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Utah Pacific Islander Former Gang Members:  
Meanings of Everyday Lived Experiences

Natasha Afalava Garrigan

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Educational Specialist in School Psychology

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## ABSTRACT

### Utah Pacific Islander Former Gang Members: Meanings of Everyday Lived Experiences

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Gangs continue to extend a strong influence around the United States, impacting most urban areas and spreading into suburban and rural communities. With approximately one million members actively involved, gangs account for up to 80% of crimes in some communities. Amidst crime and antisocial activities associated with gangs, gangs continue to be a strong allure for youth. Much research has investigated reasons for youth joining gangs; however, there is a lack of research exploring the kinds of experiences youths receive while living the gang life.

According to Utah statistics, Pacific Islander youth are at high risk of joining a gang: A disproportionately high percentage of Utah gang members are of Pacific Islander decent. Pacific Islanders make up less than 1% of Utah's population while composing 13% of Utah's gang population and 1.6% of Utah's state prison population. Minimal research has been conducted to understand the kinds of experiences Pacific Islander youths experience while with the gang. This information is critical to informing effective prevention and intervention efforts.

Addressing this need, this retrospective qualitative study focused on four males, Utah Pacific Islander former gang members who experienced gang life while in their youth. During one-on-one interviews with the primary investigator, each individual described his personal gang experiences, providing four detailed stories/descriptions of everyday lived experiences. Each interview portrayed themes of feeling respected, having access to things desired, feeling a family bond, and having the presence of significant others in their lives. Based on information shared in these four interviews, the discussion section summarizes implications for intervention and practice, providing insights to better understand underlying needs of Pacific Islander youth and reasons for entry into, continued activity in, and eventual exit from gang life.

Keywords: former gang affiliation, Pacific Islander, perceptions, qualitative research

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## Introduction

On the night of July 23, 1992, the evening before Pioneer Day, the annual Mormon celebration of religious pioneers first entering the Salt Lake valley, Miles Kinikini and a group of fellow gang members marked their territory around downtown Salt Lake. They were preparing for action. Kinikini, a member of the Tongan Crip gang, would soon find himself avenging for his deceased crew, three Samoan Compton Crip gang members murdered a few nights earlier (Sullivan, 2005, Pioneer Day section, ¶ 51).

During the morning of Pioneer Day, gunshots fired into the air aiming to kill gang members on the opposing side. It was a battle of Tongans versus Samoans. Members of the Tongan Crip gang were battling against the retaliating Samoan Compton Crip gang. Kinikini was the first to shoot. Walking towards the middle of the road, he began shooting rounds at the Samoan Crips, who in an ancestral context are considered family. The enemies fought as if they were alone on a battlefield, acting with complete disregard for the hundreds of outsiders whose lives were also placed at risk in the crossfire. First and foremost for gang members, the respect and reputation of the gang is of paramount importance. Gang members on either side were not about to be put to shame (Sullivan, 2005, Pioneer Day section, ¶ 52).

Gang life has always been an integral part of life for Miles Kinikini. Kinikini, the youngest of eight children, claims he has been in a gang since the third grade. After his birth in Tonga, his parents, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), moved to Salt Lake City. As a young child growing up in Glendale, a west-side neighborhood of Salt Lake City, Kinikini learned quickly that walking alone to school was not safe. Walking alone increased the risk of getting caught by one of the Latino packs lurking around the neighborhood.

In exchange for protection and status as a “baby gangster” at the age of nine Kinikini allowed a group of older Polynesian kids to beat him up (Sullivan, 2005, First Generation section, ¶ 42).

Kinikini was rapidly induced into an early career of becoming a fully-fledged hardcore gang member. From the status of a “baby gangster,” he worked his way towards earning a leadership position in his gang. Strongly influenced by an “original” gangster from California, Kinikini’s gang, previously called the Tongan Coconut Connection, evolved during the 1980s, into the Salt Lake branch of the Tongan Crip Gang. Drive-by shootings and drug distribution rapidly increased during the 1980s. Kinikini’s involvement and escalating pattern of violence continued until 1992 when he voluntarily turned himself in to authorities after the Pioneer Day parade shootings. He was sentenced to two years in jail, convicted of having the intent to kill with a deadly weapon (Sullivan, 2005, First Generation section, ¶ 45).

While serving time in jail, life seemed to turn around for Kinikini. He read religious scriptures, the *Book of Mormon*, cover to cover and renewed his family commitments. Once out of jail, he served a mission for the LDS church in Northern California. Soon after returning from his mission, he married and established a good family life in Salt Lake City. Kinikini, his wife, and two young sons were content with their traditional family life.

Although Kinikini turned from gang activity, his younger cousins joined the Tongan Crip Gang. Their rivals, the Baby Regulators, were attacking Kinikini’s relatives in Glendale, Utah. One day, Kinikini happened to visit an aunt who shared news of a drive-by shooting. The previous night Baby Regulators shot up a car parked in front of the aunt’s house, barely missing a one-year-old grandchild who was inside the car. Vowing to seek justice, at this critical juncture Kinikini’s recently established history was laid aside. In efforts of retaliation, he took his younger cousins to the home of two suspected members of the drive-by, threw two gallons of

gasoline on the house, and lit it on fire. Shortly thereafter, Kinikini was convicted of second-degree arson and sent back to jail for another year (Sullivan, 2005, Pioneer Day, ¶ 56).

The life story of Miles Kinikini, a Utah Pacific Islander, provides insight into the everyday lived experiences of youth gang members. It is apparent that gang involvement continues to be a part of life in his neighborhood. Considering the personal protection gangs ensure, on one level, the decision to join a gang may appear to be a reasonable choice for many young men. There is still much to be learned from Kinikini's life story and similarly from other Pacific Islanders involved in gang activity. It is of particular interest to investigate their life experiences which make up the phenomenon of gang life, the involvement of individuals in gangs, and the difficult decision-making process of leaving the gang.

### **Statement of Problem**

The current high risk behaviors of Pacific Islanders in Utah are a cause for great concern. Pacific Islanders make up about 1% of Utah's total population. However, Pacific Islanders are reported to account for a disproportionate 1.6% of the state's prison population and 13% of the state's documented gang members. The 2009 *Utah Health Disparities Summary*, a report from the Utah Department of Health detailing problems related to abuse, mental health, and violence, stated that Utah Pacific Islanders have a significantly high rate of homicides. While the statewide homicide rate is 2.1 per 100,000 population, the Utah Pacific Islanders homicide rate is 11.0 per 100,000 population, over five times the state average (Center for Multicultural Health [CMH], 2009). Law enforcement, news media, and the general public all note this strong link between high homicide rates and the high percentage of Pacific Islander youth involved in active street gangs.

For reasons often unseen or misunderstood by outsiders, gangs have been and continue to be an attractive lure for Pacific Islander youth. Researchers in Hawaii (Hingano, 2000), California (Asian Pacific Islander Youth Violence Prevention Center, 2003), and Washington (Mafaituuga, 2003) have focused on reasons why Pacific Islander youth decide to join gangs; however, there is a lack of research investigating youths' experiences in a gang and how the gang is perceived in the eyes of its members.

With gang violence being an immediate concern, violence has distracted gang researchers from exploring the wide range of activities and experiences the gang provides its members (Joe & Chesney-Lind, 1995). This knowledge base is critical in order to understand gang behavior and more effectively prevent and intervene in countering destructive gang involvement.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This exploratory study is designed to seek descriptions and themes of gang members' lived experiences in the gang in order to increase understanding of the phenomenon of gangs. The specific aims of the study are to describe with great detail the lived experiences of Pacific Islanders who are involved in gangs and to identify common themes in perceived meanings of gang experiences shared across individual Pacific Islander gang members. In particular, this study will focus on the personal meanings of "being in a gang" and "being a gang member" from the perspectives of four Pacific Islanders, self-identified as "former gang members." Findings of this study will be discussed in the context of current gang prevention and intervention efforts and research related to effective gang intervention practices.

### **Research Question**

Based on perceptions of four former Pacific Islander youth gang members ("participants"), the current study will seek to answer the following question: How do Pacific

Islander youth gang members perceive and describe their experience of being in a gang and being a gang member?

The major components of this question are *how*, *perceive*, *describe*, *experience*, and *gang member*. By use of the word *how* I indicate my openness to a broad range of information about gangs that may emerge in the course of my interviews with participants.

By *perceive*, I acknowledge that gangs may be perceived differently by different people and that I desire to explore the range of differences and similarities in perceptions of gangs.

By *describe*, I refer to descriptive stories of what a gang is and what being in a gang means for participants.

By *experience*, I refer to the fact that I will be seeking comprehensive stories from the research participants of how they perceive and describe gangs in their everyday lived experience.

By *gang member*, I mean an individual who self-nominates as being in a gang. For the purposes of this study, a gang will be defined using the definition provided by the National Gang Center's website:

A youth gang is commonly considered a self-formed association of peers having the following characteristics:

- Three or more members, generally ages 12 to 24;
- A name and some sense of identity, generally indicated by such symbols as style of clothing, graffiti, and hand signs;
- Some degree of permanence and organization; and
- An elevated level of involvement in delinquent or criminal activity.

(National Gang Center, n.d., ¶ 2)

## Literature Review

Defining a gang is an important first step in gang research; however, researchers admit that establishing a consensus for a global definition of gangs is a difficult task. There is little consensus among researchers, policy makers, and law enforcement agencies as to what constitutes a gang, who is a gang member, and what gangs do either inside or outside the law (Bursick & Grasmick, 2006; Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001).

### Conceptual Characteristics Defining Gangs

Although gang definitions may vary, most conceptual definitions include the following characteristics: a self-formed group, united by mutual interests, controls a particular territory, facility, or enterprise; uses symbols to communicate; and is collectively involved in crime (Curry & Decker, 1998; Howell, 1998; Miller, 1992). The following is a discussion of three key conceptual characteristics defining gangs.

**A group united by mutual interests.** Key to gang formation is the attraction of individuals toward each other by a commonly held interest, motive, or purpose. Thrasher (1927), who is considered the father of urban studies, recognized that individuals in gangs were united by some conflict. His proposed definition of gangs is widely accepted:

The gang is an interstitial group originally formed spontaneously and then integrated through conflict. It is characterized by the following types of behavior: meeting face to face, milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict, and planning. The result of collective behavior is the development of traditional unreflective internal structure, spirit de corps, solidarity, moral group awareness and attachment to a local territory.

(p. 57)

Thrasher (1927) recognized the typical circumstances from which these youth originated and formed into gangs. He acknowledged that these youth were united by some kind of conflict and, as a group, were moving through the conflict.

**A group with an identifying name, sign, and symbols.** With the act of having a name, a sign, and communication symbols unique to a single gang, a group identity is formed through physical separation from other groups. Individuals who join gangs in search of an identity are sure to find it in the gang (Vigil, 1988). Respect, reputation, and representation are basic elements of gang mentality. Dittmore (2007) explains, “Representation of a specific gang defines how one acts, walks, talks, and dresses” (p. 12). Klein (1971) touches upon this idea of group identity in his definition of gangs.

[The group must] (a) be generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood; (b) recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost invariably with a group name); and (c) have been involved in a sufficient number of delinquent incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or law enforcement agencies. (Klein, 1971, p. 13)

**A group with collective activity in crime.** College fraternities could pass the first two criteria of being united by mutual interests and having unique identifiers; however, they are clearly not gangs. Researchers and law enforcement who define gangs use the criterion of collective criminal activity by the gang’s individual gang members contributing towards the overall gang efforts (Esbensen et al., 2001). For example, the Utah Statute 76-9-802 defines a gang in the following terms:

An organization, association in fact, or group of three or more persons, whether operated formally or informally: (a) that is currently in operation; (b) that has one of its primary



activities the commission of one or more predicate gang crimes; (c) that has, as a group, an identifying name or identifying sign or symbol, or both; and (d) whose members, acting individually or in concert with other members, engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal gang activity.

Statute 76-9-802 further defines criminal gang activity as the following: “Crime committed by an individual at the direction of, or in association with a criminal street gang; and the criminal activity was committed with the specific intent to promote, further, or assist in any criminal conduct by members of the criminal street gang.”

Overall, gangs are multi-faceted and complex, as evidenced by the multiple variations of definitions. The task of defining a gang is difficult as the gang make-up and activities vary; however, there are similarities that exist in the circumstances from which gangs form and upon the understanding of it being a separate group of members united by common interests.

### **History of Gangs**

Gangs are not a recent phenomenon. Since the birth of America, boys on the streets abandoned by their immigrant parents and homeless have joined together to form bands of protection and survival (Lewis, 2003). What started as a group of orphan boys running amok and causing havoc soon turned into a gang of criminal activity fighting for survival. In the 1700s, as the federal government increased tax demands on the working citizens, gangs began to form around activities such as robbery and illegal smuggling. The Forty Thieves Gang was notorious for operating as professional murderers, muggers, burglars, and pickpockets. By the 1830s, violent, criminal gangs, such as the Forty Thieves Gang, had their influence in most of the major coastal cities (Lewis, 2003).

## **Epidemiology of Gangs**

Actual rates of gang membership are difficult to obtain due to varying gang definitions and limited methodologies of collecting data. Information on gang prevalence rates are most often gathered through two types of sources: law enforcement agencies and youth surveys. The primary source is law enforcement reports gathered through the National Youth Gang Survey distributed annually to law enforcement agencies across the U.S. Data from law enforcement agencies provide a general picture of the scope and direction of gangs as perceived by law enforcement; however, the quality of these data are dependent upon the quality of the tracking systems used by the agencies. Year-to-year fluctuations of gang numbers may be a result of the law enforcement's shift in defining gangs (Greene & Pranis, 2007).

Youth surveys demonstrate prevalence data that are more consistent over the years as opposed to law enforcement data. Youth surveys reflect the perceptions of gangs from school-age children and can be more sensitive to behavior that does not come to the attention of law enforcement. However, youth surveys are limited by how representative the sample is to the general population (Greene & Pranis, 2007).

## **Description of Gangs in the U.S.**

With caveats given, gangs can be found in every state in the U.S. and are not limited to urban cities. According to the National Gang Threat Assessment of 2009 provided by the National Gang Intelligence Center (NGIC) and the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC), gangs can be responsible for up to 80% of crime in some communities in the U.S.; these crimes include alien smuggling, assault, home invasion, identity theft, murder, and weapons trafficking (National Gang Intelligence Center [NGIC], 2009).

Despite the violence and other antisocial activities associated with gang involvement, gangs continue to be an attractive allure for adolescents. In 1980, the reported number of gangs increased over a span of 10 years from 2,000 to a staggering 31,000 gangs with approximately 846,000 gang members (Miller, 1992). In the 2009 Gang Threat Assessment report, the NGIC and the NDIC report that our numbers of reported gang members have reached approximately one million gang members belonging to 20,000 different criminally active gangs (NGIC, 2009).

**Age.** The national average age of youth involved in gangs is 16 years. Research shows that youth who join gangs tend to do so by the age of 15 (Howell, 2003). Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth demonstrated that 2% of the youth nationwide between ages 12 and 16 are gang-involved, which is a population estimate of 440,000 youth (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). The other two-thirds of the one million reported gang members are individuals above the age of 16 (Greene & Pranis, 2007).

**Gender.** Reports of gender composition in gangs vary depending upon the source of data. The National Youth Gang Center (NYGC) which gathers reports from law enforcement show that women and girls made up just 6% of the gang members known in 2000 (Klein & Maxson, 2006). Yet, the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) reports that women account for roughly 25% of the gang population, with a 3:1 ratio of male-to-female participation (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999).

**Race.** Reports from NYGC data show that Latinos and Blacks make up the majority of gangs with Latinos accounting for 49%, Blacks with 37%, and Non-Hispanic whites making only 8% of the youth gang population. The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) provides proportional data for ethnic groups affected by gang involvement.

According to data from Add Health, about 15% of American Indian/Alaskan Native youth, 5%

of Asian youth, 6% of Black youth, 8% of Hispanic youth, 3% of White youth, and 8% of youth from other races participate in gangs nationwide (Harris, 2008). No national data was taken for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander youth gang involvement; however, a survey from Oakland, California reports that 16% of Pacific Islander school-age youth in Oakland are involved with gangs (Austin & Skager, 2008).

### **Description of Gangs in Utah**

Actual numbers and demographics of gangs in Utah may be hard to track due to the stigma attached with gangs. With this caveat in mind, the following prevalence rates will be used to provide a general picture of the gangs in Utah. The Utah Metro Gang Unit reported in 2003 that the average gang member in Utah is 18 to 24 years old, although recruitment of 14- and 15-year olds is becoming more widespread. According to the database of documented gang members, about 45% are Hispanic, 30% are White, 9% are Pacific Islander, 6% are Asian, and 6% are Black. In 2003, Utah had about 60 documented gangs (Reavy, 2003).

### **Experiences of At-Risk Youth Previous to Gang Involvement**

This section of the literature review will discuss research detailing risk factors significantly associated with and leading to youth gang involvement. The research discussed is organized into domains which represent different areas of an individual's life. Gang membership is strongly associated with high risk across multiple domains. In a longitudinal sample of at-risk youth, Thornberry (2001) found that a majority of the boys and girls who scored above the median in 7 risk factor domains were gang members.

**Family relations.** Youth involved in gangs tend to come from homes where there are high levels of disorganization. Research reports that adolescents in gangs experience low levels of parental supervision (Vigil & Yun, 1996), poor parental attachment (Hirschi, 1969) and poor

parental ability to meet the needs of the child (Thornberry, 1994). Esbensen and Deschenes (1998) found in a multi-site study that the absence of a maternal attachment was the greatest predictor for male gang membership.

In an article detailing the socialization of gang members, Vigil and Yun (1996) describe the importance of families and the consequences of the absence of a solid family unit. Families play a crucial role in a child's socialization—the social process where children learn how to survive and function in society through interactions with significant individuals. A ruptured or weak family institution weakens the ties of adolescents to societal and conventional values. Gang members frequently turn to gangs as a surrogate family and in place become street socialized (Vigil & Yun, 1996).

**Delinquent peer relations.** In 1993, Bjerregaard and Smith conducted the Rochester Youth Development Study, a longitudinal study with at-risk adolescents that examined factors associated with gang membership. The results demonstrated that having delinquent peers was a significant risk factor found to predict gang membership for both the female and male adolescents. No significant relationship was found between future gang involvement and factors of attachment to parents, family supervision, or low self-esteem (Bjerregaard & Smith, 1993).

A similar longitudinal study was conducted with an at-risk adolescent population in Denver (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Esbensen, Huizinga & Weiher, 1993). The sample included males and females from ages 11 to 17 that were categorized as belonging to one of three groups: gang members, non-gang street offenders, or control group. Esbensen et al. (1993) reported no significant differences among the three groups in terms of social isolation, perceived limited opportunities, and self-concept. This meant that according to the data, gang members and non-gang member youth shared similar feelings and patterns of social isolation, perceived

limited opportunities, and self-concept. There were no differences between the three groups in terms of involvement in a range of activities (including school-year job, summer job, attending school, school athletics, school activities, community athletics, community activities, and religious activities). However, when compared with the control group, gang members and non-gang street offenders reported (a) higher levels of commitment to delinquent peers; (b) lower commitment to positive peers; (c) higher levels of normlessness in the family, peer group, and school context; (d) more negative labeling by teachers; and (e) higher tolerance for criminal activity on the part of their peers. The only significant difference between gang members and non-gang street offenders is that gang members reported more negative labeling by their teachers.

**Neighborhood factors.** Neighborhoods which have drugs and firearm availabilities are associated with gang involvement (Hill, Howell, Hawkins, & Battin-Pearson, 1999). Youth who are from neighborhoods where there is a high availability of drugs were three times more likely to join a gang than those who are from other neighborhoods. Also, neighborhoods where social norms favor antisocial behaviors are significantly associated with gang membership (Hill et al., 1999). These neighborhoods can be described as having high rates of crime, widespread poverty, and a general feeling of being unsafe (Kosterman, Hawkins, Hill, Abbott, Catalano, & Guo, 1996).

**School factors.** Youth who are at-risk for gang involvement experience much difficulty at school. In a longitudinal sample, Hill et al. (1999) demonstrated a link between gang involvement and being identified as learning disabled, poor academic achievement as assessed by standardized test scores, low attachment to school, low commitment to school and low educational aspirations.

**Individual factors.** Several individual factors have been found to significantly predict gang membership, including a personal tolerance of fighting and a weak sense of guilt (Esbensen et al., 2001). Hill et al. (1999) observed that youth who were high in externalizing behaviors in fifth- and sixth-grade were more than two times as likely to join gangs as compared to other youth. Other significant findings on individual-level predictors are rejection of conventional beliefs, poor refusal skills, and hyperactivity as rated by fifth- and sixth-grade teachers.

### Summary

Youths who decide to align with gangs come from backgrounds with diverse challenges. Research has shown that gang membership is significantly related to individuals who have high risks across several domains in their lives, particularly peer, school, and individual domains. Boyle (2005) describes the youth gang members as “the kids who hang around older gang members hoping to be noticed and invited into the circle” (as cited in Greene & Pranis, 2007, p. 46). There are many reasons *why* youth decide to join gangs; however, it is of particular interest in this study to explore the *experiences* that the gang has provided its members.

## **Method**

“Research on AAPI (Asian American/ Pacific Islander) youth violence and delinquency remains sparse, although it is needed to inform prevention and intervention efforts” (Lai, 2009, p. 455). The inspiration behind this project stems from the critical need for more information in understanding Pacific Islander gangs to assist the Pacific Islander community in deterring our youth from a powerful, dangerous allure, such as gangs. The following chapter will outline the methods used to conduct this study, including information regarding (a) the phenomenological methods design; (b) recruitment and selection of the research informants; (c) procedures for data collection; and (d) data analysis.

### **Characteristics of Qualitative Research**

The purposes of the current study were to capture meanings and describe experiences of the phenomenon of gangs. With these specific aims in mind, qualitative interviews were the optimal method for achieving these specific aims. According to Moustakas (1994), qualitative methodologies regard data of the human experience as crucial to the understanding of human behavior and therefore seek out descriptions and meanings of the human experience through first person accounts.

### **Phenomenological Methods Design**

The phenomenological methods design was used as a guiding theory for this research project. The phenomenological methods design is a systematic and scientific way towards gaining the understanding of meanings individuals attribute to human experience. In qualitative research, the term *phenomenology* refers to “an interest in understanding social phenomena from the actors’ own perspectives and describing the world as experienced by the subjects” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 26).



The life world is an important concept in the phenomenological methods. Researchers using these methods would seek to examine the individual's life world, the world as it is lived by the person and not as something separate from the person (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989).

Consciousness is another important concept to phenomenology. Phenomenological methods seek to study phenomena as they appear in the consciousness. Husserl, the father of phenomenology, viewed consciousness as a co-constructed dialogue between a person and the world. In order to access the consciousness, one undergoes the process of intentionality where an individual intentionally directs his focus on an essence. Conscious awareness is the starting point of building one's knowledge of reality (Laverty, 2003).

Phenomenology theory was selected as the guiding theoretical framework for this study because of its strength in accepting phenomena as they are given. As the objectives of the current study are to describe the meanings and perceptions of gang experiences, phenomenology allows for a full breadth and depth of experiences to be explored, in an unbiased fashion, as they are brought to the consciousness of the participants. It is assumed that whatever experiences arise within the consciousness of the participants is a meaningful experience and describes the structure of the phenomena.

### **Participants**

Purposive sampling was used to select participants, referred to as participants, to participate in the current study. The purposes of the study dictated the types of persons who were asked to participate in the study. Snowball sampling was particularly helpful in recruiting the necessary number of participants for this study, as the number of available participants was limited.

**Selection.** Participants were selected by the study locators who were trained by the principal investigator, based upon having past experiences with gangs, being of Pacific Islander descent and being over the age of eighteen years. While assessing for past gang membership, the method of self-nomination was used in the current study, where the participants claim whether or not they were formal gang members (Esbensen et al. 2001). In this study, two participants were included in the data collection because of their past experiences with gangs, despite having no *formal* membership into the gang.

**Recruitment.** Participants were recruited using the snowball sampling method. The referral chains began with personal acquaintances of the principal investigator who served as locators. According to Biernacki and Waldorf (1981), a person serving as a locator has two purposes in a referral chain:

First, because of their particular pasts, occupations, social positions and/or lifestyles, they [have] relatively easy access to certain data sources and, as a result, [can] make contracts for possible interviews more efficiently than could the researcher. Second, because the locators often [know] the persons referred to the study, they could verify the respondents' accounts. (p. 152)

The locators in the current study provided names of potential participants who meet all of the selection criteria. The use of two different locators in the community yielded a wide variety of individuals from different backgrounds and contexts, therefore adding to the breadth and depth of descriptions of the phenomenon being studied.

**Description of participants.** Four participants participated in the current study. The participants ranged in ages from 26 to 35 years old. All of the participants were male and of Pacific Islander descent, specifically, two males were half Tongan, half Samoan and the other

two were of pure Tongan origin. All participants were of the second generation to have lived in the United States. Each of their parents had migrated to Utah from the Pacific islands of Tonga or Samoa, one reason was to be closer to the LDS church, as reported by the participants. All participants came from large, two-parent households ranging from 7 to 10 children in the family and the participants tended to be either the oldest child or one of the eldest children. Three of the participants were currently employed and one was looking for employment at the time of the interview.

### **Data Collection: Procedures for Interviewing**

Data was collected through a lengthy, semi-structured interview meeting with each individual participant. Data collection procedures for each interview are discussed in the following section.

**Interview guides.** An interview guide was constructed (included in APPENDIX B) and used to guide the principal investigator throughout the interview process and ensure that proper procedures were taken. A semi-structured interview protocol was also constructed (included in APPENDIX B) in order to focus the interviews upon the topic of interest while allowing for maximum flexibility of participant responses.

**Pre-interview contact.** Initial contacts received from the locators in the community were contacted by the locators either through person or telephone for a pre-interview meeting. The purpose of the pre-interview contact is to determine whether or not the individual is willing to participate and is appropriate for the study. Once participants expressed willingness to commit the time and work necessary to complete the study, preliminary instructions were explained. Each participant was explained by the locator, the true nature of the study, confidentiality, limits of confidentiality, and the right the participant has to withdraw from the study or skip interview

questions at any time. Any questions the participants had about the principal investigator or the study, were answered during the pre-interview meeting time with the locator. Once participant questions were answered and there was a verbal expression of understanding, participants were asked to read and sign the consent forms, if they were in agreement. After consent was obtained, a mutual agreement was made to an interview date, time and location.

**Interview meeting.** Interviews were conducted at various Salt Lake County libraries in private study rooms. These rooms were selected because they were considered a neutral, public location that offered the privacy necessary for personal interviews. Additionally, the interview rooms had large windows that gave an open and safe atmosphere for the interviewer and each participant. Present in the study room during the interviews was the principal investigator, the participant, and the locator who invited the participant to the interview. The locator served as a neutral contact who bridged the connection between the participant and the principal investigator.

Before the interview meeting, the principal investigator engaged in the process Husserl entitles “the epoche,” which is the first step of a phenomenological investigation and is a process where the researcher puts aside biases and preconceived ideas in order to see the things as they are (Ojo, 2008). The interviewer then spent a few minutes to build rapport with the participant, before engaging the participants in a semi-structured interview at the planned time and place. A research assistant accompanied the principal investigator to each of the interview meetings for the purpose of collecting interview notes and for the protection of the researcher and participants. In addition to the interview notes, each interview was tape recorded for the quality assurance of data analysis.

## **Data Management**

To ensure confidentiality, the participants' code names were used thereafter to label any data from the individual participants. The code book was kept in a locked desk. Taped recordings of the interviews were kept in a locked desk and were destroyed upon the completion of this study. Once interviews were transcribed, hard copies of the transcriptions were labeled and filed in a locked desk. All analyses of the data were done on a computer that was protected by a password.

## **Data Analysis**

This study utilized the data analysis procedures described by Moustakas (1994) for analysis and organization of the phenomenological data. All of the interviews were audio recorded. Each interview was transcribed from the audio recording into text by the principal investigator. The accuracy of the transcriptions were verified by listening to the audio recording and following along with the transcribed text. A large amount of data was collected and needed to be reduced. I began by reading each interview in its entirety to ponder on the data. I then deleted expressions that were not relevant or necessary to understanding the experience and the expressions that were redundant. "Overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions are also eliminated or presented in more exact descriptive terms" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). With the expressions that remained, I clustered them into groups and created core themes of the experience. After each of the single expressions was grouped under a theme, I verified the themes against the complete interview of the participant.

**Individual textural and structural descriptions.** With the core themes that were created and organized from the original expressions, two types of descriptions were created for each interview. The first description created was the individual textural description for each

participant, to describe what happens during the experience of gangs and the thoughts, and feelings associated with gangs. A structural description was then created by pondering on the essences and meanings lying behind the participant descriptions of the gang experience. Moustakas (1994) states that a structural description “provides a vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience, the themes and qualities that account for the ‘how’ feelings and thoughts connected [with the experience]” (p. 135). A summary was created to integrate both the textural and structural descriptions for each interview, providing descriptions of the gang experience followed by the *why* it occurs.

**Composite description.** From the textural-structural descriptions, a composite description which represents the group as a whole was created. This was done in order to provide a description of the experiences and meanings of the gang experience.

**Validation of data: Member checking.** Following the completion of the data analysis, a copy of the individual textural descriptions and the composite descriptions were sent to each of the participants for validation of the accuracy of describing the gang experience. The participants were asked to examine carefully the descriptions and input any additions or corrections they felt were necessary. This method of validation reduces the chances of researcher bias by checking with the participants who have created the descriptions. No participants made any changes to the final descriptions.

### **Summary**

The phenomenological methods design was used to guide the procedures of the current study to elicit descriptions and meanings of the gang experience. The recruitment procedures utilized community locators who have personal contacts with the desired study sample to yield potential participants. Descriptions and meanings of lived experiences in the gang were collected

through the completion of four semi-structured interviews. Raw data was created by the transcription of each interview into text and expressions were organized into themes. Through the synthesis of individual and structural descriptions, a composite description was developed to describe the experiences of gangs lived by the participants from this study.

## Results

This chapter includes textural and structural descriptions of the gang experience as described and lived by the participants in this study. From the individual descriptions of each participant's experience, a composite description was created using major themes gleaned from the interviews to communicate a synthesized description of the phenomenon of gangs.

The purposes of the study were to describe with great detail the lived gang experiences of Pacific Islander former gang members and to identify common themes in perceived meanings of gang experiences shared across the sample. However, as the study progressed and stories unfolded, describing and sharing each participant's story became of paramount import. In summarizing participants' stories, direct quotes from interviews were used extensively and stories were reported verbatim, keeping dialog in its true raw form. For the reader, this maintains an honest reality of participants' stories and promotes an insider's perspective rather than an outsider's perspective on gangs. Although the principal investigator considered possible disadvantages of using direct quotes from the interviews, such as portraying participants in a negative manner, the benefits of understanding the gang through the eyes of its members outweighed the potential negative repercussions of using direct quotes.

Four participants were engaged in the interview process, each experiencing the gang in different ways. A textural description was created for each participant to relay to the reader the kinds of experiences lived during the gang experience, while the structural descriptions attempt to add and portray meaning to why the phenomenon was experienced in such a way. Following said descriptions, an elaboration on common themes will be addressed.



## Tevita's Story

Tevita was born and raised in Utah to a family who “strongly believe and live” by their LDS religious beliefs. His story captures the allure that gangs have on young Pacific Islanders, despite the presence of a loving family. As someone whom he describes as being “strong-willed and a little lazy too,” Tevita liked to have fun and “it didn’t matter if it’s in a good way or a bad way.” Associating with the neighborhood gang was, in Tevita’s young mind, “ways to have fun.”

At a young age, the neighborhood gang had an influence in Tevita’s life. He describes: The first generation of the gang, the big gang in our neighborhood, they live down the street from me. And so, every time we walk down the street, we always see them. They always say ‘Whassup,’ gave us candy, stuff like that. And so, we knew who they were, they knew who we was. Their lifestyle started to spread and we started to see it. We started to say, ‘Oh man, he’s got so much candy. He’s got so much toys. How does he do it?’ And so we find out, you know. And slowly, people started getting into it. And that’s their way of recruiting, to make them get more soldiers, I guess, you say.

Tevita decided to “run with the boys” at the age of fifteen. Tevita’s descriptions of his experiences with the gang render textural themes that give us a picture of his overall experience with gangs. The themes included living the street code, core feelings, being ready at all times, family bond with the boys, jail, family presence, church influence, and leaving the gang.

**Gang member expectations.** There were some expectations that were imposed upon Tevita by the gang as he began associating with the gang and his interests were towards officially joining the gang. He needed to build his rep (or reputation) by showing that he was willing to do

whatever it took to represent the neighborhood and his “boys.” He built his rep in the hood by representing the gang to others outside his neighborhood.

I just went around with my boys. Whenever we see other boys, our gang signs would be thrown up. The name of gangs would be yelled out, so that they know where we from and we know where they from.

When asked what would happen if he chose not to represent his hood, he replied, “You would lose a lot of respect... other gangs, they could hurt you in many ways... so that you get the message that, ‘You left us and we didn’t appreciate it. We don’t respect you.’” Representing the hood is a must, in street code, and Tevita described that he had a strong sense of commitment to representing the hood. He said, as if saying it to rival gang members, “Anything you wanna do, we’ll do, ’cause we’re gonna rep our hood, no matter who you are, no matter where you are.”

**Street code.** Tevita defined living the street code as “doin what you gotta do and... you fight to live another day.” This meant to Tevita that he had to be ready to fight for his gang no matter what the circumstances were. Tevita’s interactions with rival gang members were heated and expected to happen at any time. He could be in a store and see somebody that he knows is from a rival gang and “something could pop off anytime.” By fighting off rival gang members at anytime, Tevita was showing that he was repping his hood and that he was down to do anything for the boys. In order to live up to this code, Tevita shared the following thought about rival gang members:

If you’re from the other gang, automatically, without knowing who you are, but just knowing where you’re from and who you represent, I don’t respect you. I hate you. I do not want to see you. You do not deserve to be around me.

***Hatred of rivals.*** Being ready to represent the neighborhood and the gang at any time meant carrying the mentality of utterly hating rival gang members because they disrespect you and want to hurt you. Tevita adopted this mentality to the fullest, not only because it was street code, but also because it was a reality for him. During the interview he shared of an early experience he had as a young boy with rival gang members, previous to associating with his neighborhood gang.

It happened to be at the same time a rival gang lived on the other side of the street. And so, we'd hear gunshots every night. A couple of times, my house would get shot up and so, it was pretty dangerous time at that time... one of my mentality was, 'You wanna shoot my house, you wanna disrespect my family, I'm gone come get you. You don't mess with me or my family.'

Despite descriptions of positively reinforcing feelings, Tevita significantly remembers feeling a strong sense of hate for the rival gang members. When the rival gang members would hurt one of his boys or hurt someone from the community, "you get in a fight [with the rivals], you're not gonna show no remorse for the other person because the amount of hate you have for that person because he's from the rival gang." Tevita described the mentality that he had at the time which fueled the strong feelings of hate. "He's out to get you same way you're out to get him. So you gotta get him before he gets you." In summing up the dominant feelings he experienced while in the gang, Tevita stated, "It's gonna be the love you have for the guys who you respect. You gonna hate those who don't respect and who are not from the same neighborhood. Those are kinda probably the only feelings you *can* feel."

***No snitching.*** Tevita described living the street code through living another street code expectation: "you're not snitching. You're staying away from anyone affiliated with the law."

Although Tevita never had any personal experiences of snitching on his boys, he witnessed what could be done if he had snitched. “You could be hurt really bad just because of somethin’ you didn’t do or somethin’ you said to the wrong people.” So Tevita set a limit for himself, a limit that would prevent him from being caught in that type of situation:

When it came to, like say for example, when it came to drinking, I didn’t want to drink *too* much because, uh, you don’t know. People could take advantage of you, asking you questions. You don’t know what you sayin’ but you could answer the question and it would most likely be somethin’ you’re not supposed to say that people are not supposed to know and I never wanted to be that type of person.

Tevita dealt with the street code expectation of “no snitching” by making sure he always had a plan in case he were to get caught by the cops. “I always had a plan, like if I was to get caught, what am I gonna say. You always gotta know you’re surroundings, so, if something was to happen, where were you gonna go and stuff like that.” Tevita described that he never wanted to put himself in the difficult situation of being caught by cops, where he would then be offered two choices, (a) to be locked up for a very long time or (b) to tell the cops what happened and who was there. The latter option was offered in conjunction of knocking off more than half of those jail time years. He shares,

It’s hard. You either begin to tell and then you get in trouble from your boys or something bad will happen or you’re not gonna tell and you’re just gonna be behind bars for a very long time, with the thing on the back of your mind knowing that, ‘I coulda just say something and I can knock off more than half of what I’ve been sentenced.’

Although understanding how this situation of getting caught is difficult, Tevita still feels that a gang member who is caught in this situation is at fault for his own actions and somehow

allowed himself to be in that position. “You shouldn’t have never gotten yourself in that kind of situation. You knew what’s gonna happen if you go out and try to steal a car... and so, you always gotta have a plan.”

The street code is an important set of behaviors that each gang member is expected to live while with the gang and it is enforced by the gang members themselves. Tevita was naturally aware of the street code and willingly embraced the street code because it was a lifestyle that he found to be fun and beneficial for him, at a young age. He also observed the harsh punishment that, at times, was brought by the gang upon those who did not live the street code. Tevita hinted a little fear of having to deal with the punishment and rejection by the gang; in response, he developed ways of living to prevent himself from being in difficult situations.

**Benefits of gang membership.** Through living the street code—representing the hood, being ready to fight, no snitching—Tevita felt like he was creating a strong bond with his boys, as if they were brothers together.

**Ensuring protection.** “We felt we had each others’ back, everywhere we went. When you felt safe when you were with your boys, it was because they got your back. Anything happen to you, they’re right there to fight with you.” When describing his boys, he said, “just down to earth people you row with and they’re like the eyes in the back of your head.”

A typical day in gang life to Tevita was just “chillin with your boys.” He remembers being able to get together frequently with the boys, partying a lot, drinking alcohol, “just hanging out, just being able to chill and not worry about anything.”

Tevita described how no one would walk around solo. They always stayed in a group because “you’re not gonna remember every single one of their [rival gangs] faces. So, the chances of those guys knowing your face and know where you’re from are really good.” Tevita

cautioned, “especially when you’re in another city, another neighborhood, you always wanna be with one of your boys, so he’ll get your back ‘cause you’re not too familiar with the place... you don’t know the secret spots. . .” Being in a group provided Tevita with a feeling of safety.

***Having fun and being cool.*** Affiliating with the gang and his boys provided a variety of feelings for Tevita, some that were positively reinforcing and others that were very strong and moving. Participating in the activities with his boys brought Tevita the feeling of having fun. “I just thought it was fun at the time and at the time, it was fun . . . At the time, I believed that there was no other way to have fun, but to do this kind of stuff.” Having the title and reputation of rolling with the boys gave Tevita the feeling of “being cool.” Demonstrating the gangster reputation brought him feelings of being respected and feared by others. “You want people to fear you. You don’t want no one to come mess with you... and being part of a gang, people would leave you alone. And it just- at the time it felt cool, it felt right.”

**Family support and relationships.** Tevita’s family created a strong and loving presence in Tevita’s life during the gang experience. He spent little time at home, except if he needed “food . . . to go shower and change . . . even to go sleep a lot.” However, he remembers feeling cared about by his family and did not report any complaints about his family. He shares his memories of his family’s presence:

They were always there for me and that was pretty much the only thing they were able to do for me because I wasn’t listening . . . just knowing that they cared and support me . . . I knew, I felt it when I was home.

Tevita’s mother showed her presence during the gang experience by paying the bail fees at every chance available when Tevita would be thrown into jail. “That’s probably the only times you would see me cry—is when I talk to my mom or when I’m thinking of my mom.” His father

showed his presence by explaining to Tevita the concepts of choices and consequences. “You can choose whatever . . . but the thing you cannot choose is the consequences that come with it.” However, at the time of receiving his father’s talks, Tevita reported feeling like, “Yea, whatever man. The *consequences*? Whatever . . .”

**Religious affiliation.** Tevita described his family as being a very religious family who lived by their beliefs. Religion had a significant influence on Tevita’s experience in the gang by making its presence known through youth leaders, creating a fear in Tevita for the consequences in the after-life, and providing him with the friends who would later support Tevita in his walk away from the gang life. Of his religious youth leaders, he described, “When they would see me across the church, drinking, while they were at a youth dance or something . . . some of ‘em would even come up to me, ‘Hey, man. What’s up?’” Tevita shared how he never felt judged by his youth leaders and that “they made me feel that these guys still care about me, they still wanna help me. But at the same time, allow me to help myself.” Of his interactions with youth leaders, Tevita reported feeling everything “went in one ear and out the other.”

**Jail.** Tevita experienced life being locked up behind bars because of the activities he had done as part of the gang experience. Jail was a hard and lonely time for Tevita. He explained:

It’s almost just as dangerous as being on the streets when you’re locked up because . . . you’re going to be locked up with other people who broke the law and the chances are very high that you’re gonna be locked up with other guys from other gangs and who might know who you are and where you’re from and don’t like where you’re from and things will start getting crazy in there. And you can’t run to your boys, you can’t run, you can’t go nowhere but just stand up and fight.

In jail, Tevita felt that “you gotta watch your back everywhere you go, even when you sleep and it’d be hard to sleep.” He concluded jail “affects you when you’re part of a gang.”

**Leaving the gang.** The members in Tevita’s neighborhood gang had an early influence on Tevita by creating a sense of curiosity and a feeling of desire to have the same kind of lifestyle. Tevita’s friends in the gang made a presence in Tevita’s life by providing opportunities to “have fun” and feel a “family bond” and “respect.” But they also provided him with some advice on life. “Just one night we was all at a park, they just broke it down to me . . . They just said this is why.” For so many years, Tevita had asked for his friends to “put me in the gang.” However, they advised him,

This life ain’t for you. We can see you doing better things with your life. One of the boys gotta make it out of the hood. And we see that it can be you. You can achieve those kind of stuff. You go and handle the business on out there. We’ll take care of the streets for you.

The words from his boys helped him to walk away from the gang life, but it wasn’t until after a few years of continuing to live the “fun life” that he would follow the advice of his boys. However, the words stuck with him in his mind and Tevita did not report feeling any opposition to the words of his boys.

Tevita was around the age of 21 or 22 when he “just felt it was time.” He took the advice of his boys to do “better things with your life.” Around the age of 21, he told the boys that he was done drinking, done smoking and done “doing this,” that he was going to go back to church and try living a better life. At this point in time, Tevita felt like he was taking a risk in losing the respect of his boys. But, instead, he felt they “had nothing but love and support” and that’s how



Tevita “knew they were really [his] boys because they had respect for me . . . because I was able to walk away from all that.”

During the process of leaving the gang, Tevita began having thoughts about how he was different from the rest of the boys. “As for me, I had the push of others. I still was able to feel stuff that they weren’t even able to feel, like fear. Most gangsters don’t show no fear for anything . . . I was always scared.” Tevita remembered having thoughts, like, “Am I gonna be in prison for the rest of my life? Or am I gonna be dead?” “Is this *really* the only way to have fun?” The presence of religion in his life supplied him with thoughts at this time, as well. “I was taught to where you knew and understand what the Lord has in store for you, after this life and that was another thing that always stuck with me. I didn’t want to suffer after.”

Tevita described his story of leaving the gang as a simple action on his part: “I just stopped coming around.” He remembers getting phone calls from the other boys, asking what happened to him because they hadn’t seen him around for a while. Tevita would tell them, “I’m done. I just couldn’t do it. I don’t see myself living this lifestyle forever.” His relationships with other fellow gang members who were not his close friends, varied after leaving the gang. “Some of ‘em would be disappointed, some of ‘em would be mad. But most of them were like, ‘We’ll see you around man. Do your thing, man.’” There were some times where Tevita felt that others thought he was being weak for leaving. Still till this day, he encounters some people who were unsettled with his leaving the gang life and with whom he can still feel some tension. Leaving the gang took some action on Tevita’s part, as well as some risk and sacrifice.

In addition to the action Tevita took on his part to leave the gang, Tevita described having extra support beside him which helped him through the process. He describes:

At the same time, my other friends, they were coming back from their [LDS] missions, and so, they were fresh off the mission. They knew what was happening to me at the time. And they were there to help me out, to carry me and, ever since then, it's been good.

Tevita described his gang experience as one of fun times, chilling with the boys.

However, with the fun times came responsibilities to live up to the gang reputation and gang expectations. Tevita's experiences of living the reputation and expectations evoked a whirlpool of up's and down's, feeling respect and feeling hate, feeling safe while constantly feeling unsafe. There were constant, unfluctuating, influences in Tevita's life whose positive influence grew stronger as time passed and Tevita's mentality began to shift. Through his journey of the gang life to its conclusion, Tevita's story highlights the journey of a young man who took the personal responsibility to leave the gang, while using the support of other positive influences around him.

**Structural description of Tevita's gang experience.** The structures that permeate Tevita's gang experience and evoke strong feelings and actions are expressed in Tevita's need to fulfill his desires, the importance of his relation to others, and his sense of responsibility to the gang.

Regarding Tevita's need to fulfill his desires, he reported having typical adolescent desires: to have fun, to feel cool, and to feel right with others. Associating with his neighborhood gang was the route for Tevita in fulfilling each of these desires. "I believed that there was no other way to have fun, but to do this kind of stuff, 'cause if I wanted something, I was going to go get it, one way or the other."

Some of the first memories which stick out for Tevita were hanging out with the boys, "being able to chill and not have to worry about anything." Letting others *see* he was associating

with gang members gave others the impression that he was a gang member. This gave Tevita the feeling of being cool. Tevita felt right with his fellow friends in the gang when he carried out behaviors representing the gang. Those behaviors were positively reinforced by members of the gang giving Tevita their respect. Gaining the feelings of having fun, being cool, and feeling right with others were all strong positive reinforcers, encouraging Tevita to continue in the gang and molding his behavior in a way that aligned with fellow gang members.

Consequently, because the gang became a route to fulfill his desires, Tevita chose to place greater importance on relationships with those closest to the gang than with those who were in opposition of the gang. However, Tevita also had the presence of a strong and loving family, whom he describes as “always [being] there for me,” as well as the presence of religious youth leaders, who each were trying to positively influence Tevita’s behaviors. His family and religious youth leaders tried to effect change in Tevita’s behaviors by having one-on-one talks with him. Of these talks, Tevita described his attitude at the time, “Everything they told me, it just kinda went in one ear, out the other. And when they left, I completely forget everything they talked about. Just didn’t care at the time.”

As an adolescent, Tevita did not want the religion-dominated life his parents were living and leading; it was not his idea of “fun.” Therefore, the words shared by his family and religious youth leaders were of little importance to Tevita during his involvement with the neighborhood gang. However, words offered by friends in the gang were often times accepted with little resistance because the gang was a fulfillment of his desires, including feeling right with others.

Tevita desired to feel accepted by members of the gang. He tried especially hard to live the gang expectations because of his unofficial position with the gang. This desire was expressed through Tevita’s thoughts of being worried and always feeling that he needed to have

a plan, in order to avoid upsetting members of the gang. Although this worry was shared by other participants, it was especially prevalent among Tevita's experiences. Worries of living the gang expectations then led to more worries and feelings of uncertainty. These worries included concerns regarding potential clashes with rival gang members, as interactions with rival gangs are key defining moments of gang member identity.

### **Toa's Story**

Toa was born in Utah, but spent a significant part of his childhood being raised in the islands of Tonga with his family before moving back to Utah as a teenager. When his family moved back to Utah, they stayed in the same neighborhood in which he currently resides. Toa describes his parents as being "Mormon. . . strong-willed, hard workers and pretty much set in their ways." His parents were brought to Utah by their parents during their teenage years, making Toa and his siblings the second generation in their family to live in the U.S.

**Early entry into gang.** Toa recalls officially adopting the title of being a "gang member" during his eighth grade year in junior high school. His stories and descriptions of his gang experience create a story of a young man who took part in a variety of activities, with a specific kind of mentality that he adopted and expressed through his activities. While living the gang life, Toa described specific feelings tied to specific situations and tied to his relations with family members, friends, and others in his community.

**Memories: Factors contributing to gang life.** Toa described many past memories which occurred previous to his gang experience, but had an association with his memories of the gang life. These memories are shared in this section to provide a more contextual understanding of Toa's lived experiences in the gang.

**Tongan upbringing.** When Toa's family lived in the islands of Tonga, he states that it was in the islands where he learned "how to pretty much take care of [himself]." He explained that on the islands, if you were being "taunted" by another person, you would interpret the other's actions as them "asking for a fight." There was a lot of fighting going on and Toa explains it as, "it had nothin' to do with gangs... it's just the way the island kids are raised... You gotta fight while you're growing up... gain your respect in your little village."

When Toa's family returned to live in Utah, he "brang the island mentality" with him. During that time in his life, there were only a few Pacific Islander families in his area and he remembers how the few Pacific Islanders tended to come together. He recounts, "So when I got here, there was probably, like, just a handful of families. So we all grew up and us bein' Poly's in America, we tended to come together. So, that's why I say, we're like family."

When he and his friends began grouping together and hanging out, Toa began feeling the label of "Polynesian gang" being placed upon him by people at school, like "principals and stuff." "So we all grew up and us bein' Polys in America, we tended to, like, come together... but as we got older, they started labeling us as a gang. And we just, I guess we just evolved into a gang."

**War stories.** Toa remembers when he was young, attending parties, when his friends, "the older guys," would enter the room and share their "war stories," or stories about the crimes they were able to accomplish and live through. Toa felt a desire to be like them. "The older guys... they're bragging about this and that and that and they're getting all the props from everybody else and you're like, 'Wow, man. I wanna do that', 'cause everyone thinks it's cool.'" Later, Toa stated, "My bigger homies, the older guys. . . some of them guys are like my hero."

***Polynesian parenting.*** A significant theme of memories which Toa kept returning to in his interview was his experiences of what he calls “Polynesian parenting.” He implies of the tough discipline many Polynesian parents use when disciplining their children.

I mean here [U.S.], they call it child abuse. Where we’re from, it’s just a part of life. . .

But it’s just the way you were raised, you know what I mean, that’s what happened to us so that’s what we do. That’s what we’re taught so that’s how we react, you know what I mean. I know it’s not right here, but we go back to where we’re from, that’s just the way of life.

But, in a way, it was a way of life that Toa describes was hard for him to live with. Of his parents’ parenting style, he shares, “They always try to teach us the right way. But they only know one way to teach it—through the belt. . . Was it wrong? No, it ain’t wrong, but it’s just the Polynesian way.”

***Personal qualities: Rowdy, crazy and Polynesian.*** Throughout his descriptions of gang life, Toa identified and emphasized important personal qualities and traits linked to the gang life. These included the island mentality, *being* Polynesian, and *being* rowdy and crazy. Toa described how he loved the island mentality that he learned and lived. He explained that in the islands, fighting is a natural, accepted part of gaining respect and no one would ever get in trouble with the police for it. Toa carried this perspective with him regardless of the context in which he interacted. As part of his Polynesian identity, Toa felt that he and his boys were “by nature. . . more aggressive than other races. . . more aggressive to fight back and defend ourselves. . . and bigger by nature.” Toa also knew that he was one who was capable of being rowdy and harbored no fear of doing the “required” activities of gang life. He describes, “The official crew of my age group, that I grew up with, you know—the rowdy crew. Till this day the

rowdy crew is either locked up, on drugs, or dead.” At the time of his gang life, Toa took pride in his ability to “be rowdy” because it meant that he was capable or and ready for anything when the time called for it. Toa described that when he and the rowdy crew were getting ready to go do something, there would be some friends who were not as “down” as he was. Toa remembers saying to these friends, “Bye. I mean, we [the rowdy crew] goin’ do this, you guys just sit right here and we’ll be back.” He continued explaining, “I don’t look at ‘em less... I always knew him was gonna say no when the day, you know what I mean, when it came to it.” These personal traits, the island mentality, *being* Polynesian and *being* rowdy, were all traits that Toa identified as critical elements required of successful gang members.

***Unlawful behaviors.*** Many of the lived experiences which Toa described from his gang life involved behaviors that are perceived by others in society as “unlawful behavior.” A defining moment for Toa and his gang was during the eighth grade summer time when they began picking up weapons and initially thinking, “Oh, this- This is *really* what it is,” sounding apprehensive at first then progressing into the confidence later on, stating, “This is it. This is what’s up.”

Becoming official, for Toa, did not include a process of initiation or anything similar to it, in his days. He felt that he and his group of childhood friends evolved into a gang. The group began wearing a specific dress code—Chuck Taylors shoes and Dickies clothing. The things they did together, which stuck out in Toa’s mind, were activities such as “spray painting, stealing cars, breaking into houses, bank robberies,” and such. A typical day in the gang life, to Toa, meant selling drugs, stealing stuff, and then selling it. A specific incident which really sticks out in Toa’s mind during the gang experience is a time when he and a few others committed an armed bank robbery, initially thinking they could get away with it, then getting caught and

sentenced to prison. He describes, “It became addictive. Once you get away with it, you think you can do it all the time, see. . . It’s like fast money.” Toa remembers using the money he gained from doing armed robberies to buy “typical teenage” things. He “got a ride with it. Got some clothes, some jewelry, took the homies and got them geared up... whatever the typical teenager wants at the time.” When Toa began carrying around more cash, he remembers getting introduced to and starting to use “a lot harder drugs.” When asked what kinds of things his gang would be doing when they were not doing unlawful activities, Toa replied, “Drinkin’, smokin’, chillin’ ... Tryna holla at the girls.” It appeared that “hanging out” with the boys was a less prominent gang experience for Toa than the unlawful behaviors involving a group of gang members.

**Respect and bragging rights.** Toa described the kind of “mentality” he had during his gang life. Some factors influencing this mentality stemmed from Toa’s personal characteristics in addition to the influence of gang dynamics and neighborhood factors. Toa claims that he performed many of the unlawful behaviors because of all the “bragging rights and for all the other *younger* homies that looked up at me like I was somebody special.” Receiving respect from members within the gang, as well as persons outside of his gang, was something that was valued by Toa. Because the desire to receive “bragging rights” was prevalent, it led to the mentality of, “Who can do the stupidest, craziest thing and live to tell about it?” He added, “You try to do something more bigger and crazier than the last one just did.” Toa later compared this type of mentality and behavior to a popularity contest in high school. “Everybody wants to be the toughest, the baddest, and the most popular.”

**Fast money.** The opportunity to gain money fast was also a prevalent thought on Toa’s mind during his gang life. A method to gain fast money was through committing crimes. When



Toa was describing his experience of the armed bank robbery he and a few others had planned out, Toa stated, “It’s like fast money...you get the money, you spend it on whatever you want, then when you’re broke, we did it again.” He continues to explain, “We want everything, but we don’t wanna work for it, like now. We don’t wanna get a job.”

**Conflict with rival gangs.** When asked what feelings he experienced while in the gang life, Toa started off by describing how gang members are just like normal people. He had other aspects in his life that he was focusing on and maintaining, that interactions with rivals were not a prevalent activity for him. About his personal experience, he describes,

It ain’t like I was, like, “Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill” every time, you know what I mean? I mean, it wasn’t like I thought like *that...* If I see them, then it’s on. If I don’t, then oh well ... It ain’t like I’m gonna go out and *look* for them *out of the blue*. If they did somethin, then, *yea*, I’d look for them out of retaliation. But I wouldn’t look for people jus ‘cause it’s ‘go kill.’

However he did share what was on his mind when he did come into close contact with a rival gang or another person who has done something wrong. “It’s ‘get or get got.’” Do whatever you need to do to make sure that you are not the one getting a beating.

**Attitude about education.** Toa described as a side note, the mentality about school boys and boys who leave the gang for an education. Toa recalled about one of his home boys who appeared “smarter than everyone else.” Toa describes his mentality about a particular homie when he was young:

We called him names and joked around when everyone was younger, but that was just, you know what I mean—it happens now, you know what I mean. But look who gets the last laugh, you know. Now we understand this. ‘Look who gets the last laugh.’ *Now*,

who do we go to when we need help, you know what I mean. We go to [name of person].  
‘Cause [name of person] got us.

Another similar thought Toa described having was about fellow Pacific Islander gang members who left the gang for education and appeared to “forget where they come from.” People who have left the neighborhood for the reason of education and who demonstrate behaviors that others perceive as being arrogant or snotty, are labeled as being, “white-washed” or in Polynesian terms, “fi’a palagi.” The terms “white-washed” or “fi’a palagi” are used as a derogatory label in the Pacific Islander community to describe Pacific Islanders who adopt and predominantly live a Caucasian-American lifestyle, while sacrificing ties to the Pacific Islander heritage. Toa explains:

Like, our mentality is just like, “Aw, they wanna fi’a palagi” ... They done went and did this. Now, they don’t even-- They see us, they don’t even wanna kick it. They don’t even wanna say “Hi” to us. So we look at it like, “Damn, you came from the same neighborhood we came from. We were just hanging out two years ago. All a sudden you got an education, you don’t wanna kick it no more?” You know, that’s-- So, people take offense to it, you know. “Oh you think you’re better than us now. Auright, we gone whoop your butt. You know, we goin’ remind you of who you are.

Despite having this definition of what some people do to earn the label ‘fi’a palagi,’ the principle investigator of this study was used as an example by Toa as someone who was fi’a palagi without demonstrating any of the listed behaviors, like living in the same neighborhood and forgetting to say “Hi” to others. It left the impression on the principal investigator that there were more deeper meanings to the label “fi’a palagi” than Toa had been able to describe, such as it meaning anyone who appears to lack knowledge of street life or dress in a manner that is

different from the manner of dress common to people in his neighborhood. Having the mentality of making fun of boys who appear to be smart or labeling others as fi'a palagi when they would leave the gang for an education, created a feeling and sense that the gang life and behaviors which make up a gang identity are the standard of life Pacific Islanders in the hood must live by, including education and manner of appearance, in order to claim themselves "Polynesian." Any deviation from this standard was considered different and wrong.

**Powerful feelings.** Core feelings that were associated with Toa's experiences in the gang ranged from feeling a powerfully motivating feeling such as feeling addicted to crime to feelings of deep sadness after the death of a loved one. Toa felt the incredibly high feeling of being addicted every time he was able to break away from an armed bank robbery scene without getting caught. It was a powerfully reinforcing and motivating feeling that led him into committing a few more bank robberies before finally getting caught.

**Respect from homies.** Another powerfully motivating feeling experienced by Toa was the feeling of being admired by the younger homies. These feelings arose each time he bragged about the crimes he committed and in return, received "props" from the boys.

**Deep sadness.** Feelings of deep sadness, which Toa described as being "traumatic," were felt whenever a close family member passed away.

When my little cousin died, [name of cousin], I was incarcerated during the time, but, I felt it... That was actually the first one that was like, immediate family, that-- where it actually happened to my family, you know what I mean. I felt bad when it was my friends, but when it was actually hit *home*, then you're like, Wow.

**Family pressures.** During his involvement with the neighborhood gang, Toa felt unaccepted at home because he chose to live a life that was different from the goals and dreams

his parents had for him. Toa felt pressured by his parents to choose the route of playing professional football. However, he feared that if he didn't make it to the professional level he would be viewed as a loser by his family. His friends, at the time, were providing him with the feelings of acceptance and understanding which he felt lacked at home. "I went towards my friends because . . . because they *understood* more. Not that they *knew* more than my parents, but because they understood *me* more." Of his parents' parenting style, Toa felt like they only knew one way to send their message to him was by pressuring him. "There was so much pressure from it, I tended to go the other way more 'cause it was less pressure." The feelings Toa felt at home were in contrast to some of the positive feelings he was experiencing on the streets. At home he felt like he was "a loser . . . [but] in the hood, I'm not a loser, you know what I mean."

**Respect from friends.** During the gang, Toa remembers having to understand his friends and determine who was headed on the same route he was on. Based upon his feelings of each friend, he developed a friendship accordingly. "You just *know* who's with it all the way and who's not with it all the way." He continues to explain the different subgroups that were present in his gang and social life:

These kids here, they're more the church boy, school kids. . . Then you got the crew that's just all the way out there . . . We're gonna call the homie that we know is gonna go do something stupid with us.

Friends and others in the community were an integral part in Toa's feeling of respect. He shared how going through the juvenile system was a way to earn respect from others. A member of the gang goes through the juvenile system, then comes out and starts getting positive attention from others. They'd say things like, "Oh, you was in DT. Whoop-dee-whoop-whoop. You're tough. You're hard." Then, a process happens when your name gets around and your "street

credibility” begins to establish. “So they see you. And then *now* they know who you are. So your name is kinda like getting’ around.” Respect depended upon others seeing you and hearing your name. Once Toa earned that respect from others, it was a reinforcing feeling.

**Role and identity within the gang.** There was a structure in the gang that established the relationship Toa had with the boys in the gang. The structure is based upon age and establishes your role and identity in the gang. Toa described the structure as a part of his experience. “You got the BG’s, the baby gangsters, which we consider anywhere from junior high school to high school kids. Then you got the YG’s, the young gangsters, 18 to mid 20’s. Maybe 28 and above, we call the G’s.” The G’s are the ones who have a job, have a family and have to pay for the bills. The YG’s are the ones who try to teach the BG’s the ways of the gang and how to carry things out in a proper manner. The BG’s are considered the ones who still need to earn and prove their respect by performing public, unlawful behavior.

**Incarceration.** A significant part of his gang career was prison time, which he feels was a life saver and life-lessons teacher for him. Still today, Toa’s past gang life has an influence on how he carries out his present life. Toa experienced what it was like to be locked up behind bars during his gang experience. It was a time of self-reflection. “Being locked up all them years, I actually sat down and thought about what I did. You got a lot of time to yourself [and you] learn a lot about yourself.”

While incarcerated, Toa described a few family events and how he could not do anything about, but feel feelings of hurt. He was unable to see his children for a significant part of their lives. In particular he noted the sadness of missing their toddler years. At that time, his wife had to move on with her life because he was sentenced for such a long period of time and could not and would not be around. A close cousin was killed through a gang fight and the only thing he

could do in his power was feel deep sadness and pain for the loss of a loved one. Prison affected Toa's life significantly and although he lost contact with a few loved ones, Toa felt that in essence prison saved his life. "I believe that if I didn't get busted, I'd probably be *dead* or a dope fiend." About himself being in prison, Toa explained, "Some people just have to learn the hard way. And I think that if I didn't learn that way, I probably would have never learned."

**Leaving the gang.** When asked about his departure from the gang, Toa replied, "I'm out. I'm out by choice, not that I'm all the way out. I'm out to a point." Toa defined leaving the gang completely as someone implying, "I don't wanna be your friend no more," and no longer coming to the gang "functions," like the bar-b-ques and birthday parties. Toa continues to socialize with his friends in the gang, but explains that "I'm not gonna go do what *needs* to be done if somethin' happened to the neighborhood . . . we don't go out and do little things we did when we was kids."

Currently, Toa's relationship with the boys in the gang are attending the social events put together by the gang, including "holiday get-togethers, bar-b-ques, stuff like that." He made it clear that he no longer socializes with the younger generation, but sticks to interacting with the guys his same age. He has a job and works to pay the bills for his family.

**Structural description of Toa's gang experience.** The gang provided a way for Toa to emphasize favorable aspects of his identity and express those characteristics by living the gang life, which were positively reinforcing for Toa. Toa's self-identity, his described self during early experiences in the gang, seemed to be heavily intertwined with aspects of his perceived gangster image. It seemed "natural" for him to evolve into a gangster because it was an identity embedded with favorable characteristics similar to his own defining personality traits. Toa felt that he was trained to be tough through his Polynesian home life; he had a natural side of being

aggressive; he had a naturally larger physique than other races; and he was driven to be the “craziest” person in his group of friends. Of his childhood experiences, Toa describes, “. . . [my parents were] just teachin’ us to be physical our whole life, you know what I mean, so we just came out more physical and more aggressive with just the way we are.”

With Toa’s self-identity being closely infused with his gang-identity, he took others’ anti-gang efforts very personal, including his family’s efforts to keep him out of the gang. He mentioned the punishing nature of laws against people like him for being their natural selves. “We fight with the police and we don’t get arrested [on the islands], so it’s just different. I guess it’s the culture here; it’s harder for them to accept us than it is for us to accept their way.” When Toa chose the gang life over an athletic career his family wanted for him, he felt unaccepted by his parents. “I always had like a struggle, because I played football and that’s the direction my family wanted me to go. And then my friends, they were more like, acceptable.” Toa felt that his parents’ love and acceptance was conditional upon his success in football.

I went towards my friends because ... because they *understood* more, you know what I mean. Not that they *knew* more than my parents, but because they understood *me* more, you know what I mean. Like, they was more willing to accept me, whether I was in the NFL or not, you know what I mean? And my parents are willing to accept me, but at the time, because they was trying to push me to go that route, I felt like, ‘Well, if I don’t make it, then, what the hell, I’m a loser?’ You know what I mean? In the hood, I’m not a loser, you know what I mean.

From Toa’s perspective, activities performed while in the gang gave him a chance to receive glory and acceptance for the person he really was.

## Junior's Story

Junior was born in Utah, but spent a few years living in Samoa with his immediate family. He moved back to Utah during his pre-teen years and shortly after became involved with the neighborhood gang. Junior was raised in a two-parent home, with parents whom he describes as “religious.” A year after he joined the gang, his mother passed away. Junior did not go into detail about his mother’s death and the researcher did not pry for details.

**Polynesian reputation.** Junior described gang life as living up to the good reputation and “carrying on the good name.” He aligned his behaviors to match the reputations of the two groups which he was a part of—his Polynesian race and his neighborhood gang. “The Polynesians just got that stereotype as being tough so I expressed myself a lot like that and live up to it ... don’t’ wanna make the name look bad you know, the Polynesian name.” In carrying this reputation out, he didn’t want to appear weak and, instead, adopted a sense of “zero tolerance” for anyone who showed a sign of disrespect to him. Many of the behaviors of being a gang member were, in a sense to Junior, carrying on the Polynesian name. By being tough and “putting that impression” on people, he was able to help keep the gang reputation from being labeled as “weak.”

**Street family.** The boys in the gang were considered family. “You got your family at home then you got your street family . . . why you do the same thing for your brother at home, you do the same thing with your friends out there on the streets.” For Junior, it all started as a group of boys hanging out together at school and at church. When fights would arise at school, “you ain’t just gone leave your friend hanging. You see a friend in trouble, you got to get in.” A sense of family protection and duty to protect was felt by Junior. Gang life seemed to evolve from these early experiences of friends sticking up for each other. With the sense of family and



duty to protect, there came a heavy load of work required from Junior, to uphold those responsibilities. As he described, “It’s fun kicking it for the meantime, but then there’s a whole lot of things that come with it—being stabbed, shot. You get put in situations where you gotta retaliate.”

**Respect.** A significant part of *being* a gang member, for Junior, was having respect from others. Junior’s relationships with others outside the gang revolved around the feeling of respect given to him. He remembers thinking, “Anybody that approaches me, come correct, or else Imma put him in his place . . . just try to leave that impression.” People would see the things Junior would do and then help spread the word about him; “they gonna tell their friends, ‘Hey man, don’t mess with that dude.’”

**Crime.** Committing crimes was a significant part of Junior’s gang experience that helped Junior to achieve the respect he wanted, as well as the money he desired. He described his behavior in the gang as “just committing crimes for little money, what we thought back then was big twenty ... robbing ... selling everything there is to get some money.” He and his friends would create “little plots and schemes” in the efforts to get money. Junior shared a chuckle when reflecting upon those memories.

**Incarceration.** Being locked up in prison was an important part in Junior’s gang life. During the earlier years of his gang experience, being involved with the juvenile system was like a rite of passage for him. People seemed to give him respect when he came out and he moved up along the ranks of the gang. When he was sentenced to prison at the age of 16, “I was the OG (the oldest, highest group in the gang) of the hood ... That’s the end of the line right there. OG.” Junior sums up his career by saying, “I’ve been through it all. Juvenile lock up. Penitentiary. I’ve been to the state penitentiary.” Through the later years of his gang life, prison began to serve

more than just a way to move up the ranks—it became a harbinger of change in life. “I was tired of going to jail, really.”

**Emotional rollercoaster.** Being part of the gang life involved a storm of feelings for Junior. He describes his emotional journey as something similar to mood swings:

It felt good, at first, gang banging, getting respect. Then you get into jail. Nobody knows you. You feel sad. You're like, ‘Man! Where are my dudes at, man? The ones that I was going down for, they ain't here now.’ It's sad. When your friends pass away, you sad.

You get angry, you gotta retaliate ... You in mood swings when you gang bang (laughs)!

Another important feeling Junior remembered having throughout his gang experience was the feeling of uncertainty, not knowing what could happen to you around the corner. “Gang banging is an everyday thing. When you at home, you safe, but when you out there hanging around with your friends ... you'll never know what's around the corner.”

**Current relationship with gang.** Currently, Junior does not claim that he has completely left the gang. “I'm still affiliated in some kind of way,” he explains, “but it's a whole different focus now.” While describing experiences associated with “leaving the gang,” Junior kept mentioning “a whole different focus” “a whole different motive.” He appeared to be working on changing his view on life and his mentality. “I'm glad that I have different people, I mean my friends, man, since the beginning, trying to lead me in a positive direction.” Junior is currently working with another friend to “make music and blow it up right now.” While he claims to no longer get involved with the “ruckus” part of gang life, he continues to enjoy opportunities the gang provides to socialize with other older boys from the gang.

**Structural description of Junior's gang experience.** In Junior's experience, a good part of being in the gang was having good relationships with friends who have similar interests

and personalities. His friends in the gang were people with whom he grew up and would get into school fights together to protect each other. Being in the gang was more about being a family together because they would look out for each other. To Junior, it made sense to join a gang because he was demonstrating to his “brothers” that he would do whatever it took to make sure that he was there for them when times called for it. In return, the gang provided Junior with feelings of respect and pride. It made sense to put yourself in dangerous situations because it was for your brothers and for the reputation, not for yourself.

When with his gang, Junior experienced the feeling of being where he wanted to be and in a place where he could be himself. Performing unlawful behaviors became normal because everyone else around him was doing the same thing. Whatever Junior wanted, at the time, he could find in the gang—money, respect, fun times, good friends—and there was no rational reason for him to walk away from the gang. When anyone tried to advise Junior to leave the gang, the advice was rejected, like a disco club rejecting outsiders.

### **Sione’s Story**

Sione describes his childhood as “being raised in a good home” and being “a straight-A student.” He also adds that in addition to being “a good student in the school,” “[I was able to] think for myself.” He was born and raised in Utah to parents whom he describes as “Americanized.” Although both parents migrated to Utah as their family’s first generation from the Pacific islands, his father moved from American Samoa, which made him “Americanized” and his mother spent most of her life in Utah, which made her “*really* Americanized.” Sione considered his parents being “Americanized” a blessing for which he was grateful because they “knew what was going on.”

**Gang label and group identity.** For Sione, the gang life began with a group of friends. These were friends with whom he traveled everywhere, including school and church. “I [was] raised with the boys ... since we was babies ... and [the gang life] just kinda grew on us.” People surrounding Sione and his friends—neighbors and teachers—“always called us gang members. You could just feel it; they didn’t even have to call us it.” He described the time when a cop first called him a gang member, “It pissed me off so much, that we wanted to actually jump the cop ... but afterwards, after the whole thought process and everything goes through, it was like, ‘Oh, I can see it.’”

A couple of experiences occurred in Sione’s life which he claims made the gang label stick, solidifying that he and his friends would become their own gang. He shares the following example:

We were in a different city, eating at a fast food restaurant. I would say seventh, eighth grade. Some Mexicans come up and say, ‘Where you from?’ They know you’re not from their hood, type deal. That was what pretty much plagued us with the title ‘cause that’s where we started representing, was *that* day.

A few weeks later, at Sione’s school, “a bunch of Mexicans lined up in front of our school, told us they were gonna shoot every Polynesian inside the school, you know, because we had beat up one of theirs for asking where we were from.” This event brought the feeling to Sione that from that point in time, he would have to stand up and represent his neighborhood against outsiders.

**Gang code of conduct.** In Sione’s experience, being a gang member was defined by the environment in which he was raised and aligned with his hometown’s definition of young Pacific Islanders. When he and his friends adopted this neighborhood identity, they created a name for

themselves and decided that their purpose was to “represent the [neighborhood].” Sione and his boys represented themselves and created a “sense of togetherness” by adopting a code of behaviors of their own, which they lived by. They didn’t drink or smoke because of their religious background, but because they were representing the title of a gang, they did everything else--stealing, shooting, and carrying weapons. Dress code was looking “plain, clean cut, white tees and basketball shorts.” The standard for their gang was to always have a plan in order to avoid getting caught.

**Gang life.** Doing activities, both legal and illegal, together with his gang was a significant part of Sione’s gang experience. A typical day in the gang for Sione was “waking up in the afternoon ... the first thing you did was call up one of the boys” and meet up together at a park or other meeting place. “As soon as the sun went down, that’s when everything changed. ‘I’m bored. Let’s go do something.’” When he was relaxing with his boys, they would play cards and board games. When they were on a mission to accomplish a task, they created a plan and worked together. It seemed as if there was always something to do while in a gang.

**Stealing and selling.** Sione described how the gang life gave him opportunities to build business skills. Sione had collected a number of technological gadgets that he had stolen and stashed in his home to sell to others. “It was like this little business. We were business minded where all we wanted to do was make money... I can go up to anybody, just some random person on the street ... and make a sale.” As a 15-year-old, this gang related business provided him with more money than when he was a young adult in his early twenties looking for employment. With money in his hand, more money than typical for an adolescent, he described feeling similar to a grown man who is financially stable and able to provide for his family.

Life was good for Sione, making money, “anywhere from \$500 to a \$1000” in one week. Sione began to adopt a “who-cares mentality,” not caring what happened in life. Sione explained, “I had alternatives of where I know I’m gonna make money. I felt like I was smart enough to where I knew I was gonna [graduate], so the only thing else on my mind now, was makin’ a buck.”

***Carrying out missions.*** The “non-caring “attitude would sometimes carry over into his relationships and interactions with others. When he and his gang planned to shoot up a house, “[did] anybody think of any family members that are gonna be in the house? We don’t care. That’s long gone now. You’ve crossed the line, so pretty much everybody’s paying.” When in the moment of carrying out a mission, “the only thought you think about at the time is getting it done.” The thoughts going through Sione’s head, at that time, depended upon the purpose of the mission. “If it was finding somebody because they hurt somebody, it was pretty much revenge. Once you get that thought in your mind, nothing else matters.”

An adrenaline rush was a significant feeling for Sione throughout his experiences. He remembered feeling the adrenaline rush through his body. “You’re higher than if you’re on ice or anything ... your adrenaline is just out, through the roof, where you can’t sleep for two days, you know.” At times, the adrenaline would take over and Sione could not remember the next morning what had happened. In moments like those, no thought process had occurred or registered and actions just occurred instinctively.

***Maintaining multiple identities.*** During Sione’s early years as a “hood banger” he remembered having to maintain multiple identities all at once. “Being from Utah. Being a Polynesian member of the [LDS] church. All of that clashes together.” After completing a gang mission and doing whatever was needed, “we were ready to come home and sleep and go to

church the next day or a scout fundraiser the next day, whatever it was.” While in his early youth, the multiple identities of Sione seemed to go along together with no problems. But as he became older, he began realizing more and more, how incompatible the gang life was with his religious life.

**Leaving the gang.** The event in his life which Sione attributes as being the one to interrupt his gang life was preparing to serve an LDS mission around the age of nineteen. Sione developed more accountability by working with his religious leader and made confessions about his behavior. He began to lose his friends in the gang due to LDS missions and was able to “think about things, if I really wanted to go.” Sione continued, “Everything was just going through my mind, ‘why’ and ‘why I needed to stop doing things.’”

Sione was asked by his religious leader to take a year to complete a process of introspection and restitution. When the year was over, he was able to leave on an LDS mission. Currently, Sione lives with his wife and children forty-five miles away from his hometown where it all happened “... so that you don’t remember a lot of things, you know. It’s hard to forget. But it’s easier than driving down the street and being like, ‘Hey that’s where...’”

**Structural description of Sione’s gang experience.** The gang life provided Sione with activities to fill his day. There was always something to do and a variety of things to do when in the gang. Whatever Sione wanted at that time, he could get for himself through the opportunities that the gang would provide. Often times, the activities were meaningful and driven with a purpose, but activities were always carried out with the boys. It was exciting and comforting for Sione to know that he was part of a group that worked for something and that provided him with a feeling of power over others. It was even more relaxing for Sione to know that he could

confidently get money and other gratifying things from the gang if other more traditional routes of gaining money, such as education and employment, failed to work out for him.

A significant part of the gang life existed in relationships Sione had with his friends in the gang. Similar to the other participants' reports, Sione had grown up with members of his gang and had fought in school fights to protect each of them. Early experiences such as school fights tended to draw the boys together and created a mentality of the "need" to fight back in order to protect each other. When one of the boys would get hurt by a rival gang, a mission of revenge was created, seeking out those who caused injury. Thoughts about the feelings or safety of rivals and their families were out the door because in Sione's mind, rivals hurt his "brother."

When Sione came to the point in his life when he began considering if he should leave the gang, a significant factor led him away from gang life. After the age of 19, his friends departed on their religious missions to serve their church. This redirected the pull of his friends' influence away from the gang and toward serving a church mission.

### **Composite of Participants' Textural Descriptions**

From the individual descriptions, common themes were elucidated and were composited to create an overall description representing the lived experiences and meanings of the gang, as attributed by this study's four participants. The themes which were extracted as common themes among the four individual descriptions included the following:

- a. Having respect of others
- b. Experiencing a family bond within the gang
- c. Having the mindset and mentality
- d. Living the reputation—*being* the gang member
- e. Getting what you want



- f. Experiencing feelings in the gang—hatred or love
- g. Listening to significant others
- h. Giving up the ruckus

**Theme 1: Having respect of others.** The word respect was used 42 times by the participants as a group. This theme included either feeling the respect of their boys in the gang or receiving respect by being feared by rival gangs. It was important for the participants to feel respect and at times they focused their behaviors around opportunities to receive respect. Respect was not only a positive reinforcement, but also an expectation the participants had in their interactions with others. Persons who offered respect to the participants were given respect in return. Persons who were perceived as being disrespectful were considered a threat and dealt with accordingly. The following comments reflect this common theme:

- I did it for all this bragging rights and for all the other *younger* homies that looked up at me like I was somebody special . . . they be given me my respect.
- You goin' into the juvenile system ... you come out. You get all your little props. 'Aw, you was in DT. Oh, whoop-dee- whoop whoop. You're tough. You're hard,' you know what I mean. So you build your little street credit up.
- You want people to fear you. You don't want no one to come mess with you... and being part of a gang, people would leave you alone. And it just- at the time it felt cool, it felt right.
- Anybody that approaches me, come correct, or else Imma put him in his place ... just try to leave that impression.

- ... One of my mentality was, ‘You wanna shoot my house, you wanna disrespect my family, I’m goin’ come get you. You don’t mess with me or my family.’

**Theme 2: Experiencing a family bond within the gang.** The family bond was a significant experience for each of the participants because it was another living force behind the gang. Typical days in the gang meant chilling with your boys, either hanging out and having fun or carrying out a mission for the gang, working together. Each participant described the personal ways their friends in the gang created the feeling of a family bond for them:

- ‘We felt we had each others’ back, everywhere we went. When you felt safe when you were with your boys, it was because they got your back. Anything happen to you, they’re right there to fight with you ... just down to earth people you row with and they’re like the eyes in the back of your head.
- Um, just hanging out um, just being able to chill and not worry about anything. And you got your boys, you felt like you was a family. Just another way of saying it was like a family reunion type thing.
- I went towards my friends because . . . because they *understood* more. Not that they *knew* more than my parents, but because they understood *me* more.
- You got your family at home then you got your street family . . . why you do the same thing for your brother at home, you do the same thing with your friends out there on the streets.
- [When fights would arise at school] you ain’t just gone leave your friend hanging. You see a friend in trouble, you got to get in.

The family bond the participants had with their counterparts first cultivated from an early friendship of boys always being together, laughing, and jumping into a fight to protect each other. The participants gravitated towards friends who shared desired personality traits, such as the “same attitude” and the willingness to “do something stupid with [the group].” Besides providing each individual with the rewarding feeling of respect, the gang provided its members the feeling of being loved, protected, “in place” with the desired group and “fun times.”

**Theme 3: Having the mindset and mentality.** During the interview, the participants were asked about the kinds of thoughts they remember having while in the gang. A variety of thoughts were shared by the participants as being part of their gang experience. When reviewing statements of thoughts described by the participants, two groups of thoughts can be created: (a) gang mentality and (b) thoughts had as a result of living the gang life.

**Gang mentality.** Some thoughts shared by the participants were manifestations of the street code being implicitly taught and reinforced by the gang. These thoughts shed understanding of the mentality and driving force behind the kinds of behaviors members in gangs display:

- Anything you wanna do, we’ll do, ‘cause we’re gonna rep our hood, no matter who you are, no matter where you are.
- If you’re from the other gang, automatically, without knowing who you are, but just knowing where you’re from and who you represent, I don’t respect you. I hate you. I do not want to see you. You do not deserve to be around me.
- It’s ‘get or get got.’

- [Did] anybody think of any family members that are gonna be in the house? We don't care. That's long gone now. [They've] crossed the line, so pretty much everybody's paying.
- The only thought you think about at the time is getting it done ... If it was finding somebody because they hurt somebody, it was pretty much revenge. Once you get that thought in your mind, nothing else matters.
- You get in a fight [with the rivals], you're not gonna show no remorse for the other person because the amount of hate you have for that person because he's from the rival gang.
- Like, our mentality [about guys who left the gang for education and forgot about us] is just like, 'Aw, they wanna [act White]' ... They done went and did this. They see us, they don't even wanna kick it. They don't even wanna say 'Hi' to us. So we look at it like, 'Damn, you came from the same neighborhood we came from. We were just hanging out two years ago. All a sudden you got an education, you don't wanna kick it no more?' So, people take offense to it, you know. 'Oh you think you're better than us now. Auright, we gone whoop your butt. You know, we gone remind you of who you are.'

The automatic hate for rivals and the attitude of being willing to do whatever it takes to represent the gang were some examples of the thoughts shared by the participants which manifest the mindset that is implicitly taught, shared and reinforced by members of the gang. The gang mentality was readily accepted and embedded by the participants without question because of the family bond felt by each of the participants combined with their desire to be a part of the gang.

***Living the gang life.*** The second group of thoughts is *Living the gang life* which includes thoughts participants had in response to living the gang life. In addition to the gang mindset, the participants had thoughts of their own about how they individually were experiencing the gang life:

***Money.*** Money was prevalent on the minds of three of the four participants. It was something that was frequently sought after and enjoyed while in the gang. In some instances, the action of seeking after money was an activity to occupy time:

- [Gangbanging is] like fast money... You get the money, you spend it on whatever you want, then when you're broke, we did it again.
- Just committing crimes for little money, what we thought back then was big twenty ... robbing ... selling everything there is to get some money.
- As soon as the sun went down, that's when everything changed. 'I'm bored. Let's go do something.'
- "Money ... power ... respect ... love ... girls ... having all those things it gives you a mentality of just 'Who cares', you know, a non-caring mentality in what happens in life ... I had alternatives of where I know I'm gonna make money. I felt like I was smart enough to where I knew I was gonna [graduate], so the only thing else on my mind now, was makin' a buck."

Another significant thought for each of the participants was how they were perceived by others. Each described thoughts of wanting to be admired by their brothers in the gang and feared by others:

- 'Who can do the stupidest, craziest thing and live to tell about it?' You try to do something more bigger and crazier than the last one just did.

- Anybody that approaches me, come correct, or else Imma put him in his place ... just try to leave that impression so when somebody else comes, like, [in] a sour way, you put ‘em in their place and then they gonna tell their friends, you know, ‘Hey man, don’t mess with that dude.’
- ... letting people see you, in their minds they’ll be like, ‘Oh he’s part of, he’s running with the people who are part of a gang. You don’t wanna mess with him.’ You want people to fear you. You don’t want no one to come mess with you and so, we had that rep as being a gangster and being part of a gang, people would leave you alone.

Part of the gang experience for the participants was having the gang mentality which enabled them to fully live the gang experience. Thoughts about the importance of representing your gang (your gang family) and automatically hating rival gang members upon sight were social customs taught and reinforced by the gang. These thoughts provided guidance to how the participants would act and carry themselves in the world and also interpret the world and its people while being a gang member. Resulting from aspects of living the gang life, the participants described thoughts of gaining fast money from the gang. These kinds of thoughts hint the focus and interpretation of unlawful behavior the participants had while committing crime—doing these behaviors was a way to many great things.

**Theme 4: Living the reputation—*being the gang member*.** Living the gang reputation was a core experience for the participants, as it was many times the first thing to be reported during the interview as an experience which stands out. When asked to describe their experiences in the gang, each participant described ways in which they represented their gang to others—living the street code, carrying out missions and representing the gang name.

Experiences of hanging out and chilling with the boys were mentioned by each of the participants, but were mentioned second to the experiences of carrying out the gang reputation through unlawful behavior:

- I just went around with my boys. Whenever we see other boys, our gang signs would be thrown up. The name of gangs would be yelled out, so that they know where we from and we know where they from.
- We planned it, you know, all the I's were dotted, t's were crossed and we were ready to come home and sleep and go to church the next day or so to speak or a scout fundraiser the next day, you know, whatever it was, we were. You know, I'd go to the scouts fundraiser with a clear conscience, you know and be like, "we're done," you know, "Get ready for church the next day."
- I always had a plan, like if I was to get caught, what am I gonna say. You always gotta know you're surroundings, so, if something was to happen, where were you gonna go and stuff like that.
- You live by the code on the streets. Retaliate is a must, you know. And you got these other gangs out here. Say for instance one of your buddies, gang members gets murdered or whatever, and you, your gang don't retaliate on that. The other gangs are gonna just run all over, you know.
- Like one of the biggest things is, uh, livin the street code is you're repping your hood. Um, you're getting your boys' back. Um, obviously, one of the biggest ones is you're not snitching. You're staying away from anyone affiliated with the law. Just trying to keep the other side, the other people out of your neighborhood that

you don't want in your neighborhood. Just, pretty much, getting your boys' back and repping your gang to the fullest.

- Um, just never being afraid of holding it down. Um, being ready, as I mentioned before. You're on your toes, you're ready to rep your neighborhood, wherever you go. Somebody call you out, you got your dukes up. You're ready to fight.
- You name it, we done did it, man, everything. Everything--spray painting, stealing cars, breaking into houses, bank robberies, which I've already been in prison for, so it doesn't matter. But pretty much everything and anything.
- Uh, (chuckles) sell drugs, steal stuff. Sell it. Uh, pretty much, that's it.
- You goin' into the juvenile system. You go over there, you come out. You get all your little props, "Oh," you know what I mean, everyone's like "Aw, you was in DT. Oh, whoop-d- whoop whoop. You're tough. You're hard" you know what I mean.

Living the gang reputation took up much of the day for many of the participants because it involved planning and carrying out. It was associated with feelings of excitement and adrenaline, as well as rewards, such as money and pride. Living the gang reputation served many roles in the identity of the gang member, including developing trust amongst each other and building one's street credibility. Living the gang reputation was not only a big part of the gang member's day, but a very important part to the identity, too. In contrast, moments of just "chilling" with the boys served only a few roles of the gang identity, which is why chilling may have come up as second to living the gang reputation for all of the participants.

**Theme 5: Getting what you want.** The gang was a way for the participants to fulfill their desires in tangible and intangible ways, such as money, respect, family closeness with



friends and protection from rival gang members. Some of the participants reported feeling as if the gang was the only way to achieve these things as a young Pacific Islander. Each described benefits they enjoyed from being in the gang:

- It's like fast money... You get the money, you spend it on whatever you want, then when you're broke, we did it again. We want everything, but we don't wanna work for it, like now. We don't wanna get a job.
- ... Just committing crimes for little money, what we thought back then was big twenty ... robbing ... selling everything there is to get some money.
- I felt in my mind that it was ways to have fun ... I felt that it was cool that people see you drinking and used it to not go to school. Uh, just made me feel like I was the bigger boy becoming a man and just doing stuff with my friends, felt like we was creating a strong bond.

Although the group of four participants had similar interests fulfilled by the gang, such as gaining money and respect, each individual had their own unique needs that were fulfilled.

Junior felt that he was on top of the world when he was sentenced to prison at the age of 16, "I was the OG (the oldest, highest group in the gang) of the hood ... That's the end of the line right there. OG." Junior sums up his career by saying, "I've been through it all. Juvenile lock up. Penitentiary. I've been to the state penitentiary." From the gang he felt powerful, on-top-of-the-world and well-respected. Sione described how the gang life gave him opportunities to build business skills which helped him in his life after the gang life. Toa found acceptance and understanding from his fellow gang members, which he felt was lacking in his own home. "I went towards my friends because . . . because they *understood* more. Not that they *knew* more than my parents, but because they understood *me* more." The gang was able to fulfill universal

needs while fulfilling individual needs in a way that the participants enjoyed and in which they found satisfaction. The perception that some youths have of gangs being the only way to fulfill certain needs and the fact that the gang indeed fulfills their needs in an enjoyable manner highlights one of the ways gangs have a strong pull on youths.

**Theme 6: Experiencing feelings in the gang—hatred or love.** The participants were asked about feelings they may have had during their gang experience. In contrast to what some may believe that gang members have blocked out their ability to feel emotion, the participants in the present study described a range of feelings that were associated with the gang experience:

- You're higher than if you're on ice or anything ... your adrenaline is just out, through the roof, where you can't sleep for two days, you know.
- There's a lot of Polynesian functions going around and things are always happenin' between, um, the different gangs. You got the Tongans fightin the Tongans, Tongans against the Samoans, even Samoans against Samoans sometimes. And, um, it'd be- We would wait for those kinds of functions to happen because, um, you knew you'd find the enemy and we would get excited for that. We would look forward to that.
- It felt good, at first, gang banging, getting respect. Then you get into jail. Nobody knows you. You feel sad. You're like, 'Man! Where are my dudes at, man? The ones that I was going down for, they ain't here now.' It's sad. When your friends pass away, you sad. You get angry, you gotta retaliate ... You in mood swings when you gang bang (laughs)!

- Um, full of hate. You have nothin' but hate for those who don't respect you, for those who're from the other gang. Um, you also feel nothing but love for your boys, for your neighborhood.

Another important feeling a couple of the participants remembered having throughout the gang experience was the feeling of uncertainty, not knowing what could happen to you around the corner. "Gang banging is an everyday thing. When you at home, you safe, but when you out there hanging around with your friends ... you'll never know what's around the corner."

**Theme 7: Listening to significant others.** Religious leaders, mother, father, or older gang members, each of the participants had the presence of a significant other in their lives while involved in the gang, offering them words of advice and guidance. Although each of the participants grew up in two-parent homes, there was a variety of perceptions about their parents' style of parenting. Toa and Junior described their experiences of being raised in their home and their perceptions of their parents' way of parenting as "hard":

- My dad was always hard on me. Yea, he's a good man he's trying to teach me something. But it was mostly like, you know what I'm saying, he used his hand, you know, to express his love but he don't know that the worse that he beats me up, I go out there and try to do it to, you know, other people. I wasn't learning my lessons, just hard head, I guess.
- Yea. My dad, man, he was a religious man, like, first ones in church and the last ones to leave. And, like I said, I was always (inaudible) street life. I had to be in church, but I wanted to be a gang member. Yea. My dad, he was always hard, though. It was hard, man. He beat me up. I go beat up some people at school. He

asked ‘Why you beat people up?’ [And I answered] ‘I don’t know. Maybe you should stop beating me up.’

- ... I guess our parents just like raised us, I mean, here they call it child abuse, where we’re from, it’s just part of life ... it’s just the way you were raised you know what I mean, that’s what ... that’s what happened to us so that’s what we do. That’s what we’re taught so that’s how we react, you know what I mean.
- ...As the male, [parents] was like, they just teachin’ us to be physical our whole life, you know what I mean, so we just came out more physical and more aggressive with just the way we are. ...and they just didn’t ... roll over, or like, get into us, like the way they wanted it to get into us. .. Do I make sense? ... The way our parents taught us, they wanted to teach us the right way, but they just taught us the way *they* knew, you know what I mean, so, now that I look back at it, they coulda broke it down differently, you know what I mean, but it was the way, it was all *they* knew, you know what I mean, so that’s ... that’s just the way. I mean, they was raised on the island, you know what I mean, it’s just a .. a whole different mentality then it is out here.
- Now I understand because I have kids, (inaudible), it was just all because of what they- they didn’t have an American education, you know what I mean, so they can only educate me from what they thought. And what they thought was by pushing me, you know what I mean. “You gotta make the NFL. You got to. You have to.” But at the same time I was thinking, like, “Am I living my life or am I gonna live your life?” you know what I mean. I wanted to play in the NFL. I wanted to do it, but because there was so much pressure from it, you know what I mean, I tended

to go the other way more 'cause it was less pressure, you know what I mean, by doin' it, goin' that route, you know what I mean. Sometimes it's good to push --- some kids are good to be pushed, some kids ain't meant to be pushed. 'Cause they'll just go the opposite way, you know what I mean.

While Toa's and Junior's descriptions of their parents' involvement appeared to be of strict discipline and familial pressure, Tevita's and Sione's descriptions of their parents' involvement appeared to be of more one-on-one talks and parental monitoring and involvement in their student's education:

- [My brother and sister] would call me momma's boy. Every time I went to jail, every time I got locked up and if I was able to get out through bail, my mom would post it. She would always find the money. Um, and that's probably the only times you would see me cry-is when I talk to my mom or when I'm thinking of my mom. I know it hurt her very much, especially, you know, like I said, my parents were very strong in our religion.
- My dad, he would just tell me, "you know you made your mistake, so you gotta face the consequences of that mistake." Um, one of the things I always remember from him telling me is "you can decide whatever, you can make the choice on anything. It's your own choice. You can choose whatever. But the thing you cannot choose is the consequences that come with it." And so, at that time, I was like, "Yea, whatever man. The *consequences*? Whatever."
- Um, my mom, was born and raised pretty much, well she was born in Tonga, but she was raised [in Utah], pretty much. And so I was actually grateful to that fact in where she was *really* Americanized, you know, super Americanized, as where

she knew what was going on, um, and I always considered that a blessing that she was. Man, I really felt for a lot of, you know, parents that didn't know anything that was going on and their kids could easily, you know, persuade them and say that they're doing this and that when they really weren't because of a language barrier, that they couldn't understand their teacher, you know, just a lot of things that they could get away with that I couldn't because my mom knew the system. Um, and I always considered that a blessing because, you know, my mom always knew exactly what was going on, at least with my school and stuff.

In addition to their parents, Tevita and Sione had the presence of religious leaders in their lives while in the gang. All of the participants in the study described their parents as being “very religious,” however, only Tevita and Sione included in their interview descriptions of religious influence being in their lives:

- Yea, my church leaders, my youth leaders, they give me the advice, um, when they would see me across the church, drinking, while they were at a youth dance or something like that. Some of ‘em would even come up to me, “Hey man, you know, what’s up?” I never got the feeling like they were judging me, that they looked at me different. But at the same time, they made their presence known. They made me feel that these guys still care about me, they still wanna help me.
- That’s because, you know, that’s what I remember, ‘cause everything after that, it was just, “I shouldn’t have done that” you know, “Bishop this” you know. When Sunday comes up, “Bishop.” And I just remember that whole process of events and going back to the bishop and bishop being like, “Seriously” like uh, “Why are you doing this?” you know.

In response to any efforts made by others against the gang lifestyle, many of the participants described feeling a resistance. The participants' perception of others giving advice against the gang was often times interpreted as individuals who lack valid knowledge about gangs because that individual never experienced the gang lifestyle for themselves. Individuals who had any immediate influence on the participants during the gang experience were their brothers in the gang. The boys in the gang had an early influence on the participants which created a strong allure for the participants to join the gang. While in the gang, the members would talk amongst each other and at times, give each other "pep" talks about life:

- Um, some of them, a couple of them pushed me, uh, towards being better, making better decisions because they just, most of them couldn't see me going in, being that gang member. They told me that, "you'd make a better life and that one of us has got to make it out of the hood, the right way, and on a good note." And so, to be honest with you, if it wasn't for that, um, I wouldn't be who I am today.

Part of the gang experience for the four participants was having others in their lives attempt to provide guidance and advice. While others were making good-hearted efforts to intervene with the gang lifestyle, their attempts only created a feeling of resistance and rebellion within the participants. It was the brothers in the gang whom the participants turned to for guidance and advice during the gang experience. It would take the participants a few years more of the gang lifestyle before they could see the perspectives on life that their parents were trying to pass on.

**Theme 8: Giving up the ruckus.** The participants were asked to describe their departure from the gang and a significant part of the process was a desistance from engaging in the “ruckus” part of the gang life:

- ... All that ruckus, like going out there and starting stuff, like you know what I’m saying, trying to earn respect like back then, nah, I’m not doing that no more.
- We hang out and stay home and drink, you know what I mean. We drink at home, now. We don’t go out, you know what I mean, and do the little things we did when we was kids. We let kids, you know what I mean, kids be kids, you know what I mean.

Although each of the participants described a desistance of gang-banging activities during their departure from the gang, each of them had different reasons for leaving and different influences which helped them to decrease the stealing, fighting and retaliating. All in all, each of the participants experienced a shift in their perception of the gang life. Toa and Sione described going through a process of “aging out” of the gang-banging lifestyle:

- Usually when you get older, people already know what you’re about, you don’t gotta prove nothing. Like I say, my whole neighborhood can vouch for that and be like, “Oh that dude aint gotta do nothing no more. You already know what he’s about, you know.” I don’t gotta get my hands dirty no more, you know. You got little kids, you know, got little kids doin that, you know. I’m older, you know. When you a OG, you just ... chill, you know. It ain’t about that the ruckus no more.



- We hang out and stay home and drink, you know what I mean. We drink at home, now. We don't go out, you know what I mean, and do the little things we did when we was kids. We let kids be kids, you know what I mean.

Toa and Junior explained during their interview that as part of the gang structure everyone tends to do their crimes while they're young because "we're young, we're ignorant, we don't care." Once members of gangs get older, around the mid- to late-twenties, everyone starts to chill out because they've already proven themselves, there's more at risk (e.g., wife, children, employment) and the crime-doing is considered as something for the kids to do. With this mentality in mind, Toa and Junior "aged out" of the gang-banging lifestyle.

Tevita's reason for leaving behind the ruckus part of the gang was due simply because he was "done" with living the lifestyle. He began critically reviewing the gang lifestyle and asking himself questions such as, "Is this *really* the only way to have fun?" In contrast to Toa and Junior, Tevita completely walked away from the gang lifestyle and replaced his friends in the gang with friends from his religious group:

- At the same time, my other friends, they were coming back from their [LDS] missions, and so, they were fresh off the mission. They knew what was happening to me at the time. And they were there to help me out, to carry me and, ever since then, it's been good.

Sione was able to walk away from the gang lifestyle with a few of his friends who desired to serve their church as a religious missionary and understood that they needed to align their lifestyles with the standards that their religion set forth. Standards of Sione's religion required that he give up the stealing, fighting and selling stolen goods. He described as being helpful, using his religious leader as someone to hold him accountable for his actions. Sione

would frequently check in and report to his religious leader about his behaviors and discuss his progress. Sione also found it helpful for him to isolate from his friends who carried on the gang mentality.

Whether it took time and age or a change in friends, each of the participants described a desistance from doing unlawful behavior and some a more sudden desistance than others. Common among all the participants while experiencing this desistance was a change in perception from viewing gang activities as fun and advantageous to it being only one of the many ways to achieve things in life. Although each of the participants had this desistance in common, each of them had different reasons and influences for giving up that lifestyle. Toa and Junior described their desistance as a natural part of the gang life once you reach a certain age, while Tevita and Sione utilized the presence of religion in their lives to support them through the process of walking away.

### **Summary of Lived Experiences**

The purposes of the current study was to describe in great detail the lived experiences of Pacific Islander former gang members and to identify common themes in perceived meanings of their lived experiences. Four participants were engaged in the interview process to elicit nuggets of knowledge regarding the kinds of experiences afforded them while in the gang. Their gang stories were shared in this results chapter with the focal point of the story being on the types of lived experiences and the perceived meanings of those experiences. In conclusion of this chapter a composite textural-structural description of the gang experience was created by major themes gleaned from the four individual gang descriptions. Themes of earning respect, being part of a gang family, and getting what you want were some of the major themes shared by the participants. Although there were common themes and similarities across the four participants'

experiences, it was also important to see from their individual stories that each of the participants experienced a different upbringing, had different perceptions of their gang experience and overall, experienced the gang life in their own way.

## **Discussion**

The focus of this concluding chapter will be to make clear the connections between the established literature in this field, the current study objectives and the study findings. This chapter will discuss the implications of the current study's results in light of established gang literature and provide practical recommendations for professional populations which work with youth at risk or involved with gangs. A section considering study limitations and possible directions for future research, as related to the current study, will end the chapter.

### **Study Objectives**

The research question which guided this study was: How do Pacific Islander former gang members perceive and describe their experience of being in a gang and being a gang member? Of particular interest was examining the different *kinds* of experiences provided to the participants by the gang and the *meanings* behind their experiences. This information is necessary in order to inform gang prevention and intervention efforts.

### **Relationship of Results to Gang Literature**

The significant themes of the kinds of experiences in the gang that were derived from each of the interviews were: feeling respected by others, experiencing a family bond within the gang, having the mindset and mentality, living the reputation, getting what you want, experiencing feelings in the gang, listening to significant others, and giving up the ruckus. These themes were considered significant, not only because they were shared by all of the participants during their interviews, but also because these themes were prevalent in the participants' memories associated with being in the gang. The participants were asked open-ended questions with the phenomenological assumption that whatever is significant to the experience will surface

to one's memory, unbiased by the investigator. These themes will be used to relate the current study findings to gang literature.

**Thinking with gang mentality.** In his research studying the socialization process of gangs, Vigil (1988) explains, "...the gang norms, its functions, and its roles help shape what a person thinks about himself and others, and the gang provides models for how to look and act under various circumstances" (p. 421). As part of their gang experience, the participants described the kind of mindset and thoughts that were going through their head while in the gang. A term commonly used by outsiders of the gang to refer to the kinds of values and cognitions members of gangs may have is "gang mentality." Dittmore (2007) explained that the gang mentality can be summarized as having five basic elements that are valued within the gang culture: Respect, reputation, representation, revenge, and regulation. Similar to Dittmore's (2007) explanation of the gang mentality, the participants of the present study described it as knowing and following the street code, automatically hating rival gangs, being ready at all times to represent the gang and expecting respect from everyone or else something needed to be done to get that respect. With this mindset, committing crime becomes functional and a vehicle to things desired and fighting becomes necessary to survive street life turmoil to gain the respect to where others will leave you alone.

The gang mentality was taught in both explicit and implicit ways to its members. The participants explained that without having the gang mentality one would be considered weak or be treated disrespectfully by the gang. With this perception of being considered weak and "losing face" among the brothers of the gang, the choice to leave the gang becomes a difficult choice, especially during a time such as adolescence where peer affirmation is key to one's identity (Vigil, 1988).

**Experiencing respect.** For Tevita, Toa, Junior and Sione, respect was a reinforcing feeling that communicated to them that they were on the right path, to continue doing the things they were doing. The participants described shooting houses, making physical threats, entering the juvenile justice system and refusing to snitch as acts done for the respect of their brothers in the gang. As stated above, the gang mentality made it so that these actions are seen as being functional and purposeful in gaining access to things desired. According to Garot (2003), youth in gangs engage in violent behaviors labeled as “face-saving” practices to defend their own “face” and protect the face of others in situations that are perceived as face-threatening. Anderson (1999) and Wilkinson (2001) have argued that members of gangs who engage in face-saving work with violence “build a name,” “enjoy esteem and respect,” and learn that “might makes right.” Face-saving work is essential for an individual’s well-being (Anderson, 1999).

Similar findings were reported by the participants in the current study. The message “Don’t mess with me or a serious physical consequence will be coming to you from me” was loudly communicated to others by the participants and the respect that was given in return was a reinforcing feeling. “That power, just to go around and be like, you know, hang your head high and know that nobody’s going to mess with you--that feels good” shared Sione.

**Committing crime.** Gangs can be accountable for up to 80% of the crime in some communities. A national sample of gang-reported crimes shows that the most common crimes committed by gangs are alien smuggling, armed robbery, assault, auto theft, drug trafficking, extortion, fraud, home invasions, identity theft, murder, and weapons trafficking (NGIC, 2009). Although unlawful behavior was not a focus of the current study and the participants were encouraged to keep confidential any unlawful behaviors, all of the participants mentioned committing some unlawful behaviors. Three out of the four participants persisted in telling about

some unlawful experiences despite investigator's efforts to redirect because crime was such a significant part of their gang experience. Experiences of simple chilling and relaxing with the boys in the gang were only mentioned by the participants when prompted by the investigator. These findings lend support to literature stating that committing crime and living the gang reputation serve many roles in the gang member's experience, including identity development (Vigil, 1988), face-saving practices (Anderson, 1999), and fulfillment of a teenager's needs and desires at the time (e.g., respect, money). In the current study, each of the participants reported different motives they had for themselves behind the crime, which highlights the heterogeneity within the broad population of "gang members." If prevention and intervention efforts are to be successful, practitioners must be keen to the functions and purposes gang activities may serve for each individual.

**Experiencing the family bond.** In a qualitative study of 20 adolescent gang members, the gang was described as a surrogate family which replaced the lack of a family connection within the home (Ojo, 2008). In the current study, participants described the family bond as having fun with the gang, receiving protection, advice, and respect from the gang. However, in contrast to Ojo's (2008) findings, the participants in the current study used the term "family" to describe the strong connection between the members rather than portray the gang as a unit completely replacing their biological family. As Sione explained, "You got your family at home then you got your street family--your second family." Each of the participants had some family present in their lives while in the gang. Despite a subtle perception the participants had of their parents' inability to effectively parent in the United States, the participants demonstrated family loyalty and respect to their biological families, values which are commonly taught in Pacific Islander homes (Canfield & Cunningham, 2004). "I went towards my friends because they

*understood* more, not that they *knew* more than my parents, but because they understood *me* more.”

**Associating with delinquent peer.** The family bond first cultivated from an early friendship of boys always being together, laughing, and jumping into a fight to protect each other. The participants gravitated towards friends who shared desired personality traits, such as the “same attitude” and the willingness to “do something stupid with [the group].” These findings support research that youth who associate with delinquent peers are more at-risk of joining a gang than youth who do not associate with delinquent youth (Bjerregaard & Smith, 1993; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Vigil & Yun, 1990; Esbensen, Huizinga, & Weiher, 1993). Affiliating with friends who shared similar valued personality traits created a feeling of being accepted and in the right place for the participants.

**Getting what you want.** Curry and Spergel (1988; 1992) discovered that youth who join gangs tend to come from disorganized, predominantly low-income neighborhoods where there is a lack of social amenities available and a presence of gangs in the neighborhoods. Researchers have made the argument that the impoverished conditions of their communities drive youth to join gangs in order to satisfy their needs. The results from this study support the findings that gangs fulfill youths’ needs at the time. The gang was subtly portrayed by the participants as a vehicle to meeting certain needs that the participants had at the time of their involvement. Tevita was looking for “fun times” and peer acceptance. Toa needed acceptance and a safe place to be the person he felt he was. Junior desired respect from everyone and Sione felt a need for power and status. All the participants described enjoying the “fast money” the gang would bring in. Each of them was able to find these things in the gang. Some of them described how they thought the gang was the only way to achieve these things. This perception of gangs being the



only way implies the lack of exposure to positive role models, lack of availability in extracurricular activities to stay busy and possibly a lack of successful experiences in more accepted contexts, such as school or sports.

**Giving up the ruckus.** Many researchers studying desistance in gang activity report the power of having a steady income and children as an agent of change in gang activity. In contrast to what some literature may say, participants in the present study reported jail time and religion as being significant life changing tools for them. Each of the participants had different stories to leaving the gang. Tevita made up his mind that he was done with the gang life and began replacing the gang life with religion and religious friends. Sione decided to leave because many of his friends were leaving the gang life during their early adulthood years. Toa and Junior reported not completely leaving the gang, but have given up the dangerous, aggressive behaviors due mostly to being incarcerated for a lengthy period of time. In jail, Toa and Junior described reflecting on their lives and feeling a difference in their perspective on life. Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph (2002) report similar findings and argue that desistance in criminal activity is due to a cognitive transformation accomplished either through jail or through participation in a structured treatment program, such as counseling or religion. For the participants, a change in perception was an important part of the process in giving up the ruckus.

### **Practical Recommendations for Stakeholders**

Although each individual participant's story is unique, common themes can offer insights into participants' stories. Much can be learned regarding their viewpoints, their retrospective memories of their involvement, what initially drew them into gang life, and the pull that kept them actively involved during their youth. In order to more effectively work with youth and to

increase connectedness with youth at risk for gang involvement, the following recommendations are made for parents, school staff, mental health professionals, and religious leaders.

**Parents.** Careful planning should consider strategies to strengthen connections between schools and families impacted by gang activities. Care must be taken to avoid judging parents, their beliefs, their culture and their ties to long-held customs. Additionally, historical disconnects between school and Pacific Islander youth and families must be considered in altering current courses. Working as partners, school staff and parents must share the common goal of keeping youth actively involved in school, both academically and socially.

**School staff.** It is critical that school staff recognize common risk factors for gang involvement and key identifiers of students who are involved in the gang. For the participants, it was hanging around a group of friends who tended to be aggressive and getting into fights at school. The participants would earn respect and admiration for demonstrating aggressive behaviors. Teachers and school staff can provide opportunities to at-risk students to assist in feeling self-efficacious in other more acceptable ways, such as being a class leader or a teacher's assistant for a day. One of the participants described making fun of the Pacific Islanders who appeared smart or who appeared to place a high value on education. It is imperative that in the event of these behaviors, students are immediately approached and are explained the implications of having such an attitude towards students who value education.

**Counselors, psychologists, social workers.** Three of the four participants described looking up to the older gang members because the older gang members were receiving things desired by the participants. Counselors, psychologists, and social workers can be the avenues through which youth at-risk of gang involvement can meet a variety of positive role models, ranging from college students and athletes to business persons. It is important that role models

introduced to youth at-risk are perceived by the youth as being similar to them in characteristics. Exposure to other positive role models may help these youth to understand that there are more routes to things like money and respect than being involved in a gang.

This group of professionals is trained to identify an individual's underlying personal needs through seeing a pattern of behavior. The participants in this study described a variety of personal needs which were met through involvement with the gang—receiving respect, gaining money, feeling accepted. It is important for counselors to identify which need is being met by the gang for each individual and create prevention or intervention plans based off of the same personal need being met in a more acceptable way. It is important to keep in mind that each individual presents a different story when describing involvement and perceptions of the gang.

Counselors must be aware of the possible immigration and acculturation factors that may be present in a student's situation. All of the participants in the present study were of the second generation to have lived in the United States. Some of the participants described how their parents were ill equipped for parenting a child in the United States because their parents were born and raised on the Pacific Islands. Counselors must first be educated in the acculturation process and experience for minority populations, which often times is very stressful, and assist these students to understand this abstract unseen process. Having discussions about the acculturation process with youth similar to those in the current study may provide some relief to students if they knew their feelings and experiences were common.

**Religious leaders.** Two co-researches utilized religion to assist in their process of leaving the gang. Sione used his religious leader to hold himself accountable and have weekly meetings. This process made the expectations of the religious leader prevalent on Sione's mind and increased the feeling of guilt when those expectations were not met. Tevita described how his

religious leaders would always visit him to let him know of the upcoming events. Tevita reported never feeling judged or treated differently by his religious leaders, despite the behaviors he was displaying. When leaving the gang, Tevita utilized friends from his religious group who were strongly committed to the religious beliefs. These spiritual friends replaced his friends who were in the gang. Implications for religious leaders would be to continue to build relationships with youth who are at-risk of gang involvement by making visits to wherever the youth may be, having frequent, quality discussions and withdrawing the attitude of judging others during any interactions with you who are at-risk.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations in the current study which should be noted. Due to the sample being of four interviewees, the current study results statistically have no generalizing power. In spite of this limitation, the focus of the study was to gather detailed individual stories to inform prevention and intervention efforts rather than represent Pacific Islanders as a whole group. The method used to collect data was retrospective interviews. Researchers who use retrospective interviews are at-risk of collecting data that is subject to participant fallibility, “inappropriate rationalizations, faulty attributions, social desirability, or simple lapses in memory,” (Miller, 2003, p. 123). These limitations of retrospective studies were addressed with some of the standards suggested by Miller, Cardinal and Glick (1997), such as asking participants about past events and facts rather than past opinions. Finally, a significant limitation to the current study was the amount of time available to carry out the project within time constraints. Minimal rapport was established with the participants prior to the interview, which could have impacted the amount of responses made by a participant. The principal investigator

of this study ensured the participants that their responses would be kept strictly confidential in order to build participant trust.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Established gang literature has found a significant relationship between gang involvement and a lack of parental supervision or poor family conditions within the home. In contrast to these findings, each of the participants in the current study described having the presence of positive significant others in their lives who had unsuccessful attempts of intervening with the gang lifestyle. The current study did not examine in depth possible explanations for the participants choosing to participate in a gang despite having parents and religious leaders in their presence. Could it have been the quality of relationships was perceived to be of poor quality? Were the others disregarded by the participants due solely to a perception that the others are unknowledgeable about the gang lifestyle? Such information could provide key persons who interact daily with at-risk youth with information to improve moments of interacting with these youth.

### **Conclusion**

The stories of four Pacific Islander former gang members were shared to examine the kinds of experiences had while in the gang. A variety of feelings and things gained through the gang were some of the experiences shared to provide insight into the phenomenon of gangs. While looking at the composite descriptions and meanings of the overall gang experience, several experiences within the gang were put into perspective of the eyes of those inside the gang in order to increase the understanding of Pacific Islanders and gang activity. Much of the findings from the present study were aligned with what has been found in gang literature.

Although much information was uncovered and surfaced through the lengthy interviews, much is still yet to be learned.

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APPENDIX A  
CONSENT FORMS

## CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

The main purpose of this form is to provide information that may affect your decision about whether or not you want to participate in this research project. Please pay close attention to the information in this document, as a clear understanding of the risks of participating in this study is crucial.

### **Title of Research**

Pacific Islander Former Gang Members: Exploring the Meanings of Everyday Lived Experiences in the Gang

### **Principle Investigator**

Natasha Afalava, BYU Graduate Student <nlafalava@graniteschools.org>

### **Introduction**

This research study is being conducted by Natasha Afalava, a school psychology graduate student at Brigham Young University, to record and examine Pacific Islander former gang member experiences in the gang. Your participation in the study is being requested because you meet all of the criteria to be in the study, which include the following: must be of Pacific Islander descent, older than 18 years of age, have participated in and have left the gang within the past 6 years.

### **Procedures**

In gathering data, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will be held in a reserved meeting room at a local public library location in the Salt Lake County. The interview survey to be used consists of 21 questions and is projected to take up to 5 hours of your time to complete. Questions will ask about your demographics, your family and your experiences with a gang. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed in order to ensure accurate processing of your responses. During the interview, should you choose to discuss unlawful, illegal behavior or experiences, the audio recording device will be stopped and the principal investigator will redirect you to the next question. Once data analysis is complete, you will be sent a final summary of the gang experiences shared during the interview in order for you to validate the accuracy of your experiences being recorded.

### **Risks/Discomforts**

In responding to some interview questions, you may put yourself at risk of self-admitting to unlawful conduct, thereby providing the opportunity for interview material (e.g., audio recordings) to be used against you in the event of civil action or criminal investigation. In this case, confidentiality of your responses cannot be guaranteed. In order to decrease the likelihood of this situation occurring, it will be asked of you to withhold any disclosure of unlawful behavior during the extent of your participation in this study. You have the right to skip or refuse to answer any question.

Also, some interview questions may prompt memories that trigger feelings of sadness, grief, guilt or frustration. You may skip any question or discontinue your participation in this study at any point without any negative consequences. Melissa Allen Heath (a UT licensed psychologist)

is supervising this project and is available to discuss concerns and make referrals for counseling if requested. Her contact information is included in the “Questions about the Research” section of this form.

### **Benefits**

We don't expect any direct benefits to you from participation in this study. We do however expect to create a description of the experiences Pacific Islanders have in gangs, which will help service providers to understand the gang and make effective prevention and intervention decisions. This has the potential to benefit children, parents, business leaders, psychologists, policymakers, and society.

### **Confidentiality**

Summarized information and quotes (not personally identifiable) will be included in the researcher's thesis (pdf file of thesis will be available online to the general public) and also submitted for publication in an academic journal. These publications will not contain participants' names or personally identifying information. Specific details (names, locations, and relationships) will be altered to protect participants' confidentiality. In order to maintain confidentiality of your records, the researcher will use false names and change any personal identifiers within the data. All data, including questionnaires and tapes/transcriptions, will be kept in a locked storage cabinet and only those directly involved with the research will have access to them. After the research is completed and information transcribed (altering or deleting personally identifiable information), the questionnaires and tapes will be destroyed. However, in the event of a criminal investigation or civil action, the primary researcher may be subpoenaed and required by law to provide all information and interview materials for use in court. In this situation, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Individuals who voluntarily choose to participate in this study will do so with the understanding that they take on the above listed risks.

### **Compensation**

Participants who complete the interview and participate in member checks will receive a \$20 gift card to use at any Wal-Mart location. This gift card will be given to you after you have validated the summary of your interview, which will be done during member checks.

### **Participation**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at anytime or refuse to participate entirely without negative consequences.

### **Questions about the Research**

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Natasha Afalava, at (801) 946-9769, [nlafalava@graniteschools.org](mailto:nlafalava@graniteschools.org) or the supervisor of this project, Melissa Allen Heath, at (801) 422-1235, [melissa\\_allen@byu.edu](mailto:melissa_allen@byu.edu).

### **Questions about your Rights as Research Participants**

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the BYU IRB Administrator at (801) 422-1461, A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602, [irb@byu.edu](mailto:irb@byu.edu).



I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

**Note: By signing below, you are telling the researcher “Yes,” you want to participate in this study.**

**Please keep one copy of this form for your records.**

Your Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Your Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL  
AND GUIDES

## Interview Guide

### Pre-interview Meeting

1. Introduce self and review interview process:
  - Review purpose of the study
  - Structured and unstructured interview questions
  - Answer questions
  
2. Consent:
  - Go over consent forms
  - Obtain consent signature, if not already signed
  - Go over interview guidelines
  - Answer questions
  - Obtain two copies of consent
  - Give one copy to participant
  - Keep one copy for files

### Interview Meeting

1. Interview:
  - Ephoche
  - Privacy and comfort of setting
  - Remind subject he can skip any questions he/she chooses not to answer
  - All information is confidential
  - He or she can withdraw at any time
  - Names will be changed to protect identity
  - Answer questions
  - Start interview
  - Begin taping
  - Provide for break periods, if necessary
  - End interview
  
2. Member checking:
  - Explain function of member checking
  - Arrange for possible follow-up appointment
  
3. Debriefing:
  - How are you feeling?
  - Offer sincere appreciation for participation in interview

### Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Pseudonym	Date	Location	Start Time	End Time

\_\_\_\_\_ Participant signed Release Agreement

#### Introduction

The information you share in this interview will be kept strictly confidential. You have been assigned a false name as an identifier and any third persons mentioned during the interview will also be assigned false names to mask their identity. Locations and events that would be associated with your name will also be altered to protect confidentiality. However, there are limits to confidentiality that I would like you to understand. During the interview, if you choose to share information about any illegal behavior, like a murder or theft, or any plans you have to hurt yourself or others, I am obligated to notify the nearest local law enforcement agency and any potential victims. If at a later date I am subpoenaed by law to share this information (case notes, recollections, specifics you have reported to me during interviews), I am required to share this information. In that case, your confidentiality is not guaranteed. Do you have any questions? I want to thank you for agreeing to participate as a participant in this project. You are one of 4 individuals selected for interviewing as part of my research. I will be recording this to ensure an accurate understanding of your thoughts. Do I have your permission to record this? (If no, I will then ask for permission to take notes and proceed; if yes, I will turn on recorder and proceed to record.) I will also be taking some notes to capture important points as well.

Please remember back to when you were involved in the gang.

1. In your own words, describe as fully as possible your experience in a gang.
  - a) What incidents really stand out for you?
  - b) What people really stand out for you during this experience?
2. Describe what a typical day is being in a gang.
3. Describe as fully as possible your experiences of *being* a gang member.
4. What does it mean to be a gang member?
5. How did your experience affect you?
6. How did your experience affect significant others in your life?
7. Describe your feelings generated by the gang experience.
8. What thoughts stood out for you during the experience?
9. During our time together you may have thoughts and experiences you may have not fully described. Please share your additional thoughts or experiences.

10. How, Why, and When did you leave the gang?
11. Describe your departure from the gang?
12. What information would you share to assist youth leaders in helping young Pacific Islanders avoid gang activity?

### **Demographic Profile**

13. Tell me about yourself.
  - a) Where were you born?
  - b) If not in Utah, when did you move to Utah?
  - c) Why did you move to Utah?
14. Tell me about your family.
  - a) Where were your parents born? Father    Mother
  - b) How many brothers and sisters do you have?
15. How old were you when you first heard about your gang?
16. How old were you when you joined the gang?
17. How did you join the gang?
18. Why did you join the gang?
19. How many members of your family members are in gangs?
20. How many of your friends are gang members or former gang members?
21. How many of your friends are non-gang members?

Thank participant for their cooperation and ask permission to contact by phone later if needed.

APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW LOCATION FORM

### Salt Lake County Library Locations

Circle a location that is convenient to your schedule

West Valley City Library  
2880 West 3650 South  
West Valley City, Utah 84119  
(801) 943-4636

Sandy Library  
10100 South Petunia Way  
(1450 East)  
Sandy, Utah 84092

Taylorsville Library  
4870 South 2700 West  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84118

Hunter Library  
4740 West 4100 South  
West Valley City, Utah 84120

Kearns Library  
5350 South 4220 West  
Kearns, Utah 84118

South Jordan Library  
10673 South Redwood Road  
(1700 West)  
South Jordan, Utah 84095

Salt Lake Library  
810 East 3300 South  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84106

South Salt Lake Library  
2530 South 500 East  
South Salt Lake City, UT 84106

Midvale Library  
8041 S. Wood Street(55 W)  
Midvale, UT 84047

West Jordan Library  
1970 West 7800 South  
West Jordan, UT 84084

Magna Library  
8339 West 3500 South  
Magna, UT 84044

Draper Library  
1136 East Pioneer Rd (12400 S)  
Draper, UT 84020

Herriman Library  
5380 West Main Street  
Herriman, Utah 84096

Cottonwood Heights Library  
2197 East Fort Union Boulevard  
Salt Lake City, UT 84121

To be filled out by the research assistant

<p>Interview Details</p> <p>Location:</p> <p>Date:</p> <p>Time:</p> <p>Contact Information: Participant's Code Name</p> <hr/> <p>Participant's Contact Info</p> <p>Email:</p> <hr/> <p>Phone:</p> <hr/>
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