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**Ex-gang members who have become help-
professionals: What influences their desistance from gang
involvement and their career choice?**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Social Work in Social Work at Massey
University, Auckland Campus, New Zealand**

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ABSTRACT

The growing population and changing structure of New Zealand gangs have been observed since the 1950s. Well-documented international and local research provides ample information about the process of gang affiliation and gang desistance. However, there is little specific knowledge generated nationally and internationally about the phenomenon of redemption-self (Maruna, 2001), which refers to male ex-criminal gang members taking part in generative exercises such as mentoring youth or counselling substance users. The present study recognises the gap in the literature and aims to develop a discussion and start a dialogue about the benefits of this little-appreciated uncommon phenomenon. To provide deeper understanding of what triggered and hindered ex-criminal gang members' adoption of redemption-self, the qualitative study design, located in the social constructionist framework has been applied. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with six male former-criminal gang members who have been working in the social service fields in New Zealand for at least two years. Through the thematic analysis of the men's stories four primary themes emerged, which were organised into a thematic map. The primary themes present a continuum that starts with the men's negative childhood experiences attributing to the later stage gang affiliation. The complicated, and often, zigzagged path trajectory of gang desistance, which was triggered by internal changes and external impacts, prepare the final theme's essence - the adoption of redemption-self. Alongside the advantages and benefits of having experience in both the gang and conventional world when service provision is conducted, the difficulties of being accepted into the field with past criminal-gang affiliation is discussed. The four primary themes' content provides the basis of this discussion. The conclusion of the thesis draws on local and overseas programs and initiatives to formulate recommendation for policies, educational initiatives and implications for future research topics.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	3
CONTENTS.....	5
LIST OF DIAGRAMS.....	8
CHAPTER ONE - Introduction	
1.1 Introduction.....	9
1.2 Research aims.....	9
1.3 Research questions.....	10
1.4 Classification, Glossary and Brief history of New Zealand gangs.....	10
1.5 My connection to the research.....	19
1.6 Thesis structure.....	24
1.7 Summary.....	25
CHAPTER TWO - Literature Review	
2.1 Introduction.....	26
2.2 Definition of gang.....	27
2.3 Gang socialisation.....	29
2.3.1 Onset phase.....	30
2.3.2 Continuity phase.....	32
2.4 Theories of desistance.....	35
2.5 Redemption-Self.....	42
2.6 Summary.....	45
CHAPTER THREE - Methodology	
3.1 Introduction.....	47
3.2 Theoretical Perspective.....	47
3.2.1 Social constructionism.....	47
3.2.2 Qualitative research.....	50
3.3 Method.....	53
3.3.1 Selection criteria.....	54

3.3.2 Participant recruitment and sample procedure.....	55
3.3.3 Interviews and information collection	56
3.4 Analytical framework	58
3.4.1 Interpretive description.....	58
3.4.2 Thematic analysis.....	60
3.5 Ethical Considerations.....	62
3.6 Summary.....	66
 CHAPTER FOUR - Findings	
4.1 Introduction.....	67
4.2 Participants.....	68
4.3 Findings – thematic map	68
4.3.1 Precursors of gang affiliation.....	70
4.3.1.1 Dysfunctional Family.....	71
4.3.1.2 Environment.....	73
4.3.1.3 Summary.....	74
4.3.2 Continuity	75
4.3.2.1 Joining the gang	76
4.3.2.2 Gang becomes family.....	77
4.3.2.3 Length of time spent in the gang	81
4.3.2.4 Losing connection with outside world.....	82
4.3.2.5 Summary.....	87
4.3.3 Exit	87
4.3.3.1 Sign of maturation	88
4.3.3.2 Prompters	92
4.3.3.3 Lingering Ties.....	93
4.3.3.4 Summary.....	94
4.3.4 Finding a new identity	95
4.3.4.1 Finding conventional life-style	96
4.3.4.2 Adoption of redemption-self	97
4.3.4.3 The past bites back.....	100
4.3.4.4 The importance of understanding both worlds - practicing new identity	101
4.3.4.5 Summary.....	104

4.4 Chapter Summary	104
CHAPTER FIVE - Discussion	
5.1 Introduction.....	107
5.2 A brief overview of the key findings.....	107
5.3 Discussion of key findings and their consistencies and inconsistencies with local and international studies	109
5.4 Summary.....	122
CHAPTER SIX - Conclusion	
6.1 Introduction.....	124
6.2 Review of the aims	124
6.3 Key Learnings	125
6.4 Suggestions for initiatives and policies for educational providers	127
6.6 Limitations and strengths.....	132
6.7 Future research	134
6.8 Conclusion	135
REFERENCES.....	136
APPENDICES	
Appendix A - Information sheet	147
Appendix B - Consent form	151
Appendix C - Guiding questionnaire	152
Appendix D - Advertisement.....	154
Appendix E - Authority to release transcript forms.....	154
Appendix F - Request letter	157
Appendix G - Evidence of consultation.....	159
Human Ethics Northern Committee Approval.....	160

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

Diagram 1: Thematic map	69
Diagram 2: Theme of precursors and its subthemes	70
Diagram 3: Theme of continuity and its subthemes	75
Diagram 4: Theme of exit and its subthemes	88
Diagram 5: Theme of finding new identity and its subthemes	96

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Through the presentation of the study aims (1.2) and the research questions (1.3) this chapter presents the outline of ex-criminal gang members' redemption-self adoption. In section 1.4, following the presentation of New Zealand gang classification, a glossary is offered to enhance the readability of the study. A brief overview of the study's background and my own connection to the topic, in section 1.5, further develops this study's place within the context of gang research. The overview of the thesis structure (1.6) summarises the specific areas within which this study is developed and concluded.

1.2 Research aims

This qualitative study explores what motivates ex-criminal gang members to desist from gang activity and select a career in the helping professions. The examination of the desistance and the process of redemption-self adoption is sought to understand the underlying factors leading to the possibility of change in human behaviour. By exploring what gang desistance means for ex-criminal gang members, this study aims to provide an understanding of the negative impacts of the stereotypical view of (ex-criminal) gang members. Finally, the thesis aims to open a dialogue regarding the various programs or initiatives for the effective utilisation and retention of the redeemed ex-criminal gang members' knowledge and skills in the social service fields.

1.3 Research questions

1. What motivates ex-gang members' desistance from gangs and their career choice in social service fields?
2. What is considered gang desistance from the perspective of an ex-criminal gang member?
3. Can ex-criminal gang members successfully change and adopt redemption-self?
4. What hinders ex-criminal gang members to persist in maintaining redemption-self?

1.4 Classification, Glossary and Brief history of New Zealand gangs

Committee on Gangs (1981) classification is presented to highlight the different type of New Zealand gangs. Participants recruited for this study indicated former criminal connections with these gang types. A glossary of the colloquial, Māori and theoretical terminologies is provided and are organised into distinguished categories to assist the legibility of the study. Finally, this section introduces the history of New Zealand gangs and its connection to the researched topic.

Classification of New Zealand gangs:

A summary of Committee on Gangs' (1981) classification identifies the following various gang types:

Ethnic gangs have well-recognised hierarchical structure and leadership. They mainly comprise of Māori or Pacific members. These gangs have large memberships tend to exist nation-wide. Gangs that fit in this category are Mongrel Mob, Black Power, King Cobras, and Head Hunters.

Bikie gangs are outlaw motorcycle clubs with well-recognised structure and leadership. These gangs mainly comprise of Pākehā men and are generally localised to one bigger city. Some of these gangs represent white supremacist ideologies. Devil's Henchmen, Hells Angels and Epitaph Riders are some of the motorcycle gangs that belong to this category.

Cult groups are made up of punks, skinheads and other groups. These groups tend to lack organisational structure and be organised around one particular music trend.

It must be noted that not all gangs can be neatly assigned to the classification of Committee on Gangs (1981) as gangs vary in structure and mix political and ideological views (Dennehy & Newbold, 2001). For example, many ethnic gang members ride motorbikes and some of the white supremacist gangs have ethnic members.

Glossary

Colloquial terminology

Gang chapters have their own leaders and members and tend to be autonomic but connected to other chapters under the umbrella of one particular larger ethnic or bikie gangs. Chapters can be located in various suburbs, towns or regions of New Zealand. For example: Mongrel Mob Christchurch Chapter or Devil's Henchmen Timaru Chapter.

Honorary gang membership is colloquial term for life membership of a gang. Individuals, who usually have extended time spent in a gang or have been regarded important members of the gang receive this privileged position. An honorary or life member of the gang retains gang membership but the person is not required to wear the gang-patch or be fully committed to the gang norms and values.

‘Meth’: methamphetamine - a highly addictive substance, often referred to as ‘P’, from the abbreviated word ‘Pure’.

‘MP’: an abbreviation of Members of Parliament

‘Pres’: colloquial abbreviation of the word, ‘president’ – usually refers to the gang leader.

‘Scuttlers’: is the name of the early English gangs (mid-18 hundreds). Mainly consisted of young delinquent members.

‘YJ’: Youth Justice system, located within the department of Child Youth and Family.

Māori terminology (the meaning of the following words are derived from Te Aka Māori-English English-Māori Online Dictionary (2016))

Mana: to be legal, status, prestige

Pakaru: damaged, smashed

Pākehā: foreign, European

Whānau: family

Theoretical terminology

Desister: a person who has desisted or in the process of desisting from criminal/delinquent activities, gang affiliation or both (Healy, 2014).

Ex-criminal gang members: former members of a criminal gang. These gangs could be classified into one of the categories outlined by Committee on Gangs (1981).

Gang associates are peripheral members of the gang who are not yet accepted into or have already exited the gang but their lingering ties (through friendship or familial connections) with patched gang members link them to the gang. Gang associates are usually not allowed to wear the gang-patch (Pyrooz, Decker, & Webb, 2014).

Generative exercise: is a pro-social activity that can include guidance, care and nurture of others who are in need of support (Erikson, 1965).

Mainstream or conventional society/world/self: these terms are applied in this study to highlight the non-gang nature of the society/world/self.

Redemption-self: is a technical term used in criminology. It refers to the phenomenon in which ex-offenders by practicing generative exercise redeem themselves and adopt a pro-social identity. The adopted pro-social identity assists the reformed former offenders in maintaining desistance from crime and being accepted by the conventional society (Maruna, 2001).

Youth gang: copycat of Los Angeles style gangs, which mainly consist of youth from underprivileged areas of New Zealand (Gilbert, 2013). Youth gangs are commonly less organised than adult gangs and members tend to participate in anti-social behaviour, drug use, promiscuity, violence and follow a particular type of music, fashion, art (graffiti) and signals/regalia (White, 2002).

Brief history of New Zealand gangs

“The gangs in New Zealand, ... exist in the community ... [and] show few signs of disappearing, so it would seem that gangs will continue to play a prominent role in New Zealand ... for many years to come” (Meek, 1986, p. 275)

Due to the dearth of reliable and non-subjective information on New Zealand gangs, the study, unless referenced otherwise, mainly draws on the gang knowledge of Dennehy and Newbold (2001) and the more contemporary Gilbert (2013) to provide a short summary of the New Zealand gang history. However, authors such as Faleolo (2014), Mayeda, Okamoto, and Mark (2005), Nakhid and Shorter (2014), and Spoonly (1981) are also acknowledged for their work to bring attention to the interrelation and connection between the prevailing New Zealand Anglo-Saxon culture and the various ethnic New Zealand cultures' contribution to the growth in various types of gang membership. This section reaches back to the early colonial times to provide a brief historical overview how the gangs started off in New Zealand. Further, it discusses the influences of economics and politics, which played major roles in the evolution of the modern suburban and city gangs. The visible changes in the contemporary gangs are discussed in order to connect this overview to the researched topic.

Around the 1830s, British writers such as Charles Dickens noted the atrocities of youth gangs' called 'scuttlers' in several British cities. Around the same time, the British Empire started its transportation of young male juveniles from Great Britain to its faraway colonies, including New Zealand (Hagedorn, 2005). Therefore, it is not surprising that the colonial newspapers as early as 1842 reported 'scuttlers' activities in Auckland area. The members of these early 'gangs' tended to be abandoned children, living on the street or children living in extreme poverty. The shared social backgrounds and life-events such as imprisonment and the transportation to New Zealand forged a bond between the members of these early anti-social cliques. Delinquent behaviour, similar backgrounds and forged bonds between the members effectuated that the 'scuttlers' are regarded as the forebears of modern gangs.

Modern gangs were first established in the early 1950s, from the loosely organised outlaw motorcycle groups, which congregated at and frequented public places. These early motorcycle groups were fluid with no real substance to them and apart from the motorbikes and attire to articulate the members' affiliation, the members' commitment to the group was not required. Therefore, the presence of these groups fluctuated and quickly appeared or disappeared on the social landscape.

It was not until the 1960s, when the Hells Angels Motor Cycle Club Auckland chapter was established where the New Zealand gang scene became more noticeable. This American import with real leadership and a hierarchical structure was highly organised. The Hells Angels introduced the gang signals, regalia, and territorial desire to the gang culture. The gangs' territorial nature accelerated violence between different gangs and contributed to the decades-long gang wars.

By the beginning of the 1970s, recession stagnated New Zealand's economics. During this time urbanised Māori and Pasifika youth with lack of cultural identity, were less likely to be employed and more likely to experience prejudice in the predominant European New Zealand society (Nakhid & Shorter, 2014; Spoonly, 1990). As a result, those gangs, which mainly consisted of Māori or Pacific people steadily swelled as their congregations increased due to marginalised members feeling accepted and enjoying the camaraderie within the groups. Later these gangs were categorised as New Zealand's ethnic gangs¹ (Faleolo, 2014; Mayeda et al., 2005).

The presence of gangs gradually became ubiquitous in larger New Zealand cities, resulting in more frequent gang violence that was closely and often distortedly followed by media reporting (Kelsey & Young, 1982). To respond and control the gangs, the government at the time implemented harsher gang policies and procedures in order to prevent them from becoming a nation-wide issue. The government's harsh response and media's distorted coverage further alienated gang members and gangs from the mainstream society. Despite the harsher government policies and negative

¹ More information is offered in the glossary under Committee on Gangs (1981) gang classification

media reports, gang membership steadily rose and they remained active in partaking in violent misconducts.

A major gang riot in 1979 in Moerewa, when amongst many gang members, several police officers and fire fighters got seriously injured (Kelsey & Young, 1982; Meek, 1992) illustrates the escalation. The magnitude of this gang incident, which was considered to be the worst gang-related incident ever reported, generated a strong public response. Kelsey and Young (1982) labelled 1979 the year of the New Zealand gangs. As a result of the severity of this incident the government set up the Committee on Gangs to specifically investigate gang related problems. While the government did not succeed in eliminating the gangs, policies were lightened and in new government initiatives such as 'The Group Employment Liaison Scheme' were established through the Department of Internal Affairs to encourage gangs to engage in and consider legitimate employment.

Ethnic gangs with substantial memberships such as the Mongrel Mob and the Black Power were attracted to these Contract Work Scheme government initiatives that targeted unemployed people who could be more easily integrated into the workforce if group work was offered. Despite the hopes of these government initiatives that the core character of gangs would change, criminal offences which included violent inter-gang clashes, petty crimes and more serious dishonest criminal acts did not vanish from the palette of the gangs. As a result of the million-dollar government subsidy, gangs became more attractive to join to the impoverished youth. According to 'Operation Gang Strategy' Police reports, gang memberships in the 1980s skyrocketed and their organisational structure significantly changed.

In the late 1980s, MP John Carter signalled that the gangs had moved into organised crime (Gilbert, 2013). His reports were based on Police investigations of gangs' multi-million dollar overseas connections, sophisticated computer systems and organised criminal activity in the illegal drug dealing. The huge profit that illicit drugs such as pure methamphetamine (P), LSD and marijuana dealing resulted in criminal gang leaders encouraging members to avoid violence to evade police attention and making peace with old archenemies to set up franchise-style deals to distribute drugs. However, gangs' involvement in the illicit drug market to some extent sealed their

own fate. Large numbers of P addicted gang members died, were in prison or became so unreliable that were ousted from the gangs. The highly addictive nature of P decimated some of the bikie gangs and significantly reduced the numbers of the larger ethnic gangs.

Recognising the issue surrounding the consumption of drugs some gangs started to lobby against and restrict the use of substances amongst their members and in their immediate communities. One of the most visible initiatives was launched by Mongrel Mob president, Roy Dunn. Roy and his co-leaders along with the support of Salvation Army set up an 8 week long marae based drug treatment facility for the Mob members. The pilot project seemed to capture the members who contested that the treatment provided a strong message about the effects of substances. Additionally, the interviewed gang members added that the gang should be focusing more on their communities, especially on families and children (Maraetv, 2012). This type of viewpoint was unthought-of a decade or two ago.

Dunn's Mongrel Mob chapter is not the only one that initiated changes and extended their focus on the wider community. There are a number of examples across New Zealand. For example, the Hastings Mongrel Mob chapter leader, Rex Timu, is heavily involved in Taitimu Trust, Police approved youth mentoring program (Journeyman Pictures, 2015) and the Waikato based Tribal Huk has been feeding hungry school children in the local schools (Cronin, 2014) and pledged to drive amphetamine dealers out of the gang's catchment area (NZHerald, 2016). The close connection between the gangs and the community within which they exist is highlighted in statement by a Tribal Huk members: "We are part of Ngaruawahia, so Ngaruawahia is part of us" (Journeyman Pictures, 2015). Highlighting this connection, Gilbert states that New Zealand's own gang flavour stems from the poverty stricken communities with which the gangs share many socio-economic demographics similar values, troubles and outlook.

Although it is not contested that some gangs commit and involve themselves in serious crime, it is evident that gangs have gone through some significant changes since the 1950s. Gilbert (2013) attributes the changes in gang structure and approach to their community they live in to the maturation of the original and older members.

Often these are the leaders of the today's gangs. However, youth counsellor, Henare O'Keeffe, warns society to be more cautious about current gang members practicing generative actions as in reality the core of the gangs still revolves around "naughty things" (Journeyman Pictures, 2015). Hence, he suggests that gang members who are inclined to care for community members should permanently exit the gangs.

Who constitutes to be an ex-gang member is still debated but New Zealand social services employ ex-gang members with historic criminal gang affiliation, working with underprivileged families or trying to coach troubled youth. Ex-criminal gang members' transformation and their generative actions in the community are scarcely reported in the media, let alone accepted by the mainstream society. This study aims to explore the changes that contribute to former criminal gang members' reducing their connection with previous gang networks and committing to work service in social service fields.

In summary, this section reaches back to New Zealand's early colonial gang-scene and introduces those critical elements, which generated the appearance of the modern gangs on the New Zealand's landscape in the early 1950s. Due to the various socio-economic issues, New Zealand saw significant increase in the number of gangs and their memberships in the 1960s that contributed to increased inter-gang related violent atrocities. By the 1970s gangs became a nation-wide issue. To tackle the gang problem, the New Zealand government set up the Committee on Gangs and employment schemes to attract the gangs and their members into the workforce. Government subsidies helped gangs become affluent and consequently more attractive to impoverished youth. With the membership rising, gangs became more organised, while criminality remained the core characteristics of the gangs. Some gangs also entered into drug driven, profit gaining exercises. Gang members becoming addicted to drugs destabilised and in some cases terminated some gangs. Recognising these negative effects of the members' substance abuse, some gang leaders called for a total ban on members abusing harder drugs such as methamphetamines and initiated drug treatment programs. Furthermore, gang leaders started to show compassion to their non-gang community within they existed. Gang leaders by practicing generative actions in the community drew significant attention

in the media. However, ex-criminal gang members have been less recognised for their generative actions let alone for their transformation.

1.5 My connection to the research

In qualitative study the researcher is not regarded as objective, rather he or she is a subjective instrument in convening the research. Therefore, in order to adhere to rigour and reflexivity in the qualitative study design Patton (2015) urges the use of reflexive triangulation. This tool not only helps to provide understanding of the observed phenomenon and the presentation of the findings but it brings attention to the factors that might have influenced the researcher's selection, relation, assumptions and biases towards the research topic. According to Patton, reflexivity in qualitative research is paramount to present the researcher's mindfulness and consequently keen and astute self-awareness. The application of Patton's notion of reflexivity calls for a deeper and more systematic self-reflection and since embarking on this research I have become aware of various pre-existing values, beliefs and life-events that might have prompted my desire to explore and better understand the phenomenon of gang desistance and adoption of redemption-self. This section will provide insight into the self-reflection that exposed the connecting factors between the researched topic and myself.

My father was born in 1943 in Hungary to Croatian and German parents, just before the end of World War II. After World War II, the country was a ruin as half of its wealth was lost and more than a million Hungarians died in the war. The communist leadership succeeded the government and implemented harsh policies to terminate all enemies of their system. As a child growing into a teenager my father experienced extreme hardship following World War II, and was affected by the stressors of the paranoid communist system.

My mother was born in 1952 to a mixed Hungarian and German family and by the time she was a young adult the communist system softened significantly and Hungary experienced some growth in wealth and freedom. Hungary's period of

prosperity started around 1960 and lasted till the end of 1980s. There was a popular phrase that described communist Hungary, “*the happiest barrack in [the socialist] camp*”(Kornai, 1996, p. 952) indicating that this period was of relative freedom and prosperity (Romsics, 2007).

I was born in 1982 close to the end of the socialist era, in a small town of West Hungary. By then, Hungarian people enjoyed a high standard of living. Wages were good, living costs and housing prices were low, and education and medical care were free. At times, sociologists compared the Hungarian welfare system to the Nordic countries’ (Aspalter, Jinsoo, & Sojeung, 2009; Ferge, 1997; Kornai, 1996), whereby Hungarian’s entitlement to benefits and proportion of social spending were an important part of the welfare system. Notwithstanding, the seemingly high standard living on many other levels the communist government restricted the lives of Hungarians. The 50 years of Hungarian socialist regime not only created intergenerational distrust, but it also created a deep despondency within the population. The communist regime was in denial of societal problems and social services to address social care needs such as family violence, suicide, addiction and child protection was almost non-existent (Ferge, 1997; Osborne & Kaposvari, 1998). Amongst many my family was left to cope with similar issues.

The collapse of the crumbling socialist system in 1989 created a vacuum in the political and infrastructural sectors. This further fuelled hopelessness and increased uncertainty in many families’ lives including mine (Kertesi & Kezdi, 2007). Hungary was in a state of political flux as it underwent its transition from socialism to a democratic political system. The transition created significant unemployment, which was almost non-existent prior to 1989. My father who was an unskilled foundry labourer for 40 years managed to keep his job but my mother had various jobs after 1990. The macro level political and employment uncertainty trickled down to Hungarian families. Additionally, the rudimentary existence and ineffective provision of social services contributed to families’ experiencing further struggles (Ferge, 1991, 1997).

The struggle was in-house for me as my father’s physically and emotionally abusive upbringing in a paranoid communist system transferred to his later stage

abuse of alcohol and explosive behaviour. This triggered constant arguments between him and my mother. Due to these arguments at home, my sister and I often stayed at my maternal grandparents, who happily cared for us. I remember the time spent at my grandparents was always serene and without arguments or fights. My grandmother was a caring lady and my grandfather, who I in many ways regarded as father, was a gentle man with a lot of patience. These were the traits I always wanted to acquire.

My family's dysfunction was not an isolated occurrence. When I was not at my grandparents' house or home I spent a lot of time on the streets hanging out with kids with a similar family background. During my primary school years I never really drew much attention to myself but I remember in the last term things started to change in my behaviour. When I was around 14 years old I met some people who had connections with the local punk group. Through spending time with these new friends I got to know other punks and I started to listen to their music. Soon my look followed my commitment to this subculture. During my secondary school years I immersed myself and at times blindly followed this life-style and philosophy of punk. This resulted in frequent meetings with friends in local pubs or public places where we excessively drunk alcohol or took drugs, became rowdy and caused minor disturbances in the neighbourhood. Notwithstanding this self-destructing and careless life-style I maintained school attendance and as a result of my mother's and sister's encouragement I geared up for tertiary level education.

After the collapse of the communist regime, in the early 1990s, social work services were rapidly implemented in different sectors (Osborne & Kaposvari, 1998). During my time in high school I often visited the School Social Worker, which was mainly due to the punk life-style I was following. I felt, this social worker instead of judging me, tried to understand what influenced my attraction to the punk life-style. This led me to open up to her about my personal and familial difficulties and as a result we built a good relationship and remained in contact for a number of years after my completion of high school. During my visits to her she indicated that I should look into completing a social work degree. She suggested that I could utilise my family and life experiences in the field. With no clear vision what to do after secondary school I followed her suggestion. I had no desire to stay at home and the university that

provided the social work program I was interested in was located in another Hungarian city.

At home, things did not improve and during the first year at university my parents divorced. My mother moved back to her homestead and my father stayed at our family home. Initially when I returned home for the weekends, I stayed at my mother's place and rarely visited my father. Yet, because I thought I was still a significant member of the punk group I always made sure I had time for my friends. However, this changed gradually as I made new friends at university and a different of perception of the world dawned on me. At this time, I started to question the ideology of the punk life-style and the urge to spend time with my punk friends dissipated. Perhaps the exposure to an academic environment and people eventuated in a more in-depth level of self-awareness that triggered my thinking and reflection on my father's childhood stories. I remember when the clear connection between my father's adult behaviour and his upbringing and childhood environment began to make sense to me. This recognition of my father's childhood hurdles started off my father's and I's reconciliation, which continues to date.

After completing the social work degree in 2004 and working in a Budapest homeless shelter for a year, I decided to move over to the United Kingdom to learn English and continue my journey of discovery of the world and myself. Concentrating on studying English I stayed in York for over 2 years, before I bought a ticket to New Zealand, the country that always held my attention. In 2007, I arrived in Christchurch where after some travelling I decided to make this land my home. I applied for jobs in my qualification and, due to my previous experience, the Christchurch City Mission offered me a social work position in its Homeless Night Shelter.

In 2012, the passion to learn new things led me to apply for a position with Child Youth and Family in Auckland. Here, I had a real first-hand experience to work not only with gang-affiliated individuals but their families. Social workers, including myself found it difficult to engage with these people. However, some of my work colleagues who were former gang members managed to engage with ease with involuntary and difficult clientele. Impressed by my colleagues' effective service delivery approach and their transformation in their personal life I started to look more

into New Zealand gangs and the metamorphosis of individual's identity by reading auto-biographies of Isaac and Haami (2007) and Weaver (2008).

Since I have made New Zealand home the understanding of my origins (family, culture, political, socio-economic) have become more important. Therefore, not wanting to lose contact with my family I travel home almost every 2 years. While at home I enjoy visiting my teenagehood friends, especially the ones from the punk group. It is interesting to see how some have moved on and established family life but others still follow the punk life-style that I also led when I was in secondary school. Sometimes I reflect and wonder what path I would have chosen without the support of all my family members and certain people in my life if I had never moved from home.

I believe the personal experiences such as my family background, connection to the local punk group, my journey towards the understanding of the implications of my family history, my social work experience with gang members and having colleagues with former gang connections in New Zealand greatly motivated the research topic selection. My interest in connecting up the different New Zealand social work fields I was involved in also drove me to look into the phenomenon of gangs. According to Gilbert, gangs are “deeply embedded within certain communities” (Gilbert, 2013, p. VII) that are existing at the margins of society and facing triple prejudice of ethnicity, low socio-economic status, and anti-sociality (Tamatea, 2015). Even though, gangs are hard to penetrate by non-gang members, social workers in almost all fields tend to deliver their services in the layer of society where gangs exist. I hope this research and its findings can generate and contribute to an ongoing dialogue on how to appreciate ex-criminal gang members' knowledge and skills and effectively utilise their experience in social service provision.

1.6 Thesis structure

This study is divided into the following six chapters:

Chapter one introduces the aims of the study and the research question, which are designed to explore what causes ex-gang members' motivation to adopt redemption-self. The inclusion of a brief history of the development of New Zealand gangs is also presented alongside my own personal connection to the researched topic.

Chapter two reviews and examines current international and local literature to identify research gaps related to the three phases of the former gang members' identity transformation such as gang affiliation, desistance and the adoption of redemption-self. It also seeks to explore a suitable gang definition for participant selection criterion.

Chapter three outlines the design of the study by presenting the theoretical perspectives of social constructionism and the qualitative paradigm, and methods such as the recruitment and selection criterion, the information collection and management process. Moreover, the analytical framework, which comprises the interpretive description and the thematic analysis, leads to reporting and fine-tuning of the results. The ethical considerations tailored to this study are also considered in this chapter.

Chapter four after the introduction of the recruited participants, the thematic map is outlined. This map, which consists of four primary themes and their subthemes, the participants' thematically analysed narrations are organised into. The first three emerging primary themes and their subthemes closely follow the phases of the life-course framework the onset, continuity and desistance. These primary themes are identified as precursors, continuity, and exit. The fourth primary theme outlines the process of the adoption of redemption-self.

Chapter five summarises and outlines the study's key findings and the content of the primary themes presented in chapter four. It also presents a discussion of the findings'

consistencies and inconsistencies with the national and international literature presented in the second chapter.

Chapter six reviews the aim of this study and outlines the key points that have emerged from chapter five. In relation to the study's findings and emerging discussion points, the chapter discusses the current issues surrounding policies and educational and social service providers' approach to redeemed ex-criminal gang members. The study's limitations and the strengths provide a background of suggestions for future research.

1.7 Summary

As a backdrop for the researched topic, this chapter has presented the study's aims (1.2) and the research question (1.3). It has also given context to the research by providing a quick historical overview of New Zealand gangs (1.4) and its pertinence to the researched topic and connected my personal experience to ex-criminal gang members' adoption of redemption-self (1.5). Relevant terms and classification to gang research and the thesis structure have also been presented in the glossary section (1.4). Finally, section 1.6 offers an overview of the study's structure.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the existing literature is explored for insight into external factors that generate the transformation of human identity and behaviour. To form an understanding of what constitutes ‘gang’ and gang membership, section 2.2 reviews scholarly debates about gang definition. Section 2.3 examines the life-course framework of Pyrooz, Decker, and Webb (2014) in which gang socialization and gang desistance theories emerge. The gang socialization category is further divided into two subsections: the onset phase (2.3.1) or the familial and environmental triggering factors and the continuity phase (2.3.2), which looks at the positive and negative consequences of gang affiliation and gang membership status. Section 2.4 reviews Rocque (2014) integrated maturation framework and introduces desistance theories from the disciplines of physiology, sociology and psychology. Finally, section 2.5 not only defines what redemption-self means, it also explores the literature on how the generative exercises and the retroflexive reformation theory maintain the process of desistance and adoption of redemption-self. By reviewing the available literature on the process of ex-criminal gang members’ identity transformation this section identifies the gap in the existing literature and establishes the research question.

2.2 Definition of gang

“The phenomenon of gangs as a form of human association and a social problem is both ancient and contemporary. Probably no generation has been without them.”

(Manley, 1995 p.25)

In this section, the scholarly debates about the necessity of a universally approved gang definitions are discussed. An introduction of Miller’s (1980) gang definition based on (ex)gang members’ understanding of the gang, and Gilbert’s (2013) differentiation between criminal and non-criminal gang categories are offered.

Rebelling, ‘anti-social’ groups in mainstream society have been present for centuries but scholarly interest in seeking to understand and define the term ‘gang’ only started to become evident at the beginning of 1900s. To date, none of the research was able to identify a comprehensive gang definition for the term, gang. Regardless, both Tamatea (2015) and Decker and Kempf-Leonard (1991) call for a uniform definition and point out that a universal definition could benefit the understanding of gangs and could also have an impact on research and policy-making (Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001).

Lala (1996) argues that the lack of cohesion that surrounds the gang definition stems from the term, ‘gang’, being ambiguous and it means different things to different people. Depending on what segment of society is asked about the term, ‘gangs’ its definition could be misconstrued and contextually-dependent (Ball & Curry, 1995). For example, policy makers and law enforcement agencies that are responsible for maintaining safety and public order are only interested in gangs if they are involved in criminal activities (Lala, 1996). Such government agency was the New Zealand Committee of Gangs, in which the Comber Report only involved gangs with criminal characteristics. Reports of the New Zealand Committee of Gangs inevitably emphasised the criminal nature of the gangs and suggested that the term, ‘gang’, denotes a devious characteristic for those who join it and participate in their activities (Gilbert, 2013).

Moreover, Lala (1996) and Miller (1980) stress that definitions that describe gangs and gang membership status are conceived from existing theoretical or ideological frameworks, and further underpin the researcher's biases and provide an askew understanding of gangs as non-law abiding citizens to the policy makers and enforcement agencies. Additionally, since gangs are regarded anti-social due to their criminal characteristics, the gang members generally approach information gathering about their organisation with suspicion. This leads to gang members' tendency to elicit little information about their communities to the outside world, which further complicates the development of a universally approved gang definition (Manley, 1995; Tamatea, 2015).

As a consequence of these ongoing scholarly debates, Horowitz (1990) poses the question whether developing a gang definition is either needed or is desirable, because a definition would only obscure the problem areas and discourage questions to be developed. Petersen (2000), although agreeing with Horowitz's (1990) argument that gangs should not be confined to a universal definition because they mean different things to different group of people, supports the idea of having a contextual and micro-level examination of different types of gangs, which could provide a general understanding of some baseline similarities in gangs.

Junger-Tas and Marshall (1999), Ball and Curry (1995) and Lala (1996) argue that police and policy developers foundational knowledge of gangs is greatly biased due to the lack of connection between the actual gangs, researchers and the methodology used to define gangs. Hence, Petersen (2000) and Decker and Kempf-Leonard (1991) suggest that those who have first-hand experience should be asked and involved in the formation of definition and policymaking. Miller's (1980) definition process is designed to reduce biases of policy makers and individual scholars by basing definition development on the perspective of ex and current-gang members' understanding of gang culture. Miller concludes:

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)

Further, Gilbert (2013) highlights factors that distinguish between criminal and non-criminal gangs. Gilbert finds that although criminal and non-criminal gangs share many similarities, as both are structured groups where membership can be gained by adopting the gang's distinguishable identifiers (regalia, gang-patch, handshakes, tattoos) and by adhering to the gangs' formal rules over a long time period, the criminal gangs' organisational focus is maintained by profit gaining criminal activities. This is important because it extends Miller's gang definition and provides further understanding of gang structures and characteristics, which helps the development of this research.

This section has provided a brief discussion of the on-going debates about gang definitions and introduced Miller's gang definition, which is extended by Gilbert's understanding between criminal and non-criminal gangs. The following sections of this chapter review the existing literature on the process of gang affiliation, gang desistance and redemption-self adoption.

2.3 Gang socialisation

This section is divided into two subsections. The first subsection, the onset phase introduces the main precursors of gang affiliation such as dysfunctional parental care, family circumstances, low school achievement and environmental impacts, which may cause anti-social behaviour and consequently result in a rejection of conventional society. It is viewed that those who develop anti-social behaviour and perceive rejection from pro-social groups are more likely to affiliate with gangs. The process of gang embeddedness and its consequences is discussed in the second subsection - the continuity phase.

2.3.1 Onset phase

International research views gang affiliation as a short-lived phase in youth life-course (Decker, Katz, & Webb, 2008). A vast amount of research data has established that as a result of the gangs' inherent characteristics, which promote anti-social behaviour, even a short-lived phase of gang membership significantly increases delinquent behaviour (Pyrooz et al., 2014; Thornberry, Kron, Lizotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003). Therefore, Klein and Maxson (2006) maintain that gangs are considered a specific social problem that individuals with the propensity to commit crime and anti-social behaviour are attracted.

Pyrooz et al. (2014) dispute that propensity to commit crime is the only factor to draw an individual to gangs and argue that researchers need to dig deeper to understand the more complex factors that precede anti-social behaviour and gang membership status. Tamatea (2015) sees negative childhood experiences such as physical, verbal and sexual abuse, neglect and environmental impacts of school, neighbourhood, peers, and family members gang affiliation, as significant precursors that are commonly connected to anti-social behaviour. These precursors are grouped by Pyrooz et al. (2014) under the life-course framework onset phase.

Within this phase, the family factors are viewed as the major contributors to anti-social behaviour. Physical, verbal and sexual abuse is found to significantly increase rates of violent teenage offending (Farrington, 2003; Nee, Ellis, Morris, & Wilson, 2013; Smith & Thornberry, 1995; Widom, 1989; Zingraff, Leiter, Myers, & Johnsen, 1993). Furthermore, Windom (1989) states that those who experienced childhood parental neglect showed similar patterns of committing crime to those who have been exposed to parental abuse. Hawkins et al. (1999) points out that neglect has different forms. Therefore, understanding what type of neglect the individual has been exposed to it is important to determine and understand what type of treatment to offer.

The authors explain that on the one hand, inadequate family management can stem from poor parental supervision and inability to schedule time for childcare or both. On the other hand, parents' disengagement and un-nurturing parental care can

cause a void in the child's perception of being accepted, seen, understood and empathised. This physical closeness but emotional distance between the parent and his/her child is called *proximate separation*, which has been identified as a contributing factor to the child's anti-social behaviour and lack of academic achievement (Máté, 2003).

Poor school achievement and truancy are also recognised as triggering factors in anti-social behaviour and youth offending (Hawkins et al., 1999). Alongside delinquency, anti-social peer relations and dysfunctional family, personal traits such as learning disabilities can be attributed to low-level educational achievement and truancy or both (Hill, Lui, & Hawkins, 2001). Young people who miss out on academic opportunities due to anti-social behaviour are greatly restricted on acquiring a variety of job skills. The restriction in learning employable skills can later contribute to delinquency (Moffitt, 1993).

Although family circumstances are considered to be the dominant precursors of delinquent behaviour, environmental influences are also identified as significant triggering factors. It is recognised that in poverty stricken neighbourhoods the rate of gang affiliations is higher than in affluent suburbs (Campbell, 2011; Gilbert, 2013). This is the consequence of the economic disadvantage that impacts on the available resources and support to the residents (Goldstein, 1991). Goldstein outlines that these disadvantages stem from tripartite reasons. Low socio-economic communities are poorly resourced to adequately socialise young people, which stems from a lack of opportunities to participate in pro-social groups or events. Finally, the community members have/receive limited support from each other and from the wider community to provide pro-social environment for young people's appropriate socialisation. Additionally, modelling of criminal and antisocial family members' attitudes can contribute to the child and adolescent delinquency (Farrington, 2005; Farrington, Jolliffe, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, & Kalb, 2001).

It is understood that youth may rebel against these aversive circumstances and look for alternative avenues to attain status and respect in their immediate environment, which has often limited means to appropriately facilitate this (Maclure & Sotelo, 2004). Therefore, those young people whose anti-social behaviour is left

unaddressed can gradually develop an anti-social personality coupled with dearth of employable skills. People with antisocial personality experience negative reactions from the pro-social environment (Moffitt, 1993). The lack of ability to form pro-social peer and family attachments can lead delinquent youth to seek camaraderie, pride, and a sense of belonging in anti-social groups where further delinquency is conducted. These anti-social groups are characterised in gangs, where anti-social behaviour is not only tolerated but encouraged (Smith & Thornberry, 1995).

2.3.2 Continuity phase

The second phase of the life-course framework is continuity, which is a direct continuation of the onset phase. Discussions of prospective members' commitment and persistence to gang driven life-style emphasise the acceptance of practices and values of gangs. Furthermore, gangs fulfil individuals' needs that individuals cannot achieve satisfy in mainstream society. These needs are identified by Tamatea (2015) as:

stimulation-seeking (drugs, aggression), status (reputation and position in hierarchy), material rewards; and, collective concerns, such as protection from rivals or law enforcement (uncertainty reduction), social stability (including the ability for members to exert influence on other's behaviour to monitor and shape expectations of personal conduct), and a coherent sense of internal structure that defined in-group/out-group relationships (para. 3)

As result of the gratification of these needs and further encouragement of anti-social behaviour the gang's inherent characteristics tend to lead to the understanding that gangs have a negative impact on its members (Thornberry et al., 2003). However, more recently the positive aspects of gang membership have been recognised (Campbell, 2011; Faleolo, 2014; Gilbert, 2013). The positive incentives manifest in members learning new skills such as a new language, driving cars and establishing a business. The process of learning new skills results in developing a new identity that

is considered to be more persistent and adaptive towards every-day challenges and adversities. The development of the new skills and identity are strengthened by the perceived camaraderie in the group circumstances (Campbell, 2011). It is not surprising that those who recognise the experienced positive factors in this environment tend to remain active in the gang driven life-style for a long period.

Prolonged and durable membership specific to New Zealand gangs (Gilbert, 2013; Lala, 1996; Tamatea, 2015) are understood to be the result of the following two reasons. Firstly, gangs are deeply entrenched in poverty-stricken mainstream society where gangs share similar values and perspective of its wider community, and in the event of joining the gang, the new member can easily adapt to the gang norms. Secondly, while gangs share similar values with the non-gang communities the gang norms consist of internal processes and practices that are logical only to the members (Tamatea, 2015). These internal processes and practices separate the gangs from the non-gang world. With more time spent on adapting to and internalising gang practices and processes, exclusivity to the gang is offered. On the one hand, exclusivity generates tightened family-like bonds between members but on the other hand it considerably limits members' return to the conventional society that is often rejected when attempted (Fleisher & Decker, 2001; Smith & Thornberry, 1995).

Violence, through which respect is demanded and status is gained, is considered one of the basic principles within the gang world. Violence is the most prevalent component to anti-social and increased delinquent behaviour during gang affiliation (Decker et al., 2008; Klein & Maxson, 2006; Sweeten, Pyrooz, & Piquero, 2012; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, & Chard-Wierschem, 1993). Thornberry et al. (1993) state that violence is a basic and simple method of problem solving, which is frequently offered in gangs because some members have limited problem-solving skills to apply in the face of adversities. Violence is also recognised as an instrument to control not just external but internal gang processes (Tamatea, 2015; Thornberry et al., 1993).

Notwithstanding of its predominance, Pyrooz et al. (2014) found that tolerance of violence is variable and that gang members' at a certain age and in certain circumstance regard violence as a distracting factor to membership. Moreover, being

on the receiving end or witnessing innocent people being subjected to violence can sever members' ties with the gang networks. In turn, while it is seldom recognised, violence can be an aspect to exiting gangs.

In summary, in the onset phase of life-course framework, alongside the most dominant experience of childhood abuse (physical, verbal and sexual) and neglect, poor school achievement, environmental impacts (family members' antisocial traits and peer relations) can influence the development of anti-social, delinquent behaviour. These identified precursors may lead individuals to join gangs, where needs for acceptance and camaraderie are offered. Although, the consequences of satisfying these needs are regarded negative, they can trigger the adoption of a resistant identity and the acquirement of new skills. These positive factors are partly considered to be triggers for lengthened gang membership. However, acceptance into gangs can increase members' delinquent behaviour and prevent gang members from being accepted into mainstream society. This further lengthens gang membership and heightens status. Violence in the gang world is considered to be the most prevalent, its basic notion is to implement fear and control of external and internal gang processes. Yet, being subjected to gang violence can be motivation to discontinue gang membership.

Cutting ties with previous gang networks are considered to be a complex phenomenon that is more than a single pivotal turning point in the members' lives (Gormally, 2015; Maruna, 2001). According to Tamatea (2015), desistance from gangs normally occurs when the individual has alternative competing rewards outside of the boundaries of the gangs. In the following section, those multiple internal and external desistance triggering factors are discussed by reviewing the different theories that attempt to cast light on the complex phenomenon of desistance.

2.4 Theories of desistance

In this section, the last phase of the life-course framework (Pyrooz et al., 2014), desistance is explored. Theories that view desistance as a zig-zag path between conventional world and the criminal world are discussed under Rocque's (2014) integrated maturation framework. These multifaceted and competing theories of desistance from sociological and psychological disciplines are extended with the inclusion of the link between desistance and physiological maturation. For a more comprehensive picture of desistance, alongside the three levels of relational desistance, the importance of positive desistance is presented.

In criminology, desistance is viewed as a turning point in which termination of offending and the risk of future offences decrease to the same low level as non-offenders' in the general population (Bushway, Piquero, Broidy, Cauffman, & Mazerolle, 2001). Laub and Sampson (1993) argue that desistance might be triggered by an abrupt turnaround in an individuals' life history. The power of these life events can separate individuals' past from the future. For example, military service in which rigid rules and severe punishment subjecting young men to the dictates of the army can separate their past of life history from their present circumstances (Elder Jr., Gimbel, & Ivie, 1991).

Research has consistently shown that desistance is more often a slow withdrawal from criminal gang behaviour (Carlsson, 2012; Healy, 2014; Maruna, 2001; McNeill, 2014; Weaver, 2015). It is, therefore, viewed that dynamic progression towards non-offending behaviour is needed to achieve the state of desistance (Kazemian & Maruna, 2009). Carlsson (2012), however, disputes the use of the word 'progression' as it suggests that desistance is a linear process. The drift theory developed by Matza (1964) underpins Carlsson's (2012) claim about non-law abiding people's non-linear recurring adherence to conventional morality and periodic delinquent behaviour. Both Matza and Carlsson argue that in reality desistance from crime is more often a 'zigzag path' between the criminal/gang and the conventional social worlds. Leibrich (1993) summarised their claim and emphasised that

individuals continually desist from criminal behaviour and relapse to criminal gang affiliation until they achieve desistance.

Further debates surrounding desistance highlight the importance of measurement of desistance. For example, Maruna (2001) and Kazemian (2007) see desistance as a permanent change of behaviour that commences when crime-free behaviour is maintained, even in the face of life's obstacles and frustrations. Maruna and Kazemian attribute the start of desistance to major turning points (army service, marriage, employment) in the individual's life. Carlsson (2012) disputes their notion by raising the following questions: Firstly, whether turning points are single life events or part of the more complex life events and processes secondly, if the turning points are part of the more complex life processes whether they are more important than any other life events or processes. Finally, whether these turning points can actually be understood and considered an accurate starting point to analyse changes in offending. By posing these questions Carlsson suggests that the complexity of life processes contribute to the difficulty in measuring the commencement of desistance and its permanency. Therefore, he suggests that individuals can only report desistance retrospectively up to the point in time when measurement of desistance is conducted.

The demarcation time spent away from offending individuals and ongoing relations with previous delinquent peers also raises questions about who can be constituted as a desisted gang member (Kazemian & Maruna, 2009; Pyrooz et al., 2014). Katz, Webb, and Decker (2005) argue that, due to the inconsistency in the scholarly understanding of desisters the most reliable method to measure gang affiliation and desistance is the use of self-reports (Junger-Tas & Marshall, 1999)².

The varying understanding and debates of desistance originate from the different disciplines that explore crime and gang desistance (Maruna, 2001). The sociological and criminological observation of desistance includes all theories that explain the process of desistance as a result of external influences within the

² More explanation of the self-nomination approach is offered in the Methodology chapter, Selection criteria section.

individual's environment. These theories are generally grouped into sociogenesis approaches while the psychological approach underlies the theories of ontogenesis. Ontogenetic theories explore the changes in the individuals' personality that triggers a shift towards a conventional-self.

Rocque (2014) states that desistance can only be achieved through "physical, intellectual and affective capacity and stability, and a sufficient degree of integration of temperament, personality and intelligence as well as an ability to function in society" (p. 3). Thus he argues that in order to formulate more in-depth understanding of desistance, it should be presented in an integrated theoretical framework. Based on Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck's³ desistance study, Rocque inquires into the phenomenon of desistance through the lens of maturation by examining the correlations between the theories of sociogenesis, ontogenesis and physiology, and incorporating them into one overarching framework.

Rocque posits that the neurological brain functioning in relation to criminal behaviour has been mainly overlooked and discounted in the desistance literature. To fill this gap Rocque draws on evidence of physiological research, which concludes that traumatic brain injury can deteriorate brain functioning and increase violent behaviour (Fazel, Lichtenstein, Grann, & Långström, 2011). In support, Vaughn, Salas-Wright, DeLisi, and Perron (2014) state that traumatic brain injury may be related to violent criminal offending due to its association with increased impulsivity and decreased emotionality. The findings of Fazel et al. (2011) and Vaughn et al. (2014) are further supported in Dennehy and Newbold's (2001) research. In this, Dennehy gives an account of her ex-husband's motorbike accident that left him with a serious brain injury. As a consequence of the brain injury the husband's behaviour changed drastically and presented as escalated possessiveness, suspiciousness and violent explosive behaviour.

³ Rocque (2014) states that Gluecks' longitudinal study started in 1937, and their book the *Unravelling juvenile delinquency* was released in 1950. The Gluecks' study has been heavily critiqued for being tautological and ontogenetically biased.

Similarly to a brain injury, Fazel et al. (2011) find that during adolescent maturation hormonal and biological changes can exacerbate impulsivity and violent behaviour. The authors find that eventually the brain biological maturation process improves the brain's functioning and increases its speed of information transfer. The changes result in an improvement in impulse control and decision-making. Consequently, brain maturation is viewed to contribute to the reduction in delinquent behaviour. As yet, this is an underdeveloped area of desistance. Rocque urges researchers to explore the brain's biological maturation in relation to crime desistance.

The second category includes the sociogenic theories and approaches that are based upon extensively developed theoretical and empirical backgrounds (Rocque, 2014). These theories and approaches measure the social ties and social connectedness, which are considered to generate desistance. Laub and Sampson's (1993) informal social control theory is considered to be one of the most comprehensive theories in this category (Moloney, MacKenzie, Hunt, & Joe-Laidler, 2009; Savolainen, 2009; Warr, 1998). This theory offers a holistic view of socialisation over the life-course, highlighting the importance of turning points, social bonds and the social capital in a desisting individual's life.

Laub and Sampson find that informal social control is normally a by-product of pro-social activities (marriage, army service, employment), acting to socially bond the individuals to their environment. Yet, without substantial meaning to these pro-social activities criminal behaviour may not be modified. Therefore, the authors argue that desistance from criminal behaviour can be maintained through changes in the adoption of new conventional-self, for which the establishment of social capital is required. Social capital is gained from pro-social relations with the members of the pro-social groups. If more social capital is produced, the more likely the individual is bonded to a pro-social group. Accordingly, this process is a crucial contribution for maintaining the newly adopted conventional-self. Social capital and social bonds are, therefore understood to be reciprocal, interdependent and generated by turning points (marriage, becoming a parent, employment, army, relocation) in individuals' lives.

Although Warr (1998) admits that Laub and Sampson have conducted a comprehensive and sophisticated sociological analysis of desistance, he argues that informal social control theory is flawed. He sees that the social control theory fails to recognise the power of romantic relationship over the delinquent peers' bond. In other words, Warr, through the differential association theory explains that delinquency is learnt over time in a tight knit group situation from significant delinquent peers. The learnt criminal behaviour and the bond between the members of the delinquent group can effectively be reduced when the delinquent individuals enter into a meaningful romantic relationship. Hence, Warr considers marriage the strongest informal social control.

Moloney et al. (2009) contest Warr's claim about marriage and state that becoming a parent is more effective in gang membership reduction. In their study, they examined gang members' views on attaining fatherhood. The authors found that not all fathers automatically desisted from gangs, but after the birth of their child, all have reduced criminal activities and risk taking behaviour. Therefore, they concluded that fatherhood initiates transformation in priorities and outlook for future, which last even after the event of divorce from their partner.

The third category comprises the psychological or ontogenetic theories. These theories, while acknowledging the importance of the environmental influences, also emphasise the individual's internal shift that generates readiness for agency change (Healy, 2014). In support of the ontogenetic view, Kazemian and Maruna (2009) explain that humans are all products of their time, their socialisation experience and their environment, which are together responsible for constant social and situational changes that can assist desistance from crime and gangs. However, they maintain that desistance is also related to internal changes, which need to be acknowledged.

Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph (2002) acknowledge Laub and Sampson (1993) informal social control theory but critique it for its incompleteness to address the individuals' 'up-front' work, which enables individuals' cognitive capacity to imagine alternative pro-social selves accompanied with an emotional maturation process (Healy, 2013). Giordano et al. (2002), based on the informal social control theory, formulated the cognitive transformation theory to present the process of

desistance from the ontogenetic angle. Within this theory, the following four steps of cognitive shift process and the maintenance of non-criminal selves have been observed:

First, the most important aspect is the individual's availability for change. Second, through the process of self-selection, the person needs willingness to choose and engage in meaningful pro-social activities (such as employment, marriage, army membership, parenthood). Selection of a pro-social activity, promotes desistance by helping to forge and embrace the new noncriminal identity, the 'conventional-self'. Third, by having connection or belonging to a pro-social group the adoption of the groups' pro-social roles is paramount to maintain acceptance in the group. Adhering to the rules of pro-social group influences the maintenance of the new conventional-self. Fourth, as a consequence of the adopted conventional-self, the perception of delinquent life-style is altered with the negative consequences of delinquent behaviour becoming more apparent and unattractive.

These three components of the integrated framework leads to the understanding that desistance occurs when changes in social relationships, in identity, in the view of self, and biological processes interact as part of underlying maturational process (Rocque, 2014).

In a very recent study, however, Nugent and Schinkel (2016) critique Rocque's theoretical framework for considering desistance only on two levels. These are the *act-desistance* in which individuals' period of non-offending occurs and the *identity desistance*, which refers to the stage when the non-offending identity is adopted and internalized. In order to understand the desistance process more comprehensively, Nugent and Schinkel (2016) introduce the third level, the *relational desistance*.

Relational desistance discusses the process of acceptance of the desisting individuals within their environment. The process of acceptance is divided into three levels. The acceptance of the individual's desistance occurs on micro level, including the individuals' family and immediate environment. The individual is accepted as a desister on mezzo level such as employment or school. Finally, the individual is

regarded and accepted as a transformed person on macro level, or the world at large. This underpins Carlsson (2012) argument that states desistance is not a linear process but can be delineated into spheres, the world outside, within ourselves and in relation to others. In other words, we act depending on how we see ourselves, which depends on how we see ourselves reflected in the eyes of others, which in turn depends on how we act (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016).

Furthermore, Harris (2009) points out that positive desistance is crucial to maintain genuine agency transformation because if desistance is related to fear of returning to jail, agency transformation cannot be considered substantial (Healy, 2013). Healy (2014) finds that for those who have not developed social links, been accepted by others, or are lacking a new imagined identity, desistance can be an isolating and a difficult journey. To successfully achieve longer lasting positive desistance, all three levels (micro, mezzo, macro) of relational desistance need to be in place and linked back to the primary and secondary desistance (McNeill, 2014). To underpin this view, Healy (2013) highlights that desisters often communicate their new identities through social roles, which are firmly bonded with the individual's environment on micro, mezzo and macro level.

Additionally, the experience of positive desistance from crime and gangs requires the approach coping style (Healy, 2014), which include the ability of possessing an optimistic outlook, sense of purpose and superior cognitive skills in highly constrained circumstances (Healy, 2013). Maruna (2001) finds these traits highly developed amongst successfully desisted research participants who have implemented a new conventional identity while practicing generative activities.

In summary, crime and gang desistance research has shown that desistance is a complex phenomenon. Multiple discussions and theories attempt to identify the course of desistance and its triggering points. The phenomenon is approached from the different angles of psychology and sociology and the large body of desistance theories generated inconsistencies between theories. Consequently, Rocque (2014) pulls the more significant desistance theories into an integrated maturation framework to provide in-depth understanding of crime and gang desistance.

Special attention has been given to dominant desistance theories such as the informal social control theory (Laub & Sampson, 1993) and the cognitive transformation theory (Giordano et al., 2002). However, Nugent and Schinkel (2016) point out that these desistance theories are incomplete for failing to address the effects of relational desistance, which outlines how desisters regard themselves through the wider community's acceptance. It is argued that alongside micro, mezzo and macro-level acceptance, approach copying style is also paramount to establishing positive and long lasting desistance (Healy, 2014; McNeill, 2014), an outcome that is observably more developed amongst ex-criminals who practice generative actions and become help-professionals (Maruna, 2001). The phenomenon of redemptive-self is discussed in the forthcoming section.

2.5 Redemption-Self

This final section presents a review of what generative exercise is and it outlines how programs based on reformed ex-criminals' practice of generative actions have been implemented to trigger desistance for persistent offenders. It also discusses the positive implications of generative exercises on the reformed ex-criminals.

Generative commitments are connected to the course of maturation and are mainly associated with the period of middle-adulthood. Generativity is usually regarded as a participation in activities that include guiding, caring and nurturing others, especially younger generation (Erikson, 1965). Consequently, these societal and personal goals are regarded to positively contribute to community and ensure the safety of next generations. McAdams, Diamond, de St Aubin, and Mansfield (1997) recognise seven psychosocial features that influence individuals' desire to participate in generative commitments and practice these actions. These psychosocial features are the following:

The '*cultural demand*' for age appropriate behaviour is sensed or recognised by the individual. An inherent '*belief*' in the importance of human life and a '*personal desire*' are developed to work in a team with other adults to generate a conscious

'concern' that triggers '*generative commitments*' that appear in '*generative actions*'. These generative actions are expressed in behaviours that aim to create worthy outcomes for the next generations. Finally, the generative efforts are expressed through '*generative narrations*' as part of the individual's life-story.

Ex-offenders practicing generative actions were recognised and recorded in the United States as early as the 1950s (Cressey, 1965; LeBel, 2007; LeBel, Richie, & Maruna, 2015). However, it was the British government that introduced Bristol Project Program, which was designed to specifically utilise the knowledge and experience of reformed ex-offenders in transforming persisting criminals. Although success was accredited to the Bristol Project, due to change in legislation it was shut down in the early 1990s (Caddick, 1994). Since then, self-help groups with service principles is based on the 12 steps programs, such as Alcoholic Anonymous, Narcotic Anonymous or Al-Anon were formed by redeemed criminals to provide support and alternative choices to persistent offenders (Marsh, 2011). One of these programs is the Public Safety Initiative of LIFERS, Incorporated, which derives its name from of the members who are life-long prisoners (Harris, 2009). Non-government agencies, often run by a church and religious groups also provide programs or initiatives where reformed ex-criminals are employed as help-professionals (Kavanagh & Borrill, 2013). In New Zealand, agencies running such programs include Wesley Community Action, Outcast Ministry and a Christian based motorcycle club the 'Jesus is Lord the Redeemed'.

Cressey (1965) states that programs based on the experience of reformed ex-criminals utilise the similar experiences shared by reformed ex-criminals and the clients. The emphasis is on the use of shared language, which Cressey (1965) sees as an essential instrument for peers to influence each other. He states:

Criminal and delinquent behaviour is not just a product of an individual's contacts with certain type of groups, it is in a very real essence 'owned' by groups rather than individuals; just as language is owned collectively rather than by any individual. (Cressey, 1965, p. 51)

In other words, delinquent behaviour is learnt through group processes where the exchange of emotional and social dialogue adds confidence and trust. Therefore, Cressey further argues that language that changes delinquent behaviour can be more effectively introduced by someone who has significant relationship to the group members. In support of this view, Liem and Richardson (2014) highlight that shame can be reintegrating depending on who introduces the conventional language to the group (Braithwaite, 1989).

Moreover, in the Liverpool Desistance Study, Maruna (2001) found that the interaction of a significant other's support greatly influence desisters in the gradual establishment of a sense of agency, control of their own destiny and practice of a conventional-self. This view relates back to the earlier established relational desistance, which posits that the immediate and wider communities' acceptance and support empowers desisters' maintenance of desistance.

Furthermore, in the retroflexive reformation theory, reformed ex-criminals practicing generative exercises are not only viewed as the change agents but they become the target of change (Brown, 1991; Cressey, 1965; LeBel, 2007; Maruna, 2001; Weaver & Weaver, 2013). In other words, as much as the reformed criminals' generative exercises support the clients to reduce delinquent and risk-taking behaviour, it also supports the reformed criminal's maintenance of desistance. According to Cressey, ex-criminals, in order to be able to positively influence persistent criminals' delinquent behaviour, must share and adhere to the values of pro-social, anti-criminal groups. By adapting non-criminal and pro-social values the reformed ex-criminals prove to become a member of the pro-social group.

The phenomenon of ex-offenders practicing generative actions is called redemption-self (Kazemian, 2007; Maruna, 2001). The redeemed-self is the product of the agency change and the positive sense of self, constructed by the interactions and acceptance by pro-social groups on micro, mezzo and macro level of relational desistance. This triggers desisters to be highly motivated to emphasise their inner goodness and aspire to contribute positively to the wider society. The wisdom they have acquired via the criminal life experience and the utilisation of this past experience enables them to support others in overcoming their harmful behaviour

(Kazemian, 2007). However, Healy states that the early-stage desisters are often more concerned about establishing conventional new life that revolves around family and non-generative work. She adds, “[p]erhaps when the trappings of the conventional life have been attained desisters can turn their attention to higher-order goals” (Healy, 2014, p. 561).

Individuals who successfully desist from crime, adopt a redemptive-self, and gain employment in the social service sector as counsellors, social workers, probation officers or other help professionals, have also been called “wounded healers” (Workman, 2014, p. 44). Brown’s (1991) study of ex-addicts who became counsellors elaborated on this view, articulating that the symbolic and emotional identification of ex-addicts within the therapists, blended with deep personal meanings in work-relationships, were the external inspirational factors for clients to maintain substance abstinence and pursue career in help-profession. Therefore the question, which generated this study, is: what type of factors influenced former gang members’ decision to cut ties with their gang networks and adopt redemption-self?

2.6 Summary

Opposing scholarly and governmental views of gangs and the gangs’ nature of providing little information to the non-gang world has left the academic field with much debate surrounding the generation of an appropriate universally accepted gang definition. Miller’s (1980) view to reduce biases (governmental and scholar) includes the voices of current and ex-gang members in the generation of his gang definitions. To provide further understanding of gang characteristics, Miller’s definition has been extended by Gilbert’s criminal gang category. Furthermore, it is established in section 2.3 that within the life-course framework’s onset phase the familial and the environmental precursors such as abuse (physical, verbal and sexual), neglect and connection to delinquent family members and peers are contributing factors to anti-social behaviour and precede gang affiliation. It has also been highlighted that while gangs pose a real risk to encourage anti-social, violent behaviour, research shows that

violence can cause reduced gang connections, and can eventuate gang desistance.

Desistance theories have traditionally been divided into two categories sociogenesis and ontogenesis, depending whether psychological or sociological approaches have been utilised to determine desistance. As a result various and often competing desistance theories have been generated. For clarity, Rocque (2014) calls for an integrated maturation framework (2.4). Alongside the amalgamation of the sociogenic and ontogenetic understandings of desistance, Rocque introduces physiological influences on brain maturation consequently desistance from crime. Moreover, theories of positive and relational desistance also provide further understanding of how ex-criminals' aspiration to practise generative exercises and adopt redemption-self may occur.

There is a large body of literature that explores the influencing factors of gang membership and gang desistance. Despite the growing body of literature that explores the phenomenon of ex-criminals' re-formation and the adoption of redemption-self, there is little specific information found on ex-gang members' adoption of redemptive-self (2.5). It is perhaps assumed that due to gangs' inherent anti-social characteristics, gang members adopt redemption-self in a similar way to criminal offenders. However, desistance and adoption of redemptive-self appear to be more complex process for a gang member due to the demand of adherence to certain gang values and processes.

By recognising this gap in the literature this qualitative study has been undertaken to gain insight into the ex-criminal gang members' experiences of their desistance and influences of adoption of redemption-self. In order to explore ex-criminal gang members' experiences the qualitative paradigm has been selected for this study. In the following chapter, the study's methodological design and its elements namely the theoretical perspective, methods, analytical framework and ethical consideration are presented.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In order to understand the transition of some former criminal gang members' experience from gang affiliation and gang desistance to redemption-self the social constructionist theoretical paradigm (3.2.1) was considered appropriate. Additionally, to allow the study to keep its exploratory nature and flexibility the qualitative study (3.2.2) design has been selected. Following from the theoretical perspectives, discussions of the technicalities of participant criteria, participants' recruitment, interviews, and data analysis are offered under the method (3.3) and analytical framework (3.4) sections and their sub-sections. Finally, this chapter outlines the ethical considerations (3.5) relevant to this project.

3.2 Theoretical Perspective

The discussions offered in this section draws an outline of the social constructionism theory to which the research designs is aligned. It also explains why the qualitative study design's flexibility, holistic approach, critically insightful and participants' narrations lead nature have been selected to answer the research question (Sarantakos, 2013).

3.2.1 Social constructionism

In this section the context of the study is aligned with social constructionism. The reasons for selecting this theoretical paradigm are presented in a brief discussion that highlights the social constructionism's view of the significance of social interactions

via language and its critical view of essentialism and the taken-for-granted realities.

The conflicting positions people hold by being employed as help-professionals and having historic criminal gang affiliation raises some significant questions in contemporary New Zealand society. Part of the conflict centres on who is considered to be an ex-gang member and consequently a desister, a concept that is still debated in the scholarly literature (see section 2.4). This study was initiated to explore and critically discuss the varying negative effects of the stereotypical view of ex-criminal gang members, particularly where this type of former criminal gang membership is perceived to be not 'fit' in terms of character, based on guiding documents such as the Social Workers Registration Board, Fit and Proper Person policy statement (Social Workers Registration Board, 2015).

The Fit and Proper policy statement is established to protect professional excellence, the clients' and other stake holders' interests. However, those who generate policies about employee and help-student suitability unintendedly determine a redeemed ex-criminal gang members' future and career prospects (Miller, 1980). To challenge New Zealand society's easily applied but not fully understood labels such as (ex-)gang members or desisters, I was looking for an approach that questioned and critically observed the taken-for-granted realities and the understanding of the gang phenomenon. I found Burr's (1995) statement "what exists is what we perceive to exist" (p.3) a very important consideration. Her statement means to me that critically observing a phenomenon depends on how the observer perceives a situation to be. Therefore, much of what is understood is dependent on how the observer has interpreted what they have experienced, which is influenced by their particular connection to a (sub) culture. In other words, social constructionism takes the stance that how we construct knowledge of our world is the product of our own subjective interpretation, influenced by our connection to our communities.

The perspective of social constructionism is presented by Berger and Luckmann (1967) who frame their argument on a subjectivity-objectivity paradigm. This provides an essential lens where meanings are ascribed depending on who observes the particular phenomena. In other words, how humans understand the world is historically and categorically determined and explicit to various cultures. In the context of this study, I am hoping to socially construct information gathered from ex-

criminal gang members on what was going through their minds, what emotions (if any) were they experiencing, and the prevailing influences of their economic and social arrangements over their life course. Although social constructionism critically observes psychological and sociological views, it recognises that people's interactions are influenced by cognitive processes and how we interpret the knowledge of the world greatly depends on the daily social interactions with others (Burr, 1995).

Further, social constructionism rejects the views of essentialism, which asserts that once people have formulated their personality it is fixed for the future (Burr, 1995) and argues that everyone has their own nature, which determines what they can and cannot do. Therefore, social interactions have little impact on personality, as it is predetermined and unchangeable. The essentialist views appear to have been taken up by some of today's New Zealand politicians (Gagné, 2009), who consider gang members to be criminals regardless of their quality of affiliation with their gang network, motivations and actions in their community (Radio New Zealand, 2016). Contrary to this view, social constructionism sees people as a product of the social interactions whereby 'personality' constantly changes from situation to situation depending on the individual's relations with others. In other words, while essentialists' view of behavioural patterns determines an individual across life situations, social constructionism sees a person as an entity with multiple potential identities that are adopted and generated by their different roles depending on the given circumstances and social interactions.

Social interactions are not only the processes of interpretation of 'knowledge' but contribute to the fabrication of the knowledge that is instrumental to how we at a certain point in time understand our world. In this process of constant interaction, we fabricate and refabricate our knowledge and consequently the 'truth' of our world. Hence, in social constructionism, the emphasis lies on the recognition that 'truth' varies across cultures and constantly changes with time. In terms of New Zealand gang culture, Gilbert (2013) points out that today's gangs resemble little to their earlier 1960s counterparts. The changes in gangs could be attributed to the economic and social arrangements. However, changes also occurred to the members within the gang culture. It is understood like any other culture gang members have their own personality types and even though limited they have connections and interactions with

other people and subcultures within the mainstream society (Tamatea, 2015).

Connections and interactions between people are usually conducted via the medium of language (written, verbal and other means) Berger and Luckmann (1967). Şahin (2006) underpins this view by stating reality is filtered through language, which reflects the interpretation of the world by the user of the language. Hence, the function of language is considered to regulate and coordinate social life and, consequently construct and reconstruct our world and our identities during interactions with others. In summary, social constructionism sees language as a significant instrument in which thoughts and sensations are conducted and identities of people are learnt, contested and validated, as well as maintained and fought for (Dean, 1994). This is in parallel with Cressey's (1965) view that language belongs to a particular group of people (such as gangs) through which individuals learn the language of criminal and delinquent behaviour. Following Cressey's argument if language is the tool through which criminal behaviour is learnt, a significant member of the group can implement language promoting pro-social activities to the rest of the group members.

Moreover, if the argument states that the interpretation of the perceived knowledge is reflected in the user of the language, it also suggests that the research itself constructs its own understanding of the social world rather than re-present some independent reality. With this in mind, the usefulness of research findings is disputable and can generate questions of their validity by both the researchers and the consumers. However, social constructionism fits well with the preferred qualitative methodological choice for this study because it includes people's different perception of a particular situation that presents multiple realities and various truths and generates an essential lens to find out more about this study's phenomenon.

3.2.2 Qualitative research

The qualitative approach's strength to explore the researched topic holistically, and with a flexible approach is presented in this section. Moreover, particular attention is given to the connection between qualitative study design, social work, reflexivity and

triangulation, which further strengthen the critical insight into the research's argument.

Liamputtong (2009) argues that qualitative study is designed to provide flexibility for exploring the human interactions, impressions and opinions of those who can best describe and present the experience of their social world. As a result, the qualitative researcher's holistic approach is to investigate person, community, program and phenomenon embedded in their complex system of social-context as a whole (Patton, 2015). Investigation of the processes of gang affiliation, desistance and the adoption of redemption-self within the qualitative study design offers a critical insight into these phenomena. Such insights into the experiences of the redeemed ex-criminal gang members could not be fully achieved from reliance on the quantitative paradigm as qualitative study findings usually derive from the analysis of participants' narrations rather than statistical inferences and independent and dependent variables. Thus, following Liamputtong's and Patton's argument, the qualitative approach leads this study to achieve deeper understanding of the processes of the aforementioned phenomenon with a commitment to keep the participants' point of view in the focus of the study.

Qualitative study designs were first used in anthropology and sociology to establish better understanding of the "subjective of interactions of social life" (Conrad, 2004, p. 6608). Qualitative research recognises that humans do not exist in the vacuum and our culture, history, and belief systems influence the everyday perception of our reality (Crossan, 2003; Kazemian & Maruna, 2009). As outlined, researchers who utilise the holistic approach of the qualitative study, tend to explore individuals' world through their social interactions and their behaviour without disregarding the individuals' view on that (Creswell, 2014; Crossan, 2003). Extending on this view, Parahoo (2014) suggests that qualitative studies should not only analyse individuals' perspectives on behaviours and perceptions caused by relations to others but they should also explore participants' beliefs and values (Carr, 1994). Therefore, Crossan (2003) posits that greater flexibility tend to be achieved in qualitative studies because of the exploration and acknowledgment of interconnectedness and incorporations of the social issues such as culture, gender, attitudes, beliefs, behaviour, and socio-cultural issues.

Qualitative study and social work

The qualitative study's greater flexibility synchronises well with social work "as in types of practice and service provision, the topics and interests that encompass qualitative social work research are varied, often unpredictable and rarely ever easily confined to clearly labelled compartments" (Carey, 2012, p. 8-9). Hence, a rigid and inflexible research design would not be able to accommodate the dynamic and variability of social work epistemologies and applications as in quantitative methodologies. Shaw (2005) posits that social worker researchers, who are also practitioners, spend a considerable amount of time with individuals who are socially disadvantaged or marginalised. In order to earn trust and gain access to a group of 'hard to reach' people with whom culturally or socially the researcher may not have much in common, Whitmore (2001) calls for persistence, resilience and emotional intelligence from the researcher. To underpin Whitmore's (2012) notion, Carey (2012) states that empathy and tolerance are ideal traits to question previously held prejudicial and stereotypical views of 'hard-to-reach' people but he argues that researchers should have a reflexive approach to their selected research topic.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an integral part of qualitative research in which the researcher engages in a critical self-exploration through self-questioning and self-understanding. Thus, in the process of reflexivity the researcher is encouraged to reflect inwardly and consequently practice mindfulness and self-awareness. Self-awareness is essential for conducting in-depth and inter-personal qualitative inquiries (Patton, 2015). Sandelowski and Barroso (2002) highlight that in qualitative study, reflexivity exposes the qualitative inquirer's ability and willingness to openly acknowledge and be attentive of their own political understanding, cultural awareness and ownership of his/her perspective. Researchers are also required to be conscious of their own backgrounds, which without greatly influencing the outcome of research findings forms a backdrop to their interpretations (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Conrad, 2004). Hence, to be reflexive is a process of an ongoing conversation and examination of the researcher's knowledge and experience outlining what s/he

knows and how s/he knows it. This approach mostly corresponds to the qualitative inquirer's perspective of his or her sociocultural and political origins as well as the interviewees' perspective and other stakeholders that are involved. This process of reflexivity, therefore, grounds the inquiry in the reflexive triangulated inquiry (Patton, 2015).

Triangulation

In qualitative study, triangulation has various forms and it is primarily utilised to explore data and information from different sources. For example, generating knowledge through reflexive triangulated inquiry is the combination of the participants' perspectives and responses and their consistency and inconsistency with the local and international research, and additionally the researcher's own direct reflexive understanding and interpretation of the data and research findings (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Therefore, (Patton, 2015) argues that although the focus on the presentation of participants' point of view in qualitative research is already a strong establishment for the background of study with the combination of information from additional data sources such as existing literature and researcher's reflexive mindfulness can further strengthen the research argument.

3.3 Method

The method section explains the criteria for participant selection, recruitment, and the process of data collection. It also presents the analytical framework, interpretive description and the procedure of the collected data thematic analysis.

3.3.1 Selection criteria

The participants were identified through the project selection criteria. These criteria excluded geographical constraints, as the number of suitable participants was unknown at the beginning of this project. Further to this, it was also considered that all cities are comprised of different demographic characters, which reflect different population ethnicities, age groups, vocational choices and career opportunities that may have influenced the participants' different experiences of adopting redemption-self. By having no geographical boundaries, I was able to recruit participants from different New Zealand regions.

The participants were required to be able to understand and speak fluent English and be over 18 years of age. The age restriction was put in place to adhere to the ethical considerations. In New Zealand, at the age of 18 a person is considered to be legally independent from their parents, which signals the person's adulthood (Pollock, 2012). Furthermore, in order to experience full-gang membership, exiting from it and being employed in the social service field for over two years or more was expected to be highly unlikely to occur under the age of 18.

The female members of the gang are under the authority of male members in gang society (Dennehy & Newbold, 2001). Thus, the females' different role in the gang may influence a different experience of desistance and adoption of redemption-self. Due to the limitations of the research the comparison between female and male ex-gang members' experience was beyond the scope of this project.

My decision to use Miller's (1980) gang definition as one of the participant's selection criteria is outlined in the previous chapter's gang definition section (see section 2.2).

To confirm the participants' former criminal gang connection the self-nomination approach was utilised (Esbensen et al., 2001; Junger-Tas & Marshall, 1999; Katz et al., 2005). This approach was devised to compensate prevalent biases in the government's policy generating crime statistic management tools and the multiple drawbacks such as the narrow survey methods that exclude those gang members who

have no criminal background within police crime statistics (Esbensen et al., 2001). Self-nomination approach pays particularly attention to utilising and drawing on the interviewees' self-reports by using the approach to enquire into the measurement of socially condemned delinquent behaviour prevalence, incident, and specific population rates of crime, and the correlation of crime statistics and etiological theories of crime to generate less-biased opinion (Junger-Tas & Marshall, 1999). Katz et al. (2005), therefore, argue that self-reports can be robustly utilised as a measurement of individual's gang affiliation. Furthermore, Junger-Tas and Marshall (1999) argue that due to the more well-rounded approach of inquiry into criminal behaviour, self-nomination research's recommendation are more adequate for the implementation of intervention and treatment programs.

3.3.2 Participant recruitment and sample procedure

Participant recruitment commenced soon after the Ethics Approval (Appendix H) was granted by Massey University Human Ethics Northern Committee. The participant recruitment was executed through different methods. One of these methods included targeting various social service agencies with the Request Letter (Appendix F). These agencies were specifically selected due to my understanding that potential participants might have been employed there. Another method was to utilise my memberships at Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) and Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) to advertise for potential participants (Advertisement – Appendix D). While the former method generated interest amongst half of the recruits the latter method reached a couple of participants.

As outlined in the Guiding Questionnaire (Appendix C), at the end of the interview participants were asked if they could recommend other potential participants, who could fit the research criteria and may be interested in partaking in the research. Through this commonly known method of snowballing (Maltby, 2010; Patton, 2015), one participant was recruited.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommend using a smaller sample size in qualitative research due to the time consuming process of familiarisation and transcription of the data. Following their recommendation, six participants were recruited, which was the maximum number that could be accommodated in this study.

All participants who demonstrated some interest in the study were requested to make contact with me through my Massey University email address or a specific phone number utilised for this research. During the initial contact with the participants, I ascertained that the participants were suitable for inclusion in the research. This first contact was followed by an email, to which the Information Sheet (Appendix A), Consent (Appendix B) and the Guiding Questionnaire (Appendix C) forms were attached to provide further information to the participants about their rights, the research's objects and criterions. Participants with continued interest were asked to sign the Consent Form and electronically return it me. Following the participants' confirmation of their interest, a phone call was made to set up and organise suitable location, time and date for the interviews.

3.3.3 Interviews and information collection

The interviews were aligned with the interpretive description method located within a qualitative paradigm and were aimed to generate an authentic insight into people's experiences (Silverman, 2004). Therefore, the interviews were made up of open-ended questions to allow flexibility for the participants to fully describe their experiences (Speziale, Carpenter, & Lewenson, 2011). Semi-structured interviewing was selected over structured interviews to allow the participants to explain their experiences of gang affiliation, gang desistance and adoption of redemption-self without having any tight constraints on their story telling. Furthermore, semi-structured interviewing contributed to the research topics being covered without following any specific order, and helped participants feel less constrained to disclose richer and deeper account of their experiences (Roberts & Taylor, 1997). Moreover, the application of semi-structured interviews provided a roughly formed guide, which helped my qualitative interviewing skills develop (Patton, 2015).

Initially, all interviews were planned to be conducted face-to-face. However, due to the scattered locations of the participants, time and financial constraints, only two interviews were completed one on one. The rest of the interviews were either via Skype calls or through phone calls. The non face-to-face interviews were conducted at my home when no other family members were present. On the other side of the Skype/phone-line, I ascertained that the participants were alone while the interviews took place. The quality of the interviews conducted via Skype or phone calls, at times, were hindered by two factors. Firstly, I could not observe facial expressions and other body language of emotional feelings. Secondly, the quality of Skype or phone line were compromised and disrupted by the online or phone service. As a result, some interviews had to be restarted, which destructed the flow and the essence of data gathering.

One of the two face-to-face interviews was conducted in the South Island at the participant's workplace. The interview took place afterhours when no other employees were present to interrupt the meeting. The second face-to-face interview took place at the participant's Auckland based workplace. Here an interruption free environment was also provided.

The lengths of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to around 100 minutes and five out of six interviews were audio-recorded. All participants consented to audio recording, which was applied to ensure that I captured all provided information accurately. Only one interview was conducted through phone due to technological issues with the participant's computer. While initially this interview was going to be audio recorded, due to the technological issues, the interview was recorded manually.

Although, former gang membership was one of the participatory criteria, during the process of the interview I was enlightened that having no current gang affiliation meant something different to the participants then it meant to me. The complexity of this stemmed from that participants' understanding of 'ex-gang membership' meant ex-criminal gang membership. For the participants a continued connection with their previous gang networks was not regard as gang affiliation or association in their technical term. Despite the maintained ongoing emotional or social ties with their previous gang networks and gang members, participants expressed that their withdrawal from the gangs' criminal characteristics allowed them

to lead an offence-free life style. Therefore, the study refers to the participants as ex or former criminal gang members.

3.4 Analytical framework

The analytical framework is divided into the interpretive description analytical method that outlines the study's inductive analysis approach based on participants' shared realities and Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic data analysis tool.

3.4.1 Interpretive description

The following aspects of interpretive description led the selection of the analytical framework for this study: the research question development from the existing gap in the knowledge, the lack of adherence to one theoretical framework, the call for the recognition of the influences between researcher and participants and the inductive nature that explores the participants' shared realities from their perspective rather than from an existing theoretical framework.

In qualitative research one of the strategies to inquire and explore change is through interpretive description. Interpretive description does not demand a set adherence to one particular philosophical standpoint (Parahoo, 2014). Consequently, Caelli, Ray, and Mill (2003) warn that generic qualitative methods like interpretive description approach, are lacking epistemological and methodological grounding, which weakens the quality of the research and constitutes to inconsistency within generic qualitative studies. On the other hand, Thorne, Kirkham, and O'Flynn-Magee (2004) argue that interpretive description aligns with the philosophy of constructed and contextual nature of human experience that in essence produces shared realities. These shared realities or phenomena are investigated inductively. Meaning, interpretive description does not begin with an existing theory and explore data that proves or disagrees with this theory but identifies themes and patterns in the

collected data and changes these as data analysis proceeds (Brewer, Harwood, McCann, Crengle, & Worrall, 2014). Through this process, interpretive description finds an accurate description of aspects of society. Hence, Sandelowski (2010) purports that interpretive description is “especially amenable to obtaining straight and largely unadorned answers to questions of special relevance to practitioners and policy makers” (p.337).

Notwithstanding, the interpretive description’s lack of philosophical standpoint and its strong inductive approach, allow firm alignment with a particular discipline. The alignment with a particular discipline generates an acceptance of the discipline’s existing knowledge and its influence on the research. Consequently, the interpretive description outlines the commonalities and the individual differences (consistencies and inconsistencies) between the research and the disciplines’ existing knowledge.

Due to the fact that interpretive description is located within the qualitative paradigm, researchers who utilise this method are required to explore the phenomenon in its own context without disregarding that the phenomenon may not be unique to one context. Furthermore, during the conduct of the study, context is generated between the researcher and participants that calls for attention to the inseparable influence between the researcher and the research participants (Brewer et al., 2014). This enables the researcher to be aware of introspections about personal preconceptions and ideas that crystallise the researcher’s verbal interpretation of discussion with the participants (Maltby, 2010).

Research questions in interpretive descriptive studies emerge from a recognised gap in the past knowledge (Thorne et al., 2004). Therefore, the study’s goal is to offer a systematic summary of a particular series of events that can be easily understood by the audience. The product of the investigation is a conceptual description of thematic patterns in the recognised and characterized researched phenomenon. The research question also indicates the process of sampling and data collection. In descriptive studies data collection occurs concurrently with the data analysis. As a result, data collection and analysis inform each other repeatedly (Thorne et al., 2004). Hence, the transformation of the raw data into findings to

create an interpretive account of themes needs an explicit presentation of the analytical process (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002). Thus, for its flexibility and its ability to explicitly present the analytical process the thematic analysis has been chosen to construct participants' narrations into a rich textual data.

3.4.2 Thematic analysis

In this section, a brief discussion of the advantages of using thematic analysis is offered. This is followed by the presentation of the six steps of Braun's and Clarke's (2006) inductive thematic analysis that has been used to saturate the collected data into a thematic map.

Thematic analysis is deeply embedded in qualitative study designs and used across major qualitative analytic traditions (Boyatzis, 1998). Notwithstanding, the thematic analysis' prevalent use, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that some studies confuse it with different analytical methods. The confusion of thematic analysis with other analytical methods appears to stem from the poor demarcation of thematic analysis and its less rigid theoretical connections. Therefore, Braun and Clarke advocate for the indication of its clear outline in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Tuckett, 2005). In support of this view, Boyatzis (1998) explains that the strength of thematic analysis lies within its flexibility that allows the development of thematised meanings. However, an absence of rigor can contribute to confusion when using the tool.

Hence, Boyatzis (1998) and Braun and Clarke (2006) introduce different types of thematic analysis. One of the commonly used types of this analytical tool is the inductive thematic analysis. Although, Braun and Clarke (2006) recognise "that researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (p.84) they posit that in inductive thematic analysis themes are mainly identified outside of the researcher's theoretical curiosity and analytical preconception. Therefore, the analysis is data-driven, which can produce unexpected answers for the researched

topic.

Furthermore to reduce confusion, Boyatzis (1998) points out that like in any other analytical method skills have to be learnt to effectively follow the coherent stages of thematic analysis. The required skills and the six systematic phases of thematic analysis are succinctly outlined in the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) and are followed in this study to achieve a sound thematic analysis of the gathered data:

First, data analysis commenced straight after the conclusion of the first interview through verbatim transcription of the participant's narration. The transcription of the narrations allowed me to immerse myself in the raw data and be able to reflect on the overall meaning of the transcriptions. The reading and rereading of the dataset contributed to the second phase, in which I started to code by highlighting with different colours those data set features that I thought were relevant and had special connection to each other and the researched phenomena. In the third phase, these significant features and codes of each transcription were then extracted into a list. From this list, different potential themes emerged and were identified and named. The fourth phase started when by linking the relevant data to the themes, the initial version of the thematic map started to show. After revisiting and reflecting on the identified themes, alterations were made to the thematic map in order to better connect the themes to the overall data.

Then, I decided to put the data analysis on hold to let the information sink in. After around a week I returned to read the transcripts and the previously identified themes. This pause in the data analysis enabled me to enter into the fifth phase of thematic analysis and come back to the data with new perspective, which helped the further amendment of existing and the identification of new themes. Consequently, a more chronologically refined thematic map started to emerge that was more aligned with the entire dataset.

For further analysis and fresh ideas the thematic map and its identified themes were submitted to my supervisors. The supervisors' feedback encouraged me to be more attentive to some of the under-developed themes and to further analyse the data set. The refinement of the data set generated the final version of the thematic map. With the help of this map the final phase of thematic analysis was commenced

in which the findings of the study's consistency and inconsistency with the local and international literature was checked and related back to the research question in order to conclude a report. This report formulated the basis of the discussion in chapter five.

In summary, inductive thematic analysis seemed the most suitable tool to analyse data gathered from semi-structured interviews, in an exploratory study, where the participants' point of view is central to the research. My approach to explore the continuum of change, such as gang affiliation, desistance and the adoption of redemption-self, was further strengthened in the method of interpretive description located in the qualitative paradigm and led by the social constructionism theoretical framework. The selected theoretical perspective acknowledges and demands attention to the participants shared realities so the resultant themes are generated through data rather than my own theoretical preconception.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Prior to the commencement of the research the ethics approval was granted by Massey University Ethics Committee. The following principles of The Code of Ethical Conduct of Massey University (2015) guided the research process:

- Respect for persons
 - Informed and voluntary consent
 - Respect for privacy and confidentiality
- Minimisation of Risk of Harm
 - Risk of harm to participants
 - Risk of harm to researcher
 - Risk of harm to groups/communities/institutions
- Treaty of Waitangi
- Avoidance of conflict of role interest
- Storage/Archiving/Disposal of data
- Compensation of participants

Consent and confidentiality

Prior to the interviews and after the initial contact, all participants were given or emailed a copy of the Information Sheet (Appendix A) and Consent Form (Appendix B), which contained detailed information of the participants' rights. By signing and returning the Consent Forms, participants consented to voluntary participation in the research. As part of the interview briefing, the content of the Information Sheet was read out loud and participants were asked if they understood their rights and whether they still wanted to proceed with the interview. During this briefing, it was highlighted to the participants that they were the experts and they can decline to answer any of my questions or they can ask questions from me any time during the interview.

Furthermore, the participants were advised that their personal information would be kept confidential unless risk of harm to themselves or others was disclosed. The emphasis of confidentiality was paramount to alleviate distrust and to create a comfortable environment for the participants. The participants were also advised that their identity would only be known to me and it would be protected with code names. Finally, before starting the interview, I double-checked whether participants still consented to audio and manual recording of the dialogue.

Harm

To mitigate any discomfort that participants could have experienced measures such as participants pausing or stopping the interview, if needed, were put in place and assurance that participants could withdraw from the research without any consequences was restated. As aforementioned, to further minimise any inconvenience confidentiality was provided to the participants. For privacy measures the participants were ensured that code names would protect their identity. Code names were given to participants following a chronological order of participation. For example, the first participant to have been interviewed received the code name of 'A' and the last 'F'. Verbatim transcriptions of the interviews were emailed back to each participant to ensure I captured all information correctly. Additionally, participants

were asked to sign and return the Authority For The Release Of Transcript Forms (Appendix E) if they were satisfied with the quality and content of the transcripts. All participants were satisfied with the transcribed interview.

Prior to the interviews, participants were advised that should they experience any discomfort while recalling sensitive memories, they could seek further support at 24/7 anonymous phone line services such as Anxiety New Zealand Trust and Life Line Aotearoa. In order to protect the participants', their communities' and my integrity the Criminal Disclosure clause was presented in Participant Information Sheet. The Criminal Disclosure clause elaborated on my duty to pass any undisclosed criminal activities and other sensitive information onto my Massey University supervisors for further consideration before the received information was submitted to the right authorities. During the interview briefing, the Criminal Disclosure clause was specifically highlighted and further discussed with the participants. During one of the interviews this clause was referred to when I sensed that one of the participants was about to disclose sensitive and compromising information. Before the participant launched into his story, I stopped the participant, who agreeably changed the topic.

Furthermore, arrangements were made to ensure my own safety when face-to-face interviews were conducted. These arrangements included letting someone know of my whereabouts and the interviews' intended time frames. Additionally, a support person was organised nearby should I have felt unsafe, and I took a muted switched-on phone with me during the interviews. Face-to-face interviews were organised at public places such as participant's work places. Communication with all face-to-face, Skype and phone-call participants was carried out via Massey University email address, a specific research phone number and Skype account. None of my personal contact details were used and disclosed during the recruitment of and the communication with the participants.

Treaty of Waitangi

The phenomena of interest were looked at from the participants' perspectives rather than based on their ethnicity. As a qualified practicing social worker, my practice was informed by a bicultural competent practice framework. This meant that I had a general knowledge of basic Māori tikanga and kawa. This enabled me to provide a culturally respectful space to conduct research. However, additional cultural supervision was organised with a Kaumatua and a Kuia at Hamilton Anglican Action Mission Trust to enhance my general knowledge of Maori tikanga and kawa should I have been in need to conduct a strict culturally appropriate research interview with a potential Māori participant. The Kaumatua's and Kuia's support was affirmed in the Evidence of Consultation (Appendix G).

Avoidance of conflict of role interest; Compensation of participants; Storage/Archiving/Disposal of data

During the participant recruitment process in order to avoid conflict of interest, I ensured that none of the participants had any previous collegial relations with me. Furthermore, all participants were offered a \$20 fuel voucher for their time and travel or both. Those participants who were interviewed via Skype or phone were asked to provide a postal address to post the vouchers to. The participants were assured that all the personal details, audio-recordings, transcripts, and the signed research related forms such as Consent and Authority For The Release Of Transcripts Forms were temporarily kept safely on my password protected computer or in locked cabinet at my home until these forms were handed over to my Massey University supervisor for permanent storage and destruction.

3.6 Summary

In section 3.2, the social constructionist theoretical framework (3.2.1) in conjunction with qualitative research design's (3.2.2) flexibility and critical insight was introduced. These theoretical frameworks were selected to best accommodate and highlight some of the opposing views of gang affiliation, gang desistance and the adoption of redemption-self. To examine first-hand experiences of the phenomena, six ex-criminal gang members who are currently working in social services, as help-professionals were recruited through different methods of sampling and selection criteria (see in section 3.3). Interviews were semi-structured to provide flexibility in participants' information sharing and to guide my qualitative interview skills. The collected data was analysed through interpretive description and rendered into a thematic map following Braun and Clarke (2006) six step thematic analysis method (see in section 3.4). Finally, the ethical considerations (3.5) were introduced to demonstrate the study's adherence to Massey University's ethical requirements.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

“People should have the opportunity to redeem their mana. Even though the systems have judged them, their own people have judged them and walked away from them”
(Carnachan, personal communication, July 8, 2013)

4.1 Introduction

After section 4.2 introduces the six participants, the data analysis’ outcome, the thematic map is presented in section 4.3. The thematic map consists of four overarching primary themes, *Precursors* (4.3.1), *Continuity* (4.3.2), *Exit* (4.3.3) and the *Adoption of redemption-self* (4.3.4). These themes seemed to be coherent across all six transcripts and were selected to best illustrate what motivates a current or an ex-gang member to move towards employment within helping professions. The order and content of the first three primary themes (precursors, continuity and exit) resemble the life-course framework (Pyrooz et al., 2014). Hence, the theme terms follow this order. The fourth primary theme, the Adoption of Redemption-self, follows Healy’s (2014) line of thought in which she explains that desisters generally establish the conventional life trappings, like finding work and stable family-life before pursuing higher order goals such as practicing generative roles. Furthermore, secondary and tertiary themes are identified in order to provide a detailed explanation of the primary themes and their specific concepts. The primary themes and their sub-themes provide ample evidence from the participants’ narrations to extend on and underpin the research question. The themes are not mutually exclusive, but are selected to better extend on the process of adoption of redemption-self by current and ex-gang members. While the participants’ quotes utilised in this study are grammatically or structurally modified for privacy and clarity purposes, all efforts are retained to keep the meaning of the participants’ viewpoints.

4.2 Participants

The six participants' names and other personal details are removed from the study to protect their identity and to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The age of participants vary between 40 and 75. The majority of the participants identify as Māori, however, the study includes two New Zealand Europeans and a New Zealand born Samoan. Due to the lack of geographical limits, participants are from six different urban locations in the North and the South Islands regions. The geographically open study enables me to select participants who had decade long affiliations with different types of gangs or different chapters of larger gangs. The different type of gangs that are represented in this study fall under the Committee on Gang's (1981)⁴ classification of the ethnic and the bikie gangs. Even though participants highlight their honorary gang membership, the longevity of their criminal-gang connections and their remaining lingering ties with their previous gang networks, none of the participants have current or recent gang related offences and all of them are employed as help professionals in different fields such as social work, counselling, youth mentoring and community advisory.

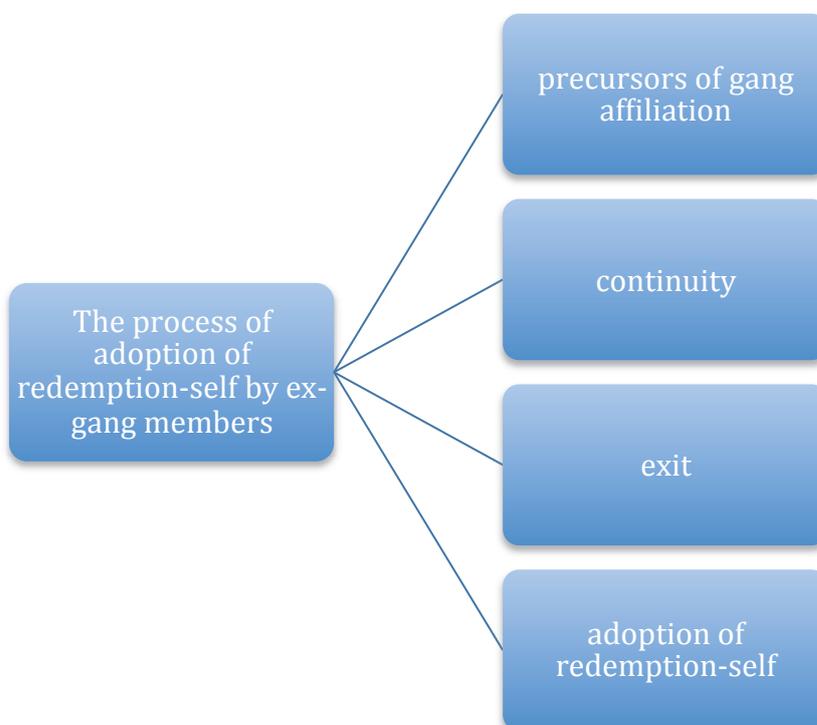
4.3 Findings – thematic map

The thematic map (Diagram 1) is divided into four primary themes, Precursor, Continuity, Exit, and Adoption of redemption-self. Within the first primary theme of Precursors sit two secondary themes, the Dysfunctional family and the environment. Within the Dysfunctional family secondary theme, the two tertiary themes of Abuse (verbal, physical, and sexual) and Parenting difficulties are located. The second primary theme, Continuity, identifies the participants' motivation to join a gang, their positive experience of being part of a gang and the participants' perception of the

⁴ Further details about gang classification are found in Chapter One under the section of Classification, Glossary and Brief history of New Zealand gangs.

conventional world's prejudice against gangs and gang membership. Furthermore, it presents the results of the positive experience in the gang and the negative experience of facing prejudice in participants' durable memberships. The following primary theme, Exit, introduces the psychological processes such as maturation and agency change and sociological factors such as external impacts and prompters, which through correlation appear to bring about desistance. Within this primary theme, the secondary theme of lingering ties outlines the participants' understanding of gang desistance. In the final theme, Adoption of redemption-self, participants account their adaption to a conventional life-style and what triggered the process of adoption of redemption-self. Furthermore, how participants utilise their past experience of criminal gang member experience for the advantage of better service provision is discussed.

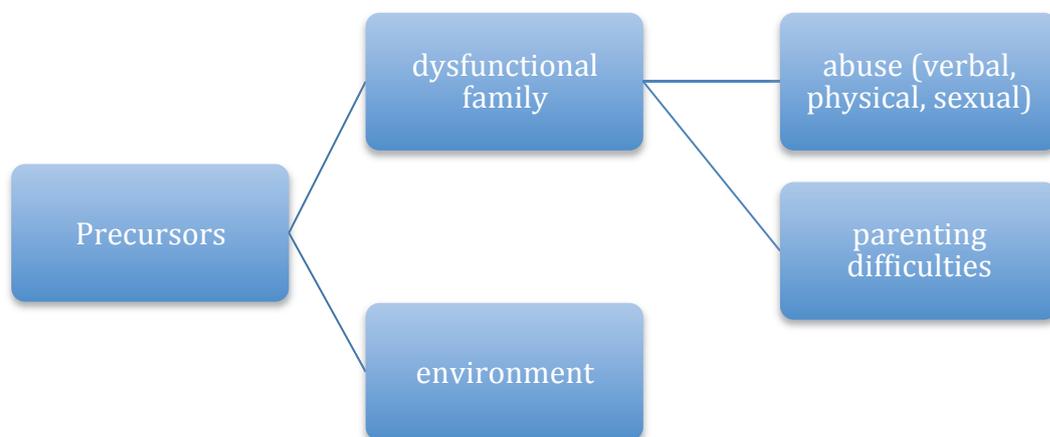
Diagram 1: Thematic map



4.3.1 Precursors of gang affiliation

The first primary theme to be considered is the Precursors of gang affiliation. At the beginning of the interview, participants are asked to revisit their childhood and talk about their experiences growing up. Most participants report negative childhood experiences that are attributed to dysfunctional family related issues, or peer pressure and the neighbourhood environment. According to the participants, these negative experiences contribute to the decision of getting involved in delinquent behaviour. The two identified sub-themes the Dysfunctional family (4.3.1.1) and Environment (4.3.1.2) in *Diagram 2*, extend on the participants' childhood experiences.

Diagram 2: Theme of Precursors and its subthemes



4.3.1.1 Dysfunctional Family

The Dysfunctional family secondary theme highlights participants' family backgrounds and experiences of upbringing in two tertiary themes, the Abuse and the Parenting difficulties. In the theme of Abuse, participants' narrations depict the different type of punishments they have to endure as a child, while in the Parenting difficulties theme focuses on the parents' lack of awareness of their abusive behaviour that create an unstable home environment. Participants point out that these negative features of their early childhood contribute to their later stage anti-social behaviour.

Abuse (verbal, physical, sexual)

During the interview most of the participants talk about experiencing some type of abuse as part of their upbringing. The most commonly endured abuse is reported to be verbal and physical, which at times is fuelled by the parents' alcohol consumption. However, one participant reports to experience sexual deviance in his family. From participants' accounts the following extracts are selected to depict childhood hurdles:

Participant D: I had a father who enjoyed alcohol... I can remember, it seemed to be always me that he would be waking up all hours in the morning. He put a big fist in my face threatening me and threatening to send me into homes et cetera, for stuff that I couldn't remember doing or stuff might have happened weeks earlier, which was never, never ever a major ...

Participant E: ... [home environment] was pretty strict because of the culture. Samoan culture is pretty strict and you know, we did anything wrong it wasn't a telling off it was a hiding ... I loved my mum more than I loved my dad because he was quite a violent man ...

Participant F: ...He [participant's father] ruled us through fear, we didn't get bad beatings but he made us scared of him...

Participant C: ... my father was also sexually abusing his children so we have been trying to block out those bad bits and there were some good bits but not many of them. Our upbringing was challenging...

While revisiting these traumatising moments and experiences some participants' voices fade indicating that they are still connected to these negative childhood memories. In particular, the most vivid narration is provided by Participant D, who lifts his fist close to his own face, enacting his father's drunken and threatening behaviour. The parents' fear-induced childrearing and abusive behaviour towards their children is normally coupled with other dysfunctional traits such as neglect, which is discussed under the next sub-theme.

Parenting difficulties

The participants who as children experience one or more forms of abuse in their family setting, more prevalently report that their parents' lack of knowledge of how to provide a nurturing and accepting environment have affected their behaviour. The participants' understanding of the connection between their upbringing and delinquent behaviour is openly elaborated in their dialogues. This is evident in the following statements:

Participant D: ... back in those days there was the 6 o'clock swill. He [participant's father] would be getting pissed and bringing his mates back and get my mother on our piano, which was in the next room and make a noise in all hours so it was quite a struggle for us...I don't understand how and why I ever did some of the things and the victims I created in the past ... I just can't put my finger on it why I did [create victims], other than my childhood influenced it so much ...

Participant E: ... mainly my dad was in control of my life, and my aim was to get out of that environment and I just did. I was being naughty and trying to go to jail to get away from home ... and then I just got into the trouble being in the gang.

Participant C: ... because what was happening in our house, we spent a lot of time trying to get away, running away and that led to not going to school and petty crimes and by the time we reached 11 or 12 we were made wards of the state and we were taken out of the care of our father and put in homes.

Not only did the experience of abuse in the family settings contribute to the adoption of a later stage anti-social life-style but the sense of neglect and non-acceptance of parent(s) also affect some of the participants' outlook on life. During reflection on the past, these participants openly acknowledge and recognise the precursors of abuse, non-acceptance and neglect, as part of the contributing factors to delinquent behaviours. On the other hand, some participants associate their neighbourhood surroundings to their anti-social behaviour. These environmental influences are further explored in the next theme.

4.3.1.2 Environment

In this secondary theme, the focus is shifted to some of the participants' perceived challenges in their school and neighbourhood environment, where participants have to learn how to physically fend for themselves. Furthermore, the dataset suggests that having family members, friends, or both demonstrating delinquent behaviour incite participants' motivation to follow suit. These connections with delinquent people and the experienced challenges in schools and neighbourhood prepare participants to gain some of the 'streetwise' skills:

Participant B: ... I take my father's colouring so I got ripped a lot for that in a predominantly Māori school, I got ripped a lot for that and I learnt to use

myself effectively with my hands... “you wanna fight call me I’ll fight you” and that was my pakaru that’s, how I was, I didn’t take a backward step and so I got a bit of a reputation of being handy with my fists ...

Participant C: ... after my last year in school, when I was 12, I became basically a transient. So I was between foster homes and boys’ homes and I was mainly with people older than me so, I kinda as a teenager I grew up alone in terms of family but heaps of friends mainly street kids other transients ... Most of us were old enough to go to prison and then we just transitioned into prisons...

Participant F: ... The third boarding school they [participant’s parents] took me to, I met some guys who I got into some fights with. I stepped out a couple of kids...

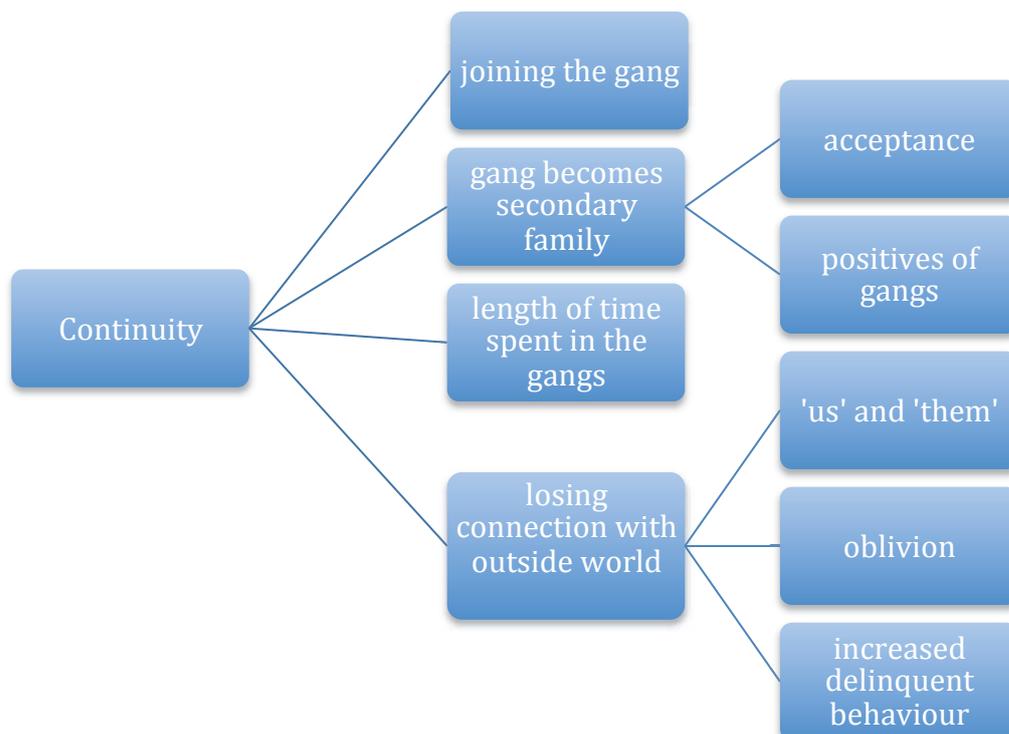
4.3.1.3 Summary

It seems that dysfunctional and demanding family members can trigger individuals to rebel against their upbringing. Additionally, environment can also contribute to the delinquent behaviour. Participants explain that by experiencing no control over their lives while growing up in their home setting, the outside world becomes the place where their frustration can be let loose. Once connected to gang affiliated people, the participants’ discussions suggest that the pre-obtained set of street skills help to gain acceptance in gangs. In the following section, a discussion on the participants’ familiarisation and continued association with the gang is offered.

4.3.2 Continuity

The second theme outlines the participants' gradual acceptance and entrenchment into gang life. In *Diagram 3*, the four secondary themes, Joining the gang (4.3.2.1), Gang becomes family (4.3.2.2), Length of time spent in gangs (4.3.2.3) and Losing connection with outside world (4.3.2.4), highlight the outset and the continuum of the participants' deepening immersion of gang affiliation. In contrast to the common stereotype of gangs, some patterns suggest that participants can recognise the gang membership's positive effects through retrospective reflection. However, the participants' full and durable commitment to criminal gang life-style contributes to that participants' oblivion to the non-gang world. This life-style becomes the uppermost concern while protecting and upholding gang values. Violence, as the medium to ensure the gangs' need for respect is met, increases anti-social behaviour. This is ubiquitously articulated in all narrations.

Diagram 3: Theme of Continuity and its subthemes



4.3.2.1 Joining the gang

This theme continues from the discussions presented in the Environment theme and portrays the participants' young age and their first encounter with the gangs. It is also indicated that all participants in their teens have the desire to belong to a group, where security and acceptance is provided. The following statements exemplify the participants' longing to belong:

Participant B: long story short we beat the crap out of these five Samoan blokes and from that point I knew these fellas were affiliated to [one of the ethnic gangs] but they sort of said, "you know that took a lot of guts from you to do that, because you could have electrocuted us, you could have killed us. Because you did this, you know, we liked your style we were thinking come over and join us" - so I did. I actually I picked up the patch and joined them then as a 16 year old boy...

Participant F: ... I stepped out a couple of kids who had Black Power family members, but my mates on my side had [other gang] family members/mates, and from then on I realised how much I can rely on these guys...

As highlighted above, pre-gang acquired street skills seem to help participants gain invitation into the gang. Fighting skills is a sought-after trait. Those participants, who can fend for themselves exhibit their willingness to participate in clashes with rival gangs. However, combat skills are not always the requirements for acceptance. Spending time, bonding with the members and accepting the gang's operational structure also opens the doors into the gang:

Participant D: When I was 17, I was going out with a girl her friend was going out with this guy called Jim and we both ended up splitting in our relationships. After that me and him hung out quite a bit and then he eventually started getting into motorcycles... that stage I was about 19 ... this new bkie gang started so he says come out for a beer and I went around. I

remember the pub where I met all these other guys there ... one come up I remember he says – “what’s your nickname?” – I went “I haven’t got one” – but I felt these guys were friendly, didn’t ask anything of me, I felt included so I just kept going and kept hanging out ...

Participant C: ... my mother was living in [participant’s current city] and she was associated with the gang as were my two sisters but the president wouldn’t allow me to join because I was too young so it took me a year of asking to join before they accepted me ...

The dataset suggests that all participants’ motivation to join the gang is facilitated by the ambition to belong to a group. Additionally, prior to joining the gang, having had gang related family, friends or both precedes and bolsters the bond that is built between the participants and the gang. In the next theme, this strengthened bond between the participants and the gang is explored.

4.3.2.2 Gang becomes family

After joining and spending a large amount of satisfying time with the gangs, all participants highlight their reinforced bond to their fellow gang members, consequently to the gang culture. The participants’ bonds to gangs are perceived to be strong enough to be compared to their own biological families. The participants’ tightened connection with the gang is articulated in the participants’ language in which reference to the gang, as a ‘family’ or similar words is a common pattern:

Participant F: ... The boys were my family, they were the ones I could count on, no matter what they would come and help me if I was in trouble...

Participant E: ... to me the boys were like my family. It was just a family of boys never mind the girls...

Those participants, who omit the word 'family', emphasise their gang connections with other illustrative words such as 'communes, collective living', 'brotherhood', 'camaraderie' and 'committee'. These words not only suggest the participants' strong, family-like connections to gangs but the participants' full commitment to gangs:

Participant A: ...we were pretty much a peer group who were mainly Māori...there was a whole thing around communes and the sort of alternative living and collective living ...

Participant B: ... The gang culture we had back then was a brotherhood we drank together we smoked Buddha sticks together, we partied together, we womanised together, we fought together...

Participant C: ...I found that with the members we shared similar experiences in our upbringing so there was this kind of unsaid unwritten kind of a camaraderie based on shared challenging experiences...

Participant D: ... just getting on the piss as such having a good time and going for rides and hanging out together really... the gang was like a committee...

The participants' narrations present that socialisation and familiarisation with gang members intensify the participants' connection with the gang. Furthermore to this, participants' realisation of having similar backgrounds to other members facilitates the participants' sensation of acceptance, which is further explored in the following theme.

Acceptance

It appears that the gangs fulfil the participants' need for security and the sense of acceptance and inclusiveness. Participants' quotations highlight their welcome of this experience and the relief that comes with acceptance:

Participant C: I think in retrospect I couldn't put a word on it then but in retrospect it was what I would now consider love, which was a non-judgemental love. I spent most of my upbringing being judged when I went to [the gang] they were the first group of people that didn't judge and just accepted me...

Participant D: ...I didn't get judged, you know I felt included...

Participant E: ...it [being accepted in the gang] was good you know, because I was looking for something you know, searching for something to get away from something else like my dad...

Participant F: ... all the guys who I met in the gang I could connect with them. I felt I was in the right place in the gang. In the gang, I didn't need to prove myself or anything, I didn't stand out I was one of them...

Positives of gangs

Acceptance, which most of the participants were deprived on in their younger years, appears to pull them further into the depth of the gang centred life-style. However, before the participants' total immersion and commitment to gangs is addressed, it is important to note that participants by reflecting on their gang involvements are able to recognise the positives of their gang memberships. The positive aspects of gang membership can be observed in the following quotations.

Participant E provided a substantial account of his self-imposed protective and guarding duty of his 'territory'. When, during a neighbours' reunion, he later addresses his behaviour with his neighbours, they express their appreciation for protection and assurance of neighbourhood safety:

Participant E: I made them [neighbours] feel safe, because they knew me, because I went to school with them. When I first brought the gang out they didn't know how to take it but then they reckon later on the years they felt that our area was protected because I was there, because if I saw something wrong I was there.

The lack of oppression and the perception of the full acceptance by others and the experience of challenges in the gang triggers Participant D to discover and adopt a new identity, which helps him realise his firm standing in his community. The discovery of this identity pushes D further into roles that demand more responsibility taking:

Participant D: I remember hearing a gun had been produced and some of them [other gang members] beaten, but I came in to the gang knowing this too. I don't know why, it didn't seem to bother me, I was always quite shy at school and things like that ... I couldn't put my hand up and talking in front of the class and so, but what I have seen there [in the gang]. That's one thing that been involved in the gang helped me out in some sense I think.

Similarly to Participant D, Participant F also reports that the difficulties of gang life prepared him for conventional life's demands. However, after leaving the gang these new challenges seem less demanding for Participant F. By recognising the persistence he acquired as a gang member, Participant F expresses he can offer positive advice to those who have been struggling with complications of everyday life:

Participant F: ...[after being in the gang] when I moved back to [participant's city] from Auckland I found that people made big issues of something that I

considered only small. I found it easy to help them and put a positive spin on things ...

In the previous three extracts, the participants extend on how their gang affiliation either positively affect the development of a persevering identity or support their community. Participant B also reflects on his personal challenges in the gang but he also makes a note of his journey with other gang related people whose company prompts him to become who he is today:

Participant B: I don't think I would be the person today if I hadn't gone through all those things ... I met some of the most beautiful people I have ever met in my life over a bottle of beer or over a drink. I most probably I would never have met them have I not been in that particular surrounding...

4.3.2.3 Length of time spent in the gang

Most participants report that after connecting to the gang they establish durable memberships, which last for decades. The gang as a family-like setup with its own norms and values facilitate the prolonged membership. The bond between the participants and other members is perhaps forged by the experience of “non-judgemental love” (Participant C). The quotations below, verify the participants’ lengthy gang affiliation:

Participant F: ... I stayed with the gang for 30 years.

Participant E: ... we started in the '60s and I think I pulled out, probably in the early '80s I am not too sure, how long I was in there but I was in there long enough

Participant D: It was about September 1974 when I joined up with them [the gang]... I stopped going or anything to do with the gang in about 1998.

Participant A: I got patched up in 1972 ... I am a life member of the gang

As emphasised in the Joining the gangs theme, participants are in their teens at the time of joining the gang and are well in their 30s when they withdraw from it. However, not all participants cut ties with the gang as Participant A's comment above presents. The phenomenon of participants' continued connections with their previous gang networks is further explored in the theme of Lingering ties (see in section 4.3.3.3). Simultaneously, the perception of acceptance and the sense of segregation from the conventional world perhaps also exacerbate the long-term commitment to the gang. In the following secondary theme and its subthemes, the gang centred life-style's negative impacts are looked at.

4.3.2.4 Losing connection with outside world

As a result of the gangs' perceived positive aspects, almost all participants report that they shift away from conventional world and they narrow their focus on the gang. This increased commitment is demonstrated in the 'Us' and 'Them' and the Oblivion tertiary themes. While in the 'Us' and 'Them' theme participants' perceived negative evaluation of conventional world is presented. In the Oblivion theme, the participants' articulate their absolute obsession and unwavering attention to the gang and its culture. Narrations demonstrate that the participants' life-style is dictated by the norms of the gang, increased violent and other anti-social behaviours.

'Us' and 'them'

During the interviews participants extensively talk about the conventional world's judgement and negative evaluation towards their gangs. This is a reoccurring

pattern in the participants' language that includes labels and terms to emphasise their perceived 'outsiderness'. The use of these terms signals the separation process and points to the fact that the perceived society's stereotypical view of the gang members, as a lesser citizen, reinforces and strengthens the participants' commitment to the gang:

Participant D: ... 1%, citizens were everyone who weren't in the gang, we were the 1%-ers ... we weren't allowed to associate with citizens as they were called ... the club was the club you didn't really have friends outside ...

Participant B: ... I didn't have much faith in the community they have already earmarked me as the scourge of society ... the point is, politicians don't want to talk with the gang-members we are just ignorant, uncouth man who don't know anything about life, you know, and that's their perception...

In the following statements, Participant B illustrates how he embraces the image of the society's view of a gang member. Furthermore, Participant A points out that the society's prejudicial treatment did not stop at the gang members and also involves those who are closely related to them:

Participant B: ... they all took their patches off no-one wore their patches into my parents' home, you know I threatened them if anyone ever did that to me that was like going to the toilet and not washing your hands you just didn't do it ...

Participant A: ... gang members get a bad rep so I had to leave with the bad rep, you know probably it's been harder for my family than it has for me, you know, because they got a lot of prejudicial treatment...

Other participants narrate their total withdrawal from 'outsiders' while being a criminal member of the gang. This kind of behaviour is perhaps exhibited to counteract and at the same time revenge the perceived society's discrimination towards gang affiliation:

Participant C: ... I used to think if you are not in the gang you are an idiot and that was a genuine thought...

Participant F: ... if you didn't have a patch I wouldn't have talked with you....

The participants' perception of society's prejudice generates a mind-set that further pushes the participants into a gang centred life-style. This type of experience seems to even more increase the participants' withdrawal from conventional world, which can be observed in the following theme's quotations.

Oblivion

While revisiting the experience of prejudicial treatment and application of negative labels, the participants recall those moments when they reach total loss of connection with the outside world. This sense of oblivion to the outside world is exemplified in the following quotations:

Participant A: Well, as a young gang leader I was oblivious to what other people thought, I was just completely fucking self-possessed and I didn't ask for permission

Participant D: ... I was very patriarchal my bike had come before my wife and my kids too. My bike and the gang was the thing that's all that mattered I was quite focused on that ...

Participant E: ...when I was with the boys, I couldn't care less if I got into trouble or anything, it was a different atmosphere ... I just couldn't care less about any other person just the boys in my group...

Participant F: ...I was absolutely taken by the gang I was obsessed with it ...

The following statement from Participant E illustrates the depth of criminal immersion in gang life-style. This behaviour exhibits severe indifference and disregard to his own and his children's safety:

Participant E: ... we had no front and back door 'cos' the Police kicked it in, we had too many raids in our house. They were looking for guns and thinking we were making 'meth' and dealing it. My kids were all through that experience and every time the kids heard a door closed they were coming in the room screaming 'cos' they thought it was the Police again. They have seen the Police pointing the guns at me ...

Having the notion of being isolated from the conventional world generates the participants' sense of out-law status. As a consequence of this attitude, the norms of the conventional world appear to have no effect on the participants. Instead, the culture of the gang dominates the participants' lives, where status and respect are held highly, which are often achieved through violence. This heightened violent demeanour is addressed in the following theme.

Increased delinquent behaviour

Increased obsession with the gang and disengagement from conventional society reinforces justification for criminal behaviour. In the previous theme, Participant E's account partly depicts how much instability gang life brought with itself. While drugs caused suffering for some participants, it was violence-fuelled bravado that is ubiquitously spoken about by all participants. Participant A's quotation is selected to illustrate how participants regarded the basic characteristics of the gang:

Participant A: ...Early days of the gangs we were very, very violent...

Violent clashes between gangs seem to be a common phenomenon. It appears that the gangs' basic rules entail the drive for respect and protection of the gang's territory:

Participant B: ...back in those days as I say we feared no-one...there were virtually hundreds of bikies... I said that means every one of us has to take down at least 10 people so I said if you are going down get back up because if you don't take out 10 people I will take you out...

Participant E: ... just go around fighting other gangs letting them know that we were there ...

Participant D: ...the Epitaph Riders⁵ raided them [the participant's fellow gang members] and smashed whoever they could and they smashed the bikes up which was a no, no...so we decided to get them back and that's when this [location of the scene] incident came and I got charged for shooting one of them [Epitaph Riders]...

Participant F: ... It was part of protecting my family [the gang] with whatever we could baseball bats, guns just wasting people with whatever we had. We had to keep our mark up. We had to drive our respect in the community. Back then, it didn't faze me if we had to waste somebody...

Inter-gang related violence is more commonly discussed than infliction of violence onto the participants' communities. However, few participants explain that as part of the initiation process and a profit driven exercise, gang membership facilitates to target non-gang related people:

Participant C: ... In order to be part of the gang I had to commit a crime so I robbed a bank when I was 16 I got caught and put in prison ...

⁵ Epitaph Riders: one of the South Island bikie or motorcycle gangs, further details are in Chapter One under Classification, Glossary and Brief history of New Zealand gangs section

4.3.2.5 Summary

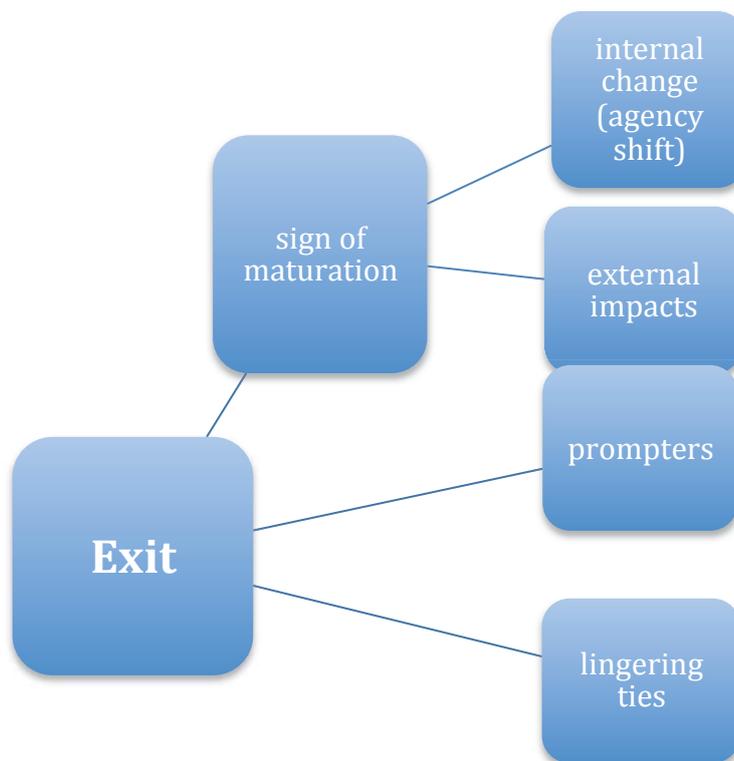
It emerges from the responses of the participants that the desire to belong to a group that offers acceptance and “camaraderie that is based on shared challenging experience” (Participant D) is the significant point for joining the gang. These non-judgemental groups where participants can freely express themselves support participants in exploring and adopting new identities, which have positive effects. However, while immersed in and journeying through the gang life-style, most decisions are made to benefit the gang community. The type of thought process that places the gang before everything else is perhaps supported by the perception of society’s “prejudicial” (Participant A) view of gang members. Moreover, thriving for status and respect, which cannot be gained from the conventional world, all participants’ narrations include imposing violence in one way or another. Notwithstanding the acceptance and camaraderie in the gangs, all participants recognise the downfall of this lifestyle. Seemingly this realisation triggers an initial thought process that perhaps begins the desistance from the criminal characteristics of the gangs. The following primary theme explores the process of withdrawal from gangs.

4.3.3 Exit

The third primary theme suggests that participants are mutually affected by external and internal events that propel them towards desistance. These random correlating occurrences are explored in the secondary-theme of Sign of maturation (4.3.3.1) and its tertiary-themes the Internal change and External impacts. In *Diagram 4*, the domain of this secondary theme is slightly expanded to highlight the theme’s significance in desistance. Furthermore, the Prompters secondary theme (4.3.3.2) is separated from the External impacts theme to demonstrate the difference between desistance generators. Lastly, the Lingering (4.3.3.3) ties secondary theme is linked to this primary theme, as it appears that all participants continued for some time or still

continue to have some social type of connections with their previous gang networks after making a conscious decision to disengage from the criminal characteristics of the gang.

Diagram 4: The theme of Exit and its subthemes



4.3.3.1 Sign of maturation

In the theme of Sign of maturation, the participants' narrations indicate that environmental factors promote agency shift that can eventuate desistance from the gang's criminal aspects. In this study, the process of desistance is looked at from the angle of maturation. However, due to the limited capacity of the study, the

participants' decision to leave the gang at that particular time in their lives is left partly unexplored. In the following two tertiary themes the linkage between the external events and the agency shift is presented.

Internal change:

When participants are asked to reflect on the motivating factors that triggered their desistance from the gang, they mostly talk about an internal desire to make a change around their criminal life-style. The following quotations illustrate this internal motive for change:

Participant E: ... I knew we had to make some changes somewhere, we had to do it and all that and so ... but it took a while but we did make the change...

Participant C: ... I didn't want anyone to go through what I was going through and I kinda felt ashamed that most of my family was in jail and my dad died in jail and so I didn't want to be the dad of a son and I died in jail...

Participant B: ... I had decided that I wanted to make a break and I think that as much as anything I was using it [reconciliation with his daughter] as the catalysis to why I should make a break [from the gang] I needed a reason to and that was the absolute now I've got my reason to leave...

Participant F: ... I couldn't find my place in the gang, my heart just wasn't in it anymore. I started to question my place there, whether I am living a fake life...

External impacts:

But what prompts the participants' internal desire for change? It appears that as a consequence of certain external events an initial thought process is triggered that help the participant to start on a journey that brings about desistance from the gangs' criminal culture. The rational that prompts the participants to exit from gangs varies. However, one of the most common reasons for leaving is seeing family members especially children suffer for the participants' criminal behaviour. The following statements are straight links to the Internal change theme's quotations. By matching them together it becomes clear how participants' thought processes are changed by external events:

Participant E: ... what made me change was seeing my children suffering...

Participant C: ... when the realisation that it [participant's criminal behaviour] was affecting the person that was going to give birth to my first baby I didn't like that, I didn't like that at all...

Participant B: ... I only ever saw my kids from, to that particular woman spasmodically⁶ but here she [participant's daughter] was, came up to me hug me and I had never seen a more beautiful but lonely girl when she ran towards me and I just thought to myself "Where the hell has your father been?" ... I thought nah this is, this is just so, so wrong and so I went home and got my leathers and everything off and said that's it...

Participant F: ... I held my son in my hands, he was the most precious to me. After the birth of my son, my thinking started to change. I didn't want anyone to touch my son...

Apart from seeing family members suffering, participants report that meeting and forging friendships with rival gang members in a prison setting makes them

⁶ Periodically

realise how removed they are from the world outside of their gang connections. In the theme of Us and Them, Participant C outlines how he regards people who are not connected to his gang. In his statement here the change in thinking is presented:

Participant C: ... I met people in prison that weren't idiots and weren't [in participant's gang]. I had to challenge my thinking and having more experiences, experiencing more people from outside of my gang, in a confined environment led me to a kinda wider understanding of humanity really...

Participant B: ...when I turned around there was this redhead fella with this big red beard who was the president the leader of those bikies on that last day that was him he was in jail over there too [in Australia]. He was a barber and I said bugger off if you get me a haircut you'll go lower where my neck is and we became good mates, we became good mates...

Others highlight that their patience runs out and tolerating fellow gang members' criminal behaviour becomes difficult:

Participant D: ...somebody gone set fire to a shed on the neighbour's property and that was my last straw for me because somebody innocent didn't do any harm didn't do anything and his shed was burnt ...

Participant A: ...I just can't tolerate bullshit [the gang dynamics] I can't tolerate all the fucking intoxication you know and all that shit just I don't have any appetite for it anymore I get bored ...

In this study, participants' responses imply that external events influence thought processes but so far, it is unclear why in that particular phase of life participants' reached realisation of the negative consequences of their behaviours. The influence of conventional world that provides further understanding to the phenomenon of desistance is further explored in the next secondary theme.

4.3.3.2 Prompters

In *Diagram 4*, the domains of External impact and Prompters overlap to represent these two themes' correlations. Patterns in the dataset suggest that some of the participants while fully committed to the gang, show signs of being receptive to messages from the conventional world. These messages seem to prompt self-reflection and awareness that is crucial to initiate desistance from gangs' criminal culture:

Participant D: I remember we went through about 3 police liaison officers. I remember one said to me at the time, "I can't figure out how come you are in this. What you are getting out of it [being a gang member]?"... I always remember that, I guess it sort of started me thinking...

Participant C: ...there was a prison officer who to this day, is a good friend of mine and he said to me after one of my visits, he said – "Was that one of your co-offenders?" and I said "What do you mean? No that was my missus bro"...And that kinda got to me. I didn't know what he was talking about so I hit him up later on that day and I said – "What were you talking about saying that was my co-offender?" and he said well, "What I've noticed is that every week she catches a bus up here she gives you smokes and puts \$20 in your account as if she did the crime that you are in here for and that's why I asked whether she was your co-offender." You know, when he said that it dawned on me for the first time in my life that my criminal actions were affecting other people and I didn't like it...

The previous three themes Internal change, External impact and Prompters outlined some of the correlational factors that set in motion the participants' process of desistance from gangs. Although, the scale of the study limits further understanding of the complexity of this phenomenon, maturation is considered responsible for the process of agency shift. This is suggested and underpinned by the dataset that indicates that participants were in their mid-30s or older, an age when

they are more open to internalise critical observation of their behaviour from people in the conventional world. While the previous chapters explore the various contributing factors to participants' withdrawal from the criminal culture of gangs, the following sub-theme discusses the participants' reduced but continued connections with the previous gang networks.

4.3.3.3 Lingering Ties

The Lingering ties secondary theme illustrates the participants' continued affiliation with their gang networks after their withdrawal from the gang's criminal life-style. It appears participants remain in connection with the gang due to the lack of instant, attractive alternative activities in their communities, and due to the bond they build with the members during the decades of membership and camaraderie. In the narrations, participants use phrases such as "*not wearing the patch*" or "*chucked the colours in*" to articulate their decreased membership and non-adherence to the criminal culture of the gangs. These phrases suggest participants' withdrawal but it is clear that ties with the gang are sustained for a long time before cutting them completely:

Participant B: ... one of the brothers said "You've come back to take the lead again" I said "No"... "I have got a wife now." I made a clean burst of it, I don't want to go back there. So I didn't because I wanted to work...I used to work in various jobs but in the evenings I used to bounce on the hotels and quite often [in this pub] the gang used to drink so when a fight broke out obviously I always levitated towards my bros but I wouldn't wear the patch so I used to just 'advise' them ... but I wouldn't actually take up arms. On other occasions, I'd go over to their pad on my days off or after work and kick back with a few ales or couple of joints or something like that, I mean, I did associate with them but I did not wear the patch...

Participant D: I threw my colours in, that was it I chucked that in but I still did what I did in the past associated with them went there as a nightclub, even

went for the odd ride right up to the North Island with them as a supporter. I had the T-shirt, they allowed me to keep my [gang] T-shirt and I was the only one they let do that...

Other participants advise that their connection with the gang remain current, however, they highlight the quality of the gang affiliation has changed significantly. Being an honorary member or someone on the periphery of the gang appears to be accepted when choosing to lead a conventional life-style. To remain as an honorary member is perhaps due to the decade long forged bond between the participants and the gang:

Participant E: Well, I haven't completely cut the ties because I still see them now and then and I still know the old members, the original members...yeah, they still in it [gang] and we get on well ... we are still good old friends and that's not going to change...

Participant C: ...I have never been back to jail since, since I made a decision not to commit crimes... it's not always clear for everyone [in the gang] that you are no longer a criminal you don't wear a badge that says that but when they saw that I was working in areas that was trying to help people getting out of trouble then less pressure was put on me to participate in anything criminal...

Participant F: ... even though I am honorary member I will never wear the patch again ...

4.3.3.4 Summary

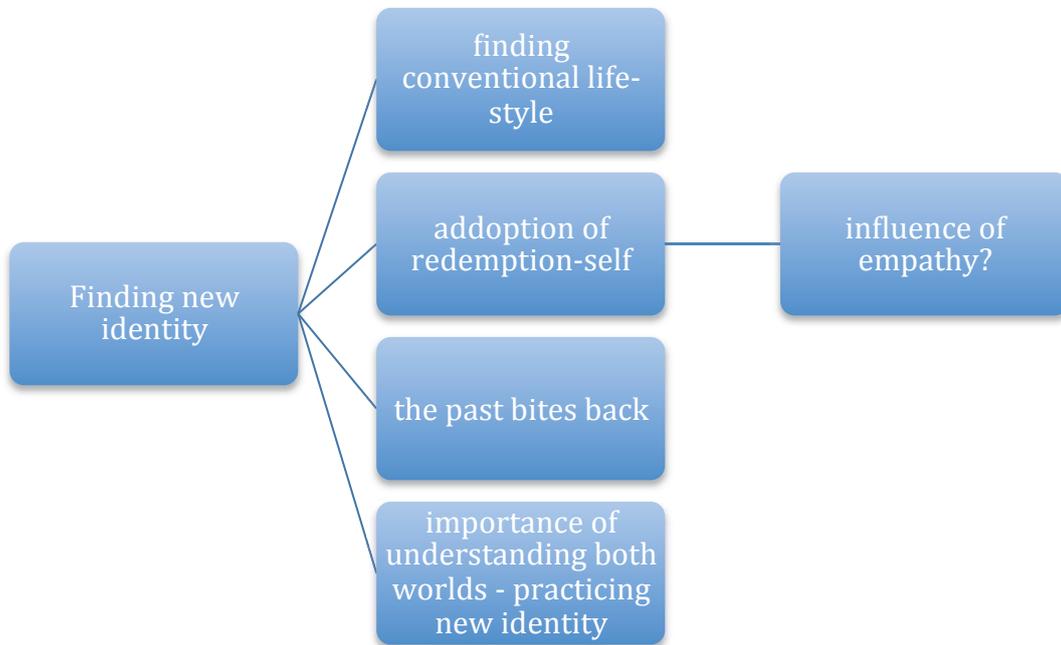
After so many years of having tight connection with the gang, desisting from it doesn't appear to be an easy process. The participants' narrations underpin this

challenging process. For participants exiting does not completely mean to cut ties with the gangs permanently. Section 4.3.3.3 highlights that even after leaving the gangs participants remained or still remain in contact with their previous gang networks. However, participants clearly articulate their withdrawal from the obligation of criminal gang culture that essentially contributes to establishing a conventional life. The process of withdrawal is explored in the Sign of maturation theme (4.3.3.1), whereby the cognitive and internal changes that are sparked by external impacts and Prompters (4.3.3.2), generate an initial thought process towards desistance. These closely related occurrences do not only impact and influence the shift in participants' thinking towards desistance, but it appears that they also prepare the participants for the next step in their journey, which is to find and establish a new identity.

4.3.4 Finding a new identity

The last primary theme's focus revolves around the process of Adoption of redemption-self. Section 4.3.4.1 and 4.3.4.2 discuss what factors might have contributed to the participants' motivation to change their paths towards a helping profession. This process is further elaborated in the theme of Influence of empathy? Then the participants' difficulties and challenges during the process of applying redemption-self is explored in section 4.3.4.3. Finally, the Importance of understanding both worlds and, practicing new identity theme (4.3.4.4) outlines the benefits and the advantage of the participants' 'past walks'. This theme also explores the inherent connection between the community's positive reception of service provision and its flow-on effect to the participants' unwavering commitment to new conventional life-style.

Diagram 5: The theme of Finding identity and its subthemes



4.3.4.1 Finding conventional life-style

As a result of reduced connection with gang networks, the participants gradually increase active participation in mainstream society. Going back to old hobbies, discovering faith in religion or finding employment that has substantial meaning, support the participants in finding alternative avenues to find acceptance in the conventional world:

Participant D: ...it was quite significant for me about '91 when I started getting into motorcycle racing...I built a motorcycle and I was road racing it, you know on the racetrack and then I stopped smoking too. I was still with the club then but started to concentrate on my racing and so when I gave the club up racing had become a life. I was dedicated to that and enjoyed it found a whole new group of other people ...

Participant B: ... when I became a Christian, I knew at that stage that I had to let everything go and when I went to the church and made this commitment ...

Participant C: ... after I got out of prison I was given the opportunity to teach Kapa Haka at an intermediate school and I used that opportunity to look for 11 and 12 year old [participant himself] at this intermediate school and every year I found them. So I just did whatever I could, I engaged with their parents I engaged with their teachers talked about how I had a fair idea of the road that they [participant's clients] were on and what was at the end of that road and did what I could to help them get off that road and do something better ...

In the previous statements, participants indicate that finding meaningful activities that provide sense of support and acceptance encourage participants to remain on the law-abiding path. It appears from the transcripts that not all participants start employment in social services soon after leaving the gangs. Rather, once they establish conventional life trappings such as family and employment of sorts, most participants talk about their motivation to work with people. In the following theme, participants extend on what has motivated them to redeem wrong doings.

4.3.4.2 Adoption of redemption-self

Participants' responses imply that seeing their family members suffer for their criminal behaviour is a preceding factor to the awareness of the wider implications of their wrong doings. Participants by extending their generative attention to their community then adopt redemption-self. Additionally, the realisation of the acquired knowledge from the past supports participants, in those areas of social services where they feel, they can most effectively service their clients:

Participant C: ... I didn't want anyone to go through what I was going through ...it started me on a journey of trying to stop young men ending up in the same place where I was...

Participant E: ...What motivated me was that, that I'd been there and I'd done that [being a patched member of the gang] and back in our days if we needed someone to talk to, no-one was there really...

Participant B: ...I am in [the participant's city] now and the reason why I am in [city] because I brought the gang here in 1972, they didn't have no gang here... when I came back from Australia, they had one of the strongest chapters of the [ethnic gang] here and that all stemmed from that time when I took my boys here so that's why I am here in [city] that's why volunteer my time with this community trust. I mentor a lot of these hard kids who have no direction...

These responses point out the participants' passion to prevent the next (younger) generation from ending up "in the same place where" (Participant C) they were. This generative behaviour drives the participants to guide and protect the next generation, consequently provides positive contribution to their communities:

Participant F: ... when we were with gang I saw that we destroyed our communities by selling drugs ... I saw the damaging effect of our dealings, all the violence in the community that the drugs caused. And we were behind that, there were legislations coming out to stop the drugs and us selling that to our whānau. Now I would like to right the wrong and undo all that harm we caused in the community with the drugs. I feel I need to give back for what I have damaged and this drives me every day...

Participant D: ... I wanted to work with men coming out of prison because of my history, my past, I believed I could connect and help make a difference and in the end I did, I did work for [one of the agencies]...

These statements outline the participants' motivation to adopt redemption-self, but what influences ex-gang members' motivation to become help-professionals and make their career choice? Similarly to the notion of desistance, the process of adoption of redemption-self appears to be more complex than what this study can explore within its limits. However, an emerging pattern leads to the understanding

that participants as young children experiencing and seeing empathy can trigger their motivation in their adult stage to choose a career in the help-profession. An explanation to this childhood influence is offered in the next theme.

Influence of empathy?

The dataset suggests that participants learnt and encountered empathy during their upbringing within their family setting, the very same place where difficulties are also faced. By recalling and revisiting their childhood events the participants are able to compare their compassionate being of their core selves to those family members who exhibit empathy and helping traits. The following statements highlight how participants regard their parents' positive personality traits as a beacon in their journey of agency shift:

Participant D: ...my mother was a kind and giving person and I guess that's what I want to be too...

Participant B: ...I had a loving mum and dad who weren't critical of me even when I was doing wrong. This was coded through to my own children. My dad said, you know I didn't like a lot of things you did, I didn't like a lot of things you said, I didn't like a lot of things you portrayed he said but I loved you because you were my son... I look back when I used to go to court it was always mum and dad that were there at the court house with me didn't say anything but just there. So having a mum and a dad was a big thing

Participant A: ... very protected environment, good education, we worked hard, strong social justice ethos in the home...

The Participant E's previous comments make clear that as a teenager he does not see eye to eye with his father. On the other hand though, it is Participant E's father who exhibits empathy and from whom Participant E learns about generative actions:

Participant E: ...he [participant's dad] knew the family of the kids, you know, the parents kicked them [children] out like that, they were only not going to school and that. He'd [participant's father] just tell to come and stay over for a few nights and he'd send them [children] back home while the parents calmed down...

Although the adoption of redemption-self process appears to be more complicated than this study can accommodate, the study indicates that childhood experience of empathy in family setting generates participants' adoption of redemption-self in adulthood. However, the redemption-self process would not exist without the participants' experience of gang-membership, which causes setbacks for some participants who attempt to become an accredited professional. These challenges are discussed in the next theme.

4.3.4.3 The past bites back

By practicing generative actions in their community and adopting redemption-self participants show interest in extending their knowledge of helping professions on to a professional level. It appears that participants with symbolic gang affiliations and historic criminal records tend to face obstacles from education providers. The following statements highlight the hurdles participants face while trying to be an accredited employee:

Participant F: ... I tried to complete social service training but they didn't accept me because of my convictions. I tried law as well but then they couldn't promise me that I could practice at the end so there was no point in going through law degree...

Participant C: ... I wasn't allowed to undertake that social work degree and they decided because of my affiliations I wasn't allowed to study and it wasn't until I appealed it. They have reconsidered it. I saw this as an opportunity

rather than a challenge. In my second year, I had to enrol again I was challenged again and now in my third year I was challenged again and yeah it's an ongoing challenge and but it is something that I have grown used to...

The previous two comments illustrate the participants' comments whose current honorary memberships and historic criminal convictions cause additional requisites or a decline in entering qualifications. Compared to Participant B who successfully enters into professional training but in order to do so he makes sacrifices:

Participant B: ... Well, I think if I had done my studies in [location of participant] where I was the 'pres' it would have been difficult but I did all my training down at [location of education provider] where sort of my extended whānau knew who I was but all those who were doing the tutoring and training did not know who I was and so I was just one of the students if you like, I became very reclusive towards those who did not know much about me. It was in my best interest not to open up too much about myself...

Despite the challenges, participants express their commitment to practice new identity. This new identity utilises elements of the participants' past gang experience and it is fed by the community where they practice and the positive reception of the participants' service provision. Participants turning their experiences to their communities' benefit are discussed in the following theme.

4.3.4.4 The importance of understanding both worlds and practicing new identity

Historic and symbolic gang affiliation hinders some participants' interest in continued professional development. Despite the educational organisations' opinion, participants regard their "*past walks*" (Participant C) as an advantage in their social service provision. Furthermore, regardless of the challenges, participants do not seem to stop from practicing new identity and claim that past gang experience helps to

build rapport and relate to their clients. This new identity that is formulated by the agency shift and the adoption of redemption-self, generates the immediate community's positive reception of the participants' service. Simultaneously, the community's positive evaluation seems to effectively encourage participants to sustain this lasting new identity. The following quotations exemplify this reciprocal influence between the participants' new identity, practice and positive reception of their service from the community in which they work:

Participant E: ... YJ⁷ kids are more open to talk to me, you know, because they know who I am. I just talk to them about my experience and the consequences and where it got me...

... I will still be a mentor and a caregiver and still doing the same thing. Just helping people, you know ... that's what we are here for to help each other and help people grow and that's what we are supposed to do...

Participant C: ... I was asked by the [gang] members, you know to help, to see if I can help their young people, their children stay out of trouble. It was a lot more comfortable for them to talk to me about their challenges than talk to a mainstream social worker...

... Not just people from our community and not just in regards to helping young people, I get approached by organisations that struggle to engage with what they would consider hard to reach communities [gangs] so they talk to me about how they can go by doing this successfully...

Participant F: ... I can see them [clients] in similar situation I was in. When I talk with alternative school kids I see them as myself. I try not to preach them because that wouldn't work. ... I used my past walks a lot and I usually tell

⁷YJ: abbreviation of Youth Justice system, further details are provided in Chapter One under Classification, Glossary and Brief history of New Zealand gangs section

them about the decisions I used to make that destroyed my life in the past. Where my thinking was when I was a 'patch member' and where I am right now. And I hope they can pick up what I am saying... I realised now that I had to go through all this to be here. I hope that somebody will pick up what I say and I can help their lives and eventually they will make some healthy choices. I will be continuing to talk to people until I can't talk anymore ... I am very committed to get out there and talk to our people it is my past that drives me. It now makes sense why I had to go through all this.

Participant B: ... people in a prison or drug and alcohol setting would listen to me because they had that understanding that this fella has been there he's got credibility ... they [clients] would ask for me specifically, "No I want you, you because you will understand where we are coming from" and so in the same way it [gang experience] became like a skeleton key, I could get into places where other people couldn't. My credibility was looked upon once I became qualified in my job, but my credibility was actually from my past walk.

... I have no intention to leave [the job] I will stay here and just keep ticking on.

These quotations highlight the participants' past experiences that they have in common with their clients, such as having had dysfunctional family background, having been a member of a gang, having exhibited delinquent behaviour, and having suffered from alcohol and/or drug use problems. These shared experiences appear to feed the participants' perception of an acquired advantage that means they are able to connect with clients, who (according to the participants) are more receptive to the participants' service due to the similar life events they have experienced. The positive feedback received for the service they provide seems to maintain participants' interest in their field. The interconnection between participants' generative actions, the service users' positive feedback and the participants' sense of worthiness for providing sound and effective service seem to sustain the redeemed identity.

4.3.4.5 Summary

These statements point to the fact that participants have gained a different outlook on their lives and they have been practicing an identity that not only serves their community but serves their inner peace and fulfils their new image. To find and adopt this new identity participants perhaps have been triggered by family members' empathy that they are now replicating by providing support to their wider community. In order to provide service effectively, participants highlight the significance of their 'past walks' in the gang. However, participants express that to get to where they are today they had to go through challenges and make sacrifices. Some of the challenges the participants report stem from their disclosed lingering connections with gangs and criminal convictions, which according to the participants are in conflict with the educational providers' interests. As a consequence, participants explain that their intention to enter into accredited programs and employment is hindered. Despite these challenges participants maintain their focus on practicing generative actions and redemption-self, which indicates that participants have no desire to return to their 'past life' even if lingering ties remain with gang members.

4.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the four primary themes that emerge from the transcriptions of the six participants' interviews provide an overall account of what motivates ex-gang members to become a help-professional. The first three primary themes, Precursors (4.3.1), Continuity (4.3.2), and the Exit of the gang (4.3.3) closely follow Pyrooz et al.'s Life-course framework and give an insight into the participants' pathways. In section 4.3.1, the dataset points to the experienced challenges in the family (4.3.1.1) and environmental settings (4.3.1.2), which seem to contribute to the participants' later stage inclination to affiliate with and join the gang. It appears that these pre-gang experiences equip the participants with necessary street skills that are welcomed in the gangs. Highlighted in the Continuity theme (4.3.2), the participants emphasise that

the primary allure of the gang is the unconditional acceptance and comradery provided by fellow gang members (see in section 4.3.2.1). These aspects of the gang not only trigger further commitment but the discovery of positive new identities (see in section 4.3.2.2). As per the dataset, the more commitment the participant has to the gang, the further they withdraw from the conventional world (see in section 4.3.2.4). While experiencing this one-sidedness or oblivion, the participants recall the need to demand respect through offering violence to rivals. However, it is evident from the dataset that external factors such as seeing family members suffer due to the participants' criminal behaviour, making friends with people from opposing gangs or being prompted by an 'outsider' generates a shift in thinking that leads to the process of desistance. This process is explored in section 4.3.3. In the Exit primary theme, relational connectedness between the external events and the agency shifts are explored (see in section 4.3.3.1 and section 4.3.3.2). Furthermore, this theme draws attention to the understanding of what is considered 'desistance' from the participants' perspective in section 4.3.3.3.

The fourth primary theme, the Finding a new identity (4.3.4) is separated from the Exit theme due to its comparability to Healy's argument of the process of redemption-self adoption. While it is unclear from the dataset what the underlying factors are to the core motivation of Adoption of redemption-self (4.3.4.2), the notion of the Influence of empathy? (4.3.4.3) emerges as a possible explanation for the adoption of redemption-self. In the section of 4.3.4.3, the narrations point to the fact that participants may have adopted redemption-self as a result of childhood exposition to compassionate trait of family members. However, it would be incorrect to think that this is the only factor that drives the participants to shift their thinking towards adoption of redemption-self. Due to the scale of this study, it is not entirely clear what other factors influence participants to adopt and practice redemption-self. Furthermore, the participants' accounts suggest that the experience of gang-affiliation hinders their attempt to enter into educational programs (4.3.4.3). However, participants explain that by utilising their 'past walks' or experiences they managed to provide effective service to their clientele. Finally, the dataset suggests in section 4.3.4.4, that the positive evaluation and acknowledgement of the participants' service provision given by the communities in which participants practice, feeds into the

participants' continued practice of redemption-self and helps to maintain the participants' effective service provision

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The thematic map construed from the collected data indicates that ex-criminal gang members are able to successfully transform into help professionals. This transformation is presented in a continuum that in the thematic map is divided into four main themes: the precursors, continuity, desistance from gangs and the adoption of redemption-self. The key points of these primary themes are summarised and presented in section 5.2. Following this summary, in order to place the study in context with the New Zealand and international research the section 5.3 offers a detailed account of the consistencies and inconsistencies of the key findings of this study with local and international literature.

5.2 A brief overview of the key findings

The emerging patterns in the previous chapter, suggest that the participants experienced difficulties during childhood and early teens in their home and social settings. By reflecting on these experiences participants linked their negative childhood experiences to their later stage, teenage gang affiliation. Once connected to the gang, the experience of non-judgemental acceptance and other positive factors supported the participants' prolonged membership of the gang. According to the participants, their full-immersion in the gang world coupled with their oblivion to the outside world facilitated negative evaluation and stereotypical view of the conventional world. Accordingly, this perceived prejudice further assisted participants' decades-long membership.

Participants explained that part of their gang culture was based on camaraderie, status and demand for respect. These values of the gang were mainly upheld by offering violence to rival gangs and at times to the non-gang world. The lack of attractive activities in the conventional world also seemed to hinder participants' desistance from gangs. However, it appeared that by reaching a certain age (mid-adulthood) participants were more receptive to external events such as less tolerance towards violence, seeing innocent people and family members suffering as a result of participants' delinquent behaviour. Maturation as an underlying cause of this process mixed with the external events appeared to trigger an internal shift towards more pro-social behaviour. The self-awareness and realisation of negative consequences of anti-social behaviour on the participants' family and community encouraged and supported the participants' decision to gradually move away from the criminal nature of the gang networks. It appeared that the process of severing links with gangs and its members took decades. However, not all participants cut ties and lingering connections in various forms with the previous gang networks remained regardless the participants' reformed thinking and life-style.

Moreover, losing tolerance towards violence and the recognition of the negative consequences of the criminal behaviour not only supported the participants' withdrawal from the criminal nature of the gangs but also signalled the participants' initial steps towards redeeming the caused harm. Furthermore, it appeared that participants commenced to promote pro-social behaviour within their family settings by being preoccupied with the establishment of stable family life-style and the focus on the spouses' and children's well-being. By recognising the advantages of having experience in both worlds (criminal-gang and conventional worlds) participants extended their generative attention to the wider community, which presented itself in mentoring troubled youth, counselling and social working people released from prison.

Initially, practicing as lay help-professionals such as volunteers or unqualified mentors, participants reported positive experiences of working with clients in their fields. Disadvantages of gang and criminal history were only encountered when enrolment into accredited programs to enhance academic knowledge of preferred help-profession was sought. However, the received clients' positive feedback for

service provision and the drive to right wrongs, motivated participants to remain in the industry. Hence, it appears that clients' positive feedback and the rewards of the job are more substantial to maintain an enthusiastic help-professional identity than the discouragement of the obstacles of education and policy providers. This leads to the understanding that these people regardless of the restrictions they face will continue to provide service to prevent others from "ending up in the same place where" they were (Participant C).

These key findings have emerged from six New Zealand ex-criminal gang members' narrations. In order to place the findings of this study in New Zealand and international context the emerging patterns are further analysed by exploring consistencies and inconsistencies with the local and international research. This discussion is presented and reviewed in the following section.

5.3 Discussion of key findings and their consistencies and inconsistencies with local and international studies

Following the order of the primary themes in chapter four, consistencies and inconsistencies between this study's findings and international and local research are presented. Firstly, the seemingly consistent overseas and New Zealand research findings of 'precursors' of gang affiliation are examined in the context of this study's findings. This is followed by the analysis of the findings within the referenced literature's understanding of the continuation and the immersion into gang life. Then, the third and fourth primary themes are addressed within the referenced literature in order to generate further understanding of the complexity of the gang desistance and how adoption of redemption-self have been understood and experienced by the participants.

Precursors of gang affiliation

Most participants reflect on their childhood as a phase where they experienced difficulties in their home settings and with the care provided by their parents. These perceived difficulties are partly construed by the frequent verbal and physical abuse inflicted by one or both of the participants' family members. The negative effects of different forms of child abuse on a teenager or adult have also been recognised as precursors to delinquent behaviour. In particular, the studies of Zingraff et al. (1993), Smith and Thornberry (1995), Hawkins et al. (1999) and Nee et al. (2013) find similar patterns to the current study. These authors suggest that youth who have been physically, verbally or sexually abused at home are more likely to commit crime and adopt violent behaviour than youth who have a stable upbringing. The findings of this study and the arguments offered in the literature underpin my own experience in the reintegration social work field. Whereby, adult male clients retrospectively often linked their delinquent behaviour to the experienced physical, verbal and sexual abused suffered under their parents' or caregivers' parenting style. Furthermore, my father's alcohol abuse and explosive behaviour was my possible trigger to pursue the culture of punk.

Another limitation in caregiving is parental neglect, which appeared to be just as significant of a precursor to anti-social behaviour as verbal, physical and sexual abuse. Those participants who disclose being subjected to abuse, also tend to extend on experienced childhood neglect that often eventuate by participants' parents' lack of concern for their children's safety and physical and emotional upbringing. The findings of Widom (1989) underpin this study's claim that those young people who have been physically and emotionally neglected are likely to act anti-socially later in life. In addition to neglect, participants articulate that the lack of nurturing and accepting parental care have also affected their behaviour. Hawkins et al. (1999) find it important to separate poor family management from neglect. According to the authors, parents can provide basic care but failing to accept, nurture and understand their child's needs can generate emotional distance between the child and the parent. The phenomenon of proximate separation is proven to significantly increase the child's later stage anti-social behaviour (Máté, 2003).

The emerging patterns of physical, verbal and sexual abuse and parental neglect from the literature and this study's findings strongly evince the links between the participants' negative experiences of their upbringing and their anti-social behaviour. By reflecting on the negative childhood experiences in the home settings, participants themselves are able to recognise the link between the received parental care and their later stage delinquent behaviour. These findings are straightforward and consistent with the literature both from New Zealand and overseas (Campbell, 2011; Hawkins et al., 1999; Moffitt, 1993). They clearly indicate that there is a high chance for someone to exhibit delinquent behaviour if the received parental care is poor.

However, not all participants reported abusive home settings. Some participants pointed out that they enjoyed their parents' company and reported them to be compassionate and providing sufficient emotional and physical care for them. These participants tended to associate their immediate childhood environment (school, neighbourhood) that created the need to physically fend for themselves. The blooming youth gangs that often exhibited violence to non-members made the participants' neighbourhood and schools insecure. This consequently led participants to align themselves with one of the neighbourhood youth gangs. Participants often talked about physical clashes with rival gangs that contributed to learning the skill of being handy with their fists. This finding is consistent with the studies of Hawkins et al. (1999) and Moffitt (1993) on environmental influences on delinquent youth behaviour. They found that young people who were surrounded by delinquent peers and family members, or both, exhibited increased antisocial behaviour. Moffitt (1993) further argued that if antagonistic behaviour is not corrected effectively in due time it could gradually develop into an anti-social personality coupled with dearth of pro-social skills. Furthermore, people with an antisocial personality experience negative reactions from the pro-social environment. This was evident for the participants, who talked extensively about their difficulties with conventional world norms such as their tendency of entering into physical fights, which was perceived to be condemned by pro-social groups.

This research has established that those who adopted redemption-self in adulthood fitted the literature's identification and descriptions. This often associates gang-affiliation with the reception of inadequate childcare such as abuse (physical,

verbal and sexual) and neglect and the influence of immediate environment such as youth gangs in neighbourhood and schools. Likewise, in the literature, these findings also demonstrate that both the environmental factors and weak parental care can influence the propensity to make links with anti-social groups in their immediate environment. Therefore, Moffitt's (1993) argument convincingly signals that youth who have fallen through the cracks of society's social network normally find acceptance in the gang with like-minded people. The following section discusses the process of joining and immersing in the gang and uses the wider context of referenced literature.

Continuity (joining the gang)

As aforementioned, this study follows the phases of Pyrooz et al.'s (2014) life course framework, where the continuity phase is closely related to and literally flows from the onset phase. This study's findings support this model. The dysfunctional family factors such as abuse (physical, verbal and sexual), neglect and non-acceptance and the environmental factors such as association with delinquent peers or family members were the significant precursor for future gang affiliation. This was also recognised by the participants who regarded the factors of the onset phase as an influence to seek for a group where non-judgmental acceptance and security was provided. In the work of Hawkins et al. (1999) and Thornberry et al. (2003), the flow from the onset phase into the continuity phase of gang affiliation was recognised but further argued that the bond between peer relations tend to precede gang-membership. The findings also support Hawkins et al. (1999) and Thornberry et al. (2003) in the contention that peer relations are the most influencing factors for gang affiliation due to the bond forged between individuals.

The arguments advanced by Hawkins et al. (1999) and Thornberry et al. (2003) make sense not only in the context of the study's findings, but also in relevance to myself, and I believe to many others who are part of any social groups such as a church or non-gang motor cycle clubs. Further to this, I can clearly recall the time when I started to hang out with my group of friends who were labelled

'punks'. This was well before I started to follow their life-style, listen to the particular music and wearing particular clothes to express my philosophical orientation. My initial friendships with a couple of members opened the door to a whole new group of people, where acceptance into the group was gained through spending large amounts of time together and following the group's (un)written norms and rules.

Inconsistencies between overseas gang literature and local gang literature are evident when it comes to the discussion of the length of gang memberships. While international literature sees gang-membership as a short phase in a young person's life (Decker et al., 2008; Pyrooz et al., 2014), local gang researchers such as Gilbert (2013), Lala (1996) and Tamatea (2015) contest that as a result of the norms and values of the New Zealand gangs often resemble the communities within which they exist, members tend to have decades long or life-long memberships. The local researchers' observation is followed by the study's findings where participants likened their previous gang networks to their family or brotherhood and specifically emphasised the forged bond with the other members. Often this strong bond was partly attributed to the participants' prolonged gang membership.

As previously highlighted, the provision of non-judgemental acceptance and sense of security were part of the reason why participants joined the gangs. Notwithstanding, these emotional and physical supports both local and international studies tend to emphasise the negative consequences of gang membership (Tamatea, 2015; Thornberry et al., 2003). However, some local contemporary researchers Campbell (2011), Gilbert (2013), and Faleolo (2014) recognise the positive contribution of the gang membership to the members' further development of specific skills and emotional perseverance. These positive aspects of the gangs were also observed in this study. Participants through retrospective reflection on their past criminal gang affiliation were able to articulate some of the good things they gained from their gang affiliations. Most of these positive aspects lay in the human connections and the sense of reassurance from and full reliance on each other. The perception of these emotional aids appeared to contribute to the sense of security and camaraderie. On the other hand, during gang affiliation by taking on new responsibilities participants were able to form new identities, which were narrated to be more resilient towards adversities. The process of forming new identities was often

supported and encouraged by the sense of underlying non-judgemental acceptance by the other members.

The conventional world prejudice towards gang members seems also to be instrumental in driving the participants' new resilient identity. It appears that committed gang membership brought about negative perceptions of the conventional world. The participants' perception of the conventional world's negative evaluation resonates well with the research of Kelsey and Young (1982). In their work, the authors highlighted that the gangs' withdrawal from New Zealand conventional society was mainly triggered by the excessive scrutiny of the media and police suppression. Kelsey's and Young's (1982) findings underpin the participants' experience of the non-gang world's negative judgement that partly led them to immerse further into the gang where acceptance and non-judgement was freely provided. Consequently, participants perceived themselves as outsiders and commonly reported their segregation from the non-gang world. Although not to the extent of the participants, I also experienced the negative evaluation of the conventional world due to the life-style and look I re-presented when closely affiliated with a punk group. People who did not know me thought I was a 'junkie' or a 'homosexual' in the words' pejorative meaning. Even though I had never lost connection with people from the conventional world it is not hard to imagine that negative labelling has a strong influence on individuals' choosing their sub-cultures where acceptance is sensed.

Furthermore, the more time individuals spend in the group the more they adopt and internalise the group values and norms (Campbell, 2011). It is highlighted by Fleisher and Decker (2001) that the individuals with long-term gang membership appear to have none or very limited connection with and support from the conventional society. According to the authors, this further encourages individuals to continue to affiliate with gangs where they are aware of the prevailing norms and values and they know how socio and economic value is gained. The argument of Fleisher and Decker (2001) was validated by the participants, who did not only regard the perceived conventional world's prejudice but they saw the familiarity of and accustomisation to the gang norms as a contributing factor to their lengthened gang membership

Almost all participants paralleled their gang membership with being an 'outcast' consciously limiting their association with people outside of their gang network. The limited association with the conventional world was reported to be partly driven by gang norms and values. Tamatea (2015) also observed the gang characteristics detrimental demands on the members and highlighted that New Zealand gangs are forms of community, which possess inherent logic that require members strict adherence to norms and rules. By accepting the gang norms individuals isolate themselves from the conventional world. Guided only by the gang values and norms, "driving respect in the [gang] community" (Participant F) became the uppermost task for the participants. Normally, this was achieved through offering violence to those who opposed or rivalled the gang. Participants' accounts of violent clashes with rival gangs indicated increased anti-social behaviour. Some participants were also willing to disclose other sensitive or compromising information. However, these could not be collected due to the limitations and ethical considerations of this study.

Consistent with the findings of this study, Thornberry et al. (1993), Klein and Maxson (2006), Decker et al. (2008) and Sweeten et al. (2012) find that even short term gang connection greatly increases violent anti-social behaviour. They argue that increased violence is present in the gang world due to the gangs' norm to demand respect and status. Violence is triggered as members appear to have limited problem-solving methods. However, Pyrooz et al. (2014) contend that violence can be a factor for discontinuing gang membership, highlighting that being on the receiving end or seeing innocent people getting hurt can support individuals' withdrawal from fully committed gang membership. Although, these findings of Pyrooz et al. (2014) are very little supported in scholarly literature, it is consistent with this study's findings.

By recognising the harm that anti-social violent behaviour caused, participants pointed out their gradual departure from and disillusion in the criminal nature and norms of the gangs. In conjunction with the literature, discussion of this study's findings on the factors that stimulated participants' recognition of the negative aspects of their delinquent behaviour, and the intricacies of desistance from the criminal culture of gangs, are offered in the following section.

Exit

For most participants desistance from the criminal culture of the gangs began with the awareness of the impact of the anti-social behaviour. The generators of the participants' awareness can be classified into two groups. Participants who started to focus more on their family members such as children and spouses, and participants who were more inclined to connect to groups outside of the non-gang world. Some participants advised that they mutually benefited from both external occurrences. The participants reporting of familial interests bringing about withdrawal from the criminal nature of the gangs supports Warr's (1998) argument of the differential association theory. Warr states that delinquency is learnt from significant others in an intimate group, which can effectively be limited and overturned by romantic relationships and marriage.

Participants' reflection on their fatherhood as a triggering factor for reduced criminal activities and risk-taking behaviour underpins the argument of Moloney et al. (2009). Participants narrated that seeing their children suffer for their criminal behaviour initiated a transformation of their future priorities and outlook. However, Laub and Sampson (1993) argue that these external events (such as family, hobbies and employment) should not be separated, as they are all part of the bigger concept of informal social control, whereby individuals desist from crime by building pro-social relations outside of their delinquent associations. Regardless of these arguments, it appears that external events did have an effect on the participants' gradual withdrawal from the gangs.

However, when reflecting on what else might have caused desistance, participants pointed out their internal desire to make changes. Most participants talked about seeing how family members suffer for their criminal behaviour helped them become aware of the negative impacts of their criminal behaviour. This self-awareness assisted participants in reducing the ties with their gang networks. The internal desire that seemed to be fed by the change in thinking about gang participation also appeared to contribute to the participants' gradual desistance. Giordano et al. (2002) argue that change in thinking and an agency shift causes self-

awareness that is theorised in cognitive transformation. In this theory, desistance starts with an internal shift towards the readiness of change that is instrumental in the receptivity of external impacts. In other words, the cognitive transformation theory implies that cognitive change towards desistance from crime occurs before the impacts of external events take place. However, the findings of this study suggest that the internal change and agency shift and the impact of external events occur simultaneously, influencing each other rather than being a linear progress where internal changes precede external events.

Furthermore, the participants' discussions of their durable gang affiliation highlighted the difficulties of moving away from their previous gang networks. Participants attributed the decades long membership to the forged bond with the other members, their accustomisation to the gang norms, and the conventional society's negative view of their gang membership. Additionally, participants articulated that the lack of attractive alternative activities outside of the gang also added to the maintenance of their gang membership. However, making connections in the conventional world but remaining on the periphery of gangs, at times pulled the participants back into criminal membership before they successfully desisted from the criminal nature of the gangs. This finding of in and out of conventional and criminal gang worlds is consistent with Leibrich's (1993) findings where she states that severing ties with the gang networks appears to be more of a process rather than a sudden event due to the bond the individual has developed with anti-social peers. Carlsson (2012) sees this process as a non-linear zig-zag path, between the conventional world and gang life, before complete desistance occurs.

However, desistance in its literal meaning does not occur in all instances. This is presented in participants' narrations, who insisted that they have desisted from the criminal nature of the gangs but maintained continued relations in various forms with their gang networks. In the participants' language phrases such as "not wearing the patch" (Participant B and F) and "chuck the colours in" (Participant D) indicated the lessened connections with the gang world. There is ongoing debate about whether an individual's continued affiliation with gangs after desistance warrants the label of being a (criminal) gang member (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Pyrooz et al., 2014).

The study sample selection method utilised Junger-Tas and Marshall's (1999) self-nomination approach to identify gang members and gang membership. Esbensen et al. (2001) convincingly argue that gang membership can robustly be confirmed by self-nomination. Therefore, it is understood that reduced or ex-criminal gang membership can also be measured and assured through the same self-nomination method. Similarly, Sweeten et al. (2012) follow the notion of self-nomination method in their work and provided evidence via longitudinal research that the decrease in gang embeddedness "can lead to substantial decrease in offending" (p. 490) but the relevance between the two facts can only be measured through the individuals' confirmation. In other words, 'not wearing or chucking the colours in' individuals can have connections to gangs with significant reduction or even non-existent criminal activity.

As previously noted, specific to New Zealand gang culture some participants spent decades within the criminal realm of the gangs. The study's data leads to the understanding that the process of change eventuated by correlational events did not set off gradual withdrawal until participants reached at least their mid adulthood. Therefore, the question arises as to why at that age do participants seem to be more inclined to step away from the criminal gang lifestyle? Rocque (2014) brings attention to this phenomenon in a holistic theoretical approach when he considers maturation as a crucial process for desistance. Beside external events and agency shift, Rocque (2014) also draws attention to the brain's physiological maturation contributing to lessened impulsiveness and more consequential thinking that reduce criminal behaviour. The combined area of desistance studies and cognitive neuroscience is still in development, but indications of these two disciplines interrelation can be observed in the research of Fazel et al. (2011).

Lessening the connections with the gang norms permitted greater focus on family and more open connection to pro-social groups in the conventional world. Furthermore, as a result of not being subjected to the gang norms and establishing a pro-social life connections within the conventional world, participants were able to recognise the advantages and benefits of their past gang affiliated lives, which they specifically utilised in their community. This process of adopting redemption-self will be further explored in the next section.

Finding a new identity

Participants drawing on their life events, signalled that withdrawal from the full gang membership allowed them to take up activities, such as hobbies and employment, or connect to pro-social groups such as churches and legally organised non-gang related motorcycle racing clubs. This not only supported participants' de-escalation of gang involvement but also enabled participants to connect to pro-social people and learn about different aspects of a pro-social life. Healy (2013) calls this approach coping style in which that individuals who have developed links with pro-social conventional groups (such as clubs, churches and employment) have a sense of purpose and optimistic outlook for the future and are better equipped to establish long lasting desistance (Healy, 2014).

As previously noted, maturation is a possible contributing factor to participants' withdrawal from the criminal nature of the gang. This seems to coincide with the participants increased attention to generative actions. This is consistent with Erikson's (1965) position, which highlights that individuals' tendency to take on roles and participate in generative activities can escalate significantly in mid-adulthood. These generative actions are presented in actions that are guiding and nurturing to the next generation and generate worthy outcomes for the community. Participants indicated that seeing family members suffer for their delinquent behaviour initiated their withdrawal from the criminal culture of the gang.

However, the narrations also suggested that the participants' awareness of caused harm during their criminal affiliation with the gang was extended to the participants' wider community. Therefore, the study's findings follow Healy's (2014) argument in which she states that delinquent individuals tend to resolve issue in their own lives before taking on higher order goals such as adopting redemption-self. In other words, first participants' practice generative actions within the family setting, which precedes and encourages participants' pro-social behaviour in the community.

Within the argument of adoption of redemption-self, Maruna (2001) contests that it is generally an outside force that motivates and supports ex-gang members to

remain and practice generative action and consequently adopt redemption-self. According to Maruna, motivation tends to come from an intimate significant other, such as a family member but Brown (1991) finds that it is more common to have professional's impact on the delinquent behaviour. This connection between the offender and the professional triggers a flow on effect that supports and generates the offenders' interest in adopting redemption-self.

While the dataset suggest that some participants benefited from the support of an immediate family member or contact with a professional, it also appeared that some participants attributed the adoption of redemption-self to their childhood exposure to the empathy of both or one of their parents. Therefore, it seems that even during childhood experiences of adversity the observation of empathy can be internalised and positively acted on once an individual reaches a certain age and is affected by certain external events that generate a cognitive shift towards the resemblance of the compassionate parent's identity. This appears to contradict the findings in the first theme that posits that the negative consequences of an unsettling upbringing are irreversible without timely and adequate external help (Moffitt, 1993).

The findings suggest that those who have their own family (spouse, children), are middle aged and exposed to some empathy during childhood are more likely to develop compassion and adopt redemptive identity. However, for the maintenance of this new identity it appears that the members of their communities' positive reception of the participants' changes was responsible. Furthermore, participants' sustenance of redemption-self was supported by their positive outlook of the future, which was bolstered by the clientele's reassurance of the importance of their service. Due to the past experiences participants felt that the clientele wanted to work with them and they felt they could relate to the clients' stories more than someone who was lacking the experience of gang affiliation.

This reciprocal influence between the community's positive reception of the participants' new identity and its flow-on effect on their practice is consistent with Cressey (1965) theory of retroflexive reformation (LeBel, 2007). Cressey explains that criminality does not belong to the individuals but belongs to the anti-social group of people, where the delinquent behaviour is learnt from other members, through the medium of language. In order to change the collective behaviour of the gang, Cressey

points out that an individual who has some type of relation or connection (such as an ex-gang member) with the other members can effectively introduce a new pro-social language and behaviour. Consequently, the pro-social individual who acts as a change agent simultaneously becomes the target of change. This is due to the repetition of the pro-social language and behaviour, which is eventually internalised and become the new norm for the transformed individual.

However, according to Cressey (1965) this new identity can only be sustained through social bonds provided by pro-social people. Cressey's argument is extended by Nugent and Schinkel (2016) who explain that sustained positive desistance can only be achieved if the individual enters into relational desistance, which is triggered by the perception of acceptance in three levels of environment. The micro level is the individuals' immediate family, the mezzo level is the individuals' school and employment and the macro level represents the world at large. Based on the findings of this study, it appears that not all participants' desistance span across all levels of Nugent and Schinkel (2016) desistance structure. Only those participants who have achieved substantial desistance from gangs and have been employed in the social service fields for over a decade reported acceptance on macro level.

The participants who were maintaining their lifetime memberships with gangs and simultaneously trying to adopt a qualified professional social work image faced challenges on a macro level. On the basis of criminal history and continued gang affiliation or both, educational providers challenged or denied participants' entry into the social service programs. In social work education this is due to the Fit and Proper Person policy statement of Social Workers Registration Board in which the exclusion of 'untrustworthy' candidates with criminal offences are outlined (Social Workers Registration Board, 2015). Although this policy statement is regarded important to protect the interest of the profession, clients and other stakeholders, opportunity is provided to applicants with criminal background to prove their transformation and redemption. Under the clause of Offences, the Social Workers Registration Board makes exceptions when assessing prospective candidates and determining applicants' suitability for entry into education. Consideration is given to the nature of offending and crime committed by the applicant, their age when the offence took place, and the time that has passed since the offence occurred. The repetition of offending, the level

of the applicant's remorse and the likelihood of the candidate's reoffending are also considered (Social Workers Registration Board, 2015).

Notwithstanding, the macro level challenges, participants pointed out their enthusiasm to continue to work with clients and up skill themselves outside of the tertiary programs. This positive outlook for the future and the persevering new identity underpin Healy's argument about positive desistance and approach coping style, which is achieved by the participants' perception of purpose via the adoption of redemption-self.

5.4 Summary

The findings of this study and the existing body of literature suggest that the factors such as negative home and neighbourhood circumstances including family members and peer influence increased attraction to gang membership. Factors that were pertinent to this study but not commonly acknowledged in other research were the positives of gangs such as non-judgemental acceptance and finding a new identity. Furthermore, the continuity with gangs meant the acceptance of the norms and values of this sub-culture, which resulted in the gangs becoming a 'secondary' family. These factors and the conventional world negative evaluation of the gang members forges deeper bond and lengthen memberships.

Moreover, the findings suggest that those ex-criminal gang members who adopt redemption-self experience similar life circumstances to other criminal gang members who avoid adopting redemption-self. The difference between these two groups could be in the process of maturation, whereby internal and eye opening external events influence each other to bring about increased awareness to the non-gang world that eventuates a gradual withdrawal from the gangs' violent nature. By lessening the ties with the gangs it is evident that a new pro-social identity is learnt and adopted. Initially, focusing generative actions on family relations, the generativity is extended and practiced in the wider community. This process contributes to the occurrence of

the adoption of redemption-self. It is recognised that the process of redemption-self is more complex than this study can accommodate but it is important to emphasise that alongside the motivation provided by a family member or professional it appears that the adoption of redemption-self stems from the childhood connection with a compassionate adult who participants wanted to resemble. These different factors play an important part in ex-gang members' journey towards being an effective and committed help-professional regardless the experienced challenges in the conventional society.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the aims of the study (section 6.2) and provides answers for the research questions in section 6.3. These two sections establish the backdrop for section 6.4, in which recommendations for initiatives and policy suggestions how to accommodate ex-criminal gang members past experiences in social service sectors are presented. The study's strengths and limitations are outlined in section 6.5, which is followed by section 6.6 where topics for future research are recommended. Finally, a brief conclusion is offered in section 6.7 to summaries the outcome and recommendations of this exploratory study.

6.2 Review of the aims

The study's primary aim was to explore what motivates ex-criminal gang members to desist from gangs and adopt redemption-self. The study, by casting its focus on ex-criminal gang members' experience of criminal gang desistance and motivation of entering into employment within the help-profession fields, sought to explore this change in human behaviour. Moreover, seeking understanding of the ex-criminal gang members' perspective on desistance and adoption of redemption-self aimed to provide an alternative perspective to conventional society's black and white view of former gang membership status. Finally, this study was aimed to commence a dialogue about effective applications of ex-criminal gang member's knowledge in social service field initiatives and programs.

6.3 Key Learnings

Drawing on the key discussion points in Chapter five, this section presents answers to the research questions and concludes the significant learnings of this research.

In line with the local and international research this study has also established that childhood experience of abuse (physical, verbal, and sexual), neglect, environmental influences such as school or neighbourhood peer groups and/or family members' affiliation with gangs contribute to teenage gang affiliation. For those who lack sense of acceptance from and within conventional society, the gang provides a substitute culture where camaraderie with other members are perceived. The perception of rejection in mainstream society and the acceptance by gangs encourages gang members' maintenance of lengthened gang-membership.

During long-term gang membership, the elevated demand for respect and status trigger new identity traits that are more persistent in the face of life challenges and atrocities. Although, the establishment of respect and status within and outside of the gang world is conducted via violence, which is therefore a significant factor in increased delinquent and criminal behaviour, it is also a factor for discontinuing gang membership. Alongside violence, desistance is triggered by a combination of external events and internal cognitive change driven by an awareness of the negative impact of anti-social behaviour.

The recognition of the negative effects of gang ties reduces the quality and quantity of gang affiliation, increases engagement in pro-social peer groups and improves positive family relations. When ex-criminal gang members' desistance commences it portrays a gradual disengagement from the gang network's criminal nature. It is clear that despite the withdrawal from criminal activities and non-adherence to the core criminal nature of the gang, ex-criminal gang members remain in connection with their previous gang networks. Former criminal gang members who remain connected to their previous gang networks communicate the withdrawal from the gang norms and values by using the term, 'not wearing the patch'. This expression

represents ex-criminal gang members' view of themselves as desisters of criminal activity.

It is recognised that maturation is a contributing factor to the withdrawal from criminal nature of the gang and the adoption of a new positive identity. The adoption of new identity is associated with the influences of professionals and childhood experiences of both or one of their parents' empathy. It is revealed that even during childhood experiences of adversity in the home environment, the observation of empathy can be internalised and positively acted on once an individual reaches a certain age and is affected by certain external events. This contradicting information is concluded from the fact that the family members are able to display both dysfunction and empathy.

The establishment of positive and nurturing family relations encourages the practice of generative actions, such as being more attentive of the future generation's well-being and being responsive to members of the wider community needs and their needs and struggles by offering advice and help. The extension of generative actions to the wider community and the alignment of the generative identity to a compassionate significant person are observed in the process of redemption-self adoption.

Former criminal gang member's maintenance of redemption-self is achieved by receiving positive feedback from the community members about their service provision. The perception of doing well at client service contributes to the motivation to pursue accredited educational training in social service fields. However, the acceptance of those ex-criminal gang members who disclose lingering ties to their previous gang networks and possess criminal history into educational programs is conflicting for educational providers. In social work education, this is due to the Fit and Proper Person policy statement of Social Workers Registration Board that excludes candidates with criminal offences but provides alternative avenues to prove their transformation (Social Workers Registration Board, 2015). Although educational providers decline ex-criminal gang members' entry into help profession programs based on this policy statement, this rejection from professionalism does not prevent

ex-criminal gang members from continuing to maintain enthusiasm to work in social service fields.

These points provide the base for the policy recommendations discussed in the following section.

6.4 Suggestions for initiatives and policies for educational providers

New Zealand ministers, policy makers, and education providers continue to limit the ex-criminal gang members' involvement in helping professions due to the stereotypical view of gang membership status regardless its quality and quantity. Notwithstanding these limitations, the non-government sector utilises ex-criminal gang members' knowledge and experience to engage and connect with the hard-to-reach gang communities. Without critiquing existing programs that include the utilisation of ex-criminal gang member's knowledge in social services, the section seeks to generate and commence a conversation about new ideas on how to effectively apply former criminal gang members' past knowledge and privileged position in social service fields.

Over the decades, various work related interventions such as The group employment liaison scheme, have been initiated by the government to curb the ratio of membership New Zealand gangs (Gilbert, 2013). However, due to entrenched intergenerational poverty, unemployment, family abuse and other societal dilemmas, the gang issue seems to remain ongoing for the government. Recognising this issue, non-government agencies such as the Wesley Community Action established by the Methodist church offers services to the 'hard to reach communities' that they prioritise to reduce the gang population in their catchment area. Another agency, the Outcast Ministry, in the Manawatu area was established by ex-criminal gang members to support and work specifically with those who are inclined to put an end to their gang affiliation. The Christian based motorcycle club the Jesus is Lord, the Redeemed was established by a Samoan ex-criminal gang member and consists of other ex-gang affiliated members. The club's growing public image and memberships are utilised to raise money and help those who are in need.

It is also evident from this study's participants that non-government service providers have been employing ex-criminal gang members who have been effectively working in their communities as help-professionals. Therefore, it is suggested that instead of preventing transformed ex-criminal gang members working or volunteering in New Zealand prisons, governments should be supporting the utilisation of the valuable knowledge of the redeemed former criminal gang members. This is underpinned by Gilbert's advice where he cautions against haphazard decision making regarding gang affiliation. Further, he suggests that evaluation should be done on the person's quality of work rather than on the basic fact of gang affiliation (Onenews, 2016). The black and white view of the government on the complex phenomenon of gang-membership might not only hinder ex-gang members' acceptance on all three levels of the desistance structure (Nugent & Schinkel, 2016) but can set back their progress of positive desistance (Healy, 2014).

In the process of redemption-self adoption, it has been observed that the participants' internal desire towards generative actions tend to precede the practice of adopting these actions. Hence, self-help group initiatives such as the Public Safety Initiative of LIFERS, Inc. could be the first access point to the process of cognitive change that is supported by external events and people (Harris, 2009). Participation in this program would be voluntary. Volunteer participation gives an instant insight into the individual's genuine intention or curiosity to change from a criminal career and also allow participants to decide whether they would like to continue with this program without any legal consequences (Kavanagh & Borrill, 2013).

This mutually beneficial self-help program could be based on and follow the structure of other 12 steps promoting programs such as Alcoholic Anonymous (AA), Narcotic Anonymous (NA) and AlAnon (Marsh, 2011). Older members who have proven their desistance from criminal gang-membership could support and counter the ways that the norms and values of criminal gang-life interfere with pro-social life. It would also be important to note that these groups would be self-governed with trusted leaders, such as transformed older criminal gang members. There should be limited external interferences with the self-help group but professional support would be at hand if the need arose.

From this self-help group ex-criminal gang members could transfer to programs where generative actions in the community could be voluntarily practiced. These programs could range from working in food banks, helping the elderly, or supporting gang related families to partaking in youth offenders mentoring programs. For these schemes to succeed it would be important to have robust and positive relations with statutory organisations such as Youth Justice and Probation Service. Therefore, this program's participants would receive support and supervision from trained social workers and other professionals who could constantly monitor the participants' progress. The working relationship between the professionals and ex-gang members could be mutually beneficial to both the participants and professionals.

Tamatea (2015) and Gilbert (2013) pointed out that gangs are close-knit communities that are rarely accessible to outsiders. Based on Cressey (1965) and his study's participants' experiences, it is understood that ex-criminal gang members would have easier access to the gang community due to their past significant relationship with these communities. Hence, ex-criminal gang members' contribution could be enormous in enabling social services to penetrate and have instant access to those vulnerable groups of people who tend to be resistant to accept advice from non-gang related professionals. Consequently, ex-gang members' service could contribute to the reduction of gang crime through the implementation of a new pro-social language and the introduced pro-social role models with the support of trained and qualified social workers and other professionals. Moreover, as Participant E pointed out:

...What motivated me was that, that I'd been there and I'd done that [being a patched member of the gang] and back in our days if we needed someone to talk to, no-one was there really...

It is important to be able to talk with a (quasi) professional who has had similar experiences and can relate to the clientele's situation. This could also set off the process of desistance for those who are ready to move away from the gang lifestyle. The extraction of knowledge and experience of ex-addicts who are working as counsellors or other professionals in alcohol and drug addiction field has been widely and effectively utilised (Brown, 1991). Brown's notion could also be more widely

utilised in social service sectors to initiate influential work relationship between reformed ex-criminal gang members and clients with criminal gang backgrounds.

Therefore, as highlighted in some of the participants' narrations as mentors they recognised their ability to communicate with their clients and provide in-depth understanding of their needs. Some of these needs were the lack of parental compassion and acceptance in the young offenders' lives that was compensated through the established mentor-client work relationship. In this study's findings, experience of childhood compassion appeared to be an important component to the practice of generative actions and adoption of redemption-self. Therefore, by employing the professional ex-criminal gang members in a youth mentoring role the personal experiences could also confront the perceived positive aspects of gang affiliation by highlighting the long-term negative consequences of gangs.

In contradiction of the educational providers' trend to challenge or decline entry into educational programs for ex-gang members, I support the up skilling in the field of social work or other help-professions the redeemed former criminal gang affiliated individuals. In order to ascertain the validity of ex-gang members claim of being redeemed a robust screening test such as the Fit and Proper Person policy statement of the Social Workers Registration Board is recommended. For example these measures could explore the persons' offending history and the level of their gang affiliation, seek references from different pro-social groups such as churches, clubs, Kaumatua from the individual's marae or other trusted leaders of the community, or undertake observation of their client interaction in the aforementioned volunteer programs, and consider the age and family status of the individual.

There are two reasons why it would be paramount to provide training to these quasi-professional ex-criminal gang members. First, drawing on Laub and Sampson (1993) social control theory and Cressey (1965) differential association theory providing academic knowledge would not only broaden the understanding of their own and their clients' circumstances but it would also enable them to generate pro-social connection to the conventional world. This perception of acceptance in the conventional world would further encourage the ex-criminal gang member to practice

pro-social behaviour. As a consequence, he would be able to role model the pro-social behaviour while simultaneously draw on his past experience to connect with clientele.

Second, it appears in this study's findings that notwithstanding the educational providers' challenges, those who are committed to provide services will eventually find some type of employment in human service fields. It is also evident these tend to be unqualified and lower level positions. Therefore, instead of challenging entry into the tertiary programs, support should be provided to ex-criminal gang members to maintain their enthusiasm in further training to achieve recognised and accredited qualifications. Through the completion of an accredited qualification individuals would have access to professional supervision, which would ascertain sound and effective service with a constant eye kept on their professional adherences and development.

Furthermore, the professionalisation of the criminal ex-gang members could be implemented through schemes such as the recently ceased NGO Social Work Study Awards (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2016). Supporting ex-criminal gang members in professionalisation could enable them to be a member of the professional bodies and associations, which tend to act as a watchdog and streamline the trade through code of conducts and code of ethics to set out the minimum standards for the profession (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2007; Social Workers Registration Board, 2016). These standards help professionals to produce a quality service, however, in order to be accepted into registration the fit and proper quality of the candidate has to be proven (Social Workers Registration Board, 2015).

While the Social Workers Registration Board, in its Fit and Proper policy statement apply factors such as the measure of the applicant's remorse and age when the offence occurred that enables ex-criminal gang members to evince their redemption, it seems that certain education providers do not consider these points. Therefore, it is suggested that instead of applying a blanket rule on ex-criminal gang members with historic criminal offences, educational providers set up close work relations with help profession bodies such as the Social Workers Registration Board to assure that the redemption of former criminal gang members are proven and the ex-

criminal gang members' suitability for entry into the help-profession training is established. Supporting ex-criminal gang members' willingness to enter into tertiary education would not only help them further their academic understanding and maintain a professional image but through registration and adherence to a minimum standard could be achieved in the profession.

In summary, redeemed ex-criminal gang members seem to establish effective working relationship with the 'hard to reach communities' such as ethnic and bikie gangs. Accepting and enabling ex-criminal gang members to practice generative actions seems to equally benefit the community, the reformed ex-criminal gang member, the service provider and the industry. Therefore, those ministers and policy makers who prevent reformed ex-criminal gang members from providing their service on a statutory level should look beyond the black and white view of gang affiliation. Furthermore, support should be in place for these transformed ex-criminal gang members to professionally utilise their valuable experience and knowledge in interventions with hard to reach clientele, combining their interest with the provision of tertiary education and consequently registration of a professional body to ensure safe practice in social services fields.

6.6 Limitations and strengths

Considering the exploratory and low-scale nature of the study, the small sample size yielded rich data for analysis that can contribute to a continued dialogue on gang desistance and adoption of redemption-self in a New Zealand context. The interpretivist methods used in this study to obtain information regarding the knowledge and experience of the participants were well suited to the subject and purpose of the enquiry. Although only a small number of participants were recruited for this project the participants represented six different larger cities of the South and North Islands. The recruitment and unreserved cooperation of the participants is a positive reflection on the overall design and implementation of the research. Most of

the participants displayed a high level of interest and a strong sense of purpose that is evident in many of their responses.

Due to submissive role that female members of the gang hold in the gang society, I only included male participants in the study. Help professionals without a gang history and former gang members not being employed in help profession fields were excluded from participation in this study. Although, the restriction to fluent English speakers was implemented, no-one was excluded on the basis of ethnicity. Hence, I was able to recruit participants with Māori, Pākehā and New Zealand born Samoan backgrounds. Also, as aforementioned, all participants were coincidentally recruited from larger New Zealand cities. Thus, to further generalise the understanding of gang desistance and adoption of redemption-self it is suggested that future studies include female participants and extend to a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds and to non-English language speaking groups.

Furthermore, to substantiate the participants' claims of being able to provide a more effective service compared with those who do not have a similar gang affiliated past were out of the scope of this study. In order to validate these claims contact should have been established with the clientele of the participants to inquire about the satisfaction of the received service from participants. This type of inquiry would have required a broader volume of research, additional time and financial support, and it would have needed a considerable amendment of ethical considerations.

Finally, the core limitation of the study lies between the participants' and my background. My upbringing occurred in Europe specifically my mother tongue and culture is Hungarian. This has created a considerable gap in my position as a researcher, to fully understand and relate to the participants' experiences who were all New Zealand born. Additionally to my 'outsiderness', the non-New Zealand gang and non-criminal background also limited my full insight into the participants' journey. Notwithstanding, my personal limitations, the large amount and information rich data gathered through the partnership with the participants proves and highlights the participants' positive approach and high level of interest in this project.

6.7 Future research

The aim of this study was to identify those influencing factors that support gang members to withdraw from the gangs and find a career in helping profession. To extend on these ideas and broaden the exploratory nature of the study and address its limitations the following recommendations are made for future research.

- To validate participants' claims of being able to provide 'better' service compared with non-gang affiliated help workers, explore the views of their clients who have been supported or worked with by ex-criminal gang members working as help professionals and non-gang affiliated help workers.
- Widen the research to explore the service provision and outcomes of those agencies that specifically employ ex-gang members as help professionals, such as Outcast Ministry and Wesley Community Action. Findings of that research could validate participants' claim of effective service provision and programs could be initiated to encourage individuals with similar background and interest to become professional in the helping field.
- To further explore the common factors that motivate ex-criminal gang members to adopt redemption-self. The investigation of generative actions in mid-adulthood as a turning stage could be a starting point.
- Explore more specifically the intricacies between criminal gang-affiliation and ex-criminal gang affiliation in the New Zealand context.

6.8 Conclusion

This study has inquired into the environmental and personal circumstances that contributed to the participants' involvement in criminal gangs and later their desistance from these criminal gangs. The participants were also able to identify internal and external factors that influenced them to adopt and continue to the practice redemption-self. It is clear that ex-criminal gang members have instant access to the 'hard-to-reach' groups and by practicing redemption-self they maintain positive and productive desistance. Therefore, it is recommended that programs that enable ex-criminal gang members to utilise their past knowledge to provide professional help to 'hard to reach' communities should be more widely utilised. Moreover, education providers should embrace the knowledge and experiences of redeemed ex-criminal gang members in order to ensure they are not excluded but accepted as credible, safe, and effective practitioners and not be judged because of their past. If social services seek to redeem service users from their mistakes and focus on empowering them as part of their rehabilitation so we should acknowledge that some practitioners can also be redeemed even if they were once gang members.

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APPENDICES

(Massey University Letterhead)

Appendix A

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Kia Ora and greetings,

First of all, thank you for showing interest in this project and taking your time to read this. Below, you can find some information on what this study is all about.

About me

My name is Gabor Radak. I completed the Bachelor of Social Work degree in 2004 and since then I worked as a registered social worker in various fields of social work such as homelessness, youth justice, reintegration and others. During the course of my employment at different agencies, I have met ex-gang members, who have decided to turn their lives around and work for social services. Intrigued by this phenomenon, I've put together this research project as part of my study toward the degree of Master in Social Work.

What are the aims of the research?

The transformation of ex-gang members to becoming help-professionals is a locally and internationally observed phenomenon. However, the debates surrounding the triggers for such life-turning events are many but exploring the help-professionals' (e.g. social workers, probation officers, psychologists etc.) journey is not common so this research project aims to give prospective participants an opportunity to tell their own stories and what it means to them to abandon gang-life and to journey towards being a help-professional.

So, who and what does this involve?

I am looking for maximum 6 male, adult English-speaking volunteers, who used to affiliate with a New Zealand gang, have no current or recent gang-related convictions and currently working as a help-professional for more than two years. If you think this is you I invite you to share your experience/journey.

Procedures

All is required is 90 minutes where some of it is a briefing and the rest is an one-hour audio or hand-written recorded interview. I have attached the questions for you to have a look so you know what I will be asking you on the day. I can assure you that what you say is private and confidential. Only my supervisors and myself will have access to the information I collected from you. For your time and travel cost a small compensation of a \$20 fuel voucher will be offered.

After the interview, I will type up the conversation that we have had and I will re-contact you and ask you to review your transcript and preferably retrieve it from you on the same day.

The information that is collected will be kept on my password-protected computer that only I have access to and all signed forms will be secured in a locked filing cabinet that only I have a key to.

Should you experience any discomfort during the interview please tell me, so we can always have a short break. Should the need arise the following 24/7 anonymous phone line services will be available for further support:

Anxiety New Zealand Trust (0800 Anxiety)

Life Line Aotearoa (0800 543 354) or Suicide Crisis Services (0508Tautoko)

Samaritans 24/7 Phone Service (0800726666)

Criminal disclosure

While none of my questions are designed to ask about criminal activities and every

step will be taken to keep your identity and the information you have provided private and confidential. However, if the researcher senses that the participants are about to incriminate themselves, he will stop the interview, turn the records off and will ask the participant to change the topic. It is my duty to advise, that any information of a criminal nature that the police don't know about and which is deemed by me and my supervisors to be a risk to you, or to others or the wider community, it will be passed on to the right authorities.

Participant Rights

If you agree to take part, your rights are:

You understand that participation in this study is voluntarily

You can choose not to answer a question I may ask

You can ask questions at any stage of the study

You may stop the interview at any time

You may withdraw from the study at any time

Access to a summary report is available upon written request.

Contact Details:

gabor.radak.1@uni.massey.ac.nz Or ring me on 02102539487

Alternatively you can contact my supervisors:

Dr Moses Faleolo by Email: M.M.Faleolo@massey.ac.nz

Dr Michael Dale by Email: M.P.Dale@massey.ac.nz

Looking forward to hearing from you

Gabor Radak

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 16/24. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Andrew Chrystall, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x43317 email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix B

Ex-gang members who have become help-professionals: What influences their desistance from gang involvement and their career choice?

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information She

Signature:

Date:

.....

Full Name - printed

.....

Committee Approval Statement

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Guiding Questions

Q1. Theme: Socialization (10 minutes)

Tell me what do you still remember about your childhood?

What do you remember about your teenager experiences?

As an adult, what has it been like since your teenager days?

Where do you see yourself in the next ten years?

Q2. Theme: Gang socialization (10 minutes)

Tell me how you came to join a gang?

What was gang life like?

What were the critical turning points leading up to leaving the gang?

Was there somebody (ies) to support you with this decision?

If there was, who was it? And what relationship did you have with the person?

Q3. Theme: Knowledge (10 minutes)

In the readings it says the people who turn their lives around and make good go through a transformation called redemptive-self or redeeming themselves by doing good things.

Tell me what are your thoughts about this thing called redemptive-self? Is this what happened to you? Explain with examples please?

Q4. Theme: Issues (10 minutes)

What was the transformation like, was it easy or was it hard? Explain with examples please?

What was it like trying to get a job? Was it easy or hard?

How did your society and people react to you while you were trying to transform yourself?

Q5. Theme: Solutions/Strategies (10 minutes)

What things did you have to do in order to achieve your goals?

What advice would you give to someone who has left the gang and wants to make good?

Q6. Theme: Additional information (5 minutes)

Before I conclude this interview do you have any other comments, suggestions, or anything you want to add apart from what we have spoken about already?

Q7. Theme: Other (5 minutes)

Before we say good-bye, I would like to ask the method (email or post) you would prefer to be sent the transcript? Also I would like to ask if you know anyone else who would be interested in participating in this project? And finally, for time and travel cost, I would like to offer you \$20 fuel voucher.

Gabor Radak

Committee Approval Statement

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Advertisement

Kia Ora and greetings,

My name is Gabor Radak. I completed the Bachelor of Social Work degree in 2004 and since then I worked as a registered social worker in various fields of social work such as homelessness, youth justice, reintegration and others. During the course of my employment at different agencies, I have met ex-gang members, who have decided to turn their lives around and work for social services. Intrigued by the process of change, I have put together this research project as part of my study toward the degree of Master in Social Work.

To understand more of this phenomenon, I would like to invite maximum six English speaking adult males, who have no current or recent gang-related convictions, successfully exited from gangs and have been working in the help profession (such as social workers, counsellors, probation officers and correction officers, psychologists etc.) for two or more years, to share their experience in an interview.

There will be a small compensation of a \$20 petrol voucher for your time and travel cost.

This study aims to give you the opportunity to tell your story as you have experienced it... **YOU ARE THE EXPERT. You will not be named** when the results of the study are written.

If this sounds like you, or you would like more information, please contact me for a more detailed information sheet

gabor.radak.1@uni.massey.ac.nz

02102539487

Gabor Radak

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 16/24. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Andrew Chrystall, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x43317 email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

(Massey University Letterhead)

Appendix E

Ex-gang members who have become help-professionals: What influences their desistance from gang involvement and their career choice?

Researcher: Gabor Radak

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview(s) conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

I confirm that no identifying information will be included in the thesis, and any publications or presentations.

Signature:

Date:

Full Name – printed

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 16/24. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Andrew Chrystall, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x43317 email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

(Massey University Letterhead)

Appendix F

Draft request letter

To whom it may concern

My name is Gabor Radak and I am an extramural student at Massey University currently completing my thesis towards a Masters degree in Social Work.

My chosen topic is to explore the factors that motivate ex-gang members to turn their lives around and become help-professionals such as social workers, mentors, counsellors and psychologists. In order to achieve an in depth understanding of this phenomenon, through your agency I am hoping to find some people who have this type of life-experience and willing to share their stories with me during an interview.

If this is a research project you are interested in supporting, I will forward you the ethics approval of Massey University Human Ethics Committee, the research Information Sheet and Advertisement documents that provide further details of the project.

Should you need any information or have any questions please contact me via my email address or my cellphone number:

gabor.radak.1@uni.massey.ac.nz

02102539487

or my supervisors at Massey University:

Dr Moses Faleolo:

M.M.Faleolo@massey.ac.nz

Dr Michael Dale:

M.P.Dale@massey.ac.nz

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 16/24. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Andrew Chrystall, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x43317 email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

Evidence of Consultation

This letter is to confirm that I, Canon Pine Campbell, Anglican Action Mission Trust Kaumatua and Whaea Lyn Neha-Toki, Anglican Action Mission Trust Kuia have consulted with Gabor Radak, Massey University Extramural Student on 19 April 2016.

Our consultation took place to agree on the provision of Māori cultural supervision by us if Gabor's general knowledge of Māori tikanga and kawa is in need of enhancement to conduct a culturally appropriate research interview with a potential Māori participant.

Signed:

Kaumatua, Pine Campbell



Kuia, Whaea Lyn Neha-Toki



Student, Gabor Radak





Date: 09 June 2016

Dear Gabor Radak

Re: Ethics Notification - **NOR 16/24 - Ex-gang members who have become help-professionals: What influences their desistance from gang involvement and their career choice?**

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: **Human Ethics Northern Committee** at their meeting held on **Thursday, 9 June, 2016**.

On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Dr Brian Finch
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)