Welcome to the (Facebook) Neighbourhood: Exploring How Community Residents Use Facebook Groups to Address Crime

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Abstract:

The Metro Vancouver Regional District is home to many Facebook Neighbourhood Groups (FNGs). However, there is limited research on FNGs in general, with most of the research focusing on the effectiveness of FNGs and community event spillover effects of FNGs. The current study is an exploratory qualitative exploratory research study to learn why Metro Vancouver residents join FNGs, to learn if FNGs are utilized as a crime prevention tool and whether social ties created in FNGs redefine Carr's (2003) concept of new parochialism. Eleven in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted online, and themes were analyzed by utilizing a social disorganization, specifically collective efficacy lens. The three major themes of this study are: seeking community and finding it online, FNGs as a neighbourhood square, and FNGs as local bridges. A key finding is that FNGs serve as an example of Granovetter's (1983) concept of local bridges, rather than Carr's concept of new parochialism. The research suggests that municipal governments and police departments can learn how to leverage FNGs to communicate relevant information to residents and strengthen parochial-public ties. Residents can also learn how FNGs can be used and how the FNGs absorb the community context as its identity. This research adds to the limited existing literature on FNGs, specifically Canadian FNGs.

Keywords: community criminology, collective efficacy, block watch, neighbourhood watch, Facebook Neighbourhood Groups, parochial ties

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List of Acronyms:

FB=Facebook

FNGs=Facebook Neighbourhood Group

NW=Neighbourhood Watch

BW=Block Watch

LM=Lower Mainland

MV=Metro Vancouver

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Introduction

The growth and evolution of social media platforms has changed the nature of our interactions. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Reddit, and X (formerly Twitter) have facilitated the evolution and expansion of social networks while potentially changing the nature of social ties and what it means to be part of a community. Despite discussions surrounding the impact of social media on how we understand communities, there is a tendency to think more globally, as these platforms allow us to connect with individuals all over the world. However, it is just as important to explore the impact that social media has at the neighbourhood level. Specifically, what is the impact that social media has had on neighbourhood social networks, the development of parochial and private ties (see Bursik and Grasmick, 1993) at the neighbourhood level, the ways in which neighbourhood residents interact with each other, as well as the ability of residents to mobilize? To explore these questions, this thesis will look at the proliferation of Facebook Neighbourhood Groups (FNGs).

FNGs are growing in numbers and popularity (Schreurs, et al., 2020) and have been used as a new communication method for residents (Sipley, 2024). FNGs serve several purposes including facilitating information sharing between residents. These online groups allow residents to provide updates on local events, share information about local businesses, highlight positive community developments, and report on important neighbourhood issues, including reporting neighbourhood crime and disorder. Neighbourhood crime and disorder are issues that have become a growing concern for many communities across BC (Miljure, 2024), which has only been heightened in an election year (Chiang, 2024) due to how politicians use crime statistics to attack other parties. The political tension between residents, may impact the strength of social

ties. Though it is likely that members of FNGs communicate about local crime and safety concerns, the role of these groups in facilitating community crime prevention efforts remains underexplored. Walby and Joshua (2021) have observed that most posts in these groups are about perceived crime and disorder, which suggests that there is some potential to play a role in community crime prevention.

FNGs allow community members to post important information, advertise events, and share local news among other things, making them something akin to online community centres or digital town squares. FNGs can be incredibly useful during historical events such as the Covid-19 pandemic where residents might only be able to communicate online. As an online vehicle for residents to share information about local crime and safety issues, one might look at FNGs as a new form of online or digital Neighbourhood Watch, creating a new way for community residents have their proverbial "eyes on the street" in the words of Jane Jacobs (Jacobs, 1961).

One possible way that FNGs can play a role in community crime prevention is through creating or enhancing local social ties. Brown and Dustman (2019), state that social ties can be strengthened via FNGs. Given that these ties are less intimate, they could be likened to what Bursik and Grasmick (1993) characterized as "parochial ties" in their systemic model. According to their work, parochial ties can play a positive and crucial role in crime reduction through partaking in informal social control action. Given this literature, it is worth exploring if members of FNGs perceive the groups as crime prevention tools this way.

Facebook is a social media application that is popular amongst older adults and was created by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 (*Definition of Facebook*, n.d.). It is a free application where people can share updates about their current life status. Within Facebook, there are groups,

both geographical and interest-based groups that people can join. The growth of these geographical groups could potentially be a new form of FNGs.

FNGs can start community programs such as "Free Little Libraries" and make community gatherings a regular occurrence (Mosconi, Korn, Reuter, et al., 2017). As per Brown & Dustman (2019) and Mosconi et al. (2017), FNGs can be used as community mobilization tool, potentially playing a role in building collective efficacy. Collective efficacy has been measured in numerous studies but Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls (1997) suggest that there is a level of social cohesion that is rooted in working trust and mutual support, and a willingness to intervene when there is a problem within the neighbourhood (Wilcox et al., 2018 p.180). Sipley (2024) shows that willingness to intervene looks different with FNGs, as it could look like residents talking about downloading Pokémon Go to figure out if there has been an increase in the number of suspicious people in the neighbourhood or if it is simply fellow residents coming into certain areas of the community to play Pokémon Go. This is different from the traditional neighbourhood watch program, as, according to a 911 call taker, most people concerned about a suspicious person tend to call 911 (Lopez, personal communication, October 22, 2024). Given the change in how people communicate with each other and how willingness to intervene can vary, it is worth exploring if members of FNGs perceive the groups to engage in more actions to intervene for the greater good of the neighbourhood.

The existing research on FNGs focuses on the effectiveness on FNGs and the spillover effects of FNGs. I aim to shed light on the potential purposes that FNGs serve residents of the Metro Vancouver Regional District. This exploratory, qualitative study utilizes in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 11 Metro Vancouver residents that belong to FNGs. The objective is to

explore their perceptions and experiences with these groups and to explore how they view the role of these groups in community crime prevention.

The research was analyzed through a social disorganization theoretical lens, specifically, collective efficacy theory (Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls, 1997) and the concept of social ties (Bursik and Grasmick, 1993). The research questions are: Why do adults aged 18+ join Facebook Neighbourhood Groups (FNGs) and what purpose(s) do these groups serve? Are FNGs utilized as a crime prevention tool, if yes, how? Do FNGs redefine the Carr (2003)'s concept of "new parochialism"?

Where this Research Fits:

As noted by Linning et al. (2022), social disorganization theory is the heart of community criminology. This field focuses on the strength of different social ties and how that can affect crime and disorder in the community. Due to the proposed research study building upon social disorganization concepts, the research findings will add to the field of community criminology. While community criminology today is vastly different from environmental criminology, Linning explains that due to the formation of different branches of criminology, certain concepts such as "neighbourhood" and "informal social control" would relate to both environmental and community criminology fields (Lopez, personal communication, August 28, 2024). While this research will primarily add to the field of community criminology, it will also add to the field of environmental criminology, specifically within the area of community crime prevention. This research will add to the existing body of Canadian literature.

Key Concepts:

There are several key concepts that need to be defined. Facebook Neighbourhood Groups (FNGs) are defined as online community groups within the application Facebook for people of a specific neighbourhood, district or city to connect and share information pertaining to their neighbourhood, district or city.

There are many definitions of neighbourhood, but (Linning et al., 2025) identify the four main components of each definition. The four components of each definition are: geographic areas, boundaries, high and low bounds, and people. Given these components, I will be adopting the following definition excerpt from Linning et al., (2025):

> "This procedure…is consistent with the general definition of a neighborhood as a geographical and social subsection of a larger community in which residents share a common sense of identity that persists over time (see Bursik and Grasmick, 1993, p. 5–12) (Neissl et al., 2019, p. 1103)."

The simplicity of this definition allows me to join any Facebook Neighbourhood Group in Metro Vancouver which will aid in participant recruitment.

The term "Metro Vancouver" is short for its official terminology of "Metro Vancouver Regional District," which is defined as encompassing the following the districts, villages and municipalities: Village of Anmore, Village of Belcarra, Bowen Island Municipality, City of Burnbaby, City of Coquitlam, City of Delta, Electoral Area A, City of Langley, Township of Langley, Village of Lions Bay, City of Maple Ridge, City of New Westminster, City of North Vancouver, District of North Vancouver, City of Pitt Meadows, City of Port Coquitlam, City of Port Moody, City of Richmond, City of Surrey, Tsawwassen First Nation, City of Vancouver, District of West Vancouver and City of White Rock (Vancouver, n.d.). [1]

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[1] The reason for defining Metro Vancouver can be found in the methods section.

In Bursik and Grasmick's (1993 p. 34) systemic model, they recognize that there are three different types of social ties that affect how strong or weak informal social control and formal social control actions in the community. The three types of social ties are: private ties, which can be defined as the people one has an intimate relationship with; parochial ties, which can be defined as more loose acquaintances (e.g. relationships one has with their neighbours and fellow residents); and public ties, which can be defined as the relationship residents have with persons or agencies outside of the community (e.g., law enforcement, government).

Carr (2003) defines new parochialism as informal social control behaviours engaged in by residents at the neighbourhood or parochial level of control but are facilitated by public agents (e.g. law enforcement). An example of this would be a bar being a hotspot of crime and disorder. Residents may work together with the police to close the bar down.

Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls (1997), define collective efficacy as social cohesion among neighbours along with their willingness to intervene for the greater good of the neighbourhood.

Linning et al, (2024) discuss, but they identify the four main components of each of the many definitions of informal social control. The four components of each definition are: the people who are acting, the *subjects*; a description of what they are doing, the *action*; the people acted on, the *object*; and a clause explaining the purpose of the subject's actions, the *reason*. With this information, the working definition of informal social control that I developed for this study is "residents who enforce societal norms to reduce crime and disorder." While this definition is quite vague, it leaves it open for discussion with participants and what they believe is informal social control. Informal social control action is defined as people enforcing shared

expectations and societal norms. An example of this could be residents asking a suspicious person in the neighbourhood why they are there and who they are seeing.

This exploratory research will examine the different neighbourhood dynamics and shared expectations that affect community relations. By providing insight of the different neighbourhood dynamics and shared expectations that affect parochial ties, the research will be able to help municipalities in Metro Vancouver strengthen public ties and hopefully increase informal social control indirectly through the improvement of social and community crime prevention programs such as Block Watch. For example, FNGs may be a viable secondary component of a formal Block Watch program.

Literature Review

Introduction:

This section will explore some of the existing literature on the social disorganization framework, specifically collective efficacy theory, which will guide the analysis of the findings. One of the main literature topics is community crime prevention programs and how programs based on collective efficacy tend to fail. The Neighbourhood Watch program, otherwise known as Block Watch in Canada, is the main community program talked about. Literature on Neighbourhood Watch's issues and effectiveness are discussed, which leads to the research topic of Facebook Neighbourhood Groups. This section will conclude by identifying the gaps in the research that I hope to address.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Introduction to Informal and Formal Social Control:

In their seminal piece on Broken Windows Theory, Wilson and Kelling (1982) posit that fear of crime and disorder leads to the breakdown of community control. Wilson and Kelling came to this conclusion when they discovered people avoid community engagement when they fear crime and street disorder. The inability or unwillingness of community residents to engage ultimately undermines community control. Failure to enforce both societal norms and standards of conduct (formal social control) leads to crime and disorder becoming more visible, thus the community control being weakened. With community control being weakened, communities become uncontrolled. With uncontrolled communities, fewer people are willing to engage in informal social control actions, and many are unwilling to intervene for the greater good of the neighbourhood. To borrow a phrase from Jane Jacobs (1961), there are fewer eyes on the street.

Community control is made up of two components, informal and formal social control. Informal social control can be measured through the strength of both personal and parochial ties. The strength of personal and parochial ties can be measured through willingness to intervene, maintaining social norms, friendship network and more. Formal social control can be measured by the strength of the relationship between residents and public agencies as well as the impact public agencies have on residents which influence whether residents continue to rely on public agencies to help them during desperate times or if they give up on them and take formal social control action themselves (Anderson, 1994).

The Impact of Social Ties on Formal and Informal Social Control

In Bursik and Grasmick's (1993 p. 34) systemic model, they recognize that there are three different types of social ties that affect the strength of both informal social control and formal social control actions in the community: private ties, which can be defined as the people one has an intimate relationship with; parochial ties, which can be defined as more loose acquaintances;

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and public ties, which can be defined as the relationship residents have with persons or agencies outside of the community (e.g., law enforcement, government).   Bursik and Grasmick (1993 p. 35) stated that it is difficult for residents to form and maintain strong private ties thus making it difficult to exercise informal social control behaviour in a short time span. Greenberg et al. (1985:46) as cited in Bursik and Grasmick (1993 p. 35) have observed that while gossip, or the possible threat of it, is a powerful means of social control, its effectiveness depends on the residents' willingness to be open and inability to hide details of their life from other residents. This variance makes it an unpredictable and unreliable form of social control that should not be solely relied upon to maintain social norms. . Greenberg and her colleagues (1982a, 1982b, 1985, 1986) as cited in Bursik and Grasmick (1993 p. 35) identified three primary forms of supervision that fall under parochial ties: informal surveillance, willingness to intervene, and avoidance of areas deemed unsafe.Informal surveillance is when residents look out for their neighbours and their property, which is different from formal surveillance. Formal surveillance can be seen as security guards whose job is to stand guard to deter potential criminal and disorderly acts to keep residents and businesses safe. Willingness to intervene is defined as a resident engaging in informal social control action, for the greater good of the neighbourhood. Willingness to intervene can look like calling 911 on a suspicious person in the neighbourhood or disciplining the neighbour's children for engaging in delinquent behaviour. Residents will avoid areas deemed unsafe, and because of this fear, these areas are not taken care of or well   maintained. Avoiding these areas results in less "eyes on the street", leading to more broken windows which can invite offenders to commit crime in neglected areas. This can lead to an increased likelihood of victimization (Wilson and Kelling, 1982). It is important to note that not all social ties are seen as equal in maintaining strong formal and informal social control. Weak parochial

ties could be seen just as critical for community crime control (Granovetter, 1973, as cited in Bellair, 1997) because these people are more likely to involve public agencies (formal social control) to help with intervention. While strong parochial ties were considered to be good, they were seen as clique-ish, which could be viewed in a negative way because then residents in a "clique" would not be likely to engage in informal social control action unless a neighbourhood problem affected them directly (Granovetter, 1973, as cited in Bellair, 1997). This is why weak parochial ties were perceived to be better than strong parochial ties, as they would be more likely to engage in informal social control action and involve public agencies for the greater good of the neighbourhood. Carr (2003) notes that the private and parochial ties that Bursik and Grasmick (1993) mention are significantly smaller in numbers than what they have assumed as supervision and willingness to intervene is dependent on age. Supervision and willingness to intervene responsibilities are typically assumed on familial and personal networks and not fellow residents, as discipling disorderly children falls under familial responsibilities. Carr (2003) also stresses that the intersectional relationship between parochial and public ties is vital to both informal and formal social control actions. This intersectional relationship between parochial and public ties is what makes the concept of new parochialism possible. New parochialism is defined as a set of semi-formal practices coproduced by residents and formal control agents (Carr, 2003).

Informal Social Control and Collective Efficacy:

Samson and Groves (1989) systematic perspective (Wilcox et al., 2018 p. 47), posit that both strong private ties and strong informal social control were needed to maintain social norms. They measured informal social control on three dimensions: the strength of local friendship networks, participation in formal and voluntary organizations; and residents' willingness to intervene (reporting disorderly behaviour). They found that informal social control was related to

community rates of crime (Wilcox et al., 2018 p. 49). Specifically, they found that private and parochial ties were negatively correlated with some of the measures of community crime, whereas fellow peers who were unsupervised (absence of guardianship) were positively correlated with some of the measures of community crimes. This led Samson and Groves (1989 p. 783) to conclude that strong ties are linked to strong informal social control which led to lower rates of delinquent and criminal acts. The supervision ("eyes on the street") from peers and other residents along with the possibility that they will intervene if needed, is considered enough for residents to behave in a socially acceptable manner. Collective efficacy theory is composed of two parts, social cohesion and informal social control (Gearhart, 2022). It was found higher levels of social cohesion were associated with higher levels of collective efficacy (Hipp, 2016 as cited in Hipp et al. 2023; also see Collins et al. 2014, as cited in Hipp et al. 2023). However, residents' strong perceptions or feelings of social cohesion alone do not equate to a resident's willingness to intervene (Hipp, 2016 and Wickes et al. 2013; as cited in Hipp et al., 2023, also see Sampson, 2006[2] as cited in Molinet, 2023).Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls (1997) state that the linkage of mutual trust and willingness to intervene for the common good defines the neighbourhood context of collective efficacy. A person cannot intervene if the shared expectations in the neighbourhood are unclear, and a person will not intervene if parochial ties are extremely weak. If the shared expectations are unclear and if the parochial ties are extremely weak, it will result in weak informal social control. Weisburd et al., (2024) found that residents can have the potential to develop strong informal social control while living in crime hotspot areas. The strong parochial ties needed for informal social control is there but the potential for informal social control action could be increased significantly with stronger public ties. Weisburd

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[2] Sampson (2006), as cited in Molinet (2023), state that social networks alone are not sufficient in exercising social controls.

et al., (2024) also said that while public ties need to be strengthened by investing resources (ex: parks, community centers etc.) into the community, the burden of constantly engaging in informal social control action and willingness to intervene depends on the residents' relationships with each other.

Collective efficacy theory is extremely important for community-based crime prevention as it is associated with multiple outcomes such as lowered levels of juvenile delinquency (Sampson et al., 1997, as cited in Gearhart, 2022), neighbourhood disorder (Sampson, 2012, as cited in Gearhart, 2022), crime (Armstrong et al. 2015, as cited in Gearhart, 2022) and violence (Mazerolle et al. 2010, as cited in Gearhart 2022). Despite this, interventions based off collective efficacy theory are found to have no impact (McDonell et al. 2015, as cited in Gearhart, 2022) to being able to successfully improve collective efficacy within a small portion of residents, but not the overall neighbourhood (Ohmer et al. 2010, as cited in Gearhart, 2022). With this wide range of success, it is safe to assume that community crime prevention programs such as Block Watch are not as effective as they were intended to be.

Community Crime Prevention Programs:

For crime prevention efforts to be successful, it requires the efforts of all levels of governments and most importantly the residents' successful acceptance and implementation of the program. There are many government-initiated community crime prevention programs, such as Neighbourhood Watch, otherwise known as Block Watch in Canada. Government-initiated community crime prevention programs were implemented with the goal to strengthen social ties amongst residents (both private and parochial), increasing the number of "eyes on the street" which would increase the number of residents engaging in informal social control action and intervening for the greater good of the neighbourhood (*Block Watch Society of BC – Crime*

Prevention, Community, Neighbours Helping Neighbours, Block Watch Program, Non-Profit,

n.d.). These programs were also implemented to help further prevent and reduce crime in the

neighbourhood. Community crime prevention programs like Neighbourhood Watch have been

around for decades. In Canada, the Neighbourhood Watch program, known as Block Watch,

focused specifically on reducing property crime while bringing the community closer and

increasing informal surveillance; or fostering what Jane Jacobs referred to as "eyes on the street"

(Jacobs, 1961). While Neighbourhood Watch serves to increase important eyes on the street, its

impact on crime reduction is mixed at best. For example, Lab (2019 p. 114) has noted that

traditional[3] Neighbourhood Watch has yielded positive results in reducing burglary, theft, and

robbery, while also yielding mixed results in reducing fear of crime. The mixed results in

reducing fear of crime can be attributed to how residents react to receiving crime news. On one

hand, residents may become m to receiving crime news. and too afraid to step outside their

homeOn one hand, residents may become more vigilant These residents and too afraid to step

outside their home. Meanwhile other residents may use the crime news to re-assess their security

measures and reflect on their routine activities before making any adjustments to their security

measures and behaviours to keep themselves safe. These residents may feel safer after learning

what additional security measures can be taken. Much of the empirical literature on the overall

effectiveness of neighbourhood block watch programs has not been positive. For example,

Sherman and Eck (2002 p. 315) state that,

> "One of the most consistent findings in the literature is also the least well-known to
> policy makers and the public. The oldest and best-known community policing
> program, *Neighbourhood Watch*, is ineffective at preventing crime."

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[3] Traditional Neighbourhood Watch is defined as in-person Neighbourhood Watch.

At the international level, nearly 50% of the properly evaluated Neighbourhood Watch programs have been deemed unsuccessful at preventing crime (Holloway et al., 2008, as cited in Kelly and Finlayson, 2015). Years later, Tompson, Belur, & Giorgiou (2020) found that around 13% of offenders would refrain from offending if they saw a Neighbourhood Watch sign, 28.7% would offend elsewhere and 58.4% would carry on regardless. The 13% reduced offending statistic was like UK research that found that Neighbourhood Watch areas were associated with a 10% decrease in property crime compared to similar areas (Tompson, Belur, & Giorgiou, 2020).While some criminologists say even a small reduction in crime should be considered a victory, the statistic that 28.7% of offenders would just commit crime elsewhere (crime displacement) and 58.4% would offend regardless, suggests that this Sherman and Eck's critique is a valid one. In addition, to its relative ineffectiveness at reducing crime, research suggests that the ability of Neighbourhood Watch to improve community members' perceptions of crime is also questionable. That is, while Neighbourhood Watch has operated in different formats over the years, (in-person and various online formats through applications such as NextDoor, email, WhatsApp Neighhourhood Groups and Facebook Neighbourhood Groups), a consistent finding is that it does not always reduce fear of crime as intended with multiple residents posting only about the perceived growth of crime and disorder events (Walby & Courtney, 2021), altering residents' perception of crime and feeling of safety. With Facebook Neighbourhood Groups, it is easy to consume media violence on a regular basis, which invariably stimulates a feeling of vulnerability in people, causing them to believe that their neighbourhood, city and society are more dangerous than it is (Bereska, 2013 p.101).

Issues with Neighbourhood Watch:

There are several issues with Neighbourhood Watch. The first being that residents living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are more likely to participate in a Neighbourhood Watch groups (Kang, 2015), explaining that this could be seen as residents wanting to defend their neighbourhood. This idea is evocative of the work of Elijah Anderson (1994), who found that in high crime communities, residents may feel that they need to take matters into their own hands because they do not feel supported by public agencies, namely, the police. This negative attitude and perception towards law enforcement and other public agencies is known as legal cynicism, a concept that Elijah Anderson (1994) emphasizes.

Neighbourhood Watch programs in disadvantaged neighbourhoods demonstrate community residents' care/investment in community (Weisburd et al., 2024) However, they conditions are not conducive to those programs working well because there is not yet formal social control. Formal social control is needed before informal social control as Weisburd et al., (2024) concludes for these programs to be successful. The issue with the programs being in more affluent neighbourhoods is that those areas are never really threatened by crime, and thus, do not really need such programs.

There are several issues associated with Neighbourhood Watch, with all the identifiable factors being demographic. The first demographic issue is the age of the Neighbourhood Watch group membership. According to Kang (2015), most members of neighbourhood watch groups are found to be older, living with larger families without young children, are homeowners, and have high incomes of above $50,000 (USD). Given that most members of neighbourhood watch programs are older and it appears from limited research, there is no one replacing the older members thus causing the Neighbourhood Watch program membership to decline, which then

causes the program to become dormant in certain neighbourhood, until a group of residents decides to revive it.

Luymes (2024) state that 54% of Metro Vancouver residents have thought about leaving the region due to the rising costs associated with groceries and housing, with 25% being likely to move to someplace cheaper such as Alberta in five years. Senior residents who make up most Neighbourhood Watch groups (Kang, 2015) were more likely to move at 27% versus the young adults (18-24 age group) at 20%. The five-year mark discussed by Luymes (2024), is significant as Rosenbaum (1987) defines residential stability as residents living in a neighbourhood for a minimum of five years. If many residents are moving in and out of a neighbourhood over a five-year period, it is difficult for shared expectations to be made clear, parochial ties to be formed and strong informal social control to be exerted.

Kang (2015) also noted that homeownership is a big factor as to whether one joins a neighbourhood watch group, as many homeowners are more likely to contribute to community safety. This could be explained due to factors such as residential stability, access to resources and the attachments homeowners have towards their community.

Kang (2015)'s findings that employment is negatively associated with Neighbourhood Watch program membership and as of 2023, 5.6% of employed Canadians (approximately 1.1 million) work two jobs or more. Given this information, it is not a surprise that many residents do not have the time to dedicate towards joining a neighbourhood watch groups program. Perhaps, FNGs offer more of a community feeling because anyone can be a member of these groups – regardless of demographics such as age, or housing status (homeowner or renter) while allowing residents to choose how much time they can dedicate towards their neighbourhood via FNGs. By allowing residents to choose how much time they can dedicate towards their

neighbourhood, it relieves residents of having to engage at a certain level to feel part of the community.

Evaluations of Neighbourhood Watch:

There is a popular claim made by Sherman and Eck (2002 p. 315) Tompson, Belur, & Giorgiou (2020)'s that Neighbourhood Watch is ineffective.", however the research on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness is rather limited. In Bennet et al., (2009)'s systematic review, they discover that of the Neighbourhood Watch evaluation research available, 56% found that Neighbourhood Watch was deemed to be effective in reducing crime and 44% of the research stated that Neighbourhood Watch had either a null or negative effect on reducing crime. However, Bennet et al., (2009) discovered 91% of the research stating that Neighbourhood Watch was deemed to be effective was not published[4]. Majority of the research stating that Neighbourhood Watch was effective was researched in the United Kingdom compared to the United States and Canada. An importance difference discussed by Bennet et al., (2009) is that in United States and Canada, Neighbourhood Watch is a standalone program and most of the evaluations conducted in these countries are negative whereas in the United Kingdom, it is more common that Neighbourhood Watch has a second or multiple additional components[5] – Bennet et al., (2009) refers to this as "Neighbourhood Watch plus". Most of the claims stating that Neighbourhood Watch is effective evaluates Neighbourhood Watch plus programs. The

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[4] Systematic reviews may include grey literature. Grey literature can include unpublished studies, government reports, theses and dissertations etc, (see *LibGuides: Evidence-Based Practice Research in Nursing: Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses*, n.d.)

[5] Bennet et al., (2009) does not provide examples or explain further on what NW additional components may include.

additional components of Neighbourhood Watch plus may have played a larger role in the evaluation of the program.

Additionally, when Neighbourhood Watch programs get evaluated and are deemed successful, the crime and disorder has been displaced to a nearby neighbourhood, thus crime or disorder rates are not being reduced (Kelly and Finlayson, 2015). Kelly and Finlayson (2015) state that many Neighbourhood Watch programs failed because of weak public ties, specifically the police not being committed enough to the program and because elected government officials such as MLAs and other policy makers often have a short-term focus on community policing initiatives.The Neighbourhood Watch programs that are deemed successful, are typically only marginally successful as the program is often implemented in White middle-class neighbourhoods where the crime rate is low (Bright 1991: 78; Skogan 1990; Husain & Bright 1990, as cited in Fleming, 2005).

Enter Facebook Neighbourhood Groups (FNGs):

Wood (2015) found that Richmond residents have become increasingly frustrated with Block Watch as the communication between residents and police were extremely low while break-ins and property crimes increased. Residents discovered that living in a diverse city came with large problems – the language barrier and cultural differences which may have led to a potential decrease of members who would be willing to intervene and number of crimes going unreported. Due to the residents' wanting to improve their parochial ties and number of residents' willingness to intervene, a Facebook Neighbourhood Group (FNGs) was created. The purpose of this Facebook Neighbourhood Group was to share updates on suspicious activity and meet new members (Wood, 2015). This is consistent with Schreurs, et al. (2020)'s findings which is that residents join FNGs for two reasons, community crime prevention and feeling of community.

FNGs have growing in presence (Schreurs, et al., 2020) and have been used as a new communication method for residents (Sipley, 2024). FNGs serve several purposes including facilitating information sharing between residents and increasing the sense of community. Sipley (2024) explained that FNGs are utilized in a variety of ways but ultimately acts as a conversation starting point. Residents may see a post, not directly engage in with it, but share the news with their network either via Messenger or another social media (ex: Instagram, X etc.). These online groups allow residents to provide updates on local events, share information about local businesses, highlight positive community developments, and report on important neighbourhood issues, including reporting neighbourhood crime and disorder, an issue that has become a growing concern for many communities across BC (Miljure, 2024), which has only been heightened in an election year (Chiang, 2024). Though it is likely that members of FNGs communicate about local crime and safety concerns, the role of these groups in facilitating community crime prevention efforts remains underexplored. Walby and Joshua (2021) have observed that most posts in these groups are about perceived crime and disorder, which suggests that there is some potential to play a role in community crime prevention.

Facebook Neighbourhood Groups as the New Neighbourhood Watch:

FNGs allow community members to post important information, advertise events, and share local news among other things, giving them the role of online community centres or digital town squares. As an online vehicle for residents to share information about local crime and safety issues, one might look at FNGs are a new form of online or digital Neighbourhood Watch, creating a new way for community residents have their proverbial "eyes on the street" in the words of Jane Jacobs (Jacobs, 1961). One could argue that Neighbourhood Watch has evolved to FNGs because some FNG moderators adopt the role of Neighbourhood Watch captain

responsibilities (Mols & Pridmore, 2019). This digital format has allowed for more flexibility in the role of Neighbourhood Watch captain. With the flexibility, moderators can leisurely walk around their neighbourhood and learn the routine activities of fellow residents.

One possible way that FNGs can play a role in community crime prevention is through creating or enhancing local social ties. Brown, & Dustman (2019), state that social ties can be strengthened via FNGs. Given that these ties are less intimate, they could be classified as what Bursik and Grasmick (1993) characterized as "parochial ties" in their systemic model. According to their work, parochial ties can play a positive and crucial role in crime reduction through partaking in informal social control action.

FNGs can start community programs such as "Free Little Libraries" and make community gatherings a regular occurrence (Mosconi, Korn, Reuter, et al., 2017). As per Brown & Dustman (2019) and (Mosconi et al. (2017), FNGs can be used as community mobilization tool, potentially playing a role in building collective efficacy. Given the community program spillover effect of FNGs, it is important to explore how Metro Vancouver residents engage with FNG posts because it could help explain online collective efficacy and could also provide some insight as to how these community programs are born. Both online collective efficacy and the community program spillover effects of FNGs remain underexplored, yet both are crucial to understanding how FNGs can encourage community mobilization or revitalization and act as a crime prevention tool.

Gaps in the literature:

Facebook Groups were first launched on October 6, 2010 (Pages, 2020). The oldest FNG I joined was created in 2014 while the latest FNG I joined was created in 2021, thus making it a

relatively new research area. Though there is some research on the topic of Facebook Neighbourhood Groups and online community groups in general, the majority of the research conducted thus far has explored the issues and effectiveness of these groups (see Bennet et al., 2009; Pridmore, Mols, Wang, & Holleman, 2019; Tompson, Belur, & Giorgiou, 2020; Van Steden,, & Mehlbaum, 2022). Thus far, there is a limited number of studies done on why people join Facebook Neighbourhood Groups such as Schreurs, Franjkić, Kerstholt, De Vries, & Giebels, (2020). While both qualitative and quantitative methodologies have been applied to the online communities' groups, there has been a dearth of qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews methodology applied to this research topic. While looking for research studies in the field, there appears to be a lack of research on this topic not only within Canada but specifically in British Columbia, which is where the proposed study aids in filling in the gap.

While most of the research on Facebook Neighbourhood Groups (FNGs) has explored the effectiveness of these groups, there is limited research on how people utilize FNGs (Sipley, 2024) and the spillover effects of it (see Afzalan, & Evans-Cowley, (2015), Mosconi et. al., (2017). This proposed study will add to the existing literature on the utilization of FNGs, specifically in British Columbia.

Conclusion:

To conclude, I will be using a social disorganization lens, specifically collective efficacy theory, to guide the analysis of my findings to answer the following research questions: Why do adults in Metro Vancouver join Facebook Neighbourhood Groups (FNGs) and what purpose(s) do these groups serve their members? Are FNGs being utilized as a crime prevention tool, if yes, how? Do FNGs redefine Carr's 2003 concept of new parochialism?

The literature discussed in this section focused on community crime prevention programs, most notably Neighbourhood Watch, otherwise known as Block Watch in Canada. The issues surrounding Neighbourhood Watch and the mixed evaluations of Neighbourhood Watch were also discussed. The rise of FNGs and FNGs as the potentially new digital and modern form of Neighbourhood Watch was noted. I identified several gaps in the literature which I hope to fill by using a qualitative interview method for this research study. By utilizing a qualitative interview method, I hope to be able to provide context to Schruers et al. (2020) and Sipley (2024) while sharing new findings that can bridge the gap between Schruers et al., (2020) and Afzalan, & Evans-Cowley, (2015), Mosconi et. al., (2017). By focusing on the Metro Vancouver Regional District, I will be able to add to the limited Canadian research in this research topic.

Methods

Research Design:

The current study is a qualitative analysis of the thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of adult members of Metro Vancouver Facebook neighbourhood groups (FNGs). Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, this study aims to identify the reasons why adults join Facebook Neighbourhood Groups and to identify the purpose(s) these groups serve their members?

FNGs can facilitate communication between residents (Sipley, 2024) of a specific building, neighbourhood or city, but what residents talk about, how that information – specifically crime news, community events etc., - is shared and received by fellow residents is under researched. The strength of social ties before and after a resident joins an FNG has not been researched to the best of my knowledge, making this study the first in the field.

RQ1: Why do adults aged 18+ in Metro Vancouver Regional District, join Facebook Neighbourhood Groups and what purpose(s) do groups serve their members?

RQ2: Are Facebook Neighbourhood Groups utilized as a crime prevention tool, if yes, how?

RQ3: Do Facebook Neighbourhood Groups redefine Carr's (2003) concept of new parochialism?

The primary research question was narrowed down in scope from the Lower Mainland to the Metro Vancouver Regional District. The scope was narrowed down to due to the lack of clarity surrounding the definition of which municipalities, villages etc., constitute the boundaries of the Lower Mainland. There are several definitions for Lower Mainland and only one definition for Metro Vancouver. As I wanted to be clear on where I would be recruiting participants from, narrowing the scope was beneficial in figuring out which FNGs I would allow myself to join. The goal of this study is to contribute to the existing body of literature on FNGs in Canada while also filling in existing gaps in the research before identifying how FNGs can lead to spillover effects such as community revitalization or other community events (Mosconi, Korn, Reuter, et al., 2017).

As noted above, the primary data collection method for this study was in-depth semi-structured interviews with 11 Metro Vancouver residents that belong to one or more Metro Vancouver FNGs. All interviews were conducted using online videoconferencing software.

Research Paradigm

The constructivist paradigm refers to knowledge derived from lived experience and what exists, is what people perceive to exist (Reid, Greaves, & Kirby, 2017). Considering that the constructivist paradigm is about gaining knowledge from lived experience, the study was conducted via 11 qualitative semi-structured online interviews with residents who are apart of one or more FNGs are that are based in Metro Vancouver. I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews to ensure that I could ask key questions to all participants, while allowing participants freedom to take the interview in various directions. This flexibility allows for more personalized, open-ended questions to be asked and for the interviewer to probe, gaining more details and/or clarity surrounding an answer. Additionally, Hesse-Biber (2016 p. 106) states that qualitative interviews can be used to yield exploratory and descriptive data that may or may not generate theory. Since this proposed research is an exploratory study focused on FNG members' lived experiences, taking a qualitative methodology approach is the best way for me to collect data that will answer the research question.

Online Interviews

The intention was to conduct all interviews via Microsoft Teams (MS Teams). The reasons for conducting interviews over MS Teams was because of its easy user-ability. Microsoft Teams gives participants the option to join from their web browser or from the application itself, should they have it. The MS Teams application is available on all mobile devices, making it convenient for the participant to join. From the researcher's perspective, MS Teams addressed the potential concern of participants not being comfortable with video recording and having their camera on, while having the transcript running with the transcription feature. The transcription feature has been found useful as it helped me from having to type up each transcript. Once the

interview was concluded, I downloaded the transcript of the interview from Teams and simply

had to clean up it up. The transcription feature was only used with the participant's consent.

MS Teams is an approved research platform for the KPU Research Ethics Board (REB).

As a contingency, I was prepared to use Zoom video conference software. Zoom is also a user-

friendly application; however, it requires participants to download the application. For the

transcription feature to be used, the video recording feature must be used as well. For this reason

and the fact that interviews would have to be conducted on my Honours Supervisor's Zoom

account, it remained a last resort for participants.

Interviewing via MS Teams and Zoom

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, qualitative researchers primarily conducted in-person

interviews and focus groups to gather their data; however, Covid-19 restrictions prompted

researchers to turn to alternative methods, including videoconference software. As such, the

usage of MS Teams, Zoom and other video conferencing software amongst qualitative

researchers skyrocketed (Oliffe et al., 2021), as it became a viable alternative. Some researchers

have shared both the positives and negatives of conducting online interviews.

Archibald et al. (2019) identified the challenges and opportunities of using video-

conferencing apps such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Videoconferencing software has several

benefits including increased accessibility & convenience, overcoming logistical barriers, and

potential cost savings (Oliffe et al., 2021). Typical challenges with online interviews include

audio/video quality issues and internet lagging (Archibald et al., 2019). With all the interviews

being conducted over Microsoft Teams (N=10) and Zoom (N=1), these issues only came up

twice. The first time it came up it was during my first interview due to choppy Wi-Fi connections

on both sides. After learning part of the problem came from my side, I moved from interviewing at my bedroom desk to a private room in a different area of my house with a better Wi-Fi connection. This solved the issue from my side for the following ten interviews. The second time it came up, it came from the participant's side, and they tried to move around their residence to a better location.

Conducting online interviews was challenging at times with participants not sitting still, walking around, or choosing to have their camera off[6]. These experiences compelled me to ensure that participants were okay to be interviewed and that was their comfort level for the interview. The lack of visual body cues available at times ((Lo Iacono et al., 2016 as cited in Thunberg and Arnell, 2021), made it difficult to see whether participants still something had to add on to their answers or were finished answering a question.

Despite these challenges, Archibald et al. (2019) concluded that the benefits of video-conferencing apps outweigh the drawbacks. This proved to be true in this case, as it provided participants with the option of choosing where they wanted to be interviewed (i.e. their bedroom, living room, office, etc.), which increased their comfort level and willingness to share their thoughts, perceptions and experiences as Oliffe et al. (2021) found.

Conducting interviews meant that keeping a flexible schedule was a necessity, as I had to reschedule three interviews. One interview had to be rescheduled because the participant was not familiar with how meetings on Microsoft Teams worked, and the other two interviews had to be rescheduled due to a change in timing (one participant was 10 minutes late, while the other participant needed their interview to start 10 minutes earlier). The small number of re-scheduled

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[6] Only one participant chose to have their camera off.

interviews is consistent with the findings of Jenner and Myers (2019), who found that online interviews provide more flexibility for participants and tend to be less subject to re-scheduling.

Building Rapport

Rapport can be defined as the process of establishing trust between the researcher and participant, which allows for the free flow of information (Spradley, 1979 as cited in Weller, 2017). Building rapport is important as it helps participants feel comfortable with sharing detailed responses. This helps the researcher have a rich set of data. I had a pre-existing relationship with two participants, which provided to be beneficial I learned that building rapport with people is an inexact science. In some cases, it required time to build rapport with participants (McCarrick et. al., 2016 as cited in Thunberg and Arnell, 2021). While in other cases, I was able to build rapport quite quickly by relating to participants who have conducted research for university before or talking about Kwantlen Polytechnic University (current university), current classes and Simon Fraser University (where I am headed for my MA in Criminology).

Sample

My primary sampling method was purposive as I needed to interview residents who have lived in Metro Vancouver for a minimum of 6 months and were members of a Metro Vancouver FNG (Hesse-Biber, 2016, p. 55). The research sample for this study was obtained through a purposive sampling technique. Finding participants who were willing to talk and were available for an interview between January 3, 2025, and January 25, 2025[7] is known as a convenience sample (Hesse-Biber, 2016, p. 56). This makes the sampling both purposive and convenient.

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[7] Interviews were completed on Jan. 24, 2025

I recruited participants in a variety of ways. First, I joined FNGs and messaged my Facebook Friends (all of whom are acquaintances) to see if they were interested in participating. I had emphasized to them that there was no pressure for them to participate, unless they were truly interested. I sampled 2 participants this way. Secondly, I posted a recruitment poster and caption (see Appendices D and E) into FNGs with memberships ranging from 355 to 78.8k. I recruited most of my participants (N=8) this way.

My Honours Supervisor, reached out to an acquaintance in Maple Ridge to see if she would be willing to partake in my research or knew anyone that would be willing to participate. Unfortunately, it was bad timing, but the acquaintance offered to post recruitment poster and caption in a Maple Ridge FNG[8]. Through the acquaintance's efforts, I secured another participant. My Honours Supervisor had also asked 2 people from his Vancouver network if they would be willing to participate in my research. From his efforts, we were able to secure the last participant.The sample consisted of 11 participants. The participants were from Richmond (N=2), Vancouver (N=3), Surrey (N=2), Port Moody (N=1)[9], Anmore/Belcarra (N=1), Lions Bay (N=1) and Maple Ridge (N=1). The majority (N=9) were female and the remaining (N=2) were male. This was unsurprising because females have primarily been seen as the main caretakers of their families, thus it was expected that most members of FNGs are female. My sample reflected my observations and was also consistent with the literature (Kang, 2015), which suggests that females were primarily responsible for relaying information from the FNGs to their network via other social media platforms (Sipley, 2024).

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[8] Maple Ridge FNGs were difficult to post in as an outsider.
[9] Many residents (N=5) reached out, however with so many Port Moody residents expressing their interest early in the recruitment stage, I decided to not follow up with the other four potential Port Moody participants. This decision was made to keep the sample as diverse as possible.

The first point of outreach for potential participants was by joining Metro Vancouver FNGs and messaging acquaintances who were part of these groups. I reached out to a total of nine acquaintances, three were interested in partaking and two were interviewed. Two acquaintances informed me that they were busy, while the remaining five acquaintances left me on read or delivered on Facebook Messenger. While I messaged nine acquaintances, there were a few more people I could have reached out to; however, I did not reach out the others because they were either a family member, they no longer live in Metro Vancouver, or I had a strained relationship with them that would have prevented them from seeing me as a researcher and not as a member of a particular group.

When searching for Metro Vancouver FNGs to join, I created a set of criteria that each FNG would need to meet for me to join it. The first part of the criteria was ensuring the FNG was based in Metro Vancouver. After confirming the FNG boundaries, I looked at how active the group was, how many new members there were added, total numbers of members and how many years ago the FNG was created. If the number of FNG new members were low and new posts were low compared to the size of the city, then I would think twice about joining the FNG. At this point, I would look at the FNG creation year. If the FNG was created within the last two years, then I did not join, as it could take a couple of years for an FNG to become popular and those groups often had very low membership numbers, When looking at the FNG name, I primarily looked for keywords such as "Neighbours" and "Neighbourhood". After finding limited results with those keywords, I expanded the keywords search to "Community". This helped. To ensure consistency amongst the FNGs, the FNG descriptions had to have one of the following: a) it is a place for residents to engage in conversations and help each other out,

b) specify the audience (ex: residents and those who work in X city), c) mention "community" and/or dialogue.

Based on the criteria above, I attempted to join 24 FNGs based in Metro Vancouver; however, I was only accepted into 21. For the three FNGs I was declined membership in, the reasons were: unknown, group is for residents only and request to join is declined if you do not agree to rules[10]. Of the 21 FNGs, I was only able to post in ten (47.6% success rate)[11], seven posts were still awaiting moderator approval by the time recruitment was completed (Jan. 20, 2025)[12] and in three FNGs, my post was declined or removed. From the 10 FNGs where I was able to post, twelve people reached out for an interview and one police officer reached out to offer a talk[13]. I also attempted to reach out to an FNG creator to gain his insights and to learn why he created the group, however the FNG creator did not see my message request. My Honours Supervisor who is also part of a West End FNG, asked his network who fit my inclusion criteria if they were interested in partaking in my research and recruited one participant.

After acquaintances and FNG members showed interest, a formal consent form (Appendix B) was emailed to them along with the email script (Appendix A). Once the participants sent me their consent forms, I put it into my Honours Supervisor's OneDrive Research folder, sub-folder "Consent Forms" and figured out a time to meet that was best for the participants. After agreeing on the interview time, I sent them the Microsoft teams meeting link. This was done for all participants except one. One interview had to be conducted over Zoom due

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[10] The rule, I believe they were referring to was "no promo". "Promo" in FNGs is loosely defined and dependant on the administrators and moderators.
[11] I did not post the recruitment poster in one FNG due to the timing of acceptance (January 17, 2025) into the group and successful recruitment of 11 participants at the time.
[12] On January 21, 2025, I removed the posts from needing moderator approval and left all the FNGs.
[13] The talk with the police officer did not occur because the police officer did not respond to my email asking for his availability.

to the participant's lack of familiarity with Teams. To use Zoom, my Honours Supervisor sent the Zoom meeting link. This was done for two reasons, REB guidelines as per Dr. Lyons instructions in the Honours Seminar course (CRIM 4970 S10) and because there is no transcription feature on the KPU student account. To transcribe the interview, the interview had to be recorded. Since this participant was part of my Honours Supervisor's network, both my Honours supervisor and I ensured that the participant was comfortable being recorded for the sake of the transcription feature.

Data Collection

On the day of the interviews, I went over what I was offering partial confidentiality and what I was not offering (honorarium). I then proceeded to ask them if they had any questions or concerns. The guiding interview questions were "When did you decide to join your current Facebook Neighbourhood Group? What prompted you to join your current Facebook Neighbourhood Group? What has your experience been like in your current Facebook Neighbourhood Group?". From there, the participants' answers guided me in tailoring questions on the interview guide specifically for them which also allowed me to ask questions only for them, given their unique journey. Some participants gave such in-depth answers that I did not need to ask them questions from the interview guide, as they had answered it already with the research questions, while other participants needed to be probed more to receive the level of detail I needed.

The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 24 minutes long, lasting an average of 52 minutes. For the ten interviews conducted on Microsoft Teams, I used the transcription feature to transcribe the interview and then proceeded to download it, to then anonymize it before placing it in my Honours Supervisor's Research Folder, sub-folder "Transcripts". For the

one interview conducted on Zoom, I used my Honours Supervisor's Zoom account as per KPU's REB guidelines and because there is no transcription feature on my student account. For the transcription to occur on Zoom, the interview was recorded, both my Honours Supervisor and I had ensured the participant felt comfortable being recorded, which allowed me to get the transcription file from my Honours Supervisor after the interview. My Honours Supervisor uploaded the transcription file to his Research Folder, sub-folder "Transcripts" as a VTT file, then informed me that he done so, allowing me to copy the text into a Word document to then anonymize and upload it into the "Transcripts" folder. This process allowed me to I then proceeded to delete the VTT file, and my Honours Supervisor deleted the recording.

Data Analysis

The coding scheme was interpretive, as I used the transcripts and field notes to find the emerging themes. These field notes included similarities, differences, and key standout answers. The topics that I wanted to cover in each interview were: residents' relationships with their neighbours and communities, strength of social ties and informal social control. These two topics can be found in my interview guide. I first highlighted the responses to the questions surrounding the purposes FNGs served the participants to find common themes and patterns. To dig deeper, I then highlighted the responses to the question "Where do you get your crime and criminal justice news from?" and compared them to see how FNGs are used. By looking at these responses first, it allowed me to look for data from the transcripts first, that backed up emerging themes (ex: community, feeling of belonging, etc.) and to see how they connected. Connecting the thematic findings proved to be difficult as there were numerous sub-themes that emerged after looking at both the transcripts and the field notes. I asked my Honours Supervisor to aid me in coming up with potential overarching themes, which allowed me to analyze the data from a new

perspective. This allowed me to connect all the themes and sub-themes in a concise way. Throughout this study, I had to constantly engage in reflexivity to ensure that the results of the study were accurate and not what I wanted to find.

Reflexivity:

Reflexivity is a continuous process and self-examination of the researcher's positionality (ex: gender, socioeconomic status, race, citizenship etc., see more factors in Jacobson and Mustafa, 2019), biases and assumptions. Being aware of how these factors, biases and assumptions can influence the research development (ex: interview guide, data analysis etc.), helps the researcher self-monitor the impact the aforementioned factors on their findings (Berger, 2015 as cited in Dodgson, 2019). Practicing reflexivity helps the findings section to be an accurate representation of what the participants' say. As a criminology student, I have taken the following courses: CRIM 3100: Communities and Crime; CRIM 4201: Community Safety and Crime Prevention. These classes taught me the importance of social ties and how communities play a part in maintaining social norms. However, these classes, have made it easy for me to make assumptions of what I expect to discover in my participants' responses. I expected to hear that some people join FNGs for several reasons which include the following: seeing how safe a neighbourhood or city is as a potential place to live, finding people who share similar interests as them, neighbourhood safety etc. Being aware that I have these assumptions means that I will have to engage in reflexivity at every point throughout this journey to ensure that the research is truly representative of what the participants say.

Taking the time to reflect before conducting an interview or even going through any part of the research journey to go through the following checklist by Anderson and Jack (1991) as cited in Hesse-Biber (2016) will ensure that the data is representative of what the findings say.

Anderson and Jack (1991) as cited in Hesse-Biber (2016) checklist is as follows:

- Be mindful of your own agenda

- Go with your own "hunches, feelings [and] responses that arise through listening to others" (p. 24)

- If you are confused about something, don't be afraid to follow up on an issue or concern.

What about your own discomfort and how this might affect the interview? Can your personal discomfort also provide you with a clue as to where you need to look at what is being said and what the participant is feeling? To ensure that I was being reflexive, most especially during the development of the interview guide and interview process, I will not only be taking the time to reflect on the checklist prior to each interview, but also making notes in my research journal about what I thought challenged my biases and assumptions during the interviews for me to reflect on after the interview. I also had regular debriefs with my Honours Supervisor to talk about my biases, assumptions and what stood out to me from each interview. Having debrief meetings with my Honours Supervisor allowed me to recognize any underlying assumptions or biases I did not notice and provided an opportunity for my Honours Supervisor to remind me of certain facts and circumstances that not only relate to the participants responses but also give context as to why they could have potentially given certain responses. During data analysis, I will be writing my assumptions and biases on a separate document, to ensure that I am aware of them. When reading through the transcripts and thematic coding, I will ensure that themes are only highlighted if two or more participants echo the same theme. By doing this, I will be able to highlight the central themes and not what I want to find.

Ethics:

This study was deemed to be "minimal risk" by Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU)'s Research Ethics Board (REB). KPU's REB gave ethics approval on Jan. 2, 2025. After receiving ethics approval, I started recruiting participants by submitting the recruitment post for moderator approval, reaching out to acquaintances who were part of FNGs while also asking my honours supervisor to pass the word along to his network. 11 Interviews were conducted from January 3, 2025, to January 24, 2025. Participants were asked to share their experiences within FNGs. To ensure private information was not identifiable, I offered partial confidentiality. Partial confidentiality included not using the participants' names and using Participant #1-Participant #11, asking participants what pronouns they use and redacting any information on the transcripts that could identify them (i.e., current occupation). Both oral and written consent was required to ensure all participants understood what they were agreeing to.

To ensure the integrity of the data, all transcriptions were immediately anonymized and placed onto my Honours Supervisor's password protected, dual authentication OneDrive Research Folder, sub-folder "Transcripts". All the data collected on the OneDrive Research Folder will be destroyed on April 24, 2029, by my Honours Supervisor. All of the field notes in my research journal will also be destroyed on April 24, 2029, by me. This will be done by shredding the paper and discarding it. The only people who have access to the data was myself and my Honours supervisor. The data is original and has not been fabricated, as such, this paper is a fair and accurate representation of the data collected.

Limitations:

When joining FNGs based in Metro Vancouver, there were challenges that arose that affected the sample. The first challenge was the lack of FNGs in the Metro Vancouver Regional District. The Metro Vancouver Regional District is composed of 21 municipalities, one electoral

district and one treaty First Nation group (Vancouver, n.d.); yet Electoral Area A, Bowen Island and Tsawwassen First Nation[14], did not have an FNG which limited my outreach and sample. Furthermore, administrators and moderators of Langley City/Township, Maple Ridge, and Pitt Meadows FNGs declined or removed my posts. Meanwhile administrators and moderators of Richmond, Anmore, Delta, Burnaby, Port Coquitlam, and Maple Ridge FNGs did not approve my post in time, leading to a less diverse sample. Even in cities where there were multiple FNGs, it was difficult to join them due having to state which intersection of the city I "lived" in or other neighbourhood/city specific questions, making it difficult to complete the request to join certain FNGs as I chose not to use deception to become a member of these FNGs.

There are limitations to using online video conferencing software such as MS Teams and Zooms over in-person interviews. A couple limitations were previously mentioned – lack of cues and body language when the video is turned off and one can only see the upper half of the other person (Lo Iacono et al., 2016, as cited in Thunberg and Arnell, 2021) but there are other limitations to only conducting online interviews, such as potential participants not being familiar with MS Teams[15] and/or preferring in-person interviews (Thunberg and Arnell, 2021), which could have limited the number of people from each FNG who reached out, especially when considering the Canadian Facebook user demographics are as follows - 50 to 64 (83%) are the majority, followed closely by 35 to 49 (81%), 65+ (77%) and 18 to 34 (71%) according to (Facebook Still the Most Popular Social Network Among Canadian Adults, 2024).

Findings:

This chapter will involve an in-depth discussion of key findings from the qualitative interviews with Metro Vancouver FNG members. Interview participants provided robust

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[14] Tsawwassen First Nation had an FNG, but it was also an FNG for residents in neighbouring municipalities outside of Metro Vancouver Regional District. For this reason, I did not join. This FNG was also not found until Jan. 21, 2025

[15] MS Teams was the only videoconferencing software advertised in the recruitment poster.

qualitative data and diverse perspectives on their experiences in neighbourhood groups. Through the analytical process, three major themes emerged: seeking community, FNGs as a crime free street, and FNGs and the power of community context. Within these primary themes, several subthemes also emerged. The following discussion will explore these themes and will present detailed accounts from participants that illustrate the different purposes FNGs serve, how FNGs are utilized and a new way of perceiving parochial ties.

Seeking Community and Finding it in the Online Space:

A key theme that emerged from interviews is the sense of community that FNGs provide participants. Participants spoke about the importance of building a sense of community and having a connection to others. Though it could be said that while participants live in communities, it does not necessarily mean they felt any connection to their neighbours. This sense of disconnection is something that was possibly exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, for some participants, FNGs provided an opportunity for community connection that, for whatever reason, they were not necessarily getting in the physical world[16].

Community feeling for the purpose of this study, is defined as feeling part of the wider neighbourhood that one resides in. When exploring the idea of community with participants, we discussed their relationships with their immediate neighbours which led to discussions about their relationship with their community (i.e. fellow residents who are not in their neighbourhood but who are residents of the same city). Few participants had strong relationships with their immediate neighbours, with most indicating that they had weak or non-existent relationships.

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[16] One potential reason could be residents are too busy to join an in-person community group.

Consequently, most participants also had weak or non-existent relationships with their community, indicating that there is a lack of physical connection within the participants' communities. For Participant 7, FNGs provided an opportunity to become more connected to one's community as seen below.:

> "In society, you know, people specially after pandemic are just kind of doing their own thing alone and don't need a lot of people. But I like having people like being connected. I like having community..."

This quote is evocative of the sentiment, that people want to be connected to community in some capacity – whether that is online or in-person. During the Covid-19 pandemic, participants shared that many residents had to reach out for help, so they did by posting in their FNG. They received the help they needed, but it rarely sparked a connection or friendship. While it made them feel part of the community, in-person interaction aspect was lacking. The need for human interaction and feeling of belonging is still needed (Maslow's hierarchy of needs, 2015 as cited in Watson and Hill 2015). Community is not built immediately; it takes time to cultivate the feeling of community, trust and belonging. Once a community is built, residents need to support each other and continue to keep their doors open to newer and younger residents who will keep the community culture alive. Community culture can be kept alive in various ways. In a digital society this may be possible to accomplish online via social media platforms such as FNGs.

Hillery (1955) as cited in Mahmoudi (2016) examined definitions of community and identified three main components: a specific place, common ties and social interaction. As society evolved, the specific place went from working and living in a specific neighbourhood or community to having these places become separate. Presently, it is common for people to live in one area of a city and work in a different area of the same city or work in a neighbouring city.

With being part of multiple neighbourhood communities, it can be hard to feel part of one community.

Building a sense of community can be challenging, as it takes time to establish a set of acceptable behaviours, frowned upon but still permissible behaviours, and unacceptable behaviours. The list of these types of behaviours are often unspoken and are known by "regulars" who hang around in the neighbourhood (Wilson and Kelling, 1982). Regulars are residents who live in or near the area and help enforce informal social control. In a virtual community, such as an FNG, members maintain norms by reminding each other to be kind in the comments section.

Interviews with FNG members suggest that FNGs provide a digital space to build communities and create a sense of belonging for residents. Each of the participants explained that they joined their FNG for one or more reasons relating to community – feeling like they belong to a community, keeping up with goings on in the neighbourhood and wider area; and sharing/receiving information (e.g., restaurant recommendations, community events, etc.) with community members. This is evident the words of Participant 1:

"I think because we are kinda isolated [in this area] that it was useful for me to see what's going on up there, but not necessarily be physically out there. Um…news travels really fast and sharing of information is really fast with social media as opposed to, say, TV that I find using. Better for me for like for timely [information]. It's more timely, I think."

This suggests that the physical characteristics of a neighbourhood can impact one's feelings of connection towards the community and the potential for technology to create connection to one's community without leaving the house. In this sense, FNGs may be an accessible and convenient way to be connected to one's community, even when residents are extremely busy. This makes FNG membership more accessible and potentially more representative of the neighbourhood than a BW membership.

Participant 4 was the only participant who mentioned the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact it had on her and her community. Her community valued physical connection and because of the restrictions, they could only connect online due to the Covid-19 public health orders. The FNG provided an alternative form of community connection which strengthened parochial ties during an unprecedented time, as seen below in Participant's 4 quote.

"Um, just for kind of more general neighborhood knowledge and I think that was when was, yeah, I was doing COVID. You're kind of feeling a little more isolated, disconnected, and it felt like a, um, a spot where? Yeah, you have people that you're kind of living in a similar area. To kind of pool pool resources and discussions from. Well, at the time, I mean it was covered. So, it was 2020. We were all at home and there hadn't been something like that in lines where we don't really have a local newspaper, and we don't have a radio station so. Um, you know news etcetera, etcetera, was going out in that group. Initially it started during COVID. It was sort of people were helping each other out, there was a lot of really good community stuff going on."

Participant 4 talked about how not having any form of connection to the community other than the FNG was difficult. Without a local newspaper or radio station, residents could not keep up with their community through traditional forms of communication. They had to pivot to utilize their FNG in a different way. From using the FNG to casually stay informed about community events and recommendations to checking it daily to stay informed about what fellow residents need help with, how they can help each other and sharing resources. In this sense, Participant 4's FNG moved from a community bulletin board to a digital neighbourhood square.

Physical characteristics and in-person connections are not the only thing that may influence a resident's reason for joining FNGs. Some residents join to get localized news. This was the case for several participants. The desire to stay updated and informed about community issues is indicative of a need to stay connected. This reflected in the statements of Participants 3, 8, and 10 below:

"I just I guess I what prompted me to join them as just to sort of keep up with local news in sort of our city. Um, I can't remember which one I joined first, but one of one of them I probably was recommended to join via another member of the community saying are you on this group? You should join it, that kind of thing." [Participant 3]

"Um, I actually don't remember when I think that the prompt is more just. Ah, that's just one of multiple sources of ways to just be, you know, get more localized news or, like, opinions of people regarding to certain things." [Participant 8]

"Just to find out what's happening around the neighborhood. Some of it is very neighborhood specific, like you know, something like happening in one of the local parks." [Participant 10]

While wanting to have general sense of the goings on in one's community was the prevailing motivation for many participants, some were interested in more specific information like Participant 10.

The feeling of community can be tied to fear of missing out, otherwise referred to as FOMO. Participant 5 talked the fear of missing out on important and relevant information about their community as seen below:

"And I guess there's some sort of FOMO as well, I guess. I mean, some people don't like social media....I just like to know what's going on in the community.... just like to make sure that you know, I'm aware of what's going on in the community."

This is further highlighted by Participant 8. Participant 8's FNG no longer serves the information sharing purpose it originally served him, yet he cannot seem to pull himself out of the FNG because he is afraid of missing something that might be relevant. By keeping updated, one has the same knowledge as everyone out, which results in one feeling knowledgeable and feeling like they belong. He went on to describe social media as "sticky" because it makes it easy

to join a group, yet the fear of missing out on potentially important information makes it difficult to leave a group that one no longer engages in.

Participants 5 and 8 imply that belonging to an FNG is a necessary requirement if one is to be considered part of the community. This notion that one must be part of the FNG to be part of the community could be a factor as to why active FNGs have such high membership numbers. For example, the Lions Bay FNG I joined has over 1,000 members – which is a large membership number when compared to the population number of 1,390 in 2021 (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 2023). This connection of FNGs to the community feeling might explain why some participants are part of multiple FNGs – which is to reinforce that feeling of community.

Digital Neighbourhood Squares

> "There's a familiarity aspect there that you know when you sort of can see in the lives of other people, you sort of have a better understanding of where you think you have a better understanding of what's going on in your community. So, I think that's part of it is just it's sorted to you know if I think back before social media days, it would be like going to the local legion or the Community Centre and talking with people. What's been happening in your neighborhood? You know, like, how are your kids like, what's going on?" [Participant 2]

FNGs provide a snippet of residents' lives as mentioned in Participant 2's quote. By being able to see a snippet of other residents' lives, it makes FNGs more personalized, more welcoming and increases the trust within the group. The mutual trust to share little bits of private information such as children's ages, hobbies, etc., increases the weight of recommendations given by fellow residents. Two participants explained that they give value towards

recommendations given within the FNG because of the mutual trust within the group and knowing that everyone there is trying to be helpful.

This leads into the idea that FNGs could be seen as a symbol for digital neighbourhood squares as they are often created with the intent for residents to help and support each other, keep each other updated on community news and issues, and more. As mentioned earlier, it becomes more than a community bulletin board as residents engage with posts by tagging people who can offer support, having conversations in the comments section makes it a virtual place for residents to "enter" by posting or commenting and "leave" by lurking or leaving the FNG anytime they want.

A digital neighbourhood square also has different benefits from a traditional neighbourhood square. Beyond helping residents stay informed and connected, participants identified several benefits of FNGs. These benefits include convenience, and timeliness of information. There is no need to wait for the newspaper to be delivered as information gets disseminated quickly according to Participant 8.

Physical neighbourhood squares are less common nowadays, partly because we now have digital spaces where one must be actively engaged within the community to feel like they belong. However, Participant 6 recognized she did not feel fully part of the neighbourhood and wider community, until she saw her FNG and joined it. She stated that, "No, I just…they just popped up [in my Facebook feed] and I just like to like I say, I like to know what's going on around the city."

Participant 6 might not have realized it at the time, but she may have felt that her feeling of belonging and sense of community was lacking, which may have prompted her to join her FNG when it appeared in her feed. When stating that she likes to keep herself informed on what is going on in her community, it appears that she was not receiving enough community updates to feel like she is aware of the community's needs and issues.

Moving to a new neighbourhood can be a daunting experience, and new residents can face challenges in adapting to their new surroundings. Several participants indicated that FNGs can help in the adjustment process, providing a way to learn about and connect with one's new community. For example, Participants 2, 7 and 11 decided to join their FNGs after moving, and did so as a way to get a lay of the proverbial landscape and to possibly connect with their new neighbours. That is:

> "So, I decided to join. I would say shortly after we moved so 2018 um, certainly after we moved to Coquitlam, to the community and the reasons why I joined well, I think it sums up nicely with the word curiosity. I you know, I'm curious about what kind of neighborhood do I live in? Who's there? What kind of things go on? And then questions, right. So, when you're in a new area, you're wanting to understand, um, like, you know if you need something and it's just, it's kind of like a resource and information. Um and a group for resource and information and. And that is focused around your neighborhood where you are, right?" [Participant 2]

> "I moved into the neighborhood about 3 1/2 years ago and I wanted to make friends in the neighborhood. I wanted to have local friends that I didn't have to commute to go visit and so that was the primary purpose. What's happening? What are the events and from that Facebook group I found out there was a new group called White Rock Women, Rocks. And so, I was like, oh, that's cool." [Participant 7]

By being able to keep up with the community's needs, wants, current issues and more, it increases the community connection, which opens doors to creating strong parochial and private

ties. By increasing community connection, it allows residents to form new friendships like

Participant 7 and it can also reinforce one's decision to move into a specific neighbourhood. By

being part of an FNG that acts as a digital neighbourhood square, it allows for more "senior"

residents to share their "insider knowledge".

Transmitting Insider Knowledge

"I joined probably pretty soon after we moved into the neighborhood, which was. Yeah. Again,
like four years ago, almost four years ago and. Um, yeah, I guess it prompted me just to um, like,
feel connected to the people in here....We moved from Kitsilano and felt it didn't feel very
neighborly, and so I wanted to be, like, intentional about, you know, feeling connected to my
community here. And also, I felt it was a really good resource to sort of get to know the
amenities and like small businesses and stuff like getting restaurant recommendations, or if
you're looking for um, I I've made posts about like is a good massage therapist in the
neighborhood and like dentists and like sort of asking for resources….And I feel like it's a. it's a
good resource for that, to sort of lean on your community.
I had to learn more about, like things to access in the neighborhood, I guess." [Participant 11]

Participant 11 highlighted the value of a community with strong parochial ties. Her

fellow residents have built a community and supported each other to the point where she can

utilize her fellow residents' "insider knowledge" without feeling judged. Participant 11's FNG

has not only built a community, but they have also sustained it by keeping the group active (i.e.

residents are engaging with posts, posting in the group, administrators and moderators are

approving new posts and members etc.). By keeping the group active and allowing residents to

ask questions and seek advice without judgement, they facilitate community growth and

sustainability. The older members get to pass down their "insider knowledge" to the next

generation of residents who then pass down that knowledge, as well as their own knowledge and

perceptions, to the new set of residents, helping to keep the community culture alive.

FNGs allow residents to support each other by offering their insights otherwise referred to as

"insider knowledge" as Participant 2 says. Participant 2 defines "insider knowledge" below:

> "So, insider knowledge would be like knowing, like, where the good coffee shops are or
> where the good restaurants are. Or, you know, recently the boathouse has been under
> attack for, you know, for not letting a patron into their establishment with a pet. And so
> that's sort of inside knowledge that, I mean it ended up becoming a story in the media. I,
> from what I understood, but there's just some of those citizen concerns, perspectives. Um,
> you know. The little secret places that aren't really secret, but unless you're a local, um,
> you know it might be things like a local like vendor or artist or just something that's
> unique, right. And so, I don't I think it's a lot harder to understand. The sort of those…I
> don't know how you would refer to it. I say sort of that inside knowledge. Maybe it's
> personality, maybe it's characteristics of a community you don't really know."

For Participants 2 this insider knowledge assists in connecting one to their community.

> "Yeah, I definitely think that it increases your connection to your community because just
> because you have more knowledge of, you know, insider knowledge. I think that creates
> the greater connection to the community." [Participant 2]

For Participants 6 and 10 (as seen below), insider knowledge is knowing where the good garage

sales are, finding the hidden beautiful trails that tourists would not know about. This insider

knowledge can aid a resident in truly feeling like they belong to the community.

> "It's just finding out things in the community, like just finding out what's going on and
> like, who's doing what and where the good garage sales are. Not that I go, but you
> know. And then if yeah if I wanted to post like say like post saying that we're going to
> have a garage sale or something, it's probably the fastest way to get the word out about
> something and probably safer than say marketplace or something like that." [Participant
> 6]

> "I've discovered some trails in our neighborhood and some other things like probably
> wouldn't have known about other than that." [Participant 10]

This sharing of "insider knowledge" can be seen through the comments on a recommendation

post, or community events posts that share part of the community's culture and history (ex:

Steveston's Salmon Festival). These types of posts were reported by participants to be some of

the most popular posts seen within their FNGs. With residents supporting each other through FNGs, it allows the feelings of belonging and community to be strengthened, something that most participants reported since joining their FNGs. It is rare that this type of parochial support spills out beyond the online group in physical community events borne out of the FNGs (1/11 participants reported this). This is further supported by the literature as there is only one study known at this time (Mosconi, et al., 2017) which discusses community programs being created because of FNGs.

This greater connection to the community allows FNG members to feel like they belong, even if they do not post or engage with the posts/comments within the FNGs. Nonnecke et al., (2004) as cited in McLaughlin and Haverila (2024), discovered that browsing and absorbing information that way was sufficient to get what they needed from the group. Nonnecke et al., (2006) as cited in McLaughlin and Haverila (2024) found that people join an online community such as an FNG to be aware of the conversations, stories and get a general understanding of the community. In various ways, the participants stated that keeping up with the neighbourhood news, resources and/or events was one of the primary reasons they joined their FNGs, which support the findings of Nonnecke et al., (2006).

Sharing resources and recommendations in addition to other elements of insider knowledge is what keeps some residents like Participant 2 in FNGs. However, insider knowledge can also be seen as knowing how to utilize FNGs. For example, Participant 4 stated that her FNG is so helpful in returning lost items, that if she ever lost something, she would first post in the FNG. Knowing that one's fellow residents are willing to provide help and support as needed, increasing its reliability as a resource.

The residents engaged within FNGs could likely be the people who would join this group, if they met in-person. Over 50% of participants shared they were involved in the community. Community engagement was seen through their occupations, past volunteer and extra-curriculars or being an administrator/moderator for another FNG or Facebook community group. This was expected as I did not offer an honorarium and wanted to attract residents who were involved in their community because I believe they have a rich perspective that has not been explored yet.

Passive Engagement

That practice of lurking is performed by member who is part of the group but contributes the bare minimum to stay in the group. For some participants like Participants 7, 9 and 10 who had no choice but to be lurkers due to their jobs as they were prohibited from engaging in FNGs – they could be members who leave the group and come back when they are not as busy. It is almost like how Participant 11 stated that there are residents who go rent in the building for some period, leave and later come back to rent.

At the same time, lurkers could potentially be seen as the "not in my backyard neighbours" who peek out their windows, watching what their neighbours are doing silently from the comfort of their homes without talking to anyone.. This is supported by Participant 4, who talked about community safety awareness posts being taken too far, as they sometimes promote hypervigilance. She gave the example of a post where there was a homeless person who had a shopping cart with a caption along the lines of "This person must have stolen something from the store." These types of posts, where the person may look "suspicious" but is not acting in a

disorderly or criminal manner could promote feelings of fear, altering perceptions of crime and disorder in the neighbourhood.

Lurking allows residents to remain weakly connected to their community yet also being largely disconnected because of their lack of engagement and participation. have joined many extra-curriculars and within those groups/clubs there is a popular saying of "What you put in, is what you get out." If residents decide to be active within the FNG (i.e. posting, commenting, sharing and liking) then, then it could lead to them getting to know their fellow residents better, which may lead to connections and friendships. It can also increase their feelings of belonging and community to the point where they might think about hosting a community event. Whereas if a resident just needs to feel part of the community, they may choose to be a lurker because that is enough to satisfy their need to feel part of the community.

Lurker Levels and Redefining "Engaged Community Behaviour"

All the participants identified themselves as lurkers. However, during the data collection and analysis stage, there seems to be different levels to lurking. Before getting into the different levels of lurking, the term "lurker" needs to be defined. Sun et al. (2014) defines lurkers as a silent member of the online community. These lurker levels could help redefine what engaged community behaviour looks like online. By learning the lurker levels, it opens the possibility to redefining the concept of what engaged community behaviour is. Prior to the analysis of online community groups and engagement within those groups, the measure of an engaged community member has been through surveys often asking questions such as asking about organizational and civic participation (see Sampson and Groves, 1989; Putnam, 2000; 2020).

Level 1: Invisible Lurkers

The first level of lurkers are residents who do not engage directly within the FNG at all. These are the residents who are completely invisible, unless one were to look at the membership. The residents who are invisible lurkers are sometimes bounded by their work requirements[17] or because simply being part of the FNG satisfies their feeling of belonging to the community.

A prime example of an invisible lurker is Participant 8. Participant 8, as mentioned previously is just part of his FNG because social media is "sticky" and makes it difficult to leave. Participant 8 found that his FNG does not serve him any purpose, he does not see any posts (as seen below), yet another resident would not know he was part of the group unless they looked at the FNG membership.

> "They definitely were (talking about community ties), and I think they still are. I think what I'm what I've seen over the last you know, since this (political) change people, people have actually left the group, some people are hesitant. There, there's a lot of lurking going on. Um, there's, you know, people are there, but they're not contributing. They weren't even like or anything. They won't even react to a post or a comment necessarily. They're hesitant." [Participant 5]

Participant 5 notes that sometimes, FNG politics can make residents transition from lurker level 2 to level 1. Participant 5 shows that FNGs can resemble in-person social environments, emphasizing the importance of ensuring the digital neighbourhood square is just as friendly and welcoming as the in-person community social events, so that more residents would feel comfortable engaging with the FNGs.

Participant 9 got her boyfriend to join her FNG because of the drama and entertainment. While they both keep up with community news, they do not comment or like posts. At most, they send each other FNG posts by using the "share" feature. Participant 9 is a great example of

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[17] This was the case for Participants 7, 9 and 10.

residents who like to stay updated, who cares about what is going on in the community, but from a bystander perspective.

Level 2: Just popping in lurkers

The second level of lurkers includes residents who pop in and out of conversations within FNGs. They will post a comment occasionally or might engage with the post in a different way (ex: sharing the news link with family, but not commenting on the post), but they will not actually post into the FNG. This is the most common type of lurker I found.

> "And you know, a lot of times I read comments on I don't post a lot, but I comment, or I read comments because I think it's interesting to understand people." [Participant 2]

These residents are often trying to be helpful by answering other residents' questions and the FNG may be so helpful to others, that the welcoming, safe environment may encourage them to post occasionally. These residents contribute to sharing the "insider knowledge" previously discussed, allowing the local bridges to be formed with a rare possibility to grow into a strong parochial or private tie. FNG users like this are essential in keeping the community culture alive and who also keep the online parochial ties alive.

Level 3: Enforcers lurkers

The third type of lurkers are residents who say they lurk because they do not post but are active in the comments section. These types of lurkers are an interesting group because by Sun et al. (2014)'s definition, they are on the borderline of being considered as active users.

> "This is a very traditionally middle-class wealthier community. And there's traditionally a lot of older people in White Rock and some of the comments that come through are could be taken as really racist in nature. So that's very interesting to look at and to have

dialogue around and **I'm the type of person that would like flag it to the moderators to get it taken down."** [Participant 7]

These residents are often enforcing social norms, ensuring the community control is strong. They regularly remind others to be kind to each other in the comments section, they might comment something like "@admin" or "@moderator" to get the moderators and administrators' attention if a rule has been violated. The moderators and administrators are the residents who set the rules. The administrator-moderator team could also be seen as the police in the group, which would classify their enforcement of the rules as formal social control. These residents are bold and who are not afraid to call others out for the well-being of the community.

Crime is in the eye of the beholder

"Crime is very low on the list of things that people talk about. A lot of us up here have security cameras." [Participant 10]

FNGs can be very useful, it is part of the reason why they have hundreds, if not thousands, of members. The data indicates that FNGs are primarily used for keeping up with the neighbourhood and wider community on a variety of topics. However, most participants stated that, in their FNGs, the topic of crime or disorder is not frequently discussed. This was supported by what I saw in their FNGs during the recruitment period. The above quote by Participant 10 reveals that, in his experience, crime is very low on the list that residents talk about. That is, crime is not necessarily something that is on their radar. Participant 10 was not alone in having this experience. Several other participants spoke about crime being a minimal part of their FNGs. This does not necessarily mean that crime and disorder news/stories are uncommon in all FNG. It may be due to the factor that most of the participants live in communities where there is little

crime, which may result in FNG residents having low levels of concerns or interests talking about it. Another factor that needs to be considered is that there are also specific crime watch/crime prevention Facebook groups[18] dedicated to facilitating these discussions.

An [Almost] Crime Free News Source:

Participants indicated that they got their crime and criminal justice news from a variety of sources including Facebook or FNGs, television news channels, work; family and/or friends, City Council and the newspaper[19]. Crime news is defined as first-hand experience (e.g. someone posting about a porch theft incident) and new articles shared within FNGs. It is important to note that news links cannot be opened in Facebook or other social media platforms (Mundie, 2023).

The diversity of where participants get their crime and criminal justice news from suggests that FNGs may not be seen as a popular "go-to" news source for residents[20]. This is supported by Participant 1, who stated:

> "They don't necessarily have anything to do with crime, which I think is your topic of interest, but it's a lot of it is a lot more like helping out and seeing what's going on around the community."

Participant 1 felt that their FNG was more community focused than crime focused, which goes back to the earlier discussion on FNGs acting as a digital neighbourhood square for suburban communities that have low crime and disorder rates. Despite this, some participants mirror what other residents think about crime in their community, namely, that they do not keep up with crime. They ignore it because they believe their community is safe. An example of this is

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[18] It is important to note that some communities have their own Crime Watch Facebook Group.
[19] It is important to note that some physical newspapers were converted to an online newspaper only.
[20] This is not definitive due to the small sample size.

Participant 11, who stated that crime news, in general, simply is not on her radar. As such, it is not something she is particularly mindful of seeking out in her FNG.

> "Yeah, crime is not something I really keep up with very intentionally. I feel like crime reporting has a lot of like I don't know, a lot of fear mongering and stuff that I feel doesn't add very positively to my life."

While Participant 11 does not view crime on her radar and thus, rarely checks out news sources, Participant 2 has crime on her radar and checks online sources. Participant 2 stated she gets some of her news online, including through her FNG, stated that her FNG was not only timelier and more convenient as many other participants mentioned, but it was also more accurate than online news sources.

Unlike the other participants who joined FNGs primarily for information sharing, feeling of belonging, etc., Participant 9 had a different primary reason for joining her FNG – which is staying updated on neighbourhood crime issues, in addition to keeping up with the wider community so that she can be on the lookout and be prepared in case she runs into a stalker, as stalkers are a big neighbourhood crime issue in her area. This is because Participant 9 is one of the few participants who lives in an urban city, with more serious crime issues, rather than loud music or dog poop, which are viewed as more serious issues in smaller suburban communities, as will be discussed below.

Crime Takes a Backseat

Participants reported that crime and disorder posts were approximately 10-20% of all FNG posts (as seen below), while one Vancouver resident stated that she saw crime posts at least once a

week, if not daily. That Vancouver resident and the Port Moody resident stated that crime posts

made up approximately 40% of crime posts. One Surrey resident reported that she saw crime and

disorder posts daily. Despite these reported estimations of crime posts being up to 40%, most

participants felt that crime was not a primary topic of discussion in their FNGs as most of the

participants are satisfied with their current safety and security measures.

> "I'll just give you a little guesstimate, probably 10% (of posts are about crime and disorder). It's not like huge, but people love to post accidents." [Participant 7]

> "Crime. I think it's a small percentage. It really depends on the group." [Participant 1]

> "Port Moody, I would say is the most emotionally charged and it's focused a lot on development and green space, whereas if I compare to something like Port Coquitlam. However, I see a lot more crime things. It is issues on crime posted in Port Coquitlam, um, and then you take something like Burke Mountain and it's neither of those. There isn't a lot of crime stuff. There isn't a lot of complaints over development and green space um and it just seems just more um more general, so more.
> You know, I would say maybe even more balanced from a sort of what you see in those in that group right there isn't." [Participant 2]

> "Strengths…keeping current with the neighbor neighborhood concerns. Reminders about City things like events or garbage days that get changed, or um fundraisers.
> Um, what else? Yeah, I guess getting to know some members in the community a little bit better as well." [Participant 3]

The first two quotes by Participants 1 and 7 indicate that see crime posts are more

uncommon in their FNGs. This may be due to two distinct factors – the Facebook algorithm and

the frequency of crime posts. The second set of quotes by Participants 2 and 3 show what is

posted more frequently than crime, which are community issues such as garbage, context

specific, neighbourhood issues citizen complaints and more.

In addition to crime, the subject of disorder also emerged during interviews. Disorder was

defined in numerous ways. When defining the term "disorder" to participants, I defined it as

"anything deemed unusual or unacceptable to societal norms". Some participants had a different definition for disorder. Participant 11 defined disorder as is "people in distress". She went on to state that she believed her neighbours defined disorder as including suspicious persons or "people who look shady. Participant 8 defined disorder as "homelessness". Participant 3 defined disorder as suspicious activity. That is, she defined it as "loitering, homeless people camping out and/or open drug use and missing elderly people" (due to mental health issues they may have, for the safety of the elderly person and for the community). Residents' definitions of the term "disorder" were thus a reflection of what they see in their communities. To these residents, persons in distress and homeless persons are linked to disorderly conduct, which could be part of the reason why they define disorder differently.

Another potential reason that their definitions greatly varied is because of the differences within their social norms. The establishment of behaviours that are acceptable, frowned upon but still acceptable and completely unacceptable are norms that the community agrees upon enforced by regulars and law enforcement (Wilson and Kelling, 1982). Despite their differences, the participants only mentioned disorder relating to other residents. They did not bring up the physical environment, which suggests that participants do not live in truly disadvantaged neighbourhoods and that the physical environment for the most part, is well taken care. This could mean that there is a higher level of collective efficacy and social cohesion than residents believe.

Becoming More Vigilant

Some participants have reported that they have become more aware of their physical surroundings due to the crime and disorder posts.

"I don't really avoid like going to areas, but I would definitely avoid living in areas. So you know, there's certain patterns that you start to see certain streets names that come up constantly with people having issues and whether that's related to crime or, you know, accidents or, um, whatever it is, you know, there was there's posts on flooding, you know, some houses we had bad rain there a couple years ago and some of these concrete walls started coming down… Like so, it starts influencing. You know, if I was to move areas, I'd want to live for me, it really makes me appreciate where I live because I'm like, wow, I'm not dealing with these things, right? So, I think it really influences perspective on your, you know your own community, you know locally to where you are, um, compared to other communities." [Participant 2]

Participant 3, on the other hand, is much more aware of her surroundings due to the number of theft posts in her FNGs. Participant 3 used the word "vigilant" when describing her increased awareness, which suggests she has seen many theft posts.

Participants 2 and 3 shared how they both became more vigilant through FNGs. They use FNGs to guide their behaviour, to see what they should be weary of, and what safety precautions they should take, if needed. Participants 2, 3 and 9 are females who have had to adjust how they go to/approach their routine activities due to the crimes and disorder behaviour they observe. With crimes/disorder happening near them, it is safe to assume that these offenders live or work near the participants. Through the FNGs, participants could potentially see the patterns of what makes a home an easy target for a porch theft or what environment increases the likeliness of a female becoming an easy target. By learning this information through FNGs, residents like Participants 2, 3 and 9, can take the necessary safety precautions to keep themselves safe and deter offenders/people who engage in disorderly behaviour.

Four participants shared safety precautions they take, but only three participants took/implemented extra measures because of FNGs. Not all of the safety precautions shared were deemed extreme as they would be considered to fall under the category of "female safety" (ex:

not walking alone at night, having your partner's phone on and having them pick you up from a "sketchy" or unsafe area) or "common sense" (ex: not leaving something valuable in your car when in a downtown core). While the common "female safety" precautions are not new, the reason behind their increased awareness differs. Participant 9 stated that she is extra vigilant because of stalkers in her neighbourhood.

> "It's (FNG) helpful, especially like, I was saying, like, we have photos of those guys who are stalkers and women in the group were reporting every time they saw these guys and it actually got to the point where they managed to pull to get police to this guy."

As Participant 9 noted, stalkers are a problem in her neighbourhood. Her fellow residents came together and started posting pictures of the stalkers in the FNGs to help keep each other safe with the hopes of police officers catching the stalkers. This is an example of digital collective efficacy as residents decided to collaborate and work together to address stalking – a neighbourhood crime issue by using the FNG to make others aware of the stalkers. With more residents aware of the stalkers' description, it became easy for residents to report to police. Since there is evidence in the FNG (ie. the posts), police can do their part to identify and arrest the stalkers and keep them off the street, which makes the community safer. It is also evidence of collaboration between residents and law enforcement. This quote it also shows the value of FNGs as Participant 9 knew that stalkers are a major issue because of her FNG. Since she is part of the FNG, she can take extra safety pre-cautions, which show that FNGs have the potential to be a crime prevention tool and crime awareness tool.

> Participant 7 does not walk outside at night for a different reason as shared below:
>
> "Well, I live by a massive park with massive trees and sometimes sheltered people are there, you know, looking to commit crimes, break into places and I wouldn't go there because someone might be sleeping in the trees. Um, yeah, so just that kind of stuff mostly."

This quote along with Participant 1's quote from theme 1 of seeking community and finding it online, informs us that physical characteristics of an area can influence one's feelings significantly. This quote also shows that residents who engage in disorderly behaviour in Participant 7's community are often in the nearby park, which can make residents fearful of going near said parks. With more fear of crime and disorder, there are fewer eyes on the street as Jane Jacobs' says. This could mean that there are fewer residents engaging in informal social control at public places such as the park, where enforcement of social norms may be required to ensure that the community control does not break down.

Participant 2 added a Ring doorbell because she saw a lot of residential break and enters (B&E) posts. She has parked her car differently because of some FNGs posts and is currently looking at sensors to buy to increase her home security and feeling of safety.

It should be noted that Participants 2, 7 and 9 did not alter their behaviours due to a single crime-related post. Their behaviours changed due to observing a cluster of posts or consistent posts relating to a certain crime or type of crime. The frequency of the posts led them to conclude that these issues were worthy of their attention and necessitated them changing their behaviours and increasing their level of vigilance. This observation is a good example of Wilson and Kelling (1982)'s broken windows theory, only in the online space. In this case, one crime post can be an example of a single broken window, which is not really enough to generate much attention, or necessarily get people to alter their behaviour. However, multiple crime stories (multiple "broken windows" or a signal of potentially more serious crime and disorder creeping into an area) led some participants to begin to alter their behaviour, as Wilson and Kelling discussed.

The following participants show that crime is not a big neighbourhood issue, at least in their area of the city. What residents see in their communities – wildlife, dog poop and garbage issues, those are likely to be the major issues residents care about. This is reflected in the posts they see and interact with. To these residents, their social norms (ex: no dog poop in the park) are being violated. Seeing their social norms being violated, they want to show their fellow residents that violating those norms is unacceptable behaviour. By calling them out directly in FNG posts whether by being the poster or one of the many residents commenting, they are engaging in informal social control.

> "If something came up in the group like "Don't go here because of this" or be vigilant when you go there because of...(crime)" I would, I would certainly be conscious of it. Yeah, for sure. But I haven't come across anything at that at what did I see? Oh, there was a cougar. Ohh months ago, wandering around here somewhere and yeah. And then there was a bear last summer, which was a little concerning cause it was at like, very close to home. But you know, people would say "stay away from there". So, you, you just do, right?" [Participant 6]

Participant 6 showed that "Don't go here" and "Be vigilant" posts can have different contexts. To a resident in an urban community, it might mean something relating to crime and disorder. However, since most of the participants live in a suburban area like Participant 6, it relates to wildlife. The community context can influence what people deem to be important. For the participants in the suburban communities, what is deemed important are wildlife issues. This is further supported by other participants as seen below.

> "We were also living on Vancouver Island, up in Port Hardy. Well, my partner was teaching up there and we joined a lot of Facebook groups up there because that's the way that most of their news and information was shared. Every business had a Facebook page like schools, so you kind of had to if you wanted to really be kept in the know. I would say up there in this kind of may not be relevant to your project in Vancouver, but up there I noticed there was a lot more like animal awareness and safety cause you're up in a small town… So, you had a lot of posting about nature and Cougars and bears, and you know both good and bad and safety tips as well as spotlight spotting. So, if you saw Cougar

near school kind of thing, keep your kids in. That's to be honest, that's also quite similar. Or Fairview Group talks a lot about coyotes and posting about coyotes for kind of your pet safety. Um. Yeah. So, I guess that's a similarity." [Participant 4]

"So, I actually sit on the bear smart committee because we are a bear smart community and we get bear sightings reported to us because we love our bears and often I'm getting video camera footage from the ring doorbell or the whatever, and they're always in the same place and you can see which bear it is."[Participant 5]

"Yeah, like, I feel like freaking like daily (talking about frequency of dog poop posts). Somebody will post something they'll take a photo of like the other day, like, literally yesterday, I was looking at it, and this person took a photo of an area in the West End, and there's 6 bags of dog poop just sitting in an area. And they're like, seriously, people like you picked it up, but you just left it sitting…. We get coyotes here, and people will post about the coyotes, too." [Participant 9]

"Dog poop, you know, first world problems, right? Children are dying of starvation and war over the face of the earth. But the most important issue up here is dog poop. Dog poop and garbage. Those are the two big triggers up here…" [Participant 10]

To quote Dr. Josh Murphy (my Honours supervisor and police researcher), "To them (the participants in suburban communities), no call is too small." In small communities, police typically practice "no call is too small" policing. This means that residents call police to deal with "minor" issues that are not necessarily considered police matters because there is very little crime. Since there is very little crime, police are not that busy and will come. This practice is common is small, suburban communities whereas urban communities, these "minor" issues are in fact, too small for the police to care about as police will care more about actual crimes. All of the participants who were just quoted live in a suburban community (except for Participant 9) where calling the police over dog poop, garbage, etc., would be something worthwhile. For Participant 9 and the other participants who live in an urban community, the idea of calling the police over something like dog poop is not something that would be taken seriously. If the

participants who live in a more urban community wanted to be taken seriously by the police, a more serious crime (ex: break and enter, assault etc.,) would have to occur.

While the FNGs I recruited participants from may not be utilized as the digital crime prevention tool, I envisioned it to be, it can be used as an informal social control enforcement tool, community news sharing tool and as an emergency tool – like how Block Watch (BW) was utilized for Participant 5. Participant 5 stated that BW is mentioned in their city's emergency bylaws to help facilitate communication between residents. These findings show that FNGs can serve multiple underlying purposes and that the way it is used depends on the community it was borne out of because the FNG absorbs the identity of the community context.

Discussion:

This study aimed to answer the following research questions by conducting eleven online in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Metro Vancouver residents.

RQ1: Why do Metro Vancouver residents join FNGs and what purposes do these groups serve?

RQ2: Are FNGs utilized as a crime prevention tool and if so, how?

RQ3: Do FNGs redefine Carr's concept of new parochialism?

Belonging to the community:

To answer the first research question, participants identified three primary reasons for joining FNGs. The first reason is community. Residents want to feel part of their community and stay updated on local news and events. This gives them a sense of belonging to or connection with their community. The second reason is information sharing. FNGs can provide real-time information at the local level. Residents can share information that, while not

necessarily important to the general population, is of interest to local residents. However, technological advances can be a double-edged sword, while providing convenience and timeliness; however the risk of misinformation being shared can be high depending on the community's knowledge and ability to fact-check what they see posted. A lot of this responsibility, however, falls onto administrators and moderators of FNGs – who are residents that volunteer their time. This means, depending on how much time an administrator or moderator can dedicate to the FNG, along with their ability to fact-check posts, posts with misinformation can be lessened or increased.

FNG Usage

In analyzing the data, I discovered that the FNGs I joined were not primarily utilized as crime prevention tools, but rather as a digital neighbourhood square. One possible reason for this is that most of the people I interviewed belonged to FNGs that were situated in low crime and disorder communities. As such, these issues may simply not be on the radar of residents. Most of the participants reported crime and disorder posts being low, approximately 10-20%, with a few exceptions (one Surrey participant, one Vancouver participant and the Port Moody participant) stating that crime and disorder posts made regular appearances, making up approximately 40% of the FNG posts, which was the highest percentage estimate given. Meanwhile the previously mentioned Surrey and Vancouver participants noted that they see crime posts on a regular weekly basis, sometimes even on a daily basis. None of the participants stated that crime prevention tips were shared by fellow residents; however, few participants noted that seeing multiple FNG crime posts prompted them to take extra safety precautions and alter their behaviour in certain ways. FNGs have the potential to become something similar to BW-as a

crime prevention tool, if they are located in urban cities where crime and disorder are more prominent. FNGs currently serve as a general information sharing tool, but crime prevention tips, residents sharing crime and disorder patterns they notice – seem to be rare or non-existent according to participants. If these types of posts were to increase, FNGs could become akin to BW.

FNGs as a "bridge builder"

To answer the last research question, the data shows that FNGs do not provide an updated example of Carr (2003)'s concept of new parochialism. Rather, they represent Granovetter (1982)'s idea of "local bridges". According to Granovetter, "local bridges" are weak ties where two people share information in the fastest way possible, is applicable to FNGs, as one resident shares information to the FNG which could be considered as another person. Since FNGs are primarily used to share information, the FNG's ties would start as a "local bridge" that could turn that type of parochial tie into a stronger parochial or private tie that fits into Bursik and Grasmick's (1993) systemic model of social ties. FNGs are also a form of social capital, specifically bridging. The concept of "bridging" as defined by Putnam (2020 p. 22), is a form of social capital that is inclusive. Since FNGs are inclusive to those who live and work in certain neighbourhoods or cities, they can help foster a stronger community identity and sense of community through various types of posts that allow residents to help each other out.

As discussed earlier, the engagement levels in FNGs can vary greatly. This could be because FNGs are a tertiary association. Tertiary associations are a new label created by Robert Putnam and are defined as community organizations in which most of their members do not do much aside from being on the membership list and paying their dues (Putnam, 2020 p. 52). Most

members are unlikely ever knowingly encounter any other member and that their social tie is like two fans of the same baseball team living on opposite sides of the coasts (Putnam, 2020 p. 52). This FNG type of social tie connects residents to each other because of where they work and/or live, not to each other as Putnam (2020 p.52) says. This could help explain why most of the participants reported they did not become friends with someone through FNGs. Participants gave varying definitions of the term "friendship", but their responses had two main components which were time and shared values/beliefs. One interaction through an FNG post does not equal friendship. It takes time for the participants to get to know their fellow residents and to learn about their values, beliefs, whether they share any interests or hobbies, etc. Simply put, living or working in the same neighbourhood or city as someone else is not enough for a friendship to be born. Participants indicated that engaging with fellow residents and learning all this information needs to happen outside of the FNG.

Summary:

By utilizing a social disorganization, specifically collective efficacy, perspective to analyze the data, the following themes emerged. Community is important, it takes time to build one, there needs to be residents to keep the community culture alive and welcome new residents who will continue to keep it alive. FNGs are utilized in different ways, the most prominent way being a digital neighbourhood square as the content shared in the group, mirrors what would be shared in-person. Those who are active in the FNG, would most likely be attending in-person meetings if the FNG had a spillover effect to community revitalization. FNGs also have the potential to enhance collective efficacy through various means which include the community coming together and attempting to fix a neighbourhood crime issue, enforcing social norms and more. Those who are lurkers, may be perceived as the "not in my backyard neighbours" or

members of a community group who just joined the group to feel like they are part of something bigger. Parochial ties in FNGs need to be explored as they do not redefine Carr's 2003 concept of new parochialism, instead they reflect Granovetter (1983)'s concept of local bridges.

Limitations:

While the current study is the first to gain an understanding of why Metro Vancouver residents join FNGs, there are several limitations to this study. The first being the exploratory nature of the study and the second being the small sample size (N=11). Given the small sample size, the findings are not generalizable and should merely act as a snapshot into the perspectives of a small group of FNG members. The lack of eligible FNGs to join limited the diversity of the areas where participants were from. This meant most participants lived in "bedroom communities" where crime and disorder rates are low (ex: 156 calls for service in Anmore Village during 2023 (Village of Anmore, British Columbia, 2023 Annual Report, 2023); 466 calls for service in 2022 (Village of Lions Bay, n.d.); crime decreased by 4.7% in Port Moody in 2022 (Rhonda, 2023) , making it challenging to apply urban criminological theories. In this sense, the research sample was not necessarily equipped to answer my research questions. It is likely that the FNG experience is context-specific and would have likely been more useful to focus on FNGs in more urban communities. For example, one participant who lived in a more urban environment – where crime and disorder were common – had very different experiences and perspectives compared to other participants who mostly lived in more suburban communities.

Additionally, I was unable to interview any FNG creators, which left a significant gap between the participants' perceptions of the FNGs and the FNG creator's original intent for creating the group. The lack of active commenter and poster type of residents in FNGs also leaves a significant gap as to why those residents join their FNGs and what they get from the

group. There is a possibility that crime is too "niche" of an issue when considering the fairly broad types of posts one can find in these groups. It may have been better to focus on crime prevention specific FNGs rather than general FNGs.

Implications , Conclusion and Future Directions:

This study can aid municipal governments and law enforcement in communicating with their residents by utilizing FNGs to share timely, important and relevant information to the specific area/neighbourhood of a city. This study can also help Metro Vancouver residents understand that while FNGs can serve many purposes, but how it is used is dependent on the community's needs and issues. FNGs reflect the community's context through the most popular types of posts. Community centres may also wish to utilize FNGs to reach more residents, help with leading community-oriented events, community revitalization, informal social control and parochial ties.

An Untapped Police Resource

All participants stated that FNGs are an information sharing tool; however, no police department or crime prevention organization has decided to utilize them in that way. Residents are among the first people that observe and sometimes interact with offenders and persons who engage in disorderly behaviour. Thus, police should be made aware of the FNG resource, as they can reach hundreds, if not thousands of residents and ask for information that might be useful in making connections to criminal cases or catching offenders. Police departments can also ask residents to share information through FNGs in a timely manner. This would be useful as residents may share information through a variety of means (ex: tagging people in the comments section of the post, sharing the post link through Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp, etc.). Police

could also use FNGs to help deal with low priority calls such as dealing with a call about a stolen bike.

By utilizing FNGs to share relevant information, and as a way to communicate with the wider community it allows for more residents to be reached. It could also help strengthen parochial-public ties which is important for keeping both informal and formal social control strong,which also helps in keeping the community safe. Utilizing FNGs would promote collective efficacy amongst residents and new parochialism efforts.

The findings of this study indicate that there are many reasons why residents join FNGs. The three main reasons are: seeking community,to participate in the online neighbourhood square, and to learn more about the local crime issues. The findings indicate that FNGs I joined are not utilized as a crime prevention tool, but rather as a digital neighbourhood square. These digital neighbourhood squares essentially mirror the FNGs if they were to be a physical in-person group. FNGs appear to be very context specific as they seem to take on the identity of their community, matching their rhythms, concerns and dynamics. This was evident with the type of posts in each group being specific to each group. This shows, there may not be a "one size fits all" FNG as FNGs serve different purposes to different people depending on where they are situated. This research also filled in a gap, which is the reasons why some residents are lurkers.

This study can be taken in a variety of ways, from attempting to replicate it fully or partially in a different region/province to see if there are significant similarities or differences across FNGs. An example of this is only joining urban city based FNGs. The sample could be restricted to FNG creators, administrators and moderators offering a new perception of the FNG purposes and how they were intended to be utilized. The theoretical framework could be

changed to social network theory, which could provide additional context and contribute to existing FNG literature. One potential new area research that arose during the interview process was the user-friendliness and effectiveness between FNGs, NextDoor, Reddit groups and other similar applications.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Email Scripts

Snowball sampling email script:

"Please see the message from Marika who is leading the study.
My name is Marika Lopez, I'm a Criminology Honours student at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU). I am conducting a research study titled *Welcome to the (Facebook) Neighbourhood: Exploring How Community Residents Use Facebook Groups to Address Crime"* *REB #2024-46*. If you are interested in learning more, please contact me at marika.lopez@student.kpu.ca You can also see the attached poster for more information."

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Once a potential participant reaches out:

Hello,

My name is Marika Lopez, I appreciate your interest in participating in my research study. To provide some more details, I am asking for 45 minutes of your time for an online interview conducted via Microsoft Teams. I have attached the consent form below for more details, please let me know if you have any questions that will help you make an informed decision in whether you decide to partake in my research study.

Sincerely,
Marika Lopez
Co-Investigator and Student Lead

Appendix B: Consent Form

[Welcome to the (Facebook) Neighbourhood: Exploring How Community Residents Use Facebook Groups to Address Crime]
#2024-46

STUDY TEAM
Principal Investigator: Josh Murphy, Ph.D.; Instructor, Criminology Department, KPU. Contact: joshua.murphy1@kpu.ca
Co-Investigator(s): Marika Lopez, Undergraduate Honours Student, Criminology Department, KPU. Contact: marika.lopez@student.kpu.ca

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST (If applicable)
- There are no perceived conflicts of interest.

INVITATION & PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
- You are being invited to participate in the study to help further understand why adults aged 18+ in Metro Vancouver Regional District join Facebook Neighbourhood Groups, what purpose(s) these Facebook Groups serve the residents, how residents utilize Facebook Neighbourhood Groups as a crime prevention tool and how crime information is shared within Facebook Neighbourhood Groups.
- The purpose of this study to learn about people's experiences as a member of a Facebook Neighbourhood Group.
- The research study is being completed as a partial graduation requirement for a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Criminology.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
- Participation in this research study is completely voluntary, and you will not be compensated for your time.
- Participant involvement is purely voluntary. If chooses to participate in this study, it will not affect their employment and/or academic standing. Participants will be given information that is relevant to their decision to continue in the study. Participants will be able to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative outcome.
- The investigator will share with you any new findings that may develop while you are participating in this study.

PROCEDURES
- If participants decide to agree to be part of the study, they will sign this consent form, inform me of a time that is convenient for them to sit down for a 45-minute interview via Microsoft Teams. At the beginning of the interview, participants will be reminded about the purpose of the study, partial confidentiality, anonymity, storage of the data, and that their participation is voluntary. Participants will then be asked if they are comfortable with the audio being transcribed for data-gathering purposes. They will be reminded that their answer does not affect their participation, this is for the co-investigator to ensure I respect their privacy. After this, they will be asked a series of questions regarding their reasons for joining a Facebook Neighbourhood Group and experiences as a member of ae Facebook Neighbourhood Group.

- There are two methods of recording. The first is writing detailed notes in my research journal during the interview. Secondly, if given consent by the participant, audio will be transcribed.
- If participants do not feel comfortable answering a question or are unable to answer a question, they can skip by saying "Skip" or "I'd rather not answer" or "next question" to clearly indicate to the co-investigator that they do not want to answer a question. The co-investigator will immediately move on to the next question

WITHDRAWING FROM THE STUDY

- Participation is voluntary, and participants have the right to withdraw from the study by March 15, 2025, without providing a reason and without fear of any negative outcome.
- If the participant chooses to withdraw from the study by March 15, 2025, all information (notes, transcripts, etc.) relating to them will be immediately destroyed.
- After March 15, 2025, participants will no longer be able to withdraw, and their data will be included in the analysis and final report.

ANONYMITY & CONFIDENTIALITY

- The data will be anonymized and that their identity will be kept confidential.
- The only pieces of personal information being collected from participants are their names and email addresses. The names will be seen on the consent forms, which will be stored in the Principal Investigator's OneDrive Research Folder, subfolder "Consent Forms". Only the Principal Investigator and co-investigator will have access to this data. The co-investigator will be the only person who will have the email addresses of the participants. Should participants state their name, or the co-investigator state the participant's name during the interview by accident, it will be removed from the transcription. If participants disclose their occupations, that will also be removed from the transcripts.
- Participants will not be referred to by name and instead will be given a unique title, e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.
- Data will be collected via Microsoft Teams, *a U.S. company and as such is subject to U.S. laws including the U.S. CLOUD Act and U.S. Patriot Act. As such, there is a possibility that information about you may be accessed without your knowledge or consent by the US government in compliance with the US laws. The security and privacy policy for the web survey company can be found at the following link: https://www.microsoft.com/en-ca/privacy/ccpa*
- Participants will be offered limited confidentiality if they choose to take part in the research. While name, email and occupation of participants will remain confidential in most circumstances, this information will be released on the following exceptional grounds:
  - Disclosure of self-harm or intention to self-harm.
  - Disclosure of criminal acts that have not been reported or sharing of plans to commit a crime.
  - Disclosure of child abuse.
- The data itself will not be widely shared; however, research findings may be published and/or presented at conferences.

BENEFITS

- Participants can discuss their experiences with and perceptions of Facebook Neighbourhood Groups. They can share their lived experiences with the potential to add to the existing body of knowledge on this topic.

RISK

- The risk to participants is minimal.
- As stated in the Confidentiality section, participants in this study will be given limited confidentiality. Since the information participants provide, the Co-investigator will not pertain to illegal activity, they will be faced with little or no risk from their involvement. Furthermore, participants will be routinely asked if they wish to take a break, and the Co-investigator will respect their decisions not to answer certain questions. Additional safeguards, including restricting the age of participation to 18 years or older, will be put into place.
- There will be no risk to third parties, as specific references to names of people will be removed from the transcripts and replaced with "Participant 1" before it gets uploaded to the Principal Investigator's OneDrive Folder labelled "Transcripts".

COMPENSATION (If applicable)

- There will be no compensation offered to participants.

STUDY RESULTS

- This study is being conducted as a requirement of my Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Criminology.
- Participants will be offered a copy of the completed thesis at the end of their interview.
- The research findings may be published. The data itself will not be disseminated.

DISPOSAL OF DATA

- All interview transcripts will be anonymized and will be retained by the Co-investigator after the research project has ended, if consent to retain the interview transcripts has been granted by participants.

Consent to retain the transcripts will be sought as part of the verbal consent process. If a participant does not consent, then their interview transcript will be destroyed upon completion of the Honours thesis.

- If the participant does consent, transcripts will be stored in a designated folder in the Principal Investigator's OneDrive for a period of 4 years (48 months) after the completion of the Honours thesis. This is to allow opportunity for the data to be revisited should follow-up research be conducted in this field, including future projects and studies with the data.

The notes taken in the research journal will be destroyed by the co-investigator by ripping up all of the paper before being recycled after 4 years.

CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

- If you have any questions or would like more information on this study, please contact Dr. Josh Murphy at joshua.murphy1@kpu.ca or Marika Lopez at marika.lopez@student.kpu.ca

CONTACT FOR COMPLAINTS/ETHICS CONCERNS

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the KPU Research Ethics Board at reb@kpu.ca.

CONSENT
Participation is voluntary, therefore if one chooses to withdraw, they can do so without consequences regarding their employment, education, etc. Participants do not waive any legal rights by participating in the study.

Signed consent

By signing, you are consenting to take part in Marika Lopez's Honours research study titled "Welcome to the (Facebook) Neighbourhood: Exploring How Community Residents Use Facebook Groups to Address Crime"

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Signature of Co-Investigator (Marika Lopez)

Date signed: _____   Date signed: _____

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Welcome to the (Facebook) Neighbourhood: Exploring How Community Residents Use Facebook Groups to Address Crime

Demographic questions about participants:
- How long have you lived in Metro Vancouver?
    - Were you born in Metro Vancouver or did you move to Metro Vancouver?
    - If you moved to Metro Vancouver, why did you choose to move to Metro Vancouver?
- Have you ever been part of a Block Watch program or other type of community safety program?
    - If yes, what was that experience like?
- Do you feel the group represents the diversity of your neighborhood?
    - Why or why not?
- Do you rent or own?
- Where do you get your crime and criminal justice news from?

Decision to join Facebook Neighbourhood Groups questions:
- Tell me about how you decided to join your current Facebook Group?
    - When did you decide to join your current Facebook Neighbourhood Group?
    - What prompted you to join your current Facebook Neighbourhood Group?
- So, what is the FNG like? What has your experience been?
- What were you hoping to gain or contribute by joining?
- Are you a member of other similar groups?
    - If so, how does this one compare?
- Why are you still a member of your current Facebook Neighbourhood Group?
    - What do you use the group for? OR What purpose does it serve you?
    - What types of things are posted on the Facebook Neighbourhood Groups?
    - If you've stopped participating or are less active now, what contributed to that change?
    - What do you think are biggest strengths or benefits from being a part of the group?

Change related questions about Facebook Neighbourhood Groups:
- Have you formed new connections or friendships through the group?
    - If so, can you share an example?
- Have you become more aware of your surroundings after being accepted into your current Facebook Neighbourhood Group?
- Can you tell me a bit about your relationships with your neighbours?
    - Have your relationships with fellow residents strengthened, weakened or have experienced no change since becoming a member of your current Facebook Neighbourhood Group?

- Has being a part of the group impacted your sense of community or belonging in your neighborhood? If yes, how?
- Have you ever used the group for practical purposes, such as buying/selling items or seeking recommendations?
  - How successful was that?
    - Did that experience impact your sense of community??
- How much of what you see posted in the group involves crime or disorder issues?
  - Are there any crime prevention measures you implemented because of something shared in the group?
    - If yes, what measures have been implemented and why?

    - Have crime-related discussions in the group influenced your behavior, such as avoiding certain areas or taking additional safety precautions?

- Have any posts about crime influenced your feelings of safety in the neighborhood?
  - If so, how?
- Do you think Facebook Neighbourhood Groups are useful to the community?
  - Do you think crime-related posts contribute to solving issues (e.g., helping police, identifying suspects) or escalate fear and tension?
    - Why?
- Have these posts impacted your view of the neighborhood or specific areas within it?
  - If so, how?

Questions regarding informal and formal social control intersecting:
- What are the opportunities for the group to collaborate with local authorities or organizations on crime prevention?
- What are some ways that Facebook Neighbourhood Groups to build connections with police?
- Do you think this Facebook Neighbourhood Group should be added as a component to a formal block watch program?
  - Why or why not?
  - If yes, what can the Facebook groups bring to the neighborhood watch?
  - If no, what is an alternative?
- Do you think that police should be involved in Facebook Neighbourhood Group?
  - Why or why not?
  - If yes, how should they be involved?
  - If no, what are some alternatives?

Appendix D: Social Media Caption

Social media caption:

Hi everyone! My name is Marika Lopez, and I'm an Honours Criminology student at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU). I am in the process of completing an undergraduate research study on social media and community safety.

My research study is titled "Welcome to the (Facebook) Neighbourhood: Exploring How Community Residents Use Facebook Groups to Address Crime" REB #2024-46

So, if you fit my recruitment criteria, and are interested in being a part of my research, please contact me (email at the bottom).

If you know anyone who fits my criteria and would be interested in participating, please share this post with them!

This research is based on community criminology, and I need the community's help to learn about your experience with Facebook Neighbourhood Groups.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at marika.lopez@student.kpu.ca. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact my Honours Supervisor, Dr. Josh Murphy, at joshua.murphy1@kpu.ca.

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Image Description:
The poster background colour is teal. The Facebook logo is in the upper left corner of the poster. In a white bubble the following text reads "Facebook Neighbourhood Groups Research Study: Participant Recruitment"

On the left side of the poster, the following header reads "Requirements".
In bullet form, the requirements read:
- Age: 18+
- Fluent in English
- Residing in Metro Vancouver for 6 months or more
- Part of 1 or more Facebook Neighbourhood Groups **OR** Facebook Community Groups that is based in Metro Vancouver
- Available for a **1-on-1, 45-minute interview**
- Access to Microsoft Teams videoconferencing software

At the bottom of the poster, in a white bubble, it reads;

To participate please contact:
Co-investigator and Student Lead: Marika Lopez (e: marika.lopez@student.kpu.ca)

If you have questions or concerns, please contact
Principal Investigator: Dr. Josh
Murphy   (e: joshua.murphy1@kpu.ca)

REB #2024-46 | REB e: reb@kpu.ca

Appendix E: Social Media Recruitment Poster