly results in the production of negative representations of the labeled youth.

“By getting the proper label, by properly labeling what is going on sometimes that makes a common language and we can get away from just because a kid wears his hat on backwards a gang affiliated kid, and now you won’t call that kid a gang affiliated kid anymore. So you won’t just be throwing all of these kids in the same basket. The other side of the coin is that if you do, every time you label a gang affiliated, a victim or something, or ADHD or whatever you are now putting them in a bucket with the others. And no matter what we will always know what the label is. It still doesn’t just define the person, but you have to be leery of that. Just because a person has ADHD for example doesn’t mean that they are going to be exactly the same way that everyone else who has ADHD. But you will get teachers or people out there that will automatically treat that person the same as everyone else. I had a kid who had ADHD two years ago and this is what I did, so I did the exact same thing. So if you do put a label on the gang affiliated kid you are going to run the risk, you will run the risk of doing the same thing if the people aren’t educated about it.” (P.5, I.2, p. 3)

This interviewee expressed concern that a label lumps individuals together in order to fit a particular ideology. This leads to assumptions and stereotyping. In such cases, the youth is not seen as an individual, but rather lumped into a group.

“You have to be careful too because people have rights. If you label someone as a gang member without proof...especially a youth, then there would be recourse for that person.” (P.2, I.1, p.5)

Because of the negative impacts that some labels carry in society, particularly those of being part of a gang, interviewees expressed concern over who should have the power to label youth as such. Because those in positions of power usually apply gang labels, youth have difficulty disproving the accusation. Through mislabeling, those in positions of power unjustly lump particular youth. The lumping or categorizing of youth through particular characteristics facilitates regarding a youth as a label first, and an individual second.

The Power to Define: Who should Have the Power to Define Youth as Gang Members?

Due to the negative consequences of labeling, especially for those individuals who do not have the power to define themselves within the larger community, the interview participants expressed concern over who has have the power to define or label an individual as a youth gang member. Because of the negative implications that such labels carry, the participants explained that each agency has a role when dealing with youth at-risk of gang membership and youth gang members, and that only specific agencies and experienced workers should be given the authority to assess a youth.

One interviewee described the roles of justice officials in identifying and labeling youth as gang members:

“The primary function as police officers is to enforce the will of society through the criminal code and other sanctions that society has placed on individuals. That is basically their function and once people are involved in the legal process, typically they will have some kind of sanctions placed on them through court orders like undertakings, or probations and that is where they come into play.” (P.3, I.1, p.1)

This interviewee believed that the justice system should have the authority to not only define but outline the criteria used for labeling youth gang activities and involvement.

This interviewee stated that because of their limited physical-presence in Saskatoon, justice officials must rely on others to inform residents of Saskatoon about youth gangs.

“Because police staff has been cut back they don’t do school chats anymore. That is where Mr. Jackson [not real identity] goes and does a bang up job, he does great p.r. on behalf of the city. He works for the city, as a gang liaison guy. He does all those chats for them.” (P.3, I.1, p.8)

The role that this Saskatoon city official is described as:

“...work with the city of Saskatoon, with various organizations from community-based right through to media associations, talking to schools-elementary to high school. He does quite a bit of this in the past year and a half. The individual has done over 52 presentations. However, the individual can’t go to external requests outside of the city because it limits them to only the city issue. The individual works with community-based organizations where they do presentations about the gang behaviour and issues because a lot of these case workers/managers which work in probations, justice services, mental health services, and First Nations organizations that work with youth, have some that are part of these gangs.” (P.4, I.1, p.1)

The role of this individual is that of a liaison officer to communicate the concerns of organizations and the city to the residents of Saskatoon. This role is to inform Saskatoon residents of any changing characteristics in activities, behaviours, and/or dress with youth gangs.

Other interview participants agreed that the justice system should have the power to define and create criteria to identify youth gangs, along with their activities and behaviours. This is due to the different roles that each participant plays in Saskatoon.

“We are really a holding place so, you know it would be different, we don’t have a police role. We have a holding role. We do what the court tells us... The difference between us and say the police it is not our job to investigate, it is our job to keep people safe and to help people to rehabilitate to reduce re-offending behaviour, right? So we are not the court where we have to judge, or the police where we have to figure out if they did a crime. We are in an acting role.” (P.2, I.1, p.3-4)

Another interviewee described the role of long-term treatment centres for youth who are referred by social services.

“Provide long-term treatment for troubled youth. Youth are referred through social services or child family services. Can’t be sentenced, however youth in care may be involved prior to being in care, while others may still get involved during their time. Only a small percentage are involved in the justice system.” (P.5, I.1, p.1)

Due to some participant’s jobs, they felt that only the justice system should have the power to define and label youth as gang members because it would assist them in suppressing deviant behaviour and protecting the residents of Saskatoon.

Interview participants stated that the role of the courts, police, and justice system should be to define youth gang activities and behaviours for Saskatoon because of their ability to use the law to enforce the criteria.

“The only tool that we have is the law. We have to follow the law to bring people to justice. We have to follow the law to prevent people from perverting justice. And getting them through the court process is what we do, and a lot of people forget that other half of what we do is getting them through the other end.” (P.3, I.2, p. 5)

“There is the Canadian Justice criteria. We do not have a use to define a gang member because a gang member is something that the court uses to define when they are sentencing, right? All we need to know is if you are affiliated or you hang out with a certain group of boys...I don’t believe that we have the power to meet the criteria to do that. The police and the court have to do that. Even if I think a youth is a member of a particular gang, I do not believe that they would ask our opinion. No, they don’t ask our opinion.” (P.2, I.1, p.2)

Although a majority of the participants believed that the courts and police should have the authority to label youth as gang members, how do they examine youth gang behaviours and activities within their own facilities? Some of the agencies that partook in the study were short-term and long-term correctional facilities or group homes for youth. Because of their “holding role,” one participant explained that the lead clinician within each house has the credibility and expertise to define or label youth within their care as gang members.

One interviewee said the lead clinician of the house has the authority to define and label youth as gang members because of their knowledge of the individual youth.

“The lead clinician of the house determines if a youth is part of a youth gang or is part of gang activities.” (P.5, I.1, p.1)

In this agency the lead clinician has the authority to assess youth because they are seen as having the most experience and knowledge pertaining to youth gangs.

The interview participants also felt that field workers who have worked with youth at-risk for an extended period of time should also have the authority to use their judgment and opinions to assess youth as gang members.

“Mostly it is on the job training and it is an extension of other work that we do. We are event driven and every individual who comes into the unit has lots of experience with the events at hand.” (P.3, I.1, p.2)

“We wouldn’t do it specifically for gang involvement, we do it as part of our best practice, we try to get the new workers try to have them to go through a variety of induction and that kind of training at first. We try to have them work with more experienced workers for that guideline, but it wouldn’t be for a specific reason.” (P.5, I.1, pp. 2-3)

The reason given for experienced workers to assess youth gang activities and behaviours was because of their experiential knowledge in their designated field.

One interviewee stated that experience is something that cannot be taught through a book and has to be learned first-hand:

“That gets pretty much done on a, when people come in they get matched up with experienced staff. You know, so even Outreach for example, if you are a new staff, they always go out with a seasoned staff person, someone who has been out in the van for an excess of a year. You know? Or even in house here, and it’s kind of like a policy and procedures manual here. Everyone gets one here, they are obligated to read it, and they have to sign a document saying that they received, read and understood the contents of the policy and procedures manual of the organization. And without fail, I have people come to me and they ask all of these questions, and I say that is in the policy and procedures manual. Continually, people read it and say ok, I read. I believe that people retain better when they are hands, when you verbalize it to them when you are in the heat of it. And that is what we do with these guys.” (P.1, I.1, p.6)

Because much of the knowledge gained from working with youth at-risk to join gangs is from personal experiences, experienced workers are regarded as great assets for training inexperienced workers about youth gangs.

One interviewee expressed a need for experienced and inexperienced workers to work together:

“I would prefer that they be working with someone that has been around, and has some insight that can better explain to them. Because when you read something and it says: if they are wearing a bandana they are. People read that and when people come in people start asking from that it might lend to three or more questions that there are no answers for. At least if you are with me, I can then when I say one thing to you, you might sit there for 10 minutes and then go, so aside from that then, and then we can have that discussion and you can become more well-versed from that discussion. And I believe that you would retain that a lot more than you would read here.” (P.1, I.1, p.10-11)

By having experienced and inexperienced workers work together, rather than just learn from a manual, the interview participants felt that a relationship can be built between co-workers. Thus, a greater amount of knowledge can be transferred between different members within a facility.

Experienced workers are also used to show inexperienced colleagues the importance of building relationships with youth. These relationships allow agents to see the youth as individuals, not stereotypes that. One interviewee explained the value of experienced workers for training purpose:

“But in terms of that stuff, we have just done it like I said hands on, verbalize it, just being around another staff person so that they can really grasp, and see the approach that staff has. Why holler across the room, and this is one of the things that was one of my biggest pet peeves when I started as the director here because I have seen it with staff here, holler across the room at a kid about something, whether they were flying a bandana, or they are screwing around and they are going to get themselves or someone else hurt. Get up go over there and talk to the kid. Don't yell at them, don't be an authority figure, and explain to them... Well you know you start hollering at kids and pushing them up against the wall, like anyone else they are going to start pushing back.

Talk to them. Without making them, and some of them are looking for that attention of the class clown kind of thing.” (P.1, I.1, p.7)

In addition to expressing beliefs about who should have the power to define youth gang activities and behaviours, the interview participants also described those individuals or agencies that should not use the term gang youth, or label youth as gang members. The labeling of youth as gang members by teachers, schools, or the media promotes stereotypes constructed from second-hand sources. Diana Fishbien (1998) describes how this negative labeling pushes youth towards a cycle of deviant behavior.

However, parents and school systems ill-equipped to deal with a child suffering from a learning disability, may indirectly contribute to delinquency by removing the child from the classroom, thereby alienating him or her from friends and inculcating the belief that the child is “different,” possibly even inadequate...Consequently, the cycle of negatively interacting forces continues and the risk of becoming delinquent and eventually criminal is heightened. Once the individual attracts the attention of the criminal justice system, the problem is already significantly compounded. (pp.105-6)

The interview participants described how these labels are used not only to remove individuals from particular programs, but also to categorize or lump particular youth in order to marginalize them from the rest of the community.

Schools, specifically teachers, should not label youth as gang members because most do not have the training or experience to do so. One interviewee stated:

“Depending on who is using the label, right? Teachers probably shouldn’t be using labels on a lot of kids, without having the training or education on it, because then you do throw everybody in the same basket.” (P.5, I.2, p.3-4)

The participants feel that much of the information that teachers have on a youth comes from second-hand sources and his peers.

“And we get kids that come in there and the school has them flagged as active gang members. Whether they are or they are not. Whether they got it from little Johnny down the hall who said, ‘Yeah, I am sure that he is.’ So they just apply these labels and you

know they try and do what they view what is in the best interest of and what they see as the safety of all. But in the end, that label in that file follows that kid around forever.” (P.1, I.1, p.2)

One participant explained in detail how the community used labels to stereotype and ostracize youth from particular schools or areas of Saskatoon:

“We went through this with Street Outreach and individuals in the sex trade, people saying, ‘Oh, these girls need to have their own school, and that.’ Why? Why should they? Shouldn’t they be going to Aden Bowman, Walter Murray, Bedford Road, you know different schools. Why should they not be able to fit in where the norms happen. Because otherwise, what we are telling them again, is that in some ways you have some special and unique needs but we are also reaffirming that they are kind of like a leper, we still don’t want to touch you out in the rest of the community.” (P.1, I.1, p.8)

By marginalizing youth through gang or other detrimental labels, schools are able to effectively and efficiently remove those whom they feel do not belong in their school or classroom.

According to the interview participants, the media is another group that holds a great deal of power to label youth. Like teachers, individuals who are involved within Saskatoon’s media circles do not have requisite experience or knowledge to assess youth gangs.

“That is hard to say because, I think that a lot of the members of the media are different in what they do. I am going to sound really wishy-washy, but I really don’t think that they understand and that they are flying by the seat of their pants.” (P.2, I.1, p.3)

Due to the extent to which the media is able to reach residents of Saskatoon, the interview participants felt that the media should not have the authority to define youth gang behaviours or activities. The goal of the media is to report information, but sometimes this information is inaccurate. Therefore, the media’s usage of a gang label may undeservingly apply to youth wherever they move in Saskatoon. These stereotypes

may be further applied to marginalize youth who live in inner-city neighbourhoods and come from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

The interview participants indicated that only those individuals who have the experience and knowledge of working first-hand with youth gang members should have the power to define a youth as a gang member. One participant stated:

“I talk lots with groups when I am out presenting and that we need to get away from labels. Labels become the detriment of many people... Adding labels to them only compounds to that and keeps them down like anything or anywhere else in life. It indicates a pecking order.” (P.1, I.2, p.8)

Another concern was that once a youth has been labeled as a gang member, this label is able to follow him for years. There are two factors, the interview participants stated, that compound the difficulty of youth to shed a gang label that has been applied by others.

“... a worker can still write during this last reported period there has been a lot of gang activity, talking lots about gangs and doing all that, so then it would go to social services, or ICFS and then it is part of their personal file.” (P.5, I.1, p.6)

“You know, we have had school social workers here in meetings with us and they bring up a kids name and they say, ‘Oh, that kid is gang affiliated.’ How do you know that? ‘Well we heard it from other kids.’ And I happen to know that that kid is carrying 3 rags. Why? Because he doesn’t want to get his ass kicked, and he is not even gang affiliated at all. But here I go with the label again. They read it somewhere in a file or someone said it so it had to be true. And the fact that I told them what I told them won’t go in the file. That kid will still be affiliated and that file will follow them forever.” (P.1, I.1, p.7)

These two factors emphasize the interviewees’ views that individuals who have community influence and lack experience or knowledge should not apply definitions and labels.

Because gangs have been linked to an increase in violent crime committed by their members, some interview participants expressed concerns about how labeling youth as gang members inhibits their mobility in the community (Klein & Maxson, 2006). The

interview participants felt that the gang label is used to remove specific youth from schools, and further stigmatize those who live in Saskatoon's inner-city neighborhoods. Unable to move freely throughout Saskatoon, these youth may become further entrenched into a gang lifestyle because it is their only means of support. With limited mobility, the label gang may be applied simply by the neighbourhood of residence, thus further marginalizing particular youth from mainstream society.

“When somebody stops you, and we don't think that police officers know what background you come from. I say don't be stupid. Every police officer in the city, the liaison officers that work with the different schools in the city, pretty well know what background each kid comes from...” (P.4, I.1, p.5)

“Even the kids who aren't involved in gangs they are wearing it more now. It became the byproduct of the problem here... And the kids here, there are 3 or 4 kids walking down the street in backpacks, and yeah I hate to say it, but if their skin tone is a little brown they tend to get stopped more often, and what are you doing, who are you affiliated with? I get kids all the time that say, ‘One of the first questions that I get asked is who I am affiliated with?’ And then they open up their backpacks and there are school books in there.” (P.1, I.1, p.4-5)

The interview participants also acknowledged that while there are youth gang members in Saskatoon, we need to stay away from defining and labeling youth as because of the negative implications of such labeling. However, if the interview participants agree that there are youth gangs, how do Saskatoon agencies work youth gangs and youth at-risk of joining without labeling them gang members? What types of prevention, intervention, and suppression do participants feel are effective in deterring youth from a gang lifestyle?

Youth Gang Programs in Saskatoon

This final section focuses on programming for youth gangs and youth at-risk. It will reflect the three pillars of programming (prevention, intervention, and suppression),

different types of assessments and how they are used, the different types of programming taking place in Saskatoon at the time of the interviews, and the importance of relationships in successful programming. Again, throughout this section, the ideology of defining and labeling will continue to be addressed in order to understand why the interview participants believe that a lexical definition is not beneficial but is rather detrimental to youth who belong to particular neighbourhoods in Saskatoon.

Pillar One: Prevention

Preventative measures dealing with youth gangs focus on those youth individuals whom agencies determine exhibit the greatest risk of joining gangs. The programs that have been created in other rural and urban centres attempt to explain to youth the negative impacts that gangs have on their lives (Klein & Maxson, 2006). However, due to a variety of reasons as to why youth join gangs, it is difficult to ascertain the exact reasons why each gang member joined. Klein (1995) states,

Gang prevention programs have been rare. They require accurate knowledge of the predictors of gang membership, that is, identifying likely future gang members, and they require knowledge of the causes of gang membership. Finally, they require knowledge of the likely impact of prevention efforts. (p.137)

Even if exposed to common factors, some youth will join gangs and others may not. Thus, blanket preventative programs have been proven to not work because not all youth will join gangs for the same reasons or in the same way (Klein & Maxson, 2006). The nature of locales is key here. Because of this, researchers, theorists, and policy-makers have looked at multi-level programs where the focus is not just on the individual, but also includes family and community. By focusing on all these diverse elements, program

planners may be able to influence youth and the community more effectively on the negative impacts of gang membership (Klein & Maxson, 2006).

Some of the interview participants acknowledged gang prevention as a necessary component, but there are very few, if any, programs that deal directly with prevention initiatives in Saskatoon.

“I don’t really know anyone that is doing any prevention work right now in this community.” (P.1, I.1, p.13)

This lack of prevention programming can be linked to how suppression practices are utilized in Saskatoon.

“So we don’t do a lot of prevention stuff. Prevention through suppression by doing intensive curfew checks, and checking individuals involved with gangs and with crime.” (P.3, I.1, p.1)

The few programs that incorporate preventative measures focus on the behaviours that are identified as gang-related. Personal observations by frontline workers provide a foundation for envisioning what could be done in the realm of prevention.

Although some interviewees claimed that there are few programs designed specifically for prevention in Saskatoon, one interviewee explained that their role is to work with Saskatoon organizations to understand the issue of youth gangs so as to create prevention programs.

“From the prevention side, my side, working with the Friendship Centre, or Communities for Children, we talk about the behaviours that, and the gang activities. What is going on in the city right now. And from the informative side of what prevention is all about what you would like to see happen, but you can’t as an employee, what I do is try to generate something for an organization to look at. What to look more for, in terms of what they need to take a look at more so.” (P.4, I.1, p. 9)

This interviewee went on to explain that through anti-gang presentations, Saskatoon residents appear to become more socially aware of the anti-social behaviours that youth at-risk of joining youth gangs may exhibit.

“Now from the prevention side I listen to what is happening and when I go out to the community for presentations with organizations and that I state that we need to do more of this. Now what is working and what isn't so presenting, my prevention side is the behavioural patterns of gangs and what is in existence. With open discussions on what we can do more, is there something that we are missing, or finding out that organization is doing.” (P.4, I.1, p. 9)

The interviewee stated that discussing the issue of youth gang activities and behaviours with Saskatoon residents are forms of prevention practices. “Early signs of such problem behaviors as reactivity, aggressiveness, and impulsivity should be addressed with effective programs” (Klein & Maxson, 2006, p.160). Through observations and creating meaningful relationships with youth, preventative techniques can be created to dissuade youth from becoming fully entrenched in a gang lifestyle. Ideally, effective prevention programs lead fewer youth needing to intervention programs. Due to particular social pressures, however, the reality is that some youth will not be able to avoid becoming drawn into a gang lifestyle, and so intervention programming is needed.

Pillar Two: Intervention

Intervention and prevention methods are often similar because many prevention strategies have intervention ideologies when youth gang stereotypes are used to create programs that help remove youth from a gang lifestyle (Klein & Maxson, 2006).

Therefore, many intervention programs are created and assessed on stereotypical definitions and criteria that are irrelevant to specific rural and urban centres. As stated previously, there are few preventative programs that have been created for and used

effectively in Saskatoon. Intervention strategies are common when communities already have youth involved in gang activity. These programs are also more narrowly defined than prevention programs. However, they still focus on the individuals, families, and community that they are addressing.

Moving to the intervention level of strategies necessarily narrows the focus of one's goals. Intervention involves affecting individuals, groups, and communities already stereotyped with the gang label. Individual-level goals can be to remove members from their gangs, or to reduce their levels of participation, or to reduce their criminal involvement while in the gangs... Group-level intervention is harder to conceive. Goals may include reducing external pressures for gang maintenance, transforming gang-related values into more-acceptable prosocial values, or reducing conflict and tensions between rival gangs... Community level goals... focus on already-involved gang communities, more than likely communities or neighborhoods with traditional forms of gangs. (Klein & Maxson, 2006, pp.239-240)

With a narrowed focus, agencies can target youth whom they believe have the greatest risk of entering or maintaining a gang lifestyle.

“The risk factors that make the youth... the same risk factors that make the youth at risk to commit crimes are the same risk factors that make them to join a gang. So attacking those risk factors with some intervention will help them stay out of the gang.” (P.2, I.2, p.1)

With a focus on the risk factors that affect youth, the interview participants are able to avoid labeling youth as gang members while maintaining their focus on other social factors that may lead youth to deviant behavior.

“Our youth program that we run here, we talk about the fact of gang issues in it. Is it specifically gang? No. But much of what I have been talking to you this morning, we talk about it as part of the whole package, because without it, then we are starting to exclude that issue for some of these guys, and in this case for guys because this youth program is a guys' only program. And again if there are only, if we wanted to stay away from just saying we are only going to take you because you are a gang member and we are going to develop something for you. It is just, I don't know, we just don't want to isolate these kids into one area.” (P.1, I.1, p.13)

Because agencies do not wish to isolate youth with labels, the youth will hopefully not be excluded from particular programs because of their history or particular characteristics that they may be exhibiting. Instead, as interview participants explained, agencies seek to not label youth in order to be inclusive and appealing. With an inclusive philosophy, some agencies try to show the youth that gangs are not the only ones who will accept them for who they are.

Pillar Three: Suppression

While prevention and intervention programs are important for reaching out to youth, many agencies also employ suppression techniques. These are used to minimize actual gang activity. Suppression is, again, more narrowly focused than prevention and intervention techniques because the goal of suppression is to inhibit acts that are detrimental to the safety and lives of others (Klein & Maxson, 2006). Many of the participants see suppression as a means of taking power away from gang lifestyle tendencies, such as the use of colours, graffiti, and tattoos which are meant to instill fear among youth and claim territory within a community.

“Probably one of the few areas is our drop-in, where we don’t see a lot of individuals who are self-identified as gang members, or that we have any heavy suspicions that are actively involved as a gang member that come to our drop-in. I don’t know if it is because they are too cool for here. Or, if it is from a number of years back that we set a policy right from the on-set about flying colours in here like bandanas and stuff, to try and stem any type of recruitment or gang activity sort of taking a foothold in this facility, not making it safe for the kids.” (P.1, I.1, p.1)

“We just try and insure safety... We would suppress it. If they had gang tattoos all over their sleeves we would ask them to wear long sleeves. We don’t allow any gang colours in the building, tattoos, graffiti, you know how they role a pant leg up, we don’t allow that.” (P.2, I.1, p.5)

By inhibiting particular lifestyle choices, agencies that work with youth at-risk and youth gang members, believe that they are able to have some control over the presence of gangs and the exhibition of gang paraphernalia in their facilities.

Within Saskatoon, suppression is viewed as conducted primarily by the justice system and law enforcement officials.

“When someone breaks the law, police get involved and if there intent on continuing to break the law police are intent on suppressing it. That is prevention. From a justice perspective that is the best role that police have to offer because there is no one in society that can do the suppression part. The courts and police are the only folks we have... Prevention through suppression by doing intensive curfew checks, and checking individuals involved with gangs and with crime.” (P.3, I.1, p.1)

Through the suppression of illegal activities, justice and law enforcement officials are seen as protecting Saskatoon residents, and preventing youth from pursuing a future gang lifestyle.

The problem with suppression techniques is that they have little success addressing issues of gang membership (Bjerrard, 2003; Lafontaine, Ferguson, & Wormith, 2005). Another concern with suppression programs is that they are more costly than prevention and intervention programs, because of the costs of prosecuting and incarcerating individuals as gang members (Chettleburgh, 2007; Klein & Maxson, 2006; Lafontaine, et al., 2005; Mercredi, 2000). Because of the ineffectiveness and financial toll of suppression policies in other urban centres, Saskatoon should focus on prevention and intervention programs rather than pursue suppression as its primary tactic for countering youth gang activities and behaviours. With proper prevention and intervention programs specific to Saskatoon, agencies and law enforcement personnel can help deter youth from ever associating with gangs. So how do agencies assess youth at-risk of joining and youth

gang members in prevention, intervention, and suppression programs? What are the philosophical approaches of Saskatoon agencies that work with youth at-risk?

Assessment Tools for Youth At-Risk

An important aspect for any program is to be able to assess individuals properly for the best possible programming. Some of the assessment tools that the interview participants described range from checklists and behaviour monitoring over extended periods of time, to creating relationships in order to understand youth on a more personal level. Before these assessment tools can be used effectively, the individuals using them need to understand the factors that lead some youth to join a gang.

For those youth at-risk of joining a gang, or have begun to exemplify particular gang tendencies, agencies must consider those factors most likely to lead youth to look to gangs for support or survival. Two interviewees explained some of the risk factors that may lead to deviant behaviours and a gang lifestyle:

“When you take a look at the society, and the society, and I think as individuals, or even organizations, or even the city of the population of Saskatoon, we differentiate the different sides of the city sections. The core neighbourhood because of the low income that lives in the majority of that side...it kind of ties into the low income because there is no real family dynamics side, there is no real support mechanism from both sides. You have low income people over here that don't have that support mechanism, there is no stability.” (P.4, I.1, p.7)

“What I would do is look at the youth as a whole, and they have certain risks, certain needs, certain issues that affect their re-offending risk. It is their ability to cope, and not commit misconducts, right? So we would look at all of those. Things like substance abuse anti-social attitudes. Gang involvement or whatever would affect some of those somewhat, right?” (P.2, I.1, p.6)

The risk factors that these interviewees described were weak family support, low income, and a compromised sense of belonging, and are typically identified upon a youth's first

contact with an agency. Other risk factors related to deviant behaviours exhibited by youth include substance abuse, theft, and violence.

“The risk factors that make the youth... the same risk factors that make the youth at risk to commit crimes are the same risk factors that make them to join a gang. So attacking those risk factors with some intervention will help them stay out of the gang... The things that they need whether they are in a gang or not a youth at risk all these risks mean similar things. You have to figure out what those are.” (P.2, I.2, p.1)

By conducting initial assessments of known risk factors, the interview participants believe that they are able to address any safety measures needed for other individuals in their care. Initial and follow-up assessments provide an opportunity to create a programming plan for the youth.

Holistic Healing: Focusing on the Whole Child

When we are sick with a cold or the flu, we see a doctor to receive treatment. The treatment prescribed is intended to have us back to a normal or healthy state as quickly as possible. Youth gangs have been described in a similar manner, as an infection or disease overrunning communities and living off people’s fears. Chettleburgh (2007) addresses how gangs have been likened to a social disease that is exported by other communities and neighbourhoods:

Fingers pointed everywhere, looking for the cause of Toronto’s street-gang problem. Looking at one symptom rather than the whole disease, Mayor David Miller suggested the U.S. was exporting its problem of violence to the streets of Toronto. (Chettleburgh, 2007, p.9)

The idea that gangs are a disease or an infection was also described by one of the participants in the study.

“Because it is kind of like an infection, if you are only looking after that part and you are not watching where the rest of it is streaming, you are going to end up with another infection start to take root somewhere else.” (P.1, I.1, p.5)

The problem with youth gangs in Saskatoon is that the interview participants have stated that there is no one specified factor(s) as to why youth join gangs. Just as there is no one specific factor to join, the participants stated that there is no single cure or program that will work all youth.

“When we work with kids here everyone is out there for the magic end-all-be-all solution to fix it. And it really doesn’t exist I believe, because if it would have, we would have found it.” (P.1, I.1, p.7)

Because of this, agencies that work with youth at-risk and youth those immersed in a gang lifestyle must look to multiple strategies in order to help them break free from a deviant lifestyle. By not focusing on just one aspect, such as drugs, violence, anger management, or gangs, the participants feel that they will not neglect other aspects of health that might also be affecting a youth.

All participants stated that they employ a type of holistic programming where physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental aspects are all addressed. The programs used by the various agencies may have different names and different ideologies, but share the guiding principle of holistic healing. One interviewee described how holistic healing is used in their agency’s case management model:

“...there is a level of inventory which is really a rating on risk to reoffend, and there are 8 areas. One is pro-criminal attitude, one is addictions/substance use, and I can’t remember them off the top of my head. But they are leisure/rec time, employment, education, and their family circumstances.” (P.2, I.2, p.2)

This interviewee believed that this model works well because youth may be facing multiple issues, and these issues can all be addressed in the programming. The

interviewee explained that gangs are not a primary issue because the more pressing issues that led youth to join a gang are what need to be addressed.

“What I would do is look at the youth as a whole, and they have certain risks, certain needs, certain issues that affect their re-offending risk; their ability to cope, and not commit misconducts, right? So we would look at all of those. Things like substance abuse, anti-social attitudes. Gang involvement or whatever would affect some of those somewhat, right? But if you have gang involvement and all these other issues and we try and deal with your gang involvement all of these other issues are going to affect you and it won’t help. So you have to look at the person as a whole, and we call it a wrap-around where we try and deal with your risks and your needs and the way you respond to someone trying to help you as a whole. So you might need some help with your substance abuse, some help with your cognitive abilities.” (P.2, I.1, p.6)

Throughout the programming process, the interviewee believed that the issue of gangs is covered through other aspects of the program. Because of this wrap-around approach, gangs do not become the primary issue in the program.

A second model that a participant described was a “social nourishment model,” which focuses on teaching youth different ways to deal with their problems beyond a rewards/consequences system.

“We work from a social nourishment model. Teach kids different ways on how to deal with frustration, with stress, and their underlying problems. Don’t have a rewards/consequence system. Don’t work from a level system. It is a holistic type of approach with youth.” (P.5, I.1, p.1)

This interviewee explained that within this model the assessment comes from a variety of professionals in order to ensure that all aspects of “self” are addressed.

“We have social workers, child youth care workers, teachers, psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists so we try and get at some point or another in the assessment phase we try and get all of those peoples professional twist on what they think is going on, and what they think their part is of the treatment plan for that young person. So it is coming from a variety of perspectives.” (P.5, I.2, p.4)

This model's strength comes from the professionals who work one-on-one with the youth. Holistic programming is believed to best address multiple factors because different professionals provide input to develop programming for each youth.

The third model described was a progress approach, which emphasizes that youth and community members understand that those in the agency's programs are attempting to improve their lives and that it is a progression. The main focus is on how the youth is progressing through his particular issues, not the process. For example, the interviewee states:

"We come at it from the progress not the process approach. Where we continually work with kids to try and progress them. We recognize that they are not going to be perfect. A lot of our programs are built on that basis here, if not all." (P.1, I.1, p.2)

The interviewee believed that programs must look at how the youth is progressing, rather than focus on how the process is being accomplished.

Holistic healing looks at the four elements of health, namely the spiritual, the emotional, the mental, and the physical. The reasoning is that if a youth partakes in a gang lifestyle or is at-risk of joining a gang; unhealthy activities will have an effect on multiple levels.

"And if gang stuff is their only issue, I guess I would call bullshit on it because of the plural issues; there are addictions, abuse issues, for a lot of these guys as well, from physical, to sexual, to mental abuse to all of those different factors. That is how they got there." (P.1, I.1, p.16)

One interviewee stated that holistic program development is important because of the multiple issues affecting youth:

"Often it is multifaceted like the issues that are affected in their lives. And gangs are one of them. You have a kid who comes in here and has drug addictions. Is it because of gang lifestyle, or did they have the drug addiction before they became involved in gangs? Like I said, we look at the whole package. You have kids who come in with all sorts of health

related issues, from mental health to actual physical health issues that have to be taken into consideration.” (P.1, I.1, p.13)

Interview participants also believe that a holistic approach allows their programs and programmers to address the issue of gangs without bringing it to the forefront. Gang labels therefore do not need to be applied to the youth. If labels are not applied, there is less marginalization and stereotyping of youth. Holistic approaches allow agencies and their agents involved with youth at-risk to joining and youth gang members to create meaningful relationships between themselves and youth. These relationships are intended to break prior stereotypes that may have been present.

The Importance of Meaningful Relationships

A holistic approach to program development shifts the focus to the relationships that are created between frontline workers and youth. The interview participants stated that meaningful relationships and holistic methods are needed in order for prevention and intervention programs to be effective. The relationship between youth and agency is vital for this to occur.

“You can have the greatest program in the world but if you don’t have a relationship it isn’t going to mean squat because your client base is not going to be there or if they come in by force. It doesn’t matter if you have the program that cures them if you don’t have the ability to connect and build a relationship you lose them in a very short order.” (P.1, I.2, pp.3-4)

Based on these meaningful relationships, staff can assess youth on an individual basis.

“But it all comes down and our best success rate in terms of any way you want to define as success is when you work one on one with the kid... But we also involve kids into what they plan has to be for themselves, because I can’t tell you what to do with your life. I can give you some suggestions and input but only once again I only understand some of what you are coming from. What are you involved in? What are you currently doing? What is lacking for you right now? And there isn’t a kid I haven’t met, a person that I haven’t met that hasn’t had an idea or a thought of aspiring to something in their life.” (P.1, I.1, p.8)

Relationships encourage youth to feel welcome and supported in the different programs and agencies. Two interviewees explained the importance of creating safe spaces for youth to talk and feel respected.

“You know how it is that they gave you a chance to talk, that they can feel safe when they came to school in the morning, people are listening to what I have to say. Not to be too judgmental of what it is that you are bringing. I know there is 15 or 20 other kids that you have in your classroom, but sometimes that one kid is going to say something and maybe it is too late.” (P.4, I.1, p.12)

“If we can get relationships with them that is how you can start, you know, supporting them and assisting them to make change because you can go and make all the policies you want with all of the program curriculum that you want. But in the end if you sit down with these kids and they are telling you really, once you have some insights with them, this is really what I want to do. And it is just trying to help to negotiate that.” (P.1, I.1, p.12)

Within meaningful relationships, youth are more willing to open up and self-disclose particular information about themselves and others. An interviewee explained that it is important for agency workers to listen faithfully because youth usually tell the truth about their actions.

“The thing about kids is that they don’t deny what it is that they are doing.” (P.4, I.1, p.4)

By listening, agencies and their workers can create meaningful relationships in which a youth feels safe to disclose the risk factors influencing his decision whether to join a youth gang.

Finally, the interview participants believe that meaningful relationships can break labels and stereotypes. This, then, creates a sense of empathy with the youth rather than sympathy.

“And I try to work with the teachers a little bit more. I guess one of the things that I try and tell them is that, it is not about us as educators it is about the kids that we are trying to work with.” (P.4, I.1, p.12)

“So you grew up in a certain area and there is a lot of delinquent behaviour going on it is kind of expected of you to survive in that environment you may need to keep up with the Jones’s, or you may need to throw that rock through that window, or mug the person, you might need to do that or you are going to be beat up or other things happen. So some workers see that as a lot of people would have done that if they were in the same environment in order to survive.” (P.5, I.2, p.3-4)

“The thing that I am always telling people is to keep an open-mind when these kids come in and don’t judge them, and take the time to get to know who they are.” (P.1, I.2, p.8)

“Continually we see these kids as what they are. They are young teenagers that got more issues and more problems going on in their lives than the average teenager. We don’t look at one and say I don’t want to help because they are a junkie. We see them as individuals...” (P.1, I.2, p.13)

Through meaningful relationships, programs can help youth move from a gang lifestyle to one that is healthier and more productive. These relationships are also vital to help dispel stereotypes that communities might have misapplied to youth. Breaking stereotypes created by labels a youth to be viewed simply as an individual who has more barriers to overcome than his peers. By creating meaningful relationships, the participants said that a support system can be established where a youth feels comfortable coming to particular agencies for help, rather than turning to gangs.

Summary

The interview participants who work at a variety of agencies were able to identify characteristics, behaviours, and activities that are unique to youth gangs in Saskatoon. The interview participants explained that they used these identifying markers to help create policies to limit deviant behaviours and activities. Although the participants are able to identify what they saw as unique and specific markers of youth involved in gangs, they were hesitant to create a lexical definition or common criteria. Because the

participants do not have a lexical definition of a youth gang, the gang does not become a mitigating factor in prevention and intervention programming aimed at deviant behaviours. The participants explained that meaningful relationships and holistic programming best address the issue of gangs without labeling youth as a gang members.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion, Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Anyone who has studied gangs over a period of time will admit that the more one studies them, the more complex they are. At best, we can come to understand a bit about certain features at given points of time. Gangs are dynamic, flexible, and ever-changing.

William B. Sanders (1994)

The purpose of this thesis was to explore why Saskatoon agencies that work with male youth gang members and male youth at-risk have not created a lexical definition of male youth gangs. I have suggested that by employing a common definition, agencies and their workers could better create and assess the effectiveness of their prevention, intervention, and suppression programs designed to help male youth stay out of or leave a gang lifestyle. Another reason that I wanted to conduct research on youth gangs was because there is a gap in the literature on youth gang behaviours and activities in Saskatoon. Currently, most people living in Saskatoon have gathered their information and understandings about youth gangs from the media, school, and other second-hand sources (Richter-White, 2003). These sources tend to sensationalize and marginalize specific youth into gangs, stereotyping or labeling them as gang members.

Through this research, I have come to understand that youth who are at-risk of joining youth gangs come from low socio-economic and marginalized neighbourhoods. The interview participants also stated that the reasons why youth join gangs are for economic gain, protection, and a sense of identity. Although I had hoped to create a definition of youth gangs based on the interviews, the participants explained that one overall definition or common criteria to assess youth gangs might ultimately be used to label and lump particular youth into categories. Through mislabeling, youth living in

particular neighbourhoods and in low socio-economic families are marginalized ever further from the “norms” of society. Participants expressed concern that a lexical definition of youth gangs may facilitate the removal of youth from particular places in Saskatoon such as schools because of the stereotypes associated with gang association. According to the interview participants, many Saskatoon residents, through media portrayal and second-hand sources, have already created subjective definitions of a potential youth gang member, where they reside, along with their activities and behaviours.

Compare and Contrast

As data were being compiled and analyzed, some similarities emerged between agency members’ views on youth gangs in Saskatoon and those reported in the literature covering various rural and urban centres across North America. The interview participants stated that in Saskatoon, the majority of residents will not be affected by gangs or their activities. This is supported by work done by Chettleburgh (2007). Jarkowsky and Park (2008) also state that crime experts regard most gang activity as occurring only within urban ghettos or the poverty-stricken pockets of a locale.

Sociologists and criminologists have argued that the concentration of poverty creates an environment within which criminal behavior becomes normative, leading impressionable youth to adapt criminal lifestyles.
(p.28)

Within the literature, gangs and their activities are seen to be cultural byproducts of those who have been marginalized by the community (Jargowsky & Park, 2008). The interview participants expressed concern that the residents of Saskatoon (like those in other locales) stereotype particular youth inadvertently encouraging them to join gangs, effectively

marginalizing those who live in inner-city neighborhoods. Stereotyping by the media, other second-hand sources, agencies, and law enforcement personnel have labeled youth as gang members based on race, socio-economic status, and family affiliation.

Siegel (2003) looks at how gang databases are used as a tool to target particular individuals as youth gang members based on race:

As is the case in so many other areas of the criminal justice system, the gang databases disproportionately target people of color...two out of three young black men in Denver were on a gang suspect list...The overinclusion of African Americans on Denver's gang list is particularly shocking because blacks are only 5 percent of that city's population (but 47 percent of the gang database). (p.225)

Statistical data reveal that Denver is not an isolated case. Siegel (2003) extends her analysis of the overrepresentation of minorities on suspected gang lists across California, and links these statistics to that of former police states found in Eastern Europe and how they focused only on those whom they wished to oppress.

Other cities' databases suffer from the same racial bias. According to a report by the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office, 46.8 percent of the African American men between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-four in L.A. County have been entered into the police gang-tracking database. In contrast, less than one-half of one percent of white men in the same age group have been entered into the system. San Jose's database is 95 percent nonwhite; 69 percent Latino. For young people of color, the United States is coming more and more to resemble the kind of police state that existed in the former Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe. Relative anonymity is one of the hallmarks of a free society, but for tens of thousands of Blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans, including many who have never committed an illegal act, anonymity is no longer possible. Their names, addresses, and telephone numbers, and other personal information are easily accessible to the police and other law enforcement agencies. (pp.225-6)

Databases in the United States focus primarily on individuals who are of a non-white ancestry, therefore adhering to the common stereotype that gangs and youth gangs are

primarily composed of individuals of colour and live within particular neighbourhoods characterized by poverty and high rates of crime.

Most provinces have begun to create databases on gangs so that agencies and law enforcement officials can compare and track individuals across jurisdictions (CISS, 2005). At the time of the writing of this writing, Saskatchewan does not have a universal database on gangs. Information on individuals associated with gangs is limited to law enforcement personnel in their own jurisdictions. However, this is not to suggest that databases on gangs have not been constructed in Saskatoon. The Serious Habitual Offender Criminal Apprehension Program (SHOCAP) and the Break and Enter Criminal Apprehension Program (BECAP) are two such databases that have been created by the Saskatoon Police Service to follow up on individuals who have had a history of offending and engaging in gang related activities.

The interview participants explained that most files and assessments on youth at-risk and youth gang members in Saskatoon are created when youth enter their facilities. The files are used for developing intervention strategies for the individual youth and follow youth even after they leave the agency or program. Through this filing system and documentation, many youth are never able to escape a gang label.

The interview participants argued that labeling has detrimental effects because it lumps individuals. The participants felt that due to labeling, youth tend to become more entrenched within or enticed to pursue a gang lifestyle. Authors suggest that “involvement in antisocial behaviour may also cause the individual to be officially labeled, making participation in conventional arenas such as school and work more difficult” (Farrington, 1977; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003, p.6).

To break their agencies' misuse of labels and stereotypes, the interview participants stated that meaningful relationships must be established between the various agency representatives and youth. Through the establishment of meaningful relationships, the interview participants explained that labels and definitions would be dismantled, that youth would be seen as individuals rather than as members of a particular gang. Meaningful relationships allow agencies and their workers to recognize the different barriers that some youth have to face daily just to survive. The key to preventing delinquent and offending behaviour and intervening in existing trajectories of offending lies in fully understanding and identifying the specific risk factors that youth face (Dembo, Wareham, Poythress, Meyers, & Schmeidler, 2008, p.645). Dembo et al. expand on the importance of relationships between agencies and youth, stating that "peer rejection and isolation may also place youths at greater risk for antisocial behavior and gang affiliation" (2008, p.646). The focus of treatment can focus on different environmental aspects (e.g. alcohol, drugs, and money) rather than solely on the gang label.

This research also found some disparities between existing literature and participants' concern with regards to who holds the power to impose gang labels on youth. The interviewees share a belief that justice officials should hold this responsibility. This is consistent with past practices, where the defining and assessing of youth gangs has been primarily a justice prerogative (Fritsche, Caet, & Taylor, 1999). The interview participants view law enforcement and justice officials as having the necessary tools to limit mislabeling youth as gang members. However, as some studies have suggest, this may not be the case. One concern is that police, prosecution, and legislative definitions

and interpretations may vary within the rural and urban centres themselves. Fritsche et al. discovered that

One specific problem with gang intervention strategy evaluation is the fact that police, prosecutor, and legislative definitions of gangs, gang related crime, and gang members differ widely. (1999, p.129)

Just as rural and urban centres may differ on the criteria used to assess youth gangs, so too do those who work in the justice system.

Another concern is that police officers and their officials are under pressure to protect a locale. The creation of accurate data surrounding youth gangs, however, is problematic. The “gang data gathered by police is sloppy because they are under pressure to manipulate gang/crime stat[istic]s” (Katz, 2003, p.487). Katz also notes that police officers are not immune to the subjective tendencies used to stereotype individuals and crimes as gang related.

It is subjective – police do not necessarily document individuals because of behaviour but rather document individuals according to their own ideas and beliefs about gang members...Officers focus on where they live and who they associate with, look like, and what clothes they wear. (p.487)

Accordingly, justice officials should not have the sole authority to create the criteria or definitions used in assessing youth gang activities or behaviours. Furthermore, justice officials should not be the only individuals with the authority to gather information and define the characteristics of youth gangs.

Because the literature supports the idea that no single group or organization should have the power to define what constitutes a youth gang, Fritsche et al. (1999) state that more than just justice officials who need to work to combat the issue of youth gangs:

The literature has concluded that law enforcement alone cannot solve the gang problem – in fact, the typical police organization is ill-equipped and poorly structured to deal with gangs (Rush, 1996). Dealing with gangs

requires a comprehensive approach that involves all members of the criminal justice community, schools, community leaders and the like (p.125)

Saskatoon agencies must work together to create specific criteria for assessing youth gangs, leading to programs specific to the social factors that lure Saskatoon youth into gang activities.

Collaboration between Saskatoon residents, police, schools, youth, and other agencies would lead to a better understanding of youth gangs may be created. From multiple perspectives, relevant criteria could be created to assess more effectively the behaviours and activities exhibited by Saskatoon youth gangs. However, after data analysis, it is apparent that the interview participants would be unable to come together because of differences with regards to their approaches. These differences, however, have allowed agencies to minimize the impact that gangs have in Saskatoon and on programs designed to deter youth from joining a gang.

The Elephant in the Room

Denying the existence of youth gangs has been a strategy employed by many rural and urban communities across Canada to largely minimize the negative effects and presence that gangs have their (Chettleburgh, 2007). In *The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life*, Eviatar Zerubavel (2006) writes,

According to many psychologists, denial stems from our need to avoid pain. When awareness of something particularly distressful threatens our psychological well-being, we often activate inner floodgates that block the disturbing information from entering our consciousness. (p.5)

The problem with denial is that it ignores the issue until the issue becomes out of control – “unless people were affected in some way by street-gang crime, it was considered an

‘elsewhere’ problem” (Chettleburgh, 2007, p.9). If people are not directly affected or are not forced to acknowledge social problems (e.g. racism, sexism, classism) the social issue can be denied as existing or valid (Bishop, 2002).

Toronto, Winnipeg, and Calgary are three large cities in Canada that have used denial to minimize the effect and presence of youth gangs (Chettleburgh, 2007). Within each of these cities, city officials denied the impact of youth gangs until the issue could be contained no longer and the youth gang problem had become an epidemic (Chettleburgh, 2007). On 29 July, 2008, retired Calgary police officer Henry Hollinger stated, “Calgary’s gang problem could have been prevented if it had not been downplayed when in fact it was on the rise...and it was a mistake not to put more resources toward the problem sooner.” Hollinger said that because the city denied the particular events and information, gangs were able to take root and flourish in Calgary neighbourhoods. Calgary’s gangs now have the upper hand, and the police must begin anew (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2008).

An important or emerging theme from the literature is that youth gangs differ from locale to locale. It is natural that different agencies within rural and urban settings will differ in criteria used to assess youth gangs. Fritsche et al. (1999) argue that gangs vary from city to city, and even within the cities themselves.

Gang problems and behaviours vary widely from city to city as well as within cities (Wiesel and Painter, 1997). In accordance, it is doubtful that one strategy will be effective across and within all jurisdictions. (p.124)

These differences can create political differences between communities and agencies, especially among justice officials.

A fringe “wannabe” in one jurisdiction and a violent “shot-caller” in another may both be considered street-gang members, but they are not the

same breed of gangster. And the lack of a clear definition allows for some unfortunate politicking: some police agencies may purposely over- or underestimate the size of their street-gang problem – to get more resources or to satisfy citizens they are doing a good job – by manipulating the definition accordingly. (Chettleburgh, 2007, p.21)

The results that emerge from various studies can then be used as propaganda by the media or other agencies to further personal or professional political agendas. Because of differences in criteria used to assess youth gangs between locales, nationally conducted studies are skewed, generating inadequate conclusions (Chettleburgh, 2007; Klein & Maxson, 2006) that can encourage some locales to deny the presence of youth gangs.

As with other communities, the assessment and labeling of youth as gang members has political implications in Saskatoon. Denial of the existence of youth gangs in Saskatoon stems from the role that an agency has within the community. As stated earlier the interview participants believed that law enforcement officials should have the authority to assess and label youth as gang members or associates. However, because of the immense pressure from city residents, statistics and the types of crimes may be altered to create a false sense of safety and allay fears (Schmidt & O'Reilly, 2007).

Although it may seem that it is only law officials who deny the presence of gangs, some participants also denied the presence of gangs, albeit from a different point of view. The denial of gangs is strong and occurs even when agencies acknowledge that gang members access their programs. Collective agency denial stems from a tendency to not see gangs as an important focal point during treatment of troubled youth. Those who work in the area of prevention and intervention expressed their concern that labeling ultimately carries detrimental effects. This may help deter the mislabeling of youth as gang members, but by denying the importance of the gang factor in the lives of youth

with regards to prevention or intervention, these programs may fall short of helping youth overcome the lure of the gang. Therefore, the gang issue must become a focal point in helping youth to not only break free from gangs, but prevent other youth from entering a gang.

Future Research Recommendations

One purpose of this research was to explore why a common lexical definition of youth gangs has not been created for the city of Saskatoon. A second objective was to establish a set of criteria for youth gangs upon which all agencies could agree. These criteria could be used to evaluate and assess the youth gang phenomenon that has been proliferated in Saskatoon and across Saskatchewan over the past two decades.

However, the creation of common criteria for assessment is not supported by these five participants because interview participants stated a gang label may be detrimental to the identity of a youth. The creation of a common lexical definition or a set of criteria may result in mislabeling youth as gang members and result in further marginalization. The denial of the importance of defining youth gangs fulfills several political agendas, such as program implementation, the numbers of youth involved in gangs, the number of gangs, and who is considered a youth gang member.

One area of study that must still be addressed is to have a better understanding of what it means to be a youth gang member in Saskatoon. This could be accomplished by approaching gang members, ex-gang members, Saskatoon residents, and those who work with youth at-risk and youth gang members. Together, these individuals can contribute their voice, opinions, and concerns about youth gangs. Coming together, these groups

could identify the specific risk factors that lead youth to engage in a gang lifestyle. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) argues that all members of a social community must be consulted because everyone must have the power to define themselves through their own perceptions. Therefore, youth and other residents of Saskatoon must be considered when trying to understand what it means to be a part of a youth gang.

One study conducted by Lafontaine, Acoose, and Schissel in 2005 attempted to address the issue of involving youth in their research of gangs.

Most policy-makers, politicians, law enforcement officials, and other youth-serving professionals would most often define a gang through acts of crime and delinquency, these youth define a gang through strong, and often emotionally painful descriptors of human suffering and struggles to belong. (pp.32-33)

By allowing youth to come up with their own perceptions of youth gang life, some researchers have begun to understand that that youth view gangs much differently than agency workers or researchers. The youth who participated in the study addressed youth gangs in more humane aspects than the adults who have the power to define youth gang activities and behaviours (Lafontaine et al., 2005).

Another reason that continuing research must be done is that it will allow researchers, theorists, and policy-makers an opportunity to assess biases and stereotypes within Saskatoon. This relates to a larger topic of systemic oppression that this research was unable to fully acknowledge. Throughout the data analysis, the interview participants discussed how particular youth in Saskatoon were seen as belonging to youth gangs, even though most have no affiliation to a gang. This biased stereotyping is a barrier that must be overcome if Saskatoon residents are to realize that youth gangs are a byproduct of limiting social factors such as race, and class.

It is hoped that through the involvement of youth and other residents of Saskatoon in the assessment of youth gangs, a more complex picture of youth gangs will be created. With a more comprehensive understanding, Saskatoon, and other locales, may appreciate the complexities that youth face with regards to the issue of youth gang involvement. This appreciation of the complexities that youth face will help agencies and residents break their stereotyped view of youth gang members, and instead see these youth as individuals trying to survive in a system that oppresses system, rather than just as another thug.

Reference

- Abelson, R. (2006). Definition. In D. Borchert (Ed) *Encyclopedia of philosophy: Vol. 2* (pp.664-677). New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan.
- Barrow, R. & Milburn, G. (1990). *A critical dictionary of educational concepts* (2nd ed). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Becker, H. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance*. New York: Free Press.
- Bishop, A. (2002). *Becoming an ally: Breaking the cycle of oppression* (2nd ed). Halifax, NB: Fernwood Press
- Bjerregaard, B. (2003). Antigang legislation and its potential impacts: The promises and the pitfalls. In *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 14(2): 171-192. Retrieved 28 November, 2008 from <http://cjp.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/14/2/171>
- Bruno, F J. (1986). *Dictionary of key words in psychology*. London: Routledge Keagan Paul.
- Bursick, R J. (2002). The systemic model of gang behavior: a reconsideration. In C R. Huff (Ed), *Gangs in America: Vol. III* (pp.71-81). London: Sage Publications.
- Castanon, J. (2008). Gang clothing. In L. Kontos and D C. Brotherton (Ed), *Encyclopedia of gangs* (pp. 59-61). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Charmaz, K. (2002). Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. In J. Gubrium and J. Holstien (Eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method* (pp.675-694). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Thousand Oaks.
- Chettleburgh, M C. (2002). *Results of the 2002 Canadian police survey on youth gangs*. Toronto: Astwood Strategy Corporation.
- Chettleburgh, M C. (2007). *Young thugs: Inside the dangerous world of Canadian Street gangs*. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Collins, J W. and O'Brien, N P. (Eds). (2003). *The greenwood dictionary of educations*. (2nd ed.). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

- Contenta, S. (2008, 20 July). Prisons poisoning natives. *The Toronto Star*. Retrieved 7 February 2009, from <http://www.thestar.com/specialSections/crime/article/460763>
- Criminal Intelligence Service Saskatchewan. (2005). *2005 intelligence trends: Aboriginal-based gangs in Saskatchewan*.
- Cureton, S R. (2002). Introducing hoover: I'll ride you, gangsta. In C R. Huff (Ed), *Gangs in America: Vol. III* (pp. 83-100). London: Sage Publications.
- Curra, J. (2000). *The relativity of deviance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Curling, Dr. A. (2008). *The review of the roots of youth violence: An executive summary*. Retrieved 23 November, 2008 from www.rootsofyouthviolence.on.ca
- Delaney, T. (2006). *American street gangs*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Dembo, R., Wareham, J., Poythress, N., Meyers, K., & Schmeidler, J. (2008). Psychosocial functioning problems over time among high risk youths: A latent class transition analysis. *Crime and Delinquency*, 54 (4): 644-670. London: Sage Publications.
- Dubois, J. (2003). *Media coverage of organized crime – police managers survey*. Ottawa: Royal Canadian Mounted Police.
- Esbensen, F-A., Taylor, W L., Jr., He, N., Taylor, T J. (2001). Youth gangs and definitional issues: When is a gang a gang, and why does it matter? *Crime & Delinquency*, 47 (1): 105-130. London: Sage Publications.
- Farrington, D P. (1977). The effects of public labeling. *British Journal of Criminology* 17: 112-125.
- Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. (2003). *Alter-Natives to non-violence report: Aboriginal youth gangs exploration: a community development process*. Saskatoon, SK: Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations.
- Fishbien, D A. (1998). Biological perspectives in criminology. In S. Henry and W. Einstadter (Eds.), *The criminology theory reader* (pp.92-109). New York: New York University Press.
- Fritsch, E J., Caeti ,T J., & Taylor, R W. (1999). Gang suppression through saturation patrol, aggressive curfew, and truancy enforcement: A quasi-experimental test of the Dallas anti-gang initiative. *Crime and Delinquency*, 45 (1): 122-139. London: Sage Publications.

Gang Strategy of Saskatoon. Draft. 20 February, 2006.

Hamilton Police Service. (2007). Street Gang Mentality. Retrieved 23 March, 2008 from <http://www.hamiltonpolice.on.ca/HPS/PreventingCrime/Gangs/gangmentality.htm>

Huff, R C. (Ed.). (2002). *Gangs in America Vol. III*. London: Thousand Oaks Printing.

Jargowsky, P A. & Park, Y. (2008). Cause or consequence? Suburbanization and crime in U.S. metropolitan areas. *Crime and Delinquency* 55 (1). Retrieved 28 November, 2008.

<http://cad.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/55/1/28>

Jones, D., Roper, V., Stys, Y., & Wilson, C. (2004). Street gangs: A review of theory, interventions, and implications for corrections. Retrieved 23 June, 2006 from <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/rsrch/reports/r161/r161.e.pdf>

Katz, C M. (2003). Issues in the production and dissemination of gang statistics: An ethnographic study of a large midwestern police gang unit. *Crime and Delinquency* 49 (3): 485-516. London: Sage Publications.

Klein, M W. (1971). *Street gangs and street workers*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Klein, M W. (1995). *The American street gang*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Klein, M W. (2002). Street gangs: A cross-national perspective. In C. R. Huff (Ed), *Gangs in America Vol. III* (pp. 237-254). London: Sage Publications.

Klein, M W., & Maxson, C L. (2006). *Street gang and patterns and policies*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kontos, L., & Brotherton, D. (2008). *Encyclopedia of gangs*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Kubrin, C E., Stucky, T D., & Krohn, M D. (2009). *Researching theories of crime and deviance*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lafontaine, T., Acoose, S., Schissel, B. (2005). *Healing connections: Rising above the gang*. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan.

Lafontaine, T., Ferguson, M., & Wormith, S J. (2005). *Street gangs: A review of the empirical literature on community and correction based prevention, intervention and suppression strategies*. Retrieved 9 December, 2008 from http://library2.usask.ca/gp/sk/cps/GangReportforCPSJune30_05.pdf

- Little Bear, L. (2000). Jagged worldviews colliding. In M. Battiste (Ed), *Reclaiming indigenous voice and vision* (pp.77-85). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Marvasti, A B. (2004). *Qualitative research methodolgy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mathews, F. (1993). *Youth gangs on youth gangs*. Carleton University: Centre for Applied Population Studies.
- Mellor, B., MacRae, L., Pauls, M., & Hornick, J P. (2005). Youth gangs in Canada: a preliminary review of programs and services. Calgary, Alberta: Canadian Institute for Law and the Family.
- Mercredi, O. (2000). *Aboriginal gangs: a report to the correctional service of Canada on Aboriginal youth gang members in the federal corrections system*. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Services Canada.
- Miles, M B., & Huberman, M A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: an expanded source book* (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Miller, W. (1980). Gangs, groups, and serious youth crime. In D. Shichor and D. H. Kelly (Eds), *Critical issues in juvenile delinquency* (pp.115-138). Lexington, MA: Heath.
- Minimizing gang problem has hurt Calgary. (2008, July 29). *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* (CBC). Retrieved July 30, 2008.
<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/calgary/story/2008/07/29/gang-activity.html>
- National Youth Gang Center. (1999). *1997 National youth gang survey: OJJDP summary*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Neufeld, G., & Mate, G. (2004). *Hold on to your kids: Why parents need to matter more than peers*. Toronto, ON: Vintage Canada.
- Punch, K. (2005). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Richter-White, H. (2003). *The direct and indirect impacts of organized crime on youth, as offenders and victims*. Retrieved 24 June, 2007 from
www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ccaps/research_eval_e.htm
- Roediger, D. (1991). Irish-American workers and white racial formations in the antebellum United States. In *Wages of Whiteness*. (pp. 133-163). London: Verso.

- Rush, J P. (1996). The police role in dealing with gangs. In J.M. Miller and J.P. Rush (Eds) *Gangs: A criminal justice approach* (pp.85-92). Cincinnati, OH: Anderson.
- Schiappa, E. (1999). Lecture. In L. Bridwell-Bowles and H. Littlefield (Eds), *Constructing reality through definitions: The politics of meaning*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.
- Schissel, B. (1997). *Blaming children: Youth crime, moral panic and the politics of hate*. Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood.
- Schmidt, L M., & O'Rielly, J T. (2007). *Gangs and law enforcement*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, Ltd.
- Short, J F., Jr. (1996). *Gangs and adolescent violence*. Boulder, CO: University of Colorado.
- Siegel, L. (2003). Gangs and the law. In L. Kontos, D. Brotherton, & L. Barrios (Eds). *Gangs and society: Alternative perspectives* (pp.213-227). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Smith, L T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Dunedin, NZ: University of Otago Press.
- Spergel, I A. (1995). *The youth gang problem: A community approach*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology: An overview. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds). *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp.273-285). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Swanson, J. (2001). *Poor-bashing: The politics of exclusion*. Toronto, ON: Between the Lines.
- Tannenbaum, F. (1938). *Crime and the community*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Thornberry, T. P., Krohn, M. D., Lizotte, A. J., Smith, C. A., & Tobin, K. (2003). *Gangs and delinquency in developmental perspective*. Cambridge University: Cambridge University Press.
- Thrasher, F. M. (1927). *The gang: A study of 1313 gangs in Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vigil, J. D. (2002). *A rainbow of gangs: Street cultures in the mega-city*. Austin, United States: University of Texas Press.

- Vigil, J. D., & Yun, S. C. (2002). A cross-cultural framework for understanding gangs: Multiple marginality and Los Angeles." In C. R. Huff (Ed). *Gangs in America* (pp.161-174). London: Sage Publications.
- Weisel, D. L., & Painter, E. (1997). *The police response to gangs: Case studies of five cities*. Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum.
- Wellington, J. (2000). *Educational research: Contemporary issues and practical approaches*. New York: Continuum.
- Wiede, R. D. (2008). Labeling theory. In L. Kontos and D. C. Brotherton (Eds), *Encyclopedia of gangs* (pp.149-150). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Zerubavel, E. (2006). *The elephant in the room: Silence and denial in everyday life*. New York: Oxford University Press.

APPENDIX A

Youth Subcultures: Defining Youth Gangs in Saskatoon

Letter of Invitation

I am seeking community members and/or a volunteer from your agency that is willing to participate in a study that seeks to develop a definition of youth gangs and their involvement within the city of Saskatoon.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the study is to seek to develop a common understanding for determining youth gangs and youth gang activity in the city of Saskatoon. From the interviews conducted a definition and criteria to define youth gangs can be constructed.

CRITERIA OF PARTICIPANTS

I am seeking participants from both the community as well as participants from community agencies that work or come into contact with youth gang members on a regular basis. Participants should have substantial knowledge and a minimum of three to five years experience working with youth gang members or activity in Saskatoon.

YOUR PARTICIPATION

Participation within this study is completely voluntary. There is no personal benefit for your participation with the study. It will involve two separate one-on-one interview sessions of approximately a half an hour in duration. You may only answer those questions that you feel comfortable in answering. Data will be collected through the questions and dialogue during the interview sessions. The data received from the interviews will be stored in a locked cabinet in the office of Dr. Verna St. Denis (Room 3058, Education Building) University of Saskatchewan, for a minimum of five years.

If you are interested in participating or require more detail about this study, please contact:

Robert Henry, M. Ed. Candidate, Indian and Northern Education, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Ph: (306) XXX-XXXX Email: XXXX@mail.usask.ca

Dr. Verna St. Denis, Associate Professor, Department of Ed Foundations, University of Saskatchewan. Ph: (306) XXX-XXXX. Email: XXXXXX@usask.ca

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has approved this research of study (insert date). They can be contacted through the Ethics Office (306) 966-2084.

Appendix B

Interview One Sample Questions

- 1) What is your position/title with your agency? How long have you worked with the agency? – These two questions are important because it allows for validity of the interviewee.
- 2) Describe your philosophy or approach towards youth? – Allows the interviewee to explain how they interact with youth and the types of relationships they see themselves having with the youth.
- 3) As descriptively as possible respond to the following:
 - a) How do you assess or determine gang involvement within Saskatoon? – Allows the interviewee to begin to think of how they determine youth gangs. Also begins to align interviewee's perceptions on how they interpret youth gangs in Saskatoon.
 - b) What criteria do you and your agency use to determine youth gang members or those that are susceptible to joining a gang lifestyle? – Allows the interviewer to begin to understand the different criteria that individuals and agencies have when determining if a youth is involved in a gang.
 - c) How does recent media representation of the youth gang situation fit with your knowledge and experience with youth gangs and youth susceptible to joining gangs in Saskatoon? – Gives the interviewee an opportunity to validate their knowledge and experience to that which the rest of the community may only get from local media.

- d) How will having common criteria for determining youth gang activity/risk for youth involvement impact intervention and youth programming policies? – Interviewees are given the opportunity to voice the importance of developing common criteria when defining youth gangs in Saskatoon.
- e) Do you believe that a definition should be in place for all agencies in Saskatoon to use when defining youth gangs/groups? – This question allows for the interviewees view on the need for a common definition for all agencies, so that they are able to work together and identify youth gang/group individuals and trends.
- f) Have you witnessed any situations where organizations/agencies differed in their ideologies and definitions of youth gangs/groups? – Allows the interviewee to state where discrepancies, if any, have occurred between agencies when discussing youth gangs/groups within Saskatoon.

APPENDIX C

Youth Subcultures: Defining Youth Gangs in Saskatoon

CONSENT FORM

You have been invited to participate in a study entitled **Youth Subcultures: Defining Youth Gangs in Saskatoon**. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

Researcher: Robert Henry, M. Ed. Candidate, Educational Foundations, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 0X1.
Ph. (306) XXX-XXXX.

Purpose: The aim of this city wide study, is understand and define what a youth gang is in particular to the city of Saskatoon through the lens' of frontline workers of different agencies that work or deal with youth gang members on a regular basis. The overall goal of this study is to create an understanding and the criteria used to define youth gangs in Saskatoon.

Procedure: I am seeking to involve community members and one individual from different agencies within Saskatoon who work with youth at risk for gang involvement or gang preventions, for two separate half hour interview sessions. There is no personal benefit for participating in the study. These interview sessions will be conducted one-on-one, where the participant will answer a series of questions that will be audio taped. You may only answer those questions in which you feel comfortable answering.

The first set of interview questions will look at the situation of youth gangs in Saskatoon. These questions will look at the demographics (who is involved), and the definition, if any, that is used by the individual/agency when describing youth gangs.

The second set of interview questions will be conducted once all data is collected and deciphered from the first set of interview questions. This interview time will focus primarily on what was discovered in the first set of interview questions. It will also define the youth gang situation in Saskatoon by the different individuals.

Potential Risks and Confidentiality: You understand that your participation study is not completely anonymous as you are being invited as a member of a specific participant pool, namely, that you are an individual who works with youth gang members in a particular context, and thereby you might be identifiable on the basis of what you say. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

You understand that your oral contributions to this study will remain confidential and anonymous in any discussion, public presentation, or written report.

Potential Benefits: Participation in this study can serve as a professional learning exercise by providing an opportunity to explore diverse and similar understandings and definitions of gangs and gang activity in Saskatoon.

Storage of Data: In accordance with the University of Saskatchewan guidelines, all data (field notes, transcripts, and tapes) will be securely stored in a locked cabinet for a minimum of five years. There will be no personal identifying information on group interview tapes and transcripts, other than a reference code to a list of kept in a separate location. The data received from the interviews will be stored in the office of Dr. Verna St. Denis (Room 3058, Education Building) University of Saskatchewan for a minimum of five years.

Right to Withdraw: You understand that your participation is voluntary, and that you may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort.

You understand the data collection and reporting of that data will be completed by June 30, 2008 and that a copy of the thesis will be made available to you upon completion. You understand that you will also be able to access the report on the University of Saskatchewan website.

Release of Data: Participants will be provided the opportunity to review the final transcripts of the first interview and then sign a transcript release form where in you acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what you said or intended to say. You are advised that any quotations used in the reporting of research results will contain no information that would identify participants. It is at this time that you may also refuse to allow the information to be used. This procedure will be repeated with the second interview.

Questions: If you have any questions concerning this study, you are free to ask at any point; **you** are free to contact the researcher at the number provided if you have any questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on (Nov. 20, #07-235). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084).

Consent to Participate: You have read and understood the description provided above; you have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and your questions have been answered satisfactorily. You consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that you may withdraw this consent at any time or ask that some or all of your data be removed from the study. A copy of this consent form has been given to you for your records.

(Name of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

(Name of Researcher)

(Date)

(Signature of Researcher)

(Date)

APPENDIX D