

**Through an Indigenous Lens: Understanding Indigenous Masculinity and Street Gang  
Involvement**

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By

Robert D. Henry

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## ABSTRACT

Colonization has had a detrimental impact on Indigenous peoples and communities. Colonization has and continues to remove Indigenous peoples from full participation in Canadian society, which has forced some Indigenous men to search out other avenues in order to gain power, respect, and economic capital to survive. It is the direct result of colonial-shaped socio-political histories and ideologies that have led to the creation and proliferation of urban Indigenous street gangs.

This dissertation examines 16 Indigenous male ex-gang members and their perceptions of masculinity, identity, and how this is supported through their involvement within a street gang. Relational accountability was the methodology utilized to engage and support the men through the course of the research process. It was from the focal point of relational accountability that photovoice methods could be modified to accommodate the lived realities of the men during the time of the study. Overall, fifteen individuals participated in the study, with nine engaging in photovoice methods to document and explain how they understood and practiced masculinity. The nine men, who completed photovoice, had their photographs and narratives brought together to create *Brighter Days Ahead*, to give back to the organization STR8 UP and help inform the broader community about the multiple issues that Indigenous youth face in the Canadian Prairies.

The role of masculinity was integral for the men's inclusion into street gangs. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity and Bourdieu's concept of habitus helped to create a framework to understand why some Indigenous men see street gangs as a viable option to practice masculinity. By examining the men's histories, with a focus on their relationships' with parents, siblings, family, peers, and social institutions, a more robust understanding the linkages to street gang involvement is created. The street gang epitomized the ideal "man"—tough, independent, emotion-less, and powerful, as it were these individual's whom they would target for their recruitment. Analysis of the men's narratives and photographs revealed how violence and trauma impacted their notions of maleness. It was through violent and traumatic experiences that the men would create a "mask" that they would wear to help them engage in hyper-violent behaviours within multiple fields and protect them from further victimization. This study directs our attention to focus future research on: 1) the impacts of colonization as both a historical and contemporary factor in the lives of Indigenous peoples; 2) the importance of relational accountability within the research process; 3) the potential of photovoice methods in expanding street gangs research; and 4) the need for gang prevention and intervention programming to focus on the concept of masculinity in order to deter gang involvement amongst Indigenous males and build healthier stronger communities.

## **DEDICATION**

I want to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to the men who were brave enough to share their narratives and photographs within this dissertation. I have learnt more from you than I could ever repay or show. Thank you, and I wish all of you the best in the future. I make this dedication to: Adam, Baldhead, Bones, Bonks, Clayton, Dale, Dave, Dez, Dwayne, Emil, James, Kinuis, Mat, Mathias, and Stacey. I would also like to thank Dave and Shielagh for their help in transporting the men to and from places. To Father André, Stan, and STR8 UP for their guidance and support. I am privileged to have met you and hope that others may be able to learn from you and what you all have to share.

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

*There were no emotions. A gangster is this. You gotta be cold. You gotta be mean, and you gotta be a good talker. The game is psychology and math, the way I look at it. You gotta learn how to count your money and you gotta learn how to talk. You gotta learn how to make ten bucks into twenty. I have took over blocks. I've fought a lot of mean guys. I had knife fights. I have been chased with mace. I've been shot at. There's a lot of shit that I went through man. ... I put that fear into you. I'll put that demon into you—what I been carrying. I take that demon and I put it in you. I make you feel this pain I'm holding. This is the scare I'm holding. This is the anger I'm holding. Now I'm gonna put it in you. (Adam (age 36) STR8 UP Member)*

### 1.0 – Introduction

Indigenous street gangs continue to be constructed and defined by criminal justice officials and experts as deviant social groups who occupy the lowest rung on the social hierarchy of organized crime.<sup>1</sup> I use the term Indigenous rather than Aboriginal throughout the dissertation for two reasons. First, it captures the multiple and divergent cultural identities located across Canada. Second, it connects the men to the land and separates the socio-political histories of Indigenous and ethnic minority street gangs caused by colonization that have led to the formation of street gangs.<sup>2</sup>

Indigenous street gangs continue to be labeled by public media as constant threats to society due to their unpredictable violence.<sup>3</sup> The language used to describe Indigenous street gangs by the public media continues to support colonial ideologies of fear towards Indigenous males, where increased surveillance and removal are considered necessary to

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<sup>1</sup> Jana Grekul and Patti LaBoucane-Benson, "Aboriginal Gangs and Their (Dis)Placement: Contextualizing Recruitment, Membership, and Status," *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice/La Revue Canadienne de criminologie et de justice pénale* 50, no. 1 (2008): 77.

<sup>2</sup> Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, "Decolonizing Antiracism," *Social Justice* (2005): 120-143; Winona Stevenson, "'Ethnic' Assimilates' Indigenous": A Study in Intellectual Neocolonialism." *Wicazo Sa Review* (1998): 33-51.

<sup>3</sup> Susanna Kelley, 'Nightmare' Predicted as FAS Makes Some Aboriginal Youth Vulnerable to Gangs. *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 16, 2010; Darcy Henton, Thug life: Alberta's Response to Gangs. *Alberta Views*, 14(5), 2011. The Canadian Press. Native Gangs Spreading Across Canada. *CBC News Manitoba*, March 16, 2010.

protect the general public.<sup>4</sup> Words such as “hyper-violent”, “unpredictable”, “skid row”, “addict”, and “urban terrorist” are used to create a ‘gangster’ image, which influences social perceptions of who is to be considered a street gang member.

Over the last two decades the “problem” of Indigenous street gangs within the Prairie Provinces of Canada has garnered national and local media attention.<sup>5</sup> Media reports by Christie Blatchford<sup>6</sup>, Susanna Kelley<sup>7</sup>, and other Canadian journalists depict Indigenous street gangs as a “disease” or “epidemic” that plagues both urban and rural communities.<sup>8</sup> The sensationalized journalism styles rely heavily on “gang talkers” and “gang talk” which coincidentally feeds the collective imagery and runs “the risk of misrepresenting what it claims to represent, the reality of violent street worlds.”<sup>9</sup> Some media reports have gone so far as to suggest that Indigenous street gangs are “a demographic tsunami facing Canada,” due to a younger and rapidly growing Indigenous population.<sup>10</sup> This type of journalism represents little more than recycled clichés where Indigenous populations in poor-urban environments are violent, devoid of moral consciousness, and justifiably feared by broader society. News reporting that has little

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<sup>4</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>5</sup> See Jeff Friesen, “The Ballad of Daniel Wolfe,” in *The Globe and Mail*, June 18, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Christie Blatchford is a national reporter for Post Media News who focuses her attention to issues of criminal justice in Canada.

<sup>7</sup> Susanna Kelley is a political and investigative reporter who has written for The Canadian Press and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

<sup>8</sup> For example see Susanna Kelley, “Native Gangs Spreading Across Canada, Targeting At-Risk Youth, Says RCMP,” in *The Canadian Press*, March 15, 2010; Christie Blatchford, “Christie Blatchford in Hobbema: Reserve’ Code of Silence Deafens,” in *National Post*, July 13, 2011; Christie Blatchford, “Christie Blatchford: Hobbema, Where Sorrow Gets Early Start,” in *National Post*, July 14, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Simon Hallsworth and Tara Young, “Gang Talk and Gang Talkers: A Critique,” *Crime, media, culture* 4, no. 2 (2008): 177.

<sup>10</sup> Kelley, *Nightmare Predicted*.

analysis continues to reinforce colonial perceptions that Indigenous street gangs are comprised of “savage” criminals.<sup>11</sup>

The assumption that all Indigenous males are at-risk to become a member of a street gang cannot be further from the truth. In fact, the majority of Indigenous males in Canada will never be involved in criminal activity, let alone have involvement with a street gang.<sup>12</sup> With little analysis focused on the socio-political histories that have created entrenched poverty, fragmented identities, and a legacy of inter-generational traumas for Indigenous peoples and communities public media accounts of Indigenous street gangs helps to label all Indigenous peoples as potential violent street gang members. As a result, the actions and behaviours of Indigenous males are associated to *de facto status crimes*.

As Lisa Cacho explains:

The term *de facto status crime* also captures the ways in which criminalized conduct has been intimately linked to the use of “status” to refer to identity categories, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class...De facto status crimes can be defined as specific activities that are only transparently recognized as “criminal” when they are attached to statuses that invoke race (gang member), ethnicity (illegal alien), and/or national origin (suspected terrorist).<sup>13</sup>

Simply being Indigenous, or looking Indigenous in Canada impacts one’s social and cultural capital and their actions within multiple fields. I use the term field in a Bourdieuan sense, where the field is the social space that shape and dictate relationships between those who are involved in the field.<sup>14</sup> According to Bourdieu, fields are multiple and ever changing, and therefore individuals must navigate their concepts of identity in

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<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Comack, *Racialized Policing: Aboriginal People’s Encounters with the Police* (Winnipeg, MB: Fernwood Publishing, 2012); Emma LaRocque, *When the Other is Me: Native resistance Discourse 1850-1990* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Raven Sinclair and Jana Grekul, "Aboriginal Youth Gangs in Canada:(De)Constructing an Epidemic," *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 7, no. 1 (2012): 8-28.

<sup>13</sup> Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

accordance to the required protocols of the field. This is important to note, as it helps to understand that the men were more than just gang members, as their identities were “fluid” and were dependent on the field and their relationship to others within different fields.

Because ‘Indigenous’ is associated with violence, criminality, and deviance through colonial ideologies, Indigenous peoples and communities are watched more intently as it is ‘common knowledge’ that they will ultimately commit a criminal act.<sup>15</sup> This is supported through differential incarceration rates and the vast overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in both federal and provincial correctional institutions.<sup>16</sup> The Office of the Correctional Investigator’s most recent report found that the Indigenous incarceration rate has increased 47.4% since 2005. At only 4% of the national population in 2014, Indigenous peoples now comprise 22.8% of the total federal offender population.<sup>17</sup> Such statistics show how colonization continues to negatively impede Indigenous peoples and communities, as large numbers of individuals are removed and placed in the criminal justice system.

Colonization has fragmented Indigenous families and communities through policies of control (*Indian Act*) and assimilation (residential schools). It has constructed a legacy of trauma or *trauma trails*<sup>18</sup> that continue to negatively impact micro (personal) and macro (social) identities. The socio-political histories of colonization continue to shape contemporary ideologies that assume Indigenous peoples are second-class citizens within their own traditional territories. Limited social status results in limited social

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<sup>15</sup> Comack, *Racialized Policing*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Office of the Correctional Investigator (OCI), *Annual Report 2013-2014*, ISBN: 1493-5295 (Ottawa, ON: Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Comack, Lawrence Deane, Larry Morrisette, and Jim Silver, *Indians Wear Red: Colonialism, Resistance, and Aboriginal Street Gangs* (Winnipeg, MB: Fernwood Press, 2013).

opportunities, while de facto criminal status helps to ensure the need for increased surveillance, policing, and control within Indigenous communities.<sup>19</sup> Indigenous masculinity has been shaped through socio-political histories as male role models are often removed from the community and are incarcerated. For some young Indigenous males, their male family members are inextricably linked to incarceration<sup>20</sup> and/or involvement with street gangs. This has resulted in creation of and adherence to a masculine performance that is connected to toughness, power, respect, and bravado shaped by violence and involvement in local illegal street economies. For some Indigenous males, the process of becoming a man is closely connected with incarceration and their participation in street gangs and illegal economies.<sup>21</sup>

This dissertation focused on a small segment of an Indigenous male population who, at one time, were involved within street gangs in the Prairie Provinces of Canada. The intention of the study is to understand how the participants were socialized to understand masculinity within an urban street environment and the relationship of masculinity to street gangs. The analysis provides a broader understanding on how particular social policies, environments, and institutions have intersected to create a masculine performance that is recognized and promoted within street gangs. Through the narratives, insights, and reflections of Indigenous males who have found themselves involved within street gangs, appropriate, comprehensive, and effective policies and

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<sup>19</sup> Comack, *Racialized Policing*.

<sup>20</sup> OCI, 2013-2014

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Comack, *Out There/In Here: Masculinity, Violence, and Prisoning* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 1999); Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*. To see how this has occurred within the Aborigine population in Australia, see Emma Ogilvie and Allan Van Zyl, "Young Indigenous Males, Custody and the Rites of Passage," *Australian Institute of Criminology* (2001).

programs may be designed to help prevent further Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadian youth alike, from becoming involved in violent street gangs.

### 1.1 – Dissertation Landscape

This dissertation is a qualitative analysis of the personal experiences of fifteen Indigenous ex-gang members, who are members of the Saskatoon, Saskatchewan street gang intervention program STR8 UP.<sup>22</sup> Photovoice research methods were used to understand how the men constructed and used their masculinity to gain statuses of power and respect in relation to street gangs, street cultures, and specific ‘street codes.’<sup>23</sup> The men’s narratives provided an acute understanding of how local histories and social environments have intersected to construct a hyper-masculine mask that is embedded in Robert (Raewyn) Connell’s concept of *hegemonic masculinity*.<sup>24</sup> As described, the behaviours of hyper-masculinity include: a central focus on one’s self and image; increased risk-taking to gain status from peers and others in local social environments; and the use of violence in the socialization of power and respect. I argue that the characteristics exhibited by the men prior to and during their street gang involvement is greatly impacted by colonial policies of the removal and control of Indigenous bodies through the *Indian Act*, residential school system, “sixties scoop,” child welfare systems, and the penal system. The socio-political histories that have shaped Indigenous and settler relationships in Canada have created a legacy of intergenerational traumas that

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<sup>22</sup> The program STR8 UP is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>23</sup> Elijah Anderson, *Code of the street: Decency, violence, and the moral life of the inner city* (New York, NY: WW Norton & Company, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> Robert William Connell and Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2005); Robert W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic masculinity rethinking the concept," *Gender & society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829-859.

continue to negatively impact Indigenous peoples, families, and communities.<sup>25</sup>

Consistent with their social and cultural capital as Indigenous Canadian males, the men were socialized to validate the use of violence through hyper-masculine performance as a way to gain power and respect. To engage in the levels of violence, the men slowly created a “face” or a “mask” that was framed around hyper-masculinity, where one had to always be “tough” or risk being seen as weak or fragile. Once applied, the men were able to hide behind their mask, which helped to validate their use of violence.

Policies created to address the issues of Indigenous street gangs focus primarily on how to stop or police individuals once they join a street gang. Because the policies are reactionary and address gang involvement after the fact, the policies have little impact on addressing the root causes of street gangs. As James Diego Vigil and Steve Yun explain through their research on ethnic street gangs in Los Angeles, California:

[Gangs are] the result of complex processes that stem from the multiple levels and forces over a long period of time. Macrohistorical and macrostructural forces lead to economic insecurity and lack of opportunity, fragmented social control institutions, poverty, and psychological and emotional barriers in broad segments of ethnic minority communities.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, the answers to why and how street gangs form in communities should not focus on controlling populations through suppression, but rather on understanding how socio-political histories intersect to shape one’s social, cultural, and economic capitals across social fields. For example, how does hegemonic masculine<sup>27</sup> identity influence street socialization and street gangs? Does hegemonic masculinity play out differently for

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<sup>25</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Melissa L. Walls and Les B. Whitbeck, "The intergenerational effects of relocation policies on indigenous families," *Journal of family issues* 33, no. 9 (2012): 1272-1293.

<sup>26</sup> James Diego Vigil, and Steve Chong Yun, "A Cross-Cultural Framework to Understand Gangs: Multiple Marginality and Los Angeles," in *Gangs in America III*, ed. C. Ronald Huff (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002): 162.

<sup>27</sup> Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity will be discussed in more detail.

Indigenous gang members who are not afforded white “privilege”?<sup>28</sup> My research looks to fill the knowledge gaps that exist in understanding why a subgroup of Indigenous males have created hyper-violent-masculine identities as a way to express agency and garner authority within specific street contexts and fields.

## 1.2 – Intentions of Research

My reasons for focusing on Indigenous male ex-street gang members through photovoice methods are threefold. First, research conducted on Indigenous street gangs is limited, and there is an absence of research that analyzes the intersection of Indigenous masculinity and colonization, and their relationship to street gangs.<sup>29</sup> With limited research on Indigenous street gangs in Canada,<sup>30</sup> information on street gang structures and behaviours is often developed from American research.<sup>31</sup> This is problematic as “a fringe wannabe in one jurisdiction and a violent shot-caller in another may both be considered street-gang members, but they are not the same breed of gangster.”<sup>32</sup> The importance of understanding the historical, socioeconomic, cultural, and political forces

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<sup>28</sup> White privilege is the notion that those who are deemed “white” are afforded particular privileges or rights not granted to others based solely on the colour of one’s skin. See George Jerry Sefa Dei, Leeno Luke Karumanchery, and Nisha Karumanchery, *Playing the Race Card: Exposing White Power and Privilege* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2004); Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege,” *Privilege: A reader* (2003): 147-160; Zeus Leonardo, “The Color of Supremacy: Beyond the Discourse of ‘White Privilege’,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 36, no. 2 (2004): 137-152.

<sup>29</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Mark Totten “Aboriginal Youth and Violent Gang Involvement in Canada: Quality Prevention Strategies.” *IPC Review* 3 (2009): 135-156.

<sup>30</sup> Denis C. Bracken, Lawrence Deane, and Larry Morrisette, “Desistance and Social Marginalization The case of Canadian Aboriginal Offenders,” *Theoretical criminology* 13, no. 1 (2009): 61-78; Kathleen Buddle, “Urban Aboriginal Gangs and Street Sociality in the Canadian West: Places, Performances, and Predicaments of Transition,” *Aboriginal Peoples in Canadian Cities: Transformations and Continuities*, eds., Heather A. Howard and Craig Proulx (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2011): 171-201; Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Totten, *Quality Prevention*.

<sup>31</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs: Inside the Dangerous World of Canadian Street Gangs*. (Toronto, ON: Harper Perennial, 2008): 21.



that shape local gang-set space<sup>33</sup> is essential for effective development and implementation of local prevention and intervention policies and programs directed to curb Indigenous street gangs.

Second, with limited research on Indigenous street gangs, the information that has been collected in Canada is primarily derived from criminal justice agencies and victim surveys.<sup>34</sup> Although this information is important to understanding specific crimes, the rates in which they occur, the groups identified as street gangs, and the numbers of individuals involved, this information provides little direction on how to prevent gang involvement or to assist those individuals who are exiting the gang lifestyle. Information through criminal justice agencies and surveys has limited usefulness because it does not address specific pathways prior to involvement in street gangs and criminal activity.

While the information collected from these agencies and surveys is important, it requires further context.<sup>35</sup> The lack of context propagates perceptions that involvement in street gang is determined either by one's choice or by one's social environment/determinants, but rarely through the interaction of the two. A historical analysis is also needed to support personal choices to avoid street gang involvement within the context of the prevailing social environment. Without this context, prevention and intervention programs continue to target specific neighbourhoods based on racial and economic make-

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<sup>33</sup> See George E. Tita, Jacqueline Cohen, and John Engberg, "An Ecological Study of the Location of Gang 'Set Space'," *Social Problems* 52, no. 2 (2005): 272-299, for a discussion on how the organization of place helps street gangs form in some communities.

<sup>34</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Robert Henry, *Not Just Another Thug: Implications of Defining Street gangs in a Prairie City* (Master's Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> Simon Hallsworth, *The Gang and Beyond: Interpreting Violent Street Worlds* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013); Klein, Malcolm W. and Cheryl L. Maxson, *Street Gang Patterns and Policies* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).

up with the goal of educating individuals to make correct choices without recognition of their social realities.

The third reason for this research is to give space for Indigenous male ex-gang members to tell their life stories, where contextualized experiences provide a counter-narrative to those produced through traditional quantitative research designs.<sup>36</sup> Through photovoice methods, I attempt to capture what Clifford Geertz calls a “thick description,”<sup>37</sup> where multiple layers of social identity are exposed in an effort to understand the men’s perspectives of masculine performances. By intersecting race, gender, class, and the socio-political histories shaped by the Canadian colonial experience, a deeper understanding of socialized performances of masculinity within Indigenous street gangs becomes visible. The information gathered through the research supports the need to understand Indigenous street gangs from a position of fluidity, where one’s masculine identity and performance is reflective of their perceived place within a specific field.<sup>38</sup> By providing space to understand those life histories, events, peoples, and circumstances that led the men to their involvement in street gangs, I seek to understand how their constructions and performances of masculinity developed and shaped their relationships to the street cultures and street gangs in particular. In summary, this research represents a qualitative engagement of the antecedents of masculinity that predisposed Indigenous men to the lived experience of street gang involvement.

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<sup>36</sup> See Bracken et al., *Desistance*; Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>37</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" *Readings in the philosophy of social science* (1994): 213-231.

<sup>38</sup> Todd W Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Rob White, “Disputed Definitions and Fluid Identities: The limitations of Social Profiling in Relation to Ethnic Youth Gangs,” *Youth Justice* 8, no.2 (2008): 149-161.

### 1.3 – The Proverbial Definition of the Street Gang

The one common issue that continues to impede research across geographies is the term “street gang”.<sup>39</sup> Constructing a definition of a street gang is difficult given the diversity of behaviours and structures found among gangs, the complex socio-political histories of marginalized peoples, and their contemporary relationships with local social hierarchies. Questions such as ‘What is a street gang?’ and ‘How have we come to understand street gangs?’ are important because the answers help frame the individuals and groups that are targeted for policy intervention or research purposes based on the street gang label.

Indigenous street gangs have been viewed as part of urban environments on the prairies for almost 30 years; however acknowledgement of their existence by local police agencies varied. The provinces of Manitoba and Alberta have acknowledged the presence of Indigenous street gangs since the 1990s, but it was not until almost a decade later that Saskatchewan recognized the proliferation of such gangs outside of federal and provincial correctional institutions.<sup>40</sup> Prior to 2000, Saskatchewan criminal justice officials believed that released gang members would return to larger urban centres (i.e. Winnipeg, Calgary, and Edmonton) rather than remain in Saskatchewan.<sup>41</sup> In 2002, however, the National Youth Gangs Survey contradicted these assumptions. The survey found that Saskatchewan had the highest per capita concentration of youth gang members

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<sup>39</sup> Finn-Aage L. Esbensen, Thomas Winfree, Ni He, and Terrance J. Taylor, "Youth Gangs and Definitional Issues: When is a Gang a Gang, and Why Does it Matter?," *Crime & delinquency* 47, no. 1 (2001): 105-130; Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Andrea Spindler and Martin Bouchard, "Structure or Behavior? Revisiting Gang Typologies," *International Criminal Justice Review* 21, no. 3 (2011): 263-282; Rob White, *Youth Gangs, Violence and Social Respect: Exploring the Nature of Provocations and Punch-ups* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Criminal Intelligence Service Saskatchewan (CISS). *2005 Intelligence trends: Aboriginal-based gangs in Saskatchewan*. (Regina, SK: Government of Canada, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> CISS, *Intelligence Trends*; Henry, *Another Thug*.

among Canadian provinces. Additionally, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and Regina, Saskatchewan were determined to have two of the highest concentrations of street gang membership in the country at 2.57 and 1.42 per 1000 youth.<sup>42</sup> In comparison, the study found that Toronto, Ontario had a concentration of 0.44 per 1000 youth involved in street gangs.<sup>43</sup>

The survey found that Saskatoon, Saskatchewan had the second highest concentration of youth street gang members per capita in all of Canada. However, Saskatoon police and provincial correctional officials maintained that street gangs were not an issue of concern within the community.<sup>44</sup> While the police acknowledged the presence of street gangs in Saskatoon, they maintained the assumption that the gang members were passing through on their way to larger urban centres.<sup>45</sup> Sergeant Tyson Lavallee of the Saskatoon City Police, the head of the gang unit in 2012, explained how this changed in 2004 after the murder of Elizabeth Halkett by three members of the Indian Posse (IP). Ms. Halkett had expressed her intent to testify against the IP in court for the murder of her brother:

*So, we were all kind of naïve back then and then it began to evolve. There was kind of high-water marks that happened throughout time, through the last ten years. There was a shooting on Avenue H that caused a rift between groups of guys and other little events that happened that tore guys apart and ruined that little isolated two-year period of bliss. One of the high-water marks, I guess, would be right after that shooting on Avenue H, there was the homicide of Elizabeth Halkett. Her death and Joel Halkett's death caused a lot of issues in the city. First time we've ever had a Crown witness murdered. That was a big deal. It was the spark that lit the match that created the Saskatoon Gang Strategy. We had a lot of that stuff in play that was being talked about at committee levels, and community levels that we needed to establish these things, but in 2003, 2004, when those incidents happened, that was the spark*

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<sup>42</sup> Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*: 22.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid* 22.

<sup>44</sup> Henry, *Another Thug*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*

*that said okay, now we need to do something now and that was the start of our unit.* <sup>46</sup>

At the time, Saskatoon did not have a definition of the term 'street gang' and agencies could deny or exaggerate the existence of street gangs based on their perceptions of what a street gang was to be.

Definitions of street gangs are often difficult to formulate due to the variance of groups that have been so labeled.<sup>47</sup> Since the advent of research on the subject, a definition of what actually constitutes a street gang has proved elusive to researchers, policy-makers, and criminal justice officials<sup>48</sup> As Simon Hallsworth satirically explains:

The number of gangs identified will be directly related to the criteria used to define your gang. So if you want a lot, then keep your definition broad and inclusive. If you want fewer, add in more filters. And there you have it: the truth of the matter is that you can have as many or as few gangs as you need. At the end of the day it's not realistically about what is going down on the street. What exactly constitutes a suitable amount of gangs remains a political decision.<sup>49</sup>

Due to variability among those with the power to define street gangs, those being targeted accordingly, and the political implications, a brief review of the history of street gang definitions is needed.

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<sup>46</sup> This incident was also explained to me by one of the participants who knew Elizabeth. At the time, he was already working on his way out of his gang and explained the circumstances of what happened from his point of view.

<sup>47</sup> Beth Bjerregaard, "Self-Definitions of Gang Membership and Involvement in Delinquent Activities," *Youth & Society* 34, no. 1 (2002): 31-54; Esbensen et al., *When is a Gang a Gang*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Irving A. Spergel, *The Youth Gang Problem: A Community Approach* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995); Jane Wood and Emma Alleyne, "Street Gang Theory and Research: Where Are We Now and Where Do We Go From Here?," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 15, no. 2 (2010): 100-111.

<sup>48</sup> Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Henry, *Another Thug*.

<sup>49</sup> Hallsworth, *The Gang*, 186.

### 1.3.1 – Defining Gangs as Criminal

During the 1920's, Frederic Thrasher undertook one of the first studies to understand street gangs and their dynamics.<sup>50</sup> In his seminal work *The Street Gang*, Thrasher observed 1,313 different street groups in Chicago. From this work, the first definition of street gangs was constructed. Thrasher defined a street gangs as:

...an interstitial group originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict. It is characterized by the following types of behaviour: meeting face to face, milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict, and planning. The result of this collective behaviour is the development of tradition, unreflective internal structure, *esprit de corps*, solidarity, morale, group awareness, and attachment to local territory.<sup>51</sup>

Thrasher did not view crime or criminal deviance as a defining factor of a street gang. Rather, it was the gang's lack of adult supervision, their ability to remain stable over periods of time, and the creation of a counter-identity to that of the larger community that separated gangs from other local youth groups.<sup>52</sup>

Over time, the term 'gang' would focus more acutely on criminal behaviours for the benefit of the group.<sup>53</sup> The shift to criminality helped law enforcement agencies to separate those positive youth groups, often white and affluent, from youth groups who were poor and ethnically marginalized.<sup>54</sup> This shift to criminality as a defining characteristic of a gang can be attributed to the American government's 'war on drugs' campaign developed in the early 1970's.<sup>55</sup> By linking street gangs to criminality (i.e.

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<sup>50</sup> Frederic Milton Thrasher, *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

<sup>51</sup> Thrasher, *The Gang*, 46.

<sup>52</sup> Thrasher, *The Gang*.

<sup>53</sup> Bjerregaard, *Self-Definitions*; Henry, *Another Thug*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Walter B. Miller, "Gangs, Groups, and Serious Youth Crime." *Critical Issues in Juvenile Delinquency*, edited by D. Schicor and D. Kelly (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1980).

<sup>54</sup> Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Miller, *Serious Youth Crime*; Wood and Alleyne, *Gang Theory*.

<sup>55</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2012); Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh and Steven D. Levitt, "'Are We a Family or a

illegal drug sales), policing tactics focused on controlling segments of the population based on 'lay' definitions that characterized street gang members as violent, poor, and people of colour.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, whole communities became labeled as 'gang communities' where new laws and policing tactics could be uniformly applied to all who lived in the community.

Law enforcement officials, media, and the general public rely on historically constructed racial and class stereotypes to determine who is at highest risk of criminality. In the United States, this includes poor, Black, and Latino, while in Canada the attention is on poor, Indigenous, and people of colour. It is through this history that racialized stereotypes connected to criminal activities and deviance are normalized, supporting the need to fear the racialized poor.<sup>57</sup> A primary issue with criminality as a focal point for street gang definitions is that the definitions do not differentiate between street gang crime, violent youth crime, or deviant crime.<sup>58</sup> As a result, even though an individual may not commit the crime for the benefit of the gang, it may still be investigated as such. This is simply a function of who the individual is, or is perceived to be.

In 2001, Esbensen, Winfree, He, and Taylor utilized data collected from the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) program to understand how broad and

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Business?" History and disjuncture in the urban American street gang," *Theory and Society* 29, no. 4 (2000): 427-462.

<sup>56</sup> Alexander, *Jim Crow*; Cacho, *Social Death*; Venkatesh and Levitt, *Are We Family*.

<sup>57</sup> Ken Dowler, Thomas Fleming, and Stephen L. Muzzatti, "Constructing Crime: Media, Crime, and Popular Culture," *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice/La Revue Canadienne de criminologie et de justice pénale* 48, no. 6 (2006): 837-850; Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Joanne Cheryl Minaker, and Bryan Richard Hogeveen, *Youth, Crime, and Society: Issues of Power and Justice* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008); Holly Richter-White, *The Direct and Indirect Impacts of Organized Crime on Youth, as Offenders and Victims* (Ottawa, Canada: Research and Evaluation Branch, Community, Contract and Aboriginal Policing Services Directorate, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2003).

<sup>58</sup> Bjerregaard, *Self-Definitions*; Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Hallsworth and Young, *Gang Talk*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*.

narrow definitions of ‘gangs’ impact studies on youth street gangs.<sup>59</sup> Their analysis was designed to first use broad definitions, where the youth self-nominated or claimed to be a street gang member. The analysis then narrowed the definition and its criteria specifically around behaviours (criminality, delinquency, and violence) and structures (hierarchy, leadership, and defined roles). The aim was to determine if the definitions impacted levels of violence and one’s association to street gang membership.<sup>60</sup> The researchers found that the definition used had little impact on those who considered themselves on the fringes<sup>61</sup> of belonging, compared to those individuals who identified as being active within a street gang. Of interest was the finding that active individuals did not consider their profiles to be in line with more restrictive definitions based on criminal justice surveys. In other words, these individuals did not reflect the prototypical street gang member—one who was poor and of ethnic minority—supported through law enforcement data. They state:

Contrary to what we had expected, the most restrictive definition did not produce a picture of gang members that was more consistent with law enforcement data than was the least restrictive definition. That is, the core gang members, relative to the “ever” gang members, were not more likely to be male or members of racial and ethnic minorities, a finding inconsistent with law enforcement-based surveys.<sup>62</sup>

Therefore, the authors challenge the value of criterion-specific definitions for street gangs and call for a self-nomination method allowing youth to define their own involvement with street gangs.<sup>63</sup> Under this conceptualization, law enforcement surveys that

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<sup>59</sup> Esbensen et al., *When is a Gang a Gang*.

<sup>60</sup> See Spindler and Bouchard, *Structure or Behaviour* for a Canadian study conducted in a primarily all-white community in Quebec.

<sup>61</sup> Fringe in this case refers to those individuals who hang out with gang members and participate in what is considered street gang activities; however, they are not members of a street gang as they have not been formally initiated by the gang.

<sup>62</sup> Esbensen et al., *When is a Gang a Gang*, 117.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 125.



continually report gang members as— poor, racially ethnic males would be considered misleading. The findings derived from Esbensen et al. indicate that self-reports by youth do not correspond with the more definitive and ‘prototypical’ conceptualizations of street gang membership. Thus, marginalized populations will continually be labeled as ‘street gang’, even through designated criteria and specific definitions are in place.

With the inconsistency and negative implications that gang labels carry in targeting marginalized populations, Simon Hallsworth and Tara Young express the need for communities and researchers to abandon the gang label altogether. Hallsworth and Young assert that the gang label helps recreate a negative identity that impressionable young males who live in particular neighbourhoods believe they need to live up to.

A key problem in attempting to do so [define a gang] is that the notion of a ‘gang’ is terribly permissive. It can be evoked in so many ways that delineating what is and what is not one remains problematic. When is a group of young men not a gang? Does it apply only when they are poor? If so, are the ‘gang-like’ qualities observed conferred or self ascribed? And just how many crimes do not involve group activity of some kind? Are the groups also gangs and if not why not? And if we want to firm matters up by arguing that, by gang, we mean an organised group pursuing a collectively agreed criminal goal, why apply the label to young people?<sup>64</sup>

In other words, due to the ambiguity of the definition, communities are free to apply the street gang label to those who are a “poor fit” for the community. As a result, the criminal activities and who benefits from the activities becomes less important, than who committed them.

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<sup>64</sup> Hallsworth, Simon, and Tara Young. "Getting Real About Gangs." *Criminal Justice Matters* 55, no. 1 (2004): 12.

For the purposes of this research project, I followed the definition created through the Eurogang program, which was based on workshops with researchers and government ministries in Europe and American gang researchers.<sup>65</sup> This definition states that:

A street gang is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity.<sup>66</sup>

This definition allows for variation and diversity, an important consideration since some of the individuals in this study participated in street gang activity across Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. By not focusing on specific characteristics (colours, specific territory, symbols, etc.) or a specific structure (loosely based, or organized crime syndicate), associations can be made across time and place in an effort to understand why some Indigenous youth become involved with street gangs. This definition also helps to situate the history of street gangs in the prairies. As the men in the current study expressed, they all belonged to particular youth groups prior to joining what they saw as a legitimized street gang.<sup>67</sup> The Eurogang definition is flexible enough that individuals could explain how the progression occurred for them and how they separated their involvement within a street gang from other street group activities, even though they were similar in nature.

#### 1.4 – Chapter Overview

This dissertation shares the stories of 16 men who, at one time, were actively involved with an Indigenous street gang in one of the three Prairie Provinces of Canada

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<sup>65</sup> David G. Curry, Scott H. Decker, and David C. Pyrooz, *Confronting Gangs: Crime and Community, Third Edition* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013); Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*.

<sup>66</sup> Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*: 4.

<sup>67</sup> In Saskatchewan, street gangs were not considered to be a part of the social fabric until the early part of 2000, see Criminal Intelligence Services of Saskatchewan 2005 Report.

(Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta). Most of the men interviewed resided in Saskatoon at the time of data collection, all of them were involved with the street gang intervention program STR8 UP, and all self-identified as Métis or First Nations. Due to the diverse cultures, languages, and relationships with colonial governments, I will not offer a pan-Indigenous perspective of Indigenous masculinities and street gangs. Rather, I attempt, through the voices of the men, to create a mosaic that articulates the common lived histories and social conditions that the men endured over their life times. The result of their histories helped to shape the men's perceptions and performances of masculinity, which they carried into street gang involvement. Through interviews and interactions with the men, I have come to understand the important role that masculinity has in one's status and power within violent street environments.

This research is intended to be more substantive than a momentary snapshot of how individuals regard their gang as an embodiment of their masculinity. Rather, the goal is to explore the specific ways in which the men were socialized to privilege specific masculine performances that centred on violence, toughness, and bravado. It was through their relationships and experiences within multiple fields (home, school, child welfare, youth detention centres, the street) that the men were socialized to participate in violent behaviours as a protective factor from the victimization of others. Over time, this violence increased, leading to the creation of an illusion of self or 'mask' that eventually manifested in performance of a violent street masculinity.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review on the history of street gangs and theories used to explain street gang involvement. The first part of Chapter 2 examines the history of street gangs focusing on the creation and growth of the American street gang culture

that originated during American Antebellum. This historical overview will show how particular populations and communities have been marginalized based on their class and ethnic identities. Through a critical perspective, I analyze the history of the early street gangs of the Eastern seaboard of the United States, to show how specific bodies were deemed “less than” and subsequently segregated to specific urban neighbourhoods in an effort to remove them from industrial capitalistic ventures. To survive marginalized youth and young adult males formed groups for protection and increased economic opportunities.<sup>68</sup>

The second part of Chapter 2 analyzes the three influential macro theories that have shaped the knowledge of street gang involvement and the policies created to address the issues of street gangs. I pay particular attention to the theories of social disorganization, strain, and social learning and how they conceptualize those deemed as at-risk for gang involvement. I explain how the three theories address street gangs through a deficit approach, where *lack* of morals or judgments of the individuals and their families become the focal points of the theory. In doing so, the theories largely ignore how socio-political histories have shaped opportunities within local environments, placing the onus of gang formation solely on the individuals and marginalized communities. It is through this limited capacity that many researchers and policy makers are unable to move beyond simple reasoning of choice that hinders the creation of effective prevention and interventions that address Indigenous street gangs. I also focus on Mark Totten’s pathways approach for Indigenous youth gang involvement in Canada, to show how colonial ideologies frame even those policies that are intended to have good intentions. As such, Bourdieu’s concepts of field, capital and habitus are needed within

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<sup>68</sup> Tim Delaney, *American Street Gangs* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006).

street gangs research to shift the onus from equal choice for all to choice determined through opportunities.

Chapter 3 focuses specifically on the Indigenous street gang experience in the Prairie Provinces and the negative impacts that colonization continues to have on the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Attention is heeded towards the social determinants of health and the over-criminalization of Indigenous peoples to show how colonization continues to limit large segments of Indigenous peoples from fully participating in Canadian society. It is through the structural violence and micro-aggressions created through colonization that the men came to understand their identities and social positions as Indigenous males. As such, violence became associated with masculinity as it was reinforced by parents, family, and peers, as well as structurally by justice, social welfare, and educational systems.

In Chapter 4, I analyze Indigenous masculinities and how they have been shaped through the Canadian colonial experience. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity is used to frame how processes of colonization have limited the social, cultural, and economic capitals of Indigenous men, where particular masculinities become both dominant and subordinate within a hegemonic masculine framework.<sup>69</sup> Although Connell's hegemonic masculinity has been challenged due to its rigid structure,<sup>70</sup> it is pertinent to this study because it helps to frame the ways in which the men associated violence with masculinity, and how global, regional, and local social spaces distinguish

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<sup>69</sup> Robert W. Connell, and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829-859.

<sup>70</sup> Tony Coles, "Negotiating the Field of Masculinity The Production and Reproduction of Multiple Dominant Masculinities," *Men and Masculinities* 12, no. 1 (2009): 30-44; Holly Thorpe, "Bourdieu, Gender Reflexivity, and Physical Culture: A Case of Masculinities in the Snowboarding Field," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 34, no. 2 (2010): 176-214.

an individual's actions in relation to their cultural capital. Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is pertinent to show how hegemonic masculinity is not a static performance, but rather it is the dominant masculinity that other masculinities become subordinate to.<sup>71</sup> Thus, hegemonic masculinity needs to be positioned within the social, political, and historical contexts of the particular place. Through this analysis, I come to show how the street gang becomes the space for the men to utilize the hegemonic masculine performance to obtain power and respect through violence.

Chapter 5 focuses on relational accountability and how it created the methodological framework for the study. I explain the importance of creating meaningful relationships with community partners as ways to conduct authentic and reflective research with Indigenous peoples. Kirkness and Barnhardt's conceptualization of the 4 Rs is used to show how relationships mature through ethical research partnerships.<sup>72</sup> Willie Ermine's concept of ethical space<sup>73</sup> helps to frame this space, as it calls for reflexivity and understanding of one's social position within the research process. Ermine's concept is important within critical research, for it informs the researcher of their privileges and social power they hold due to specific socio-political histories. It is through this recognition that I was able to position the men and myself as active agents within the research process, thus moving towards Paulo Friere's concept of transformation through participatory action research.<sup>74</sup>

Chapter 6 focuses on the use of photovoice methods for this study. Photovoice methods give participants the opportunity to identify, represent, and create change within

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<sup>71</sup> Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory*.

<sup>72</sup> Vema J. Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt, "The Four R's-Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility," *Journal of American Indian Education* 30, no. 3 (1991): 1-15.

<sup>73</sup> Willie Ermine, "The Ethical Space of Engagement," *Indigenous LJ* 6 (2007): 193-203.

<sup>74</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1970).

their communities.<sup>75</sup> As such, photovoice is seen to be an emancipatory and transformative research method.<sup>76</sup> Traditionally photovoice is used as a way to contextualize the concepts of health and wellbeing within marginalized populations.<sup>77</sup> Participants are given cameras and asked to capture images that can be used to help articulate their thoughts about a particular social issue. The intentions of photovoice are to engage participants through all stages of the research process (data collection, analysis, and dissemination).<sup>78</sup> However, complications arose for some of the participants. The result was a modification to the photovoice process to allow for the maximum amount of participation by the men, in relation to their social realities of the time. Issues such as addictions, homelessness, incarceration, safety, and transportation impacted the level of participation of the men. For example, I quickly found that safety and a lack of transportation were primary issues of concern. To accommodate the men, I would drive them in and around their neighbourhoods, travel with them out of Saskatoon if they had to go to another community, or even take photographs for the men at times. The modifications helped to break down barriers that some of the men had, as we were able to engage in conversations as we traveled between locations. As a result, the project at times

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<sup>75</sup> Heather Castleden Theresa Garvin, and Huu-ay-aht First Nation, "Modifying Photovoice for Community-Based Participatory Indigenous Research," *Social science & medicine* 66, no. 6 (2008): 1393-1405; Claudia Mitchell, *Doing Visual Research* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2011); Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris, "Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and use for Participatory Needs Assessment," *Health education & behavior* 24, no. 3 (1997): 369-387.

<sup>76</sup> Mitchell, *Visual Research*; Caroline C. Wang, "Youth Participation in Photovoice as a Strategy for Community Change," *Journal of Community Practice* 14, no. 1-2 (2006): 147-161; Caroline Wang, "Using Photovoice as a Participatory Assessment and Issue Selection Tool," *Community based participatory research for health* (2003): 179-196; Wang and Burris, *Photovoice*.

<sup>77</sup> Castleden et al., *Modifying Photovoice*; Wang and Burris, *Photovoice*.

<sup>78</sup> Tracy Brazg, Betty Bekemeier, Clarence Spigner, and Colleen E. Huebner, "Our Community in Focus The Use of Photovoice for Youth-Driven Substance Abuse Assessment and Health Promotion," *Health Promotion Practice* 12, no. 4 (2011): 502-511.

steered more towards photo ethnographic methods<sup>79</sup> rather than photovoice. However, the men maintained control of the images that were to be photographed, maintaining the integrity of the photovoice process.

In Chapters 7,8, and 9 I present the analyzed data gathered during the study. I present the data through particular age segments in an effort to show how, over time, the men's perceptions of masculinity shifted through their interactions with family, friends, and social institutions or structures. These chapters focus on the narratives of the men, and how they have come to understand masculinity in relation to the street gang. The core themes that outline these chapters include: violence; male role models; opportunities for success; street socialization; victimization; fatherhood; street codes; toughness; addictions; and risk. These themes support how the men were socialized to understand that masculinity is associated with power, respect, fear, and violence. To enact the levels of violence onto others, the men had to create a 'mask' that could remove them from the violent actions and spaces. Over the course of their lives, I show the reader how colonization continues to create instability and limited opportunities for the men to envision any other option than the street gang. The 'mask' that is created is one that reflects earlier work on *loco, or cholo* within Latin American gangs,<sup>80</sup> where lack of emotions, toughness, violence, and risky or *crazy* behaviours (never backing down from individuals for fear of being labeled as weak) are associated with being a man. As a result of this masculine performance, the men in the gang became noticed by older gang members and recruited into the gang. As the men began to recruit other individuals into

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<sup>79</sup> See Philippe Bourgois and Jeffrey Schonberg *Righteous Dopefiend* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2009).

<sup>80</sup> Diego Vigil, *A Rainbow of Gangs: Street Cultures in the Mega-City* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002).



the gang, it was this same masculine performance that they searched out in their recruits, thus continuing the cycle of the masculine performance for future generations.

Finally, in Chapter 10 I summarize the key concepts of the research. I summarize the process that the men undertook in their conceptualization of masculinity. I focus on how violence became easily associated to masculinity and how some of the men successfully transitioned out of the street gang lifestyle. Secondly, I conclude the dissertation and situate the research findings within the larger socio-historical and political context of Indigenous street gang research. I explain the positive impacts that photovoice methods had overall; however, I caution the use of photovoice methods within street gangs research, as it takes an inordinate amount of time and there could be heightened risks as a result of the relationships that some may still have in the community. In the end, I challenge the commonly held social perspectives that joining a street gang is as simple as a choice and push for a focus on concepts of agency and masculinity to create effective policies to address the issues of Indigenous street gangs.

## Chapter 2 –History of American Street Gangs and Theories

*Society has always had a love/hate reaction to the ghetto. Getting rid of the ghetto and economic inequality is never going to happen in this particular society. This is capitalism and we need our status quo. We'll always have people who haven't gotten their foot up. Back in the day, it was Irish people and Jewish people. Now the Black and the Mexicans fill the ghettos. The fear factor is part of the game. Our society wants to turn a certain element into monsters, certain locations into scary places. Society wants to make you think the gangs aren't organized and don't know what they're doing. White people believe the gangs are after them. The gangs aren't even **thinking** about them.*

-Foreword by Ice-T in *Inside the Crips*<sup>81</sup>

### 2.0 Introduction

Street gangs have a vibrant and storied history across North America. Street gangs have most often been associated to those marginalized through their ethnic, racial, and class identities.<sup>82</sup> Socio-political histories have shaped street gang formation by segregating communities through limited economic opportunities and by controlling the movement of people through racialized policing.<sup>83</sup> This chapter addresses the history and progression of American street gang culture and those criminological theories that have influenced research and knowledge about street gangs. The American street gang

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<sup>81</sup> Ann Pearlman and Colton Simpson. *Inside the Crips: Life Inside LA's Most Notorious Gang*. (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2013): xvii.

<sup>82</sup> Steven Cureton, *Hoover Crips: When Crippin' Becomes a Way of Life* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008); Steven Cureton, "Something Wicked This Way Comes: A Historical Account of Black Gangsterism Offers Wisdom and Warning for African American Leadership," *Journal of Black Studies* (2008): 347; Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*; Delaney, *American Street Gangs*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*.

<sup>83</sup> Alexander, *Jim Crow*; Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio, Second Edition* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Cacho, *Social Death*; Comack, *Racialized Policing*; Robert Garot, *Who You Claim?: Performing Gang Identity in School and on the Streets* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2010); Victor Rios, *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2011).

experience is important to note, as it is has framed Canada's knowledge of street gangs and how to address the proliferation of street gangs.<sup>84</sup>

Through a historical analysis, I will show how specific bodies have been removed from full participation within American society, which has resulted in marginalized males forming groups to improve their social and economic capitals. I begin first by examining the history of North American street gangs in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century focusing on Irish street gangs that formed as a result of their forced removal from Ireland during the Great Potato Famine. It is from these early youth gangs that the behaviours and structures of contemporary street gangs originated. American researchers have identified four influential time periods post 1870 (1890's, 1920's, 1960's, and 1980's) that impacted street gang culture. These periods shifted street gang culture through the immigration of new proletariat and racial populations, increased illegal economic opportunities, and increased hyper-sensationalized media representations. Together they impacted the ways in which street gangs and their members have been identified and researched.<sup>85</sup>

The second section focuses on three-macro theories of criminology that have had the greatest impact on the accumulation of knowledge about street gangs.<sup>86</sup> The theories include: strain, control, and differential association or social learning theories. These theories have shaped and supported research on, as well as influencing the prevention, intervention, and suppression programs, policies, and initiatives directed to curb the

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<sup>84</sup> Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Spindler and Bouchard, *Gang Typologies*.

<sup>85</sup> Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*; Delaney, *American Street Gang*.

<sup>86</sup> Wood and Alleyne, *Gang Theory*.

violence and illegal activities associated with street gangs.<sup>87</sup> Problems arise with the three theories, as well as those developed in parallel such as cultural transmission, differential opportunity, and labeling as they reinforce deficit perspectives that reduce street gang involvement and activities to poor values and morals as a result of their cultural deficiencies.<sup>88</sup> These theories continue today to hold value by researchers, policy developers, and criminal justice officials in understanding street gang involvement through commonly held assumptions of who is a street gang member, the activities that they do, and those at-risk of becoming involved in a street gang.<sup>89</sup> The early theories are detrimental, specifically for knowledge about Indigenous street gangs, as colonial ideologies help to support these deficit theories through “Othering” and maintain cultures of fear created to maintain control over Indigenous bodies in colonial states.<sup>90</sup>

I recognize that some criminologists, most notably the work of the late Jock Young, have recently fallen in disfavor of traditional positivistic criminology to a more robust critical criminology. According to Aaron Doyle and Dawn Moore, it has been the British movement within critical criminology, and not the American, that has had the greatest impact on Canadian criminology.<sup>91</sup> Even though knowledge and research has increased on how to address crime, positivistic criminological theories continue to hold

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<sup>87</sup> Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Spergel, *Gang Problem*; Mathew T. Theriot, and Barbara “Sunshine” Parker, “Native American Youth Gangs: Linking Culture, History and Theory for Improved Understanding, Prevention and Intervention,” *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice* 5, no. 4 (2008): 83-97; Vigil, *Rainbow of Gangs*.

<sup>88</sup> Wood and Alleyne, *Gang Theory*.

<sup>89</sup> Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Wood and Alleyne, *Gang Theory*

<sup>90</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1965); Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston, NE: Beacon Press, 1965); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1978); Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

<sup>91</sup> Aaron Doyle and Dawn Moore, “Introduction: Questions for a New Generation of Criminologists,” eds. Aaron Doyle and Dawn Moore, *Critical Criminology in Canada: New Voices, New Directions* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2011): 1-24.

sway over governments and policy development in Canada.<sup>92</sup> As a result, poor and racialized minorities continue to be labeled as *de facto status criminals*<sup>93</sup> and results in street gangs to be viewed as the causations of urban decay.<sup>94</sup>

Strain, control, and social learning or differential association theories maintain “Lombrosian undertones” that continue to label communities as deviant through “Othering”.<sup>95</sup> By “Othering” street gangs socio-political histories of privilege and oppression are ignored enforcing that it is the “goodness” and “morality” of those not involved with street gangs that separates them from those who are. Simon Hallsworth maintains that othering through the street gang label constructs “new postcolonial natives of the urban jungle.”<sup>96</sup> For Indigenous peoples, othering maintains historical colonial ideologies within a contemporary framework.<sup>97</sup>

The third section provides an analysis of Mark Totten’s pathways approach of Indigenous youth’s involvement in street gangs.<sup>98</sup> Totten’s work has found support within governments and community agencies, as his approach is easily quantifiable and reflects “at-risk” criteria that have been developed through the three-macro theories of gang formation.<sup>99</sup> The difficulty with Totten’s approach is that it continues to frame Indigenous street gangs outside socio-political relationships, both historical and contemporary. Because of this absence, Totten falls into Hallsworth’s “gang talker” motif,

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Cacho, *Social Death*.

<sup>94</sup> Martín Sánchez Jankowski, *Islands in the Street: Gangs and American Urban Society* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>95</sup> Said, *Orientalism*.

<sup>96</sup> Hallsworth, *The Gang*: 82.

<sup>97</sup> LaRocque, *Other is Me*.

<sup>98</sup> Totten, *Pathways*.

<sup>99</sup> Totten’s pathways approach is used to help construct anti-gang programs in Indigenous communities in Canada. For more information see Totten, Mark and Dunn, Sharon. *Final evaluation report for the Prince Albert Outreach Program Inc. Youth Alliance Against Gang Violence Project*. <http://www.tottenandassociates.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Prince-Albert-YGPF-Final-Evaluation-Report-Totten-June-30-2011.pdf>

where Totten relies on colonial constructions of the “savage” and “drunk” to support his observations and analysis. Such an analysis contributes to an oversimplification of the complex socio-historical factors and in doing so, reinforces negative colonial images of Indigenous peoples in general.

To move beyond positivistic theories of crime and create a more robust understanding of street gang formation, membership, and activities, Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* must be applied. Habitus allows for a thicker conversation on how socio-political histories have shaped one’s perception of choice in relation to their capital and expected behaviours within specific fields.<sup>100</sup> Using Bourdieu’s concept of habitus within a critical decolonial/anti-racist lens situates how street gangs have become the social group for some Indigenous males to find not just a place to belong, but a space where their perceptions of masculinity are encouraged and privileged. Habitus and hegemonic masculinity together can contextualize and rationalize the Indigenous street gang phenomenon in relation to the deprived social conditions that many urban Indigenous peoples are subjected to. I introduce the concepts here but take a deeper look into the importance of habitus and hegemonic masculinity and their connections to Indigenous street gangs later in Chapter 6.

## 2.1 History of Street Gangs – Membership of the Excluded

According to American gangs researchers, there are four major time periods that have influenced street gang culture in the United States—the 1890s, 1920s, 1960s, and

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<sup>100</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2001).

1980s.<sup>101</sup> Scott Decker, Frank Van Gemert, and David Pyrooz explain that each time period was marked by rapid social change resulting from increased immigration of ethnic minorities to urban centres.<sup>102</sup> Decker et al. assert that the drastic shift in neighbourhood racial composition led to conflicts between marginalized populations; where residents in neighbourhoods that “are in the cross-hairs of racial change” would resist the change in ethnic diversity most often through physical violence.<sup>103</sup> The resistance to ethnic minorities increased levels of violence in neighbourhoods, where “values of toughness and street smarts” became normalized within poor neighbourhoods.<sup>104</sup> Youth would form groups to protect what they considered their ‘turf’ or neighbourhood from the intrusion of those who they viewed as an “enemy”. Often the divide followed one’s ethnic identity, as many early street gangs were racially homogenous, where race and culture were the distinguishing factors for one’s street gang affiliation; however, locality or where one resided also impacted one’s allegiance.<sup>105</sup>

Researchers note that there are four periods that have impacted American street gang culture; however, the American Antebellum Period, specifically the year’s pre and post Great Potato Famine had great influence on American street gang culture.<sup>106</sup> It was at this time that large numbers of Irish immigrants were being displaced from their homelands and immigrated to large urban centres in the United States.<sup>107</sup> However, Irish immigrants were met with discontent, as British imperialism and the following

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<sup>101</sup> Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*; Scott H. Decker, Frank Van Gemert, and David C. Pyrooz. "Gangs, Migration, and Crime: The Changing Landscape in Europe and the USA," *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, no. 4 (2009): 397.

<sup>102</sup> Decker et al., *Changing Landscapes*.

<sup>103</sup> Decker et al., *Changing Landscapes*.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*: 400.

<sup>105</sup> Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*; Delaney, *American Street Gangs*.

<sup>106</sup> The early antebellum period ranged from 1800-1860 and was the period in which a large influx of displaced Irish migrated to the Eastern seaboard, particularly New York, Boston and Philadelphia.

<sup>107</sup> Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*; Delaney, *American Street Gangs*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*.

colonization of Ireland, subjugated Irish Catholics as inferior to other ‘white’ Europeans.<sup>108</sup> In the United States the inferior label followed the Irish and they were relegated to low-skill employment and blamed for unfair wages, as they were seen to work for little pay.<sup>109</sup> It was within this social context that young Irish males began to bond over their common marginalized identities. Irish youth would form groups to increase their social and cultural capital by gaining power and respect through their membership size, as well as the violence that they partook in.<sup>110</sup> Due to their violent reputations, politicians would use Irish street gangs during elections to steal election boxes and intimidate voters.<sup>111</sup> With increased membership, the groups would distinguish themselves through the adoption of a group name and symbols that created a collective identity, thus the creation of the local street gang.<sup>112</sup>

During the 1890’s, gang membership primarily consisted of those who were marginalized to the “bottom of the economic and cultural scale in their cities”.<sup>113</sup> Even though political propaganda promoted equal opportunity for all, many first and second-generation Irish, Jewish, and Italian peoples were relegated to low-skill, low-pay, and high-risk employment opportunities.<sup>114</sup> Marginalization would create close ties between individuals and their local neighbourhood. The connection to an urban space created a sense of pride from where one originated. Protection of the neighbourhood from the encroachment of others through violence was the primary activity of street gangs.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, UK: Verso, 1999).

<sup>109</sup> Delaney, *American Street Gangs*.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Delaney, *American Street Gangs*.

<sup>112</sup> Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*; Delaney, *American Street Gangs*.

<sup>113</sup> Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*, 15.

<sup>114</sup> Roediger, *Whiteness*.

<sup>115</sup> Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*; Delaney, *American Street Gangs*.



The 1920's saw the next shift in gang culture with the rise of organized adult crime groups and the glamourized gangster image produced through public media representation of Al Capone, Bugsy Siegel, and other high profile mafia crime bosses.<sup>116</sup> These criminal groups differed from previous street gangs, as they were comprised primarily of adults who were "taken off the streets and placed in the military during World War I"<sup>117</sup> and then returned back to their communities as men. As a result of their social and cultural capitals (primarily white and war heroes) the newly formed organized crime syndicates participated in larger criminal economic opportunities.<sup>118</sup>

While adult crime syndicates were constructed as organized, hierarchical, and profit-driven, street gangs were viewed as disorganized, composed primarily of youth from first generation immigrants, and because of their social capital could not become involved in large profit-driven criminal activities.<sup>119</sup> Street gangs continued to use local symbols for membership and became more engaged with criminal activities; however crime was limited to robbing, loitering, and violence against other youth.<sup>120</sup> The street gangs of the 1920's maintained a close connection to their local territories and continued to align themselves along ethnic identities.<sup>121</sup> With an increase in illegal street economies, street gangs would strengthen connections to their "turf" as a way to recruit and become noticed, which increased their status in their community.

The third shift would occur in the 1960s.<sup>122</sup> The street gangs of the 1960s are seen to have the greatest impact on the behaviours, characteristics, and structures that are

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<sup>116</sup> Curry et al., *Confronting the Gang*; Delaney, *American Street Gangs*.

<sup>117</sup> Delaney, *American Street Gangs*: 44.

<sup>118</sup> Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*.

<sup>119</sup> Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*; Delaney, *American Street Gangs*; Thrasher, *The Gang*.

<sup>120</sup> Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*.

<sup>121</sup> Thrasher, *The Gang*.

<sup>122</sup> Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*.

associated to contemporary street gangs.<sup>123</sup> According to Steve Cureton, the time period of 1966-1989 was stage 3 of his “gangster colonization” concept, where street gangs became entrenched in the social fabrics of marginalized communities.<sup>124</sup> Prior to this time, street gangs were seen to be a part of a community, but would often dissipate as individuals aged.<sup>125</sup> The entrenchment of street gangs was supported by the de-industrialization that was occurring in urban communities across North America.<sup>126</sup> Many individuals lost their low-skilled factory jobs, resulting in the movement of individuals and businesses from the inner city.<sup>127</sup> The result was a growing urban underclass overrepresented by African American and Latino populations as they were unable to obtain Federal Housing Loans, thus limiting their ability to gain middle class status.<sup>128</sup> However, many marginalized males at the time “did not accept exclusion from mainstream society’s opportunities, so hustling drugs, guns, and stolen goods, prostituting women, and gambling became suitable alternatives for inclusion in a capitalistic, material-driven culture.”<sup>129</sup> This led many young males to redefine notions of masculinity within inner-city neighbourhoods.

The street gangs of the 1960s redefined masculinity in accordance to one’s respect within the street. The notion of respect, according to Cureton, became the ‘social currency’ that was highly valued within growing street environments. Those who did not

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<sup>123</sup> Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*; Christopher M. Grant, “Gangs in Indian Country: An Overview of a Growing Problem,” in *Gangs: Their Increasing Grip on the RMIN Region—Special Report From the Rocky Mountain Information Network*, June (2010): 10-14.

<sup>124</sup> Cureton, *Something Wicked*: 352.

<sup>125</sup> Albert K. Cohen, *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang* (New York, NY: New York Free Press, 1950); Thrasher, *The Gang*.

<sup>126</sup> Cureton, *Something Wicked*; Curry et al. *Confronting Gangs*.

<sup>127</sup> Cureton, *Hoover Crips*; Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*; Yasser Arafat Payne, “‘Street Life’ As a Site of Resiliency: How Street Life-Oriented Black Men Frame Opportunity in the United States.” *Journal of Black Psychology*, Vol. 34, 1 (2008): 3-31.

<sup>128</sup> Özlem Sensoy, and Robin DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal?: An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2012): 128.

<sup>129</sup> Cureton, *Something Wicked*: 352.

have respect became easy targets for violence.<sup>130</sup> Street violence and hyper-masculine behaviours of toughness, bravado and a lack of emotions then became synonymous to being a man within inner-city neighbourhoods.<sup>131</sup>

The final shift in American gang culture came in the 1980s with the mainstreaming of hip-hop, specifically the emergence and popularity of “gangsta rap”.<sup>132</sup> Through global markets, the image of the “gangsta” was produced and reproduced in a way to represent “millions of the socially excluded.”<sup>133</sup> Through popular media, those outside of the specific street localities where street gangs proliferated, could finally visualize the “gangsta lifestyle,” and search for their own opportunities to gain power and respect through the violent gangster pose.<sup>134</sup> The 1980s also saw an increase in street violence specifically connected to guns. As Curry et al. contend:

The modern landscape of gangs, or the contemporary period, was initiated in the 1980s. During this time there was a clear shift in the direction of gangs; they became more violent, more institutionalized on the street and in prison, and they spread throughout the United States outside of urban settings and into suburban and rural areas.<sup>135</sup>

Research and data collected by Walter Miller and the National Gang Center showed a dramatic increase of communities and jurisdictions reporting street gangs and street gang activity during the 1980’s, to a point where Miller describes this increase as a “gang

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<sup>130</sup> Cureton, *Hoover Crips; Something Wicked*.

<sup>131</sup> Elijah Anderson *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral of Life on the Inner City* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1999); Cureton, *Something Wicked*; Payne, *Street Resilience*.

<sup>132</sup> John M. Hagedorn, "The Global Impact of Gangs," *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 21, no. 2 (2005): 153-169; Eithne Quinn, *Nuthin' but a "G" Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>133</sup> John M. Hagedorn, *World of Gangs: Armed Young Men and Gangsta Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

<sup>134</sup> Quinn, *"G" Thang*.

<sup>135</sup> Curry et al. *Confronting Gangs*: 16.

explosion”.<sup>136</sup> The explosion was supported through the glamorization of street gangs within public and popular media.<sup>137</sup>

### 2.1.1 Summary

This brief history of the American gang experience exposes the impacts that colonization, marginalization, urban sprawl, and neo-liberal economics has on gang formation and identity. From the Irish experience, street gangs became the social group for marginalized and displaced youth to come together, bond, and increase their social capital within hostile environments. As slavery was abolished in the United States, free Blacks then fled northward as new policies of segregation (Jim Crow laws) were created.<sup>138</sup> Later, civil wars supported through capitalistic ventures in Latin and Central America would create new waves of Latin immigrants to American urban centres.<sup>139</sup> However, with the inclusion of new peoples, policies were created to exclude individuals from full participation within local economies based on their social capital, thus pressuring individuals to search for other economic alternatives.<sup>140</sup> This then created a shift in identity, moving males to create stronger connections with new and growing street economies, which in turn redefined masculinity.<sup>141</sup> The transformation of masculinity in the streets is associated to the glorification and growth of the ‘gangster culture’ through public and popular media.

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<sup>136</sup> Walter B. Miller, "The Growth of Youth Gang Problems in the United States: 1970-1998," *Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention* (2001).

<sup>137</sup> Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Klein and Maxson, *Street Patterns*; Frank van Gemert, Dana Peterson, and Inger-Lise Lien. *Street Gangs, Migration and Ethnicity*. (Portland, OR: Willan Publishing, 2008); White, *Fluid Identities*.

<sup>138</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*.

<sup>139</sup> Bourgois, *Search of Respect*; Delaney, *American Street Gang*.

<sup>140</sup> Cureton, *Something Wicked*; Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*.

<sup>141</sup> Cureton, *Something Wicked*.

The history of the American street gang experience is important, as it was from this experience that much of the knowledge about street gangs globally is constructed.<sup>142</sup> Socio-political histories have created the fields where an individual, as a result of their social capital, are more readily viewed as a member of a street gang.<sup>143</sup> As a result of this labeling or “Othering”, research on street gangs has focused on those neighbourhoods with high rates of poverty and minority populations.<sup>144</sup> This has limited street gang research and theories of street gangs to focus historically on underprivileged and marginalized peoples. Deficit theories, such as the culture of poverty are then validated, as the socio-political histories that have shaped the environment(s) for street gangs to form become ignored. Theories of street gangs, because of their connections to positivistic criminology, reinforce meritocracy and neoliberalism where street gangs emerge from poverty and detachment to the larger community because of their inferior cultural status.<sup>145</sup>

## 2.2 Theories of Street Gang Involvement

Researchers are not immune to processes of socialization. Who the researcher has trained under, the theories that researchers utilize to make sense of a phenomenon, and their relationship to the research topic all influence the research process.<sup>146</sup> However, many researchers continue to ignore the significance and importance of self-reflexivity in

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<sup>142</sup> Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*; Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; White, *Fluid Identities*.

<sup>143</sup> Cacho, *Social Death*; Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*; White, *Fluid Identities*.

<sup>144</sup> Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*.

<sup>145</sup> Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*.

<sup>146</sup> See Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 1992); Rios, *Punished*; Sensoy and Di’Angelo, *Everyone Equal?*.

research.<sup>147</sup> The search for objectivity has hindered social researchers from positioning themselves within the research process.<sup>148</sup> Because of this, researchers and theorists often continue to ignore the impacts of socialization on their research process and how this impacts the understanding of a phenomenon.

Gang researchers, who focus on why and how individuals have become involved in street gangs, traditionally posit that the community or the person lacks the moral judgement to make proper choices.<sup>149</sup> Most theories on street gangs assume that gangs are able to offer something to individuals that are otherwise unavailable, specifically a sense or place of belonging, financial opportunities, or protection.<sup>150</sup> Due to the growing connection between street gangs and crime<sup>151</sup> (which can be seen through the changing definitions of street gangs), traditional gang theories ignore the impacts of the socio-political histories that have created the social fields conducive to the development of street gangs.<sup>152</sup> Although many of the positivistic criminological theories have fallen out

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<sup>147</sup> Linda Tuiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Dunedin, NZ: University of Otago Press, 1999); Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Winnipeg, MB: Fernwood Publishing, 2008).

<sup>148</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

<sup>149</sup> These perspectives have slowly begun to change within criminology with the inclusion of critical, feminist, de/post/anti-colonial, and queer theoretical perspectives. However, theories that focus on street gangs seem to remain locked in traditional criminological and criminal justice perspectives. For changes that have shifted to critical criminology, see Doyle and Moore, *Critical Criminology*; Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Hallsworth, *The Gang*.

<sup>150</sup> Wood and Alleyne, *Street Gang Theory*; Adrienne Freng, and Finn-Aage Esbensen, "Race and Gang Affiliation: An Examination of Multiple Marginality," *Justice Quarterly* 24, no.4 (2007): 600; Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*.

<sup>151</sup> The crime associated to street gangs primarily focus around the trade of illegal drugs and goods, and the violence used to protect these markets.

<sup>152</sup> Thrasher, *The Gang*; Jodi Lane, and James W. Meeker, "Social Disorganization Preceptions, Fear of Gang Crime, and Behavioural Precautions Among Whites, Latinos, and Vietnamese," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 32, no. 1 (2004): 49; Spergel, *Gang Problem*; Wood and Alleyne, *Street Gang Theory*; Emma Alleyne, and Jana L. Wood, "Gang Involvement: Psychological and Behavioural Characteristics of Gang Member, Peripheral Youth, and Nongang Youth," *Aggressive behaviour* 36, no. 6 (2010): 423-436.

of favour with criminologists today, they still impact government and social policy development because those in positions of authority see them as truth.<sup>153</sup>

### 2.2.1 Strain Theories

Strain theory is associated to the research of Robert Merton (1938),<sup>154</sup> Albert Cohen (1955),<sup>155</sup> and Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (1960).<sup>156</sup> Merton's early observations and thoughts focused on how individuals are pressured into crime because they are unable to attain economic capital outside of criminal activities.<sup>157</sup> Merton explains that although the "American Dream" was proposed as attainable for all citizens as long as they worked hard and abided by the social rules (meritocracy), it was not afforded to all.<sup>158</sup> Many individuals were excluded from legitimate means to attain the economic capital to participate in the middle class.<sup>159</sup> Exclusion creates a strain where individuals "are pressured into crime when they are prevented from achieving cultural goals like monetary success or middle-class status through legitimate channels."<sup>160</sup> This strain is compounded for those who also find themselves excluded from pro-social

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<sup>153</sup> Doyle and Moore, *Introduction*.

<sup>154</sup> Robert K. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie," *American sociological review* 3, no. 5 (1938): 672-682.

<sup>155</sup> Cohen, *Delinquent Boys*.

<sup>156</sup> Richard A. Cloward, and Lloyd E. Ohlin. *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Study of Delinquent Gangs*. (New York, NY: New York Free Press, 1960).

<sup>157</sup> Francis T. Cullen, and Agnew, Robert. *Criminological Theory: Past to Present – Essential Readings, Third Edition* (Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing, 2006).

<sup>158</sup> Merton, *Social Structure and Anomie*.

<sup>159</sup> Cullen and Agnew, *Criminological Theory*; Charis E., Kubrin, Thomas D., Stucky, and D. Krohn, *Researching Theories of Crime and Deviance* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009); Theriot and Parker, *Linking Culture*; Wood and Alleyne, *Street Gang Theory*.

<sup>160</sup> Cullen and Agnew, *Criminological Theory*: 164

institutions (i.e., school, family, and community, etc.), which create feelings of guilt, loss of self-esteem, and even self-hatred.<sup>161</sup>

Within street gang research strain theories support the notion that street gangs “provid[e] illegitimate means in order to provide for shortcomings,”<sup>162</sup> and that “strained individuals are unlikely to engage in crime unless they first form or join a delinquent subculture.”<sup>163</sup> As Michael Chettleburgh explains:

The irony is that we criticize the same aspiration if it is held by the poor, uneducated, disenfranchised inner-city immigrant youths with few opportunities when they give it meaning through their apparently only viable option, a drug-dealing street gang.<sup>164</sup>

Disparities created through strain are often associated to the “immoral values” of single parents or “disorganized” families and communities. Aspects of poor parenting, pre-teen stress, economic shortcomings, and low self-esteem with high tendencies towards anger, frustration, and anxiety are privileged without contextualizing how this has occurred.<sup>165</sup>

With its connection to the “American Dream”, strain theory was “inspirational for the War on Poverty of the 1960’s” as policies and programs were created to increase opportunities for poor families.<sup>166</sup> However, the policies and programs often did not address the realities of the community, were poorly supported, and fell out of favour in later years, as right-wing politics of the early 1980s usurped and cut the programs.<sup>167</sup>

A second problem that arises through strain theories is that it is too difficult to pinpoint or quantify the exact causes of strain or the levels of strain that causes

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<sup>161</sup> Wood and Alleyne, *Street Gang Theory*: 104; See also Kubrin, Stucky, and Krohn, *Researching Theories*.

<sup>162</sup> Wood and Alleyne, *Street Gang Theory*: 104.

<sup>163</sup> Cullen and Agnew, *Criminological Theory*: 164.

<sup>164</sup> Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*: 40-41.

<sup>165</sup> Alleyne and Wood, *Gang Involvement*.

<sup>166</sup> Cullen and Agnew, *Criminological Theory*: 166.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*



individuals to search out belonging within a street gang. Jane Wood and Emma Alleyne contend that:

[A]lthough it [strain theory] explains some of the reasons why youth may join gangs it fails to explain why most lower class youth eventually lead law-abiding lives even though their economic status remains static (Goldstein, 1991) or why many youth who experience strain do not offend.<sup>168</sup>

The oversight of choice for individuals to not partake in a criminal act is also overlooked within strain theories. Robert Agnew attempts to acknowledge this through his concepts of objective and subjective strains; however his concepts maintain that crime is located in economically deprived neighbourhoods with no focus on white collar or green crimes committed within corporate boardrooms for profits.<sup>169</sup> As a result, the theory fails to acknowledge the resiliency, ingenuity, and ambition of those families and communities who resist partaking in criminal behaviours. Strain theory then is unable to explain how one family member may join a gang and another does not, and in failing to do so overgeneralizes negative responses to strain, labeling entire communities as deviant based upon their social status.

Ultimately, strain theories prioritize middle class conservative values (i.e. education, hard work/meritocracy, accumulation of wealth) as these are the values that are seen to be lacking in marginalized communities.<sup>170</sup> The difficulty with accepting classical and contemporary strain theories is that they lack the ability to fully explain a community's shared strain and trauma, as not all (and in fact, very few) community

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<sup>168</sup> Wood and Alleyne, *Street Gang Theory*: 104.

<sup>169</sup> Robert. Agnew, "Pressured into Crime: General Strain Theory," in *Criminological theory: Past to present, third edition*, eds. Francis T. Cullen and Robert Agnew (Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing, 2006): 201-209.

<sup>170</sup> Kubrin et al., *Researching Theories*.

members join gangs or partake in deviant behaviours.<sup>171</sup> In actuality, researchers have noted that many individuals who are seen to have the greatest strain are those who adhere strongly to middle class values.<sup>172</sup> Strain theories position middle class values as superior,<sup>173</sup> which masks the fact that individuals at all social levels are known to join gangs and not just those who are poor and marginalized.<sup>174</sup> As such, strain theories help to locate street gangs and crime to lower-class and ethnically marginalized populations because they are seen to value deviance and crime.

### 2.2.2 Control Theories

A second set of theories that have influenced the analysis of street gangs are those associated with theories of control. Control theories postulate that the reason for individuals to commit deviant behaviours or join a street gang is for the instant gratification that accompanies street crime.<sup>175</sup> Francis Cullen and Robert Agnew state:

[F]or control theorists, it is sufficient to observe like other animals, humans seek gratification and that crime is often and easy means to secure such gratification (see Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). People may vary in their need for gratification, but humans generally have enough desire to seek pleasure that they have ample motivation to commit crimes on a regular basis.<sup>176</sup>

Thus, crime can be controlled if one's desire to not commit crime is greater than their desire to commit a crime.

Control theories explain how street gangs are an attractive alternative for “at-risk youth” because of their weakened relationships with pro-social networks (i.e. family,

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<sup>171</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Rios, *Punished*.

<sup>172</sup> Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Spergel, *Gang Problem*.

<sup>173</sup> Kubrin et al., *Researching Theories*.

<sup>174</sup> White, *Fluid Identities*.

<sup>175</sup> Kubrin et al., *Researching Theories*: 167.

<sup>176</sup> Cullen and Agnew, *Criminological Theory*: 213.

non-criminal peers, school, police, community, etc.). With weakened relationships, individuals will look to other networks to fill this gap and fulfill their personal agency.<sup>177</sup> According to control theories, relationships can be used as a source of analysis to predict chances of individuals joining gangs in a particular neighbourhood. Those whose friends engage in deviant acts are at a greater risk to partake in such acts because of their increased contact with deviance, and their need to want to be a part of a group setting.<sup>178</sup> James Diego Vigil uses concepts from control theory to support his theory of “multiple marginality” to surmise how peers, school, breakdown of family, and law enforcement become social push factors that entice the pull factors of a street gang (power, identity, belonging).<sup>179</sup> According to Vigil, youth must decide on those relationships that are most useful to them, specifically in the short-term or near future.<sup>180</sup>

Control theories surmise that youth are lured to gangs due to disruptions and/or breakdowns of positive relationships in their lives.<sup>181</sup> Family disruption caused by single families, poverty, and lack of parental monitoring are noted as primary causes for youth to search for a gang identity. Control theories promote that “the major ‘cause’ of low self-control thus appears to be ineffective childrearing.”<sup>182</sup> Therefore, crime is associated to the inadequate parenting of poor-single mothers because they cannot adequately

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<sup>177</sup> R. J. Bursick, “The Systemic Model of Gang Behaviour: A Reconsideration,” in *Gangs in America: Vol. III*, ed. C.R. Huff (London, UK: Sage Publications, 2002), 71; Kubrin, et al. *Researching Theories*; Jill D., Sharkey, Zhanna Shekhtmeyster, Lizbeth Chavez-Lopez, Elizabeth Norris, and Laura Sass, “The Protective Influence of Gangs: Can Schools Compensate?,” *Aggression and violent behavior* 16, no. 1 (2011): 45-54.

<sup>178</sup> Vigil, *Rainbow of Gangs*; Wood and Alleyne, *Street Gang Theory*. Control theories have been heavily utilized, particularly for surveys where questions are asked about the deviance of one’s peers, and then relates these relationships to the amount of crime or criminal acts one partakes in. For examples of these surveys see: Esbensen et al., *When is a Gang*; Spindler and Bouchard, *Gang Typologies*.

<sup>179</sup> Vigil, *Rainbow of Gangs*; James Diego Vigil, “Urban Violence and Street Gangs,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* (2003): 225-242.

<sup>180</sup> Vigil, *Rainbow of Gangs*; See also Freng and Esbensen, *Race and Gang Affiliation*.

<sup>181</sup> Terence P. Thornberry, Alan J. Lizotte, Marvin D. Krohn, Margaret Farnworth, and Sung Joon Jang, “Delinquent Peers, Beliefs, and Delinquent Behaviour: A Longitudinal Test of Interactional Theory\*,” *Criminology* 32, no. 1 (1994): 47.

<sup>182</sup> Cullen and Agnew, *Criminological Theory*: 214; see also Wood and Alleyne, *Street Gang Theory*.

discipline or support their children.<sup>183</sup> The tendency with programs framed by control theories is to teach middle-class values through education programs for individuals to learn how to control their urges and value their hard work.<sup>184</sup>

Street gangs are seen to support and provide youth with opportunities to gain materials quickly.<sup>185</sup> Public media sources rely heavily on control theories to support the media constructed gangster image, where street gangs are predatory entities searching for vulnerable youth who have been neglected by their families and other social institutions.<sup>186</sup> As such theories that focus on control, much the same as strain, lack the ability to analyze the socio-political histories that have created instability between individuals and their family, individuals and their community, and individuals and pro-social social institutions. This gap allows for the continued construction of poverty as the root cause of crime without contextualizing how poverty came to be within communities.

### 2.2.3 Social Learning and Differential Association Theories

The third theory to be examined is social learning (SLT) or differential association theory.<sup>187</sup> SLT focuses its attention on the reciprocal interactions or relationships between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental determinants as the primary mechanism of learning how to act within particular fields.<sup>188</sup> Albert Bandura (1977) explains that through social interactions, individuals come to understand the

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<sup>183</sup> Vigil and Yun, *Multiple Marginality*.

<sup>184</sup> Vigil, *Urban Violence*.

<sup>185</sup> Bourgois, *Search of Respect*; Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*; Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Spergel, *Gang Problem*; Vigil and Yun, *Multiple Marginality*; Wood and Alleyne, *Street Gang Theories*.

<sup>186</sup> Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*.

<sup>187</sup> Kubrin et al., *Researching Theories*.

<sup>188</sup> Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1977).

“proper” ways that one is to behave or act.<sup>189</sup> According to SLT, an individual learns behaviour first by becoming attentive to the act, opportunity to retain the information, space to rehearse the behaviour in similar fashions, and finally carry out the learned behaviour independently of others.<sup>190</sup> In other words, one’s environment continuously shapes how individual’s are to behave and interact within the multiple of fields that they occupy.

SLT influences cultural transmission theories and the concept of street socialization, where street gang culture is a learned behaviour from one’s interactions with family and peers.<sup>191</sup>

The likelihood that someone ends up in a gang is influenced by the “gang favourable” definition they are exposed to. ... Thus, having family members in gangs, peers in gangs, and neighbourhood gang influences will likely lead to positive evaluations of gang membership, increasing the likelihood that youth join gangs.<sup>192</sup>

SLT focuses on how an individual’s relationships with deviant family members and peers support their identity and their normalization to deviance.<sup>193</sup> Through interactions and observations with others, youth construct an image of how one needs to act and they model these behaviours using a rewards system that is contingent on the choices that they make.<sup>194</sup>

Elijah Anderson’s, *Code of the Streets* uses SLT to help frame how those who are closely associated to the street are conformed by the informal or unwritten rules of the

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<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> See Ronald L. Akers, *Social Learning and Social Structure: A General Theory of Crime and Deviance*. (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011); Anderson, *Codes of the Street*.

<sup>192</sup> Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*: 36.

<sup>193</sup> Cullen and Agnew, *Criminological Theory*.

<sup>194</sup> Ronald L Akers,. and Jennings, Welsey G., “The Social Learning Theory of Crime and Deviance,” in *Handbook on Crime and Deviance*, (New York, NY: Springer New York, 2009): 103-120.

street.<sup>195</sup> These informal rules are taught to those who reside in the community and are seen as a reflection of the violent realities that peoples in these communities face daily. Anderson explains that even if individuals do not wish to be a part of the violence, they must still react in particular ways to protect themselves from the violence through other means of force. Therefore, violence is embedded within particular communities, as this is the only way they are able to act in order to protect them from becoming victimized.<sup>196</sup>

As with the strain and control theories, SLT is limited in its ability to describe why individuals who have grown up in fields that are viewed as conducive to criminality do not join street gangs, while others may. SLT also supports the removal of individuals from spaces deemed to be “at-risk” in an effort to teach children to not be criminal or deviant.<sup>197</sup> Although SLT is needed to understand how fields shape the ways that individuals are to act and react, it creates a binary essentialism of crime and culture which supports commonly held assumptions that those who reside in particular social environments are prone to criminality. Little focus is paid to how broader social policies have impacted the available opportunities to make the “proper” choice within a specific field.

Of the three theories, SLT has the closest connection to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus. For Bourdieu, how one acts and reacts within a field is representative of their understandings of the rules within the field.<sup>198</sup> These rules are learnt once individuals begin to interact or can view the interactions that take place within a field. However, SLT focuses much of its power and influence on concrete observations of others and not on

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<sup>195</sup> Anderson, *Codes of the Street*.

<sup>196</sup> Anderson, *Codes of the Street*.

<sup>197</sup> Cullen and Agnew, *Criminological Theory*.

<sup>198</sup> Bourdieu. *Masculine Domination*.

how they came to influence one's choice based on their racial, class, or gendered identities. Therefore, socio-political histories that have shaped the actions and behaviours of individuals within specific fields are ignored, maintaining a sense of cultural superiority for those who are seen to act morally.

#### 2.2.4 Synthesis of Macro Theories of Street Gang Involvement

Critical criminologists today have worked tirelessly trying to disprove and challenge earlier positivistic theories of crime and draw attention to the structural inequalities that lead to crime.<sup>199</sup> However, most government policies continue to support positivistic approaches of crime because they maintain an "Othering" where those who do not commit crime do so because they are good and make the "right choice"; while those that do are bad and make the "wrong choice". For Canadians, such thinking is supported through colonial and meritocratic ideologies, which are supported by government policies where policing has historically targeted those socially labeled as criminals, i.e. poor and Indigenous.<sup>200</sup> The three macro theories described have helped shape contemporary theoretical perceptions of street gangs. Integrated theories (i.e. interactional theory,<sup>201</sup> unified theory,<sup>202</sup> life course theory,<sup>203</sup> etc.) have been borne from the three macro theories to help explain, in greater detail, contemporary street gang membership.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Doyle and Moore, *Critical Criminology*.

<sup>200</sup> Doyle and Moore, *Critical Criminology*; Razack, *Racialized Policing*.

<sup>201</sup> Terrence P. Thornberry, "Toward an Interactional Theory of Delinquency," *Criminology* 25, no. 4 (1987): 863-892; James C. Howell, and Arlen Egley, "Moving Risk Factors into Developmental Theories of Gang Membership," *Youth violence and juvenile justice* 3, no. 4 (2005): 334-354.

<sup>202</sup> Wood and Alleyne, *Gang Theories*.

<sup>203</sup> Kubrin et al., *Researching Theories*.

<sup>204</sup> Wood and Alleyne, *Gang Theories*.

I use broad strokes to paint the theoretical landscape of street gangs as a way to show how researchers, policy-makers and criminal justice officials have come to understand the issue of street gangs across time. However in doing this, I must also acknowledge those paradigm shifts that have been occurring recently within criminology. For example, Doyle and Moore in *Critical Criminology in Canada: New Voices, New Directions*, use Jock Young's perspective of critical criminology as a space for:

[A]cademics to research, question, and challenge current criminal justice institutions and practices, including not only neo-Marxists but also feminists, Foucauldian, legal geographers, anarchists, and numerous others who generally resist classification.<sup>205</sup>

These new pathways of understanding crime can shift the focus of the “power relations that lead to social injustice.”<sup>206</sup> For example, work conducted by David Brotherton discusses the importance of understanding street gangs through a resistance framework, where the gang becomes the social space to challenge one's social capital.<sup>207</sup> The concept of resistant identities and street gangs is also found within work conducted by Elizabeth Comack and Indigenous prison masculinities and Indigenous street gangs in Winnipeg, Manitoba.<sup>208</sup> Comack sees the creation of tough masculinities by some Indigenous males as a way to resist and challenge colonial ideologies that depict Indigenous peoples as “drunks” and perennial social welfare recipients.

This shift in theoretical perspectives has led to a more robust understanding of why individuals partake in crime and street gangs. The new theoretical paradigms are often in conflict with the suppressive policing policies that continue to pervade Canadian

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<sup>205</sup> Doyle and Moore, *Critical Criminology*: 4.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> David C. Brotherton, "Beyond Social Reproduction Bringing Resistance Back in Gang Theory," *Theoretical criminology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 55-77.

<sup>208</sup> Comack, *Out There/In Here*; Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*.



criminal justice reforms.<sup>209</sup> The “tough on crime” or “zero tolerance” policies directed to prevent, intervene, and suppress street gangs are proven to be ineffective and are continually challenged within critical criminology.<sup>210</sup> Recent research continues to show that zero-tolerance policies have an adverse affect that pushes youth to search out street gangs, as they are excluded from positive social fields.<sup>211</sup> Studies on zero-tolerance policies in schools have come to show that such policies are enforced more readily on youth who have limited social capital and are viewed by the general public (i.e. dominant) as violent and a detriment to the learning environment of other youth in the school.<sup>212</sup> Such thinking is supported through the “culture of poverty” paradigm where people in poverty are described as placing little value on education.<sup>213</sup> For street gangs research, the removal and negative experiences of students from school settings is noted as a primary factor that leads to one’s involvement in street gangs.<sup>214</sup> Although little evidence is available to support the claims of zero-tolerance, the policy continues to be

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<sup>209</sup> Discussions of this have increased recently as the current Conservative Canadian Federal Government continues push for stricter sentencing as a way to control crime. Although statistics continue to show a downward trend in crime statistics, hyper-sensationalized media reports recreate spaces and people to fear. See Doyle & Moore, *Critical Criminology*; Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Jock Young, *The Vertigo of Late Modernity* (Oakland, CA: Sage, 2007).

<sup>210</sup> Julie Barrows, and Huff, Ronald C., “Gangs and Public Policy: Constructing and Deconstructing Gang Databases,” *Criminology & Public Policy*, 8, no. 4 (2009): 675-703; Alana N. Cook, and Ronald Roesch. ““Tough on Crime” Reforms: What Psychology Has to Say About the Recent and Proposed Justice Policy in Canada,” *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne* 53, no. 3 (2012): 217-225; Henry, *Not Just Another Thug*; Stephanie Martinez, “A System Gone Berserk: How Are Zero-Tolerance Policies Really Affecting Schools?,” *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth* 53, no. 3 (2009): 153-158; Totten, *Pathways*.

<sup>211</sup> Garot, *Who You Claim*; Rios, *Punished*; Vigil and Yun, *Multiple Marginality*.

<sup>212</sup> Nancy A. Heitzeg, “Education or Incarceration: Zero Tolerance Policies and the School to Prison Pipeline,” *Forum on Public Policy Online*, vol. 2, (2009); Cathy Van Ingen, and Joannie Halas, “Claiming Space: Aboriginal Students Within School Landscapes,” *Children's Geographies* 4, no. 3 (2006): 379-398.

<sup>213</sup> Paul Gorski, “The Myth of The ‘Culture of Poverty’,” *Educational Leadership* 65, no. 7 (2008): 32-36.

<sup>214</sup> Cacho, *Social Death*; Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Cullen and Agnew, *Criminological Theory*; Garot, *Who you Claim*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Rios, *Punished*; Vigil and Yun, *Multiple Marginality*.

implemented and promoted as a way to protect students from violence and the increase of street gang violence within schools.<sup>215</sup>

Strain, control, and SLT continue to frame questions and methods for street gang research to be undertaken. Street gang research relies heavily on quantitative research designs and testimonies of community experts who are often part of the criminal justice system.<sup>216</sup> By conducting research from this perspective, categorizations or at-risk paradigms are created to predict who will become involved in street gangs. However, sociologist Rob White states that:

A major reason why ‘gangs’ as such cannot be easily profiled is because of the complexities of social belonging and social identity pertaining to how young people live their lives...young people have multiple identifications, and can be simultaneously gang members and non-gang members. This means that if the latter become part of the ‘profile’, then ‘innocent’ young people are wrongly identified as being members of gangs. It is this multilayered nature and dynamics of youth associations and affiliations that make a gang-targeting exercise difficult and problematic.<sup>217</sup>

Thus, at-risk or pathways approaches to assess or address street gang involvement lacks the complexity needed to understand how socio-political histories have shaped the reasons why individuals see the street gang as a place of refuge, or why street gangs are seen to proliferate in poverty stricken and racially segregated neighbourhoods. In Canada, socio-political histories have been shaped within colonial ideologies continuing to reproduce the “Indigenous as deviant” image, placing the impetus of street gangs primarily on Indigenous peoples and communities. As such White contends that, “The structured formation of specific groups and individuals, as the outcome of inequality,

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<sup>215</sup> Garot, *Who You Claim*; Van Ingen and Halas, *Claiming Space*.

<sup>216</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>217</sup> White, *Fluid Identities*: 149.

discrimination and the absence of opportunity, is basically lost in such analysis.”<sup>218</sup> It is directly because of this absence that a critical decolonial/anti-racist framework be used when looking at the issues of Indigenous street gangs.

To explain how positivistic approaches to street gangs continue to reproduce colonial ideologies, I will focus on Mark Totten’s pathways approach to addressing Indigenous street gangs. I do so, not to disregard the work that Totten has done in trying to create a space to address Indigenous street gangs outside of other Canadian ethnic gangs; but rather to show how his pathways approach helps to reinforce colonial ideologies of “Indigenous as childlike or incapable”. Totten simplifies the processes of Indigenous street gangs by supporting his analysis with “gang talk”<sup>219</sup> and colonial ideologies of Indigenous peoples. As a result, the pathways are little more than a refurbishing of positivistic criminological and colonial thinking, rebranded as new and critical perspectives focused on Indigenous street gangs.

### 2.3 Totten’s Pathways to Indigenous Street Gang Involvement

In Canada, policy officials have come to rely on Mark Totten’s pathways of Indigenous street gang involvement to mobilize specific programs directed to curb Indigenous street gang membership and activities.<sup>220</sup> Totten explains that:

A pathways approach is useful in identifying the primary mechanisms through which Aboriginal youth find themselves involved in violent gang activity. Some gang members are located on one primary pathway; others become gang-involved through a number of different pathways. Aboriginal youth are more vulnerable to

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<sup>218</sup> *Ibid*: 156.

<sup>219</sup> Hallsworth, *Youth Gangs*.

<sup>220</sup> Rick Linden, *Comprehensive Approaches to Address Street Gangs in Canada* (Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada, Organized Crime Division, Law Enforcement and Policy Branch, Public Safety Canada, 2010) ISBN 978-1-100-19953-5. Totten’s work is often cited and supported with different community and national organizations. See Regina City Police and Native Women’s Association of Canada.

these conditions compared to other youth and therefore are at greater risk of going down these paths.<sup>221</sup>

The majority of Totten's work on Indigenous street gangs is derived from his evaluation of two gang intervention programs located in Prince Albert, (Warrior Spirit Walking Project) and Regina (Regina Anti-Gang Service), Saskatchewan.<sup>222</sup> Through his work, Totten has created a space for the discussion of Indigenous street gangs and how specific policies have led to the increased participation of Indigenous youth in street gangs. Totten has outlined five specific pathways for Indigenous youth to become involved with street gangs: "violentization",<sup>223</sup> multiple out-of-home placements, brain and mental health disorders, social exclusion, and hyper-masculinities or sexualized femininities.<sup>224</sup> The pathways are important as they can help communities to understand why some youth may be drawn to join. Although, Totten helps to distinguish the importance of understanding Indigenous street gangs independently of other ethnic street gangs, there are some concerns within his analysis that reinforce a paternalistic view of Indigenous street gangs.

Totten's language to describe the pathways is such that it reverberates racialized colonial rhetoric that continues to be used to create and enforce policies and interventions targeting Indigenous peoples with little contextualization. For example, Totten's concept of violentization reads as such:

[T]he process through which survivors of extreme physical child maltreatment and neglect become predators and prey in adolescence. When Aboriginal children suffer these forms of harm, they are at high risk for reduced academic attainment, neurological impairment, and restricted language development. They are more likely to have personality disorders, impaired psycho-social development, and

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<sup>221</sup> Totten, *Pathways*: 140.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> Totten uses the term "violentization" to refer to the process of serious and prolonged child maltreatment.

<sup>224</sup> Totten, *Pathways*; Mark Totten, "Investigating the Linkages Between FASD, Gangs, Sexual Exploitation and Woman Abuse in the Canadian Aboriginal Population: A Preliminary Study," *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 5, no. 2 (2010): 9-22.

internalizing and externalizing symptoms. Suffering chronic and repeated sexual trauma throughout childhood is also a key driver into gang life.<sup>225</sup>

Totten continues to state that, “[t]his betrayal of trust and abuse of power is aggravated in many communities by sexist beliefs that promote early sexualization of girls.”<sup>226</sup> The discussion of sexualized trauma ends here and is not supported other than from two reports conducted by Totten on the two street gang intervention programs in Saskatchewan.<sup>227</sup> Other than sexualized trauma, Totten does not elaborate on any other forms of trauma that may be a part of the violentization process, although he alludes to mental distress caused by neglect and child maltreatment.<sup>228</sup>

Totten explains that Indigenous children are often removed from their parents as a result of trauma (physical and sexual violence) and neglect within the home,

The main reason Aboriginal children are brought into care is neglect, including severe poverty, substance abuse by parents, and poor housing (Trocme, 2005). In Canada, most Aboriginal children are placed in White settings, where it is very difficult to learn about Aboriginal teachings and develop a cultural identity. Thus, many Aboriginal children in care experience culture loss and are at high risk of gang recruitment and sexual exploitation as a way to feel loved and survive.<sup>229</sup>

Because Totten’s discourse fails to adequately address the complex historical, social, psychological, and intergenerational impacts of trauma at both a micro and macro level, he continues to reinforce the removal of Indigenous youth because of the potential threat of violence and neglect due to poor parenting. This discourse has been carried forward since the formation of the Indian Residential School system and the *Indian Act*, where

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<sup>225</sup> Totten, *Pathways*: 141.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> Totten has conducted evaluations with the Warrior Spirit Walking Program and the Regina Anti-Gang Strategy. These programs were designed to help support youth and young adults to leave street gangs as well as those activities associated to the street (prostitution, drug trafficking and usage, etc.). In *Pathways to Gang Involvement*, Totten explains that sexual trauma is consistent with females being affected greater than males, but gives no data or percentages of those involved with gangs who have been sexually traumatized to support the pathway.

<sup>228</sup> Totten, *Pathways*.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*: 141.

policies continue to be created and enforced to help “save” Indigenous children from their culture without actually contextualizing the issues.<sup>230</sup>

Through his brief description of trauma, Totten fails to note the complexities of trauma. For example, trauma refers not only to individual’s instances of trauma, but also the collective or intergenerational trauma that has impacted communities across time (i.e. residential schools, impacts of colonization, etc.).<sup>231</sup> This is a major oversight on Totten’s behalf as he attempts to connect the impacts of individual trauma and experiences without contextualizing the process and impacts of colonization on creating the spaces where these traumas occur. Thus, Totten reiterates a lay understanding of colonization that it is in the past and does not continue to impact Indigenous communities today.

Throughout the pathways approach, Totten contradicts himself through his own analysis as the pathways continuously overlap and challenge each other, with little acknowledgement to the complexities of how individuals enter and become involved in Indigenous street gangs. In doing so, Totten reinforces what Hallsworth calls “gang talk”, where the pathways “provide a vocabulary about gangs that everyone can quickly recognize”<sup>232</sup> and normalize as truth. Rather than creating a critical dialogue to address the issues, Totten’s pathways approach reinforces colonial representations that “all” Indigenous peoples are at-risk of becoming criminals, with little analysis as to how the historical and contemporary socio-political environments have and continue to shape the

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<sup>230</sup> Nico Trocmé, Della Knoke, and Cindy Blackstock. "Pathways to the Overrepresentation of Aboriginal Children in Canada's Child Welfare System," *Social Service Review* 78, no. 4 (2004): 577-600.

<sup>231</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Nina B. Wallerstein, and Bonnie Duran, "Using Community-Based Participatory Research to Address Health Disparities," *Health promotion practice* 7, no. 3 (2006): 312-323.

<sup>232</sup> Hallsworth, *The Gang and Beyond*: 83

realities of those Indigenous peoples and communities deemed to be at-risk.<sup>233</sup> Because Totten fails to acknowledge the socio-political complexities and intersectionalities of race, gender, and class, he further polarizes Indigenous youth as those who are potential ‘gangsters’, even though this cannot be but further from the truth.

A pathways approach to addressing Indigenous street gangs appears logical at first glance as it aims to shift the trajectories of individuals away from the street gang lifestyle. The difficulty with the pathways approach though is twofold. Firstly, due to the socio-political histories of Indigenous peoples in Canada, Indigenous youth and young adults continue to be labeled as at-risk to join street gangs in part only because of their Indigenous identity.<sup>234</sup> However, in Canada, one’s Indigenous identity is constructed both racially and culturally. For example, if an Indigenous person is connected to their culture then they are seen as resistant to street gangs. However, through Christianization and the essentialization of Indigenous culture to a historic past, many Indigenous peoples become at-risk because they do not have a cultural connection. It is through cultural revitalization programs that Indigenous culture has been co-opted by social agencies as they determine the appropriate Indigenous cultural practices.<sup>235</sup>

Secondly, pathways and at-risk approaches to addressing street gangs makes the assumption that all those who “fit the box” are at-risk, and therefore need to be targeted.<sup>236</sup> This supports the need for targeted suppression and education initiatives, again without addressing the socio-political histories, or acknowledging the importance

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<sup>233</sup> Joane Martel, Renée Brassard, and Mylène Jaccoud, "When Two Worlds Collide Aboriginal Risk Management in Canadian Corrections," *British journal of criminology* 51, no. 2 (2011): 235-255; White, *Fluid Identities*.

<sup>234</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>235</sup> Martel et al., *Two Worlds Collide*.

<sup>236</sup> White, *Fluid Identities*.

of resiliency,<sup>237</sup> as the majority of youth who are labelled as at-risk will never join a street gang. By attesting that a large segment of a population is at-risk (such as the notion that Indigenous peoples are at-risk because they are Indigenous) without asking “why are they at-risk?” ignores the privilege associated to other populations because of their social identities.<sup>238</sup>

Although I critique Totten’s pathways approach, there is a common theme that resonates across the pathways and can help to best explain Indigenous youth gang involvement. This is the important role of masculinity in the street gang process. Constructs of masculinity are addressed in each pathway and Totten designates hyper-masculinity as a specific pathway; however he addresses the issue from a point of prolonged sexual abuse at the hands of men, and not at a societal level where men reproduce forms of masculinity found in other social spaces.<sup>239</sup> Instead of addressing masculinity at a macro level, or in relation to hetero-patriarchy and the hegemonic male, where male dominance and control is deemed as the norm within Western institutions,<sup>240</sup> Totten focuses his attention on experiences of sexual abuse and the loss of traditional hunting and trapping roles as the causation of hyper-masculinity. According to Totten, these experiences force Indigenous men to connect with street gangs as a way to violently reassert their power as men that was stripped from them.<sup>241</sup> This limited analysis helps to maintain the colonial imagery whereby Indigenous men are needed to be feared as it

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<sup>237</sup> Sharkey et al., *Protective Influences*.

<sup>238</sup> Alexander, *Jim Crow*; Cacho, *Social Death*; McIntosh, *White Privilege*; Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*.

<sup>239</sup> Totten, *Pathways*, 142.

<sup>240</sup> David Buchbinder, *Studying Men and Masculinities* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013); Connell and Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*; bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (East Sussex, UK: Psychology Press, 2004); Allan Johnson, *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1997); Michael S. Kimmell, *Guyland* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2008).

<sup>241</sup> Totten, *Pathways*. See also Mark Totten, *Nasty, Brutish, and Short: The Lives of Gang Members in Canada* (Toronto, ON: James Lorimer & Company LTD., 2012).



helps to reinforce colonial images of the “savage”,<sup>242</sup> where Indigenous men and communities are “uncivilized” and need to be controlled. This also repeats the historical narrative of Indigenous peoples as “inadaptable to change” and positively engage with the rest of Canadian society.

## 2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has set out to explain the history of street gangs, street gang theories, and how this history has come to shape the ways in which governments and policies are created to address issues of street gangs in the United States and Canada. By analyzing the history of street gangs attention can be drawn to show how policies and social perceptions of who is considered “dangerous” can be created to control and suppress particular communities because of their race and class status. As marginalized groups gained social power afforded to them by the privileged, they would then subvert the new racialized proletariat. Fanon sees this as the violence of the colonized onto the colonized in order to gain the privileges of the colonists.<sup>243</sup> Thus, the racial formation of street gangs may have changed over time; however the macrostructural forces that shape local street fields for the proliferation of street gangs are maintained.

Traditional or positivistic criminological theories have helped to maintain cultures of fear or terror of the racialized poor. Locating street gangs as byproducts of poverty, positivistic criminology maintains that street gangs are predatory groups that will take

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<sup>242</sup> Joseph Boyden, Tomson Highway, Lee Maracle, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, Basil H. Johnston, Dana Claxton, Daniel David Moses et al. *Masculindians: Conversations about Indigenous Manhood*. Edited by Sam McKegney. (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2014); LaRocque, *Other is Me*.

<sup>243</sup> Fanon, *Wretched Earth*.

any individual who is labeled as “at-risk”.<sup>244</sup> This simplifies the understanding of street gangs to poor decisions caused by poverty and poor moral character. However, such analyses do not address how this poverty came to be entrenched, and who benefits from others being in poverty? Critical criminologists have begun to challenge the positivistic approach; however, because cultures of fear and terror are so imbedded into the social consciousness of the general population it is difficult to challenge this thinking.<sup>245</sup>

I use Totten’s pathways approach to show how entrenched this thinking is within Canada. Although Totten appears to be empathetic and critical to the Indigenous street gang phenomenon, upon closer analysis his pathways reproduce colonial ideologies. For example, his focus on fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and its connections to Indigenous street gangs is easy for the general population to connect as a pathway because Indigenous peoples have historically been constructed as “drunks”.<sup>246</sup> As a result, Indigenous street gangs not only have to be feared for their violence, but that their violence is volatile and unpredictable as they have mental impairments as a result of poor parenting, supporting the very positivistic thinking that Totten attests to challenge.<sup>247</sup>

To move beyond positivistic criminological explanations of street gangs, specifically Indigenous street gangs, a critical decolonial/anti-racist framework is needed. Such a framework will create a space where colonial socio-political histories can be understood and contextualized to understand how Indigenous peoples continue to be subjugated within Canada. The result of this subjugation is the creation of street gangs, where Indigenous youth are able to find a place to resist their subjugation and benefit

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<sup>244</sup> Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*.

<sup>245</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

<sup>246</sup> Henry, *Beyond The Simple*.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*.

through violent actions onto others within their community. What occurs for Indigenous peoples though is a “double-bind”<sup>248</sup> where their violent actions help to strengthen colonial ideologies of the savage, while also trying to challenge their subjugated space and partake within a capitalistic economy through limited opportunities.

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<sup>248</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

## Chapter 3 – Indigenous Street Gangs and Colonial Encounters

*Many of the causes of Indigenous gang formation and mobilization are inextricably linked to the systemic dispossession of Indigenous people and their ongoing subjugation within a non-Indigenous criminal justice system. The breaking up of families has been central to these processes, historically and in the contemporary time period. The social consequences have been devastating for Indigenous people, including young people. Rob White, Indigenous Youth and Gangs as Family*<sup>249</sup>

### 3.0 Introduction

Chapter 2 focused on the history of the American street gang. What becomes clear is that specific actions conducted by marginalized people based on their race, culture, location, and economic status have been readily accepted by the general (dominant) public as deviant.<sup>250</sup> Positivist criminological theories were framed from deficit perspectives to explain who is at-risk to joining a street gang and what needs to be done to curb street gang violence. American research, knowledge, and experiences have shaped Canadian perceptions of street gangs.<sup>251</sup> Similar to the United States, the majority of research on Canadian street gangs focuses on ethnic minorities in large urban centres.<sup>252</sup> In Canada, Indigenous street gangs are often included as an ad hoc section or footnote explaining differences, but with little analysis of the differences other than the mention of colonization.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Rob White, "Indigenous Youth and Gangs as Family" *Youth Studies Australia* 28, no.3 (2009): 48.

<sup>250</sup> Cureton, *Hoover Crips*; Delaney, *American Street Gangs*; Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*; Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*.

<sup>251</sup> Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Totten, *Pathways*.

<sup>252</sup> Robert M. Gordon, "Criminal Business Organizations, Street Gangs and Wanna-be Groups: A Vancouver Perspective," *Canadian J. Criminology* 42 (2000): 39; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Katharine Kelly, and Tulio Caputo, "The Linkages Between Street Gangs and Organized Crime: The Canadian Experience," *Journal of Gang Research* 13, no. 1 (2005): 17; Scot Wortley, and Julian Tanner, "Respect, Friendship and Racial Injustice: Justifying Gang Membership in a Canadian City," in *Street Gangs, Migration and Ethnicity*, ed. Frank van Gemert et al. (Milton, UK: Willan, 2008): 192-209.

<sup>253</sup> Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*; Jeff Pearce, *Gangs in Canada* (Edmonton, AB: Quagmire Press, 2010); Totten, *Brutish and Short*.

In 2002, Astwood Agency conducted the first national survey in Canada on youth gangs. The report found that there were approximately 431 gangs and 7,071 gang members across Canada, with the majority of the members being of African and Indigenous descent.<sup>254</sup> The next national assessment would be conducted in 2006 by Canadian Intelligence Service Canada (CISC) that found the number of street gangs decreased to 300, but the number of street gang members increased to over 11,000.<sup>255</sup> This increase in over 4,000 new members in a four-year period could be attributed to better surveillance techniques by law enforcement agencies as a focus on street gangs has become a priority due to public pressure to address the growing issue of street gangs.<sup>256</sup> The 76 different gangs are said to be active within the Prairie Provinces.<sup>257</sup>

The majority of Canadian research focuses on ethnic minority gangs with little information pertaining to Indigenous street gangs,<sup>258</sup> even though Indigenous youth are seen to constitute approximately 21% of those who are involved with street gangs.<sup>259</sup> To coincide with the high rate of gang involved youth, Indigenous peoples are also incarcerated at greater rates than any other racial group in Canada, where 22.8% of those incarcerated in the federal correctional system in 2013-14 were Indigenous ancestry.<sup>260</sup> The majority of incarcerated Indigenous peoples are also located in prairie institutions. The high incarceration rates are of great concern as it was estimated in 2002 that 20% of Indigenous males entering federal correctional facilities were gang members; however,

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<sup>254</sup> Astwood Strategy Corporation, *Results of the 2002 Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs*. ISBN 0-662-61824-X (Ottawa, ON: Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, 2003); Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*.

<sup>255</sup> Criminal Intelligence Services Canada (CISC), *2006 Annual Report on Organized Crime*, 0-662-49337-0, (Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada, 2006).

<sup>256</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Henry, *Another Thug*.

<sup>257</sup> CISC, *2006 Annual Report*.

<sup>258</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)placement*.

<sup>259</sup> Astwood Agency, *Youth Gang Survey*.

<sup>260</sup> OCI, *2013-14*.

upon completing their sentence, the number of those who claimed allegiance to a gang increased to over 40%.<sup>261</sup> Once released the individuals return to their communities, bringing with them their new gang identities. This chapter looks to address the lack of focus on the issues impacting Indigenous street gang membership and formation. I begin first by outlining the history of Indigenous street gangs within the Canadian Prairie Provinces. There have been few detailed accounts on the history of Indigenous street gang formation from the perspectives of street gang members themselves and what has been collected focuses primarily on information gathered from second hand sources.<sup>262</sup> From this history I then move to the policies that have been developed to address Indigenous street gangs. I explain how it has been through ineffective policy development and implementation that has led to the proliferation of street gangs across Canada in such a short period of time. Next I focus on colonial ideologies and government policies that have subjugated Indigenous peoples. Colonial ideologies have supported this exclusion through paternalistic government policies as many Indigenous peoples and communities have been systematically excluded through colonial perceptions of “child-like”.<sup>263</sup> Finally I look at the concept of kinship and relationship bonds that were created and maintained between individuals while they were removed from their families. Familial relationships are also discussed and contextualized to show how the reverberated concept of the “gang as family” becomes challenged within the Indigenous street gang context because of the disruption caused by historical and contemporary colonial policies of removal and control.

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<sup>261</sup> Mark Nafekh, *An Examination of Youth and Gang Affiliation Within the Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Population* (Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, 2002).

<sup>262</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>263</sup> LaRocque, *When the Other is Me*.

### 3.1 –The Birth of Indigenous Street Gangs – Streets of Winnipeg in the 1980s

With little research on Indigenous street gangs in Canada, it is difficult to create a chronology of their existence. As Comack et al. state:

While street gangs were not in evidence in the colonized space of Winnipeg's North End by the late 1970s, Aboriginal people were engaged in activities that foreshadowed the formation of gangs. Fights and violence (although less intense than later on) occurred, and increasing numbers of people were institutionalized in detention centres, jails, and prisons for their involvement in criminal activity. Drugs and drug-dealing were also in evidence...Politically with the rise of the new right...neoliberalism and the effects of globalization began to have their heavy impact. Aboriginal street gangs began to emerge within this context.<sup>264</sup>

According to Joe Friesen, a reporter with the Globe and Mail and who wrote about the founders and creation of the Indian Posse street gang, it was in 1988 that street gangs became entrenched within the streets of Winnipeg through the creation of the Indian Posse.<sup>265</sup> The Indian Posse (IP) differed from other groups as they began to organize themselves in accordance to the growing influence of African American street gang culture.<sup>266</sup> Friesen writes that the name "posse" was derived from Richard and Daniel Wolfe, where they:

Hit on the name "Posse" while flipping through the pages of a hip-hop magazine. They chose Indian, rather than native, much the way black rap groups often defiantly labeled themselves with the N-word. "It was about us Indians sticking together at the time. Because we were looked down on," Richard says. "We were living under the same roofs, had the same struggles: No food in the fridge. Empty beer bottles in the house. People coming over for hours at a time at night and you don't even know who the hell they are."<sup>267</sup>

The Wolfe brothers and their friends were marginalized within their community as they experienced extreme levels of poverty that put them at greater risk of victimization.

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<sup>264</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*: 73-74.

<sup>265</sup> Friesen, *Daniel Wolfe*.

<sup>266</sup> Leisha Ann Grebinski, "'That's the Life of a Gangster': Analyzing the Media Representations of Daniel Wolfe," Masters Thesis, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Regina, 2012.

<sup>267</sup> Friesen, *Daniel Wolfe*.

Friesen attests that the youths' involvement within child welfare and youth criminal justice systems escalated the risk of victimization. As a result, the youth bonded together in an effort to strengthen their power through the formation of a group, where individuals were to protect one another.

A participant in Comack et al.'s work on Indigenous gangs in Winnipeg, Manitoba described how the very policies and institutions directed to curb anti-social behaviours helped to strengthen bonds between marginalized youth:

It was all little cliques of just guys that were tight, little guys, like four or five guys here, four or five guys there, that were solid bros. They all kind of knew each other still 'cause we all grew up in the Youth Centre. So, you know, then you get out and everybody kind of started hanging out in the street, and in and out [of the detention centre], and everybody got tighter and tighter and the next thing you know it's just one or two of them. The Wolfes, actually came around and then, you know, first it was just like, "What do you think it is, bro? Do you wear this one or this one, a red rag or a black rag?" "I fuckin' wear a red rag. Fuck. We're Indians. Indians wear red." ...And the next thing you know we're a fuckin' gang.<sup>268</sup>

The newly formed gangs would use their marginalized status as a rallying point to create allegiances with others who found themselves in similar situations.<sup>269</sup> Policies created to protect, educate, and control Indigenous youth reinforce Fanon and Memmi's notions of the subjugation of the colonized, where the colonized use violence to search out other ways to gain power, respect, and economic capital within limited colonial controlled fields.<sup>270</sup>

As allegiances formed between youth and young adult males within different detention centres (youth and adult) and the streets, three primary Indigenous street gangs

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<sup>268</sup> Comack et al. *Indians Wear Red*: 75.

<sup>269</sup> Rob White, *Fluid Identities*, explains how youth groups in Australia locate themselves around their ethnic, economic, and local identities as a way to create common bonds.

<sup>270</sup> Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*; Memmi, *Colonized*.



began to form: IP, Native Syndicate (NS), and Manitoba Warriors (MW).<sup>271</sup> Although formed primarily of Indigenous members, the gangs differed in their structure and characteristics. The Indian Posse and Native Syndicate were heavily influenced by American gangster culture and adopted a sensationalized gangster image that they gathered from movies and media representation of African and Latino street gangs found in Chicago and Los Angeles.<sup>272</sup> The Manitoba Warriors were generally older than the IP or NS and they aligned their organizational structure more closely to outlaw biker gangs such as the Hells Angels, Outlaws, and Bandidos.<sup>273</sup> All three Indigenous street gangs though hybridized American street gang culture as they adopted specific colours, styles of dress, symbols, rituals, and governance structures. They then indigenized the American gang culture symbols to connect within their local concepts of Indigeneity.<sup>274</sup> For example, the Manitoba Warriors' crest is that of an eight-ray sun with a warrior head in the middle and Indigenous symbolism is woven within the different gang's tattoos through feathers, dream-catchers, and tomahawks.

Due to increased levels of violence, street justice<sup>275</sup> is often used to settle disputes and control street gang turf. Because of this heightened violence, members of the IP, NS, and MW were incarcerated for longer periods of time creating a stronger bond with the Canadian justice system.<sup>276</sup> The gangs and their members came to use incarceration as way to solidify group and individual reputations through their activities while

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<sup>271</sup> CISS, *Intelligence Trends*.

<sup>272</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>273</sup> James Jewell, "The Manitoba Warriors: Gang Incorporated," in *The Police Insider*, <http://thepoliceinsider.com/the-manitoba-warriors-gangs-incorporated/>

<sup>274</sup> See Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)placement*: 72-75.

<sup>275</sup> Bruce A. Jacobs, and Richard Wright, *Street Justice: Retaliation in the Criminal Underworld* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>276</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

incarcerated.<sup>277</sup> Suppressive Canadian criminal justice institutions and policies have supported the growth of Indigenous street gangs much the same as the incarceration of black and Hispanic males in the United States, as incarceration is used as a status symbol for commitment to the gang.<sup>278</sup> Institutions then became a site for a rite of passage for Indigenous gang members as one's record and activities inside were used to evaluate the commitment of an individual to the gang and increase their status and reputation.<sup>279</sup>

During the early part of the 1990s, the prison system also supported the proliferation of Indigenous street gangs in another way. It was policy during the 1990s that federally incarcerated Indigenous street gang members from the Prairie Provinces to be housed within one correctional institution in Manitoba.<sup>280</sup> Justice officials assumed that this would be the best way to handle the growing issue of Indigenous gangs in the prison system, as they could control and minimize the influence of Indigenous gang leaders.<sup>281</sup> However, the IP, NS, and MW used this policy to recruit and expand their institutional power by absolving smaller gangs and creating stronger national connections within different institutions.<sup>282</sup> The policy of housing gang members together would change after an incident in 1996 in a Manitoba correctional facility.

In 1996 a riot ensued at Headingly Provincial Institute in Manitoba between two rival gangs, where inmates gained control of the institution for approximately 24 hours.<sup>283</sup> After this incident, prison officials assessed that the Indigenous gangs had garnered too

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<sup>277</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*.

<sup>278</sup> Alexander, *Jim Crow*; Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Rios, *Punished*.

<sup>279</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Pearlman and Simpson, *Inside the Crips*.

<sup>280</sup> CISC, 2005

<sup>281</sup> CISS, 2005

<sup>282</sup> Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*

<sup>283</sup> David Curry, Associated Press. "Rioting Prisoners Surrender at Canadian Jail." Retrieved from: <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1996/Rioting-Prisoners-Surrender-at-Canadian-Jail/id-bfeaa2f5d724d3be68821829c334e00a>

much power and those who were seen as the most influential were moved to other institutions across Canada.<sup>284</sup> Within the new institutions, gang leaders would recruit new members and those that did not join were often intimidated and were victims to violence. The exclusion from the gangs and the potential violence that the gangs imposed on other inmates led to the creation of other gangs based on location and cultural identity. An example of this is the Redd Alert that formed in the Edmonton Maximum Security Institution. Indigenous inmates at the institutions found themselves being intimidated by IP and Alberta Warrior (AW) members.<sup>285</sup> With the movement of Indigenous gang members across Canada, Indigenous gangs had the opportunity to recruit new members in different locations. As members were released they would go back to their home communities and bring their new knowledge and identity with them. The Indian Posse soon became the largest street gang in Canada with membership from coast to coast.<sup>286</sup>

### 3.2 – Forming Indigenous Street Gangs – Hybridity versus Homegrown

When Indigenous male youth become engaged with street gangs it is oft stated that they lose their cultural identity and begin to act “black”.<sup>287</sup> The idea of acting “black” can be attributed to contemporary perceptions of street gang culture perpetuated through public and popular media.<sup>288</sup> However, such an analysis ignores how street gang culture

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<sup>284</sup> CISS, *Intelligence Trends*.

<sup>285</sup> Sandra Contenta, “Prisons Poisoning Natives” *The Star*, July 20, 2008; Andrew Hanon, “Edmonton’s Redd Alert Native Gang is Helping the Independent Soldiers in Vancouver Gang War – Source.” *Toronto Sun*, March 14, 2009.

<sup>286</sup> Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*.

<sup>287</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Robert Henry, Social spaces of maleness: The role of the street gang in practicing Indigenous masculinities. In K. Anderson and R. Innes (eds.), *Indigenous masculinities: An anthology* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2015).

<sup>288</sup> Cureton, *Hoover Crips*; Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Hallsworth, and Young, *Gang Talkers*; White, *Youth Gangs*.

has evolved over time from early “white” immigrant gangs to those who associated to street gangs today.<sup>289</sup> Through the designation that Indigenous youth do not know who they are and are acting “black”, individuals not only racialize gangster culture (and in the process demonize African American peoples as a whole), but focus anti-gang programming for Indigenous youth on cultural revitalization, or the re-education of Indigenous identity often through curriculum based education.<sup>290</sup> This results in Indigenous gang membership simply being those who do not know their culture and not on the socio-economic realities that created the field to support the formation of Indigenous street gangs.

Rather than focusing on how Indigenous youth are acting like other youth, discussions should be on how Indigenous youth have come to adopt and find connections within “gangsta culture”; how Indigenous symbolism has been used to recruit other Indigenous youth; and how Indigenous street gang culture fits within the larger global context of “gangsta culture”. To recruit new members, the majority of the early Indigenous street gangs in Canada connected their identities with traditional Indigenous symbols such as the “traditional warrior”.<sup>291</sup> Increasingly, Indigenous communities have spoken out about the usage of Indigenous symbols in this way, as Indigenous culture is being manipulated negatively to support the growth of street gangs.<sup>292</sup> Because of the pain and violence that Indigenous street gangs engage within their communities, they are

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<sup>289</sup> Cureton et al., *Confronting Gangs*; Delaney, *American Street Gang*.

<sup>290</sup> Martel et al., *Two Worlds*.

<sup>291</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*

<sup>292</sup> Kathleen Buddle, “An Aboriginal Youth Gang Narconomy,” *Hemispheric Institute* 8, no. 2 (2011).

seen as corrupting traditional Indigenous symbols and not valuing the true meaning of the “warrior.”<sup>293</sup>

Research on Native American street gangs can aid in understanding the construction of Indigenous street gangs in Canada. Research on Native American street gangs suggests that Native American street gangs are created through two processes—migration and homegrown.<sup>294</sup> Because of limited economic opportunities, many Native American families migrated to larger urban centres looking to increase their education or find employment. In the urban centres Native American youth learn from large African American and Latino “super gangs” such as the Crips, Bloods, Vice Lords, Latin Kings, Gangster Disciples, Cobras, etc.<sup>295</sup> Individuals then migrate back to their tribal communities where they bring with them their new knowledge of larger urban gangs and adopt the names, colours, and symbols in an effort to gain instant notoriety.<sup>296</sup> The importance of the linkage to larger urban street gangs is due to the infamous reputation that urban street gangs have based on their representation in American public media and popular culture.<sup>297</sup> When individuals migrate back to their tribal communities they then “indigenize” their new urban gangster identity with their Native American culture by

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<sup>293</sup> Buddle, *Narconomy*; Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*.

<sup>294</sup> Christopher M. Grant, and Steve Feimer. “Street gangs in Indian country: A Clash of Cultures,” *Journal of Gang Research* 14, no. 4 (2007): 27-66.

<sup>295</sup> Adrienne Freng, “American Indian Gangs,” in *American Indians at risk*, ed. J.I. Ross (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2014); Adrienne Freng, Taylor Davis, Kristyn McCord, and Aaron Roussell, “The New American Gang? Gangs in Indian Country,” *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 28, no. 4 (2012): 446-464; James Bell, and Nicole Lim, “Young Once, Indian Forever: Youth Gangs in Indian Country,” *The American Indian Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2005): 626-650; Ada Pecos Melton, “Images of Crime and Punishment: Traditional and Contemporary Tribal Justice,” *Images of Color, Images of Crime: Readings* (Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company, 1998): 58-71.

<sup>296</sup> Grant, *Gangs In Indian Country*. This is also similar to some newer Indigenous street gangs in Canada, where particular names and monikers are used to gain instant notoriety within the community, due to the gang’s identity through media.

<sup>297</sup> Melton, *Tribal Justice*; see also Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement* on the impact that particular movies had with some of their participants in creating an idolization of gangster culture.

integrating local Native American cultural symbols within the urban gang's identifying markers to create a connection to the local community.<sup>298</sup>

The second way that Native American gangs form is through what researchers and criminal justice officials term as “homegrown”.<sup>299</sup> These gangs commonly begin with a close-knit group of family and friends who trust one another. Over-time the group creates a specific name, symbols, and cultural traits that reflect their local Native American culture and their perceived notions of gangster culture.<sup>300</sup> Homegrown gangs identify themselves as a distinct group born of the community often associating themselves as a “modern day warrior.”<sup>301</sup> Connections to the traditional “warrior,” helps in the recruitment of new members, as older members construct the gang as a group protecting the community from the intrusion of outsiders.<sup>302</sup> The ways in which Native American “homegrown” street gangs have formed in the United States is similar to the emergence of many Indigenous street gangs in Canada.<sup>303</sup>

Native American gangs are byproducts of the socio-economic-political environments that Indigenous peoples occupy within American society and use rural—urban, and urban—rural migration to recruit and expand their territories.<sup>304</sup> Many Canadian Indigenous street gangs located in the Prairie Provinces are born out of marginalized spaces, where their communities face compounded systemic oppression that

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<sup>298</sup> Grant, *Gangs in Indian Country*; Grant and Fermier, *Clash of Cultures*; J. A. Hailer, and C. B. Hart, "A New Breed of Warrior: The Emergence of American Indian Youth Gangs," *Journal of Gang Research* 7, no. 1 (1999): 23-33.

<sup>299</sup> Freng et al., *New American Gang*; Grant, *Gangs in Indian Country*.

<sup>300</sup> Freng et al., *New American Gang*.

<sup>301</sup> Freng et al., *New American Gang*; Grant, *Gangs in Indian Country*; Grant and Feimer, *Clash of Cultures*; Hailer and Hart, *New Breed*.

<sup>302</sup> Grant, *Gangs in Indian Country*.

<sup>303</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>304</sup> Bell and Lim, *Young Once*. Freng, et al. *The New American Gang*; Hailer and Hart, *New Breed*; Theoriot and Parker, *Linking Culture*.

restricts most members from accruing economic capital.<sup>305</sup> Paternalistic colonial policies have resulted in large numbers of Indigenous peoples to reside in impoverished and marginalized urban neighbourhoods.<sup>306</sup> This has led some families to migrate between reserve and urban communities seeking out the necessary resources to survive.<sup>307</sup>

### 3.3 – Increased Indigenous Street Gang Presence on the Prairies

To address Indigenous street gangs, suppression and incarceration is often the focus of communities and governments.<sup>308</sup> Suppression and incarceration help to remove those who have, but are also viewed as criminal.<sup>309</sup> Once incarcerated, Indigenous inmates are often categorized as high-risk offenders limiting their access to programs, resulting in fewer opportunities to be released into the community prior to the completion of their sentence.<sup>310</sup> Government and independent reports on the handling of Indigenous peoples most often attribute the causations of Indigenous criminal behaviours to fetal alcohol syndrome and impacts from residential schools.<sup>311</sup> Indigenous inmates are also disproportionately identified as “gang members” upon their entry into correction

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<sup>305</sup> Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Communications Group-Publishing, 1996); James B. Waldram, Ann Herring, and T. Kue Young, *Aboriginal Health in Canada: Historical, Cultural, and Epidemiological Perspectives* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

<sup>306</sup> See Buddle, *Street Sociality*; Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal life* (Regina, SK: University of Regina Press, 2013); Barbara Fallon, Bruce MacLaurin, J. Daciuk, C. Felstiner, T. Black, L. Tonmyr, C. Blackstock, K. Barter, D. Turcotte, and R. Cloutier, *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2008* (Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010); Laurence J. Kirmayer, and Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, eds. *Healing Traditions: The Mental Health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2009).

<sup>307</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Friesen, *Daniel Wolfe*.

<sup>308</sup> Comack, *Racialized Policing*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>309</sup> Cacho, *Social Death*; Comack, *Racialized Policing*; Rios, *Punished*.

<sup>310</sup> OCI, 2013-14, OCI, *Spirit Matters: Aboriginal Peoples and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act*, (Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada, 2012).

<sup>311</sup> OCI, *Spirit Matters*.

institutions.<sup>312</sup> Institutional gang identification is used by correction institutions, federal and provincial, to organize inmates into a taxonomy and cell block placement focused on gang affiliations to better manage inmates and reduce gang-related violence.<sup>313</sup> As Julien Hulet, the Director of Security Intelligence of the Government of Saskatchewan's Ministry of Justice stated:

*Our jails are separated by region in the sense that typically the south is NS (Native Syndicate). Saskatoon is Terror Squad, predominantly... The increase in violence tends to occur when rival groups or when events occur unknowingly. It's not about a beating anymore, it's not about getting a lesson, it's about earning respect and it's about being disrespected and that opportunity to impress your fellow gang guys, your fellow gang members.*<sup>314</sup>

However, while this approach to imprisonment may limit gang-related violence, others argue the gang label can effectively limit individuals affected from accessing programs designed for reintegration back into communities.<sup>315</sup> Government and independent reports fail to truly grasp why Indigenous males are over-represented in gangs within correctional institutions, often stating historical circumstances such as Residential Schools as a primary reason.<sup>316</sup> It is because of this gap that research documenting the specific reasons why some Indigenous males join gangs is needed to help inform better policy.

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<sup>312</sup> OCI, 2013-14; OCI, *Spirit Matters*. See also the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, *Power and Politics: More prisoners joining gangs behind bars*, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/more-prisoners-joining-gangs-behind-bars-1.1196311>.

<sup>313</sup> John Winterdyk, Nikki Fillipuzzi, Jessica Mescier, Crystal Hencks, *Prison Gangs: A Review and Survey of Strategies* (Ottawa, ON: Correctional Services of Canada, Government of Canada, 2009).

<sup>314</sup> Interview, Julien Hulet, February 26, 2013. Regina, Saskatchewan.

<sup>315</sup> OCI, *Spirit Matters*.

<sup>316</sup> Nafekh, *Gang Affiliation*; OCI, 2013-14.



### 3.4 – Limited Knowledge and Ineffective Policy

With limited research on Indigenous street gangs in Canada, governments and communities continue to look at research conducted primarily in the United States.<sup>317</sup> This is problematic as local, regional, and national contexts shape the emergence and development of street gangs and may differ dramatically across locations.<sup>318</sup> Historical, social, cultural, and economic factors such as colonial oppression, slavery, and trans-global migration are examples of socio-political factors that influence the emergence of street gangs and yet may not be present in all global contexts.<sup>319</sup> Although research on Canadian Indigenous street gangs has increased,<sup>320</sup> much of the information continues to focus on specific characteristics, structures, and behaviors of street gangs, how they differentiate from other criminal groups (i.e., biker gangs and organized crime) or street social groups (i.e., tagging crews)<sup>321</sup> and not on the socio-historical contexts in relation to colonialism.<sup>322</sup>

In Canada, most researchers and policy analysts tend to compare the differences between street gangs and other “deviant” street groups from a structural perspective focusing on the group’s social hierarchy.<sup>323</sup> A structural understanding of street gangs

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<sup>317</sup> Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*; Grekul and Laboucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)placement*; Henry, *Not Just Another Thug*.

<sup>318</sup> Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Vigil and Yun, *Multiple Marginality*.

<sup>319</sup> Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Hallsworth, *The Gang*.

<sup>320</sup> Buddle, *Narconomy*; Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Bracken et al., *Desistance and Marginalization*; Lawrence Deane, Denis, C. Bracken, and Larry Morrisette, “Desistance Within an Urban Aboriginal Gang,” *Probation Journal* 54, no. 2 (2007): 125-141; Jana Grekul, and Petrina LaRocque, ““Hope is Absolute”: Gang-Involved Women-Perceptions from the Frontline,” *aboriginal policy studies* 1, no. 2 (2011); Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*

<sup>321</sup> Spindler and Bouchard, *Gang Typologies*.

<sup>322</sup> Sinclair and Grekul, *(De)Constructing an Epidemic*.

<sup>323</sup> E. J. Dickson-Gilmore, and Chris Whitehead, “Aboriginal Organized Crime in Canada: Developing a Typology for Understanding and Strategizing Responses,” *Trends in Organized Crime* 7, no. 4 (2002): 3-28; Brian Mellor, MacRae, Leslie, Pauls, Monica, and Hornick, Joseph P., “Youth Gangs in Canada: A Preliminary Review of Programs and Services,” (Ottawa, ON: Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, 2005); Spindler and Bouchard, *Gang Typologies*.

emerges from criminal justice research that hierarchically categorizes organized crime syndicates from deviant street groups, as the latter are seen to have limited stability, influence, and power within communities.<sup>324</sup> Indigenous street gangs are rarely, if ever, defined as an organized crime group. Rather, they are primarily defined as loosely based groups with a fluid structure, “gaining or waning in strength and numbers as membership changes in response to enforcement strategies.”<sup>325</sup> As Jana Grekul and Patti LaBoucane-Benson state:

Despite their longevity, their increasing numbers, and their pronounced presence in prison populations, Aboriginal gangs are still relegated to the status of street gangs and wanna-be groups, known for their violence, their semblance of structure based on African-American gangs, their conflict with other groups, and their lack of sophistication. Members are individuals who have been relegated to the outskirts of the legitimate and illegitimate opportunity structures in Canadian society. They are “double failures”.<sup>326</sup>

Criminal justice perspectives on Indigenous street gangs reflect paternalistic colonial constructions of Indigenous peoples where they are not afforded the opportunities to succeed even within illegal street economies. The majority of the data collected by Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson (2008) derived from individuals who were working in the correctional system or with street gang members in the community (9 ex-gang members were interviewed as well). As a result, we see that those who work in the system maintain the idea that Indigenous peoples are unable to organize themselves, even at a criminal level, to a point where they garner respect from non-Indigenous peoples. Therefore, rather than being the pop culture ‘anti-hero’<sup>327</sup> or the powerful mob boss or head of a biker gang, Indigenous street gangs and their members are personified in the broader

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<sup>324</sup> Klein and Maxson, *Street Gang Patterns*; Mellor et al., *Youth Gangs*.

<sup>325</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*: 75.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid*: 77.

<sup>327</sup> The anti-hero in popular culture that I am referring to here are those characters that commit horrendous acts of violence and perpetuate the ‘gangster image’ are those who the audience is to root for.

community as continued failures who work for larger more organized criminal organizations.

### 3.5 – Colonial Encounters and Fragmented Identities

The impacts of historical and contemporary colonial policies are important to understand when undertaking Indigenous street gang research. The colonial process in Canada has supported the violent removal of Indigenous peoples from becoming fully included within Canadian society. By referring to work by Frantz Fanon, Sunera Thobani states:

Colonialism created an order based on absolute violence. Fanon argues, an order that relied on the transformation of the “native” into a “thing”, an object of exploitation. The colonial encounter gave rise to new species of men, the native and the settler.<sup>328</sup>

Colonial ideologies have framed governmental policies such as the *Enfranchisement* and *Indian Acts* within paternalistic authority, infantilizing Indigenous peoples. Through the policies the Canadian government could “legally” subjugate Indigenous peoples within their own land fragmenting Indigenous communities and personal identities.<sup>329</sup>

Of all the programs directed at controlling and transforming Indigenous peoples in Canada, Residential Schools continue to be viewed as the most detrimental. Canadian Residential Schools modeled the American boarding schools program of the late 1870’s, and Captain Richard Pratt’s philosophy of “save the child; kill the Indian.”<sup>330</sup> Pratt’s philosophy was used to support the assimilation policies brought forth within Canadian Residential Schools in an effort to destroy the cultural identity of the students and prepare

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<sup>328</sup> Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*: 37.

<sup>329</sup> Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*.

<sup>330</sup> Donald A. Grinde, "Taking the Indian Out of the Indian: US Policies of Ethnocide Through Education," *Wicazo Sa Review* (2004): 25-32.

them for inclusion/assimilation into Canadian society.<sup>331</sup> However, inclusion into Canadian society has never truly occurred. Rather, Indigenous peoples who went to these schools began to internalize their oppression where they felt as though they did not belong anywhere. As John Tootoosis stated:

[W]hen an Indian comes out of these places (i.e. Indian schools) it is like being put between two walls in a room and left hanging in the middle. On one side are all the things he learned from his people and their way of life that was being wiped out, and on the other side are the whiteman's ways which he could never fully understand since he never had the right amount of education and could not be part of it. There he is, hanging in the middle of two cultures and he is not a whiteman and he is not an Indian.<sup>332</sup>

To compound the issues of a disjointed identity, residential schools also provided inadequate education where most individuals who attended were taught primarily domestic (for girls) and manual labour (for boys) skills;<sup>333</sup> lived in sub-standard living conditions where exposure and malnourishment were common;<sup>334</sup> and were abused sexually, physically, and emotionally by adults and even other youth.<sup>335</sup> As a result, children of survivors continue to experience the ripple effects or intergenerational traumas brought about by their parents' experiences in these institutions.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Sarah de Leeuw, "If Anything Is To Be Done With the Indian, We Must Catch Him Very Young": Colonial Constructions of Aboriginal Children and the Geographies of Indian Residential Schooling in British Columbia, Canada," *Children's Geographies* 7, no. 2 (2009): 123-140; John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986*. Vol. 11. Univ. of Manitoba Press, 1999; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). "Canada, Aboriginal Peoples, and Residential Schools: They Came for the Children." [www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/2039\\_T&R\\_eng\\_web\[1\].pdf](http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/2039_T&R_eng_web[1].pdf).

<sup>332</sup> Goodwill, Jean and Norma Sluman. *John Tootoosis*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: Pemmican Publications, 1984: 106.

<sup>333</sup> deLeeuw, *Colonial Constructions*.

<sup>334</sup> Rosemary Barnes, Nina Josefowitz, and Ester Cole, "Residential Schools Impact on Aboriginal Students' Academic and Cognitive Development," *Canadian Journal of School Psychology* 21, no. 1-2 (2006): 18-32; Ian Mosby, "Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942-1952," *Histoire sociale/Social history* 46, no. 1 (2013): 145-172.

<sup>335</sup> TRC, *They Came*.

<sup>336</sup> Sarah de Leeuw, Margo Greenwood, and Emilie Cameron, "Deviant Constructions: How Governments Preserve Colonial Narratives of Addictions and Poor Mental Health to Intervene Into the Lives of

Due to negative experiences and denied the opportunity to learn how to parent from their parents, through forced removal and mandatory attendance in the schools, many Indigenous peoples were not afforded the proper mentoring to grow and learn how to be a “good” parental role model for their children.<sup>337</sup> When residential schools began to close in the 1960s, Indigenous youth would continue to be removed from their homes and communities by government agencies. The “scooping” practices of the 1960’s and 1970’s, removed children to be adopted into white families without their parents consenting or knowing where their children were going.<sup>338</sup>

Today, through child welfare legislation, Indigenous children continue to be removed from their parents at greater rates than any other youth in Canada.<sup>339</sup> The removal of children, often for short time periods is justified because Indigenous parents are viewed as neglectful and removal is necessary to protect the child(ren).<sup>340</sup> For example, in 2009 a snapshot of children involved in the child welfare system in Saskatchewan found that over 80% of the nearly 3600 children in care were

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Indigenous Children and Families in Canada," *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* 8, no. 2 (2010): 282-295; Kirmayer and Valaskakis, *Healing Traditions*.

<sup>337</sup> As cited in Jacqueline Hookimaw-Witt, "Any Changes Since Residential School?," *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 22, no. 2 (1998): 159.

<sup>338</sup> Raven Sinclair, "Identity Lost and Found: Lessons From the Sixties Scoop," *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 3, no. 1 (2007): 65-82.

<sup>339</sup> Cindy Blackstock, and Nico Trocmé, "Community-Based Child Welfare for Aboriginal Children: Supporting Resilience Through Structural Change," *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand* 24, no. 12 (2005): 12-33; Barbara Fallon, Martin Chabot, John Fluke, Cindy Blackstock, Bruce MacLaurin, and Lil Tonmyr, "Placement Decisions and Disparities Among Aboriginal Children: Further Analysis of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect Part A: Comparisons of the 1998 and 2003 Surveys," *Child abuse & neglect* 37, no. 1 (2013): 47-60

<sup>340</sup> Caroline Tait, Robert Henry, Rachael Lowen-Walker, "Child Welfare: A Social Determinant of Health for Canadian First Nations and Métis Children," *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health* 11, no. 1 (2013): 39-53; Sharon McKay, Ivan Brown, and Don Fuchs, eds. *Passion for Action in Child and Family Services* (Regina, SK: University of Regina Press, 2009); Trocmé, et al., *Pathways to Overrepresentation*; Vandna Sinha, Nico Trocmé, Cindy Blackstock, Barbara Fallon, Bruce MacLaurin, Elizabeth Fast, Shelley Thomas Prokop, and K. Richard, "Kiskisik Awasisak: Remembering the Children," in *Understanding the Overrepresentation of First Nations Children in the Child Welfare System* (Ontario: Assembly of First Nations, 2011).

Indigenous.<sup>341</sup> The percentage of Indigenous youth in care is similar to the percentage of Indigenous adults in Saskatchewan correctional facilities, where approximately 80% of all inmates are Indigenous.<sup>342</sup> Child welfare and corrections services today enforce neocolonial policies that continue to create instability by removing children from their families and communities. However, it was not just the removal of children from their families that created the instability within Indigenous communities. Exclusion from economic opportunities has resulted in entrenched poverty that reinforces colonial ideologies of Indigenous peoples as lazy or welfare recipients.<sup>343</sup>

The exclusion from the accumulation of wealth for Indigenous peoples was enforced through government policies of control. The *Indian Act* and subsequent reserve system created geographical divisions in Canada where Indigenous peoples were “given their space” and non-Indigenous laid claim to everything else.<sup>344</sup> The pass system for example, was created and enforced through the *Indian Act* as a way to limit Indigenous mobility off of reserve. If caught off reserve without a signed pass, Indigenous peoples could be arrested and jailed.<sup>345</sup>

Poverty is historically linked to deviance and street gangs.<sup>346</sup> Early criminological and gang theorists worked from the premise that poverty inflicted neighbourhoods create

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<sup>341</sup> Saskatchewan Child Welfare Review Panel, *For the Good of the Our Children and Youth: A New Vision, A New Direction* (Saskatoon, SK: Saskatchewan Children’s Advocate Office, 2010).

<sup>342</sup> Statistics Canada. *Adult correctional services, admissions to provincial, territorial and federal programs*. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/legal30j-eng.htm>

<sup>343</sup> Buddle, *Narconomy*; LaRocque, *Other is Me*.

<sup>344</sup> Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*, (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990); Evelyn Peters, “Emerging Themes in Academic Research in Urban Aboriginal Identities in Canada, 1996-2010,” *aboriginal policy studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 78-105; Sherene Razack, ed. *Race, Space, and The Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society* (Toronto, ON: Between the Lines, 2002).

<sup>345</sup> Comack, *Racialized Policing*.

<sup>346</sup> Cacho, *Socialized Death*; Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Rios, *Punished*; Thrasher, *The Gang*.

spaces of disorganization where middle-class values are not valued.<sup>347</sup> Youth who live within such environments are seen to not value education, employment, hard work, respect of property, and deferred gratification.<sup>348</sup> The “culture of poverty” perspective ascertains that individuals who live in neighbourhoods need to be educated about the values of adhering to those of the middle class. From this perspective, governments continue to enforce programs and policies that underscore education, rather than acknowledge the field that has created the choice.<sup>349</sup> Such thinking continues to lay blame of actions solely on the community and its individuals without substantial analysis or connections to socio-political histories that have excluded specific individuals from full participation into Western capitalism. Colonialism has excluded many Indigenous peoples, which has led to entrenched poverty that is difficult to escape without political support.

Economically, Indigenous peoples on reserve could not actively participate in the selling of goods without the consent of the Indian agent. Sarah Carter explains how federal government policies limited and restricted the success of Indigenous farmers on the Prairies, as Indian agents controlled the selling and market prices of anything that was produced on the reserve,<sup>350</sup> Indigenous peoples themselves could not access the grain without consent of the Indian agent, even if individuals were starving.<sup>351</sup> When Indigenous farmers failed it was due to their “character as Indians” and not to the policies that limited Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.<sup>352</sup> Over time, Carter states

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<sup>347</sup> Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Wood and Alleyne, *Street Gang Theory*.

<sup>348</sup> Alleyne and Wood, *Gang Involvement*; Comack et al. *Indians Wear Red*; Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Rios, *Punished*.

<sup>349</sup> Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*.

<sup>350</sup> Carter, *Lost Harvest*.

<sup>351</sup> Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*.

<sup>352</sup> Carter, *Lost Harvest*; Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*.

that the government persuaded Indigenous farmers to surrender their lands to white settler farmers, whose “moral” character would enable them to succeed. Indigenous peoples on the Prairies were systematically excluded from economic opportunities afforded to non-Indigenous settlers because they were viewed as incapable, which supported colonial ideologies that Indigenous peoples on the prairies could not adapt to a sedentary lifestyle.

With limited economic opportunities available to those living on reserve, many Indigenous peoples began to migrate to urban centres in the 1960s for economic and education opportunities.<sup>353</sup> However, Indigenous peoples continued to find themselves excluded from economic opportunities within urban centres as a result of limited education (a byproduct of poor schooling within residential schools), but more importantly because colonial ideologies and subsequent policies had separated and negated Indigenous peoples and their experiences from the Canadian consciousness. As Evelyn Peters explains: “Canadian cities were imagined as spaces of civilization in contrast to those of Indigenous savagery.”<sup>354</sup> Such colonial ideologies were (and continue to be) supported within Canadian education curriculums, which have helped to remove and discount Indigenous experiences within Canada, creating what Marie Battiste calls “cognitive imperialism”.<sup>355</sup> Together, poor education and limited social capital helped to exclude, remove, and vilify the growing urban Indigenous population.

The urban neighbourhoods where many Indigenous peoples would come to reside were historically marginalized through: stereotypes, severe poverty, inadequate housing,

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<sup>353</sup> Comack et al. *Indians Wear Red*; Peters *Urban Aboriginal Identities*.

<sup>354</sup> Peters, *Urban Aboriginal Identities*: 82.

<sup>355</sup> Marie Battiste, "Enabling the Autumn Seed: Toward a Decolonized Approach to Aboriginal Knowledge, Language, and Education," in *Schooling in Transition: Readings in Canadian History of Education*, eds. Sara Z. Burke and Patrice Milewski, (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2012): 280.



and exclusion social and economic opportunities.<sup>356</sup> Prior to Indigenous migration, ethnic minority, primarily of Eastern European ancestry resided within inner-city neighbourhoods.<sup>357</sup> It was not until after the Second World War that those who had traditionally lived in inner-city neighbourhoods moved away followed closely by businesses.<sup>358</sup> The suburbanization coincided with the larger process of de-industrialization that was happening across Canada and the United States, where traditional manufacturing jobs found in urban centres were closed or relocated.<sup>359</sup> Altogether, this created a void in the neighbourhoods as individuals who had limited education or training in specific skills, and were given limited opportunities to gain economic capital had to find other ways to increase their social and economic capitals. It is the intersections of stereotypes, entrenched poverty, and exclusion from economic opportunities that created what early theorists posit as social disorganization, which supports deviant behaviours.<sup>360</sup> Through these experiences urban Indigenous males, similar to African American males in the US, began to conform to a masculinity that supported the use of violence, toughness, and bravado.<sup>361</sup> It was through this masculine performance that some were able to increase their social and economic capitals within limited street fields through their association with local street gangs.

Much like the formation of American street gangs, the process of gang formation took time, where younger males would collect their notions of street gangs from the interactions of older males, experiences with other youth in juvenile facilities, and

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<sup>356</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>359</sup> Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*.

<sup>360</sup> Cullen and Agnew, *Criminological Theory*; Kubrin et al., *Researching Theories*; Wood and Alleyne, *Street Gang Theory*.

<sup>361</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*.

through popular media such as movies that depicted larger American street gangs.<sup>362</sup> It is through the socio-political histories shaped within colonial ideologies that created the macro-historical and macro-structural forces needed for street gangs to form and flourish beginning in the late 1980's and early 1990's in many prairie urban centres.

### 3.6 – The Importance of Relationships – Extended Familial Bonds and Gang Connections

Colonial policies such as the *Indian Act*, residential school system, and child welfare policies, have disconnected Indigenous families and communities creating spaces of instability.<sup>363</sup> Research has shown that colonial policies and practices have negatively impacted Indigenous identity, through the removal of Indigenous peoples from the land.<sup>364</sup> In the Prairie Provinces, land that was seen as fertile was set aside for new settlers, while Indigenous communities were removed or relocated to less desirable farming areas.<sup>365</sup> Today, due to the value of natural resources found within Indigenous territories, Indigenous communities continue to be overlooked by federal and provincial governments as policies and agreements are created with large corporations for resource extraction.<sup>366</sup> As a result, communities have been removed from traditional territories to make room for the encroachment, first of new Canadian settlers, and now for commercialization of the lands through resource extraction.

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<sup>362</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Grekul et al., *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>363</sup> John D. Fluke, Martin Chabot, Barbara Fallon, Bruce MacLaurin, and Cindy Blackstock, "Placement Decisions and Disparities Among Aboriginal Groups: An Application of the Decision Making Ecology Through Multi-Level Analysis," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 34, no. 1 (2010): 57-69; RCAP, *1996 Report*.

<sup>364</sup> Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2005); Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Josephine Chase, Jennifer Elkins, and Deborah B. Altschul, "Historical Trauma Among Indigenous Peoples of the Americas: Concepts, Research, and Clinical Considerations," *Journal of psychoactive drugs* 43, no. 4 (2011): 282-290; Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*; Memmi, *Colonized*.

<sup>365</sup> Carter, *Last Harvest*; Peters, *Urban Aboriginal Identities*.

<sup>366</sup> For a discussion of this look to Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red* as they discuss the plight of one Indigenous community as it was destroyed due to damming for hydro-electrical power.

At a micro level, families have also been disrupted. For example, the residential school system was used to remove children from their families in an attempt to “civilize” Indigenous youth through education.<sup>367</sup> However, once youth entered residential schools, many became victims to sexual, physical, mental, and emotional trauma, which has impacted not only their lives, but also the lives of their children and parents.<sup>368</sup> The impact can be seen through a disproportionate number of residential school survivor’s children and grandchildren being incarcerated or placed within the child welfare system.<sup>369</sup> Thus the state is able to maintain a cycle of control through the removal of children from their families.

Although colonial violence has attempted to disrupt Indigenous families, traditional notions of kinship remain and are used to connect many Indigenous street gangs.<sup>370</sup> Julien Hulet describes this process similar to historical feudal relationships between kingdoms.

*It’s like the days when a feudal system would have two kingdoms side by side and the king would have his brother, or his son marry the prince in the next kingdom. And so what happened is you have a coming together for business ventures, based on family alliances and successful projects.*<sup>371</sup>

Kinship relationships affect street and prison politics where brothers and cousins may belong to different gangs, and depending on their location and the political environment,

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<sup>367</sup> Michael Anthony Hart, and Gladys Rowe, "Legally Entrenched Oppressions: The Undercurrent of First Nations Peoples' Experiences with Canada's Social Welfare Policies," *Social Issues in Contemporary Native America: Reflections from Turtle Island*, Hilary N. Weaver, ed. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014): 23; Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2010).

<sup>368</sup> Teresa Evans-Campbell, "Historical Trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska Communities A Multilevel Framework for Exploring Impacts on Individuals, Families, and Communities," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 23, no. 3 (2008): 316-338; Regan, *Unsettling the Settler*; Sinclair, and Grekul, *(De)Constructing an Epidemic*.

<sup>369</sup> Fallon et al., *Child Abuse and Neglect*; Fluke et al., *Placement Decisions*; Tait et al., *Child Welfare*.

<sup>370</sup> Buddle, *Street Sociality*.

<sup>371</sup> Personal interview, February 26, 2013.

they may at any given time be allies or enemies. At times, kinship complicates the allegiance of its own members, where members have to choose between following orders from the gang, or protecting one's family.

Kinship and familial relationships have a deep impact with Indigenous street gang membership and politics; however these relationships are rarely discussed outside of family dysfunction.<sup>372</sup> The literature often maintains that due to familial breakdown the street gang becomes the "family" for individuals, as it provides the rules, stability, and support found within traditional families.<sup>373</sup> Comack et al. cautions against this taken-for-granted simplicity of the street gang becoming greater than one's family as, "this analogy [of gang as family] makes intuitive sense in accounting for the attraction of street gangs, relying on its simplicity runs the risk of masking more worrisome dynamics that operate in both the contemporary family and street gangs."<sup>374</sup> However, as Indigenous street gangs create stability and longevity in communities, membership has become intergenerational, where fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, and extended family members are all a part of a particular gang.<sup>375</sup> The family as gang – gang as family connection helps to connect children to street gangs, and socialize individuals to particular cultural codes of conduct.

The complexity of Indigenous kinship relationships<sup>376</sup> makes it difficult to address who is and who is not in a gang, and when a group of family members becomes a gang? Justice officials have created policies to help identify gang members in the community.

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<sup>372</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Grekul and LaRocque, *Hope is Absolute*.

<sup>373</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*; Rios, *Punished*; Venkatesh and Levitt, *Family or Business*; Vigil, *Urban Violence*; Rainbow of Gangs.

<sup>374</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*: 61.

<sup>375</sup> Buddle, *Street Sociality*.

<sup>376</sup> Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Métis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2011)

The problem with the policies is that they do not take into account the importance of extended relationships within Indigenous communities. As a result, some individuals may be labeled as gang members simply by being seen with their own relatives. Also, because of the connection of street gangs and Indigenous youth, members of a community may mislabel groups of relatives who hang out together as a gang. Ultimately this can lead to the misrepresentation of Indigenous males as gang members simply because of family connections. Thus individuals must disassociate from their families in order to not be viewed as a street gang member.

### 3.7 – Conclusion

Indigenous street gangs were seen to form in the early part of the 1980s in Winnipeg, Manitoba's core neighbourhoods, and spread through correctional institutions across the Prairie Provinces.<sup>377</sup> The majority of Indigenous families living in core neighbourhoods have been negatively impacted through Residential Schools, have had few economic opportunities due to lower education and racism, face greater health risks as a result of poverty, and find themselves in entrenched poverty with single mothers often being the sole parent and provider.<sup>378</sup> Researchers, policy-makers, and criminal justice officials have understood such factors as ideal for the formation and entrenchment of street gangs within communities.<sup>379</sup> However, without contextualizing why and how a large number of Indigenous families came to occupy these spaces in urban settings, one

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<sup>377</sup> Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*; Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*.

<sup>378</sup> See Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*: 7-9; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>379</sup> See Bourgois, *Search of Respect*; Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Spergel, *Gang Problem*; Vigil, *Rainbow of Gangs*.

runs the risk of relying on stereotypical deficiencies to theorize the Indigenous street gang experience.

Many Indigenous youth find themselves in spaces that support strain, control and social disorganization (social learning theory) theories. The breakdown of family, entrenched poverty, and lack of opportunities are all regarded within these theories as the foundational factors that are conducive to street gang environments.<sup>380</sup> Entrenched meritocratic ideologies help to support the blaming of parents and whole communities for the creation of street gangs, where the parents have not worked hard enough or instill the proper values for their children and other youth to make “good” educated decisions. Such thinking ignores the socio-political histories that have created local fields, presuming that everyone has equal opportunities, and therefore equal choice. This exclusion and the position of colonialism as a historical event, subjugates and blames Indigenous peoples for their poverty, which continues to support colonial ideologies of paternalism and the continued infantilization of Indigenous peoples. This is why a critical decolonial/anti-racist framework is needed to understand issues relating to Indigenous street gangs. Such a framework will position colonization, not as a historical artifact, but rather as an ideological perspective that has influenced Indigenous identity and relationships with settler Canadians. Secondly, it will move beyond the Indigenous males acting “black” rhetoric and understand how masculinity is used to increase one’s social and economic capitals within local street fields.

Many Indigenous street gangs that have formed in Canada are seen to replicate American street gang cultures, in which they adopt particular behaviours and integrate

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<sup>380</sup> Cullen and Agnew, *Criminological Theory*; Kubrin et al., *Researching Theories*; Wood and Alleyne, *Street Gang Theory*.

them with the local Indigenous culture in an effort to connect to others in the community.<sup>381</sup> Due to moral panics constructed through public media, the street gang label has become synonymous with young Indigenous males and the communities (urban and rural) in which they reside.<sup>382</sup> Public media maintains a culture of fear around those presumed to live in specific communities,<sup>383</sup> which in turn focuses public attention to particular behaviours as criminal and deviant, even if others who are non-Indigenous commit these same behaviours.<sup>384</sup> In turn, some young Indigenous males who live in communities rife with low-socio economic status may internalize their marginality and claim them as sites of resistance to the social label,<sup>385</sup> resulting in individuals searching out the street gang as a place to enact their constructed notions of identity, in particular their constructs of hyper-violent masculinity.

The process of one's involvement in gangs is not one that happens quickly. Individuals are socialized by their parents, friends, schools, media, and the community and construct their social identities as Indigenous males in accordance to their social and cultural capitals within specific fields. This then leads some Indigenous male youth to create closer connection to the street and particular street cultures because this is where they believe that they belong.<sup>386</sup> Therefore the street gang, for some Indigenous males becomes the social space where they can search out specific opportunities to increase their social and economic capitals through their involvement with street gangs.<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Buddle, *Narconomy*.

<sup>382</sup> Sinclair and Grekul, *(De)constructing an Epidemic*.

<sup>383</sup> Henry, *Not Just Another Thug*.

<sup>384</sup> Comack, *Racialized Policing*.

<sup>385</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Sensoy and Di'Angelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal?*.

<sup>386</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>387</sup> Buddle, *Narconomy*.

Through this review of the literature it becomes apparent that there are many questions left to answer as to why some Indigenous males find themselves involved in street gangs? What does the gang offer Indigenous males? How do socio-political histories interconnect with one's personal choice in such a way that the street gang becomes a space where some individuals feel as though they have found a sense of belonging? What do these males possess that the street gang sees as valuable to the organization? How does the street gang help to create spaces for some Indigenous males to perform specific notions of hyper-masculinity in an effort to gain the power and respect they feel they deserve? And finally, how can habitus help create a deeper understanding of Indigenous street gangs and masculinity?



## Chapter 4 –Masculinity and Indigenous Street Gang Research

*You got to look mean or people don't respect you. White people will run all over you if you don't look mean. You got to look like a warrior. You got to look like you just came back from killing a buffalo. Sherman Alexie, *Smoke Signals*<sup>388</sup>*

### 4.0 Introduction

Masculinity is important in the research of street gangs as it frames local street fields and normalizes street gang behaviours. Being tough, showing a lack of emotions, and bravado framed in violence are attributes that Indigenous male street gang members attempt to portray in order to gain power and respect within local street fields.

Colonization has constructed Indigenous males as violent resulting in a “culture of terror”<sup>389</sup> where they are easily labeled as deviant, violent, lawless, and need to be controlled. In this chapter I examine how Indigenous males participate in *hegemonic masculinity*;<sup>390</sup> however, because of their lack of social capital, their actions are seen as criminal or deviant. Hegemonic masculinity can help to show how race and class intersect with socio-political histories to challenge biological and natural constructs of masculinity. This analysis will peel back the layers of Indigenous masculinity to show how street gangs become a rite of passage for some Indigenous males to become “real men” within limited social fields shaped by colonization.

### 4.1 Performing Masculinity within Street Gangs

The construction of masculinity and its connection to Indigenous street gangs is

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<sup>388</sup> Sherman Alexie, *Smoke Signals*. Directed by Chris Eyre. Los Angeles: Miramax, 1998.

<sup>389</sup> Michael Taussig, “Culture of Terror-Space of Death: Roger Casement’s Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture,” in *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, eds. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

<sup>390</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*.

vital in the development of effective programs and policies directed at the prevention, intervention and suppression of street gangs. Historically, street gangs were determined to be all-male groups that rely upon hyper-masculine notions of control that are influenced by specific “social codes.”<sup>391</sup> The codes support the construction of hyper-violence and masculine performances to gain respect and power as they determine how individuals are to act. To benefit from the dominant street masculinity, one must increase their levels of violence against others who are subordinate or may challenge their authority, while at the same time trying to save oneself from becoming a victim of violence.<sup>392</sup> To assert the violence necessary in street environments young males often create a “mask”. This mask is reflective of the dominant masculine image of toughness, emotionlessness, independence, and bravado to assert one’s authority. Colonization has subordinated Indigenous males’ social, cultural, and economic capitals resulting in the labeling of Indigenous male youth as criminal and deviant. Such labels often pushes some Indigenous males to connect masculinity with Indigenous street gangs.

Over the years, I have spoken with many different Indigenous community members and leaders, primarily in Saskatchewan, on the issues of Indigenous street gangs. I have listened to how they express their concerns and fears about many of the young males in their communities who they feel have been denied their traditional values and social places in the communities. This loss of “place” is what many communities attribute as a primary factor for Indigenous males to become involved in a street gang.<sup>393</sup> Some

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<sup>391</sup> Anderson, *Code of the Street*; Thrasher, *The Gang*.

<sup>392</sup> Bourgois, *Search of Respect*.

<sup>393</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Jana Grekul, and Kim Sanderson, “‘I Thought People Would be Mean and Shout.’ Introducing the Hobbema Community Cadet Corps: a Response to Youth Gang Involvement?” *Journal of Youth Studies* 14, no. 1 (2011): 41-57; Theriot and Parker, *Linking Culture*.

community members have expressed concern that their young people are not “acting like Indians” anymore: “They are acting like gangsters. Don’t they know who they are?”<sup>394</sup> It is difficult to answer, as the question is often posed in a way that essentializes Indigenous masculinity to a utopian traditional pre-contact perspective.<sup>395</sup> As such, culture becomes a “risk factor” for Indigenous males, as those who are regarded as “lacking” traditional values are seen as more inclined to join street gangs. Anti-gang programming for Indigenous peoples then centralizes on “re-educating” Indigenous males about their culture.<sup>396</sup> This focus on cultural revitalization ignores the systemic oppression faced by Indigenous peoples, as the impetus of the program is to educate a person about something that they have lost, and not on the system that has limited their opportunities because of their social capital as Indigenous.<sup>397</sup>

When concepts of masculinity are addressed by society at a macro level, the focus is on particular traits or characteristics of how males are to act, such as: toughness, physicality, virility, bravery, resourcefulness, connections to the outdoors, composed, and stoic.<sup>398</sup> This masculine performance is closely associated with traditional Indigenous perceptions of the “warrior” who is seen to be brave, resourceful, tough, physically intimidating, and connected to their environment and community.<sup>399</sup> However, through the historical and continuing processes of trauma imposed through imperialism,

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<sup>394</sup> This statement is a summary of different conversations that I have had with Indigenous Elders, leaders, program developers, and community members.

<sup>395</sup> Alfred Wasáse; Joyce Green, “Cultural and Ethnic Fundamentalism: The Mixed Potential for Identity, Liberation, and Oppression,” *Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy* (Regina, SK: Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy, 2003).

<sup>396</sup> Jane P. Preston, Shiela Carr-Stewart, and Charlene Northwest, “Aboriginal Youth Gangs: Preventative Approaches,” *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 4, no. 2 (2009): 152-160. See also Martel et al. *Two Worlds* on the problematic issues of cultural programming in prison settings.

<sup>397</sup> Verna St. Denis, “Aboriginal Education and Anti-Racist Education: Building Alliances Across Cultural and Racial Identity,” *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue Canadienne de l’éducation* (2007): 1068-1092.

<sup>398</sup> Buchbinder, *Studying Men*.

<sup>399</sup> LaRocque, *Other is Me*.

colonialism, and patriarchy, many Indigenous communities are denied the traditional perceptions of maleness and its connection to the broader community.<sup>400</sup> As a result, small numbers of Indigenous males have looked to street gangs as a way to accrue social and economic capitals. In order to unpack how street gangs support performances of violent hyper-masculinity this chapter will draw upon Raewyn (Robert) Connell and James Messerschmidt's construct of hegemonic masculinity.<sup>401</sup> Moving from global to local constructs of masculinity, I will focus on how one's social capital limits their access to the privileges awarded through hegemonic masculinity. This analysis will also challenge natural or Darwinian notions of masculinity, where masculinity is seen to be predetermined based on biology.

#### 4.2 Hegemonic Masculinity – Constructing the Ideal Man

Raewyn (Robert) Connell conceptualized hegemonic masculinity in the early 1980's to explain how men are socialized to idealize a dominant masculine performance.<sup>402</sup> As David Buchbinder writes:

Hegemony is the means by which a dominant class or group of classes (a power bloc) imposes upon the rest of society its belief system and the social and cultural practices that go with this, while at the same time encouraging in the subordinate classes the understanding that this is the way things "should be." The resulting effect is the complicity of those classes in their own subordination.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power and Righteousness: An Indian Manifesto* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999); Boyden et al., *Masculindians*.

<sup>401</sup> Robert Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987); Connell and Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*.

<sup>402</sup> Robert William Connell, *Which Way Is Up?: Essays on Sex, Class and Culture* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1983); Connell and Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*.

<sup>403</sup> Buchbinder, *Studying Men*: 92.

Those males who lack specific cultural capital to have the opportunities to participate fully within society (specifically the poor and racially marginalized) then internalize social codes of subordination to support their limited social positions.<sup>404</sup> As such:

In deprived urban communities, it would seem that young men are more vulnerable to the lure of gang culture due to the way in which masculinity is often constructed within these settings. Connell's (1987:183) concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' is pertinent here. Hegemonic masculinity is the 'dominant form of masculinity to which other types of masculinities are subordinated' and thus provides the 'primary basis of relationships among men' within particular social contexts.<sup>405</sup>

Hegemonic masculinity reinforces how individuals need to react to be seen as a real man. The difficulty is that not all males have the privilege or power to act in the same way, and thus they are subordinated in relation to their social capital within a particular field. This process of subordination supports Foucault's discourse of power/knowledge, where social power becomes invisible because those who are subordinated believe in their own social inferiority.<sup>406</sup>

Connell and Messerschmidt explain that masculinity embodies many different socially constructed ideas that maintain positions of unearned authority in society.<sup>407</sup> It is because of this social hierarchy of power that masculinity needs to be unpacked at global, regional and local levels in order to understand how hegemonic masculinity shifts and changes across time and place in relation to challenges from subordinated

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<sup>404</sup> Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*; hooks, *Real Cool*; Memmi, *Colonized*; Yasser Arafat Payne, "'A Gangster and a Gentleman' How Street Life-Oriented, US-Born African Men Negotiate Issues of Survival in Relation to Their Masculinity" *Men and Masculinities* 8, no. 3 (2006): 288-297.

<sup>405</sup> Ross Deuchar, "'It's Just Pure Harassment... As If It's a Crime to Walk in the Street': Anti-social Behaviour, Youth Justice and Citizenship—The Reality for Young Men in the East End of Glasgow." *Youth justice* 10, no. 3 (2010): 262.

<sup>406</sup> Buchbinder, *Studying Men*; Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, translated by Robert Hurley (London, UK: Penguin, 1981).

<sup>407</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*.

masculinities.<sup>408</sup> Hegemonic masculinity helps to frame how the male body is used in everyday social situations and is constructed differently dependent on one's social capital.<sup>409</sup> Social spaces are of central concern when examining issues related to Indigenous male street gangs and their members. Due to the re-cycling of colonial images of Indigenous "savages" within public media, Indigenous males are more readily associated with deviant, lawless, and violent activities by Settler society.<sup>410</sup> This results in the social affirmation that Indigenous peoples need to be watched closely, because sooner or later they will break the law.<sup>411</sup>

In his work on Latino and African American youth in Los Angeles, Victor Rios comments on the ways in which youth of colour are subjugated to illegal searches by police and school officials for dressing a particular way or walking in particular neighbourhoods.<sup>412</sup> In Canada, it has been observed and documented that Indigenous youth are treated differently within social spaces simply because they are Indigenous.<sup>413</sup> In their study focusing on Indigenous youth within public schools, Cathie Van Ingen and Joannie Halas found that the urban schools under study created policies to control gang activities; but teachers and administrators more readily used suppression towards Indigenous youth as they were viewed as problematic and not wanting to be a part of the school landscape.<sup>414</sup> Indigenous students were found to be unable to walk in groups

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<sup>408</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>409</sup> Comack, *Out There/In Here*: 23; James Messerschmidt, *Flesh and Blood: Adolescent Gender Diversity and Violence* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

<sup>410</sup> Elizabeth Cook-Lynn *Anti-Indianism in Modern America: A Voice from Tatekeya's Earth*, (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001); LaRocque, *Other is Me*.

<sup>411</sup> Buddle, *Narconomy*: Comack, *Racialized Policing*.

<sup>412</sup> Rios, *Punished*.

<sup>413</sup> Comack, *Racialize Policing*; Tasha Hubbard, and Sherene Razack, "Reframing Two Worlds Colliding: A Conversation Between Tasha Hubbard and Sherene Razack," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 33, no. 4 (2011): 318-332; Razack, *Race and Space*.

<sup>414</sup> Van Ingen and Halas, *Claiming Space*.

larger than three and had to follow the dress codes, even though other students did not.<sup>415</sup>

Such examples support the need to re-examine how the re-cycling of traditional colonial ideologies simultaneously exclude Indigenous bodies while privilege white settler bodies within social institutions.

A critical anti-oppressive analysis can help to understand how colonial ideologies are re-cycled within “multicultural” Canada. I agree with Mehmoona Moosa-Mitha where:

[A]nti-oppressive theories do not signify separate and “alternative” theorizations; rather, they engage in a conversation with other social theories that is dialectical in nature, where they contest, influence, and are in turn influenced by the ontological and epistemological assumptions of a spectrum of social theories...The “conversations” that influence and affect social theories, including anti-oppressive theories, is reflected in a process that is both creative and unpredictable so that over time it is not always easy or possible to distinguish all the various strands that come together in any one theoretical framework.<sup>416</sup>

To address the compounded and intersected issues that have come to construct Indigenous masculinity, I focus my analysis from a critical decolonial/anti-racist/anti-oppressive framework. I include decolonial to the framework as it focuses on the active need to differentiate between Indigenous and ethnic minority issues.<sup>417</sup> Often through critical anti-oppressive approaches, Indigenous perspectives become blurred through the pluralizing of oppression, specifically through anti-racist discourse, as equally applied to those who are non-white. This results in colonial white-washing, where racism is equated only to white privilege, which ignores the privilege that ethnic minorities also gain through the removal of Indigenous peoples through continued colonial policies.

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<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>416</sup> Mehmoona Moosa-Mitha, “Situating Anti-Oppressive Theories Within Critical and Difference-Centred Perspectives,” in *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous, & Anti-Oppressive Approaches*, eds. Leslie Brown and Susan Strega (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press, 2005), 38.

<sup>417</sup> Lawrence and Dua, *Decolonizing Antiracism*; Verna St. Denis, “Silencing Aboriginal Curricular Content and Perspectives Through Multiculturalism: “There Are Other Children Here”,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 33, no. 4 (2011): 306-317.; Stevenson, *Ethnic Assimilates Indigenous*.

A critical decolonial/anti-racist/anti-oppressive perspective can illustrate how hegemonic masculinity maintains its dominance by shifting its definition so that no one male can actually achieve definitive “maleness.”<sup>418</sup> Through stratification, males are continually excluded out of what it means to be a “real man,” due in large part to their race, class, sexuality, and physical ability.<sup>419</sup> Patriarchy creates social “litmus tests” designed to include and exclude males around the fear of not being able to “measure up”.<sup>420</sup> Thus to benefit from masculinity, males have to play what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as the “game” and recreate the dominant masculine performance within a particular field. As Bourdieu states:

The primordial investment in the social games (*illusion*), which makes a man a real man...is the undisputed principle of all the duties towards oneself, the motor or the motive of all that a man ‘owes himself’, in other words what he must do in order to live up, in his own eyes, to a certain idea of manhood.<sup>421</sup>

It is because of this power and need for control that a critical decolonial/anti-racist/anti-oppressive analysis is needed to expose how colonial patriarchy occurs, is maintained, and impacts Indigenous masculine performances in Canada.<sup>422</sup>

Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* is needed to explain how hegemonic masculinity is used and legitimated by many Indigenous males as they try to gain power and respect within their fields. Habitus underscores the importance of how socio-political histories shape one’s choice and behaviour, based on one’s social, cultural, and economic capital in a particular field at a particular point of time.<sup>423</sup> Social fields have created specific

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<sup>418</sup> Raewyn Connell, “Masculinity Research and Global Change,” *Masculinities and Social Change* 1, no.1 (2012): 4-18; Connell and Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*.

<sup>419</sup> Buchbinder, *Studying Men*; Connell, *Global Change*.

<sup>420</sup> Johnson, *Gender Knot*.

<sup>421</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*: 48.

<sup>422</sup> Foucault, *Sexuality*.

<sup>423</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*.



codes within their structures designed to shape one's behaviours.<sup>424</sup> The codes found within particular fields impact an individual's decision on how they need to act and whom they need to be subordinate to.<sup>425</sup> Thus, habitus acknowledges some of the complexities on how hegemonic masculinity is able to maintain its authority over subordinate masculinities across time and space.<sup>426</sup> Through habitus, one can see how socio-political histories limit and shape choice; helping to reinforce privilege and dominance as those males who reside at the margins are viewed by the privileged as inherently violent, even though the privileged themselves engage and support hegemonic masculinity through violent behaviours themselves.<sup>427</sup> The connection to violence helps to reproduce colonial cultures of fear and terror, where Indigenous peoples need to be controlled through violence.<sup>428</sup>

Together, hegemonic masculinity and habitus can explain how Indigenous street gangs have become the social field for some Indigenous males to gain and affirm their identities as "men". To show how this occurs I focus first on the Western global construction of masculinity. I address how Western patriarchal capitalist societies create and reproduce a masculine performance of toughness, independence, and bravado to gain power. It is from this global perspective that society normalizes specific "honorable" behaviours and subordinates others.<sup>429</sup> As a result, masculine role models, heroes, and

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<sup>424</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Force of Law: Toward a Sociology of the Juridical Field," *Hastings LJ* 38 (1987): 805-853.

<sup>425</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*; Pierre Bourdieu, and Loïc JD Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>426</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*.

<sup>427</sup> *Tough Guise 2: Violence, Media, and the Crisis in Masculinity*, Documentary. Directed by Jackson Katz, Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2014.

<sup>428</sup> Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, "Introduction," in *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, eds. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (Malden: Blackwell Publishing): 1-25; Michael Taussig, *Culture of Terror*.

<sup>429</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*; Katz, *Tough Guise*.

leaders all embody parts of the hegemonic masculine performance in order to benefit from its privileging status.

I then move to a regional understanding where masculinity is “constructed at the level of the culture or the nation-state.”<sup>430</sup> I include a description of how males of colour have been constructed to fit the role of criminal in Western societies,<sup>431</sup> where much of the research on masculinity and crime has focused.<sup>432</sup> Special attention is paid to the role of colonialism in constructing Indigenous males as the lawless savage.<sup>433</sup> The regional level is where socialization to local street codes<sup>434</sup> becomes central to the recognition of one’s masculinity.

The final part looks at local level constructions of masculinity and the role of street gangs. It is at the local level where the street gang becomes the primary social group that supports violent hyper-masculinities and recreated within local street contexts. To participate, individuals must come to understand the importance of local social codes that frame dominant masculine performances, which reflects the hegemonic male within local contexts.

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<sup>430</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*.

<sup>431</sup> Cacho, *Social Death*; Dana Mastro, Maria Knight Lapinski, Maria A. Kopacz, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, “The Influencing of Exposure to Depictions of Race and Crime in TV News on Viewer’s Social Judgments,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 4, Vol. 53(2009): 615-635.

<sup>432</sup> Gregg Barak, Paul Leighton, and Jeanne Flavin, *Race, Class, Gender, Crime: The Social Realities of Justice in America* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2007); Messerschmidt, *Flesh and Blood*; Corretta, Phillips, and Colin Webster. *New Directions in Race, Ethnicity and Crime*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>433</sup> LaRocque, *Other is Me*

<sup>434</sup> Anderson, *Street Code*

#### 4.2.1 Global Perspectives of Masculinity

For most people in Western society, sex and gender are often constructed around biological and phenotypical traits associated with sexual reproduction.<sup>435</sup> However, gender has less to do with biology and more to do with processes of socialization where cultural norms are transferred through the normalization of gender behaviours.<sup>436</sup> For example when children are born they are often distinguished through the colors that they wear. Blue represents a boy, and pink a girl. Without the association of colors to one's sex, it is difficult for passerby's to distinguish the sex and the appropriate compliments to give to the parents about their child. As such the socialization into one's gender roles begins at birth (or for some parents prior to the birth as they find out the sex of their child while in utero) and supported by family, religion, media, institutions, and peers.

To be considered a "real man" in Western hetero-patriarchal society is to outright reject those traits or activities socially categorized as feminine (caring, emotional, submissive, etc.).<sup>437</sup> This division between male and female is most often supported through biological or scientific terminology as being universal characteristics found in all males, where:

The division of the sexes appears to be "in the order of things," as people sometimes say to refer to what is normal, natural, to the point of being inevitable: it is present both—in the objectified state—in things (in the house, for example, every part of which is "sexed"), in the whole social world, and—in the embodied state—in the habitus of the agents, functioning as systems of schemes of perception, thought and action.<sup>438</sup>

The medicalization of gender supports essentialist notions where individuals are predetermined to be "hardwired" to act in specific ways and that any deviation from this

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<sup>435</sup> Sensoy and Di'Angelo, *Everyone Equal*.

<sup>436</sup> Buchbinder, *Studying Men*: 4; See also Barak et al., *Class Race Gender*.

<sup>437</sup> Buchbinder, *Studying Men*; Katz, *Tough Guise 2*; Johnson, *Gender Knot*; Kimmel, *Guyland*.

<sup>438</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*: 8.

is a breach of the “natural order of things.”<sup>439</sup> Therefore, constructing terms of gender through biological perspectives essentializes specific male traits presenting them as universal truths that cannot be changed, as they have always been this way. However, the essentialization of gender cannot explain the multiple gender performances that exist within and across cultures.<sup>440</sup>

But who or what does the real man look like? What are the characteristics males must measure one’s self against in order to achieve the specific power that patriarchy allows individuals to be a part of? And finally, how do these images and symbols of masculinity shape the specific behaviours of who or what it is to be a “man”?

In the video documentary *Tough Guise 2: Violence, Manhood, and American Culture*, Jackson Katz asks young adolescent men to explain what it means to be a man.<sup>441</sup> The individuals interviewed explain that a man is about not showing any of what society constructs as feminine or homosexual attributes. According to the interviewees, men are not “pussies,” “bitches,” “fags” or “emotional.” Real men are tough, independent, and powerful. Throughout Katz explains how parents and media socialize young males to practice masculine behaviours that reflect the hegemonic or patriarchal male.<sup>442</sup> This narrow definition focuses around violence and forces men to create, what Katz describes as a “tough guise.” The tough guise is used predominantly by heterosexual males to gain access to the specific social privileges granted to heterosexual males for being a “real man.”<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> Buchbinder, *Studying Men*; Katz, *Tough Guise 2*.

<sup>440</sup> Frank Harris, and Shaun R. Harper, "Masculinities go to Community College: Understanding Male Identity Socialization and Gender Role Conflict," *New Directions for Community Colleges* 2008, no. 142 (2008): 25-35; Sensoy & Di’Angelo, *Is Everyone Equal*.

<sup>441</sup> Katz, *Tough Guise 2*.

<sup>442</sup> See also Kimmel, *Guyland*.

<sup>443</sup> See also Johnson, *Gender Knot* and Kimmel, *Guyland*.

The ideals of the “real man” shape how young boys seek out opportunities to express “positive” masculine behaviours.<sup>444</sup> However, not all young males are able to actively engage in hegemonic masculine behaviours. As Ann McGinley and Frank Cooper state:

Simultaneously, the differential meanings of young black and white masculinities demonstrate the contextual nature of the “boys will be boys” narrative. Because concepts such as “boys will be boys” are embedded into law, there will be unequal prosecution and treatment of boys, depending on their social class and race.<sup>445</sup>

As such, one’s racial and class status will frame a community’s perception and label behaviours as positive or negative in relation to one’s social capital. José Torres, Scott Solberg, and Aaron Carlstrom explain how dominant masculine traits are often portrayed within popular culture as positive characteristics that males should strive to be; however, once these same attributes are applied to those outside of the dominant social spaces, they are “described with negative connotations.”<sup>446</sup> Therefore, not every boy can be a boy and practice particular masculine behaviours in the same way. Cultures of fear and terror support increased surveillance, criminalization, and removal of racialized and poor males because they are predetermined to be criminal because of their history.<sup>447</sup>

An example to show this difference can be found through initiation rites found within sports teams or college fraternities. Mental, physical, and emotional hazing of individuals, specifically in sports teams, is not seen as destructive, but rather as a part of

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<sup>444</sup> Buchbinder, *Studying Men*; Michael S. Kimmel, and Matthew Mahler, "Adolescent Masculinity, Homophobia, and Violence Random School Shootings, 1982-2001," *American behavioral scientist* 46, no. 10 (2003): 1439-1458.

<sup>445</sup> Ann C. McGinley, and Frank Rudy Cooper, “Introduction: Masculinities, Multidimensionality, and Law: Why They Need One Another,” in *Masculinities and the Law: A Multidimensional Approach*, eds. Frank Cooper and Ann McGinley (New York: New York University Press, 2012): 11.

<sup>446</sup> José B. Torres, V. Scott H. Solberg, and Aaron H. Carlstrom, "The Myth of Sameness Among Latino Men and Their Machismo," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* (2002): 164.

<sup>447</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*; Barak et al., *Class Race Gender*; Cacho, *Social Death*; Garot, *Who You Claim?*; Razack, *Race and Space*; Rios, *Punished*.

team building and initiation into a group – even if violence is the centre of the initiation.<sup>448</sup> As Susan Stuart states:

Athletic hazing is not rational. It is not an initiation rite because rookies have already become members of the team. Nascent research suggests, instead, that athletic hazing is explicitly about team self-governance, primarily through physically abusive hazing designed to humiliate younger and often smaller team members and to keep them in their place. The way to do that, in the framework of the hegemonic masculinity, is to treat those younger team members as if they are not fully masculinized, but rather feminized.<sup>449</sup>

The initiation with the team is seen as a pro-social event creating relational cohesiveness.

The violence is pardoned as the team holds positive social capital in society.

The initiation rites provide the patriarchal litmus tests to prove one's maleness. If they do not measure up then they are not fully accepted into the group. They may be asked to leave, or depending on their relationship "hang" out with the group and participate with some group activities. However, the inner sanctum of the group is off limits until the individual can prove their worth.

Male rites of passage provide young males with the opportunity to strengthen the association of masculinity to violence. The new recruits will one day have the opportunity to hold the power of valuing another's masculine worth, thus creating a cycle where males are consistently under evaluation from other males to maintain their masculine status.<sup>450</sup> Violence becomes normalized and supported within many male

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<sup>448</sup> Sandra L. Kirby, and Glen Wintrup, "Running the Gauntlet: An Examination of Initiation/Hazing and Sexual Abuse in Sport," *Journal of sexual aggression* 8, no. 2 (2002): 49-68; Susan P. Stuart, "Warriors, Machismo, and Jockstraps: Sexually Exploitative Athletic Hazing and Title IX in the Public School Locker Room," *W. New Eng. L. Rev.* 35 (2013): 377-441. The impacts of hazing in sports have created a large pushback from society. The publicized hazing of individuals within sports teams though has resulted in the criminalization of senior team members.

<sup>449</sup> Stuart, *Warriors and Machismo*: 377.

<sup>450</sup> Eric Anderson, Mark McCormack, and Harry Lee, "Male Team Sport Hazing Initiations in a Culture of Decreasing Homophobia," *Journal of adolescent research* 27, no. 4 (2012): 427-448; Johnson, *Gender Knot*; Jay Johnson, "Through the Liminal: A Comparative Analysis of Communitas and Rites of Passage in Sport Hazing and Initiations," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 36 no. 3(2013): 199-227.

group structures as a way to “pass the test” and become a legitimate member of the group. Social activities such as hazing, within sports teams and fraternities, have historically been determined as “healthy” or “positive” rites of passage as they are seen to build character and camaraderie.<sup>451</sup> The privilege associated with these “pro-social” groups supports hegemonic masculinity and socializes males to exert violence as a way to gain power, respect, and domination within multiple fields.<sup>452</sup> Again, because sports teams are viewed as pro-social, the violence is rationalized as a natural progression of becoming a “man”. If such processes are constructed outside of “pro-social” spaces they are viewed negatively by the larger social community, often linked to deviance, crime, or street gangs.

So why is it that when youth of color and/or are poor perform in ways that support hegemonic masculinity, their behaviour is often considered criminal in nature? How has this influenced some Indigenous youth to see crime as rites of passage to manhood? What has led to these constructions of masculinity to privilege specific youth?<sup>453</sup> To answer these questions a focus on the intersections of race and class must be undertaken. By moving to what Connell describes as the “regional level”, I show how one’s racial and class status impedes on their ability to practice particular masculine performances. The construction of the *deviant*, allows society to support exclusionary practices to control populations based on their social identity. Through the deviance label, described by Lisa

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<sup>451</sup> Johnson, *Gender Knot*; Kimmell, *Guyland*; Brett G. Stoudt, ““You’re Either In or You’re Out” School Violence, Peer Discipline, and the (Re) Production of Hegemonic Masculinity,” *Men and masculinities* 8, no. 3 (2006): 273-287.

<sup>452</sup> Stuart, *Warriors and Machismo*.

<sup>453</sup> The difficulty here is that “positive” is not really that positive, as to prove one’s position of masculinity, they must also exert power over a social group. This primarily puts people of colour, women, those in poverty, or those from the LGBT community at greater risk to be assaulted. This is an area of research that needs to be explored in greater detail to fully understand the consequences and connections of masculinities to power and control through patriarchal notions of oppression.

Cacho's as de facto status crimes, social institutions such as schools and criminal justice agencies can impinge on an individual's rights, as they are socially determined to be guilty of a criminal act.

#### 4.2.2 Regional Masculinities - Intersecting Race and Class into Masculine Performances

One's social capital impacts how society views one's masculine performance as positive or deviant.<sup>454</sup> In North America, children as young as 4 and 5 have been socialized through popular culture, family, media, and school that "white is good" and "black is bad."<sup>455</sup> The constructions of good/white and bad/black play themselves out in multiple social fields where individuals' behaviours are judged in relation to their racial and class status.<sup>456</sup> For example, teachers and school administration treat youth differently based on their race and class<sup>457</sup>, where Zero tolerance policies for fighting and other aggressive behaviours are enacted and enforced primarily on those who are seen to not belong within school settings (particularly those who are poor and racial minorities, i.e. Indigenous, black and Hispanic). Those who are seen to belong (white and middle class) are rarely if ever punished, or their punishments are less severe.<sup>458</sup>

Public media maintains a heightened fear of the "other" by constructing marginalized populations as overtly violent, particularly through their descriptions of

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<sup>454</sup> Buchbinder, *Studying Men*; Stoudt, *In or Out*.

<sup>455</sup> *A Girl Like Me*, directed by Kiri Davis (Brooklyn, NY: Reel Works Teen Filmmaking, 2005); Sensoy and Di'Angelo, 2012.

<sup>456</sup> Alexander, *Jim Crow*; Cacho, *Social Death*; Rios, *Punished*; Sensoy and Di'Angelo, *Everyone Equal*.

<sup>457</sup> Garot, *Who You Claim*; David Gillborn, *Conspiracy? Racism and Education: Understanding Race Inequality in Education* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008); Stoudt, *In or Out*; Van Ingen and Halas, *Claiming Space*; Sabina Vaught, and Angelina Castagno, "'I Don't Think I'm Racist': Critical Race Theory, Teacher Attitudes, and Structural Racism," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 11, no. 2 (2008): 95-113.

<sup>458</sup> Mathew Fletcher, *American Indian Education: Counternarratives in Racism, Struggle, and the Law* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008); John M. Wallace Jr., Sara Goodkind, Cynthia M. Wallace, and Jerald G. Bachman, "Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Differences in School Discipline Among US High School Students: 1991-2005," *The Negro Educational Review* 59, no. 1-2 (2008): 47-62.



crimes that involve drugs, robberies, or street gangs.<sup>459</sup> Media sensationalism re-cycles dominate ideologies of poor racialized youth as violent, deviant, and must be controlled.<sup>460</sup> For example, communities with large ethnic minority populations with entrenched systemic poverty are constructed as places of lawlessness with high levels of violence.<sup>461</sup> To protect the broader community, and the ethnic poor from their selves, laws are created and enforced to control the movement within and outside the targeted community.<sup>462</sup> This results in poor marginalized populations having increased contact with criminal justice officials and the likelihood that they will be caught breaking a law.<sup>463</sup> Public media reportage, criminal justice systems, and social ideologies of deviance help to support a caste system, where poor and ethnically marginalized populations can easily be removed from their communities and placed within correctional facilities to be controlled and monitored.<sup>464</sup> It is this cycle that reinforces Lombrosian constructs of crime and deviance.<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> Ken Dowler, Thomas Fleming, and Stephen L. Muzzatti, "Constructing Crime: Media, Crime, and Popular Culture," *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice/La Revue Canadienne de criminologie et de justice pénale* 48, no. 6 (2006): 837-850; Katz, *Tough Guise 2*.

<sup>460</sup> Cacho, *Social Death*; Katz, *Tough Guise 2*.

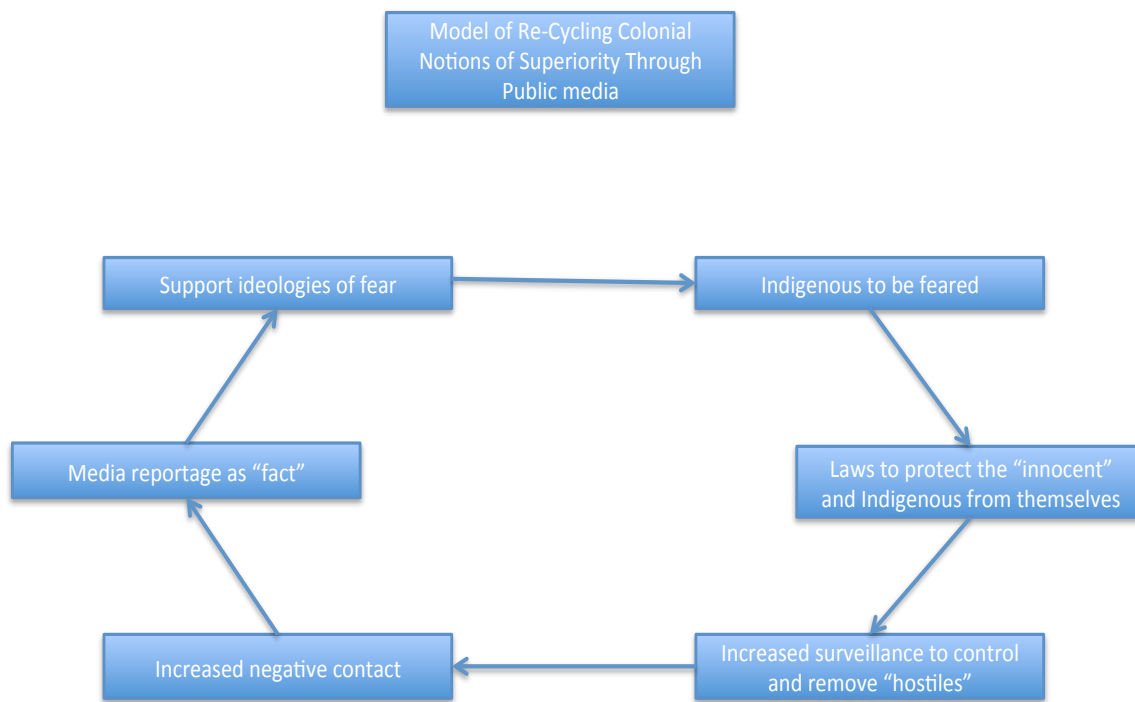
<sup>461</sup> Barak et al., *Class Race Gender*; Messerschmidt, *Flesh and Blood*.

<sup>462</sup> Alexander, *Jim Crow*; Cacho, *Social Death*; Comack, *Racialized Policing*; Katz, *Tough Guise 2*.

<sup>463</sup> OCI, 2013-14.

<sup>464</sup> Alexander, *Jim Crow*; Cacho, *Social Death*; Comack, *Racialized Policing*; L  ic Waquant, "The New "Peculiar Institution": On the Prison as Surrogate Ghetto," in *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, eds. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004): 318-323.

<sup>465</sup> Messerschmidt, *Flesh and Blood*.



*Figure 4.1 Model of Recycling Colonial Notions of Superiority Through Public Media*

A consequence of the removal and control of marginalized peoples is that the social institutions created to rehabilitate or control, become a rite of passage for some marginalized males and communities. For example, Emma Ogilvie and Allan Van Zyl (2001) conducted a study that examined the role of incarceration and its connection as a rite of passage to manhood for Aborigine males living in Northern Australia.<sup>466</sup> Ogilvie and Van Zyl found that Indigenous masculinity had become connected to the criminal justice system, as the system replaced traditional rites of passage for some young males. Although traditional Indigenous values were still a part of the community and were adhered to by some men in the community, incarceration and criminal justice institutions were seen to play a larger and more valuable role in shaping one's rite of passage to

<sup>466</sup> Ogilvie and Van Zyl, *Rites of Passage*.

manhood.<sup>467</sup> Therefore, incarceration and the institution where one was incarcerated increased one's social capital with other males in the community.<sup>468</sup>

Connections from Ogilvie and Van Zyl's study can be made with Indigenous males in Canada. In Canada, institutionalization affects a disproportionate number of young Indigenous males.<sup>469</sup> Canadian statistics on Indigenous men and women currently incarcerated in federal prison institutions is staggering. Just over 22.8% of all federal inmates are Indigenous while only comprising 4% of the total Canadian population.<sup>470</sup> In Saskatchewan, where the provincial Indigenous population is approximately 17%, approximately 80% of those housed in provincial justice facilities are Indigenous.<sup>471</sup> Indigenous youth are over-represented in national young offender facilities also, where 26% of youth admitted are Indigenous, while representing only 6% of the general youth population.<sup>472</sup> Institutionalization negatively affects Indigenous youth as it normalizes the process of incarceration as individuals are removed from their communities, to a point where the institutions are seen as a place to reunite with family and peers. One participant, Dwayne (29) explained how he, his three brothers, and father were all incarcerated together in the same institution.

*So there's five of us, but they wouldn't let me be in the same room as them (brothers) 'cause I was in high security. We had to talk through a glass but we still laughed and had fun. But those guards were just shaking their heads 'cause you know, they go, these your sons? Yeah, they're all my boys. We laughed. My dad was there and he was even my roommate.*

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<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>468</sup> White, *Fluid Identities*.

<sup>469</sup> Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. *Youth Correctional Statistics in Canada, 2010/2011*, by Christopher Munch, ISSN 1209-6393 (Ottawa, ON: Component of Statistics Canada, 2012):

<sup>470</sup> OCI, *2013-14*.

<sup>471</sup> OCI, *Spirit Matters*.

<sup>472</sup> Munch, *Youth Correctional Statistics*: 7.

With high rates of incarceration large numbers of Indigenous youth are coming to view incarceration as something that they will be a part of at some point in their lives.<sup>473</sup>

A second important point of institutionalization is connected to knowledge mobilization and socialization of specific street codes within institutions. As Indigenous males are cycled through correctional institutions, they learn to survive by adapting to the social codes found in the justice system.

Entering prison means having to join a compulsory social community that is commonly hierarchical and likely to be underpinned by core institutional and group values linked to gender, class, ethnicity, and age... In the male prison context, this may mean actively reconfiguring one's public persona and learning to integrate socially with what can be perceived as an excessively performance-orientated masculine culture.<sup>474</sup>

To survive in the institutions, many Indigenous males will join or 'hook up' with family members who are connected with a particular gang.<sup>475</sup> Kinship relationships strengthen prison gang and street gang connections as street gangs use the prison system as a way to advance their reputation on the street; and prison gangs use street gangs to increase economical capital while incarcerated.<sup>476</sup>

#### 4.2.3 Local Masculinities - Performing Hyper-masculinities on the Streets

Gender identity is as much of a social construct as it is a personal narrative on how we act or wish to be perceived within our fields. James Messerschmidt contends that we are all actively participating or resisting some socially constructed notions of gender,

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<sup>473</sup> See Jessica Ball, "Fathering in the Shadows: Indigenous Fathers and Canada's Colonial Legacies," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 624, no. 1 (2009): 29-48.

<sup>474</sup> Nick de Viggiani, "Trying to be Something You Are Not: Masculine Performance within a Prison Setting," *Men and Masculinities* 15 (2012): 272.

<sup>475</sup> Nafekh, *Gang Affiliation: OCI Spirit Matters*; OCI 2013-14.

<sup>476</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*

and that, depending on our social identity, we will act in accordance to social norms.<sup>477</sup>

Messerschmidt's observations reflect Bourdieu's concept of habitus, where an agent's field shapes their choices, but only if those choices are seen as legitimate in the situation at hand, and validated through their own (un)consciousness.<sup>478</sup>

Research conducted on Indigenous street gangs in Winnipeg by Deane, Bracken, and Morrisette,<sup>479</sup> as well as Comack, Deane, Morrisette, and Silver,<sup>480</sup> and Buddle<sup>481</sup> refer to a 'code of ethics' that shaped Indigenous street gang development. The 'code' originally focused on the protection of the community from outsiders and was seen as a way to handle issues that arose between different street gangs. Over time, individuals noted that the code has shifted from protection of the community to making money through the sales of illegal narcotics.<sup>482</sup> This shift from protection to capitalistic ventures is also found in American street gang research with older street gang members. "Original gangsters" (OGs) talk about the shift of gang ethics, as the up and coming members do not care for anything but making money.<sup>483</sup>

With the increase in profits through the sale of illegal narcotics, violence escalates with the use of "street justice" to protect the street gang's profitability.<sup>484</sup> Because street gangs are involved in illegal activities they have few options to protect their economic ventures other than heightened levels of violence. With their work on street criminals and

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<sup>477</sup> Messerschmidt, *Flesh and Blood*.

<sup>478</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*.

<sup>479</sup> Deane et al., *Desistance*.

<sup>480</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*.

<sup>481</sup> Buddle, *Narconomy; Street Sociality*.

<sup>482</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*.

<sup>483</sup> Pearlman and Simpson, *Inside the Crips*; Sudhir Venkatesh, *Gang Leader for a Day: A Rogue Sociologist Takes to the Streets* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2008); Vigil, *Rainbow of Gangs*.

<sup>484</sup> See Venkatesh, *Gang Leader*.

street gang members in St. Louis, Missouri Bruce Jacobs and Richard Wright found that the:

Street criminals' desires for safety and justice are of little or no concern to most police officials anyway...The need for them to retaliate is substantial because street criminals are especially vulnerable to victimization...The only realistic mechanism available to them for responding to such attacks and deterring future ones is exacting their own justice.<sup>485</sup>

Due to their status as criminals, and that the reasons for the violence is often around the control of illegal economies, violence inflicted by street gang members is legitimated. To inflict particular brands of street justice (home invasions, stabbings, beatings, etc.), street gang members use a “mask” to hide their emotions and validate their activities.<sup>486</sup> The construction of the “mask” and the connection to a macro identity is similar to that of military personnel validating their actions for the greater good.<sup>487</sup> Again, the difference is on how the social group is portrayed within society for their actions to be legitimated as positive or negative.

In his study of youth and street gangs in a large American city, Robert Garot examined how youth utilized their connections and reputations within street gangs to gain power and respect within different fields.<sup>488</sup> Garot describes that due to their limited social capital, the youth had to protect their reputation or “face” at all costs:

The most powerful challenge another can make is to one's *face* – how one sees oneself in relation to community. Especially if one's identity is vulnerable, one may be prone to defend it physically. In an ecology where everyone's identity is vulnerable because of the marginalization and alienation...not fighting to defend identity may pose a great risk. ... Indeed if we feel we have been “deprived of our rightful place in the world,” it is hard for most of us not to consider fighting to regain it.<sup>489</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> Jacobs and Wright, *Street Justice*: 4.

<sup>486</sup> Garot, *Who You Claim*.

<sup>487</sup> Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, *Violence*.

<sup>488</sup> Garot, *Who You Claim*.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid*: 119.

One's "face", or the "tough guise" is the symbolic image of maleness within local street environments.<sup>490</sup> This "face"— what I term as a "mask"— is attributed to power and respect as it serves to intimidate people because "respect is all about toughness, and toughness flows from the ability to inspire fear."<sup>491</sup> Therefore, those who were not afraid to use violence to protect their "face" increased their social, cultural, and economic capitals, which helped to build their reputation. It is this reputation that is the embodiment of masculinity for male street gang members.

For some Indigenous males, the street gang supports the use of violent hyper-masculine performances to gain power and respect. The performance is one that is embedded in local street codes, where particular violent acts are encouraged, while others are looked down upon. Local street codes dictate the levels of acceptable violence and the manners in which retaliation or retribution can be administered through street justice. To enact violence onto others in the community (where they may have relationships and relatives within the community), one must create a "mask" that they can wear to validate the violence and protect them from their emotional connections. This "mask" created by Indigenous street gang members is similar to the *machismo* performance observed within Latino street masculinity and street gang identity.<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> In chapter 6 an examination of the Elijah Anderson's codes of the street will be undertaken to help draw out how these codes influence the ways in which masculine behaviours are performed in order to maintain one's integrity to their community.

<sup>491</sup> Jacobs and Wright, *Street Justice*: 123. See also Bourgois, *Search of Respect*; Cureton, *Something Wicked*; Garot, *Who You Claim*; Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behaviour* (New York, NY: Patheon Books, 1967).

<sup>492</sup> James Diego Vigil "Group Processes and Street Identity: Adolescent Chicano Gang Members," *Ethos* 16, no. 4 (1988): 421-445; *Rainbow of Gangs*.

James Diego Vigil, a street gangs researcher in the United States, explains how men of colour (particularly Latino men) in low socio-economic neighbourhoods tend to enact violent hyper-masculinity or machoism to prove their self-worth:

When an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it. Whether his acquisition of the role was primarily motivated by a desire to perform the given task or by a desire to maintain the corresponding front, the actor will find that he must do both.<sup>493</sup>

However, to maintain this privileged status in the community, one must increase their behaviours to the point that the community views them as crazy or *loco*:

A person who is *loco* demonstrates this state of mind by alternately displaying fearlessness, toughness, daring, and other unpredictable forms of destructive behavior, such as getting “*loco*” on drugs and alcohol or excelling in gang-banging...[however] only a few can play *loco* without the use of liquor and drugs, and a strong need to prove oneself.<sup>494</sup>

The idea of *loco* or bravado should not be conveyed as an individual who is uncontrollable. Rather, one’s bravado helps to create a “legendary status” where their reputation is reinforced through specific actions, primarily centred on violence. Street gangs focus their recruitment to individuals who are able to perform the dominant street masculinity because those who possess it strengthens the street gangs reputation of having individuals who are willing to do what it takes for the street gang.

#### 4.3 Conclusion

Connell and Messerschmidt’s concept of hegemonic masculinity assists in the analysis of why and how marginalized males use masculinity as a way to gain power and respect. However, hegemonic masculinity needs to be framed through Bourdieu’s concept of habitus to help understand the socio-political histories that support masculinity

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<sup>493</sup> Vigil, *Group Processes*: 437.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid*: 438-9.



at global, regional, and local levels. By acknowledging the importance of socio-political histories in shaping one's actions and thoughts, habitus assists our understanding of how socialization and one's personal agency to survive work simultaneously to shape masculinity. As such, habitus has the:

... ability to capture the mundane, habitual nature of the everyday. It is internalized, subjectifying and durable in the sense that after its successful internalization the individual does not necessarily need the constant presence of others to enforce the rules that govern emotional, expressive and practical life. *Habitus* captures and reproduces a highly nuanced 'feel for the game' as the actor struggles through specific social and occupational fields, equipping him with a complex repertoire of responses to everyday life as it unfolds around him.<sup>495</sup>

Therefore, one's experiences, their relation knowledge of and willingness to adhere to social "codes", and their sense of personal agency will impact all possible choices within the local street field.

Caution must be used when analyzing street gangs through the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Without a critical analysis, hegemonic masculinity can help to support at-risk paradigms, which further entrenches stereotypical ideologies of race, gender, and class. At-risk paradigms are used by governments, criminal justice officials, and community-based agencies to create broad-based initiatives targeting youth as potential gang members due to their social identities.<sup>496</sup> Such initiatives do little to address the root causes of street gangs, and rather problematize the issue of Indigenous street gangs by positioning all Indigenous youth as potential street gang members, simply because they are Indigenous, male, poor, and live in a gang labeled neighbourhood.<sup>497</sup>

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<sup>495</sup> Simon Winlow, and Steve Hall, "Retaliate First: Memory, Humiliation and Male Violence," *Crime, Media, Culture* 5, no. 3 (2009): 285-304.

<sup>496</sup> White, *Fluid Identities*.

<sup>497</sup> See Cacho, *Social Death*; Haggard, *World of Gangs*; Hallsworth, *The Gang* for discussions about other marginalized youth and the impacts of at-risk labeling.

Even if one lives in a community where street gangs are seen as entrenched many individuals have support,<sup>498</sup> are connected to something outside of the street gang,<sup>499</sup> or they do not possess the necessary skills to be recruited; and therefore, will not become involved in a street gang.<sup>500</sup> It is at this point that the concept of habitus helps to move beyond social environmental factors of understanding gang involvement to include choice and personal agency.<sup>501</sup> Rather than relying on the at-risk paradigm, habitus creates a deeper understanding of the ways in which Indigenous males are socialized and actively engage in a violent hyper-masculinity to gain respect and power by increasing their social and economic capitals within different fields. As such, habitus can explain how even those Indigenous youth who are determined to be “at-risk” may not join because of their personal agency or choice.

To understand the process of how and why some Indigenous males become involved with street gangs, an examination of their early histories and where they learned what it takes to be a “man” is necessary. As Vigil states:

Toughness is also the gang behavior pattern most accessible for those youths who have had particularly distressing early childhoods. It is much easier for them to value and demonstrate this gang feature; as *locos* (crazies) and leaders, it is an avenue for personal expression that uplifts the ego, enabling them to appear successful in at least one arena. Striking fear into the hearts of others is a defensive action much like beating someone to the punch...Acting tough affords them pride, with the assurance of being backed by the gang if trouble arises.<sup>502</sup>

By examining the early social spaces that the men in the study found themselves in; how they were treated within these spaces; how they felt they “fit” within these spaces; and,

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<sup>498</sup> Garot, *Who You Claim*; Rios, *Punished*.

<sup>499</sup> Garot, *Who You Claim*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Spergel, *Gang Problem*; Vigil and Yun, *Multiple Marginalities*.

<sup>500</sup> Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Hallsworth, *The Gang*.

<sup>501</sup> Rios, *Punished*.

<sup>502</sup> Vigil, *Group Processes*: 427.

who they modeled their constructions of maleness within these spaces can help to construct what the gang can offer the men in terms of belonging and supporting their notions of masculinity.

By studying how Indigenous ex-gang members constructed their notions of masculinity, we can begin to see how individuals become invested in a *false consciousness*<sup>503</sup> or what I have come to understand as a “mask”. It is the “mask” that allows Indigenous street gang members the ability to participate in heightened levels of violence against others and themselves. Similar to public uniforms that service providers must wear (police, fire, paramedics, doctors, etc.), the mask is the uniform that separates Indigenous street gang members from other members of the community. As will be seen in the forthcoming chapters the problem with this “mask” is that it becomes a “double bind,”<sup>504</sup> where it creates a false consciousness of protection through violence. Thus, one’s level of violence increases as they protect their social “mask”, which results in them putting themselves in risky situations to maintain their power status.

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<sup>503</sup> Hooks, *We Real Cool*.

<sup>504</sup> Spivak, *Era of Globalization*.

## Chapter 5 – Creating a Space of Relational Accountability Within Photovoice Research

### Methods

*I got lost in the wild, the wild people took me in and helped me, made me their king, and I lived to tell civilization about it.* Victor Rios, *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*, 2011<sup>505</sup>

### 5.0 – Introduction

This chapter begins with words from Victor Rios who challenges those gangs researchers who continue to maintain the “saviour trope”<sup>506</sup>, where outsiders— in particular “rogue sociologists”<sup>507</sup>— enter into a mysterious land or environment and through their own strong will and determination, emerge to tell the story of the “other”, and become the speaker of the people. As Rios explains: “this self-aggrandizing narrative, perpetuate[s] the flawed policies and programs and public understanding[s] of the urban poor as creatures in need of pity and external salvation.”<sup>508</sup> To take up Rios’ challenge, I have attempted not to recreate research where the voices of Indigenous ex-gang members will be used to perpetuate the “othering” of poor Indigenous men within Canadian urban centres or position myself as the owner of their narrative for others to hear.

Western colonial research has historically positioned Indigenous peoples under a microscope to be deconstructed, defined, and positioned as the “Other”.<sup>509</sup> I approached

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<sup>505</sup> Rios, *Punished*: 14.

<sup>506</sup> In keeping with traditional research on Indigenous peoples I too use the “saviour trope” as a way to connect to the history of colonialism and the need to “save” Indigenous peoples from themselves. See Vine Deloria Jr. *Custer Died For Your Sins* for a satirical look at anthropological research and its relationship to Indigenous communities.

<sup>507</sup> Rios describes this as the “jungle-book trope”. Rios specifically challenges Sudir Venkatesh’s work in *Gang leader for a day: A rogue sociologist takes to the streets* (2008). Venkatesh’s work focuses on his entering the hostile Chicago housing projects in the 1990’s where he befriended an African American gang member, who let him run a specific street gang for a day.

<sup>508</sup> Rios, *Punished*: 14.

<sup>509</sup> See Kathleen E. Absolon, *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know* (Winnipeg, MB: Fernwood Publishing, 2011); Carolyn, Brooks, Jennifer Poudrier, and Roanne Thomas-MacLean, “Creating Collaborative Visions with Aboriginal Women: A Photovoice Project,” *Doing Cross-Cultural Research*, Springer Netherlands (2008): 193-211; Margaret Elizabeth Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*:

the research process in a way that I myself would not become the expert of the men's own lived experiences. Engaging in reflexive thought and being consciously aware of my privileged social identities (white-skin, male, able bodied, middle class) has helped to limit my potential "exoticizing the other."<sup>510</sup> For example, although I am Métis, my white skin allows me to move freely within Canadian social environments, as I am not a 'visible Indian.' Whiteness gives me unearned social privileges that visible Indigenous peoples (even within my own family) do not receive.<sup>511</sup> Through critical reflection of the social spaces and privileges that I hold, I framed the research around concepts of ethical relational accountability as a way to break down barriers created through colonization and social oppression.

This chapter is set up to explain the research process of relational accountability and how it was used to frame the study. Specific attention is paid to the importance and potential of relationality within research methodologies. Because I am not an ex-gang member, I needed to create relationships with community partners to help me recruit and support the study overall. Throughout my analysis, I explain how relational accountability is created when the researcher, community partner, and research participants build relationships framed by respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility (4Rs).<sup>512</sup> It is through this process that fluidity can be created so that research methods can be modified to fit the social conditions of the local field.<sup>513</sup> The

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*Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*.

<sup>510</sup> Said, *Orientalism*.

<sup>511</sup> For an example of a list of unearned privileges given to those through whiteness see McIntosh, *Whiteness*.

<sup>512</sup> Kirkness and Barnhardt, *The Four Rs*.

<sup>513</sup> See Heather Castleden, Michelle Garvin, and Huu-ay-aht First Nation (2008) for an example of how they modified their photovoice project to fit with the concerns of the Huu-ay-aht First Nation community.

modifications made in this study aided to enrich the data, as the men created strong connections to the research process, particularly through photovoice methods.

To show how relational accountability was fostered, I will first discuss where the idea for the project came from and STR8 UP, my community partner, whom I worked with over the course of the study. I follow this with a description of the research framework and how I incorporated Verna Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt's 4R framework.<sup>514</sup> Relationality becomes the focal point that binds the 4R's together and moves research forward in an ethical way.<sup>515</sup> Along with analyzing the 4Rs in terms of relational accountability other topics discussed include: ethical responsibility, relevant research partnerships, transformational knowledge mobilization, agency, and reflexivity.

## 5.1 – Getting Started – Concepts and Participants

The idea for this research began in 2007 when I was working on my Master's of Education thesis.<sup>516</sup> While conducting research for that project, I came across a book by Boogie, entitled *It's All Good*.<sup>517</sup> Within this text, Boogie entered some of New York's most notorious neighbourhoods—Bushwick, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and Queensbridge—at the turn of the 21st Century to photograph and interview those individuals who were living in the margins. As I flipped through the pages I was captivated by the power the photographs had in enriching the voices of the people. Using black and white photography, Boogie constructed the book to allow the narratives and photographs to

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<sup>514</sup> Kirkness and Barnhardt, *The Four Rs*.

<sup>515</sup> Absolon, *Kaandossiwin*.

<sup>516</sup> Henry, *Not Just Another Thug*.

<sup>517</sup> Boogie was born in Belgrade, Serbia, and immigrated to New York in 1998. He is a photographer who works out of Brooklyn, New York. His work has been shown around the world. His five monographs have focused primarily on peoples and places that have high rates of social unrest. Boogie. *It's All Good*, (Brooklyn, NY: Powerhouse Books, 2006).

speak together. Rather than a collage of photographs or small photographs with text inserted next, Boogie used full-page photographs to bring the reader visually into his work. The technique draws the reader to focus their attention to the intimate details that are happening all at once within the photograph. As I continued to thumb through the photographs and narratives, I began to wonder if such a project could be replicated to create a deeper understanding of Indigenous male street gang members, their lives, and how they have come to construct and perform their notions of masculinity within street fields.

To find participants and support for the research, I used my relationship with STR8 UP located in Saskatoon, SK. STR8 UP is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization that supports individuals as they try to remove themselves from gangs and the street lifestyle. STR8 UP's mission statement states:

STR8 UP assists young men and women to master their own destiny in liberating themselves from gangs and criminal street lifestyles. STR8 UP builds healthy families and endeavors to provide individuals and their families with the skills and resources they need to become responsible citizens which will lead to a positive and gang free lifestyle.<sup>518</sup>

STR8 UP strives to support its members through outreach and networking STR8 UP members with other community organizations. STR8 UP has built strong relationships within the core neighbourhoods of Saskatoon and other smaller First Nations communities in Saskatchewan through their outreach work and presentations to educate people about the harsh realities of the street gang lifestyle.

The program was founded in 1998 when a few Indigenous males in the Saskatoon Correctional Centre (SCC) approached Father André Poilièvre, at the time the centre's chaplain, for advice on how to get out of their gangs. At the time, there were no programs

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<sup>518</sup> STR8 UP. *STR8 UP and Gangs: Untold Stories*, (Saskatoon, SK: Hear My Heart Books, 2010).

in Saskatoon that provided interventions for individuals who were trying to exit their street gang. As Father André stated during our conversations about the history of STR8 UP:

*I remember two guys came up to me and—I don't know if they came to me or, well, I knew they were active gang members. We had talked and they had indicated that they wanted out, and I don't remember the occasion, the time, the details, the circumstances, except that they were struggling with it and I think the reason was that they were forced to get out... And so this other guy came up to me and says, "If he leaves, I leave, but we don't know what to do. We don't know anybody that's left, we don't know what happens." So that's where it started. I just said, okay, let's work at it.*

Although STR8 UP is located in Saskatoon, it can be considered a cross-provincial organization as it has supported approximately 120 individuals across the Prairie Provinces to exit street gangs.<sup>519</sup>

To avoid being seen as adversaries to street gangs (similar to police), STR8 UP does not actively pursue individuals to join. Rather, those who are looking to turn their lives around must make the active choice to join STR8 UP. Once a part of the group, STR8 UP asks all of its members to adhere to five conditions: dropping their colours; dealing with their addictions; being honest; being humble; and giving four years to the program.<sup>520</sup> Along with these conditions, STR8 UP has its members strive for three goals: become loving parents; be a faithful partner; and be responsible citizens.<sup>521</sup> Throughout the process, STR8 UP supports individuals by helping to construct and repair relationships between members, their families, and the larger community by providing advocacy work and modeling pathways of positive change.

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<sup>519</sup> Personal Communication with Father André Poilièvre, September 2013.

<sup>520</sup> STR8 UP, *Untold Stories*.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*



The number four is an important aspect within STR8 UP programming. STR8 UP asks individuals to commit four years to the program as they try to encourage members to understand that there is no quick or easy way to heal from their “personal and/or intergenerational trauma wounds”.<sup>522</sup> The number four is also important as the program is constructed around an Indigenous Medicine Wheel framework. The Medicine Wheel is an important symbol for Indigenous peoples, as it represents the four aspects of self—mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual.<sup>523</sup> As Marlene Brant Castellano explains: “The [M]edicine [W]heel teaches us to seek ways of incorporating the gifts of the other quadrants. It encourages us to bring more balance to our own lives or and to form relationships and work in teams.”<sup>524</sup> The Medicine Wheel is used to help STR8 UP members frame their journey of recovery and healing by balancing the four aspects of self.

STR8 UP is built from the foundation that individuals need space to talk about their experiences in order to heal. To support members and build capacity, STR8 UP offers community presentations, where STR8 UP members talk to the broader community about the different issues that they have faced. Presentations give new members the opportunity to hear the STR8 UP model (as it is presented to help those in attendance understand the goals of the program) and connect with other members who share their stories. In his interview, Dave (27) explains how the presentations resonated with him when he first joined:

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<sup>522</sup> Laurence Kirmayer, Cori Simpson, and Margaret Cargo, "Healing Traditions: Culture, Community and Mental Health Promotion with Canadian Aboriginal Peoples," *Australasian Psychiatry* 11, No.1 (2003): 15-23.

<sup>523</sup> Malcolm King, Alexandra Smith, and Michael Gracey, "Indigenous Health Part 2: The Underlying Causes of the Health Gap," *The Lancet* 374, no. 9683 (2009): 76-85.

<sup>524</sup> Marlene Brant Castellano, "Updating Aboriginal Traditions of Knowledge," in *Indigenous Knowledges in Global Contexts: Multiple Readings of our World*, eds. George Sefa Dei et al. (2000): 30.

*I went for coffee with him and he was like, do you want to come and see what we do and then the next day, 'cause I got nothing better to do. So, I went to it and he did his little spiel on STR8 UP, did his whole demonstration and wrote everything out on the white board for me and I was like, holy shit! This guy understands—for the first time, somebody actually f\*\*\*\*\*' made sense of everything so. I thought of it, okay, well, I actually spoke at that one 'cause I, I seen all those kids sitting there; I never, never, ever thought that I'd be talking to kids? I was seeing all those kids there... see I could just see it, you could just see it in kids' eyes, man. You can just see the hopelessness sometimes. But in any case, that's the start of my STR8 UP. For the next year and a half, I didn't miss one presentation, every presentation. I didn't care if I have to walk to it. I was getting there. And with the support of this thing, I am where I am today.*

Through the presentation members are able to build connections with other members and the broader community. This is important because some members of STR8 UP were part of rival street gangs. By building relationships along common histories, the presentations help to buffer past hostilities and offer members a chance to heal and regain balance in their life.

Following the mentorship of STR8 UP, relationships became the focal point for this study. Relationships were important as those who agreed to be a part of this project were at different stages of their healing journey. Some of the men were living healthy, stable lives; while others had just exited correctional institutions and were dealing with issues related to addictions, mental health, poverty, housing, and street violence. Because of their often turbulent and unstable social realities, it was important to have a strong relationship with STR8 UP, as it helped to frame research relationships and build trust with the members.

## 5.2 – Ethical Photography – Colonial representations through photographs

The capturing of Indigenous peoples through photographs in their “natural state” has a long history in North America and Canada. Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

photographers such as Edward Curtis set out to photograph Indigenous peoples with the intention to photograph the “features of the Indian life and environment-types of the young and the old, with their habitations, industries, ceremonies, games, and everyday customs.”<sup>525</sup> Daniel Francis describes how the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) used photographs of Indigenous peoples to create a specific experience of the “West” in order to promote tourism.<sup>526</sup> The CPR paid photographers to capture Indigenous peoples going about daily routines to sell to the tourists. However, the photographs that were most sought after were those that depicted Indigenous peoples in traditional clothing, or partaking in what Euro-Canadians understood as traditional activities.<sup>527</sup> Photographs were often staged where Indigenous peoples were told to wear or were given traditional regalia.<sup>528</sup> The removal of anything European (i.e. clothes and tools) was needed to maintain the nostalgic colonial ideology of a people who could not change or adapt to European culture.<sup>529</sup> Through the staging of photographs, the CPR and photographers reinforce Emma LaRocque’s civ/sav dichotomy, where the staged photographs helped to confirm colonial nostalgia of progression and civility.<sup>530</sup> As a result of this history, photo-based research with Indigenous peoples must tread carefully so that it does not marginalize Indigenous peoples further through photographs.<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>525</sup> Patricia Vervoort, "Edward S. Curtis's "Representations": Then and Now." *American Review of Canadian Studies* 34, no. 3 (2004): 463-484.

<sup>526</sup> Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992).

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>528</sup> Francis, *Imaginary Indian*; Vervoort, *Representations*.

<sup>529</sup> Francis, *Imaginary Indian*.

<sup>530</sup> LaRocque, *Other is Me*.

<sup>531</sup> Castleden et al., *Modifying Photovoice*.

The use of photographs and other visual methods as qualitative research tools are relatively new within street gangs research.<sup>532</sup> However, the use of photographs in research such as photo elicitation have been widely used by anthropologists and sociologists since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Researchers at this time used photographs as a way to elicit longer and more comprehensive interviews with individuals, where cognitive delays and language may become barriers.<sup>533</sup> However, the importance of the use of photographs was secondary to the research process and methodology when results were published. As Castleden et al. state:

Photography in academic research is not a novel approach. It has been an accepted tool in fieldwork practice since the 1920's... While visual data is increasingly recognized as an effective method for shared interpretation in participatory research (Davidson, 2002), references to photography in academic literature remain sparse.<sup>534</sup>

With a lack of academic literature on the utilization of photography within research processes, traditional qualitative and quantitative research methods continue to hold precedence specifically with street gang research.<sup>535</sup> This is troublesome because photographs have the ability to enhance the research process and provide researchers with a visual pathway to support the perceived realities of those involved, or who have been involved, with street gangs.

However, caution is needed when working with vulnerable research participants, as visual representations can be double-edged as images can inadvertently reproduce

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<sup>532</sup> Louis Kontos, David C. Brotherton, and Luis Barrios, *Gangs and Society* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005).

<sup>533</sup> Douglas Harper, "Talking About Pictures: A Case for Photo Elicitation," *Visual studies* 17, no. 1 (2002): 13-26.

<sup>534</sup> Castleden, et al., *Modifying Photovoice*: 1395.

<sup>535</sup> Although Castleden et al. state that there is a lack of academic photographic research, the discipline of visual anthropology and sociology have established themselves as "academic sub-disciplines, represented by professional organizations and taught in universities." See Sarah Pink, "Interdisciplinary agendas in visual research: re-situating visual anthropology," *Visual studies* 18, no. 2 (2003): 179-192.

commonly held stereotypes or prejudices of the community being represented.<sup>536</sup> Participants should be included in the dissemination of any photograph that they personally take. This will help limit researcher misinterpretations and personal subjectivity of the phenomenon under study. If ethical protocols and reflexivity are ignored during the research process, the photographs taken of or by marginalized participants can be used to reproduce and entrench their oppression.<sup>537</sup> For this project, due to the often-turbulent relationships with criminal justice officials and the community as a whole, care was taken to make sure that each photograph would be represented in ways that reflect what it meant to the men. To accomplish this I sat down with the men and analyzed each photograph independently to make sure that I was not misinterpreting their representation of the photograph.<sup>538</sup> Given the vulnerability and privacy of the men as ex-gang members, it was imperative that I formed strong ethical relationships with them and STR8 UP.

### 5.3 – Research Framework – Relational Accountability, Ethical Reflexivity, and the 4Rs

Historically, research and science have often been used to enforce oppressive ideologies over Indigenous peoples to control resources and capital.<sup>539</sup> For example, during the Enlightenment period in Europe, craniometry was used to support the racialization and poor treatment of non-white Western Europeans by quantifying

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<sup>536</sup> See Doria Daniels, "Exploring Ethical Issues When Using Visual Tools in Educational Research," In *Doing Cross-Cultural Research*, pp. 119-133. Springer Netherlands, 2008; Mitchell, *Visual Research*.

<sup>537</sup> Daniels, *Exploring Ethical Issues*.

<sup>538</sup> The process of how I analyzed the photographs through photovoice will be undertaken in the Chapter 6.

<sup>539</sup> Leslie Brown, and Susan Strega, eds. *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous and Anti-Oppressive Approaches* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2005); Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, eds. *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2008); Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

particular skull characteristics as greater than others.<sup>540</sup> Through “objective science” doctors would skew results where skulls that challenged the theories were disregarded to maintain the hypothesis as truth.<sup>541</sup> Thus, craniometry rationalized Western colonial ideologies of racial superiority to control Indigenous peoples and resources.

Scientific research has also been used to justify the oppression and removal of women from social spaces through biological and psychological theories of inferiority.<sup>542</sup> During the Age of Industrialization, biology supported patriarchal ideologies of women as weak and fragile.<sup>543</sup> Supported by scientific “proof” women’s social capital was normalized as less than and patriarchy continued to be ingrained within the social psyche of industrialized nations, further removing women from challenging male domination.<sup>544</sup> By removing women from the workforce and positions of authority, men were able to strengthen their control within social spaces where they could sway public opinions as they controlled the transfer of information, particularly public media. Thus, research in the name of “objective science” has helped to maintain the oppression of those who do not possess the dominant social, cultural, and economic capitals.<sup>545</sup> Because of this, social oppression is often difficult to recognize or acknowledge as it is reinforced through “objective scientific proof” which has supported socio-political policies of removal. It is in this vein that all research is political and can be used as a tool for agencies of both disruption and domination.

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<sup>540</sup> Michael Omi, and Howard Winant, "On the Theoretical Status of the Concept of Race," *Race, identity and representation in education* (1993): 3-10.

<sup>541</sup> Omi and Winant, *Concept of Race*; Sensoy & Di'Angelo, *Everyone Really Equal*.

<sup>542</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*; Connell, Raewyn, *Masculinities* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2005); Messerschmidt, *Flesh and Blood*.

<sup>543</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*.

<sup>544</sup> See Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*; Sensoy and Di'Angelo, *Everybody Really Equal*.

<sup>545</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*.

Given the often-turbulent relationship between research and Indigenous communities, Linda Smith states that:

It is written by someone who grew up within indigenous communities where stories about research and particularly about researchers (the human carriers of research) were intertwined with stories about all other forms of colonization and injustices. ... The greater danger, however, was in the creeping policies that intruded into every aspect of our lives, legitimated by research, informed more often by ideology.<sup>546</sup>

In Canada, an abundant amount of research with Indigenous peoples has and continues to be framed through Western colonial lenses.<sup>547</sup> Because colonization is imbedded within our institutions, research in the name of science is often used to support neocolonial policies.<sup>548</sup> Research in Canada by non-Indigenous researchers such as Frances Widdowson, Albert Howard<sup>549</sup>, and Tomas Flanagan<sup>550</sup> on economic and policy development and Mark Totten's work on Indigenous street gangs have been used to influence policies that negatively impact Indigenous peoples. For example, Mark Totten has attempted to create linkages between three social issues of— FASD, gangs, and sexual exploitation of Indigenous men and women.<sup>551</sup> Totten links the issues of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, sexual abuse, and street gang involvement with little evidence to support these claims; however, because these linkages are already present within the

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<sup>546</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*: 3.

<sup>547</sup> See Alfred, *Wasase*; Kovach *Indigenous Methodologies*.

<sup>548</sup> Eduardo Duran, and Bonnie Duran. *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995); Rauna Johanna Kuokkanen, *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2007); Raven Sinclair, "Aboriginal Social Work Education in Canada: Decolonizing Pedagogy for the Seventh Generation," *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 1, no. 1 (2004): 49-62.

<sup>549</sup> See Frances Widdowson, and Albert Howard, *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry: The Deception Behind Indigenous Cultural Preservation* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

<sup>550</sup> Tom Flanagan, *First Nations? Second Thoughts* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2008).

<sup>551</sup> Totten, *FASD and Gangs*.

Canadian consciousness about Indigenous peoples, they are easily accepted as truth.<sup>552</sup>

As such, news media outlets use this “research” and create stories that link tragedies of Indigenous peoples within communities to street gangs and the overall ill health (predominantly mental health, i.e. addictions, substance abuse, violence, etc.) of individuals and the community to their own poor choices.<sup>553</sup>

In my earlier master’s research one of the individuals that I interviewed asked me why I wanted to conduct research on Indigenous street gangs. He stated:

*Why do you want to do research? We know everything that we need to know about why kids are joining gangs. They are joining because they are homeless. They are joining because they are poor. They want somewhere to belong and where they feel that they are a part of something. And that’s why I hate research. You guys come in here, maybe not you as much, but people come here and they want to know about these kids. Well, these kids want to know that what you are doing is going to make a difference. And that’s what I tell researchers. Is what you are going to do going to make a difference?*

It is this call to ‘make a difference’ that has informed how I have tried to position myself as a researcher and how I conducted research for this study. Remembering his words, I would continually asked myself “How will this research make a difference in the community?” Reflecting on this process was important because it helped to remind and challenge myself to present the knowledge and experience in a collaborative way that could provide an opportunity for the men to express their own agency. It was because of this that *Brighter Days Ahead* was created with some of the men.

To explain how the research process was undertaken, the remainder of this chapter will outline the methodological framework used for this research. I will focus on

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<sup>552</sup> Henry, Robert. "Moving beyond the Simple: Addressing the “Misuse” of the FASD-Gang Link in Public Discourse." *Pimatisiwin* 11, no. 2 (2013): 241-254.

<sup>553</sup> For example, a CBC news report on the death of Tina Fontaine has linked her death to sexual exploitation within street gangs even though there has been no evidence that she was involved with street gangs, or had contact with them. See Donna Carreiro, “Women and Girls Often Exploited in Street Gangs, Says Ex-Member,” *CBC News Manitoba*, September 2, 2014.



relational accountability as the focal point of the 4Rs, and how ethical accountability becomes the structure of research relationships.

#### 5.4 –Relationality and Community-Based Indigenous Research

Relationality is an important concept within many Indigenous communities.<sup>554</sup>

Relationality is grounded within Indigenous epistemologies by positioning Indigenous peoples within a web of relations to their environment.<sup>555</sup> As Shawn Wilson describes:

It's collective, it's a group, it's a community. And I think that's the basis of relationality. That is, it's built upon the interconnections, the interrelationships, and that binds the group...but it's more than human relationships. And maybe the basis of that relationship among Indigenous people is the land. It's our relationship to the land. There's a spiritual connection to the land. So it's all of those things.<sup>556</sup>

According to Wilson, relationality is complex and is the interconnected space where individuals come to understand their capital and codes within different fields and how they all work as one.

Notions of interconnectedness are also emphasized by Brenda Macdougall's research on familial histories of Métis peoples in northwestern Saskatchewan.<sup>557</sup> She explains that, through the Cree word *wahkootowin*, Métis peoples maintained an identity and familial relationships across cultures, communities, environments, and time:

In short, this worldview, *wahkootowin*, is predicated upon a specific Aboriginal notion and definition of family as a broadly conceived sense of relatedness with all beings, human and non-human, living and dead, physical and spiritual...

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<sup>554</sup> Absolon, *Kaandossiwin*; Macdougall, *One of the Family*; Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*.

<sup>555</sup> Sandy Grande, *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); Michael, A. Hart, "Indigenous Worldviews, Knowledge, and Research: The Development of an Indigenous Research Paradigm," *Journal of Indigenous Voices in Social Work* Vol. 1 (2010): 1-16; Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*; Macdougall, *One of the Family*; Leanne Simpson, "Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing," *Aboriginal health, identity, and resources* (2000): 165-185.

<sup>556</sup> Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*: 80.

<sup>557</sup> Macdougall, *One of the Family*.

Identity, in this conceptualization, is inseparable from land, home, community, or family. They are all one and the same.<sup>558</sup>

Interconnected relationships must be carefully understood and navigated accordingly to construct ethical research space within Indigenous communities. The processes to engage communities in research differ depending on the community and the relationship with the researcher. For example, prior to conducting any research some researchers who have worked in Indigenous communities have participated in spiritual ceremonies such as a pipe ceremony or a sweat-lodge<sup>559</sup>; some spend the first part of their research speaking with the community members and creating relationships prior to conducting any research<sup>560</sup>; while others use community connections or “gatekeepers” to help navigate the research in the community.<sup>561</sup> Whatever the process, researchers must be willing to abide and respect the community’s wishes to forge ethical research relationships.

However, within urban environments adhering to this process becomes difficult at times due to the complexities of jurisdiction and identity politics caused by colonial policies.

To address the issue of jurisdiction, I met with leaders from the Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC) and the Métis Nations of Saskatchewan (MNS) to outline the project and explain how it could benefit their communities. The purpose for these meetings was to explain to the organizations that I was conducting research in their community and that it

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<sup>558</sup> *Ibid*: 3.

<sup>559</sup> Kathleen O'Reilly-Scanlon, Christine Crowe, and Angelina Weenie, "Pathways to Understanding: "Wahkohtowin" as a Research Methodology," *McGill Journal of Education/Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill* 39, no. 001 (2004).

<sup>560</sup> Heather Castleden, Vanessa Sloan Morgan, and Christopher Lamb, "'I Spent the First Year Drinking Tea': Exploring Canadian University Researchers' Perspectives on Community-Based Participatory Research Involving Indigenous Peoples," *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien* 56, no. 2 (2012): 160-179; Robert Alexander Innes, "'Wait a Second. Who Are You Anyways?': The Insider/Outsider Debate and American Indian Studies," *The American Indian Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2009): 440-461.

<sup>561</sup> Deborah LaVeaux, and Suzanne Christopher, "Contextualizing CBPR: Key principles of CBPR meet the Indigenous research context," *Pimatisiwin* 7, no. 1 (2009): 1-16.

was being done with Indigenous participants who are under their political jurisdiction. I also explained how findings could be presented to the organizations if they wished and that any knowledge translation pieces would be provided to them for their reference.<sup>562</sup> After the meetings, the organizations each gave written approval that they had been consulted about the project and that they supported the project and its objectives (See Appendix A, B, and C).

Due to the precarious conditions of the lives of the men, I used my relationship with STR8 UP to help recruit individuals to participate. The relationships that I fostered with Father André (founder) and Stan Tu’Inukuafe (STR8 UP coordinator) are based on trust and good faith. It is through these relationships that I was able to build a sense of trust with the STR8 UP participants. The approval of the project by Father André and Stan helped to encourage some members to participate in the project. Incrementally, I was able to build trust within the organization with the assistance of the men that were part of the project, as they would talk to others about the project.

To break down socially constructed barriers of trust and create open communication, I first listened to the men and reflected on their needs and what they needed to partake in the study. Through initial conversations I began to see the need to modify photovoice research methods. Early conversations with Father André, Stan, and some of the men helped to frame an ethical space for the research to occur. As Willie Ermine espouses:

The sacred space of the ethical helps us balance these moral considerations as we discuss issues that are trans-cultural, or trans-boundary in nature... With this notion of ethics, and juxtaposed on the broader collective level, we come to the

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<sup>562</sup> Each organization was given a copy of *Brighter Days Ahead*, which became a knowledge mobilization piece arising from the research.

inescapable conclusion about our own agency in the kind of civilization we create to live in.<sup>563</sup>

To construct this space, I needed to create a critical reflexive consciousness to understand how my socialized position shaped the research/participant relationship, because:

Each of us is born into a particular time, place, and social context—into a particular *culture*. Culture refers to the characteristics of everyday life of a group of people located in a given time and place...*Socialization* refers to our systematic training into the norms of our culture.<sup>564</sup>

Processes of socialization impact a researcher's subjective perceptions. To challenge this subjectivity, researchers must use a critical self-reflective gaze in order to understand how their epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies will shape and affect the research process.<sup>565</sup> Critical self-reflection allowed me to acknowledge my unearned privileges, specifically how whiteness allowed me opportunities (such as not being constructed as a criminal based solely on my skin colour) to make mistakes, while the men in the study were not afforded that privilege primarily due to their darker complexion.

By working from places of humility and honesty (two core values of STR8 UP), the men and I were able to construct ethical researcher/participant relationships by breaking down previously constructed social barriers, and then rebuilding these spaces to accommodate our new relationships. The support and active engagement of STR8 UP, the fostering of my own critical self-reflective consciousness, and opening up about my own personal histories all helped to create a space of trust for the men to open up during the research process. The connection to my Indigenous ancestry and openly acknowledging my spaces of privilege helped to dismantle some of the barriers caused by

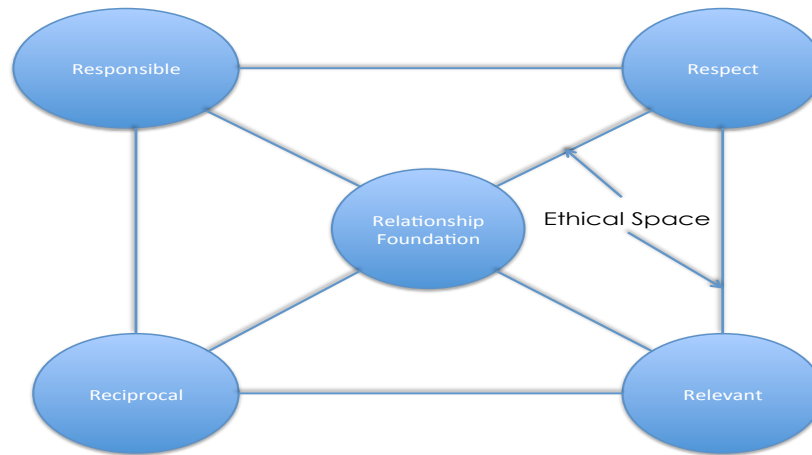
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<sup>563</sup> Ermine, *Ethical Space*.

<sup>564</sup> Sensoy and DiAngelo, *Everyone Really Equal*: 15.

<sup>565</sup> Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*.

colonization, as I acknowledged that they were the experts to their own histories, and I was there to learn from them. In doing so, a broader ethical research framework of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility could be built to strengthen the research process.



*Figure 5.1 Relational Accountability Model*

#### 5.4.1 – Respect – You get what you give

Respect within the research process is fundamental to strengthening, nurturing, and cultivating relationships.<sup>566</sup> Because respect is connected to the street through violent actions, STR8 UP works with its members to redefine respect in a positive way. For example, there were times in the men’s lives when respect meant enacting violence to gain respect through fear. Adam (36) explained:

*It seemed like everybody respected you because you got in a fight, you stabbed somebody, you robbed somebody. You know women look at that being like a gangster...the worse I got, the more friends I had.*

<sup>566</sup> Kirkness and Barnhardt, *The Four Rs*.

There were other times, when the condition of being respectful or respected was demonstrated through one's ability to care and nurture in reaction to a traumatic event.

As Dwayne (29) explained:

*I was bleeding and they were dragging me by my hair. They pulled my braid out, hitting me and I was bleeding. I don't know where this Native guy came, he was an adult. He picked me off the ground and I was bleeding and crying. I don't know who he was, but I have nothing but respect for him. I'll never forget what he told me. He said never to let anyone take my pride away. 'Be proud of who you are; be proud of being Native. Your hair is beautiful'*

These are two examples of how respect was shown or earned in the lives of the men.

Respect at an individual level was framed around violence enacted, while respect of others was on what they did to protect one from victimization.

Within academic contexts respect also has different meanings, as Rauna Koukkanen cautions:

In academic contexts, respect is often reduced to mere tokenism or, even worse, empty rhetoric... Mere respect tends to create a climate of "repressive tolerance" in which [I]ndigenous people[s] and their epistemes are allowed to exist in the celebratory spirit of different perspectives or points of view but are not recognized, heard, or understood except superficially and relativistically.<sup>567</sup>

Because of the potential for tokenism and empty rhetoric, respect as a concept must be explained as it can have different meanings for different people involved in the research process.

Within the research field, a researcher's actions or non-actions can impinge the research process. If individuals lack respect for one another, then people will find ways to create barriers making the research process difficult to undertake and complete. Thus, respect will be earned and measured based on one's trust of the other. Respect in research

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<sup>567</sup> Koukkanen, *Reshaping the University*: 79.

occurs when those involved understand the goals, objectives, and each other's roles in the process. According to Renee Pualani Louis:

Respect is not just about saying "please" or "thank you". It's about listening intently to others' ideas and not insisting that your ideas prevail (Steinhauer, 2002, pg. 73). It's about displaying characteristics of humility, generosity, and patience with the process and accepting decisions of the Indigenous people in regard to the treatment of any knowledge shared. This is because not all knowledge shared is meant for a general audience.<sup>568</sup>

If researchers do not respect their partners, then the relationships built will be strained or broken, leading to the disengagement from the research.<sup>569</sup>

To build respect with the men, I had to listen to what they needed in order to participate in the research. I also had to create an open-mind and not judge them as "bad people" for their actions. At times this was difficult to do because I was also knowledgeable about the trauma that they inflicted on others; however, by positioning myself as a learner of their personal histories, I was able to slowly comprehend why and how they made specific choices within particular fields. This position allowed me the opportunity to make connections to the larger socio-political histories of colonization, and how these histories had socialized the men to validate their choices within particular fields.

Over the course of the data collection, engagement with some men focused strictly on just talking about their experiences through one on one interviews. Others wanted me to go with them to their community as they took photographs so they could talk about different experiences and memories. The variance in how the interviews and

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<sup>568</sup> Renee Pualani Louis, "Can You Hear Us Now? Voices From the Margin: Using Indigenous Methodologies in Geographic Research." *Geographical research* 45, no. 2 (2007): 133.

<sup>569</sup> Absolon, *Kaandossiwin*; Castleden et al., *Drinking Tea*; Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

data were collected shows the different levels of respect and trust that I had with some of the men and that they had of me.

Once respect was established, the relevance of the project became clearer not only for the members, but also myself. I slowly began to understand how important it was for the men to discuss their lived realities, so that others might avoid the conditions that contributed to their involvement in gangs. Through my acknowledgement and respect of the men's knowledge, and shaping the research around helping others, the men began to see the overall relevance of the research project to themselves and others.

#### 5.4.2 – Relevance – Making research worthwhile

The construction of meaningful and respectful relationships can move discussions towards understanding the need or importance of the research for participants and the broader community.<sup>570</sup> If a researcher is not from the community, sitting, listening, and speaking to community members will be a necessary process to undertake.<sup>571</sup> Questions such as— is the research important to the community? Is the community at a point that the said research can be undertaken?— need to be asked to see if the research project is worth the engagement by the community, participants, and researcher. By engaging with the community, agency and research relevance can be established where the research methods and outcomes are made to fit the social realities of the community.<sup>572</sup> If the communities cannot see the benefit of the research, insufficient resources, or that there are other more prevalent issues in the community, then the research becomes irrelevant as more pressing issues will take heed.

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<sup>570</sup> Absolon, *Kaandossiwin*; Koukkanen, *Reshaping the University*.

<sup>571</sup> Absolon, *Kaandossiwin*.

<sup>572</sup> Castleden et al., *Modifying Photovoice*.



Within the Prairie Provinces of Canada, Indigenous street gangs are regarded as a root cause of many criminal justice and health issues affecting Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.<sup>573</sup> With little information on Indigenous street gangs outside of criminal justice surveys and annual reports in Canada, communities continue to utilize suppression strategies to target street gang activities and members.<sup>574</sup> Suppression strategies focus on the removal and incarceration of individuals for the perceived safety of the community.<sup>575</sup> For example, in the United States “gang sweeps” have become popular in urban centres as a way to “round up” potential and known gang members. However, rather than creating safety within the community, these sweeps create animosity between law enforcement and the peoples that are targeted—specifically black and Latino youth in impoverished neighbourhoods.<sup>576</sup> To avoid the increase of suppressive tactics to address Indigenous street gangs, comprehensive and relevant research is required to create a more concise and broad understanding of the issues related to Indigenous street gang involvement in the Prairie Provinces.

With limited research on Indigenous street gangs, the information available does not reflect the historical and social conditions of those who are the most impacted by or the policies created to address them. As a result, the majority of prevention/intervention/and suppression programs continue to rely on positivistic criminological theories to frame street gang programs. Such programs focus on education or curriculum-based prevention to help individuals make the “correct” choice. The

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<sup>573</sup> See Bracken, et al., *Desistance*; Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*; CISS, *2005 Annual Report*; Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>574</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>575</sup> Spergel, *Gang Problem*; White, *Youth Gangs*.

<sup>576</sup> Barrows and Huff, *Public Policy*; Beth Bjerregaard, "Antigang Legislation and its Potential Impact: The Promises and the Pitfalls," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 14, no. 2 (2003): 171-192; Sara Lynn Van Hofwegen, "Unjust and Ineffective: A Critical Look at California's Step Act." *S. Cal. Interdis. LJ* 18 (2009): 679-703.

difficulty is that choices do not reflect the lived realities.<sup>577</sup> Rather, education programs (i.e. Drugs and Alcohol Resistance and Education-DARE, and Gang Resistance, Education, and Training-GREAT) have little impact on making a change in the lives of the youth that they claim.<sup>578</sup>

To move beyond broad-based educational prevention approaches and suppressive policies that racially target communities, spaces need to be created to include the life histories of the individuals who have been involved in street gangs. Public presentations are a good way for individuals to have the opportunity to speak about their past and where they are at today. Such approaches can be seen to follow Indigenous sharing circle models, restorative justice, and addictions programs (Alcoholics Anonymous), where individuals have the opportunity to share, be heard, and be respected. As a result individuals have the opportunity to express themselves in a group setting, find support through other individuals who have shared similar experiences,<sup>579</sup> and educate others about the harsh realities of street gangs and the street gang lifestyle.

STR8 UP provides its members with the opportunity to present and talk to others through community presentations. All members are given the opportunity to speak to youth and the broader community to educate them through their own personal narratives. The men who participated in this study emphatically reinforced that this research would help them to share their narratives with others in the community. As Baldhead (24) states:

*I can get on so much different stories to tell a certain specific group...addiction, gang prevention, drug and alcohol awareness for the youth at-risk, I can get on*

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<sup>577</sup> Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Peter Korp, "The Symbolic Power of 'Healthy Lifestyles'," *Health sociology review* 17, no. 1 (2008): 18-26.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>579</sup> Lynn Frances. Lavalley, "Practical Application of an Indigenous Research Framework and Two Qualitative Indigenous Research Methods: Sharing Circles and Anishnaabe Symbol-Based Reflection," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8, no. 1 (2009): 21-40.

*different topics. I started telling my story to people and I started to see what it was doing for people...kids started coming up to me from the streets...telling me their problems and stuff like what they are going through with school and stuff and I was like, wow. I had noticed I started making an impact on kids and kids were coming up to me asking me for advice.*

Similarly, Emil (42) explained feeling rewarded for passing on the lessons he has learned to young people:

*I heard about STR8 UP and I remember hearing someone say that you go talk to schools. You go talk to kids. I remember them saying that it was ex-gang members talking about how their lives changed with drinking and alcohol. And I thought that I would like to be a part of that. It would be good, it would be some sort of good for humanity. If I could tell my story and some kid would turn away from the life of gangs.*

It is through their connections to the streets and their lived experiences that the men in this study have the potential to shift our knowledge of the issues surrounding the involvement of individuals within Indigenous street gangs. The men's narratives are what make this research relevant as their stories need to be used to inform policy and support effective prevention and intervention programs such as STR8 UP. This leads directly into the next phase, which is the notion of reciprocity or giving back to the community.

#### 5.4.3 – Reciprocity – Appropriating knowledge transfer and mobilization

One of the most precarious barriers in research is that of knowledge power or whose knowledge is seen as dominant.<sup>580</sup> Western colonial knowledge is positioned as objective truth and as such other knowledges have been subjugated and analyzed through its perspectives.<sup>581</sup> However, following the work of feminist, anti-racist, and critical scholars research has begun to shift and center the experiences of others as legitimate and

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<sup>580</sup> See Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

<sup>581</sup> Denzin et al., *Critical Indigenous Methodologies*; Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*; Louis, *Can You Hear Us*; Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

valid.<sup>582</sup> To address these barriers, concepts of reciprocity can assist researchers to recognize that “all research is appropriation”<sup>583</sup> which requires researchers and participants to benefit either directly or indirectly from the research.<sup>584</sup>

Reciprocity with vulnerable individuals is also more than just acknowledging ownership of one’s knowledge. It is also about supporting individuals for their time within the research process. Often the concept of reciprocity includes the form of monetary honorariums or gifts.<sup>585</sup> For this study the men were given \$40 for each interview that they participated in. Money was used rather than gift cards because the men informed me that money was more practical as they could use it whenever and wherever they needed. The men were also told that the digital cameras used in the study were also theirs to own.<sup>586</sup> The digital cameras had a retail value of approximately \$100 CAD and were purchased with the intention to show the men that I was invested in the project. By purchasing digital cameras and not the disposable cameras used in the majority of photovoice projects, I was attempting to show the men the importance of good quality photographs and that their time and effort in choosing the right photographs was important. The digital cameras were also used as a way to compensate the men for their time to take photographs.

Often the men asked me what I was getting from this research as they were getting the honorariums and the cameras. Some had a difficult time understanding why I

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<sup>582</sup> See Castleden et al., *Modifying Photovoice* as the community was also listed as an author for the article and other subsequent pieces that derived from the research.

<sup>583</sup> Robert Rundstrom, and Douglas Deur, "17 Reciprocal Appropriation," *Geography and ethics* (1999): 237-248.

<sup>584</sup> Louis, *Can You Hear Us*;

<sup>585</sup> See Sharlene Swartz, “‘Going Deep’ and ‘Giving Back’: Strategies for Exceeding Ethical Expectations When Researching Amongst Vulnerable Youth,” *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 11 (2011): 47-68.

<sup>586</sup> I will discuss more about the reasons as to why digital cameras were used over disposable for this project in Chapter 3.

was giving this to them and all I wanted in return was knowledge about who they were and how they came to understand their concepts of masculinity. I explained to the men that what I would receive at the end, through the use of their knowledge, was a PhD and that it was through this process that I would be able to benefit greatly from the knowledge that they shared with me. I explained how, through the completion of my dissertation, I would be able to apply for academic positions and have opportunities to talk about this experience and the knowledge gained to others nationally and internationally. So rather than receiving the immediate benefits, like the men were receiving, I explained that I would benefit from the project in the future.

For the purpose of this research project, the men were informed at all stages on how their knowledge would be used, as well as how they would like to be acknowledged for their photographs or narratives within knowledge mobilization pieces. For example, when *Brighter Days Ahead*<sup>587</sup> was in development, I made sure that those men whose narratives and photographs were to be published had control of the content. I shortened the men's interview transcripts to approximately 5-7 double spaced pages, which I then gave to them to read over checking for inaccuracies. The next stage included the layout of the book where the narratives and the photographs were placed together in the order that they would appear. Again the men went through the photographs adding, subtracting, and rearranging the orders. Once this was completed I then asked the men to choose the fonts to be used. Based on their input, I then took everything to the publisher for the book to be printed. Due to concern about ownership of data and that the production of this book was before the completion of my dissertation, only my name is associated with the book. I

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<sup>587</sup> *Brighter Days Ahead* became the primary knowledge mobilization piece that the men wanted to engage in. This was a book that was constructed to help convey the men's narratives to a larger audience through a visual and literal medium.

informed the men about this and they agreed that this was fine with them, so long as STR8 UP continued to receive the profits from the book sales. It was also decided that any proceeds from *Brighter Days Ahead* would go back to STR8 UP to help support the organization.

The men were cautious in their participation during the research process and this can be attributed to their socialization (parents, peers, street codes) and past experiences with individuals outside of their community. The men were socialized to not trust individuals who were not from their community or those that they did not have relationships with. Therefore, the men exercised caution as a way to analyze the benefits in relation to the cost of the information that they were giving. The concept of caution that the men expressed leads into the final phase of the relational accountability methodology used in this project, and that is the concept of responsibility.

#### 5.4.4 – Responsibility – Researcher and participant accountability

Responsibility within an academic research context has shifted over the last 25 years, where “there has been a trend toward demanding that universities be accountable to government and to society as a whole.”<sup>588</sup> In a historical context, research within Indigenous communities has often lacked accountability to the community<sup>589</sup> and knowledge at times has been used by colonial governments to exert control over Indigenous peoples themselves.<sup>590</sup> The landscape of research with Indigenous peoples has

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<sup>588</sup> Kuokkanen, *Reshaping the University*: 113.

<sup>589</sup> Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*; Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

<sup>590</sup> Marie Battiste, “Research Ethics for Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: Institutional and Researcher Responsibilities,” in *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, eds. Norman K. Denzin et al. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008): 497-510; Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, “Introduction: Critical methodologies and Indigenous Inquiry,” in *Handbook of Critical and*

changed considerably in Canada with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2) and OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) principles being discussed within university ethic committees.<sup>591</sup> This research received ethical approval from the University of Saskatchewan through the Behavioural Research Ethics Board. At this level a checks and balances approach is used to ensure the safety of the researcher and the research participants, and that the research is within the standards set by TCPS2 including research with Indigenous peoples.

Researchers, who work with Indigenous communities and partners must be responsible with the knowledge that they have gained, mobilize it in ways that create positive change, and support the exercising of agency by the community.<sup>592</sup> It is this movement from knowledge of facts to knowledge for agency that a shift in the political nature of research can occur. As Rauna Kuokkanen states:

Information amounts to little more than a collection of facts; knowledge is the result of the ability to learn and perceive. For information to become knowledge, one must do something with it. There can be no responsibility in the academy when there is merely information. Besides knowledge, responsibility requires action.<sup>593</sup>

An example of a shift of researcher as only a casual observer can be seen with Nancy Scheper-Hughes, an American medical anthropologist who studied violence and oppression in the *favelas* of South America. Due to her training as an anthropologist, she regarded efforts made towards challenging local political events as futile, because she

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*Indigenous Methodologies*, eds. Norman K. Denzin et al. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008): 1-20.

<sup>591</sup> See Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, December 2010, with a focus on Chapter 9: Research involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada for this research.

<sup>592</sup> See Castleden et al. *Modifying Photovoice*; Denzin et al., *Critical Indigenous Methodologies*; Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

<sup>593</sup> Kuokkanen, *Reshaping the University*: 114.

assumed that by the time anthropologists had something to say the event was over and already a part of the local history. However, once death squads were favoured in local media to deal with individuals living in the *flavelas*, and those around her began to go missing, she found it necessary to challenge the half-truths reported through public medias.<sup>594</sup> Thus she began to support agency within the community by bringing immediate attention to the atrocities that she witnessed. However, researchers must be cautious of moving too fast for the community to deal with the potential outcomes. Thus, research with Indigenous peoples needs to be conducted where responsibility becomes imbedded within the research process.

For this study, responsibility became an integral factor in developing relational accountability. Because the men predominantly have had (and some continue to have) negative relationships with law enforcement specific protective factors were set in place. The first was the admission of data that could be used for the dissertation and future knowledge translation pieces. As discussed previously, the men had the opportunity to read and delete any information from their transcripts and taped interviews that they did not want anyone else to know about. They were also given the option to use pseudonyms rather than their real names so that their identity could be concealed. The choice to use a pseudonym was offered because some of the men wanted people to know who they were, while others wanted to use their street names because of what those names meant to them. By offering the choice, the men were able to maintain a level of ownership of their knowledge. For the photographs, I informed the men that due to privacy laws they had to be responsible and inform others if they were going to be taking pictures of other people and why they were taking them. Thus, the men became responsible agents within the

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<sup>594</sup> See Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, *Violence*.



process as they needed to be consciously aware of the impacts that their actions could have on others.

Responsibility is found through all aspects of the research framework that I have described. It is the final concept that needs to be addressed as it brings together relationships, ethics, respect, relevance, and reciprocity as it strengthens the positions of the researcher within the research framework.

Responsibility links consciousness with conscience. It is not enough to merely know one's responsibilities; one must also be aware of the consequences of one's actions. Without this awareness, there is a risk of the arrogance of a "clean conscience," a stance of studied innocence by privileged, hegemonic academics who can afford to be indifferent and not-knowing.<sup>595</sup>

It is through responsibility that relational accountability shifts research from just knowledge gathering and reproduction of knowledge, to a sense of agency that shapes the development of policy and ethical change for communities.

Before I conclude this section there is a cautionary note that I would like to address, particularly for graduate students who are interested in conducting similar research. This is the responsibility of protecting one's self within the research. Responsibility to one's self care is extremely important, particularly when working with vulnerable populations who have experienced and initiated violent traumatic experiences onto themselves and others. Often there are few to no supports that graduate student researchers can access to help contextualize what they have been privy to. As such, options are limited for students who are just learning how to conduct research with and within vulnerable communities as to where they can go for their own mental health. Often supervisors are busy with other students and their own research that little time can be afforded to these students. Many students are then left searching for ways to process

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<sup>595</sup> Kuokkanen, *Reshaping the University*: 115.

the information that they had received. Questions like “what is the ethical responsibility that supervisors, funders, and host universities have in protecting the mental health of their students?” need to be asked to create support for graduate students. This is one aspect of research that needs to be looked at in more detail in order to support graduate students who are conducting qualitative research with individuals and communities where violence and trauma have become normalized.

## 5.5 – Conclusion

As I reflect back on the methodological processes that were undertaken for this project, I realize the extent to which relational accountability has guided the research process. When research relationships are constructed through an ethical lens, researchers have the opportunity to create a space of critical reflexivity. Questioning oneself by asking: “Why am I doing this research?” “Why am I using these methods?” or “Is my research even relevant?” are important because they help the researcher to begin to create a critical self-reflexive gaze. Through critical reflection, researchers have the opportunity to “unlearn” how one has been socialized to see the world, and open it up for new ways of interpretation.<sup>596</sup> This critical self-reflection is important when conducting research with Indigenous peoples in Canada, as it allows non-Indigenous and Indigenous researchers to critically assess their social privileges and biases constructed through Canadian socio-political histories that have been framed through colonization.

Through previously established relationships with STR8 UP, I was able to recruit a cohort of Indigenous male ex-gang members who had participated in street gangs in

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<sup>596</sup> See Sara Danus, Stefan Jonsson, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak." *Boundary 2* (1993): 24-50; Spivak, *Aesthetic Education*.

different communities throughout the Prairie Provinces. My relationships with Father André and Stan helped to build trust with the men, as both of these men are well respected by STR8 UP members. By gaining their respect I was able to establish relationships where both the men and myself could benefit through the research process.

As the research progressed, I paid particular attention to the way that I went about creating an ethical space. By framing the research around relationality, I forced myself to reflect back and understand how values of humility, honesty, respect, and responsibility have shaped how I have come to understand research and the research process. I began to understand how my social spaces of privilege shaped the first meetings that I had with the men, and how social barriers need to be addressed for ethical research partnerships to be created. As some of the men have eloquently stated during speaking engagements that we have had together: “When I first met him (Robert), I thought what the hell does this ‘white boy’ want from me?” As a result of this, it was necessary for myself, even as an Indigenous person, to understand that although I am Indigenous, my white-skin colour has shaped my experiences, opportunities, and my social capital. As such, I needed to come to terms with my privileges, personal history, and how they impacted the relationships between the men and myself.<sup>597</sup>

Relational accountability is a process, and it is within this process that respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility intersect to strengthen research partnerships. The process of relational accountability is important as it helps researchers and

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<sup>597</sup> In Chapter 3 I give a specific example on how my white skin privilege afforded protection for myself during a day of data collection.

community partners to create ethical boundaries, expectations, and fluidity<sup>598</sup> that can benefit all those involved. Relational accountability gives community partners the potential to share the research space in efforts to create and support a Frierean space of collaborative-transformational pedagogy and agency.<sup>599</sup> Research through a Frierean perspective shifts historical research perspectives of researcher as knower, to researcher as learner.

As illustrated throughout this chapter, relational accountability must be a central piece for all research. Ethical relational accountability has the potential to create a deeper understanding of social issues. Relational accountability helped to pave the road for the implementation and modification of photovoice methods in order to fit the lived realities of the men in the study.

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<sup>598</sup> I use fluidity here in relation to how an individual's identity shifts based on their relationship to their field. As such, when relationships grow the field also becomes altered as agents slowly renegotiate their connections to the field.

<sup>599</sup> Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Chapter 6 – Photographing the Gangster – Photovoice and Indigenous street gangs  
masculinity

*You don't make a photograph with just your camera. You bring to the act of photography all the pictures you have seen, the books you have read, the music you have heard, the people you have loved.* Ansel Adams<sup>600</sup>

*No man has the right to dictate what other men should perceive, create or produce, but all should be encouraged to reveal themselves, their perceptions and emotions, and to build confidence in the creative spirit.* Ansel Adams<sup>601</sup>

## 6.0 – Introduction

The two quotes by Ansel Adams (1902-1984) summarize the intentions of this study— the opportunity for Indigenous ex-gang members to produce, through photographs, how they have come to understand their perceptions of masculinity and its connections to their involvement with street gangs. The need for an auto-ethnographic approach to street gangs research, in particular photovoice, is that few photographic research projects have those who have been involved in street gangs to represent their lives from their own perspective.<sup>602</sup> In his work, *On The Subject of Gang Photography*, Richard Rodriguez examines three approaches used to examine street gangs through photography: ethnographic, auto-ethnographic, and representations through dominant media and law enforcement agencies.<sup>603</sup> Through his analysis, Rodriguez explains that photography is used as a political tool, shaped by the author/photographer's personal stakes and connections to the subjects and the community.<sup>604</sup> Therefore, the images may

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<sup>600</sup> Good Reads. Retrieved June 13, 2014 from: <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/52291-you-don-t-make-a-photograph-just-with-a-camera-you>

<sup>601</sup> Good Reads. Retrieved June 13, 2014 from: <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/40819-no-man-has-the-right-to-dictate-what-other-men>

<sup>602</sup> Kontos et al., *Gangs and Society*.

<sup>603</sup> Richard Rodriguez, "On the Subject of Gang Photography," in *Gangs and Society*, eds. Louis Kontos et al. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), 256-7.

<sup>604</sup> *Ibid*: 256.

not actually be a reflection of the reality of street gangs within the community, as the focus remains centred on the photographer's perception of what they believe they need to find and capture. Auto-ethnographic photography shifts from photographer centric to include the perception of ex-gang members. Caution though must be exercised as gang involved individuals may also reflect the stereotypical media gangster image because this is what they believe they need to show.<sup>605</sup>

The media gangster image has been sensationalized through dramatic over-representations by photojournalists and researchers.<sup>606</sup> This image is often a representation of the classic "media gangster" image, where violence, guns, drugs, and menacing poses become the "symbolic representations" of ethnic minorities.<sup>607</sup> The images support stereotypical and hyper-sensationalized notions of street gangs, their members, and specific lifestyles that are connected to power, wealth, and status. In doing so, such photographs reaffirm the socialized idealizations of street gangs as places of extreme physical violence supporting targeted suppressive policies and practices under the guise of protection.<sup>608</sup> Based on their social and cultural capitals, the image of the gangster is set in the social consciousness and used as a way to socially profile gang members; what do they do; and where gangs members reside.<sup>609</sup> Rob White challenges this position through the concept of 'fluid identities', where: "gangs as such cannot be easily profiled...because of the complexities of social belonging and social identity pertaining to how young people live their lives."<sup>610</sup> Consequently, those who reside in

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<sup>605</sup> Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Rodriguez, *Gang Photography*.

<sup>606</sup> Kontos, *Gangs and Society*; Rodriguez, *Gang Photography*; see also Hallsworth, *The Gang*; White, *Youth Gangs*.

<sup>607</sup> Cacho, *Social Death*; Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; White, *Fluid Identities/Youth Gangs*.

<sup>608</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*; Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Hallsworth and Young, *Gang Talkers*.

<sup>609</sup> Cacho, *Social Death*; Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*.

<sup>610</sup> White, *Fluid Identities*: 149.

privileged social spaces can focus solely on the violent images of the street gang to support suppressive strategies to control marginalized populations and ignore the multiple identities of street gang members.

Images of street gang members do not only impact those who do not belong to a street gang. Hyper-violent and popular media images of street gangs are also re-produced by gang members themselves as they adopt the label beset upon them. As Richard Rodriguez states through his work with Latino street gang members:

Very few images stick in the mind as much as that of the young Latino gang members with a menacing look and a gun. This image, endlessly repeated, takes on an iconic status that also affects the way gang members look at themselves.<sup>611</sup>

This sentiment is also reflected by the men in the current study, where media images of gangsters and gangster culture has influenced their decisions on how to act and dress to represent themselves as a true ‘gangster’.

Working with Indigenous-ex gang members through photovoice methods has the potential to move beyond the pop culture gangster reproductions, and help to create a Frierean construct of “critical consciousness.”<sup>612</sup> By placing cameras into the hands of those who have lived the lifestyle and have had the opportunity to reflect back on their histories, a “realistic” portrayal of gang life can be constructed. Photovoice when framed within a critical decolonial/anti-racist community-based reflexive method has the potential to peel back the layers of the “gangster pose” and address continuing colonial process of removal and control of Indigenous peoples.

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<sup>611</sup> Kontos et al., *Gangs and Society*: xv.

<sup>612</sup> Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

## 6.1 – Photovoice – A Brief Background

Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris describe photovoice as a “process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique.”<sup>613</sup> Traditionally, photovoice methods focus on aspects of health, where participants are asked to portray their knowledge of an issue through photographs.<sup>614</sup> The intention is that by providing participants the opportunity to capture images from their perspectives and reflect back on them, it can shift the research process to a transformational approach.<sup>615</sup> As such, those most affected by programs and policies are acknowledged for their insights, as they are acknowledged as experts within their own realities.<sup>616</sup> Transformational approaches help researchers to become open to the idea that they may not have the knowledge to even ask the right questions about an issue.<sup>617</sup>

Caroline Wang and associates first coined the term photovoice methodology while working with rural women living in China:

In previous instances, we have called this methodology *photo novella*. But the terms *photo novella*, *foto novella*, and *photonovel* have also been commonly used to describe the process of using photographs or pictures to tell a story or to teach language and literacy. The process ... is significantly different; hence, the term *photovoice*.<sup>618</sup>

Wang’s early research helped to develop three overarching goals of photovoice: to support a community’s ability to discuss and reflect on a specific phenomenon from their own perspective; to promote critical dialogue through small and large group discussions;

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<sup>613</sup> Wang and Burris, *Photovoice*: 369.

<sup>614</sup> Caroline C. Wang, "Photovoice: A Participatory Action Research Strategy Applied to Women's Health," *Journal of Women's Health* 8, no. 2 (1999): 185-192; *Using Photovoice*; Wang and Burris, *Photovoice*

<sup>615</sup> Castleden et al. *Modifying Photovoice*; Mitchell, *Visual Research*; Wang and Burris, *Photovoice*.

<sup>616</sup> Denzin et al. *Critical Indigenous Methodologies*; Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*; Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*.

<sup>617</sup> Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

<sup>618</sup> Wang and Burris, *Photovoice*: 369.



and to influence policy-makers for effective change within their community.<sup>619</sup> These goals are intended to shift research paradigms to center on the voices of the participants for effective policy change or development; and, by relying on Friere's notion of transformational education photovoice proposes that the true experts – those directly affected by the policies – should have the best insights as to the core issues that are affecting them, or limiting them from making a change.<sup>620</sup> Photovoice is intended to give the research process fluidity and flexibility in order to accommodate the needs of specific research goals, community dynamics, and community.<sup>621</sup> As such, photovoice is seen to be an effective research tool in understanding social determinants of health from those most impacted through health policies and practices, but have limited social capital to express their collective voices.<sup>622</sup>

Theoretically, photovoice positions itself closely to feminist theories in relation to distribution of social power, Friere's concepts of critical consciousness and transformative education, and, to non-traditional documentary photography.<sup>623</sup> These theoretical frameworks give way for marginalized populations to show researchers and the broader community their realities to influence agencies of change.<sup>624</sup> The methodologies used in photovoice research aim to challenge dominate discourses (patriarchy, meritocracy, colonialism, etc.) where the power of the researcher as the holder of knowledge shifts to privilege and acknowledge participants as “those who

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<sup>619</sup> Wang, *Photovoice; Photovoice Methods*. See also Mitchell, *Visual Research*.

<sup>620</sup> Friere, *Pedagogy of Oppressed*; Wang, *Using Photovoice*; Wang and Burris, *Photovoice*.

<sup>621</sup> Wang and Burris, *Photovoice*: 370.

<sup>622</sup> Brooks et al., *Collaborative Visions*; Castleden et al., *Modifying Photovoice*; Mitchell, *Visual Research*.

<sup>623</sup> Brooks et al., *Collaborative Visions*; Mitchell, *Visual Research*; Wang, *Photovoice; Photovoice Methods*; Wang and Burris, *Photovoice*.

<sup>624</sup> Elizabeth D. Carlson, Joan Engebretson, and Robert M. Chamberlain, "Photovoice as a Social Process of Critical Consciousness," *Qualitative Health Research* 16, no. 6 (2006): 836-852.

know.”<sup>625</sup> This shift in privileging knowledges must be done in a way that does not place individuals or communities at greater risk of victimization.

The importance of photovoice lies with its focus on transformational methodology<sup>626</sup>, where participants become active agents within the research process and are situated as the experts of their own lives.<sup>627</sup> Although research ethics involving Indigenous peoples of Canada have shifted, with the creation of OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) and Tri-Council Policies for Indigenous research partnerships, Indigenous voices continue to be silenced due to systemic power structures (i.e. continued colonial policies) of exclusion.<sup>628</sup> Photovoice methods shift traditional research ideologies by creating an opportunity for those people most affected within a phenomenon to become actively engaged in the research process.<sup>629</sup> Through reflexivity, photovoice methods may be used as a tool to support Indigenous male ex-gang members as they reflect back on their life history and the connections between masculinity, identity, and street gangs. The remainder of this chapter examines how photovoice was used, how it needed to be modified, and concludes with a discussion on whether it is an effective research tool for Indigenous street gangs research.

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<sup>625</sup> Roderick J. Watts, Matthew A. Diemer, and Adam M. Voight, "Critical Consciousness: Current Status and Future Directions," *New directions for child and adolescent development* 2011, no. 134 (2011): 43-57.

<sup>626</sup> Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

<sup>627</sup> Castleden et al., *Modifying Photovoice*; Wang and Burris, *Photovoice*.

<sup>628</sup> Amy T. Blodgett, Robert J. Schinke, Brett Smith, Duke Peltier, and Chris Pheasant, "In indigenous Words: Exploring Vignettes as a Narrative Strategy for Presenting the Research Voices of Aboriginal Community Members," *Qualitative inquiry* 17, no. 6 (2011): 522-533; Koukkanen, *Reshaping the University*; Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 271-313.

<sup>629</sup> Brooks et al., *Collaborative Visions*; Castleden et al., *Modifying Photovoice*; Wang, *Photovoice*; *Using Photovoice*; Wang and Burris, *Photovoice*; Caroline C. Wang, Jennifer L. Cash, and Lisa S. Powers, "Who Knows the Streets as Well as the Homeless? Promoting Personal and Community Action Through Photovoice," *Health Promotion Practice* 1, no. 1 (2000): 81-89; Caroline C. Wang, and Yanique A. Redwood-Jones, "Photovoice Ethics: Perspectives From Flint Photovoice," *Health Education & Behavior* 28, no. 5 (2001): 560-572.

## 6.2 – Implementing Photovoice - Ethical Considerations

Ethics for this project was approved through the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural and Ethics Committee in July 2012 (Appendix D). Due to the histories that many of the participants have with law enforcement and connections to illegal street activities, ethical research practices and participant consent became a central issue of concern. All members signed a consent form (Appendix E) explaining that they understood that there could be risks for some photographs and that information they shared could be requested by the police. It was explained to the men at the onset of the interviews that they would be receiving copies of their transcripts. If there was something that they wished to keep private it would be deleted from the audio-recordings as well as in the transcripts. I explained that photographs could be altered if the members wished for particular houses or streets to be changed in order to protect the location.

Due to the men's historical, familial, and contemporary connections to the streets and illegal economies it was explained that all individuals who were photographed needed to understand why they were having their photographs taken. The men were also instructed that any individual photographed was to sign a secondary participant photography release form (Appendix F) to acknowledge their consent. I supplied the men with an ample number (+20) of secondary-party waiver forms so that they would not run out or have to make any copies themselves.

All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Once the transcripts were completed I reviewed them with the men to search out inaccuracies that may have arisen during the transcription process. Once the men had reviewed their transcripts I asked if there was something that they would like to clarify, extend upon, or delete. Each

participant also received a paper copy of their transcripts for their own records. I then had each individual sign off on their transcript and photograph release forms (Appendix G, H) to give me permission to use the information for future knowledge mobilization projects.

To explain how this photovoice project unfolded, I will follow the framework used by Claudia Mitchell (2011), where “the practices of doing photovoice can be divided into (1) before taking pictures, (2) taking pictures, (3) after taking the picture, and an optional (4) making photographs public.”<sup>630</sup> Mitchell’s framework helped to create a logical path on how to address the different issues that arose as the members and myself embarked on the photovoice process.

#### 6.2.1 – Before Taking the Picture – Recruitment

In order to recruit men to take part in the project, I had asked STR8 UP to create a list of individuals who they believed would be interested in the project; and who were stable enough to follow the project to completion. During initial conversations with Stan and STR8 UP support workers, it was agreed that ten members would be recruited for the study. Ten participants, at the time represented approximately 20% of the total STR8 UP male membership.<sup>631</sup> The number would increase to 16 participants, as some individuals were unable to complete the photovoice methods. Individuals were selected based on geography, with preference given to members residing in or around Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Because the focus of the study was on the experiences of Indigenous men who were involved with gangs across the Prairie Provinces, men were also selected based on where they had been involved with street gangs. Through this selection process

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<sup>630</sup> Mitchell, *Visual Research*: 53.

<sup>631</sup> The number was later increased to 16 when some of the original participants were unable to complete the photovoice portion.

Winnipeg, Regina, Prince Albert, Maskwacis (Hobbema), Edmonton, Calgary and Saskatoon are the communities represented. Although not intended, the communities where the men had engaged in street gangs are also reflected through criminological surveys as those communities that have some of the highest numbers of Indigenous street gang members in the country.<sup>632</sup>

STR8 UP coordinators, STR8 UP members and I had a meeting to introduce the project, its expectations, and research outcomes in August 2012. As stated in Chapter 5, Boogie's *It's All Good* was the inspiration for the research methodology. The book was shown to provide an example for the men to see how photographs could be used to share their experiences.

At the initial meeting I talked to those members whom STR8 UP selected. I discussed the overall outline of the research process and explained the reasons for the research. I asked the men present if they had any concerns about the project and to leave me their numbers so that I could get in contact with them to set up interview dates and times. Father André and Stan were present because it was important to show the members that they supported the study. At the end of the meeting, the members who wanted to participate were given digital cameras to begin to take photographs. Digital cameras were used for the study and given to the men for three specific reasons: 1) giving digital cameras rather than disposable cameras was meant to convey to the men that I was committed to the project and wanted the best results possible; 2) with disposable cameras, many of the men would have not completed the photograph portion of the project, as many said to me that they would have thrown the cameras in the garbage; and 3) the digital cameras helped to express notions of reciprocity as the cameras became the

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<sup>632</sup> Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

property of the men. There were some challenges with the members completing the project, as some of the cameras went missing, were stolen, or were sold (a total 6 individuals did not complete). Because of a limited amount of funds, I was able to loan my personal camera with a blank memory card for individuals to use. The men who did not receive a camera stated that they understood and still wanted to participate. Despite the lost cameras, nine individuals submitted approximately 400 photographs.

While the men were taking photographs I scheduled interviews with the men. The interviews lasted between 40 to 120 minutes and were semi-structured. The interviews were set up chronologically to encourage the men to talk about their earliest memories on how they came to understand their notions of masculinity. I asked the men to focus on the concept of relationships in all facets of their lives: what were their memories around family, what were some major events that had happened to them as infants, children, youth, and adults, who did they admire, the impacts of school and teachers, their concepts of masculinity, overt and structural racism they experienced in institutions, and their thoughts about the “warrior image” and its connection to Indigenous street gangs.<sup>633</sup> I organized the interview into five age segments (0–5; 6–12; 13–16; gang life; exiting the gang) that focused on specific transitions and connections to social institutions and street gangs. Age 5 was considered a transition period, as school is noted as being a rites of passage for children.<sup>634</sup> Age 12 was chosen as the second transition period because it is at this age that youth in Canada can be charged under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* and

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<sup>633</sup> See Appendix I for the sample questions discussed.

<sup>634</sup> Mei Lam Seung, and Andrew Pollard, "A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Children as Agents in the Transition From Home to Kindergarten," *Early Years* 26, no. 2 (2006): 123-141.

can be admitted into addiction programs.<sup>635</sup> Gang life and exiting were broader categories because the participants became involved with street gangs as young as 12 and as old as 17. Also, the range in which individuals exited gang life ranged between 17 and 30. Despite the wide age range, the reasons for exiting were similar, such as experiencing fatherhood, traumatic event(s), and sick of being incarcerated.<sup>636</sup>

The questions were designed to help create a conversation with the men about their lives. The age framework became important, as the men were able to focus on particular times in their lives and discuss specific incidents and peoples that greatly impacted them. By segmenting the questions to age, questions could be directed to help guide the men to reflect back on incidents and relationships with institutions. Because the research focused on masculinity, a large percentage of the questions focused on role models and relationships. The reason for this is that masculinity is a performance and it is important to understand whom the men were trying to emulate, and how this emulation and performance shifted across time and different fields.

Because not all participants were able to attend the group meeting, I used the initial interview to go over research ethics, explaining the purpose of the study, their roles and rights within, how the data would be analyzed and disseminated. Due to the relationships that some of the men had with police and other justice officials, I explained that anything that they did not wish to share but was in the interview transcripts would be removed and not analyzed.<sup>637</sup> The men were informed that any information about an

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<sup>635</sup> *The Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA)*, Statutes of Canada, 2003, <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/yj-jj/ycja-lsja/back-hist.html>; *The Youth Drug Detoxification and Stabilization Act*, Statutes of Saskatchewan, 2005, <http://www.qp.gov.sk.ca/documents/english/Statutes/Statutes/Y1-1.pdf>

<sup>636</sup> The reasons to exit reflect similar findings found with Bracken et al. *Desistance*, and their research with the Indigenous gang intervention program, Ogiijiita Pimatiswin Kinamatwin (OPK).

<sup>637</sup> It was explained that the sections in the taped recordings would also be deleted.

ongoing criminal investigation, or about a crime committed against a minor, would be shared with the police.<sup>638</sup> I told the men this because it is my legal duty to bring this information forward to the proper officials. The men did not question this and understood that I had a responsibility to report. A reason for this could be through their institutionalization, where information shared with individuals not associated to them could always have the potential to be used against them. None of the participants asked for any information to be removed from their transcripts, have any photographs removed from the study, nor were there any instances where I had to report incidences to law officials.

#### 6.2.2 – Taking the Photographs – It’s Not as Easy as Saying “Cheese”

Over the course of the study, I began to realize the large time commitment needed to conduct photovoice research methods. As with other photovoice projects,<sup>639</sup> the time needed (total of 8 months) for the men to complete their photographs was substantial, and was something I underestimated. One of the reasons it took the men a long time was because of instability in their lives and their daily responsibilities of work, family, and school. Taking photographs for the study was often secondary. To address this, I asked the men to keep their cameras on them at all times in order to take photographs whenever they had the chance. For example, an individual found himself near the neighbourhood where he used to go to school and became involved with street gangs. He then walked home from the school taking photographs of specific meaningful places to him, as well as metaphorical photographs of what the life has done to his overall mental health.

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<sup>638</sup> This was an ethical obligation if information is presented where a minor is in danger that it needs to be reported to the proper authorities.

<sup>639</sup> See Brooks et al., *Collaborative Visions*.





*Photo: Baldhead (25) took of an old house he used to live in.*

A second challenge stated previously was that some of the cameras were stolen or sold before the men were able to share their photographs with me. This resulted in myself going to different pawnshops in Saskatoon in search of the cameras. No cameras were ever recovered. With no money to buy more cameras I began to lend out my own camera to some of the participants. I would set up times to go with these individuals and drive them around to different locations to take their photographs. Once completed, I would then set up a time to meet with the men individually and discuss the photographs in greater detail. The process of me actually walking and driving with the men became extremely effective, as I was able to have more open and candid conversations with the men. These were never recorded but were written down as brief field notes that I referred back to during the photograph analysis with the men.

A third challenge was that some men had trouble with transportation to specific locations. Most of the men did not have valid driver's licenses, which limited their mobility. With limited mobility it became a challenge for the men to go to those locations that held special meaning to them. To accommodate their travel needs, I worked closely

with STR8 UP coordinators to assist the men in their travel. I drove some of the members around during the evenings so that they could take the photographs they wanted. I also drove two participants to urban centers outside of Saskatoon because they wanted to go back to where they were involved in their respective street gang. A third participant asked me to take photographs for him at a particular location because he could not leave the city limits of Saskatoon due to his parole conditions. He instructed me where he wanted me to take the photographs from and the way in which he wanted the picture taken. I took multiple photographs of the places and when we sat down to discuss them he chose which one's best reflected what he wanted to show.

Reflection on the photographs helped to deconstruct some of the barriers that the men had constructed from their initial interview. The photographs helped the men to speak freely and provide intimate details about street gangs and their impact on their notions of masculinity. When viewing some of the photographs, a few of the men took time to compose their emotions when talking about particular photographs. This was particularly evident when they reflected on photographs of their own children. Dave (27) for example holds his daughters in very high prestige and acknowledged that if it were not for his daughters he would be entrenched in the gang life, incarcerated, or dead.



*Photo: Dave (27) took of his daughter at home.*

Overall, the process of taking photographs was difficult at times because life would often get in the way. However, once the men began to share the meanings behind the photographs, rich narratives emerged. The narratives reflected general themes found within the initial interviews of all the men, but provided more depth and breadth during the analysis.

### 6.2.3 – Post Photographs – Reflections and Interpretation

Photography can be an important research tool as it gives researchers the opportunity to contextualize and see a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants. Although primarily a positive experience, there were two concerns that I had while I was conducting this research. The first was an internal doubt on whether the men would take the project seriously and provide photographs or participate after the initial interviews. Because I did not know the men prior to the study, I was unsure how they would engage in photovoice methods. Although I have worked with STR8 UP in the past (albeit not directly with the members), worked directly with youth viewed as deviant

within school settings, as a bartender in a bar frequented by gang members, and have family as police and federal corrections officers, I was still unsure how the men would take up the study. Although I believed that all the men would be interested in the research because of the opportunity to put a book together, I was hesitant, as I knew that some of the men would not fully partake in the photovoice, as they just wanted whatever they could get from that first meeting. I also knew that very few would actually engage with the photographs if they felt that their knowledge was not respected or that I passed judgment onto them. Therefore, my past histories had me believe that to make the research project a success I would need to build relationships with the men.

The second concern reflects those raised by Rodriguez, where gang members who are photographed will recreate stereotypical media gangster poses.<sup>640</sup> This pose is one where the gang member is continuously poised as the dominator in the photograph. Photographs have the opportunity to help support the sensationalized notions that the men have of themselves as a “gangster”. I presumed that I would see some of the men recreate the “gangster” pose as this was the image that still gave them power. An example can be seen with Emil, who although has been out of the gang for nearly 20 years, had bought a pit-bull during the study and wanted to be photographed posing with her.

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<sup>640</sup> Rodriguez, *Gang Photography*.



*Photo: Emil (42) posing with is pitbull pup.*

I thought that the majority of the men would recreate this pose, and little attention would be had on the pull or push factors that led them to see the street gang as an extension of their masculinity.

As the project unfolded, I found that the men did not take the project lightly. Those that were able to complete the photovoice portion took great thought and care in determining their photograph selection. Many of the individuals used their photographs to expand on their initial interviews and personal narratives. During a trip to Regina with Dale (36), I learnt that his photographs focused on specific geographical locations that held significant memories for him. Through photographing these locations, Dale began to relive particular experiences that helped to open up his story about his role with the street gang and the ways in which he went about protecting himself, the gang, and his image in Regina. For example, Dale took a photograph of a house where he and a few friends had barricaded themselves inside as the police were chasing them. At the time Dale had a Canada wide warrant for an attempted murder charge. As Dale took the photograph he

described the rush of adrenaline that he had during the altercation and pointed out how they blocked out particular windows and jammed the doors shut.



*Photo: This is the house that Dale (36) barricaded himself.*

Driving around Regina became a trip back through time for Dale as he described different parties, events, or happenings in the area where he lived. Taking the photographs helped Dale to open up about his street-constructed identity, where he acquired fear and respect on the streets because of his violent reputation and behaviours.

Another photograph that Dale had taken was one where we drove down the dirt road on the way to the Regina Correctional Centre. Dale explained how he was only 17 at the time of his first trip to the centre and how he was nervous because of the stories that he had heard from others.



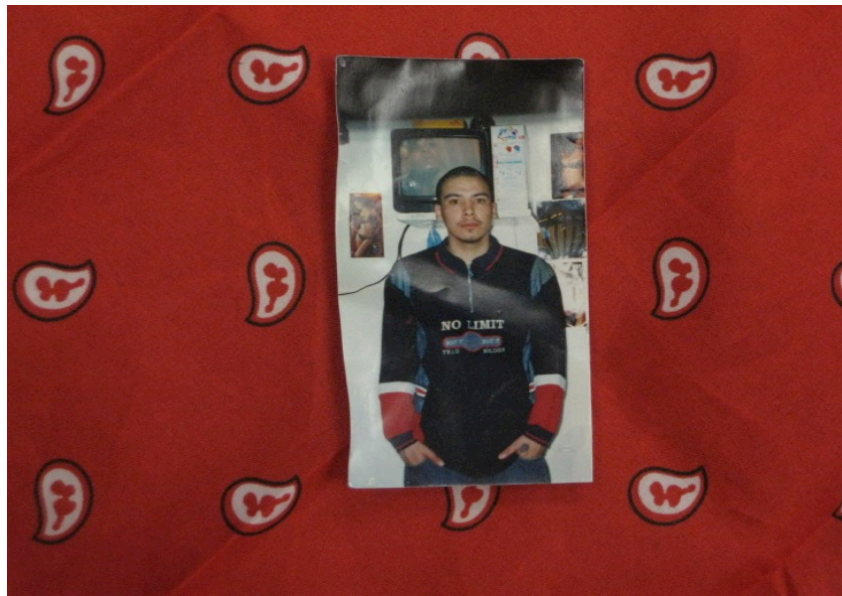


*Photo: Road to the Regina Correctional Centre taken by Dale (36)*

In the end, it was not just the photographs that opened Dale up to discussing his life. Rather, the movement through specific spaces allowed Dale to talk freely about his lived experiences in those spaces. This experience helped Dale to re-remember particular events through a reflexive gaze. The term re-remember focuses on one's ability to reflect back onto a particular instant of one's history where they can reinterpret the memory through new insights. For example, the story Dale told about the trip to the Regina Correctional Centre would not be the same one that he would have told while he was still involved in the street gang. Dale and others reiterated through their narratives, specifically through the photovoice reflections, a shift in thinking from when an event was occurring to now where they could reflect on the issues outside of the context at the time. Thus, memories of specific events can change and have different meanings as one's knowledge and understandings shift over time.

A third participant Bonks (28), did not want to go back to particular places because of past memories because the majority of the people he wanted to include had already passed away. Therefore, he created a metaphorical journey through older

photographs that had been taken while he was involved in his street gang. With close connections to two individuals who had passed away, Bonks used the project as a way to pay homage to them by using old photographs and positioning them overtop of a red bandana to represent the relationships to their street gang.



*Photo: Bonks (28) placed the old photo of his cousin who he looked up to and brought him into the gang life. He had passed away as Bonks was looking to get out of his gang.*

Through this process, he was able to show the importance of support and connection to his culture and how his culture has helped him to leave the street gang life.

When the men determined that they had gathered all of the photographs that they needed, a debriefing interview was set up. A room was secured at the University of Saskatchewan, where the photographs were enlarged and projected onto a screen. This proved to be an effective way to display the men's photographs as they could show and discuss smaller details that would have been difficult to see on standard 6x9 print. This helped some of the men to deepen their reflections opening up other memories and insights. For example, when Mathias (25) took a photograph of a house where he used to party at, he noticed that the garbage bin had an old two litre cooler bottle with needles in



it. After noticing the needles Mathias then began to talk about his own battles with drug addiction and the drugs that he chose to engage in.



*Photo: Mathias' photograph of the house that he used to party in*



*Photo: Zoomed in garbage can where Mathias noticed the needles while talking about the photographs.*

The photograph interviews were designed to bring out a “thick”<sup>641</sup> descriptive analysis by asking the men to explain in detail why they took the photograph and how they relate to their overall perceptions of masculinity and its connections to street gangs.

The reflection portion of the photographs was a participatory analysis where the men discussed what their photographs represented. In order to encourage the members to go deeper than a simple response such as, “it was a house we partied at,” I utilized Larkin and colleagues (2007) SHOWED model as a process to encourage deeper discussions.

SHOWED has researchers ask the following questions:

What do you See here?  
What is really Happening here?  
How does the story relate to Our lives?  
Why does this problem or strength exist? What are the root causes?  
How might we become Empowered now that we better understand the problem?  
What can we Do about it?<sup>642</sup>

Through this framework, the members were able to slowly explain reasons behind specific photographs. For example, when I went through photographs with Bones (31), he gradually opened up about his relationships with his son:

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<sup>641</sup> Joseph G. Ponterotto, “Brief Note on the Origins, Evolution, and Meaning of Qualitative Research Concept “Thick Description,” *The Qualitative Report* 11, no. 3 (2006): 538-549; Geertz, *Thick Description*.

<sup>642</sup> June Larkin, Charlotte Lombardo, L. Walker, R. Bahreini, Claudia Mitchell, and N. Dubazane, “Taking it Global Xpress: Youth, Photovoice and HIV/AIDS,” in *Putting People in the Picture: Visual Methodologies for Social Change*, eds. N. de Lange, C. Mitchell, and J. Stuart (Rotterdam: Sense, 2007): 31-43. As cited in Mitchell, *Visual Research*: 60. See also Wang, *Youth Participation*.



*Photo: Bones (31) and his son.<sup>643</sup>*

**Bones:** *This picture right here is how can I explain it. It's a in a way, it's bad. I don't know, kind of like saying, this is what I created, you know what I mean and I don't know, it's hard to explain. 'cause look at him now, you know. He's showing off his tatty and he's got his hat backwards and whatever. For me standing here beside him I'm thankful to be able to stand beside him. So, this picture is like the father and son connection. It's good.*

**Robert:** *I don't know if you can answer this or if you want to or not. What do you think the impact is on your son's identity knowing at least a little bit of who his dad was, and how he used to run things here in Saskatoon. How do you think that's impacted him on his idea of what it is to be a man?*

**Bones:** *Um,*

**Robert:** *When you started did you ever think that your son would be following you into the street gang life?*

**Bones:** *No way, not at all, man. Not at all. It's like even though you're not there, you're still creating something 'cause you hear stories, right? And that's all he's got are stories of what his dad used to be like. So you're still creating that. You're still creating all of that and hopefully he'll see one day. One of these days if I make it, he'll see that my dad can make it out, I can make it out.*

SHOWED questioning helped Bones to open up and create the “thick” description that I was searching for through photovoice methods. By following SHOWED, Bones opened up and discussed deeper meanings that his past gang identity has on his son's contemporary identity. Although Bones was not there to be a father figure to his son for

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<sup>643</sup> It was prior to the completion of this dissertation that Bone's son had passed away due to ailing health issues.

much of his young life, Bones understood how his past legacy impacted his son. He could see the same image that he had of himself when he was his son's age and knew what the future was going to hold for his son.

The secondary interviews were extremely valuable as the men began to show emotional connections to their photographs. The men took time to explain not only the reasons for taking the picture, but the larger meanings of what the photographs have meant to them as they continue their process of healing. The secondary interviews were integral for the men to go beyond what could be described as a pre-developed script, where hyper-violence and lack of emotions are reflected through the media and popular culture representations of street gangs and masculinity. I do not intend to suggest that the first interviews were invalid, rather the interviews involving the photographs created richer narratives that allowed the men to open up emotionally. The photovoice process created a relational and/or emotional connection between the men and the study as the men began to connect past and present experiences; how their family, community, friends, and events shaped their opportunities and choices which led to them to join a street gang; and how past decisions continue to impact their lives today.

Photographs can support researchers in reaching Friere's notion of "critical consciousness", where effective questioning can help both participants and researchers analyze their sociopolitical contexts.<sup>644</sup> Photographs through photovoice methods help to give researchers a glimpse of research participant's perceptions of reality; however, it is only through a critical consciousness that connections can be articulated between sociopolitical histories across time and space.

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<sup>644</sup> Watts et al. *Critical Consciousness*.

### 6.3 – Focus Groups and Photovoice

An important aspect of photovoice is to bring participants together for a focus group to discuss their photographs.<sup>645</sup> Conversations created through focus groups are designed to open up participant's minds and create new insights by listening to others involved.<sup>646</sup> For this study focus groups were not utilized as a data collection method. This is because some of the men ended up back in the criminal justice system, others moved away due to life circumstances (job outside the community, needed to get away), while others submitted to their past addictions. For example, Mathias and Bonks moved away for work, Bones, Dez, and Dave fell back into a cycle of addictions, and Baldhead was incarcerated. Those whose lives were stable explained that they did not want to talk about their photographs with the other men. However, they gave me permission to show their photographs to others who had difficulties generating their own ideas. This worked well, as some of the men were able to generate ideas on how they would go about taking their photographs.

### 6.4 – Making the Photographs Public – Constructing *Brighter Days Ahead*

With photovoice methods, an outcome is to make the photographs public to create an agency of change within the community.<sup>647</sup> However, with the men's relationship with the criminal justice system, as well as their connections to the street, making the photographs public became an ethical concern. To fit within the research methodology and create a commitment to the research, the idea of a compilation of photographs in a book would be created. To give back to STR8 UP for their support to the men and to the

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<sup>645</sup> Mitchell, *Visual Research*; Wang, *Photovoice Methods*; Wang and Burris, *Photovoice*.

<sup>646</sup> Wang, *Youth Participation*.

<sup>647</sup> *Ibid.*

project, it was decided with the men who were showcased in *Brighter Days Ahead*<sup>648</sup> that all proceeds would go to STR8 UP. The intentions of *Brighter Days Ahead* was to create awareness and education on the social issues related to Indigenous street gangs.

In order to maintain the authenticity of the men and accurately reflect their narratives within *Brighter Days Ahead*, those men who were profiled were given their condensed narratives that I compiled through their interviews. After the men read through their condensed narratives, they were asked if there was anything that needed to be corrected for accuracy. For example, there were a few instances that specific incidents were not in the proper order of events. This occurred because participants would jump across time during the interviews. This created inaccurate chronologies at times, and once the men brought these inaccuracies to my attention, they were reordered. The revised narratives were then given back to the men to confirm the changes. Once the narratives were approved, I then selected specific photographs that I thought best reflected the men's narratives. However, once I had the photographs selected I then brought them back to the men to confirm that what was chosen and the order it positioned was what they wanted. I had selected the first set of photographs, as I wanted to have a complete layout of the book so that the men could see what the final product would look like. After viewing the layout, some of the men changed the order of, removed, or added photographs to reflect what they wanted to show.

It was decided through discussions with the men individually, that the last photograph in each segment of *Brighter Days Ahead* reflect where the men perceive

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<sup>648</sup> Each individual who contributed received their own copy of *Brighter Days Ahead* and copies were also given to community partners (John Howard Society, Saskatoon Tribal Council, and Métis Nations of Saskatchewan), STR8 UP and Father André Poilièvre, funding agencies (Indigenous Peoples Health Research Centre and The Centre for Forensic and Behavioural Justice Studies), and each member of my PhD committee for their contributions to its creation.

themselves to be today. Once the photographs were placed in the correct order, I brought it back so that the men could confirm that everything was correct. I then had the men sign a consent form that indicated that the participants agreed that their photographs and narratives could be published. These consents were the final process before the draft was sent to the publisher and printer.

The production of *Brighter Days Ahead* completed the relational framework that the project was built around. *Brighter Days Ahead* helped to bring the overall study together as it gave the men a tangible outcome to work towards. I held multiple conversations with men and STR8 UP staff to make sure what was being put together reflected what the participants wanted to share to others. In the end, the men, STR8 UP staff, and myself all agreed that *Brighter Days Ahead* was something we were all proud of.

Working closely with the narratives used in *Brighter Days Ahead* also aided in the analysis of the data. As I broke down the narratives into short stories for *Brighter Days Ahead* and integrated the photographs within the narratives, I was able to notice particular themes that emerged across the narratives. Themes of violence, addictions, fatherhood, masculine posing, and removal from family through social institutions became. The narrative analysis process helped me to sift through large amounts of data and begin to see the connections between narratives. I used the themes collected through this process to create a thematic map used during the grounded theory analysis.

## 6.5 – Analyzing the data

For this study 16 Indigenous male ex-gang members participated in semi-structured interviews, with 9 members participating in photovoice methods. In total, over 30 hours of interview data and just over 400 photographs were collected. One of the greatest difficulties with conducting good qualitative research is maintaining the truth of the data.<sup>649</sup> Photovoice methodology is closely aligned with feminist theory as a way to critically analyze the health of women.<sup>650</sup> Through a feminist lens, Wang and her colleagues used grounded theory as an analytical tool to sift through the data to create specific grand themes that connected the women's voices and supported the women's individual perspectives.<sup>651</sup>

This study utilized a critical decolonial/anti-racist lens to frame the grounded theory and narrative inquiry analyses. Connecting the two analytic methods was effective, as narrative inquiry reduced the data sets into manageable themes. With the creation of *Brighter Days Ahead*, narrative inquiry analysis was used to condense those participant interviews that were profiled. As such, this process helped to identify key relationships that “tie the data together into a narrative or sequence, and eliminat[e] information that is not germane to these relationships.”<sup>652</sup>

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<sup>649</sup> Juliet Corbin, and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research 3e: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2008); Denzin et al., *Critical Indigenous Methodologies*; Maxwell, Joseph A. *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach: An Interactive Approach*. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2012).

<sup>650</sup> Wang et al., *Who Knows The Streets*.

<sup>651</sup> Wang, *Photovoice*; Wang and Burris, *Photovoice*.

<sup>652</sup> Maxwell, *Research Design*: 115.



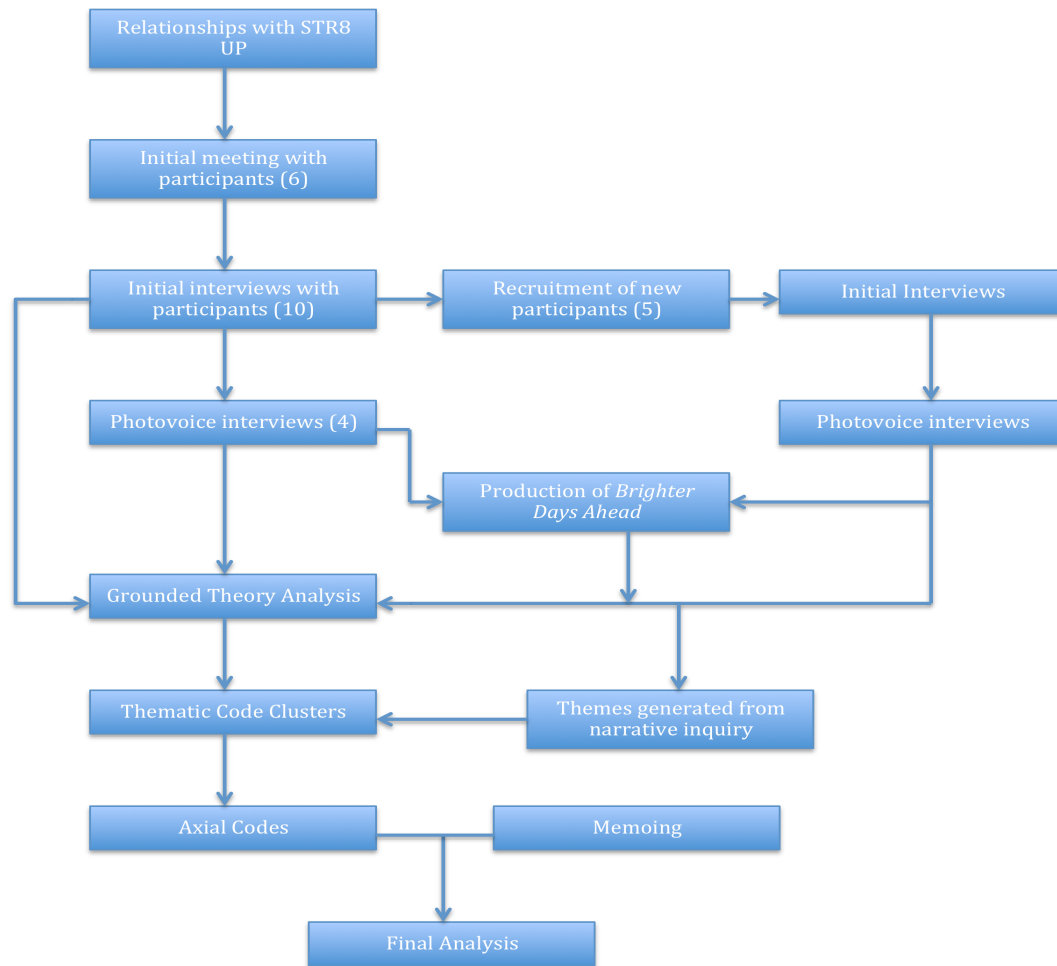


Figure 5.1 Data Analysis Model

### 6.5.1 – Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry was utilized as a way to reconstruct the narratives of those men showcased in *Brighter Days Ahead*. This analysis was important because:

All stories are composed in a context, replete with history and with culture. Within that context, certain stories may be favoured over others and will be told in ways congruent with the context.<sup>653</sup>

By first analyzing a portion of the men’s interviews through a narrative analysis I was able to construct a chronology of events that occurred in their lives across time.<sup>654</sup> I was

<sup>653</sup> Sheila Trahar, “Preface,” in *Contextualising Narrative Inquiry: Developing Methodological Approaches for Local Contexts*, ed. S. Trahar (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013): xi.

able to see how, even across time and locations, the men were impacted similarly as they all spoke of similar incidences— such as racism in child welfare and schools, hyper-violence, power, respect, substance abuse, and poverty that shaped their concepts of masculinity and personal identity.

Through the interviews, the men discussed their lives and how particular histories and their relationships to people and institutions shaped their concepts of masculinity and identity. The men described how violence became normalized over-time, and associated to masculinity and respect obtained through one's use of violence. By combining the two interviews into a life history,<sup>655</sup> I was able to identify specific signature stories or codes (i.e., relationships, trauma, violence, instability, street codes, power, and masculine posturing) that were told over and over again by the men, which were then used as a framework for the grounded theory analysis.

#### 6.5.2 – Grounded Theory

For this study, grounded theory was the primary analytic tool used to analyze the data. Grounded theory is a longitudinal method of analyzing data that allows for researchers to “generate concepts and theories based on observational data.”<sup>656</sup> Grounded theory is a qualitative analysis framework that supports researchers in their interpretation of data, as it is capable of sifting through large amounts of data in search of dominant themes.<sup>657</sup> From Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss's conceptual framework<sup>658</sup>, grounded

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<sup>654</sup> See Maxwell, *An Interactive Approach*.

<sup>655</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>656</sup> Amir Marvasti, *Qualitative Research in Sociology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004): 84.

<sup>657</sup> Glaser, Barney G., and Anselm L. Strauss. *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Transaction Publishers, 2009.

<sup>658</sup> Glaser and Strauss, *Grounded Theory*

theory has splintered into two perspectives. A traditional approach inferring objectivity and a contemporary approach that acknowledges the subjectivity of the researcher in the data analysis process.<sup>659</sup> The method used in this study aligns with Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, where they acknowledge that the research process is not objective, but framed by researcher's experiences and it is these experiences that influence how data is interpreted.<sup>660</sup> Data analysis methods within photovoice research are important because there are two mediums that need to work together, the qualitative narratives and the photographs. Grounded theory analysis has the ability to bring the two mediums together as its process and attention to coding detail is intended to be faithful to the everyday realities of the participants.<sup>661</sup>

Within a grounded theory analysis, codes are created so that data can be categorized along themes and analyzed against the data and preexisting knowledge.<sup>662</sup> According to Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, the coding process helps researchers to connect and create data streams that then help to separate into raw data that can be worked with for an analysis. They elaborate that it is through this process that a "more abstract hypothesis linking two categories, a hunch to be checked out against data, where it is either verified, invalidated, or amended" dependent on the data available.<sup>663</sup> For this study some of the large data codes that emerged included violence, street codes, trauma, instability, masculine posturing, respect, and power.

With the initial interviews divided by age periods, I separated and analyzed each period independently for all of the interviews. For example, I went through the men's

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<sup>659</sup> Corbin and Strauss, *Developing Grounded Theory*.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>661</sup> Corbin and Strauss, *Developing Grounded Theory*; Marvasti, *Qualitative Research*.

<sup>662</sup> Corbin and Strauss, *Developing Grounded Theory*.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*: 199.

transcripts and put headings in the transcripts where they shifted into a new age segment. I did this for the each transcript. I then went back and focused on one age segment for all transcripts together. As I read the transcripts I began to focus on the codes created through the narrative analysis, searching for larger chunks of data that supported or challenged early codes. It became evident early that each age period included similar stories, which reflected specific experiences that influenced decisions made later in life. Negative issues of one's involvement within the child welfare system (CWS) were emphasized in almost every narrative. The men described how negative experiences within CWS would impact their perceptions of self. Within foster homes, the men described how incidences of racism, abandonment, and other traumatic experiences impacted their notions of self, identity, and masculinity. The men also talked about how violence became normalized to protect themselves from victimization within the homes.

For each age period I created axial codes.<sup>664</sup> The axial codes were clustered among all of the men for each age period. This brought together similar or related concepts that were drawn out from the narratives. The axial codes categorized the information where I could then elaborate and define the codes to a greater degree.<sup>665</sup> I used the axial codes for each age period to connect to other axial codes across the different age periods. This process created code-clusters where thematic mapping with other axial codes from other age periods created a web of causality across time and locations.

Once relational webs were created I then moved on to the memo-writing process. Memoing is to give the research a “non-linear, visual, and flexible technique to

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<sup>664</sup> Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006).

<sup>665</sup> Strauss and Corbin, *Developing Grounded Theory*.

understand and organize [one's] material."<sup>666</sup> Memoing is a "reflective tool to record the researcher's abstract thinking about the data."<sup>667</sup> The process entails creating relationships between different clusters in order to strengthen connections and support the significance of the findings.<sup>668</sup> Through relationships, macro themes emerged across age periods where incidences of trauma, addictions, violence (structural and individual), and survival became evident across the men's narratives. For example, instability was a factor for the men in their younger years as well as in their older years. The difference between the instability came with their power to make choices. The majority of the men discussed how their early home lives, as small children were unstable as there were high rates of violence and alcoholism within their homes. Often as a result the men would be removed and placed into foster care for periods of time. As the men aged, the instability was still present in their homes; however, now they began to make choices that resulted in their becoming arrested and placed in juvenile detention centres. Therefore, the instability and removal from family remained constant. What changed was how society dealt with the issue and the agency that the men had in where they were going to be removed to—foster care or youth detention facilities.

Instability became a macro code that cut across age periods, but how instability and the men's reactions to it would differ across the age periods. It was a result of the instability within different fields that the men saw that the only people that they could rely on were themselves. Therefore, due to instability across fields the men created an

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<sup>666</sup> Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*: 86.

<sup>667</sup> Jane Mills, Ann Bonner, and Karen Francis, "Adopting a Constructivist Approach to Grounded Theory: Implications for Research Design," *International Journal of Nursing Practice* 12, no. 1 (2006): 8-13.

<sup>668</sup> Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*.

identity that offered them the ability to disengage from meaningful or emotional connections with others for fear of being hurt.

Photovoice maintains a close alignment with grounded theory to maintain the “voices” of the research participants through to the final analysis.<sup>669</sup> If one is using photovoice as a longitudinal method for studying socialization, narrative inquiry ought to be applied to understand how prior experiences have forged the ways in which a person comes to view the phenomenon. As was the case in this study, masculinity and its connections to Indigenous street gangs was not something the men could just talk about as an event, but rather required contextualization of their childhood and family experiences within socio-historical processes that have impacted Indigenous peoples across the Prairies.

## 6.6 – Conclusion

The research framework used for this project shaped the study’s results greatly. Because the study was framed on relational accountability,<sup>670</sup> trust and relationships became key components in keeping the men engaged with the study through the multiple stages. Over the course of the study, the men helped to inform what I have come to understand as the large macro factors that have influenced their opportunities, and therefore their choices to joining a street gang. The photovoice process allowed the men to become self-reflective as they journeyed back to places— both physically and mentally— that some of them have tried to avoid because of the trauma.

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<sup>669</sup> Wang, *Youth Participation*.

<sup>670</sup> See Chapter 5.

Photovoice has the potential to expand our understandings of Indigenous street gangs. It has the potential to empower those whose voices are often silenced or misinterpreted for political purposes and shift dominant society's understanding of marginalized realities by giving participants the ability to show the researcher and broader community their lived realities through personal visual representations.<sup>671</sup>

Photovoice methods in this study positioned the men as experts of their own experiences and supported the narratives of those who did not participate within photovoice methods. Despite important advantages to photovoice, there are also limitations that must be addressed.

The first limitation is the time needed for participants to feel comfortable and confident to take photographs that have meaning to them. To address this, Rob White's concept of fluid identities<sup>672</sup> must be acknowledged and taken into account by researchers. Because of other more pressing obligation research may become a hindrance for participants. As a result, some participants may not fully take part as they have other needs that they prioritize over the research. By coming to terms with fluidity within a reflexive process, social researchers can understand that their research is not located in a vacuum or laboratory that can be recreated equally for all participants. Acknowledgement of this can help to modify research processes to gain the best results without altering the validity of the data.

A second limitation to the methodology is the impact that photovoice method has on social policy change. With the topic of Indigenous street gangs so politically

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<sup>671</sup> Brooks et al., *Collaborative Visions*; Castleden et al, *Modifying Photovoice*; Wang, *Photovoice*; *Youth Participation*; Wang and Redwood-Jones, *Photovoice Ethics*.

<sup>672</sup> White, *Fluid Identities*.

charged<sup>673</sup>, the ways in which street gangs are addressed has a rippling effect throughout the entire community. With the majority of resources directed at the suppression of Indigenous street gangs, the photographs taken by the participants could be misappropriated to support punitive initiatives. Researchers and their community partners must discuss how visual research methods, such as photovoice should be used for effective and ethical social change. The agreements made can help to create collaboration between those who have social power to create policy change and those who are impacted by these policies by informing policy development.

To protect against misrepresentation of photographs, researchers must work closely with their partners where both parties are asking what do I see in this photograph? Does the photograph perpetuate the exact stereotype that the participant is attempting to challenge? If the researcher has created a meaningful relationship with their research partners they “should” be able to question the motives of a photograph in a way to develop further description. This description can then be added to the photograph as a piece of text. The text can help those viewing the photograph for the first time with some information as to what the photograph is intended to represent.

The third limitation has less to do specifically with photovoice methods but rather the importance of modifying research methods to fit the lived realities of research participants.<sup>674</sup> As there becomes more of a push to create ethical community-based research initiatives, researchers must come to understand their own social positioning and how this impacts their analysis of the data, especially around research conducted with

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<sup>673</sup> Cacho, *Social Death*; Esbensen et al., *When is a Gang a Gang*; Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Henry, *Just Another Thug*; White, *Youth Gangs*.

<sup>674</sup> Castleden et al., *Modifying Photovoice*



Indigenous peoples and communities.<sup>675</sup> Researchers need to become aware of their social privileges, and it is through anti-oppressive, critical, de/anti-colonial, and Indigenous theories, that reflexive thought can be achieved.<sup>676</sup> Through reflexivity, researchers have the ability to create meaningful relationships where modifications to research methods take into consideration the lived realities of the participants for richer data to be collected. Therefore, social research must take into consideration that life is not static and what works for one participant may not work for all, even within the same study. When examining the lives of individuals who live at the margins, modifications that are constructed in ethical partnerships with researchers help to strengthen relationships, while aiding researchers in the understanding of larger social forces that they may have taken for granted.

For this research process, photovoice methods proved to be an effective way of building relationships with the men. The relationships helped to peel back multiple layers that the men had constructed around their notions of self and masculinity. By peeling back the layers of their narratives through a critical decolonial/anti-racist lens, I was able to draw connections to the larger social structures of colonization and its violence on Indigenous peoples and communities. By framing the study through relational accountability, photovoice methods could be adapted without jeopardizing the validity of the data. Rather, the modifications to photovoice helped to enrich the data, as I was able to engage more fully into the research process.

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<sup>675</sup> See Castleden et al., *Modifying Photovoice; Drinking Tea*; Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*.

<sup>676</sup> Denzin et al., *Critical Indigenous Methodologies*; Ermine, *Ethical Space* ; Ruth Nicholls, "Research and Indigenous Participation: Critical Reflexive Methods," *International journal of social research methodology* 12, no. 2 (2009): 117-126; Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

To conclude, the participants who completed the photovoice methods expressed how they have benefited from the photovoice process. This research approach affirms that the best way to understand street gangs is from those who have actually been a part of the lifestyle.<sup>677</sup> In this study, this means listening to the Indigenous men themselves and how they have come to understand their own lived realities, or the habitus in which their choices could be constructed.<sup>678</sup>

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<sup>677</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*

<sup>678</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*; Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Reflexive Sociology*; Korp, *Symbolic Power*.

## Chapter 7 – The Formative Years - Creating the Building Blocks of Gang Masculinity

*I wanted to be like my uncles and my dad. My dad was respected in the criminal world. My dad had done a lot of big things, you know? And he was good at what he'd done. So a lot of people respected my dad, which I came to find out later. And the people that looked up to my dad, I looked up to those people. So in a sense I looked up to my dad, too, for a lot of things. 'Cause that's all I knew, right; I didn't know any better. Bonks (31) STR8 UP Member*

### 7.0 – Introduction

This research was undertaken in an effort to understand how Indigenous male gang members came to use their masculinity in relation to their involvement with street gangs. As with other male dominated fields,<sup>679</sup> the street gang is framed by specific codes and conducts that its members must abide by. For street gangs, violent hyper-masculinity becomes the dominant masculine performance, supported through “street codes” on how one is to gain respect and power.<sup>680</sup> Street gangs support the usage of violence through initiation or rites of passage, to control behaviours, settle disputes, and maintain control. Relationships and experiences with family, peers, social institutions (i.e. educations and justice), and multiple social environments have socialized the men to privilege a particular masculine performance. Special attention was paid to transitional periods connected to age because of the different experiences within social institutions— school, child welfare, young offender facilities, addictions facilities, and adult corrections for example. As the men aged, their experiences and relationships with others helped to shape their constructions of self and masculinity. Because the men were not born “gangster”, it is important to understand how some Indigenous men have come to connect

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<sup>679</sup> Kimmel, *Guyland*.

<sup>680</sup> Anderson, *Street Codes*; Bourgois, *Search of Respect*; Gilberto Q. Conchas, and James Diego Vigil, "Multiple Marginality and Urban Education: Community and School Socialization Among Low-Income Mexican-Descent Youth," *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 15, no. 1-2 (2010): 51-65; Garot, *Who You Claim*; Payne, *Gentlemen and a Gangster*.

their notions of masculinity with street gangs.

In Chapters 7, 8, and 9 I present the findings through narrative and visual representation. The chapters are organized along a chronological timeline of the men's lives and highlight the process through which they came to understand and perform masculinity through their experiences and observations with family, peers, and social institutions. These constructs shifted over time due to relationships with family, peers and social institutions. Although the individuals' ages ranged from 21 to 43 at the time of the study, their life histories are extremely similar when viewed collectively. For example: 73% of the participants were involved with the child welfare system, 73% grew up in a household with an absent or "floating"<sup>681</sup> father figure, 87% grew up in poverty, 87% were involved in the young offender system, and 100% were involved in provincial adult corrections, with 53% involved with federal institutions. The men's pathways to gang involvement is linked to their ideals of masculinity in search for power and respect. As stated in Chapter 4, masculinity is a performance of socially constructed expectations and is influenced by one's social position in relation to race, class, sexuality, and ability/physicality.<sup>682</sup> The men in the study have come to create a masculine "mask" to support their use of violent hyper-masculinity within their particular street fields. The goal of this performance was to gain power and respect in relation to specific street codes that promoted physicality, toughness, emotional withdrawal, and the need to do what was necessary to maintain one's street reputation.

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<sup>681</sup> I use the term "floating" father because the men discuss how their fathers were not absent their entire lives. Rather they would float in and out of their lives depending on what was happening within their own. One of the reasons for this was that some of the men's fathers were caught in an incarceration cycle where they would only be out in the community for a short time before they were charged with another crime. As such, these men would assume the role of a father figure for some of the men. It is because of these realities, that an absentee father does not give a clear idea of what is actually happening.

<sup>682</sup> Bourgois, *Search of Respect*; Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*; Buchbinder, *Studying Men*; Garot, *Who You Claim*; Sensoy and Di'Angelo, *Everyone Really Equal*.

The men in the current study discuss the importance of group membership, which has been noted extensively in gang research as a major reason for male involvement in street gangs.<sup>683</sup> However, the majority of the men in the study stated that they did not actively search for a street gang to belong to; rather they talk about how the street gang actively sought them out through recruitment processes. It was through their recruitment by the gang that the men were able to increase their power and respect within the local street field, which would then increase their social and economic capitals. Because street gangs have a reputation and image to uphold in the community they will not actively recruit any individual within the community; rather it is only those that reflect particular behaviours and have specific skills that street gangs find valuable. As a result not everyone can be recruited into a street gang. Those who are recruited reflect the street gang's image of power and respect through physicality, toughness, and a willingness to do what was necessary to maintain the street gangs reputation on the streets. However, as a result of socio-political histories, particular groups of peoples are more readily identified to partake in gang activities because of their race and class identities.

A critical decolonial/anti-racist analysis of the socio-political colonial histories can explain why Indigenous males are identified more readily as *de facto status* street gang members by dominant Canadian society.<sup>684</sup> Colonial ideologies have created and maintained the Indigenous as “deviant” label through policies created within social institutions.<sup>685</sup> The result has been the consistent removal of Indigenous children from their families creating instability and victimization, which increases incidences of trauma

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<sup>683</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Bracken et al., *Desistance*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Vigil, *Rainbow of Gangs*.

<sup>684</sup> Cacho, *Social Death*; White, *Fluid Identities*.

<sup>685</sup> LaRocque, *Other is Me*; Razack, *Racialized Policing*.

as families become cycled through social systems. The cycling and continued victimization has led to instability for many Indigenous peoples and communities, where an unnecessary burden of trauma caused by colonization is often ignored and left unsupported. By analyzing the men's narratives, one can recognize how different family, peer, and social relationships have shaped the men's perspectives and rationalization of why and how they became involved in a street gang. Together, the concepts of habitus and hegemonic masculinity help to contextualize socio-political histories and how they impact the ways in which Indigenous males can perform masculinity.

This chapter shows how the men came to understand concepts of masculinity within their early formative years. The men witnessed and experienced heightened levels of victimization that led to instability and increased physical, emotional, and mental traumas. Through their experiences, the men came to formulate their ideas of masculinity as they watched the performances of older males jockey for power and respect. At the same time that this was occurring, the men were inundated with negative images and experiences within "pro-social" environments as a result of historical colonial ideologies of Indigenous peoples. Overall the men would come to understand the role of violence and its connection to masculinity as a way to gain power and control within different fields.

### 7.1 – The Formative Years 0–12

Instability in the lives of the men in the study was relevant, particularly within their early lives. The men stated that a causation of their family dysfunction was a result of their own parents' experiences as children, where they were removed from their

parents through residential schools. For example, Kinuis (24) explained that his mother did not know how to parent, as she was a product of the residential school system.

*My mom had issues with men. She was in a residential school and stuff that caused a lot of her dysfunctionality. So the way she would treat us was, you know, if we didn't do things in her manner, we'd get spanked or she'd beat us because of it. I know it's not something that she's proud of but she didn't know how to raise us.*

Kinuis did not explain the events that occurred to his mother as a student of residential schools, rather over time he came to understand how his mother's experiences came to impact her actions towards him. Kinuis, like the other men did not blame their parents for specific incidences of abuse that they felt at the hands of their parents; rather, they acknowledged that their parents were damaged and that the trauma that they experienced in residential schools had severely impacted their ability to parent effectively.

The men explained how their parents would often use extreme levels of violence against them, their siblings, and their mothers. The men felt that the physical violence that was often directed towards them at this time was a justified way to correct their behaviours or actions. However, they also explained at times that the violence went beyond the correction of behaviour to physical abuse. Bonks (29) explains the heightened levels of violence that he witnessed and endured as a young child from his father.

*My dad was very abusive and violent in a lot of ways. He grew up in a residential school; the stories I heard about him when he grew up like... There's a good reason why he's like that towards us, you know. He'd been through a lot of bad stuff and it might not have been worse to us but, you know, he was pretty bad to us. You know a lot of things I do remember was him beating us all up. Sometimes he would focus on different people, different times, you know. If he were sober, he would beat up my mom. Depending on who was around too, right, was always a big thing. Seem like whenever he'd come home drunk, sometimes he could be really, really nice. Sometimes he could be really, really mean when he got home and he took it out on me and my siblings and my mom. And I remember he always used to use weapons on us, you know. Not just like a little stick, you know, he would use tools and wrenches and brooms and whatever. Whatever he could get. I*

*remember being thrown outside in wintertime and him shooting at us with the gun, shooting around us, me and my two older brothers.*

Although Bonks witnessed and experienced this violence at the hands of his father, he still viewed his dad as someone that he wanted to be like.

Experiences of violence at young ages would normalize and socialize the men to how violence could be used to correct behaviours. Through their reflection on childhood events as adults, the men explained that they have come to disagree with the extreme levels of violence directed at them. By contextualizing the use of violence as a byproduct of their own parent's personal histories, the men have been able to rationalize to a degree their parents use of violence. In doing so, the men do not hold blame over their parents for their parenting style. This helps the men to acknowledge that their parents loved them, they just did not know of other ways of showing this love because it was stripped away from them from their experiences in residential schools.

All of the men stated that they endured violence at the hands of their parents (biological, step-parents, adoptive); however, they also talk about the happiness, contentment, and security that they also felt within their families. Dwayne (29) referred to this as a "love/hate" relationship with his father, where he hated him for the abuse; but loved him because he was his father and there were a lot of good times that they had together. Therefore, pathologizing the men's histories as constantly violent ignores the joy, happiness, and contentment that they also experienced. Pathologizing violence as an innate feature within Indigenous communities helps to perpetuate colonial ideologies,



which then help to support contemporary policies where violence is seen as a feature of a community and not a byproduct of colonization onto Indigenous bodies.<sup>686</sup>

## 7.2 – Family – Alcoholism and Violence

During their early childhood, the men described how alcohol and violence were prevalent in their lives. As the men discussed their earliest memories, the majority of their stories revolved around alcohol and the violence that they either witnessed or were victims of. For instance, Emil (42) recounted how:

*One time my mother was coming home and coming up the stairs and my little brother was on the top of the stairs, and she told him to move and he was just a baby and she nudged him or kicked him and he fell down the stairs. And went head over heels, and I remember my older sisters grabbing him and picking him up...and she came off as angry all the time because of the alcohol. I remember there were a lot of parties where my mother was angry and my dad was the more comforting. When he was around. There were people that came to the house. Sometimes were strangers. Men.*

Emil discussed how events such as this with his mother caused him to associate affection to his father, even though his father was rarely in his life. Emil's narrative about his angry mother differs from other participants, where their fathers or the men involved with their mothers were those who perpetuated the physical violence within their homes.

Often the men's first memories of violence were of their fathers, or their mother's boyfriends assaulting their mother. The men discussed how alcohol was the explanatory factor of this violence. Dale (36) for example stated:

*Well, my mom...like they always drank and my dad and mom would always end up scrapping. I always seen my mom get beat up by my dad, you know. I got a licking once in a while, too.*

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<sup>686</sup> Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*; Memmi, *The Colonizer*; Taussig, *Culture of Terror*. See also Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, *Violence*, as they discuss how peacetime violence maintains itself within its structures of the everyday.

Clayton (29) also described early memories of his parents where violence and alcohol abuse was common.

*From what I seen (in early childhood) it – probably my dad beating up my mom and like every time he was drunk. And every time which was pretty much every three days or so he was drunk. And she'd always get beaten up from him.*

To show how he remembered his parents, Baldhead (24) took a photograph of a couple sitting in a back alley. He explained that as he was walking by they reminded him of his mother and father where they would be drinking together, and that it would often lead to violence later on.



*Photo: The photo also reflects the issue of entrenched substance abuse that Baldhead sees in the community.*

To Baldhead, the couple reminded him of his parents as they were sitting behind a building drinking cheap liquor.

One of the more emotional testimonials about witnessing domestic violence in their home and against their mothers came from Dwayne (29). Dwayne explains how his father had left his mother but would come back every now and then, which would often

lead to his mother being physically assaulted. Dwayne recalled the first time that he truly saw the physical abuse that his mother received from his father.

*With my Dad, it's almost like I was always chasing him. Not when I was younger, though. When I got to be about 8 – 9 in that age group, he already left us and he was going out with all these other women. Cheating on my Mom, but still coming over... He had his own place too, and he'd still come to our place, beat up my Mom. I woke up for school one morning when I was about six. My Dad flipped out on my Mom and he cut my hair 'cause I hated it and I was begging. I was like, 'Mom, I want my hair cut, they keep calling me Girl.' My Dad got really, really mad and he took me, and shaved my hair right off. I was really happy, but my Mom cried, eh? She was really sad. But my Dad beat the shit out of her. I wake up the next day for school. She's getting me breakfast and my lunch and her hair down and trying not to look at me. I was like, 'Mom, won't you look at me?' and I'll never forget that. That was the first time I ever seen her like that, her face you know. [Dwayne then began to thump his fists on the table.] It was puffed right up—he beat her up, and then you know, then he, he wasn't even there. He'd leave for another week. But that was the first time—since then it was like I started this hate towards him. How I loved the guy, I loved my Dad, but I hated him for leaving us, hitting her, you know.*

Dwayne's narrative is important because it not only shows the extreme domestic violence that the majority of the men witnessed as young children, but also the connections to colonial violence and masculinity. In Canadian society, hair length has often been associated to gender identity, where long hair symbolizes femininity, and short hair maleness. Dwayne was bullied because of his long hair by other students at school, and saw that to be seen as a “boy” and not a “girl” he needed to cut his hair; however, his mother wanted to keep his hair long to connect him to his Cree heritage. As a result, Dwayne actively altered his appearance by cutting his hair in order to belong to social gender norms, while at the same time subjugating his Indigenous cultural identity. Dwayne's narrative portrays the impact of the continued colonization on Indigenous bodies through both systemic violence of a system to dislike one's self and the extreme physical violence used to control others who have less social capital. The violence

witnessed by the men framed how they would later treat females in their lives, even mothers of their child(ren) prior to and while they were involved with street gangs. It was not until the men began to pull away from the street gang lifestyle that they began to shift how they treated the women in their lives.

Physical violence was also directed towards the men often as forms of corrective punishment. Older males most often delivered physical violence as a way to “correct” the behaviours of younger males. Once the punishment was over, the younger males were, at times congratulated on handling the punishment like a man. As Matt (25) explains,

*Yeah, it had a lot to do with the people I was seeing because, my cousins were older than me and they were big, tough, solid guys. And then on top of that, my dad used to give me lickings all the time and shit like that. Actually beat the crap, beat the shit out of me. I remember one time he picked me up over his head, and like threw me. Because I was like five that time, it was only because I took off after dark. But he picked me up over his head and threw me, kicked me in the ass when I was on the ground. A lot of anger. That's where it came from, I think. Trying to be tough. Trying to like suck it all up and not show anybody that shit. Give everybody else the abuse back.*

An older participant Stacey (48) also noted how he would receive “lickings” as a way to correct his behaviour from his father.

*Growing up, every time I got in trouble, when I got my ass kicked or a lickin' he used to tell me, you're not a man if you cry. If you cry, you'd get it worse. If you cry, you're not coming with me anywhere. You know, so at a young age, he showed me how not to show my feelings.*

Stacey continued to explain a time when he stole two silver dollars from a jar of money that his dad had forbidden the children from touching. Stacey watched where his dad put the money and waited for him to leave so that he could take some of the money to go and buy some treats:

*All of a sudden the door flew open. Right away we all turned around and it was my dad. And he was, looking at me, and he goes, shut that T.V. off. Right away my mom turned her music down. We shut the TV off and he goes, my son, my boy,*

*stand up. Right away I stood up and he flicks those two silver dollars at me. They hit me in the chest and fell on the ground. And he goes, 'Kids, what did I say not more than four or five hours ago about these silver dollars?' Of course, my brothers and sisters said, 'not to steal them. If we do, we're gonna get a good lickin'.'*

*So, what did he say to me? He said, "Take down your pants." So I took off my pants and he took off his belt and he started giving me a lickin' in front of all my mom's friends, in front of my brothers and sisters and he said, go to your room. So I pull up my pants and I went to my room. He come around the back and started hitting me in the bedroom. Grabbed a Hot Wheel track and started using that. When that didn't work anymore, he grabbed the hose.*

*And that's all I remember. I passed out from getting a licking. At that time, I was in grade three. So when I woke up, my mom and her friend was waking me up and they asked me how I was. I said, I'm okay; I'm just tired. They asked me if I was hungry and I said no, I'm just tired. So I went to bed, woke up the next morning, put on my clothes, got ready and we went to school.*

When Stacey got to school, he had to change for his Physical Education class, and that is when the teacher noticed all of the bruises and welts that were a result of the beating from his father. Stacey then had to go to the principal's office, where, with his mother present, he had to talk to social workers, police, and teachers about the incident. Stacey would not say what happened; only that he fell. When his father returned home from work that night he hugged Stacey, told him that he loved him and that he respected him for not saying anything.

Violent actions followed by signs of affection by older male figures help to reinforce notions of hegemonic masculinity where physicality, toughness, and violence are associated with being a "man". By taking their punishment like a "man" where they put on a tough front, the men began to associate masculinity to physical toughness. Love and compassion normalized the violence, and socialized the men to a performance of masculinity that focused on toughness, aggressiveness, and to be in control of one's emotions.

The men's experiences of receiving or witnessing affection through violence framed how they needed to act towards others in order to gain one's respect. Physical abuse at the hands of their parental figures framed the notion of violence as a necessary means to control behaviours. By "sucking it up," or "acting tough," the men began to construct their notions of masculinity around hegemonic male ideals of toughness, independence, violence, and emotional suppression. This is a process that is not only enforced by actions in families, but must be understood in the larger context of continued colonial violence on Indigenous peoples. But it was not only their personal experiences that socialized them to understand masculinity in this way. Observations of male interactions at parties held in their homes also supported the connections of violence to power and respect.

### 7.3 – Parties and Violence

Although the men talked about multiple incidents of violence in their homes at the hands of their parents, they also discussed the multiple parties where violence would often occur. At the parties, the men came to witness how individuals would act and who had respect at the party. The parties also offered the men opportunities to partake in "risky behaviours", where their bravado would be tested. These early tests would help the men to begin to create a "mask" where they could not show fear, because if they did they would be made fun of by others, and their growing masculine identities would be challenged.

The men stated that the parties that they remember when they were children were often violent. Baldhead (24) shows this violence through a photograph that he took after a

party that was held in his apartment building one evening. The blood on the ground brought Baldhead back to early memories of the parties that his parents use to hold.



Bonks (28) reinforces Baldhead's memories where:

*There would be parties and every party wasn't like a normal party nowadays. It was like get drunk and get mad at somebody's party. It wasn't even a party at all. Get mad. Get drunk. Fight. Parties where whether it's gonna be your girlfriend, your brother or your mother or your dad, you know. Somebody was gonna get beat up if somebody was drinking. If there was a big party, you'd expect two or three people would get beat up. (Bonks, 28)*

Parties also afforded the men opportunities to increase their reputation for taking risks. During their formative years, the men would create challenges with their siblings to test their bravado. As a result, some of the men in the study engaged in risky behaviours such as stealing from those at the party putting themselves at potential risk of being victimized for their actions. According to Dez (21),

*So, you know, at that point we were just kids, my mom would have parties or whatever and we, me and my sister would, you know, do the thing that we always do, we'd go through people's wallets when they were passed out, you know, steal extra booze, put it downstairs, stash it, you know.*

*I remember at one point I became rebellious and stole some alcohol from the party and tried some. I didn't like it at that point in my life and me and my sister*

*came up with a stupid idea. I poured out the alcohol, I pissed in the bottle and I put it back. I watched for that bottle to get picked up by a drunk and he picked it up and opened it, drank it. He started swearing around and he threw the bottle. "What the hell, there's piss in there; there's piss in there; I drank piss. Who's fuckin' around." He started getting mad and right away my mom knew it was me, she came outside looking for me. She whooped my ass. She was drunk, whooped my ass. So, that's probably where I started becoming rebellious after my mom whooped my ass.*

Rebellious and risky behaviours aided to construct self-confidence for some of the men. Even though they knew that consequences of being caught would result in often-severe physical punishment, the men continued to up the ante, as they would try to "one-up" others and themselves. With each successful risk the men would gain valuable social points from others in their group. However, this also caused a cycle of risk, where to maintain their status they had to increase the level of risk involved.

Some of the men explained that more often than not (depending on the weather), they would leave the house during parties to go wander the streets late at night. Milling in the streets helped the men to create relationships to others wandering in the streets and to the street itself, as the street provided for some, a sense of safety and stability that they felt was absent in their homes. Emil (42) explained how he began to fear being around the home and at the age of four, he and his younger brother would roam the city streets at night until they thought it was safe to go home. They would often run to a gravel pit that was next to their house until the parties subsided. Emil took a photograph to show his old childhood home; however a fence now stands in place of the old gravel pit.





*Photo: Emil (42) childhood house that was across from an open gravel pit when he was younger*

As Emil states:

*My older sisters would take care of us, me and my younger brother. It seemed like we had a lot of freedom but nobody watching over us, like a parent taking care of a child. A lot of dysfunction in the house. My dad was, he must have been working or something, I don't know. I remember a lot of nights after dark we would be out and our neighbour kids would be peeking out of their windows and we would be talking to them from the streets. ... A lot of other times there were parties and they would get too loud or my mother would get too angry and us kids would just get up and go across the street. And we would hang out in the gravel pit until everything calmed down and my mother it seemed would push us all away.*

The street for some of the participants was a place of refuge from the instability and violence that they were subjected to. Through nascent relationships with street subcultures, the participants began to understand the specific “street codes” that governed the streets. Older individuals, who were primarily male, were in positions of authority and reinforced notions of “don’t rat and be tough” to youth through violence, which supported the participants’ emerging masculine identity. The streets soon came to promote violent and risky behaviours and those who participated in the “right way”, were rewarded with respect and power.

## 7.4 – Peers and Extended Family – Street Socialization

As children age they begin to seek acceptance from peers and less from family. Adolescent's identities shift and align more with the values of their peers—especially those who share similar lived experiences—and social environments outside of the family.<sup>687</sup> Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Maté state that the shift from parents to peer affirmation within Canadian society is the result of capitalism, where the focus centres on the self and the need of recognition through the collection of goods.<sup>688</sup> Capitalism and colonization are interconnected within Canada, as colonial ideologies helped to remove Indigenous peoples from the land for the opening up of capitalistic markets.<sup>689</sup>

Colonization has negatively impacted Indigenous parenting in Canada. The legacy of residential schools, historical and contemporary child welfare policies, and the cycle of incarceration have created instability and disconnect within the parenting role, as many did not have positive parenting role models to learn from.<sup>690</sup> These histories have pushed the men towards creating meaningful connections with individuals who were orientated to the streets as this is where they believed that they belonged. As Bones (31) states:

*My mom was 15 when she had me and I went straight into foster care because she was too young to look after me. So I went into foster care right at birth till the age of four and my grandparents from the reserve came and got me and basically, I stayed with them 'til I was around six years old. During that time there was a lot of alcohol, lot of violence, lot of abuse. As a result of that, I ended up taking off. Started running away from home at the age of six and I was put into a residential school, in P.A. When I was six and took off from there and that's how I found my way to the street. I started hanging out in the streets. Hanging out with older people, older cousins and friends that I knew. So I started hanging out with them and we got involved with solvents, stealing, stealing cars, doing B&E's [break*

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<sup>687</sup> Gordon Neufeld, and Gabor Maté. *Hold On To Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers* (New York, NY: Random House LLC, 2004).

<sup>688</sup> *Ibid*: 8

<sup>689</sup> Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*; Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*.

<sup>690</sup> Karen M. Benzies, "Parenting in Canadian Aboriginal Cultures," *Parenting Across Cultures: Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science* 7 (2014): 379-394; Blackstock and Trocmé. *Supporting Resilience*.

and enters] *and all that. That's all I knew at that time 'cause I didn't want to be home, right. So I'd always take off to the streets.*

Bones' narrative reflects Elizabeth Comack, Lawrence Deane, Larry Morrisette, and Jim Silver's work on street gangs in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where the North End is labeled as a place where individuals are socialized at early ages to partying, substance abuse, violence, and crime.<sup>691</sup> The instability created at home helped to strengthen connections to the street, but ironically, the environment that the men were trying to escape was similar to the one that they became involved with.

The men describe how early relationships with their parents were often strained or broken due to instability within their home environments.<sup>692</sup> This strain often led to traumatic events that forced the men to create stronger connections to those individuals who were outside of their nuclear family. As Clayton (29) recalled,

*At the time it was all street kids, all poverty like no parents. If their parents are there like they don't even care what their kids do and stuff like that. That was the only crowd I would actually fit in with back in grade school. We'd always skip school, go steal bikes or steal from stores when we were hungry or break into houses and the like. We would pretty much fight other kids that looked different from us. Like they just picked fights like for no reason. They were all bigger kids. Grade seven was probably yeah probably the year that all my like violent crimes started. I don't know like the first time I was in jail too was in grade seven.*

Similarly, Bones (31) explained that,

*Because it gave me like, the people that were on the street, we looked after each other and we helped each other out and it was like everybody cared for one another, you know what I mean and that's, growing up as a child, that's what, you know, a child strives for, right, is to be loved and cared for and nurtured and all that and that's where I got mine was on the streets from the older people.*

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<sup>691</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Where Red*: 62.

<sup>692</sup> At this point, we must remember that the instability that I am talking about here is directly linked to the continued impacts of colonization and its policies on Indigenous peoples in Canada. If we maintain our current understandings of disorganization in relation to middle class values, we ignore the privileges and can then assume that the issues faced by these families is largely connected to their choices that they have made, when in actuality it is the larger social and political environments that limit the spaces and opportunities for individuals to make healthy choices. For a better understanding of this please refer back to Chapter 2 and the discussion on Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*.

Although the streets were viewed by some of the men as a place of safety for some, when reflecting back the men discussed how dirty street was.

Dave (27) depicted the “dirtiness” of the street with a photograph of garbage piled on the street outside of an empty garbage bin. However, Dave also noted that although the neighbourhood was dirty at the time he did not notice or seem to care because it also held positive memories.



*Photo: Garbage piled up in a back alley taken by Dave (27).*

As the men described, the instability that they faced within their homes pushed them to search for connections with other youth who share similar experiences. Through the instability within their homes, the men were searching for places where they saw other individuals who were like them and understood what they were going through.

The ways in which individuals create relationships to the streets is important with gang research, as it helps to explain why individuals might be attracted to the street lifestyle. The street field becomes the space for individuals to try to escape from their realities at home or school and connect with others who they see are like themselves.

According to James Vigil, the process of street socialization is important to consider because many youth who face instability in the home often turn to the streets to escape.<sup>693</sup> This begins in early childhood, and is pronounced in adolescents when youth begin to associate their identity to external affirmation and less from their parents.<sup>694</sup> Identity becomes strongly connected to the streets because this is where the men feel that they belong, or are supposed to belong. As such, removal from the street to other social environments, such as foster care, extended family, or group homes can have little impact to change one's behaviours if the individual feels as though they do not belong in the new spaces.<sup>695</sup> Rather than protecting individuals, these new fields can actually push individuals to strengthen their connections to the street, because the new fields are actively excluding the individuals from belonging.

Some researchers have come to see the identities that are performed by street gang members in opposition to mainstream society.<sup>696</sup> As a result, a counter-identity is created that supports the limited social opportunities that some individuals are afforded based on their race and class.<sup>697</sup> Street orientation allows marginalized males to construct and perform their ideas of maleness within a specific social space that is framed by socio-political histories and local culture. According to James Vigil:

One of the first goals of the street is to determine where one fits in the hierarchy of dominance and aggression that the street requires for survival. Protection comes from seeking associates who are street wise and experienced and willing to be friends. In turn, this prompts the youth to return the favor by thinking and acting in ways that his friends approve. The new social bonds are reinforced, a sense of protection is gained, and new behavior patterns and values learned.<sup>698</sup>

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<sup>693</sup> Vigil, *Urban Violence*: 230.

<sup>694</sup> Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*; Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Vigil, *Urban Violence*; White, *Youth Gangs*.

<sup>695</sup> Deane et al., *Desistance Within*.

<sup>696</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Garot, *Who You Claim*; Rios, *Punished*.

<sup>697</sup> Bourgois, *Search of Respect*; Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*: 18.

<sup>698</sup> Vigil, *Rainbow of Gangs*: 99-100.

Street socialization during early ages is important because it helped the men to connect with others and to begin to understand the different social codes that would later frame their future choices. For example, due to limited opportunities to gain economic capital later in life, the men would turn to the street to partake in underground street economies.<sup>699</sup> The activities are often illegal and individuals soon find themselves engaged with the criminal justice system.

### 7.5 – Learning Early Criminal Behaviour or Learning to Survive?

As the men strengthened their connection to the streets they began to learn of different ways to support themselves and others within illegal underground economies. Over the course of their interviews, the majority of the men said they committed their first criminal acts between the ages of 6 and 12. Break and enters (B&Es) were committed and justified as a way for some of the men to get food for themselves and their siblings. As Baldhead (24) recounts,

*I remember me and my sister did our first break and enter, I don't know, I must have been like six; she's just a year younger than me so she was probably five. We had no food in the house. We broke into a house and our intentions were to get some food. This was right on the main street; I don't know how anybody didn't notice us, we were small. She slid open the window and I told her to keep six<sup>700</sup> while I went in and stole some cookies, doughnuts, juice.*

Baldhead discusses the importance of what one needs to do to survive. Because he and his sister had little to no food, they had to resort to stealing to survive. Baldhead's

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<sup>699</sup> Bourgois, *Search of Respect*; Venkatesh, *Gang Leader*.

<sup>700</sup> *Keep six* is in reference to watching out for someone who is going into a dangerous situation. In reference to a clock where 12 is straight ahead, 6 is one's backside. Therefore, *keeping six* is to make sure that an individual will not be seen, surprised, or blindsided.

narrative helps to show the levels of entrenched poverty that many Indigenous families face in Canada.

As the men became more confident they increased the amount of crimes that they committed. The increase in their participation to crime helped the men to be noticed by older males who they respected. Bonks (29) explained how he, his older brother, and cousin became involved in crime at a young age in order to belong with older males.

*It would be me and my older brothers. We were out doing B&Es before we could even remember just because we were going into windows for people, you know. I was a little... I remember this probably three or four times, five times even, getting pushed through a window, you know. Going to open the door and just having, being told to grab toys, if I wanted any toys to take 'em. You know, things like that. So that's how I was trained. In turn, when it came time for me to help my family and put food on the table for them, so that's how, that's how I learned to steal. I started stealing at a young age and things got big really fast. I started out, at probably six years old.*

Over time the men normalized criminal behaviour as a way to survive within their lived realities. As the men continued to engage in illegal activities to survive, they also began to recognize other benefits such as power, money, and respect that came with their actions.

Bonks continued to explain how his participation in crime was to gain the same respect that he saw his father receive from others. To do this, Bonks would do what was asked from him by older individuals.

*So a lot of people respected my dad, and the people that looked up to my dad you know, I looked up to those people. So in a sense I looked up to my dad, too, for a lot of things. So I looked up to my dad for a long time and I looked up to my uncles and my cousins. I always looked up to bad people. I always thought the world of them, you know. I always wanted to please them, to do everything for them. When I was a little kid me and my older brothers we were out doing B & E's as long as I remember.*

Thus, Bonks was trying to emulate the same masculine performance of his father, because of the social capital he saw him receive from others. Bonks took a photograph of

his late brother to represent the bond that he had with him. It was this familial bond their and early experiences together that would later influence Bonks to be recognized by his future gang.



*Photo: This is one of the only pictures that Bonks has of his older brother. It was taken shortly before his death from cancer.*

Bonks (28) talked about how he was committing break and enters and other crimes at the age of eight with his older cousins. Overt time, Bonks would increase the volume and types of crimes. By migrating into larger communities, Bonks would increase his knowledge on criminal activities.

*By the time I was eight years old I was doing B & Es getting whatever I could. If I had the help I would be rolling TVs. Already my older cousins were stealing cars when I was eight years old and I was already riding around in stolen cars, you know? Going around stealing gas, doing B& Es, going from town to town. Just stealing whatever we could, you know? So when I got to the big city I met more criminals and more people so that kind of got worse. So I knew how to do more things and steal more things, steal more vehicles. I was ten years old the first time I stole a vehicle on my own. We were always stealing vehicles, that's how we'd get place to place. And then in Edmonton, that's when I committed my first robbery. I remember we used to always go around and if we couldn't steal something, if we couldn't find nothing to steal or a place to break into you know, then we'd would be looking at people to rob. So that's how that started when I was a little kid.*



With an increase in crime, the individuals that Bonks interacted with were involved in the cyclical nature of the Canadian penal system.

*They were all older than me and they were all going to jail. They would come out of jail for long periods, come home, you know, and then they'd do it all over again and those are the people you know. Like I always used to see them coming home and when they'd come home, they'd be all big.*

The older males who Bonks looked up to would be removed from the community, and upon their return they would increase their physical stature as males through their increased muscular appearance.

Murray Drummond explores the connection of masculinity to muscularity with his work on the archetypal heterosexual male body.<sup>701</sup> He states that a male's physical appearance helps him to gain status as a male, because it is a reflection of society's historical connection to a particular physical masculine appearance of power. Thus, a masculine performance and a masculine image work simultaneously to enforce the specificities of the hegemonic male.

As Bonks explained, he looked up to his uncles and cousins because when they returned home from jail they would be healthy and "big". For Bonks, and other young males, being fit or having big muscles became a sign of strength and source of power for one's sense of masculinity.<sup>702</sup> Bonks also talked about the "coming home" parties that people would have for those who returned from prison. As such, Bonks slowly began to associate the need to go to prison as a way to gain respect from his family and other community members. Therefore, Bonks, like the other men in the study, began to associate respect to crime and the need to prove one's self as a man within the justice

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<sup>701</sup> Murray Drummond, "Reflections on the Archetypal Heterosexual Male Body," *Australian feminist studies* 26, no. 67 (2011): 103-117.

<sup>702</sup> Henry, *Indigenous Masculinity*; Katz, *Tough Guise 2*; Kimmel, *Guyland*.

system. As he moved from one youth centre to another, Bonks would continue to gravitate towards those who exemplified those same masculine and criminal traits that he found commanded respect.

As the men aged, they were able to strengthen relationships with their extended family and peers. This socialization process helps to support the formation of groups, where their identities were connected to the group and its activities. Because the majority of the participants grew up in poverty and homes where substance abuse led to ineffective parenting, the participants utilized peer groups as a way to gain economic capital to obtain their basic needs. To best understand how to participate in the underground or illegal economy the men watched older males who were involved in the street economy. As a result of entrenched poverty, lack of parental involvement, and an introduction to criminal behaviours, the men began to have increased contact with social institutions (child welfare, police, youth detention facilities) that removed them from their current situations to try to protect them from further neglect and negative behaviours. However, the new spaces were often as detrimental to the development of the men, as the men would face heightened attacks on their identities, leading them to use violence to protect themselves from becoming victimized.

#### 7.6 – Government Institutions – For the Protection of all Children Equally

Government institutions have left a scar on the history of Indigenous and settler relations in Canada. Government institutions such as schools, police, and social services were created through colonial discourses of superiority over Indigenous peoples, which

have resulted in the mistrust of the institutions by Indigenous peoples.<sup>703</sup> The impacts of racism within social institutions were evident throughout the participant's narratives. As Bonks (28) recalls,

*I seen a lot of things you know. A lot of parties where they never liked taking people to the hospital when I was growing up. A lot of the old people never liked taking people to the hospital because when people went to the hospital, there was a chance they would never come home. Whether they died in the hospital and just, their body went and buried without the family, or else they could just be taken away by Social Services or in the residential school. There were a lot of reasons why my grandparents never took us to the hospital when we were kids.*

Here Bonks explains how the legacies of negative relationships between Indigenous communities and colonial government systems are entrenched, where families are afraid to search for help, for fear of losing individuals to the system. As a result, Bonks was socialized to view those from outside his community as a threat, which created distrust to outsiders.

The distrust was not just to colonial institutions, but those who were seen as the enemy, is supported by the socio-political histories and relationships between Indigenous and Eurocentric settler institutions. We can see this within Stacey's earlier reflection when he stole the two silver dollars from his father. Stacey had learnt to not talk to those who were non-Indigenous or who worked for government institutions. By staying quiet and not talking to others about the incident, Stacey was later comforted by his father, where his father told him that he loved him. Like the other men in the study, Stacey was socialized from a young age to not trust specific people because of their connections to government institutions. Bones (31) explains how he was taught to not trust white people in general because they had the power to take him away.

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<sup>703</sup> Naomi Adelson, "The Embodiment of Inequity: Health Disparities in Aboriginal Canada," *Canadian Journal of Public Health/Revue Canadienne de Sante'e Publique* (2005): 45-61; Comack, *Racialized Policing*; Hubbard and Razack, *Reframing Two Worlds*.

*Oh, I had an attitude like you don't rat; you don't tell anybody anything; you don't speak to any cops. Anything that had to do with, let's just put it bluntly—white people—back then, anything that had to do with white people you never trusted them...I wouldn't say all white people, but just white people that were with the law—anything, social services, cops, security guards, people like that. You just don't talk to them. You don't trust them. That's just how I was raised.*

The men's distrust maintained a sense of fear towards those institutions that were controlled by “white” people. This fear is not unwarranted, as Indigenous peoples have had negative relationships with colonial institutions.<sup>704</sup>

#### 7.6.1 – Introduction to Child Welfare

Poverty is often associated to high levels of violence and neglect of parents towards their children.<sup>705</sup> For Indigenous families, this results in high rates of children being removed from their care and placed within child welfare. A 2011 report on First Nations children in child welfare across Canada found that the majority of First Nations children in care were for neglect (46%) compared to non-Aboriginal children (29%), and non-Aboriginal children were more likely to be physically abused (23%) compared to First Nations children (9%).<sup>706</sup> Neglect has been found to be a subjective term used by child protection workers to justify removing children due to entrenched poverty that parents do not have control over without external support. This results in the majority of Indigenous children being removed from their families and placed within non-Indigenous homes, where the foster parents do not understand or have knowledge about the impacts of colonization or Indigenous culture.<sup>707</sup>

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<sup>704</sup> Comack, *Racialized Policing*.

<sup>705</sup> Gorski, *Question of Class*; Trocmé, *Pathways to Overrepresentation*.

<sup>706</sup> Sinha, *Kiskisik*.

<sup>707</sup> Tait et al., *Social Determinant of Health*.

Often when siblings are placed into foster care, they remain together or are placed into homes with a sibling. As Baldhead (24) recalls, this removal from family was very traumatic and caused him to disengage from creating relationships with others because he believed that they would soon be taken away or sent back to live with their parents.

*In this foster home they took my sister, Destiny, away from me, I was sad, I was upset. I guess she lived like only a few miles away in a different foster home, so I remained there and I became really lonely in there, like really lonely. I missed my mom and we had kids coming in and out and this is the most, this is where I experienced jail even though I wasn't in jail, it felt like jail. Now that I think about it from a different level because when I was in that foster home, I seen kids come. They would stay there for a while until I got used to them. Until I liked them. Until I started you know, to feel that kiddly love, you know. And then they would get released back to their parents and this happened to, like a lot of kids were coming in and out and I was feeling this loneliness.*

It was through this removal and cycling of children through the home that Baldhead felt was the start of the normalization of institutionalism for him. Through his experiences in foster care, Baldhead began to disengage from creating relationships with other youth and blocking opportunities to create friendships or relationships with other children.

Although this was a negative experience, Baldhead also had positive experiences at times, where he began to see what “normal” was supposed to be.

*So they took us away and that's when I started to learn a normal, functioning life for a bit. They started pointing out that I'm supposed to be in school. They started pointing out, do you have any friends? They started pointing out that I wasn't really sociable as how I was supposed to be. So throughout that I was put in special classes to sort of catch up with everything and 'cause I was sort of a little used to the life where I came from. Eventually the foster home started to become abusive and they took us away. (Baldhead, 24)*

The foster homes may have created stability in the sense of finances, however the experiences within the foster homes created instability within Baldhead's sense of self, as he did not feel he belonged. Baldhead stated that although his home had high levels of dysfunction, he would still rather be there than in the foster homes because he never felt

like he belonged in foster homes. Because he was consistently removed from homes, the system itself created a sense of instability where Baldhead did not know where he belonged, only that he was not valued. This sense of not being valued is the basis of Memmi's concepts of colonization, where the colonized begins to believe in their subjugations, which supports their actions to act in the manner that the colonized views them to be.<sup>708</sup>

Although the men described some foster homes where they were happy and things went well, more often than not they were placed in homes where they faced abuse at the hands of their foster parents. Mathias (25) recalled a home where he and his brother were made to feel inferior by their foster parents.

*We got taken away to a foster home where me and my brother were abused by the foster parent. She kept us in the basement the whole time we were there. Did something wrong so she'll make us, she'll show us that we're "natives" by making us just wear fuckin' rags and shit outside, and she'll let us in when she feels like it.*

Dave (27) also talked about how he would go and hide because he was afraid of what could happen to him every time a door opened in the home.

*I used to have the habit of hiding in the closet so I wouldn't get taken. There was a lot of abuse and stuff, so...just every horror story you hear about foster homes is true; it's, you get physically, mentally, sexually—everything that shouldn't happen to a kid happens to a kid and you just get cycled off, sent to a new one or taken away in the middle of the night. That's my only memories of them is—I thought that's the way things worked.*

Indigenous youth are often moved multiple times within the child welfare system. For example, Emil (42) took this photograph to show the street where he had been placed into three different foster homes throughout his youth. Emil used the photograph to open

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<sup>708</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer*.

up about the abuse that he suffered in the homes, as well as the alcoholism of a particular foster family.



*Photo: This photograph was taken by Emil (42). It was on this street that Emil was placed in three different foster homes at different times in his life.*

Through the photograph, Emil explained his emotions when he was taken away as a young child and how it created a wedge between him and his biological family.

*So they took us to a foster home. And it was the beginning of the separation from our family. It was pretty painful it was the most traumatic thing in my life. Besides the violence in my home was being taken away from my family because that is all I needed. That is all I wanted. I didn't care if my mother was angry. I just knew that that was my family, and I just wanted to be with them. So we were thrown into a foster home and we were scared and lonely my younger brother and I. He was small and he didn't really understand. I was a year older than my brother and I understood that we are not at home and we can't go home and our parents aren't coming for us. It took a while to adjust. It was tough. So for that first year I went to daycare for a while. I was so shy. I wouldn't talk. I would keep my head down and the daycare that I was in, my older brother who was apprehended, Gary, was there and I remember seeing him and I remember saying "hey I know that guy", and wondering if I should talk to him. But I was so shy that I didn't even bother. I think that the trauma of being raised the way I was and in the foster home made me so shy that I didn't want to talk to anyone. So you are working with a broken little abused child.*

The abuse the men faced in these homes created a sense of instability and fear of the unknown. This helped to strengthen the men's perceptions of themselves that they were

less than non-Indigenous peoples. The men explained how their involvement with child welfare created a sense of instability where nobody wanted them, leading them to withdraw from their families, and search for connections with those who of similar experiences.

Although the men began to feel isolated from their families and others, the child welfare system inadvertently facilitated connections to other youth facing similar circumstances. The child welfare system helped the participants to find others who were also facing similar experiences and instability. It was within the foster homes that some of the men did create relationships with other youth who they would meet later on in various young offender facilities.

#### 7.6.2 – Gladiator School: The Educational System

The majority of the men in the study expressed that they had negative childhood school experiences. The education system helps to support colonial ideologies as curriculum and other school policies work together to subjugate the Canadian Indigenous experience.<sup>709</sup> Canadian curriculums support the production, normalization, and privileging of whiteness which helps to support colonial ideologies that Indigenous peoples had little impact with the formation of Canada as a country, or how Indigenous peoples have come to be subjugated within their own lands.<sup>710</sup> Policies are created that remove youth from schools through the guise of protecting other youth from the threat of

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<sup>709</sup> Jessica Ball, "As if Indigenous Knowledge and Communities Mattered: Transformative Education in First Nations Communities in Canada," *The American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2004): 454-479; St. Denis, *Silencing Curriculum*; Van Ingen and Halas, *Claiming Space*.

<sup>710</sup> Ball, *Indigenous Knowledge*; Dei et al., *Race Card*; St. Denis, *Alliances*.



particular students because of their race.<sup>711</sup> The men explained that the teachers for the most part made the men feel as though they did not belong, and so the men were often removed from their classrooms and fellow students. Dez (21) explains:

*My experience with teachers was somewhat retarded because the teachers didn't know what to do with me. Sometimes they would just send me to the principal's office where I would just flip out and get suspended or like, at one point, you know, they suspended me for a long period of time where I just like there was no point in going back to school either way. So teachers would either scream at me; one teacher slammed me against a wall, but that was about it.*

Dave (27) also explains his experience in an “all-white” rural school in Saskatchewan where:

*I had some learning disabilities and nobody could diagnose me kinda thing. So rather than deal with it they just put me in a desk beside the principal's office and basically checked up on me every couple hours to make sure I was still sitting there. But other than that really I think they just passed me so they didn't have to deal with me. I didn't have no identity; I was an Indian. I took a lot of discrimination, racism from everybody, including teachers and one day I just had enough of it and I just started fighting. I beat up the one guy who everybody was scared of and I beat him up and everybody started leaving me alone. Actually that guy got respect from me and I started hanging out with the bad crew because he was part of the bad crew in that little town.*

The removal from school settings created feelings of loneliness, marginalization, and instability that often led individuals to fight back during their primary school years.

Mathias (25) took a photo from a distance of the field next to his old elementary school.

It was here in this field where Mathias explained that he learned how to fight and protect

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<sup>711</sup> Lawrence and Dua, *Decolonizing Antiracism*, Rios, *Punished*; St. Denis, *Silencing Curriculum*.



*Photo: Mathias (25) took this photo of a school ground because it was a place where he saw and participated in a lot of violence at a young age.*

himself. With their experiences at home, the men understood the power and respect that individuals could gain through violence (based on their previous experiences) and they began to use violence on the school grounds in order to protect themselves. In not backing down, the men gained a reputation as someone who was not easily intimidated. By not backing down, the men increased their bravado factor, supporting earlier observations and experiences that connected backing down as a sign of weakness that could be exploited by others.

Due to the social and cultural capital, size, and age of the teachers, the participants, as elementary school boys, would exert this violence onto other youth who they felt posed a threat to them. They could not attack the white students for fear of repercussion from the teachers, so they often fought other Indigenous youth, or those youth labeled as “bad” by teachers and others in the school. School fights gave the men an avenue to release their built up emotions in a manner that supported hyper-masculinity,

by exhibiting their toughness, violence and aggressiveness.<sup>712</sup> These behaviours allowed the men to gain a sense of respect and power with and over other youths within the school setting. For example, Baldhead's (24) remembered the racism and negative labels directed at him because he was Indigenous.

*I remember not wanting to go back to school 'cause there was a lot of racism there. There were a lot of kids calling us, putting us Natives down. At that time I wasn't a fighter; I didn't fight but I still had this built up anger from the foster home and everything.*

Baldhead would later begin to fight other youth on the playgrounds and in the classrooms in order to create a space of respect and power where no one could push him around. However, this violence began to have a negative impact on his psyche as he lost compassion with those who challenged him.

*I remember one kid that picked on me lots in that school. I didn't want to fight because he was a good fighter but I knew I would probably eventually have to fight him because he picked on me quite a bit. I remember one day going to school and a bunch of kids were crying and I found out that later on, at school, that that kid died. He hung himself or something in the reserve. And I was like, wow, and that was one of my enemies gone, less trouble for me. That's the way I thought of it. I didn't think of the family; I didn't think of his friends; I thought of it as wow, one of my enemies was gone, less trouble for me. And I was happy about it. That's what gets me to this day. Why was I happy about it?*

This idea of relief stemming from another person's failure supports the colonial process, where one's failure secures another person's sense of superiority, thus pitting Indigenous peoples against one another.<sup>713</sup> As will be seen in the next chapter, as the participants navigated their way through the education system, schools became the social space where stronger relational bonds were created along racial, economic and family lines. These bonds would push individuals to partake in high-risk behaviours in order to maintain or

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<sup>712</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*; Katz, *Tough Guise 2*; Kimmel, *Guyland*.

<sup>713</sup> Fanon, *Wretched Earth*; Memmi, *The Colonizer*.

create their position to fit within the particular group and survive within their changing environments.

## 7.7 – Discussion

As stated previously, street gang theories put great emphasis on the impacts caused through disorganization of familial and environmental structures as the primary factors for youth to join street gangs.<sup>714</sup> This type of thinking is problematic because the families that are impacted through this disorganization often have few opportunities to stabilize the environments for their children. By focusing on the contemporary issues without contextualizing to how this had occurred ignores how specific groups of people are overrepresented negatively, while others are privileged. In so doing, the ideas to change or better the social reality of individuals focus particularly on their making of the right choice, and not on how their choices have been limited as a result of socio-political histories that shape choice. For example, a 2013 report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that 40% of Aboriginal children in Canada live in poverty. The number becomes even more pronounced in the Prairie Provinces where 62% of First Nations children living in Manitoba and 64% in Saskatchewan live in poverty.<sup>715</sup> This results in families and children doing what is necessary to gather the essentials to survive.

Colonization has negatively impacted Indigenous peoples of Canada, as it has tried to remove Indigenous peoples and their cultures from the Canadian landscape.<sup>716</sup> It

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<sup>714</sup> Conchas and Vigil, *Multiple Marginality*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Alleyne and Wood *Gang Involvement*.

<sup>715</sup> David Macdonald and Daniel Wilson. *Poverty or Prosperity: Indigenous Children in Canada*. (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, June 2013).

<sup>716</sup> Marie Battiste, *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2011); Daschuk, *Clearing The Plains*; LaRocque; *Other is Me*; Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*.

was through racist ideologies that colonial governments created policies to remove Indigenous peoples from their land and cultures in an effort to extract resources to support capitalistic global economies.<sup>717</sup> To accomplish these violent colonial policies, colonial governments required an ideology that legitimated and entrenched the unequal power relations, which supported notions that “natives” needed to be saved from their own savagery.<sup>718</sup> This ideology was framed within a sense of racial superiority, where Indigenous peoples were deemed to be inferior, and as such, they needed to be assimilated into the colonizer’s culture or else saved from their current states of livelihood.<sup>719</sup>

To “protect” Indigenous youth from succumbing to the fate of their parents, Canada utilized Christianization and education systems (residential schools) to help detach Indigenous youth from their collective identity as Indigenous peoples. To do this in a “humane” way, policies were created that removed control of Indigenous sovereignty and self-government, and placed it into the control of the Canadian government.<sup>720</sup> de Leeuw, Greenwood, and Cameron state that, “The pedagogic imperatives behind residential schooling were Christianizing, moralizing, civilizing, and modernizing Indigenous children, all goals consistent with discourses of Indigenous deviance and a need for non-Indigenous trusteeship.”<sup>721</sup> Residential schools have negatively impacted Indigenous identity and created intergenerational trauma that is reflected through the instability within Indigenous communities. Through the removal of children into the care of residential schools, Indigenous children were denied the opportunity to be socialized to

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<sup>717</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer*; Taussig, *Culture of Terror*; Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*.

<sup>718</sup> LaRocque, *Other is Me*:37.

<sup>719</sup> de Leeuw, *Anything to be Done*; Memmi, *Colonizer*; Taussig, *Culture of Terror*.

<sup>720</sup> Alfred, *Wasáse*.

<sup>721</sup> de Leeuw et al. *Deviant Constructions*: 288.

positive parenting skills. Thus creating a void for their own parenting of their future children.

Although residential schools are now closed in Canada, other policies and institutions have taken their place in maintaining instability within Indigenous youth's lives, by removing them from their parents under the guise of "protection."<sup>722</sup> Child welfare policies have come to replace residential schools in removing Indigenous youth from the eminent threat of becoming victimized within their homes by their parents, through neglect or abuse.<sup>723</sup> The number of Indigenous children in care today exceeds those at the height of the residential school, which has some individuals calling the child welfare system an extension of the residential school system.<sup>724</sup> Paternalistic policies such as child welfare continue to create rifts between government agencies and Indigenous communities, where statistics of over-representation help to support the larger Canadian colonial psyche that Indigenous peoples cannot look after themselves, let alone their children.<sup>725</sup>

Colonial policies and programs such as the *Indian Act*, residential schools, and child welfare have had dramatically negative impacts on Indigenous peoples and their families.<sup>726</sup> These acts and policies have continued to disrupt Indigenous families creating

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<sup>722</sup> Blackstock and Trocmé, *Supporting Resilience*; Tait et al., *Child Welfare*; Nico Trocmé, Bruce MacLaurin, Barbara Fallon, Dela Knoke, Lisa Pitman and Megan McCormack, "Mesnmimk Wasatek: Understanding the Overrepresentation of First Nation Children in Canada's Child Welfare System: An Analysis of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-2003)," (Toronto, ON: Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare, 2005).

<sup>723</sup> Blackstock and Trocmé, *Supporting Resilience*; Trocmé et al., *Mesnmimk Wasatek*.

<sup>724</sup> Blackstock and Trocmé, *Supporting Resilience*.

<sup>725</sup> de Leeuw, *Anything to be Done*; de Leeuw et al., *Deviant Constructions*.

<sup>726</sup> RCAP, *1996 Report*; TRC, *They Came for the Children*.

legacies of inter-generational trauma or “trauma trails,”<sup>727</sup> where future generations are still impacted by these historical decisions. As Angus-Monture explains:

The past impacts on the present, and today’s place of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian society cannot be understood without a well-developed historical understanding of colonialism and the present-day trajectories of those old relationships.<sup>728</sup>

The impacts from these histories, has resulted in Indigenous peoples being adversely affected. As such, Indigenous peoples often experience lower rates of overall health,<sup>729</sup> higher rates of poverty,<sup>730</sup> lower educational attainment,<sup>731</sup> and greater incidences of contact with the criminal justice<sup>732</sup> and child welfare systems.<sup>733</sup> It is because of these factors that many of the men often have had negative relationships with institutions from an early age, in particular child welfare and the educational systems prior to the age of 12. This has resulted in the men searching for a sense of belonging, but also a place where they can see their notions of masculinity supported and privileged.

Theories that focus on strain, control and social learning can all be supported from the discussions of the men’s early lives.<sup>734</sup> The men grew up in particular social spaces that were often unstable and violent. Such social environments are viewed as optimal “breeding grounds” for deviant or delinquent behavior and conducive to one’s

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<sup>727</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*.

<sup>728</sup> Patricia Monture, “Race and Erasing: Law and Gender in White Settler Societies,” in *Race & Racism in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Canada*, eds. Sean P. Heir and B. Singh Bolaria (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2007).

<sup>729</sup> Kirmayer et al., *Healing Traditions*; Waldram et al., *Aboriginal Health*.

<sup>730</sup> Kirmayer et al., *Healing Traditions*; Charlotte Loppie Reading, and Fred Wien, *Health Inequalities and the Social Determinants of Aboriginal Peoples' Health* (Prince George, BC: National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2009); Daniel Wilson, and David Macdonald, *The Income Gap Between Aboriginal Peoples and the Rest of Canada* (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2010).

<sup>731</sup> Battiste, *Decolonizing*; St. Denis, *Silencing Curriculum*; Van Ingen and Halas, *Claiming Space*.

<sup>732</sup> OCI, *Spirit Matters*; 2013-14.

<sup>733</sup> Blackstock and Trocmé, *Supporting Resilience*; McKay et al. *Passion for Action*; Sinha et al., *Kiskisik*; Tait et al., *Social Determinant of Health*.

<sup>734</sup> Theriot and Parker, *Linking Culture*.

involvement in street gangs.<sup>735</sup> However, the macro theories focus from deficit perspectives and it is because of this that anyone who is seen to belong to particular communities are negatively targeted as “gang members” until they proven otherwise,<sup>736</sup> and the socio-political histories that frame one’s habitus are ignored. What is left is the notion of meritocracy, where the men’s parents were making “bad” choices. Such narrow thinking continues to ignore the impacts of historical imperialism and colonial ideologies, and how they continue to be recycled or reproduced today, which results in the privileging of whiteness.<sup>737</sup> It is a result of this narrow thinking that a critical decolonial/anti-racist lens be used to situate the socio-political histories that have impacted early childhood experiences of Indigenous youth.

The men describe how they felt as though they did not really belong anywhere during their formative years. Because the men experienced high levels of violence and trauma, were witness to issues of addictions, usurped within the child welfare system, actively removed within educational settings, and had negative contact with justice institutions, their early memories are filled with notions of instability and fear. As such, they began to internalize and equate their social and cultural capital, creating an internalized oppression of self. To challenge this internalized oppression, the participants began to utilize violence as a way to gain power and respect from others. However, because of their limited social positions, the participants did not go and use violence against those whose bodies had greater capital than their own, rather it focused on lateral

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<sup>735</sup> Cullen and Agnew, *Criminological Theory*; Grant, *Gangs in Indian Country*; Kubrin et al., *Researching Theories*; Vigil, *Rainbow of Gangs*; Wood and Alleyne, *Street Gang Theory*.

<sup>736</sup> Alexander, *New Jim Crow*; Cacho, *Social Death*.

<sup>737</sup> LaRocque, *When the Other is Me*.



violence against those in their community.<sup>738</sup> For example they may have resisted or directed violence at times against teachers, police officers, social workers, and even white youth, but the majority of their focus was directed at those who were more like them—poor and Indigenous. As such, the participants utilized lateral violence to gain power and respect within their limited social spaces, as they stripped others in their community of their power.

By having the men describe their earliest memories and role models, we can see how their habitus and notions of masculinity were shaped through early relationships with family, peers, and social institutions. Exposure to multiple heightened violent experiences over time socialized the men to understand how violence could be used to control and manipulate others for power and respect. Intergenerational trauma caused from negative experiences with colonial policies (*Enfranchisement Act*, *Indian Act*, residential schools, and the subsequent over representation in child welfare) created instability within the men's fields where violence became a justified way of protecting one's self and handling discrepancies with others. Structural violence maintains colonial ideologies of Indigenous peoples lacking the moral fibres or fortitude. By restricting Indigenous peoples, the colonial process helps to subjugate Indigenous peoples to believe in their lesser status. To cope with the trauma many Indigenous peoples have turned to alcohol and other substances to mask the traumas. However, the use of substances help to reinforce colonial ideologies, thus creating a cycle of subjugation, where Indigenous peoples are making the wrong choices and need to be educated about their failures. This

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<sup>738</sup> See Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois for a discussion on non-violence violence and “peacetime crime” in *Violence*.

diverts attention away from discussions of limited opportunities resulting from socio-political histories associated to colonization.

Due to dysfunctional and unstable relationships the men began introvert or close off their emotions in order to protect them from becoming hurt. By closing off their emotions and attachment to others, the men began to conform to concepts of hegemonic masculinity. As such, the men began to value behaviours of: risk-taking, self-centeredness, emotionless, toughness, and violence. The men would then gravitate towards others, who were often older males that reflected these behaviours.

Instability also forced the men to actively seek out individuals, groups, and spaces that they viewed as stable and where they saw others like them. Often the decisions and spaces that they sought out were formed through their understanding of their personal identity and how they interpreted their social labels of being Indigenous. With the intersection of personal and social identities and their experiences to violence, the men began to evaluate the choices that they had— or their habitus began to form. As a result of their life experiences, the choices and validation of physical violence to power led the men to create relationships with the street and its subcultures. As will be shown in the following chapters, the relationship to the street and criminal justice facilities would socialize the men to adhere to a specific masculine performance that emulates physicality, risk-taking, toughness, and a lack of emotional connections to self and others, reflecting the hegemonic male.

## Chapter 8 – Putting the Pieces Together – Constructing Violent Street Masculinity to fit the ‘Code of the Street’

*We watched. We observed. We watched how people got power. How people stayed on top and other people listened. We figured that out. It was pretty much common sense because we were sitting there and we’d watch my mom partying and stuff. We’d see the bigger guys would get loud and people would back off. That’s how we learned, you know, be loud, be mean, be aggressive.* Dez (21)  
STR8 UP member

### 8.0 – Introduction – Understanding the Code of the Street

Dez’s statement reflects the socialization process and how the men came to learn how individuals gained power and respect within particular fields. It was through this socialization process that the men in this study came to understand how they needed to act to obtain power and status within their fields (street, youth detention facilities, group and foster homes, schools, home etc.). As children they learned to “protect” themselves from further victimization by adopting and utilizing aggressive behaviours and actions for protection, till the point it became normal. Chapter 7 builds from Chapter 6 to show how the men build from their previous experiences and knowledge to participate and benefit within illegal street economies. The involvement within the local street economies helped the men adhere to perform a dominant street masculinity that privileged violence, toughness, and bravado.

As the participants aged, stronger connections were created with peers and others who they met in school, child welfare, juvenile detention centres, and their local street community. The shift from parents to peer affirmation created stronger relationships to the street and its sub-cultures, thus weakening relationships with their family. However, some of the men’s families were also connected to the streets, so their involvement with the street strengthened weakened family bonds caused by their removal through social

services or criminal justice institutions. Socialization to the street helped the men to interpret the specific behaviours or ‘street codes’ and how to perform them in particular ways to survive in at times unstable and volatile environments.

Chapter 8 examines how the men continued to frame their notions of masculinity as it relates to the hegemonic male, and how their limited social capital forced them to portray a specific masculine performance connected to the street. Rather than being victimized when they were younger, the men took their new masculine identities and began to reclaim power that they felt was owed to them. The main theme of this chapter focuses on how a dominant street masculinity is framed by Elijah Anderson’s concepts of “street codes.”<sup>739</sup> It was through connections and adherence to specific street codes—which reflect and encourage hyper-violent masculinities—that the participants were able to gain power, respect, and economic opportunities within local street fields. The men’s view of violence shifted from violence as protection, to violence as aggressor, where rather than waiting to be victimized the men used violence against others. The irony is that through non-aggressive and aggressive actions the men increased their chances of becoming violently victimized by others (street youth, gang members) who were also adhering to the same street codes.

Before this analysis can be undertaken, the term violence must be unpacked, as the social and cultural dimensions of violence are often ignored. I do this now and not earlier to help the reader understand how I have come to understand the term “violence” within the men’s narratives. This will also help to show how violence is not just physical but abstract and structural, supporting colonial ideologies that have supported the use of violence to control Indigenous peoples. The socio-political histories of violence to control

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<sup>739</sup> Anderson, *Code of the Street*.

Indigenous peoples have resulted in some Indigenous peoples using lateral violence to exert power and control over others in their communities. The use of violence against others helps to support colonial ideologies of the “savage” and validating the removal of Indigenous peoples through criminal justice systems.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois argue that:

Violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality – force, assault, or the infliction of pain – alone. Violence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim. The social and cultural dimensions of violence are what give violence its power and meaning. Focusing exclusively on the physical aspects of torture/terror/violence misses the point and transforms the project into a clinical, literary, or artistic exercise, which runs the risk of degenerating into a theatre or pornography of violence in which the voyeuristic impulse subverts the larger project of witnessing, critiquing, and writing against violence, injustice, and suffering.<sup>740</sup>

Because street gangs are socially constructed and actively engage in violence, with a focus on physical violence<sup>741</sup>, it is easy to ignore the social violence or the structural violence<sup>742</sup> that is enacted upon marginalized communities through social labels.<sup>743</sup>

Suppression policies such as gang sweeps, curfew bylaws, and overt police surveillance are created to control specific neighbourhoods as a result of the social perception of the community as “violent”.<sup>744</sup> For example, under the guise of “gang suppression” marginalized populations are often being subjugated to racial profiling ostensibly for

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<sup>740</sup> Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, *Violence*: 1.

<sup>741</sup> For instance, Indigenous street gangs often use physical violence as a rite of passage, but also as a way to keep individuals in line. These are often conducted through what are called “minutes”. Minutes are when an individual is physically beaten by other members of their gang to: a) show their toughness and commitment to the gang in an initiation process; and b) to apply a form of justice to individuals who have broken the rules of the gang, i.e. caught using intravenous drugs, disobeying a higher up, not fulfilling their obligations.

<sup>742</sup> Bourgois, *Continuum of Violence*.

<sup>743</sup> Bourgois, *Search of Respect*; Buddle, *Narconomy*; Cacho, *Social Death*; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, *Violence*; Tita et al., *Gang Set Space*.

<sup>744</sup> Hallsworth, *The Gang*.

their own protection, but then those practices of ‘gang suppression’ become another form of structural violence, where<sup>745</sup> As Robert Garot states:

While considerable scholarly and governmental attention has been directed to the widely accepted problem of racial profiling, police departments tend to evince great pride in their efforts toward gang profiling, although one would be quite hard-pressed to differentiate the two.

Within Canada, urban communities with high Indigenous populations with entrenched structural issues relating from poverty are labeled as inherently violent or as gang communities. The result is the support of racialized policies that privilege upper-middle-class white settler populations and control over poor and Indigenous populations.<sup>746</sup>

To understand the ways the men came to understand the importance of violence, I use Elijah Anderson’s concept of “codes of the street”<sup>747</sup> to show how violence is socialized within street fields. Street codes are important in shaping a dominant street masculinity, as they supply the framework for what could be validated as legitimate behaviours and actions. By utilizing Anderson’s work, sub-themes emerged from the participant’s narratives that included: lateral violence, creating a street legend status, the need to ante up one’s violence, and constructing the gangster image. In this chapter, I intend to show how one’s understanding and association to local street codes<sup>748</sup> aided in the construction of a dominant street masculinity, which is a reflection of the hegemonic

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<sup>745</sup> Comack, *Racialized Policing*; Garot, *Who You Claim*; Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Rios, *Punished*.

<sup>746</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*. See also writings by Jock Young where he describes the concept of inclusion/exclusion in creating standards to live by, but limiting the opportunities to achieve these standards because they do not have the social and cultural capital to be seen to fit. I.E. Jock Young, "Merton with Energy, Katz with Structure: The Sociology of Vindictiveness and the Criminology of Transgression," *Theoretical Criminology* 7, no. 3 (2003): 388-414.

<sup>747</sup> Anderson, *Code of the Streets*.

<sup>748</sup> I use local street codes to differentiate that each local space has its own set of rules and expectations. Although there are commonalities such as the use of violence to maintain one’s identity, the ways in which the violence can be used differs between communities. This can be seen as a result of the street culture that was in place prior to the emergence of street gang culture, and the relational histories of those who are involved.

male, that the men used to assert domination over others. I will show how local street codes socialize the men to focus on their own well-being and do whatever is necessary (as long as it is supported by local street codes) to protect their growing street reputation. I will show how the men's habitus framed their choices and how those choices are reflective of violent hyper-masculinity.

### 8.1 – Understanding Anderson's "Code of the Streets"

Elijah Anderson's research on street subcultures focuses on inner-city marginalized Black communities in the United States.<sup>749</sup> Through his research, Anderson noted that individuals, even if they were not involved within the street economy, abided by what he called "a code of the streets", where individuals understood the unwritten rules that governed the community at the street level. As Anderson states:

The street culture has evolved what may be called a code of the streets, which amounts to a set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior, including violence. The rules prescribe both a proper comportment and a proper way to respond if challenged. They regulate the use of violence and so allow those who are inclined to aggression to precipitate violent encounters in an approved way.<sup>750</sup>

Anderson maintains that if one's association to the street is a part of their daily life that they must understand particular rules or "codes" in order to protect themselves from becoming victimized.<sup>751</sup> Street codes are socialized early in one's life and are used by some to obtain respect within the community.

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<sup>749</sup> Anderson, *Code of the Streets*.

<sup>750</sup> *Ibid*: 152

<sup>751</sup> Anderson, *Code of the Streets*; Garot, *Who You Claim*; Jacobs and Wright, *Street Justice*; Eric A. Stewart, Christopher J. Schreck, and Ronald L. Simons, "'I Ain't Gonna Let No One Disrespect Me': Does the Code of the Street Reduce or Increase Violent Victimization Among African American Adolescents," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 43, no. 4 (2006): 306-317.

In public the person whose very appearance—including his or her clothing, demeanor, and way of moving, as well as “the crowd” he or she runs with, or family reputation—deters transgressions feels that he or she possesses, and may be considered by others to possess, a measure of respect. Much of the code has to do with achieving and holding respect. And children learn its rules early.<sup>752</sup>

By adhering to the “code,” individuals can create specific “faces,” “guises,” or “masks” that they use to gain and inflict violence onto those they may know in the community.<sup>753</sup>

Hyper-violence is linked to “street codes”, as it provides the necessary means for individuals to obtain power and respect, or social and cultural capital within the community.

The code of the street emphasizes that one must maintain the respect of others through a violent and tough identity, and a willingness to exact retribution in the event of disrespect, or risk being ‘rolled on’ or physically assaulted.<sup>754</sup>

According to Anderson, the street code is necessary to abide by, specifically for individuals whose environments are dictated by street cultures. If individuals do not follow these “street codes” then they face retribution by others in the community. For youth this could be as simple as wearing the wrong colour within a particular neighbourhood. Therefore, those youth who live in neighbourhoods that have a number of street gangs must be cautious of what they wear for fear of being assaulted for wearing the wrong colours.

The understanding of “street codes” is important to gangs research as they help to contextualize the actions conducted within street environments.<sup>755</sup> Due to high rates of poverty, joblessness, mistrust of police and other social institutions, illegal street

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<sup>752</sup> Anderson, *Code of the Street*: 66-67.

<sup>753</sup> Garot, *Who You Claim*: 121; Katz, *Tough Guise 2*.

<sup>754</sup> Anderson, *Street Codes*: 73.

<sup>755</sup> Cacho, *Social Death*; Comack, *Racialized Policing*; Barbara Perry, "Impacts of Disparate Policing in Indian Country," *Policing & Society* 19, no. 3 (2009): 263-281; Rios, *Punished*; Kristy N. Matsuda, Chris Melde, Terrence J. Taylor, Adrienne Freng and Finn-Aage Esbensen, “Gang Membership and Adherence to the “Code of the Street”,” in *Justice Quarterly*, 3, Vol. 30 (2013): 440-468.



economies become necessary to obtain economic capital.<sup>756</sup> However, street economies are not a free-for-all where anyone can become engaged. To maintain power within a select few, the threat of physical violence is used to keep individuals from breaking specific codes, which creates a form of street justice to protect one's investment within the street economy.<sup>757</sup>

Street codes also support the dominant street masculine performance within street environments, where it creates a:

violent demeanor [that] not only commands respect but also serves to discourage others from “testing” or “challenging” those exhibiting the street-code style. Anderson pointed out that “for those who are invested in the code, the clear object of their demeanor is to discourage strangers from even thinking about testing their manhood.”<sup>758</sup>

Adhering and performing within the confines of street codes helps to build a reputation of being “tough” or “macho.” By providing specific guidelines and appropriate behaviours, street codes influence those activities that make people feel like “legends” within the community and in particular the gang, by offering the opportunity to gain power and respect.<sup>759</sup>

Although Anderson sees street codes as a way for people to protect themselves from being victimized, recent studies have found his street code concept is a paradox, as it requires people to be on the offensive that increases one's chances of becoming victimized.<sup>760</sup> Studies continually show that those involved with street gangs are at

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<sup>756</sup> Anderson, *Street Codes*; Stewart et al. *Increase Violent Victimization*.

<sup>757</sup> Anderson, *Street Codes*; Jacobs and Wright, *Street Justice*.

<sup>758</sup> Stewart et al., *Increase Violent Victimization*: 429.

<sup>759</sup> See Bourgois, *Search of Respect*; Pearlman and Simpson, *Inside the Crips*; Vankatesh, *Gang Leader*.

<sup>760</sup> Stephen W. Baron, Leslie W. Kennedy, and David R. Forde, “Male Street Youths’ Conflict: The Role of Background, Subcultural, and Situational Factors,” *Justice Quarterly*, 4, vol. 18 (2001): 759-789; Garot, *Who You Claim*; Stewart et al., *Increase Violent Victimization*.

greater risk to be victims of physical violence.<sup>761</sup> Those who adhere closely to street codes are at heightened risks of being victimized because the street codes support the usage of hyper-violence to resolve disputes. Therefore, no matter what one does, the appropriate reaction will always be framed within a violent outcome.<sup>762</sup>

To understand how street codes and street socialization come together to shape one's *habitus*, I will focus on Dale's (36) narrative because he is one of the older men in the study and was a founding member of one of the largest street gangs in his community. Although his story is unique, it is also consistent with stories of other men on how respect and street status is gained through violence. Dale's narrative provides a candid discussion about his behaviours and activities prior to his involvement with a street gang. Throughout his narrative, Dale expresses how the street codes impact his relationships with his family and peers, and how he used violence or the threat of violence to protect himself and increase his reputation amongst other males within his social fields.

## 8.2 – Dale's Story – A Closer Examination of the Street Code

Dale was a founding member of the Native Syndicate street gang in Regina, Saskatchewan. Prior to this time in Regina, Dale spent much of his childhood being "shipped," as he put it, from one place to another, which created instability in his early life. Dale also remembered a great deal of violence in his early years that stemmed from his parents alcoholism. However he saw the instability and violence within his

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<sup>761</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Matsuda et al., *Gang Membership*; Terrance J. Taylor, Adrienne Freng, Finn-Aage Esbensen, and Dana Peterson, "Youth Gang Membership and Serious Violent Victimization: The Importance of Lifestyles and Routine Activities," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2008): 1-24.

<sup>762</sup> Garot also acknowledges how non-violence is used to remove one's self from a violent situation. However, this could only be done if there was no one there who knew the individual being challenged.

environments as “alright,” because his peers were also experiencing similar realities in their lives.

When Dale was old enough to go to school, his family sent him away to residential and boarding schools.

*Five to eight, I was in there. Then I went home for about six months and I got put back in 'til I was about 11. Finally at 11 I left boarding school. During that time I was getting shipped around to different boarding schools. I kept running away from a couple of the ones like the Mission. They'd lock the doors so you're confined in so it was like a real jail thing. So, then I left at about 11 the boarding school, and 12 years old, I went back to my grandma's.*

Dale stated that he was the only one of his siblings to attend residential or boarding schools. As a result, Dale began to create a sense of disdain towards his family, in particular his mother, as he felt it was her choice that he had to go away.

It was during his time in the different residential and boarding schools that Dale came to understand the importance of projecting an image of “crazy” to create a “tough” reputation for protection. Dale explained how early experiences of abandonment and abuse had caused him to bottle up his emotions where he would then unleash them in physical fights with other students. Older students soon recognized his fearlessness and bravado where he never backed down from anyone. These behaviours got Dale recognized by older male students where he became included with their activities. Dale explained that he liked to hang with the older students as he viewed them as his role models because they:

*Pretty much did cooler stuff than what the younger guys were doing. They would go out, they'd sneak out at night or whatever, they'd have fun. More fun than like what the young guys were doing.*

Thus Dale's reputation developed through this process of being validated and respected by older individuals. By showing that he was tough and fearless, Dale became recognized

by those who he wanted to be like. the inclusion of Dale into the older student's group helped to strengthen Dale's concepts of masculinity and violence to gain power and respect.

Through his inclusion with older students, Dale continued to build on his reputation as someone who was reliable, as he would not talk to those in authority, even if he were the victim of a physical assault by another student. By staying quiet, Dale was adhering to the unwritten codes in the school (which are reflective of the street and earlier childhood experiences), where individuals are taught not to "snitch" or tell on others to those in positions of authority.<sup>763</sup> Dale explained how he would rather take the punishment from the priests or others in charge than to be seen by other students as someone who could not be trusted.<sup>764</sup> This behaviour earned him praise from the other students, as they knew that they could trust him, even in tough situations. After the punishment, the older students, whom Dale admired, would congratulate him for taking his punishment and not bringing anyone else into his affairs (we see similar instances in the Chapter 6 where the men were socialized to not talk to others who were viewed as outsiders). These early experiences helped socialize Dale to formulate an understanding of the specific "code" or "set of rules" that one needed to follow in order to be respected within the often-unstable social environment that he found himself in.

At age 12, Dale left residential school and moved back in with his grandmother who now lived in Calgary, Alberta.

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<sup>763</sup> Richard Rosenfeld, Bruce A. Jacobs, and Richard Wright, "Snitching and the Code of the Street," *British Journal of Criminology*, 43 (2003): 291-309.

<sup>764</sup> Again we see here how violence is used to hedge particular behaviours. By taking the punishment and not talking Dale was proving his toughness by taking it like a man and not crying. Later in life, the men in the study would also use violence as a way to control the behaviours of others.

*When I was 12 years old I went back to my grandma's. We then moved up to Calgary to be with my mom and the family. That's where I started to get into trouble up there and I ended up in CYOC [Calgary Young Offender Centre] when I was 12 years old. My mom said, you do the crime, you pretty much do the time, you know. That's what was always told to me when I was growing up. Then she wouldn't come get me. She just left me there. She left me in jail. Wouldn't even show up at court for me, so I was just staying there and pled guilty. The first one I did, I did four months at 12. I was a tiny little guy then.*

By leaving him in the system, Dale came to recognize that he was on his own and that his immediate family was not there to support him. As a result, the lack of support forced Dale to “grow up” and accept his choices like a man, even though he was only 12 years old. With little familial support, other than his grandmother, Dale had to search out other individuals to create relationships with. Through his time in the Calgary Young Offender Centre (CYOC), Dale would come to use his earlier experiences within residential and boarding schools from becoming victimized within the youth facility. By acting tough and crazy, Dale would build a reputation as someone who needed to be feared.

After the four months at CYOC Dale again reached out to his family, and it was his grandmother who once again tried to support him. However, his grandmother could not look after him at this time and Dale quickly ended up back in the care of his mother:

*I went back to my grandma's after that. My grandma then took me over to visit my mom. She took me over there and I ended up staying with my mom and same thing. She never changed, you know. She was always drinking and just leaving us alone at home. We pretty much did what we wanted.*

With his mother's continued alcohol abuse, Dale's home environment remained unstable, and just as before he and his siblings had little parental guidance. This is an example of what the men were privy to in their formative years (prior to the age of 12), where they were left to look after themselves. Lack of parental support was a reoccurring theme for the men, which lead to instability within the men's lives. To survive and thrive in non-

supportive environments the men looked to their nascent relationships to street subcultures. However, I must reiterate that Dale's social environment and relationships with his mother cannot be simply constructed as bad choices by his mother. Rather, the unstable and often strained relationships are the result of intergenerational trauma caused through colonization. Dale's mother, like many other Indigenous peoples have come to use alcohol and other substances to cope with the trauma as a result of these histories. Therefore, to lay blame of Dale's life solely on his mother's actions ignores the historical and contemporary impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples and communities.

With little supervision, Dale found himself searching for a place where he felt as though he belonged. This searching pushed Dale to make choices that increased his risky behaviours, as it was through these behaviours that he gained acceptance from individuals that he respected:

*I would go and I'd be out all night, man. I'd be downtown Calgary roaming around on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and that's where all the drug dealers and that were. That's where I first got introduced to coke when I was 12 too.*

*One day a couple of these guys approached me. They wanted to do a B&E (break and enter) and they asked if I wanted to go along. I said sure, so we went and did a couple of these B&Es. We got a bunch of stereo equipment, jewelry and a few other things. We ended up selling them and traded for some cocaine, some pot, a few pills, and hash. That's how I first got introduced to coke. A guy asked if I wanted some. My bro,<sup>765</sup> he was older and he asked me, "Have you ever tried this?" I said, "Yeah, I've tried it before." You know, I'd never tried it in my life, you know, just wanted to look cool in front of them. So, that's when like coco puffs and lines – mixing it with weed – like it was different. Coke for the first time. So I started hanging around lots with them downtown Calgary. Some of them sold weed and that. I'd sit down there with them and I'd hold their weed 'cause a lot of them got jacked up by the cops and searched. I'd be sitting there and they're like, how old are you? 12. And they're like, what are you doing down here? You should be at home. Then they'd let me go 'cause I'm like 12 years old and so that*

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<sup>765</sup> Bro in this sense does not refer to Dale's brother. Rather, this is a term of endearment to someone that one is close to on the street. It can best be understood as a sense of acknowledgement towards someone who is like you.

*that's about it. I'd just hang around with them 'cause they were cool and did a lot of cool things.*

The drive to be “cool” on the street is reflective of Dale’s time in the residential and boarding schools, where he was attracted to older individuals who were seen as “cool” or did “cool things.” The question, “Have you ever tried this?” was a test for Dale, where those in the group would evaluate Dale’s reaction.<sup>766</sup> The question was not about whether Dale had ever tried cocaine; rather, it was asked to assess his reaction to drugs. If Dale did not try the cocaine, then he would become excluded from future experiences with the group. He might still have had the opportunity to be a part of the group, but the “cool things” that they did would be off limits to him. Therefore, he would be marginalized from the core group and be a part of the fringes until he could prove himself to be “cool” to the inner circle of the group.<sup>767</sup>

Questions such as the one posed to Dale, are a way for those involved in the street lifestyle to check the commitment others have to the group. The question helps to frame a rite of passage, where individuals must make the choice to participate or risk losing their place within the group. Because his family already had marginalized Dale, and he was searching for a place to belong, this choice was easier for him to make, as the group had accepted him; he just needed to prove that he was willing to make the choice to belong. Peer pressure would have also had an impact on influencing Dale’s decision because individuals are more willing to partake in activities that they may otherwise not do while in a group.<sup>768</sup> Therefore, Dale had a choice to not do the cocaine, however this would

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<sup>766</sup> Dale and other men in the study explained that when they were recruiting younger members they would set up situations in order to watch how younger individuals would react. Chapter 8 examines how individuals are tested and assessed in more detail.

<sup>767</sup> Garot, *Who You Claim*; Pearlman and Simpson, *Inside the Crips*; Venkatesh, *Gang Leader*.

<sup>768</sup> Vigil and Yun, *Multiple Marginality*.

exclude him from the group and the choice to not engage in cocaine was trumped by his need to belong and prove his bravado status.

Once Dale proved that he was willing to participate, he was allowed to continue to hang out with the group of guys as they conducted their business on the streets. By observing how individuals participated in the street economy, Dale became socialized to how business was conducted. Slowly, Dale would become engaged within the local street economy because it offered him the opportunities to make money and increase his reputation on the streets.

*A lot of them were selling on 7<sup>th</sup> Ave., 'cause that's where all the drug trafficking happened. A couple of them were also always jacking people. I'd go along and I'd pretty much do whatever they said.*

*A lot of my uncles were selling coke downtown Calgary too. I slowly got into it. When I was 14 I started to sell coke and I got robbed. I got beat up and robbed. And I was like, wow. So my bro, his street name was Chev, his dad was a Reaper at that time. He introduced me to his dad and I told him you know, I try to sell and that and he asked me if I wanted to be one of his little runners downtown and I was like, sure, I'll check it out. And I started selling coke downtown Calgary when I was 14.*

Another participant, Adam (36) also discussed how his father guided him as he began to be schooled in the local street economy.

*My father was a full patch member and he taught me how to – he taught me how to hustle. He taught me how to flip five bucks to twenty. Twenty to sixty – sixty to 80. At the end of the day – you'd get home –you'd have \$600 - \$700 dollars. It'd pay for your hotel, it'd pay for your clothes, it would pay for your habit.*

Similar to Dale with his uncles, the street economy helped to build a relationship between Adam and his father. Thus, the street became a place where father and son could bond over common interests, goals, and activities.

Even though Dale's relationship with his mother was unstable, he would often see her on the streets. At times Dale said she would try to chase him home, or away from the



streets, however he rarely listened as he had begun to build a stronger relationship with the street.

*I ran into my mom a couple of times down there, and she was like, what are you doing down here? Oh, nothing, just hanging out with some of my friends and that. She was like, be careful down here. She tried to chase me home, but I wouldn't go. And then, by that time I was like barely home and that and I was doing whatever. My mom just got sick of it one day and just kicked me out. Said there's the door, man. Get out.*

Dale had used his family and their home, at least nominally for a place to sleep and eat if food was available. His mother again kicked Dale out of the house, which resulted in him becoming homeless in Calgary at 14. Because he was only 14 and had limited education, Dale was left with few options. To survive in a hostile environment, Dale relied on his knowledge of the street code and the illegal street economy to generate economic capital for food and shelter:

*So, I was 14, downtown Calgary and didn't have a home to go to. So I started selling. Between 14 and 15, I picked up drug trafficking and possession charges and went to jail. I got out right away and by 15, I was renting my own place. During that time, I got robbed a couple of times and I didn't like it because I got beat up bad. So I started carrying a gun at 15 years old.*

Because Dale was only 15 years old, he had to rely on an older individual to pay his rent. Often the individual would take Dale's money for himself, which would leave Dale without power or water.

*Then, I was renting my own apartment, one-bedroom apartment in Bridgeland. Sometimes I couldn't pay all my bills you know. Like my heat and my water, 'cause my buddy, he was to take care of that. He signed and everything under his name and that and I just lived there.*

*So, one time I didn't have like hot water and that in my place, so I went to my mom's. She lived with her old man there and that and I went there and I asked her, can I shower here? She was like, "Yeah" and then told me straight, "You can't stay here though". And I was like, all right. No problem. I just wanna shower and that.*

*I left my duffle bag and when I was showering, my mom dug through my bag and I come out and she had my money there, my coke, and that handgun. She goes, what the hell is this? I said that's none of your business, I said. That's how I make my money; that's how I pay my rent and that.*



*Photo: Kinuis (24) took this photograph to show the amount of money that is available to individuals if they are willing to do certain things for the gang.*

*She got mad at me and was gonna tell my uncle on me or something. So, I ended up leaving and sure enough, my uncle came and found me downtown and asked me if I was selling and I told him, no. He told me don't lie to him 'cause he heard already I was running around there selling. And then, he ended up giving me a licking. Said, don't do this 'cause you'll get hurt down here. You'll get stabbed up or something. I told him, no, I won't I said. He said 'What do you mean? Fuck, I got a gun, man.' He just kinda laughed at me. Do you know how to use that thing? And I was like, yeah, I know how to use it.*

As Dale became more involved with the street economy, he found himself increasingly running into the criminal justice system. The engagement with the criminal justice system and his accumulation of “paperwork”<sup>769</sup> helped Dale to build and solidify his reputation on the street.

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<sup>769</sup> Paperwork refers to the criminal convictions that individuals have been charged with. The participants, as well as the community informants, discussed the importance of one's papers. The papers are used to show the types, length and where individuals were placed. These papers help to solidify one's reputation, particularly if they do not have any other connections to the street gang.

Dale's increased use of violence was his way to create an identity that reflected his growing connection to the street. After becoming a victim of robberies and being physically assaulted, Dale saw the need to carry a gun for protection. The threat of violence is imperative in the men's lives. As Dez (21) discussed through his reenactment of a home invasion, one is not safe even in their own home. Individuals must always be weary of the potential threat of violence.



*Photo: Dez (21) took this photo to reenact a home invasion. He said that this was something that was common when he was in the gang as it created a sense of fear that people are not safe, even in their own homes.*

Arming one's self became important for the men at a young age. Often the men would have guns and knives on them for protection and a sense of safety against violence from others. Another participant Kinuis (24) stated that he felt a surge of power and control when he held a gun for the first time. He explained that he would carry the gun not only for protection, but to also use for economic purposes when they arose. The gun symbolized a sense of safety as it could be used to settle disputes or protect an individual

from the threat of an assault from a rival. Gun's and other weapons afforded Dale the ability to not rely on others for protection, thus supporting hegemonic masculinity.



*Photo: Dez (21) took these photographs to reflect the knives that he used to carry on him while he was involved in his gang.*

For example if Dale had gone to the police about the robbery he would be labeled within the street as someone who is soft and can be easily taken advantaged. This would have resulted in Dale facing an increase in assaults or being denied the opportunity to gain from the street economy. As Stewart and Simon explain:

The code maintains that, “a man goes for himself, takes up for himself, and calls on no one else to fight his battles.” Consequently, disputes are settled informally, violently, and without the intervention of responsible authorities like parents, police, or teachers.<sup>770</sup>

Therefore, to assert his masculinity within the street, the owning of a gun, even if he did not use it, became a statement that he had the means to protect himself.<sup>771</sup>

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<sup>770</sup> Eric A. Stewart and Ronald L. Simons, “Race, Code of the Street, and Violent Delinquency: A Multilevel Investigation of Neighbourhood Street Culture and Individual Norms of Violence\*,” *Criminology* 48, no. 2 (2010): 573.

<sup>771</sup> Katz, *Tough Guise* 2.

With his involvement in the street economy, Dale had to protect himself outside of societal law. Bruce Jacobs and Richard Wright describe this as “street justice,” where individuals who participate in the illegal street economy are not afforded “normal” social means of protection (i.e. police, justice system). Individuals who are vested in illegal street economies must protect themselves in a manner that is justified by local street codes, which are often violent.<sup>772</sup>

The street code created a “double bind”<sup>773</sup> of victimization for Dale. If he went to the police for help or was assumed to go to the police, he would lose the respect that he had gained on the street. If he did not go, he had to deal with the actions of others by adhering to the code, which would continually place him in a victim status because those who he attacked also understood the code and would have to act in a heightened violent way in order to save their own face in the community. Thus the street code and street justice create cycles of violence, where individuals become victims of real and potential violence as a result of their actions. Dale’s choice to increase his violence solidified his street reputation by through his masculine performance of bravado, toughness, and independence.

A repercussion of Dale’s increasing violence towards others is that those looking to attack Dale would victimize those close to him. For example, if a partner was assaulted one could not go to the police; rather it had to be dealt with like a man— through violence against the perpetrator. Dale described an incident where his girlfriend at the time was attacked and through the attack, Dale’s masculinity and reputation were also attacked.

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<sup>772</sup> Jacobs and Wright, *Street Justice*.

<sup>773</sup> Spivak, *Era of Globalization*.

*I met this girl in the Spotlight<sup>774</sup>. She was 18 and I was 15 and I ended up going out with her and that's when I had my first kid, when I was 15. I picked up my first attempted murder because her ex came back to her and he ended up beating her up. He slashed her up or something with a razor, like cut her face, and arms and shit. Then she came and seen me. Of course I got all mad and then I phoned him up and said, what the fuck, eh? Got all mad at him and shit and he told me, fuck, you wanna scrap or something. Fuck, sure, man. He told me to bring my friends, if you want. So, we went. I met him where we were supposed to fight and then – it was weird, there was like the bigger guy and the smaller guy and I thought I was gonna be fighting the smaller guy. I went up to that smaller guy and I said you the bro I'm supposed to fight, and I just smashed him right away and punched him in the face.*

*Then this other guy is like no, it's me, and boom, he just cracked me and a little brawl broke out. Then one of his friends had a gun and lit off a couple of shots and one went right by my head. Then, one of my buddies there had a shotgun. He shot a couple of shells off and that. A few people got hit. But during that whole time that scuffle was going on, me and that guy were rolling around and then I had a knife on me and I stabbed him once.*

*Then I lost that knife and my buddy passed me a machete and then I chopped him a few times with the machete. I gave him 300- 400 stitches across his chest. I tried to buck<sup>775</sup> his head off, but I missed. And then, that's how I picked up my first attempted murder 'cause he ended up charging me.*

This event became the point in which the street code and Dale's construction of masculinity intersected and solidified his street reputation. Dale solidified his street reputation as someone who was tough, would never back down, and would do what was necessary to protect his image through violence. Dale utilized hyper-violence as a way to create a legend status, through his bravado, where his reputation would protect him at times, because those who would challenge him in the future had to be sure of their actions for fear of retribution.

With the attack on Dale's girlfriend and the mother of his soon to be child, Dale responded to the attack in a way that was supported by street codes. We do not know if Dale's girlfriend went to the police to file a charge against her ex-boyfriend. We can

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<sup>774</sup> The *Spotlight* is the name given to the core neighbourhood in Calgary.

<sup>775</sup> To "buck" one's head off is to try and decapitate someone.

assume that she, like Dale and others, who were involved in the altercation, abide by the same street codes. Her reaction after her attack was to tell Dale about the incident and who committed it. Dale then had to react to the attack in a way that would avenge his reputation from the assailant. Dale reacted to the situation in the only manner that he saw as normal. He saw the attack by the ex-boyfriend on his girlfriend not as an assault on his girlfriend, but an attack on his identity as a man. The actions committed by the other individual was influenced by street culture and hetero-patriarchy, where challenging one's masculinity is done through disrespect.<sup>776</sup> This results in heightened risks for family and those closest to them as potential victims for others to gain respect.

After the altercation, Dale's reputation became strengthened on the streets, thus alerting law enforcement officials to Dale's willingness to be violent. As Dale explains,

*I stayed in CYOC for about nine, ten months, through my trial. And then I beat it. My ex at that time, by the time my trial came they were gonna convict me. They were gonna give me four, five years, juvy time. But my ex old lady, she stood up, said she couldn't do it, she felt really guilty. And then, she got asked why and she said the cops coached all of them, all the way through. They had them all in a room, and they got told what to say and so it was pretty much just to convict me. That ended up beating the charge. They let me go 'cause the judge said, is this for real? It was like yeah and that got me off.*

After this event, Dale tried to put his life back together again by going back to his grandmother. She tried to help Dale stay clear of the streets and put his focus back into positive spaces such as school and religion.<sup>777</sup> However, his relationship to the streets and what it offered— money, reputation, excitement, etc.— were stronger than the support that his grandmother was trying to offer him.

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<sup>776</sup> Johnson, *Gender Knot*; Katz, *Tough Guise 2*; Kimmel, *Guyland*.

<sup>777</sup> This is also ironic as schools and Christianity are what began Dale's progression to violence as it created instability in his life. At this point though, he had the support of his grandmother, someone who he had respect for, and it was her support that offered him the necessary stability to try to succeed.

*I tried to go back to school and went back to my grandma's. That's how she brought me back. That's how she tried to bring me back out, cause my grandma is a Christian, pretty much telling me that's no life for you. I went back to school and I was off and on but I still stayed in the drug trade. I still sold grams of hash and weed. Still kept in touch with my friends 'cause they were pretty much who I hung out with all my life. Like when I was young, through all my teens.*

*At this time I wasn't a part of a gang, rather it was pretty much a crew 'cause it's just like a group of guys and then, we wouldn't let nobody come in. It was always just us and what we did was among just us. Nobody's allowed to come around or nothing. So it was like little unity pack and we always watched out for one another. When I was in jail, they helped me out a few times with money orders and that if I needed it for canteen in there and that.*

Dale's reference to a close-knit group of friends or a clique is important. All of the men in the study talked about a close group of friends that they associated to, but they did not refer to these groups as gangs. Rather, they termed them as cliques, crews, or as Dez (21) called it a *familia*. These groups were often formed in early childhood and maintained their connections into early adolescents.



*Photo: Kinuis (24) with two old friends that he had prior to the gang and now he has reconnected after he left his gang.*



Through Dale's experiences and socialization to the streets, he had begun to create a "mask" that he would use to portray an image of toughness. Dale would use his burgeoning street masculinity to protect himself from being seen as vulnerable.

*You see, when I was on the streets I had to portray myself pretty much like, if you mess with me, I'm gonna hurt you. I'll do my best to hurt you. 'Cause down there is pretty much if you gave in you're gonna be vulnerable. Like you'll just keep getting jacked, robbed, then pretty much just get rolled off the street. You wouldn't be able to sell down there or nothing no more. And then pretty much just like stabbing people, then yeah, that's about it.*

In the end, the street lifestyle and Dale's need to engage in violence to support his masculine image held out over the support provided by his grandmother. Although Dale understood the repercussions of his actions, his past relationships and experiences became so engrained within specific street codes and hegemonic masculinity, that any choice that did not support his newfound identity was not really a choice.

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is important within the analysis of Dale's decisions. We can see that Dale's decisions were based on a sense of agency to not become a victim in his lived reality. As a result of the decisions, Dale's reputation grew, as well as his power and respect in the community. To maintain his new reputation, he needed to participate in hetero-patriarchal, hyper-violent ways in order to protect his image. A hyper-violent street masculinity became the dominant masculine performance that Dale, and men in this study used to maintain, proclaim, and reclaim their maleness.

### 8.3 – Discussion

Dale's narrative is a reflection of the process that the men had gone through to build their reputations in relation to the street. Although not all of the men went through this process at the same time in their lives (youngest was 11 oldest was in his early 20's),

at particular points, the men began to see the need to adopt a violent hyper-masculine performance to gain power, respect, and a place to belong. As the men became more involved within the local street culture and illegal economies, their identities focused on a dominant masculine performance that encapsulated violence as a way to act and react to gain power and respect. Anderson's notions of street codes are shaped by the socio-political histories that have come to shape local street fields. As a result, local street codes shape one's *habitus* to validate specific choices, as they are seen as the only viable options at the time, and within that social space if they wish to be seen as a "man" by others.<sup>778</sup>

Street codes encourage males to engage in hyper-violence and street justice as a means to control individuals within street environments and marginalized communities. For example, Kinuis (24) discussed the first time that he was given a gun as a way to engage in criminal activity and for protection him during these activities.



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<sup>778</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977); *Masculine Domination*; Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Reflexive Sociology*; Korp, *Healthy Lifestyles*.

*Photo: Kinuis (24) took this photograph when he was younger. The picture represents the violence that he found himself in, and the need to carry the gun for protection.*

*I was 11 years old when I did my first B&E and from that point on I was looking for acceptance because I thought it was cool to steal, to fight. When I was 12 years old I was affiliated with (name of gang), the older guys. I'd hang out with these guys. I remember I was 14 years old when I held my first gun. It was just a little hunting rifle, a 30-30. One guy had a closet full of shotguns and just ammunition and he said he was holding it for some guys. He would let me use these things and tell me to "take it if you want to make yourself some extra money." Although I never used it I just took it to intimidate. I never shot nobody but, it benefitted me financially.*

Although Kinuis never shot anybody, the gun (much the same as Dale) offered him the opportunity to intimidate individuals who were a threat to him. Through the image of the gun, Kinuis was able to gain power and respect from others; for fear that he may use it on them.

Over time, socio-political histories have shaped street codes and local street fields. Because the activities within the street economy are illegal, individuals who partake do not have the protection of police and the justice system. As Jacobs and Wright explain:

Offenders who fall victim to crime are reluctant to go to the police because, among other things, doing so could expose their own illegal activities to official scrutiny... Moreover, the inherently conflictual relationship between street criminals and law-enforcement personnel, coupled with an informal code that prohibits offenders from cooperating with authorities as a matter of honor, militates against turning to the police for help.<sup>779</sup>

Because the "code" centers on the use of violence, violence becomes the appropriate way to address challenges to one's reputation.<sup>780</sup> According to Anderson,

At the heart of the code is the issue of respect—loosely defined as being treated "right," or granted the deference one deserves. However, in the troublesome public environment of the inner city, as people increasingly feel buffeted by

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<sup>779</sup> Jacobs and Wright, *Street Justice*: 3.

<sup>780</sup> Anderson, *Codes of the Street*; Jacobs and Wright, *Street Justice*.

forces beyond their control, what one deserves in the way of respect becomes more and more problematic and uncertain.<sup>781</sup>

In essence, the code supports hyper-violent actions as a way to protect one's social position in the community. Street justice and street codes work together in creating a cycle of violence; where there are never any real winners, as people are always on edge to protect their reputation and life impending threats of others.<sup>782</sup> We can see how contemporary street fields support both Fanon and Memmi, where violence is used to subjugate Indigenous peoples within colonial hierarchies. The increased violence of the "Indigenous" reinforces Taussig's concept of the culture of terror, where colonial states are able to validate the use of violence to control Indigenous peoples from harming others and themselves.

Supporting the critique that one's following of the street codes protects individuals from victimization, Dale's narrative shows how the stronger the relationship between himself and the street, the greater the need to use violence; however, the greater levels and incidences of violence, the greater the chance that Dale, and those he surrounded himself with, would become victimized to violence as well.<sup>783</sup> Therefore, Dale and the other men's narratives challenge Anderson's assertion that adherence to local street codes protects individuals from violence.<sup>784</sup>

Through Dale's narrative, we can see how street codes support violent hyper-masculine behaviours of toughness, independence, and bravado are used to protect one's reputation at any cost. Rewards are given (i.e. an increase in social, cultural and economic capital within street environments) to those who use violence as a way to gain

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<sup>781</sup> Anderson, *Codes of the Street* as cited in Cullen and Agnew (eds.) *Criminological Theory*: 152.

<sup>782</sup> Garot, *Who You Claim*.

<sup>783</sup> Stewart et al., *No One Disrespect Me*.

<sup>784</sup> Garot, *Who You Claim*; Jacobs and Wright, *Street Justice*; Stewart et al., *No One Disrespect Me*.

power and respect, which increases one's reputation.<sup>785</sup> Hyper-violent actions helped Dale to build his street credentials and reputation, as an individual who would do whatever was necessary to gain power and retain this power within the local street field.

Within the street environment, Dale needed to focus his attention on himself and his reputation. Although he was connected to other individuals, the relationships were to gain power and respect through his membership. If an individual was attacked and Dale did not see it as an attack on him or the gang he showed little emotion to the incident. However, if he determined that the attack was an attack against him as a person, or an attack on the gang he would react in violence to regain power and respect that he felt was denied. As a result, Dale did not care what happened to others; rather it was the thought that others could challenge his reputation by attacking those closest to him, that he needed to react in ways that were supported through hyper-violent street codes.

It was Dale's use of hyper-violent masculinity within street codes and street justice that affected his choices and ways in which to gain power and respect. From a young age, Dale and the other men observed how older males gained respect and power through violence. As the men aged and became more involved with the local street field, they then began to use the same violence against others to assert power over others. The early groups that the men found themselves belonging to helped to normalize the use of violence to settle disputes. Although Dale talks about his actions, it is in the last section of his narrative that he talks about the crews or cliques that he hung out with. It was the support of the group that helped Dale to gather the strength and courage to confront the individual who attacked his girlfriend at the time.

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<sup>785</sup> Stewart and Simons, *Violent Delinquency*: 573.

The men all talk about the early groups that they belonged to, where once they reflect back realize that they were stronger than the gangs that they soon found themselves involved in. However, because the gang was alluring with its power within local street and prison fields, the men could not see the false relationships that were created. It was over time that they would find out through their experiences (which were often and had them removed from the community through incarceration) that they were little more than pawns to violence, even when they had positions of authority in the gang.

## Chapter 9 – The Soldier in Action— Forming a New Identity Through Hyper-Violent Masculinity

*One evening, I pull on new Chuck Taylor shoes bought with some money from a robbery Smiley and I had done. I lace them with blue strings, pull on a blinding white shirt and khaki pants. My flags are folded and pressed. I've sewn two bandanas together and my crisp slice of royal dangles to my knees. I check myself in the mirror as I pick my hair long. I'm "Crippled down," playing a position for my team. This is my army uniform, the bandanas my medal of honor. The blue is me. I'm no longer Colton abandoned by his father and abused by his mother. I locate myself in this world as Li'l Cee Loc.*

— Colton Simpson,  
*Inside the Crips*<sup>786</sup>

### 9.0 Introduction

Chapters 7 and 8 examined how socio-political histories, framed by colonial ideologies, created instability within the men's lives. Through multiple movements within the child welfare system, instability in their home life caused through addictions and violence, and social labeling where the participants were marginalized within social institutions, the men began to construct a masculine performance as a way to gain power and respect. Through their experiences and observations, the men were socialized to construct their maleness in connection to hyper-masculinity, where toughness, independence, and bravado were privileged. As the men aged, they would see the important role that violence (physical violence and non-violent violence or presumed violence) has on improving one's social, cultural, and economic capital within local street fields.

Over time, the men became aware of the need to create a "mask" or a "face" in order to impose violence onto others in their community. The "mask" allowed individuals to do what was necessary to maintain their reputation amongst their peers, and the

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<sup>786</sup> Pearlman and Simpson, *Inside the Crips*: 33-34.

“street”. Early observations of the use of violence directed at the men and others socialized the men to practice specific behaviours that would help frame a dominant street masculinity that is borne from violence, instability, and the need to protect one’s reputation at any cost. Policies borne out of colonization (i.e. *Indian Act*, residential schools) have fractured relationships between Indigenous peoples and Settler Canadians. Some of the men discussed how they were taught at young ages to not trust those who were not from their community or represented government institutions. These early lessons also connect to local street codes where individuals connected to the street are: do not rat or tell others about an event; do not talk to authority figures as they are seen as the enemy; deal with your issues yourself and do not look to others to solve your problems; and, maintain your reputation at any cost, even if it means putting your life in danger.<sup>787</sup>

Street codes help to frame a dominant street masculinity, as it rewards those who are willing to enact violence onto others. Through physical violence, or the potential of violence, illegal street markets open up to those who are willing to do what it takes to expand and protect their investments.<sup>788</sup> Individuals involved in street fields, utilize violence as a way to control others within hostile and unstable environments.<sup>789</sup> Violence then becomes the primary mechanism for those involved in street fields to gain power and respect, which increases their social and economic capitals.<sup>790</sup> Because there is a sense of protection in numbers, individuals would connect with those who shared similar

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<sup>787</sup> Anderson, *Code of the Street*; Rios, *Punished*.

<sup>788</sup> Bourgois, *Search of Respect*; Venkatesh, *Gang Leader*.

<sup>789</sup> Anderson, *Code of the Street*; Garot, *Who You Claim*; Jacobs and Wright, *Street Justice*; Matsuda et al., *Adherence to the Code*.

<sup>790</sup> Jacobs and Wright, *Street Justice*.



experiences to form small groups or cliques to protect one's self from the threat of violence from others.

This chapter continues to follow the men's progression towards a specific violent masculine performance that is connected to and reflective of the men's street identity. To show this, I focus on recruitment processes and how they are used to identify potential members. For example, the men discuss different behaviours and characteristics that they looked for when they were recruiting new members. As a result, the men recruited individuals who were not only searching for a place to belong, but one that reflected the behaviours, attitudes, and actions that validated their concepts of masculinity.<sup>791</sup> However, when asked about the ways in which they were recruited, the men were as much searching for the gang as for a way to feel as though they are part of something bigger, as it was the gang searching for the right individuals to help solidify its reputation on the streets. The street gang, with its adherence to local street codes became the ideal social field as it encouraged the use of violence to gain respect and power.<sup>792</sup> The street gang offered the men the opportunity to build on their own reputation, as the street gangs reputation provided a group identity and relationship with others outside their local community, in particular relationships in adult correctional centres. As a street gang gained social and cultural capital (power, respect and reputation) within a community, the participants would also benefit through their association, thus increasing their social and cultural capital in the community. Overtime, through acts of bravado, some of the men

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<sup>791</sup> Deane et al., (2007) looks at how prevention and intervention programs need to be able to include the individuals visually, where they see themselves belonging and succeeding through the program. If not, then the individuals will leave because they cannot see themselves succeeding. This is the same within the gang as the men were able to see themselves being a part of and succeeding because the men could relate to those who were seen to have success.

<sup>792</sup> Tita et al, *Gang Set Space*; Venkatesh, *Gang Leader*.

were able to reach a “legend status” where they were able to benefit and accumulate power and respect through their reputation alone. These men became the new role models that shaped future generations of Indigenous street gang members.

To show how this transformation occurs, this chapter analyzes how the men became involved with street gangs. Close attention is directed to how and why the men were recruited by their street gang. Contrary to popular belief, not every Indigenous youth who was involved in child welfare, experienced violence, grew up in poverty, or lived in neighbourhoods with high street gang activities is going to join a street gang.<sup>793</sup> In reality few individuals actually join a street gang either because there were resistance factors that helped support individuals or the street gang did not see potential within the individual.<sup>794</sup> As a result, those who are recruited exemplify specific behaviours that are valued by street gangs. Behaviours such as violence, bravado, toughness, street credibility or reputation, and past relationships to the gang or its members are used to assess an individual’s worth.

The intent of this chapter is threefold. Firstly, the chapter shows how the men’s participation in violent hyper-masculinity created the attention needed to be noticed by street gangs. Not all individuals who live in unstable environments or experience trauma become involved in street gangs, rather it is their willingness to perform in ways that reflect the attributes needed by street gangs that led youth to become involved. As a result, street gangs become the social group, where the men felt that they belonged because the street gang supported their earlier socialized perceptions of what it means to be a “man”. Secondly, relationships that were built with other youth through child welfare placements,

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<sup>793</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>794</sup> Deane et al., *Desistance*; Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Hallsworth, *The Gang*; Rios, *Punished*; White, *Youth Gangs*.

youth justice facilities, school, extended family, and the street were used to recruit and validate one's reputation. Early relationships often determined the recruitment process. Prior and existing relationships would influence the initiation process, as not everyone was initiated in the same manner, even within the same street gang. Lastly, through the analysis of the participants' involvement with street gangs using Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, I challenge the validity of at-risk paradigms in determining the potentiality of an individual to become involved in a street gang. The men created a masculine "mask" that reflected the hegemonic male, but in a street context, as a way to enact high levels of violence against others. However, the "mask" created a double-bind where the increase in violence against others, would increase their risk of violent victimization. Thus, at-risk paradigms ignore that it is only a select few who exhibit the level of toughness and bravado to be noticed by street gangs.

### 9.1 – Street Gang Set Space

As stated previously, street gangs are a product of macrohistorical and macrostructural forces that limit social, cultural, and economic capital for marginalized members of a community.<sup>795</sup> In order to gain the economic capital to survive in a Western capitalistic society, some individuals become invested in the local illegal street economy.<sup>796</sup> Jock Young surmised that although dominant society presumes that marginalized communities do not value middle-class or capitalistic ventures, they are rather invested deeply in the capitalistic enterprise, but their limited social capital limits their opportunity for "positive" involvement. Young ascertains that:

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<sup>795</sup> Conchas and Vigil, *Urban Education*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Vigil, *Rainbow of Gangs*; Vigil and Yun, *Multiple Marginality*; Spergel, *Gang Problem*; Thrasher, *The Gang*.

<sup>796</sup> Vigil and Yun, *Multiple Marginality*: 65.

The problem of the ghetto was not so much the process of it being simply excluded but rather one that was all too strongly included in the culture but, then, systematically excluded from its realization.<sup>797</sup>

Street gangs for some become the social enterprise for some individuals to gain the economic capital that is seen as necessary to be “someone” within society. For marginalized men in “ghetto” or marginalized labeled communities, involvement in street economies provides them with opportunities to be viewed as a provider for their family.<sup>798</sup>

Specific spaces are sought by individuals for their economic opportunities in the street economy as well as to maintain a visual presence in the community.<sup>799</sup> Researchers have defined gang set space as: “the actual area within the neighbourhood where gang members come together as a gang.”<sup>800</sup> Violence and the threat of violence are used to lay claim or authority over a particular geography and to intimidate those not from the community from entering.<sup>801</sup> Often street corners or open air spaces are chosen as they offer a place to be seen and also see those who are entering the neighbourhood.<sup>802</sup> Today gang set space has grown from the presence of just street corners to include larger geographical territories (i.e. blocks, neighbourhoods, towns, cities, and reservations); however, economic activities of the street gang are often limited to specific locations.<sup>803</sup>

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<sup>797</sup> Young, *Sociology of Vindictiveness*.

<sup>798</sup> Bourgois, *In Search of Respect*; Cureton, *Something Wicked*; Venkatesh, *Gang Leader*.

<sup>799</sup> Bourgois, *Search of Respect*; Travis A. Taniguchi, Jerry H. Ratcliffe, and Ralph B. Taylor, "Gang Set Space, Drug Markets, and Crime Around Drug Corners in Camden," *Journal of research in crime and delinquency*, 48, no. 3 (2011): 327-363; Venkatesh, *Gang Leader*.

<sup>800</sup> Tita et al., *Gang Set Space*: 280.

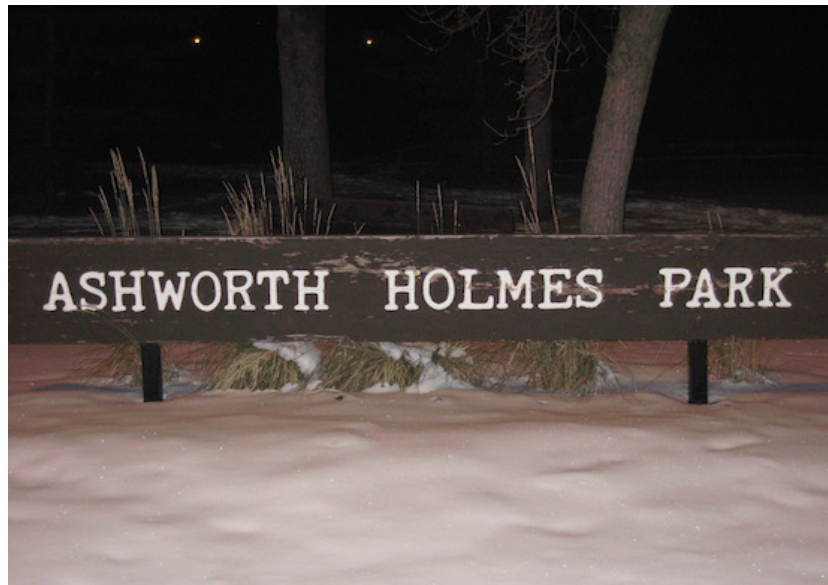
<sup>801</sup> See Venkatesh, 2008 for examples on how rival gang members would drive into neighbourhoods and shoot their guns off. Their intention was not to hurt or kill people in the rival's neighbourhood, but rather to create a police presence, which would affect the gang's engagement in the illegal economy.

<sup>802</sup> Taniguchi et al., *Drug Corners*; Thrasher, *The Gang*; William Foote Whyte, *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>803</sup> Taniguchi et al., *Drug Corners*.

Like other urban centres across North America, street gangs in the Canadian prairies have increased their territory from small street corners to controlling specific neighbourhoods.<sup>804</sup> The men explained that while they were involved with their street gang, they had to hold down specific neighbourhoods for their gang. The men explained how they were to be the authority and representative for the street gang when they milled around in the neighbourhood with other gang members. Kinuis (24) took a photograph of an old park that he and his old gang used to claim in their territory. Kinuis explains that in their territory they would:

*We'd steal, rob, sell drugs, and we'd fight all the time. We held down the Caswell area. That was our 'hood, like everyone knew it as a Crip neighbourhood.*



*Photo: Kinuis (24) took this photograph of a park in his old territory that he and his gang claimed as theirs.*

Specific places in neighbourhoods were also allocated for initiations, meetings, and a place to “chill” or hang out. On a trip to his cold community, Dale (36) took a photograph of an old house that he and his gang used. He explained that it was the place

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<sup>804</sup> Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*; Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*.

where initiations and punishments were delivered, as the trees in the summer months blocked outsiders from seeing what was happening.



*Photo: Dale (36) took this photo and explained different things that used to happen at the house. The house was surrounded by approximately 10-foot high hedges that, when leaves were on, would obscure the activities from the outside.*

In order to differentiate which gang is present within a neighbourhood, street gangs use specific “tags” and symbols for street communication and to show ownership. Detective Sergeant Tyson Lavallee of the Saskatoon City Police explained the progression and difference of Indigenous street gang tags in Saskatoon, SK:

*Has tagging evolved here, in the graffiti and stuff like that? The big thing I’ve noticed just by doing things is that the Indigenous gangs keep their letters together. It hasn’t changed too much in ten years. We talked about it already a little bit, the American model it’s just intense trying to figure out all of their letters and how they do everything. Here it’s still pretty straightforward; our gang graffiti is exactly that, it says what it needs to say.*



*Photo: Dale (36) took this photograph to show his old gang's tag. Dale explained that the other names in black are the street names of the gang's members in the area.*

Through a system of “street literacy,”<sup>805</sup> tags allow street gang members to communicate with other members and rivals.




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<sup>805</sup> Although there has been limited research on the connection of tagging, literacy and street gangs, there has been an resurgence of connecting literacy to the street as a way to acknowledge the ways in which communication can occur outside of formal literacy. See David E. Kirkland, and Austin Jackson, ““We Real Cool”: Toward a Theory of Black Masculine Literacies,” *Reading Research Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2009): 278-297; Laurie MacGillivray, and Margaret Saucedo Curwen, “Tagging as a Social Literacy Practice,” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 50, no. 5 (2007): 354-369.

*Photo: Bones (31) took this photo to show an old gang tag. Numbers and letters are used on the street to identify meanings. The numbers 4 25 mean “for life”, as the number 25 represents the years of a life sentence in the criminal justice system.*

Often the larger territory that the gang controlled had to be “held down” as their actions against encroaching rivals warned others who were trying to enter into the territory unannounced. Violence or the threat of violence was used to “hold down” one’s neighbourhood as it created a sense of unease or fear on what could happen to someone once they entered a rival’s neighbourhood. As Dale (36) explained,

*When the bikers came in, they took over “the local biker gang”. Some stuff happened afterwards and they kicked a lot of the locals out and they kept the ones that they wanted. So, the ones that they wanted had to strike now, so they tried to come into the ‘hood and take over. They got maybe six blocks in man, and three of them ended up getting shot right off their bikes, and it didn’t last too long man. Nothing ever happened about it. They just went their own way and stayed out of the ‘hood.*

Bonks (29) recalled a time when his street gang was in direct competition with a rival street gang:

*We were always competing with other groups, right. We started competing with these guys and we were always having wars with them. They would never use any of their own guys; we’d always go up to them you know, try to have a little stand off or whatever, and they would never do it. They would always run away and would send other people and we’d always beat or stab them up or whatever.*

This violence helped Dale, Bonks and their gangs to maintain control of the potential economic enterprise of their ’hood by protecting it from the encroachment of others.

The size of a gang’s territory is important for street gangs because the larger the territory that a street gang is able to preside over, the greater the opportunities to benefit through the illegal street economy. Because of the economic opportunities, territories are highly contentious spaces, specifically those that are seen as border spaces between street



gangs.<sup>806</sup> The way that one is dressed, their colours worn, and how they walk all become dependent on assessing if an individual is a threat. To show how a street gang's power is used in a community I will provide a detail of events that occurred with Dave (27) and I while we were collecting photographs in his old neighbourhood.

In October 2012, I had a chance to travel with one of the participants, Dave (27), to Regina, SK to collect photographs for the project. Dave directed me to his old 'hood where he began his gang career. As we drove around, Dave noticed at how much the neighbourhood had changed: it seemed cleaner now than when he was living there six years ago. Dave explained that there had been trash and garbage everywhere, and now the neighbourhood looked cleaner where old “party” houses had turned into new residential developments.



*Photo: Dave (27) explained that this is a house that this was the house that he first saw the street gang that he would later join. The men would sit on the front step and “chill” all day.*

As we drove through his neighbourhood, Dave began to get frustrated, as he was not able to find the specific places that he wanted to photograph. It was a warm and

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<sup>806</sup> Thrasher, *The Gang*; Tita et al., *Gang Set Space*.

sunny autumn day, and we had not seen anyone on the streets, so I asked if he wanted to walk through the neighborhood. Dave said ok and he directed me to a convenience store where he used to park his car when he was dealing or had things to do. As we stopped, he told me that if anything happens, I was supposed to run, grab anything to use as a weapon, to get into the convenience store or another business as soon as possible, and not worry about him. He explained that if we were separated, he would find me later.



*Photo: Dave (27) took this photograph of shoes over power lines, which have become synonymous with street gang culture.*

I have been to the neighbourhood that Dave was taking me through numerous times without any issues in the past. Individuals who live in or in similar neighbourhoods that Dave was taking me through, often tell me that they believe that I am an undercover police officer or a probation officer when they see me. Because of my perceived perception in the community, most people are hesitant to talk or confront me as I resemble institutional authority through my whiteness. As we stepped out of the car, Dave muttered “shit” under his breath. He pointed out that he was wearing all black—the

colour his old gang<sup>807</sup> would wear when they went on missions. I offered to switch sweaters, but he said that it should be ok, as we did not see anybody while we were driving.

We walked across the street from the convenience store and crossed a back alley to walk on the adjacent street. As we came through the back alley, we passed a silver SUV with five individuals who were wearing red. On the other side of the street was an elementary school and standing there were three individuals also dressed in red. As soon as they saw Dave they began to walk closer to us. As they walked, they began to throw different gang signs asking Dave whom he was “down with”. As this was happening I kept walking straight ahead, but as soon as Dave was challenged, he began to walk towards the three men. As this occurred, the silver SUV slowly approached.

I went back and stood next to Dave as he explained that he was not with a gang and that they needed to back off. I tried to explain to the men about the research and that we were there to take photographs of the life that Dave used to be a part of. As I talked to the gang members, my hands were in my front pockets of my hooded sweater, and as I talked I slowly removed them to show them that I did not have a weapon on me. As I removed my hands one of the men stepped back and lifted the back of his shirt slightly in anticipation of me coming at him.

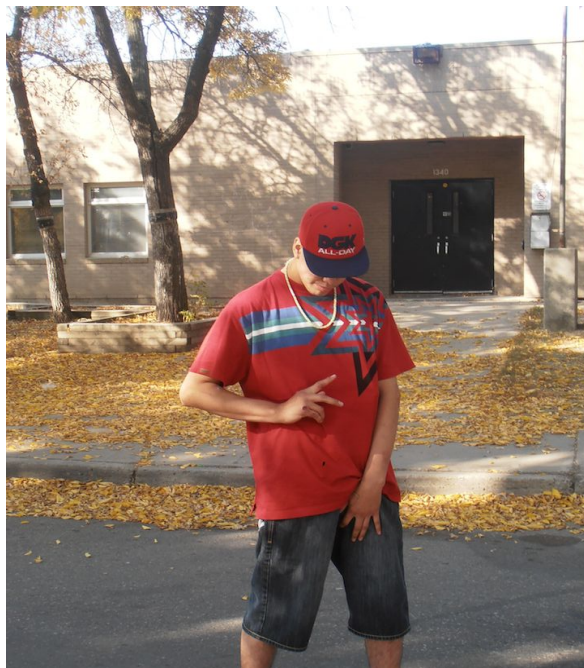
I said that Dave had the camera and that we just wanted to keep going through the neighborhood to take the photographs. The guys laughed and said that we were lying. To prove our intentions, Dave took the camera out of his hooded sweater. As Dave did this, the other two men stepped back, lifting up the back of their shirts and I caught a glimmer

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<sup>807</sup> Native Syndicate are associated to black and white, while their main rivals in Regina, the Native Syndicate Killers (NSK), are associated with the colour red.

of metal behind their backs. I could not make out if it was a gun, knife, or a piece of metal. Dave kept one hand up to show that he was only going into one of the pockets and he slowly pulled out the camera. The guys laughed again and after this we shook hands as they came to view us as non-threatening in their neighbourhood.

I asked if they would like to pose for the project and two of the guys walked away. One of the guys said that he would, but only if I used his photograph for the cover of *Brighter Days Ahead*. After the photograph, the three men walked in front of us and pointed to people to go inside of their houses, and the silver SUV drove away.



*Photo: Dave (27) took this photo of one of the gang members who confronted us on the streets. Dave asked the individuals if they wanted to pose, as they reminded Dave how he used to act and dress while he was in the gang. The pose is significant as the individual is using his hands to identify his gang. The placements of his hands also help to tell the relationship that they have with a rival gang. The left hand lower by the groin is a sign of disrespect to a rival, while the right hand is shaped as the letter 'K' signifying "killer".*

For the men, their 'hood was an important geographical space that they intended to protect from those who could pose a threat to their control. Street codes legitimizes the use of violence or the threat of violence, in order to maintain a street gang's power and control of a territory by promoting a sense of fear into those who would disrespect their claim. Gang set space creates a sense of entitlement and power over a territory where the gang has the right to conduct business and protect their 'hood in any way means necessary.<sup>808</sup> Because of the consistent potential of eminent threats, individuals must always be ready to defend the gang and its territory. It is this constant threat of violence that those who exhibit high levels of bravado are needed. Bravado ensures that members do not run away easily, which helps to maintain an image where individuals are willing to do whatever is necessary to protect the gang.

In order to protect the gang turf, street gangs require individuals who are willing to do what it takes to protect the space, even if it means that they have to use violence against family, friends, and/or strangers.<sup>809</sup> But how do they know which individuals have the mental toughness, or the willingness to use violence so readily in these situations? What do the individuals get for participating in these violent acts? And, how does the street gang amplify these violent aggressions to the point where those involved in the gang life, are willing to die for their gang? The recruitment process reveals how these connections are made and how violence is connected to one's rite of passage into the gang and its association to becoming a man.

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<sup>809</sup> Bourgois, *In Search of Respect*; Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Pearlman and Simpson, *Inside the Crips*; Venkatesh, *Gang Leader*.

## 9.2 – Getting Down – The Recruitment and Finding One’s Place

When individuals become engaged within different groups, there are transition periods where those in the group assess a recruits commitment to the group.<sup>810</sup> These tests can be simple, with little effort required to become a member, or they might be more involved, such as those processes found in Indigenous street gangs where initiation rites assess one’s reputation, skills, and commitment.<sup>811</sup> Initiation rites into a street gang are also dependent on the relationship that a potential recruit has with the street gang.<sup>812</sup> Therefore, one’s reputation and connections are important factors to determine if the individual is worthy to become a member.

If one analyzes the research on those who are considered “at-risk” to joining street gangs (due to marginalization, poverty, ethnic minority, low education, lack of parental control, etc.), we see that the signifiers are closely related to those who are considered at-risk to living an unhealthy lifestyle.<sup>813</sup> Since there are many more people whose identities are associated within the at-risk paradigm than there are gang members,<sup>814</sup> individuals who want to be in a gang need to portray particular attributes or character traits in order

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<sup>810</sup> James A. Densley, "Street Gang Recruitment: Signaling, Screening, and Selection," *Social Problems* 59, no. 3 (2012): 301-321; Richard L. Moreland, and John M. Levine, "Socialization and Trust in Work groups," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 5, no. 3 (2002): 185-201.

<sup>811</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

<sup>812</sup> It has been stated by researchers that the initiation for women and men into street gangs is highly dependent on the connections that they have with the gang. Some of the men in the study have explained that because their cousin or brother was a higher up, they did not have to be initiated like others whose name was not proven on the streets. Also, women and men are seen to be initiated differently, where women are “sexed” into the gang, while men are “beaten” by the gang to prove their loyalty and commitment to the gang. Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*; Vigil, *Rainbow of Gangs*.

<sup>813</sup> White, *Fluid Identities*; Chis Melde, Stephen Gavazzi, Edmund McGarrell and Timothy Bynum, “On the Efficacy of Targeted Gang Interventions: Can We Identify Those Most At Risk?,” in *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 9, Vol. 4 (2011): 279-294.

<sup>814</sup> See Malcolm Klein, *Chasing After Street Gangs: A Forty Year Journey*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007). The Saskatoon City Police have approximately 600 individuals that are a part of their gang database (personal communication with Det. Sgt. Tyson Lavalley of the Saskatoon City Police). When looking at the number of people living in poverty in Saskatoon it was estimated that in 2010 almost 27,500 people were living in poverty with approximately 40% of those people being of Aboriginal ancestry, and 56% of Aboriginal children under the age of 15 living in poverty. (Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership, “From Poverty to Possibility...and Prosperity,” City of Saskatoon (August, 2011).

to set themselves apart and be noticed by older individuals who are involved within street gangs.<sup>815</sup> Research conducted on Indigenous street gangs in Winnipeg, Manitoba provide an example of the need for an individual to be noticed or have a reputation to get the attention of a “higher up”.<sup>816</sup> Comack et al. describe how those who hold higher statuses within the gang do not pay attention to others not associated to the gang until they prove their worth in some capacity.<sup>817</sup>

Prior to joining their gangs the men were personally involved within the criminal lifestyle and illegal economy. It was through their involvement in criminal activities, that the participants built their street reputations and became noticed by street gangs that were active in their neighbourhoods. As Kinuis (24) explains, it was his earlier connections to crime and violence that received him notice from older male gang members.

*That's when I first got down with the West Side Crips. I was a full member when I was 15. They recognized my street skills. He could steal, you know, he could fight, he could be rude, he could be ignorant, you know. He's really good at it so they gave me that sense of acceptance and because of that I hung out with them constantly. We just did the same thing that I was doing when I was a kid.*

Unlike Kinuis, Bonks had family who were connected to a particular street gang. It was through his family's reputation and connection that Bonks was able to build his own reputation from and become noticed. Bonks (28) describes how it was his family's reputation that helped to solidify his own reputation with the street gang:

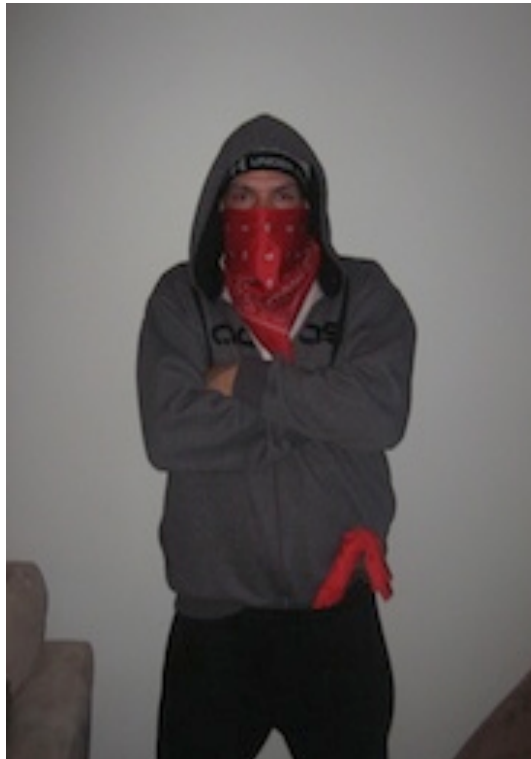
*I remember my brothers they did a lot of stuff and everybody knew that from our criminal background. We were willing to do what we had to do for whoever we were doing it for kind of thing. So the gang was almost perfect for what we were already doing. We had no respect for anybody. No respect for the law or any authority figures, we had no respect. We were just filled with a lot of hate.*

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<sup>815</sup> Densley, *Street Gang Recruitment*.

<sup>816</sup> A higher up is in reference to a member of a street gang whose status is greater than one's own status. This creates the gang hierarchy and a level of command where those who fall under the status of an individual must do what they are told. Even if that individual is younger or not as physically intimidating.

<sup>817</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*: 82.



*Photo: Bonks took this photo to show how he would dress before he went on his missions. He explained that this outfit helped him to create a sense of identity where he was able to put his emotions aside and do what needed to be done.*

Emil (42) stated that even if an individual had connections to a gang, portrayed an image of toughness, and had bravado, it did not guarantee that they would be recruited for the gang. Emil explained that one's crimes also factored into the recruitment process. As Emil explains crimes are placed on a prison hierarchy. If an individual commits a crime that is not legitimated by the street or prison codes, and a gang accepts them, then they will lose their status as a reputable gang.

*I was in the PA pen and I asked to be transferred to Winnipeg, Stony Mountain. I wanted to go see what the big life was all about and I heard about the Winnipeg gangs. That is where I joined the Manitoba Warriors. There was no initiation, because when you are in the pen word gets around that you are in for a solid beat ... no sexual assaults. Can't be a gang member with anything like that. That is where I became a gang member in the pen, because if you are big and strong, and you are there for the guys, it is a good thing in the pen.*





*Photo: Emil took this photo outside of Stoney Mountain Institution where he joined up with the Manitoba Warriors in the early 1990s.*

Emil's pose outside of where he was incarcerated is reflective of having the strength to survive. Once inside, the men's reputations and standing within the gang would increase with acts of bravado through missions. One's street reputation is important when entering correctional facilities as they can help to protect individuals from assaults from other inmates. Through their violent street reputations, the men were noticed by older street gang members and were actively recruited to a gang while incarcerated.

As stated by Bonks, familial relationships influenced the majority of the men to gravitate to become involved within a specific street gang. Family members or the family members of their close friends would persuade the men and their clique of friends to connect to a larger group. For example, with Matt (25):

*It was awesome, like, 'cause there was three of us, right? And we started it, like when we started, we had a higher up and we were the juniors. Our higher up was one of my best bros uncles. He sewed me up, when I threw somebody through a window and shit like that and I was like 14 years old. He like sewed me up and told us we should start something. We didn't have to get a minute or anything like that. It gave us all this power. He told us to start something big you know, start recruiting guys and get on the streets and start doing shit, give him some money.*

*He said, "You boys should do something, you know, start something. You guys are bad, you know?" So we did.*

By affirming their identities as “bad”— as in relation to tough— older males support the use of violence for younger males to gain power.

Past reputations and relationships with others who were involved with street gangs aided the men to become noticed by higher up gang members. Because gangs gain power and respect through violence, they need to recruit those who best reflect the image of toughness, aggression, and physicality. Through acts of bravado, individuals are able to construct a reputation and an image of violent hyper-masculinity. The need to find the best recruits (those that could be feared) helps street gangs to maintain control of their local territory and protect their interests in the street economy. To understand those characteristics that the gang was looking for, I asked the men to describe whom those youth were that they targeted for recruitment and how they went about testing the recruits so that they found the best “fit” for their gang.

#### 9.2.1 – Recruitment – Scouting for the “Right” Recruits

Due to the constant threat of violence from rival street gangs to take over their territory, gang recruitment is a continuous process. Street gang membership is in a continuous flux as members are incarcerated, move out of the community, remove themselves from the street gang, or die as a result of violence. To maintain strength in numbers, recruitment of younger members on the streets and adults who are incarcerated is necessary. However, not all individuals who are involved in a street lifestyle or find themselves incarcerated are recruited into the street gang.<sup>818</sup>

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<sup>818</sup> Chettleburgh, *Young Thugs*; Densley, *Street Gang Recruitment*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*.

The men explained how, when they were involved in their street gang, they would be constantly searching for others who they believed had the right skills and behaviours required to belong to the street gang. Individuals were recruited for different reasons, as some were recruited for their physicality, while others were recruited for their ability to make money for the street gang. The common attributes that all of the recruits displayed were the ability to present themselves as tough, fearless, and a willingness to do what was necessary (bravado).

To find the best recruits higher ups will orchestrate tests for potential recruits, as other members would watch and gauge how a potential recruit would react. One participant James (25), explained this process and what he specifically searched for in others.

*I watched them – how solid are they – seen what kind of person they were. Made sure they weren't a punk; they weren't scared to fight; they never jammed out; like they never said no. "No I don't want to do this or nothin'." They're always down for everything. Those are the kind of guys I looked for, those that were straight<sup>819</sup> don't say no and down for anything. **You don't have to tell them what to do – they know what to do.** I just looked for people that weren't punks that would hold it down with me and I wouldn't get stripped easily or get jumped easily. They needed to be solid guys. The kind of people I went after was the solid people that weren't punks. And people that I heard about I'd go recruit them and stuff – are you solid or what?*

*And so I'd scrap them and see how solid they are or I'd make two of my bros scrap them all and see how long they can stay on their feet and stuff like that – just test them. I would just test them, see how solid they are and if they're down enough, because I didn't want to be called a bitch and say oh he's got f\*\*\*\*\* bitches under him and stuff like that? Oh his bros are bitches like that – 'cause I seen people like that havin' like punk kids under them and they just get treated like shit and bossed around by other people's leaders or other people's captains and shit. And they just listened and I don't know. I didn't want people like that under me. I just recruited the toughest and hardest people.*

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<sup>819</sup> Straight in this term is not in reference to one's sexuality, although sexuality does play itself out within the street gangs. Straight in this context refers to shooting straight, as in not lying, and would not bend when pushed.

Throughout, James explains how he needed to recruit individuals who he found possessed specific skills and behaviours. Individuals who were willing to do whatever was necessary to maintain their “face,” were able to hold their own, had a reputation of being tough or violent, and knew what to do without being told were those that James actively sought out to recruit. Once James became aware of possible recruits he would then put them through basic tests to evaluate how the prospects would react within particular situations. These tests were important for James because his own identity was also on the line, and he needed to recruit those individuals who had the potential to strike fear into others. The recruitment process, from James’s perspective, was accomplished in such a way that he could judge the character of those individuals whom he felt would best maintain the image of the gang. James and the other men did not want individuals who were seen as weak or were afraid of violence; rather they needed individuals who not only looked “tough” but also had the mentality to protect that image no matter the cost. It was the image of the dominant street male, one who was tough, aggressive, intimidating, and showed bravado that James actively sought out. By recruiting those whom had a credible street reputation James maintained his street reputation as tough and violent. Therefore, the recruitment of the right individuals is important as it helped to strengthen the overall credibility of the street gang.

Masculinity and patriarchy socialized James to choose those individuals that best reflected his concepts of masculinity. His constant referral to being a “bitch” is reflective of hetero-patriarchal labels of being seen as weak.<sup>820</sup> It was the threat of not being a “man” influenced James to recruit individuals that he thought best reflected his constructs of masculinity. Individuals with a “solid” street reputation of being tough and feared would

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<sup>820</sup> Katz, *Tough Guise 2*; Kimmel, *Guyland*.

help to protect James and his own reputation. Through the recruitment of the “right” individuals to his crew, James would not have to worry about succumbing to being another member’s “bitch”, particularly if he outranked them. James was able to increase his own maleness, by recruiting those individuals who personified those characteristics associated to the hegemonic masculine ideal. Violent masculinity helped James and other men to gain power and respect for fear of their potential and actual violent behaviours that they or their gang could enact against others.

### 9.3 – Putting on the “Mask”

It has been well documented that one’s involvement in street gang activities increases delinquent and violent behaviours, and is considered to be “one of the most robust and consistent observations in criminological research.”<sup>821</sup> Street gangs aid in supporting the socialization of violence through initiation and disciplining processes, as well their adherence to local street codes.<sup>822</sup> The street gang’s macro identity helps to alleviate the guilty conscience for some individuals and justify performing specific tasks without having to worry about what they had to do, or who was affected. Kristy Matsuda, Chris Melde, Terrence Taylor, Adrienne Freng, and Finn-Aage Esbensen state how one’s membership to the gang diminishes one’s feelings of guilt, thus supporting the increase

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<sup>821</sup> Terrence P. Thornberry, “Membership in Youth Gangs and Involvement in Serious and Violent Offending,” in *Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders*, eds. R. Loeber and D.P. Farrington (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998); See also: Densley, *Gang Recruitment*; Esbensen et al., *When is a Gang*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Matsuda et al., *Gang Membership*; Chris Melde, and Finn-Aage Esbensen, “Gang Membership as a Turning Point in the Life Course,” *Criminology*, 2, Vol. 49 (2011): 513-552; Melde, Chris, and Finn-Aage Esbensen. “Gangs and Violence: Disentangling the Impact of Gang Membership on the Level and Nature of Offending,” *Journal of quantitative criminology* 29, no. 2 (2013): 143-166.

<sup>822</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*; Matsuda et al., *Gang Membership*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Tita et al., *Gang Set Space*; Thrasher, *The Gang*.

use of violence and offending.<sup>823</sup> By neutralizing guilt, individuals who join gangs are able to rationalize their use of violence because the actions are viewed as necessary to maintain and strengthen their reputation within the gang.<sup>824</sup> The men's membership to a street gang then validates their earlier experiences and socialization of violence as a legitimate way to gain power and respect within their local street fields.

To engage in this heightened violence, the men would create a masculine identity that reflected an image of power, dominance, toughness, and physicality. Work conducted by Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson's with urban African Americans supports this performance as they observed how poor urban African American males would use their body to create a domineering or "cool pose". As a result African American males utilized their bodies and social identity— where their "blackness" was to be feared— to create a pose that gave them respect and power for fear of what they could possibly do.<sup>825</sup> The cool pose is a deliberate performance where "conspicuous styles of demeanor, speech, gesture, walk, stance, and other physical gestures" are used to empower African American males to fulfill their "masculine ideal."<sup>826</sup>

Robert Garot's work with ethnically diverse urban youth also supports the "cool pose", as the youth in his study would create an identity front or a "face" that the youth used as protection within their social environments.

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<sup>823</sup> Matsuda et al., *Gang Membership*: 445. See also Finn-Aage Esbensen, Dana Peterson, Terrance J. Taylor, and Adrienne Freng, "Similarities and Differences in Risk Factors for Violent Offending and Gang Membership," *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 42, no. 3 (2009): 310-335; Cheryl L. Maxson, Kristy N. Matsuda, and Karen Hennigan. "'Deterrability' Among Gang and Nongang Juvenile Offenders: Are Gang Members More (or Less) Deterrable Than Other Juvenile Offenders?." *Crime & Delinquency* 57, no. 4 (2011): 516-543.

<sup>824</sup> To see how individuals can come to enact levels of violence, from the very space of ignoring its occurrence, to that of killing individuals for others see Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, *Violence*.

<sup>825</sup> Richard Majors and Janet M. Billson, *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1993).

<sup>826</sup> Ronald E. Hall, "Cool Pose, Black Manhood, and Juvenile Delinquency," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 19, no. 5 (2009): 531-539; Majors and Billson, *Cool Pose*.

The most powerful challenge another can make is to one's *face*—how one sees oneself in relation to community. Especially when one's identity is vulnerable, one may be prone to defend it physically...Indeed, if we feel we have been “deprived of our rightful place in the world,” it is hard for most of us not to consider fighting to regain it.<sup>827</sup>

Garot explains how street gangs were used both in school and street environments, to promote and empower one's “face”. This “face,” as Garot describes it, was associated to local street codes as a way to protect an individual from becoming.<sup>828</sup> Because the youth's reputation was all that they had, due to their marginalized social and cultural capital, they needed to protect it at all costs, but in ways that were supported by local street codes. As a result, the youth were in a continuous performance, centered on making calculated decisions on how to maintain their reputation through physical violence and non-violent posing, while “saving face” in front of others in their community.<sup>829</sup>

The men in the current study explained that they also needed to create a “face” in order to protect themselves from being disrespected or victimized within their community. To show how this “mask” is constructed, Dez (21) took photographs of two individuals posing, one who was a member of a local street gang and the other a non-gang member. Dez described that individuals who are a part of the street can tell who is a legitimate threat through their eyes. He continues to state that gang members have to put on a “face” in order to constantly portray a particular image to protect one's self from becoming victimized by others.

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<sup>827</sup> Garot, *Who You Claim*: 119.

<sup>828</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>829</sup> *Ibid*: 121.



*Photo: Dez (21) The individual on the right is a member of a gang, while the youth on the left has never been involved with a gang. Dez explained that it is not something that can be described easily, rather is just “known” by individuals who are involved in street gangs.*

*So the first thing is put on your face. Let’s do this. Let’s go. And so, I went and did what I needed to do. This face, just the face you know. People are going to look at you and they can tell. You put the face on and you look mean as best as you can.*

Stacey (48) also talked about the importance of what he called a “mask” when he was involved with street and prison gangs. Stacey created his “mask” as a way to suppress his “good” conscious in order to put forth a front that he was not weak or could be easily victimized.

*If you show weakness, you’re preyed upon. You got robbed, you got beat up, piped, maybe even stabbed. There (prison) you can’t show weakness, so you put on that mask of don’t look at me, or else. That “no fear” mask.*

*You know, if you walked around there and you were kind, you help people. You were looked at different because in there you don’t help people, unless they’re your friends or you’re affiliated, brothers or family, you know. You don’t show that. If you show weakness, passiveness, if you show kindness, you’re preyed upon. So a lot of people put on that mask where you can’t tell that they’re hurtin’, lonely, sad, and that’s—you hear brothers at night some of them, you hear them crying in the cells, and when you do that, you hear a lot of people saying, who’s that cryin’, who’s that pussy? You know, that cryin’ stops. You know, that’s why when people write from the system, they pour all that hurtin’ feelings on the paper because in*



*there, you can't show it. That's what I mean by putting on those masks that you wear, to belong, to be accepted.*

Dez and Stacey had both created a “mask” in an attempt to portray an image of the hegemonic male,<sup>830</sup> which was an “idealized form of masculinity that is culturally [mainstream] glorified, honored, and exalted.”<sup>831</sup> Within the street code, this performance is one where individuals must adhere to a performance that encapsulates toughness, strength, a lack of emotions and a sense of bravado in order to gain status as a real man within their local street and prison fields.<sup>832</sup>

The men understood from a young age that in order to gain respect and be viewed as a man, they had to embody a specific masculine identity, one that focused on the use of violence to prove one's toughness and bravado. In order to hide their emotions, the men created a “mask” to hide their emotions for fear that they would be victimized or not accepted by their peers and those that they respected. The mask helped the men as it would help to hide their emotions, where they could be viewed as weak or feminine. The street gang offered the men a group identity that validated the men's socialized perceptions of masculinity. Through their compliance to this violent masculinity, the men were able to find a place that they could belong. The street gang then became the social space where the participants could finally act in ways that they believed that they had to act in order to be considered a “man”.

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<sup>830</sup> See Buchbinder, *Studying Men*; Connell, *Masculinities*; Connell and Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity*.

<sup>831</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*: 20.

<sup>832</sup> Anderson, *Code of the Streets*; Garot, *Who You Claim*.

### 9.3.1 – Forgetting Who One Is – The Power of the Name

As the men became entrenched within their gang, their identities and goals shifted back from individualistic to the betterment of the collective group identity, where their primary association was to the group and their secondary association was to themselves.<sup>833</sup> As a result, the men would first claim their allegiance to their gang prior to their own identity. The collective gang identity provided the men with a sense of belonging, acceptance, and power to something larger than themselves.

Although the men had already established a street identity/reputation and were supported by those who recruited them, they still had to pass specific rites of passage to show their loyalty to the gang. As stated previously, rites of passage and codes of conduct found in the gang are framed around violence, where violence is validated to show one's loyalty and commitment to the gang. Dave (27) described how he first thought that he was included in the gang because he had been allowed to socialize with the gang members. It was not until the night they asked him if he was willing to be “down” with his gang, that he realized he was not a part of the group. The memory of Dave's initiation came flooding back to him while he was taking photographs. He went back to the park where his initiation occurred. When he got to the place where the initiation took place there was fresh blood on the ground a broken bottle of glass close by.

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<sup>833</sup> Karen Hennigan, and Marija Spanovic, “Gang Dynamics Through the Lens of Social Identity Theory,” in *Youth Gangs in International Perspective: Results from the Eurogang Program of Research*, eds. F.A. Esbensen and C.L. Maxson, (New York, NY: Springer, 2012): 127-150; Moreland and Levine, *Group Processes*.



*Photo: Dave (27) took these photographs of the park where he got jumped in. There was fresh blood and a broken bottle in the same area where he was jumped in.*

*So anyways we were just joking around and I didn't even know any of the slang or nothing like that yet. I still talked completely white so I didn't understand what they meant by, "Do you wanna be down?" They were drunk already and they asked, "Do you think you can be down?" I was like, "Yeah, I can be down." Before I could even finish the sentence, I already had a 26oz bottle over the back of my head and they laid me out just in the park and started bashing a couple bottles on me. They then spit on me, called me bitch, pussy and all that stuff and then they walked away. I didn't know what the fuck happened. But the next day I did the same thing. I was cocky so I parked my car in the same place right in front of their house just so I could show them I wasn't scared. I'm a plumber so I had pipe wrenches so I figured I had weapons. So anyways these three guys approached me again. Same three guys and they had white bandannas and all that stuff, and rather than walk up to me and beat me up or wanna go again, they walked up to me with their hands. They called me baby bro and I guess that night I figured out what a minute was.*

Dale (36) also explained his initiation process while he was incarcerated in the Regina Correctional Centre. Dale also had to endure a "minute" from four older gang members to prove his commitment to the gang.

*So four of them came to the unit I was on. The one guy goes, "Well, you're gonna get a minute." I go, "Well, what's a minute?" He was like, "You're gonna get beat on, man, for a minute." I started thinking "Holy shit," and these are like big guys. They didn't even fuckin' wait. One guy just smoked me over the head, and then they just continued to kick me and punch me and everything. I ended up with*

*a black eye, split lip, bleeding nose, like my ribs were sore and all that. After it was done they picked me up, dusted me off, shook my hand and they said, all right, you're down now.*

The extreme violence associated with both Dave and Dale's "minutes" was the final rite of passage for them to be considered a part of the gang. It was through this process that both Dave and Dale were emasculated to the point where they had no control of the outcome and were made to feel powerless. The point of the minute was not to see if one could fight back, because if they did it lasted longer; rather, the point was to see if they could handle a physical beating and be able to get up afterwards. By getting up and standing their ground after the minutes, both Dave and Dale proved that they were willing to take a beating for the gang.

Although, "minutes" are seen as one of the most popular initiation rites into Indigenous street gangs,<sup>834</sup> not all individuals have to endure a minute due to their connections with other members of the gang (i.e. for instance, some of the men already had a reputation built or their family members held high positions in the gang, which allowed them to join without the minute process). As Clayton (29) explains:

*I joined when I was inside the Saskatoon Correctional. It was actually through the kid I used to always fight with when we were younger growing up. He was one of the main guys for that gang so me and him were already good friends by the time adult correctional came along. So I just ended up joining with him.*

*For me I didn't have to get a beating. Like I met him in there and we talked and I said okay and I got out right away. Then he's phoning me and he wanted something done out on the street. He wanted me to go and rob someone. And I was like okay. So I grabbed a couple of guys and we went to some apartment and knocked on the door or whatever and we ended up robbing the guy. That made me a full member of the gang.*

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<sup>834</sup> Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*.

Even though Clayton did not have to endure a “minute”, his initiation still centered on violence. Conducting the home invasion proved to others that he was willing to do what it took to support the gang; even if it meant that he would be going back to prison.

Once individuals are initiated into the gang, the men talked about a sense pride and accomplishment when they were handed their colours for the first time. As Bones (36) described:

*Like at that time, for me that was a, that was a deadly feeling. It's like a feeling of respect, like you've earned that respect and you're a part of something, man. It's an awesome feeling. Because not being a part of anything growing up you know, and now you're a part of something. People look at you and they shake your hand and they respect you, basically out of fear. It was an awesome feeling. It was just a feeling of knowing that you have somebody there now. You know what I mean and you never have to worry about anything and so that was something.*

When Bones received his “colours” he felt a sense of pride that he was able to accomplish something that was revered by those he knew and respected. Once this initiation was complete individuals would then start to “put in the work” in an effort to prove themselves and work up their gang hierarchy. As Bones (36) continues,

*I put my rag on, grabbed my clothes and I went straight to the 'hood. Now that I was fresh out of the Pen, I had an attitude like I was somebody now. So started rolling on drug dealers and things like that. Doing home invasions on people and giving orders for people to do this and that. So that's what I did. I earned my patches. I earned my colours when I got to the pen and when I got out I was able to floss it now. You know what I mean?*

Another important part of the initiation process was the creation of one's “street name.” For some, their street names carried over from their younger years, as they wanted to maintain their reputation. However, most were given new names once they became a member of their gang. Naming became important for the men as it finalized their transformation into the street gang culture.

*And how I got a nickname was from my – ‘cause my dad was Bear. So they called me Baby Bear. And after a while everybody – all the homeless people, and all the drug dealers and all the gangsters they started calling me Baby Bear ‘cause my dad was Bear. And, they’d say where’s Baby Bear, man? I heard he fucked up this guy and I heard him rob this guy. (Adam, 36)*

Adam shows great pride in being associated to his father. Through his name, Adam became part of his father’s street legacy, where he had to carry forward and maintain the family’s reputation.

Kinuis’ (24) naming process was different than Adam’s. As he was the first person in his family to join a gang, the process of his name came about in a different manner.

*Yeah, like you know, Kin u is, you know you’re family, you know, we accept you as family. So they all started calling me Kinuis and it stuck and it still does ‘til this day you know. People don’t even know me by my real name. And some people that’s the only name they know me by. It stuck because like I said, it gave me that sense of acceptance you know. Okay, well, they’re calling me their brother and they’re calling me their family. And finally, accepted, you know.*

Similar to the naming of a new baby, one’s street name becomes the final piece of a street gang member’s new identity.<sup>835</sup>

The street name fulfilled the identity process for the men. The name helped the men to validate the necessity to commit violence as it helped to put a name to their “mask”. The naming rite finalized the transition of the men to a gang member, allowing the participants to hide and subvert the hurt, pain, and marginalization that they felt within their family, community, and social institutions (i.e. school, child welfare, youth justice facilities). The new identities gave the men the opportunity to remove themselves from their perceived victim status, to staking ownership of their own lives. Through their

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<sup>835</sup> It must also be noted that with the acceptance into the gang, each gang member is also given a number that is associated to him. This number can be associated to the rank in their gang or the year that they came in. These numbers are as important as the street name because it is a way that they can associate to others through gang tags, as well as having the number tattooed within any bars or patches that one may receive.

gang membership, the men had found a place where their socialized ideals of maleness were supported, thus finding a place to belong and see themselves belong too.

#### 9.4 – Discussion

Research on street gangs has consistently demonstrated that an individual's involvement with street gangs increases delinquent behaviours, particularly when they are compared to non-gang groups.<sup>836</sup> The men discussed how they watched and used violence to prove their toughness and gain respect across different social fields. When it came time to be initiated into their street gang, the men explained that the transition was fairly easy because of their prior experiences. For example, when Dez (21) had to perform a series of strikes (tasks) he had little issue in complying as he had already participated in the acts as a young child in protecting his family and his reputation.

*I had to do three strikes. We had to rob somebody, rob a house, and then stab somebody up, which I did. I had no problem doing it 'cause like I've already stabbed people for my mom. The people that tried to get aggressive, and I was a kid at the time and I stabbed somebody. It was the scariest thing in my life, man, and it still scars me today. I've never seen so much blood at that time, when I was a kid. After like the first two or three times, of you know, actually stabbing somebody, you know... Coming up to that point, it was easy. I was like, you know, I can stab somebody. It's not hard, it's like whatever, you know.*

James (25) also reiterates how his past experiences and reputation helped him to get noticed; however, it was his family connections that influenced his decision to join.

*Bros seen all the money I always had and they wanted me down. It seemed like they knew who I was and what I was about at twelve years old. These guys were older, like fifteen, fourteen and shit. Some of them were like 18, and seen what I was about. Like the money I had and they always seen me around rollin' with my bros and wanted me down. Plus all my family were down with them.*

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<sup>836</sup> Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns* Jacobs and Wright, *Street Justice*; Melde and Esbensen, *Gang Membership*; Gangs and Violence.

As we see through the men's early experiences, their actions prior to their engagement with a street gang are what created the necessary reputations to become noticed. The idea that street gangs are selective in their recruitment of members challenges a common misperception<sup>837</sup> — created through at-risk paradigms— where street gangs are seen as a predatory group that will accept anyone who lives within a marginalized community.<sup>838</sup>

Prior to the men becoming involved in street gangs they were already making decisions and partaking in violent and non-violent illegal activities to: a) protect themselves and others; b) create a sense of agency through their actions; and c) use a specific hetero-patriarchal performance centred on violence to access social, cultural, and economic capital restricted through colonization in order to belong.<sup>839</sup> Unstable social environments framed specific street identities, where Indigenous males could gain power, respect, and economic opportunities as long as they were willing to enact violence onto others. At the same time, the active participation in specific violent hyper-masculinities separated those Indigenous males that conform, from other individuals in the community, who could or would not use violence to gain capital, even though they may have had similar experiences.

Once Indigenous males join a gang, the collective identity of the gang becomes the sole identifier in the individual's life. The men noted that prior to their engagement within a gang, they had to survive as an individual or a small clique of friends. All of the men were engaged in illegal activities and were performing multiple violent street masculinities prior to joining the gang; however, it was through their inclusion into the

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<sup>837</sup> Tom Brodbeck, "The Gangs of Winnipeg: Politicians Say They're Cracking Down, But Police Report Shows Problem Isn't Going Away," *Winnipeg Sun*, November 21, 2013; Pearce, *Gangs in Canada* Totten; *Quality Prevention Strategies*; White, *Fluid Identities*.

<sup>838</sup> Densley, *Gang Recruitment*.

<sup>839</sup> LaRocque, *Other is Me*; Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*.



street gang that they became supported at larger group level to maintain and enhance their masculine identity. With their inclusion into the street gang, the men now had to protect their identity, as well as the street gang's identity from attack or belittlement from others. To show how violence and reputation are continually at play, Dale took a photograph of a back-alley where he and his "wife" were being chased and threatened by rival gang members. It was here; after he got his girlfriend to safety that he then went back and challenged his rivals.



*Photo: Dale took this picture of a back-alley near the Cornwall Centre in Regina, and what follows is the connection that he has to this location.*

*This is where I got caught slipping<sup>840</sup> with my wife and this is my second attempted murder I went up for. Every time when I was in the gang, when I never carried a knife or a gun, something always happened to me. It's like what goes around comes around and that day I'm not armed, it's coming around. And sure as shit, I was in the mall that day with my woman and some white guys and (rival gang) spotted me in the mall and they rolled up on me. And a couple of them just threatened to kill my wife first before they killed me. Then I was just like "F\*\*\*, whatever man," you know.*

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<sup>840</sup> "Slipping" is in reference to not paying attention to one's surroundings. It is a term used to describe a time when an individual was not paying attention to what was happening around them and something negative happened.

*I put my woman behind me, took my jacket off, wrapped it around my arm man, and two of them had knives out right in the mall man and I was ready to scrap. I wasn't gonna back down anyways and this is where I got this actually this stab wound right here, these two right here I got stabbed up here. That's in that alley, that's where I got these stab marks man it was vicious. I went home and I had a knife sticking out of my arm and I didn't even know I had a knife stickin' out of my arm until I got home.*

*My one buddy met me beforehand because they were chasing me around and my buddy met me in front of the library in his car and he gave me a 28 inch long bowie knife and... stupid me I could have stayed in the car and drove home then and nothing would have happened. But no, I jumped out and then they seen me and they started chasing, stupid me, I could have ran back to the car but I ran down this alley and that's where they cornered me and I had a wicked knife fight here man.*

I asked Dale why he did not just get into the car and drive away, and he explained:

*Pretty much did it to save face because I've never run, I never ran from a fight in my life.*

*Just, I don't know, my pride, I guess, man, just show no fear. I got remorseless man, I don't give a shit once I just snap, man, like I have no f\*\*\*in' feeling, no remorse.*

*That day I was mad. I was pissed off at the fact that they said they'd kill my wife and that just irked me. I was like, 'cause I didn't have a weapon to defend myself right away, but once I got that knife... 'cause man I'm a f\*\*\*in' fierce ass f\*\*\*in' knife fighter buddy and I was known in Regina as a knife fighter. That was my weapon of choice is a knife and I had a bad rap for stabbing up people. That's why I wasn't scared man, as soon as I had that knife man, I wasn't scared man. 'Cause I know I could take on like five guys by myself with a knife and I went. But yeah, I don't know if its plain stupid or is this ... I'm really looking at it, yeah, man, they could have killed me, back then.*

Dale explains that he could have died that day in the back alley for nothing more than holding down his colours and reputation. Because Dale had built his reputation as “the best knife fighter”, he gained confidence as soon as he had the weapon in his hands. Dale was so confident in his knife skills that he was always willing to engage in violence, even if out numbered. As a result, by engaging in violence with the five attackers, Dale not only saved “face” in the situation, but also increased his reputation as he took on five

rivals and walked away. By always having to protect their personal and the gang's reputation from potential violence, Dale and the men's association to their gang would place them at greater risk of victimization, than the protection that the gang was supposed to offer.

With identities interconnected and influenced by specific street codes, the street gang becomes the group for some young Indigenous males to support their identities and connections to others who share similar ideologies on violence, power, and respect. Due to the fear factor that has been created through media representations of street gangs shaped through colonization<sup>841</sup>, young Indigenous males created poses, similar to the African males described by Major and Billson, to gain power through intimidation and the possible threat of violence.

As we see from the previous chapters, the level of violence and criminal activities escalated once the men became involved in street gangs because they always had to protect their gang's reputation. Baldhead (24) explained that when he was incarcerated, he continually had to hold down his gang's reputation by fighting anyone that challenged him.

*I had respect on the range when I was in jail. Uh, 'cause uh, I wouldn't check in, there was so much different gangs that came in there like Indian Posse, Terror Squad and they'd try and strip me and try and make me patch over and stuff like fight me and shit. I would get jumped in there. I lived there for like six months, constantly rivalry, and I never checked in. I would stay in there. That was my home. So I got a lot of respect that way and I was the only Crazy Cree. I was the only one.*

For some of the men, at times this meant that they would also have to commit violent acts against their own family members.

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<sup>841</sup> Dowler et al, *Constructing Crime*; Adrienne. Freng, "American Indians in the News: A Media Portrayal in Crime Articles," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 1, Vol. 31 (2007): 21-37; LaRocque, *Other is Me*.

*The gang put me through a number of tasks to do, people to rob. For 18 – 20 months, I did that. Finally, one day, one of my uncles come in the system, brand-new bunny hug. Brand new hat. You could tell new clothes from older clothes. Right away one of the brothers that sat in the higher up said see that guy right there? What's his name wants his stuff, his hat and his bunny hug. His hoody. All right. I went walking up to this guy and you, man, what's up? The guy turned around. It was my uncle. Hey what's up? We started talking about back home, how the family was. After about 20 minutes, I told him, hey, man, I need your jacket and your hat. He started laughing at me and he noticed I wasn't laughing. He looked at me and he goes, "Do what you gotta do, but I'm not gonna give 'em to you for free. I'm not just gonna give 'em up to you." Aright, so I hit him and he went down. I took his hat. He wouldn't give up his jacket, so I beat him up. Finally, he let his jacket go. I walked up to my higher ups and threw them on the table. "Here's your shit" and I walked away. (Stacey, 48)*

Through the men's narratives about their identities prior, during, and after their gang involvement, patterns and themes emerged that both support and challenge existing and current research on Indigenous street gangs, and street gangs in general. The difficulty is that because research, outside of a handful of studies on street gangs, continues to focus on the experience of criminal justice officials and community workers. This results in a particular gangster image that continues to be remade over and over and is supported by "gang talkers" and media sensationalism.<sup>842</sup> Such dialogues have shaped social consciousness about who, what, where, why, when and how street gangs form, act, behave, and should look like. Through historical and contemporary colonial ideologies, it is often difficult to see the street gang beyond the archetypical "drunken-violent Indian" stereotype.<sup>843</sup> Colonial lenses continue to shape and inform the policies directed at curbing the growth and proliferation of Indigenous street gangs through "Indian" as at-risk paradigms.<sup>844</sup> As a result, communities entrenched in poverty with high Indigenous

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<sup>842</sup> Hagedorn, *World of Gangs* Hallsworth, *The Gang*.

<sup>843</sup> Buddle, *Narconomy*; Comack, *Racialized Policing*.

<sup>844</sup> Martel et al. *Two Worlds*.

populations are continuously labeled as gang communities with little analysis to how this has occurred.<sup>845</sup>

By focusing on at-risk paradigms, communities, researchers, and policy developers have the ability to ignore similar behaviours and actions of those who have social and economic capital in a community.<sup>846</sup> For example, violent initiation into different sporting teams or college fraternities have been constructed as rites of passage that create strong social bonds to the organization.<sup>847</sup> However, if the same actions are done by those deemed deviant, then the bonds created are not positive; rather, they are viewed negatively by the broader community.<sup>848</sup> Distinctions need to be created to understand how violence is interpreted within different social fields and who becomes privileged because of this.. What needs to be noted is that at-risk paradigms are not so much wrong; rather through poor implementation they encourage and maintain social inequalities.<sup>849</sup> As such, stereotypes continue to be used because they are often constructed around a “grain of truth”, and it is because of this that they are difficult to deconstruct and challenge. For example, colonial ideologies of the “Indian savage” have, over time, become so ingrained in the Canadian collective consciousness, that anything outside of this depiction is seen as “special” or abnormal. The Canadian social imaginary helps to reinforce and perpetuate colonial stereotypes as truth, and thus cycles of continued marginalization are maintained.<sup>850</sup> As such, analyzing street gangs through

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<sup>845</sup> For an example of how these labels have been used with other minority populations in the United States, Australia, and Europe see Pierre Bourgois (1999), John Hagedorn (2008), Simon Hallsworth (2013), and Rob White (2013).

<sup>846</sup> White, *Fluid Identities*.

<sup>847</sup> Kirby and Wintrup, *Running the Gauntlet*; Stuart, *Warriors and Machismo*.

<sup>848</sup> White, *Fluid Identities*.

<sup>849</sup> White, *Fluid Identities*; *Youth Gangs*.

<sup>850</sup> Sensoy and Di'Angelo, *Everyone Really Equal*; Mario Luis Small, "Four Reasons to Abandon the Idea of “The Ghetto”,” *City & community* 7, no. 4 (2008): 389-398.

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* aids in the deconstruction of at-risk paradigms, where acts of agency and choice can be incorporated to understand how the street gang is representative of the wider social structure that supports hetero-patriarchy and the hegemonic male.

Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital help to show how individuals with similar histories still have the agency to "choose" to join a street gang. Habitus works to bring to the forefront, the need to understand specific socio-political histories and how they have shaped particular social environments, capital (social, cultural, and economic), and thus an individual's perception of self. Violent hyper-masculine performances found within street gang cultures are the direct result of the socio-political histories that have shaped the habitus of some Indigenous men to gain status through their adherence to hegemonic masculinity.

Colonization has created instability in the lives of Indigenous peoples and communities. Through the removal of children under the guise of "protection", Indigenous families continue to be fragmented. This removal and the subsequent assaults on Indigenous children has created intergenerational trauma and fragmented identities for many Indigenous peoples. For some, their adherence to the hegemonic male, limited to their fields, gives some Indigenous males the ability to increase their social and economic capitals through illegal economies. The street gang provided the social field for the men in this study to find a place where their socialized notions of being a man were supported and encouraged. Through their association to the hegemonic male and local street codes, the men were able to forge new identities and create a "mask" where they could hide their emotions and justify their actions and violence towards others.

## Chapter 10 – Conclusion

*You go through so much abuse and so much frickin' garbage you know that's just how you feel if. You feel old and you feel exhausted. After you've been through so much. You put people through so much. You gotta see, you gotta rebuild. Rebuild everything, which is again where I'm at.* Bonks (29) STR8 UP Member

### 10.0 – Introduction

The primary intention of this study was to understand how Indigenous male ex-street gang members came to construct their notions of masculinity and how this led to their involvement with street gangs. The focus was not on the men's activities within the street gang, but rather how their experiences with family, peers, community, and social institutions shaped their perceptions of masculinity. Utilizing Bourdieu's concept of habitus within a critical decolonial/anti-racist framework, a broader understanding of Indigenous street gangs can be undertaken, where the street gang becomes the field where the men's perceptions of masculinity are supported and privileged. It was through their involvement with their street gang(s) that the men were able to increase their social and economic capitals and gain the power and respect they felt they deserved. However, because one had to act within local street codes framed by violence, they had to validate their actions by creating a "mask" that adhered to hegemonic masculinity, so as to not be discovered as weak or emotional.

The men, through their socialized perceptions of self, came to understand the importance of performing masculinity in a way that gave them power and respect, as long as it adhered to local street codes. Bourdieu's concept of habitus helped to contextualize the socio-political histories of the men and the importance of one's choice to belong, as habitus challenges common at-risk pedagogies. Due to colonization many Indigenous men will experience similar histories; however, only a select few will actually be invited

to participate, or have the opportunity to fully participate within a street gang.<sup>851</sup>

Therefore, one's choice to become involved with a street gang is based upon one's local socio-political histories plus the calculations of risk and reward within the boundaries of one's social capital, which results in the choice to conform to their conceptions of self. This process privileges violent hyper-masculinity as it became the desired performance that street gangs sought out in individuals. This is because a member's reputation and actions would increase the street gang's power and control within local street and prison fields.

By adhering to the concept of hegemonic masculinity, Indigenous male street gang members benefit from Connell's concept of the "patriarchal dividend," where men gain "honour, prestige, and the right to command," which results in the accumulation of "material wealth and state power."<sup>852</sup> However, due to socio-political histories shaped through colonization, colonized males are often limited to the social and economic capital in their communities; and therefore some resort to a physical hyper-masculine performance to benefit from hegemonic masculinity.<sup>853</sup> Since "[m]asculinities are fluid, and learned and negotiated in a variety of [social environments] such as the family and work environments,"<sup>854</sup> individuals continually shift their performances in accordance to their position within the field. As a result, individuals are continuously calculating the risks and rewards of proclaiming a particular identity within multiple fields.

As the men described their earliest role models and interactions with social institutions, it becomes apparent that many of the men experienced heightened levels of

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<sup>851</sup> Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*.

<sup>852</sup> Cole, *Negotiating the Field*: 31; Connell, *Masculinities*.

<sup>853</sup> Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*; hooks, *Real Cool*; Memmi, *The Colonized*.

<sup>854</sup> Thorpe, *Gender Reflexivity*: 184.



trauma— physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental. For many of the men, growing up Indigenous meant that they were subjected to racial stereotypes that mitigated their experiences and marginalized them within urban environments. Historical and contemporary colonial violence— structural and through force were central to this process. Colonization shaped the socio-political histories of Indigenous peoples experiences resulting in a legacy of trauma that continues to impact Indigenous peoples today. As a result of colonial histories, violence for some Indigenous peoples is seen as a legitimate means to increase one's social and economic capital within their particular fields.

It is this space where we see the byproducts and continuation of colonial violence onto Indigenous peoples. To obtain the privileges found through hegemonic masculinity, Indigenous males do not have the social capital to challenge those who hold social power over them (white and economic capital). This results in Indigenous men having to claim a sense of authority over those who are in the same social spaces created through colonization, i.e. other Indigenous men of the same social class and Indigenous women. As seen through Fanon, this process creates an image where the colonized see themselves as part of the colonizers, only when they hold power over others who are colonized.<sup>855</sup> Therefore, it is a direct result of the trauma experienced through violent colonial histories that Indigenous street gangs become the byproduct of internalized violence as a way to protect one's self from the real and potential violence of other Indigenous males searching to increase their social capital within limited street fields. The violence then perpetuated by Indigenous males onto other Indigenous peoples supports the colonial

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<sup>855</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*.

enterprise, where violence onto Indigenous bodies continues as a way for colonial systems to control Indigenous peoples, supporting Taussig's "culture of terror".<sup>856</sup>

A secondary purpose of this study was to determine the applicability of photovoice research methods with ex-gang members. Photovoice is viewed as a transformative research process where individuals share control of the research process and participants become the experts of their experiences.<sup>857</sup> The results indicate that photovoice is an effective tool to conduct research with Indigenous ex-gang members as it gives them the opportunity to move beyond cliché or media sensationalized notions of gangsta culture. However, because of the often, unstable lives of the men, traditional photovoice methods must be modified to engage participation. It is this adaptation of methods that a relational research framework be utilized in order to optimize the research process and the richness of the data that is collected.

For photovoice to be an effective method in street gangs research, ethical relationships need to be built where trust and relational accountability become the foundation for the research process. The construction of ethical relationships with Indigenous male ex-gang members was integral for the photovoice research process to be undertaken for this study. With experiences of mistrust towards institutions and those not from within their community, the building of relationships were integral to the research. A relational framework, supported through the 4Rs and ethical reflexivity, allowed for modifications to the research process to adapt to the lived realities of the men. To understand how Indigenous ex-gang members constructed their masculine performance, three primary questions were asked to help explain the socialization process.

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<sup>856</sup> Taussig, *Culture of Terror*.

<sup>857</sup> Castleden et al., *Modifying Photovoice*; Mitchell, *Visual Research*; Wang and Burris, *Photovoice*.

1. Who and what were the greatest role models that the men had in their lives?
2. How did experiences within specific social institutions impact notions of self and masculinity?
3. How did notions of masculinity change over time and space?

The research presented shows how the men constructed a masculine “mask” as a way to validate their use of violence. This mask is a reflection of the hegemonic male, where one needed to portray a guise of toughness, lack of emotions, and a sense of bravado to gain respect and power. However, because of the men’s social capital their activities were viewed as deviant.<sup>858</sup> This pushed the men to create stronger connections to local street fields to validate their status as “men”. By creating a reputation centred on violence, toughness, and bravado the men were influenced and recruited by local street gangs. With their engagement to local underground street economies, street codes, and street justice street gangs support a violent hyper-masculine performance to maintain power, control, and protection from victimization from others.<sup>859</sup>

## 10.1 – Findings

It became apparent through the data analysis that the men’s perceptions of masculinity centred on the hegemonic patriarchal male, where toughness and bravado are privileged. During early childhood, the majority of the men observed older males across fields (e.g., house parties, in the home, child welfare, etc.) gain respect and power through violence. Engaging in hegemonic masculinity supported the men: a) to be accepted by specific individuals and groups that promoted violence; b) to create and build upon their reputations within limited social environments; c) as a site of resistance to

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<sup>858</sup> Cacho, *Social Death*; McGinley and Cooper, *Masculinity and Law*; Rios, *Punished*.

<sup>859</sup> Anderson, *Code of the Street*; Jacobs and Wright, *Street Justice*; Young, *Merton and Katz*.

authority figures; and d) as a way to protect themselves from further victimization at the hands of others. The findings of the study presented in Chapters 7, 8, and 9 were designed around specific age categories to show the men's notions of masculinity were constructed and impacted by their personal experience, but also through structural violence supported through socio-political histories of colonization.

#### 10.1.1 – Role models

Questions about one's role models were asked to understand whom it was that the men respected and mirrored their actions and behaviours. Often the men stated that they did not have any specific role models or that they could not remember anyone of significance. However, as the discussions continued, the men slowly began to open up and talk about those who had the greatest influence on how they needed to act in order to be considered a "man." These included:

- a. The role of the biological father:** Throughout the interviews all of the men talked about their biological father. Only one of the men had no contact with their father as he was murdered before he was born. Those individuals whose biological fathers were active in the men's lives from their early years discussed that their fathers were individuals who were often respected in the community, but were all involved in the illegal economy in some capacity. The men often saw their fathers display violence towards their mothers and siblings. Often they would be victim to this violence. However, even though there was violence, if the men acted like the "man" their fathers were looking for, they would be rewarded

with affection by their fathers. Thus if the men acted like a “man” in the eyes of their fathers they would be rewarded positively.

- b. Role of family:** The majority of the men discussed the role that extended family had in their lives. Influential relatives were often involved in the illegal economy and would take the men under their guidance. The men would look up to older male relatives as they had accumulated a level of personal capital that gave them respect within the community. The men discussed that they would often see relatives being incarcerated when their relatives were small or unhealthy, and upon their return had “big muscles”. This supports research on the importance of physicality and masculinity, where body image becomes an extension of one’s masculine identity. Secondly, parties were given to their relatives when they returned back home. The parties strengthened the connection of incarceration and one’s rite of passage to become a man. Later in life this connection would be strengthened again through the street gang’s connection to incarceration and increasing one’s status within the street gang.
- c. Role of friends:** As the men aged their relationships with their peers became more important than that of their family. The relationships often began in the child welfare system and continued within juvenile detention centres, the street, and into adulthood. Within foster homes, the men explained that they learnt from other youth on how to act and would do what was necessary to be included. Early relationships with peers helped the men to create a group identity by creating cliques. The cliques aided the men to practice group dynamics and street codes that were important with their later involvement in street gangs. Relationships

built through these early cliques would also provide the men with opportunities to increase their connections to street gangs through their peers' relationships.

**d. Role of community:** The majority of the men talked about different parties or get-togethers that would happen in their homes. Such events gave the men the opportunities to observe how individual's garnered power and respect from others. The parties focused on heavy usage of alcohol that often led to extreme levels of physical violence between individuals.

None of the men talked about having or seeing individuals who were not directly involved with them as role models, such as pop stars, sports stars, or even those who are deemed to be positive influences at a community level, i.e. teachers, police officers, firefighters, etc. Overall, those individuals who the men considered to be role models often displayed high levels of physical violence to gain power and respect from others. This socialized the men to connect masculinity to power and respect through violent acts of toughness and bravado.

#### 10.1.2 – Social Institutions

A large proportion of street gang literature looks at how positive or negative relationships with social institutions impacts an individual's perception of self and belonging.<sup>860</sup> Negative experiences are often the result of structural violence through racism and classism, which marginalizes some young males to search out another place to belong. Following Vigil's concept of multiple marginality<sup>861</sup> questions were designed

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<sup>860</sup> Cureton, *Hoover Crips*; Curry et al., *Confronting Gangs*; Delaney, *American Street Gang*; Garot, *Who You Claim*; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson, *Aboriginal (Dis)Placement*; Hagedorn, *World of Gangs*; Klein and Maxson, *Gang Patterns*; Rios, *Punished*; Vigil, *Rainbow of Gangs*; White, *Youth Gangs*.

<sup>861</sup> Vigil, *Rainbow of Gangs*; Freng and Esbensen, *Race and Gangs*.

to understand the relationships that the men had with social institutions and how the actions of those in positions of authority impacted their perceptions of self. Social institutions excluded the men as they were told or shown that they do not belong. The forced removal from institutions created stronger relationships to the street and other individuals who were excluded. Overall, institutions impacted the men in three ways:

- a. Constructing the “savage”:** Many of the institutions demoralized the men through racist comments that depicted them as nothing more than a “savage” or a “dirty Indian.” Primarily non-Indigenous adults, who held positions of authority within these institutions would use racist language to belittle the men, making them feel out of place. All of the men talked about multiple negative experiences in school and the child welfare system, as teachers, students and foster parents would consistently berate and exclude them. This would push the men to see themselves as not being wanted or good enough to fit into the different fields. To resist this removal, the men would fight back, which would then help to support the claims that they were violent and should be excluded from those fields. Therefore, the men often found themselves supporting the negative labels, as they would use violence to fight back as a way to protect themselves. However, through violence the men supported their exclusion as they proved the stereotypes held by the authority figures that they were violent.
- b. Creating connections:** As the men became involved with different social institutions, they would form relationships often with older individuals to find a place to belong. Due to similar experiences, the men created bonds with those who could empathize and understand what they were going through. The

relationships were important as they helped to create a support system for the men, as well as expand their connections with others. Connections made through one's institutionalization would build the reputation through their actions and relationships.

- c. **Rites of passage:** The men used some institutions as a way to strengthen their masculine identities and evolving reputations that had become connected to the streets. Often criminal justice institutions were used as spaces for the men to make contacts and learn from others on how to act. In order to move up in different street gang hierarchies the men needed to be incarcerated in different institutions, i.e. provincial or federal. It was here where the men would adapt their masculine performance to those higher ups that they met and respected.

Overall the men talked about the impacts that social institutions had on how they came to construct their identity. Because the men felt, were told, and at times physically excluded from social institutions they would create relationships with other disenfranchised youth and those fields that would accept them. The burgeoning identities can be seen as a counter-identity to the social institutions that were excluding the men. Time spent within the institutions also gave the men opportunities to prove their toughness through acts of bravado that challenged institutional norms or codes.

### 10.1.3 – Changing Identities and Masculinities

Masculinity is a performance that changes across time and place. Masculinity is framed by the social standards and/or “codes”<sup>862</sup> that are produced through socio-political histories of inclusion and exclusion. Colonization has resulted in limited

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<sup>862</sup> Anderson, *Code of the Streets*.



opportunities for many Indigenous men to increase their social and economic capitals. Local street fields would become the space where the men found refuge and the opportunities necessary to increase their capital and see themselves more than victims.

**a. From cliques to street gangs:** The majority of the men discussed the importance that cliques or groups of friends had on their identities and understandings of group dynamics. The clique was often used as a stepping-stone, where they could form their identities and hone specific violent masculinities in an attempt to gain power and respect in the community. Often cliques would be brought into the street gang all together especially if the clique had respect on the street. The men explained that when they moved from the clique to the street gang, the greatest differences were the levels of violence and access to illegal street economies.<sup>863</sup> By moving from a clique to the gang the men's identities also shifted where they now had a connection to something larger than just their clique of friends. By joining the gang the men would adopt and protect the ethical code of the street gang. Therefore, they had to adhere to specific rules, protect particular territories, always represent their street gang or colours, and be willing to do what was necessary to uphold the credibility of the street gang and their own name within the gang. It was this movement to the street gang and the need to protect both the street gang and their personal reputation from others that the men created a mask to protect themselves from being seen as anything but a tough guy.

**b. The code of the street:** All of the men talked about the importance of one's connection to the street. In their early years, the street was a place where the men could hide out from the chaos that was happening in their homes and became a

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<sup>863</sup> Buddle, *Street Gang Narconomy*.

place of refuge. As the men aged, the street moved from a place of protection to that of place to increase one's social and economic capitals. The men learnt specific skills that they then honed in order to increase their economic and social capitals based on their personal agency. The more there was to gain, the greater the risk and potential violence. Thus, one had to show the bravado necessary to access the potential benefits. The men would come to understand through their experiences and observations, which behaviours and actions were appropriate to use within different contexts. Through violent hyper-masculinity, the men came to create a mask that helped to support a "false consciousness" of protection, because the deeper the men engaged in maintaining their status, the greater their potential victimization.

Local street codes shaped the men's perceptions of masculinity and how to interact within local street fields. By conforming to hegemonic masculinity that privileges toughness and bravado, the men created a reputation that would increase their status and power among the street. Street codes were used to validate violence to maintain justice within illegal street economies. The codes were not new to most of the men, as they reflected the codes taught to them earlier. What shifted were the fields and levels of violence to maintain their privileged street status.

## 10.2 – Theoretical Implications

When issues of street gangs arise in communities the most common response is to suppress those behaviours or remove those individuals who are considered deviant or

unwanted.<sup>864</sup> Suppression as a deterrent to the behaviours is ineffective because it does not address the root causes as to why the particular behaviours or actions are committed in the first place. However, because Canadian society is structured around the notions of good and evil, and that choice is equal to all, suppressive programs and policies continue to prevail over evidence against the latter.

Positivistic criminological theories have also framed prevention strategies, where education of choice becomes the focus of the programming with little attention paid to supporting the choice within an individual's actual reality. For example, popular programs created to deter youth from joining street gangs, such as the Gang Resistance Education And Training (G.R.E.A.T.) and the Drug Abuse and Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) are continuously found to have little long-term impact on the activities and/or behaviours of those youth that the programs are intended to target.<sup>865</sup> As Comack et al. state:

The issue is constructed in neoliberal terms, with the street gang members being the ones held responsible for making the right “choice” to exit. The difficulty with this approach is that it is entirely individualistic. It is premised on the notion that the problem is street gangs per se — and not the underlying systemic issues that have produced the street gangs.<sup>866</sup>

Positivistic criminological approaches maintain division of “good” and “evil”. For Indigenous peoples, such language reiterates colonial nostalgia of the infanticization of Indigenous peoples. As a result, Indigenous peoples just do not know better and need to be taught how to act within civil society. Bourdieu's concept of habitus challenges such perceptions, as it incorporates how socio-political histories shape the rules of the field.

The incorporation of habitus within gang's research can help researchers to create

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<sup>864</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*; Cacho, *Social Death*.

<sup>865</sup> Hallsworth, *Gang Talkers*; Klein and Maxson, *Street Gangs*; Totten, *Pathways*.

<sup>866</sup> Comack et al., *Indians Wear Red*: 140.

connections and similarities between street gangs across time, place, and personal histories. It also helps to connect both personal agency to join a street gang and the social structures that influence one's choice.

As seen through the evidence from this research, education and suppression strategies will not be effective when dealing with the issues of street gangs. From a young age, the men in this study had constructed counter-narratives to the middle-class values that such programs try to instill. The men understood from an early age that they had limited social capital compared to other youth. By adhering to the hegemonic male within local street field, the men created an identity that challenged Indigenous stereotypes of drunk, lazy, poor, or on welfare by increasing their economic and social capital within local street fields. Therefore, if programs wish to be effective in addressing Indigenous male street gangs they need to focus on concepts of masculinity, mental health, and viable opportunities that reflect the social realities of those targeted.

### 10.3 – Recommendations for Future Research

This study was designed to understand the ways in which Indigenous male ex-gang members have come to construct their perceptions of masculinity and how this led to their involvement with street gangs. What was apparent was that the connection of the men's perceptions of masculinity to Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. Masculinity, as understood by the men, was framed on the ability of one to use violence to prove their toughness and bravado as a way to increase their social and economic capitals within local street fields. The behaviours and attitudes offered the men

opportunities to gain power and respect while at the same time maintaining a connection to the code of the streets.

Violence plays an integral role throughout the lives of the men, and therefore research on trauma and mental health, specifically post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) needs to be undertaken. As more information continues to be collected on the impacts of PTSD on service providers, there is a lack of information being collected on those who live in communities where high levels of trauma and violence occurs. With a greater understanding of the impacts of trauma and PTSD within marginalized communities programs can be created to effectively address mental health within different fields. For example, rather than focus on zero-tolerance policies in schools, schools can create and implement strategies of improving mental health to maintain positive connections between schools and students.

A second research stream should focus on females and their roles with street gangs and how they gain status within masculine dominated spaces. Current research continues to position females in inferior positions within street gangs, where they have little power or control.<sup>867</sup> Most often females are seen as sexual objects that are used by the street gang themselves or for prostitution.<sup>868</sup> However, with Indigenous street gangs having high numbers of female numbers as well as the growth of all-female street gangs, research needs to focus on how females navigate the masculine dominated street field. For example how do Indigenous females maintain their femininity, while at the same time enact in what is traditionally associated as violent masculine behaviours?

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<sup>867</sup> Buddle, *Street Sociality*; Grekul and LaRocque, *Hope is Absolute*; Anupriya Sethi, "Domestic Sex Trafficking of Aboriginal Girls in Canada: Issues and Implications," *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 3, no. 3 (2007): 57-71; Totten, *Pathways*.

<sup>868</sup> Totten, *Pathways*.

Finally, research should be directed at the connections of the street gang lifestyle as an addiction. With more research conducted on the issues of addictions, and in particular behavioural addictions, does the gang life create a behavioural addiction for the men? Is this a reason why it is so difficult to leave the gang? With many street gang prevention, intervention and suppression programs dealing with the issue of addictions from a substance perspective, is there a place to see the gang lifestyle as a behavioural addiction? This research can help to create connections to the seductive power that street gangs can offer and why it is difficult for individuals to leave the street gang, even though they know the detriment that it will have on their lives.

#### 10.4 – Limitations

Although limitations to the methods of photovoice were discussed in Chapter 6, this section addresses two specific limitations that impacted the outcome of the project. As previously stated, photovoice methods are an effective way to gather information about the lives and perceptions that the men have on masculinity and identity. The photographs collected enriched the narratives of the men as they were able to reflect back on specific incidences of their lives and how they helped to shape or solidify their identities in relation to masculinity.

The first limitation focuses on the authenticity of the men's narratives. The men were not coerced in any way to take part in the study but authenticity was a concern. In the beginning I was naïve to assume that the men spoke from a place of truthfulness. However, I had to understand that due to their prior experiences the men had understood the power of deception and how to utilize it for their own needs. The idea of deception

came up during public presentations of *Brighter Days Ahead* with individuals from the study. I invited the men to talk to the community about their experiences in the project and to be honest about what they thought about the experience. Some of the men expressed that when they first saw me they began to ask themselves – What can I get from this “white” guy? What is the story that he wants to hear? – Because of these questions, I began to question the authenticity of the men’s narratives, where I began to ask – Is the information given sensationalized on what the men want to see of themselves and not on what actually occurred?

To address this I went back to the men’s narratives and began to create a timeline of events through some of the men’s lives. Through the timeline I noticed particular events where individuals would speak about particular incidents but from different perspectives. Such connections confirmed the validity of the men’s narratives.

I also tried to validate the men’s narratives through interviews conducted with community experts. With limited information about Indigenous street gangs, community experts were sought to understand how the landscape of Indigenous street gangs has changed specifically in Saskatchewan, since this is where the majority of the men participated in street gangs. What was interesting about the interviews was that the men and experts both discussed similar incidences that were seen as catalysts for targeted street gang initiatives. Such connections helped to confirm the validity that the men in the study were involved not only in street gangs, but that their involvement indirectly has come to shape particular actions on the part of corrections and policing to limit street gang activities in the province of Saskatchewan. Although the confirmations do not remove embellishment, the interviews conducted with the community experts,

strengthens the authenticity of the men's narratives. Again during this process, I did not divulge any information that was given to me by the men to hedge conversations with the community experts.

However, there were also omissions across many of the men's narratives in relation to the violence that they enacted against females or women in their lives. The men discussed how they witnessed violence against females; however only a handful discussed their own violence against females. There were some exceptions but these were limited to specific incidences where a female had broken the code or had stolen money. In such instances the men explained that the punishment that the female received would have been the same as if it were a male that had done it.

A second limitation to the study is the validation that the information collected through this project will impact the development of effective social policy change. One of the primary goals of photovoice is to influence policy-makers.<sup>869</sup> However, this is difficult to assess, particularly with street gangs, as policies continue to change as street gangs change their ways in order to avoid detection from police. Policies directed at addressing street gangs continue to focus on suppression and therefore policies that shift from this perspective challenge the political atmosphere that continues to favour punitive measures. The ability to measure the outcomes of policy change within photovoice studies must be addressed longitudinally, which this research is unable to accomplish at the current time.

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<sup>869</sup> Wang et al., *Photovoice*.



## 10.5 – Conclusion

Colonization has maintained a legacy of trauma on Indigenous peoples. One of the greatest impacts has been on the fragmentation of Indigenous identities, as Indigenous peoples have been constructed as deviant, savage, or childlike within colonial ideologies. By examining how Indigenous male ex-gang members constructed their notions of masculinity issues of mental health and trauma become apparent. To protect themselves, the men created a “mask” that supported hegemonic masculinity to gain power and respect through violence. It was through violence that the men were able to gain the power that they needed to gain respect and validate their position as a man. However, their adherence to the hegemonic male within local street fields has left the men physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually traumatized.

*There are days like my face is marked up from gang battles in parking lots, home invasions, people rolling up on me and I have no weapon, even in front of my kids. That's the sad life about it, there is so much dark days and you have some little bright days but there's more dark nights in that life than there are bright days.*  
(Baldhead, 24)

This violence has been the reality for many Indigenous male street gang members.

In the end my dissertation must not continue to support the rhetoric that Indigenous gang members are a result of bad parenting or that they are “bad” people. More exactly, it is intended to challenge common misperceptions of Indigenous street gang involvement by positioning colonization, racism, classism, and masculinity as key contributors to the construction of Indigenous street gangs. There is no simple answer to stop Indigenous street gangs. Rather, communities need to understand that to effectively address street gangs, the entire community must work together to redefine concepts of masculinity and create opportunities for everyone to become an integral part of the

community and to contribute to making our communities a place for all to belong. In order to achieve this outcome, the conversations that I present to you today, must continue beyond the pages of this dissertation. In closing, I trust that increased education and awareness will encourage the change necessary to build healthier communities where even the most vulnerable have the opportunity to live healthy and safe lives.

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## APPENDIX A



May 8, 2012

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to outline the Metis Nation-Saskatchewan's (MN-S) Health Department support for Robert Henry. We have met with Robert and are confident in his knowledge of respectful and ethical research with Indigenous peoples. Robert has provided us with his research proposal and has agreed to keep us informed of his research as it progresses. The Health Department at MN-S seeks to increase partnerships in research with academic allies and graduate students to work together in a way that is respectful and responsible to Metis knowledge and worldviews.

We look forward to working with Robert throughout his research and anticipate that his results will help inform our work at the MN-S Health Department.

Respectfully,

Director of Health

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406 Jessop Avenue, Saskatoon SK S7N 2S5 Tel. (306) 343-8285 or 1-888-343-6667

*The Métis Nation – Saskatchewan represents Métis Citizens living in Saskatchewan. As such, the MN-S strives for the political, legal and constitutional recognition and guarantee of the rights of our People, including the right to a land and resource base, self-government and self-government institutions.*

## APPENDIX B



## STC URBAN FIRST NATIONS SERVICES, INC.

Owned by the Saskatoon Tribal Council

ASIMAKANISEKAN ASKIV RESERVE # 102A

Mailing Address Suite 200 - 333 Packham Avenue, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 0S1  
Tel: (306) 936-6100 Fax: (306) 244-1097

Robert Henry  
317 Kirk Hall, University of Saskatchewan  
117 Science Place, Saskatoon SK  
S7N 5C8

Re: Indigenous street gang Project

STC Urban First Nations Service Inc. Justice Programs have a vested interest in research that provides a better understanding of the antecedents to gang involvement. Evidence based research will better our ability to respond through prevention and intervention practices. I have reviewed the research methodology proposal you have provided. I am pleased to provide you with a letter of support for your project. Further, if you require any assistance please do not hesitate to contact my office.

I look forward to the final report on the research project.

Director of Justice  
STC Urban First Nations Services, Inc.  
602 20<sup>TH</sup> Street West  
Saskatoon, SK.  
**306-370-1346 (cell)**  
306-242-7140

Safe House: [oklaway.wikinav.com/stayaw](http://oklaway.wikinav.com/stayaw) | Acadia Home: Early Learning Center | Aboriginal Headstart: KidsFirst | PALS: CHILDS: Children First | OM: People's Program | Four Feathers Boxing Club: Employment & Training Services | Urban Justice: Urban Resource Development | Revolution Support Program | White Buffalo: Youth Lodge

Kinistin • Mistawasis • Muskeg Lake • Muskoday • One Arrow • Whitecap Dakota • Yellow Quill

## APPENDIX C

# John Howard

## The John Howard Society of Saskatchewan

JHSS Provincial Office  
#100 - 855 Arcola Ave.  
Regina, SK S4N 0S9  
Ph: (306) 584-2115  
Fax: (306) 584-7089

JHSS Regina Branch  
#124 - 2305 - 11th Ave.  
Regina, SK S4P 0K6  
Ph: (306) 737-6637  
Fax: (306) 347-0707

JHSS Saskatoon Branch  
202 - 220 3rd Ave S  
Saskatoon, SK S7K1M1  
Ph: (306) 244-6347  
Fax: (306) 244-9923

JHSS Moose Jaw Branch  
15 Hochelaga St., W.  
Moose Jaw, S6H 2E9  
Ph: (306) 693-0777  
Fax: (306) 692-7635

March 1, 2012

Robert Henry  
317 Kirk Hall, University of Saskatchewan  
117 Science Place, Saskatoon SK S7N 5C8

Dear Robert,

The John Howard Society of Saskatchewan (JHSS) is committed to addressing the causes and consequences of crime, which is why I am pleased to offer our agency's support for your research proposal focusing on Indigenous male gang activity on the prairies.

For several years now we have provided long term support to individuals who seek an alternative to criminal gang life through our *STR8-Up* program. While we have seen many examples of healthy transformation, we are always seeking to understand how we can improve our care. I believe that your research can provide valuable insight into the roots of indigenous male youth street gangs in Saskatchewan and, therefore, shape intervention and prevention initiatives in the future.

As a demonstration of our support, I am pleased to grant access to members of the *STR8-Up* program in order to populate your photovoice project. On behalf of the JHSS, I enthusiastically support this important research.

Should you require further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

John Howard Society, Saskatoon Branch

Cc Greg Fleet, Executive Director, JHSS  
Tobi Graham, Program Coordinator, JHSS  
Sue Delanoy, Kinsmen Activity Place

MEMBER OF JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY OF CANADA



**APPENDIX D –**

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## APPENDIX E

### CONSENT FORM

Title: Through an Indigenous Lens: Understanding Indigenous Masculinity and Street Gang Involvement

You have been invited to participate in a study entitled Through an Indigenous Lens: Indigenous Male Gang Identity on the Prairies. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask any questions you might have. This form can also be read to you for clarity.

**Researcher:** Robert Henry, PhD. Candidate, Department of Native Studies, College of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK, S7N 0X1.

**Phone:**

**Email:**

**Purpose:** The aim of this photovoice project is to understand Indigenous male gang identity from the perspective of those individuals who are exiting the gang lifestyle. The perspectives of Indigenous male gang members is of utmost importance for policy and program developers to understand so that effective prevention and intervention programs can be created in order to minimize the amount of Indigenous youth to join gangs. The overall goal of this study is to create an understanding of what is drawing young Indigenous youth to see the gang as a social structure or rites of passage to masculinity.

**Procedure:** I am seeking to involve 10-12 Str8-Up members who have or are exiting their respective gang. The participants will be expected to participate in a variety of research methods such as: semi-structured interviews, information sessions, focus groups, and feedback presentations. The participants will be paid an honorarium for their time in for the interviews, focus groups and feedback presentations. It is hoped that funding will be awarded so that the participants may keep the cameras after their pictures have been handed in. All participants can leave the research procedure at any time. However, honorariums will only be given for the time participated, and the cameras will need to be returned if a participant removes themselves from the project. Upon removal, all interview data and photographs collected will be destroyed upon participant's request.

The first set of interview questions are designed to gather aggregate data of the participants. This information will be used to frame who is participating and the breadth of knowledge that is contributing. This session will also be used to instruct the participants on the ethics involved with taking photographs and how to best use the cameras. A professional photographer will be invited to work with the participants at this time. After the training session on ethics and camera usage, the participants will be given specific questions which they may use to help guide their photographs.

Collection of the photographs will happen over the course of two months. The researcher is having the participants to take their time in order to deconstruct what the gang has

meant to them, and how they used the gang to form their identity and their idea of masculinity. The participants will also be asked to take photographs of the push/pull factors, which lead the participants to engage or remove themselves from the gang lifestyle. During this phase of the project, the researcher will also be available for the participants to ask any questions that they may have, or clarify any project objectives.

Once all the photographs are collected, the researcher will sit down with each participant and go through the photographs and ask a set of questions. These questions will be used to construct the narrative and bring forth the meaning of the photograph from the participant's perspective. The participants will also be asked to select the photographs that they feel they would like to discuss in the focus groups.

The focus group will be used for all participants to deconstruct their photographs and how they went about constructing the photographs. Through these discussions it is hoped that a deeper conversation can occur, and common themes can emerge as to the reasons why individuals joined and exited the gang; with particular attention being paid to the construction of identity, masculinity, and traditional imagery from recruitment.

**Potential Risks and Confidentiality:** You understand that your participation in the study is not completely anonymous as you are being invited as a member of a specific participant pool, namely, that you are an individual who is a member of the gang intervention program Str8-Up, and therefore you might be identifiable on the basis of what you say. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

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

It must also be said that do to your past and present relationship with law officials, any information given in the study may be taken by law officials. It is therefore essential that you explain to the researcher any information that you wish to be destroyed and not used in any part of this or future projects.

**Potential Benefits:** Participation in this study can serve as a professional learning exercise by providing an opportunity to explore diverse and similar understandings of why Indigenous male youth join gangs, and the reasons in which they leave the gang lifestyle. The project can also be therapeutic in that it gives the participants an avenue in which to talk about, or discuss their own narrative in relation to the issue of gangs. The participants will receive honorariums for their time during interviews, training, focus group discussions, and feedback presentations, the camera used in the research, as well as a finished book of their own photographs.

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

(Room 131 Kirk Hall) or in the office of Dr. Caroline Tait (Room 130 Kirk Hall)  
University of Saskatchewan for a minimum of five years.

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

You understand the data collection and reporting of that data will be completed by August 1, 2013 and that a copy of the thesis will be made available to you upon completion. You understand that you will also be able to access the report on the University of Saskatchewan website.

**Release of Data:** Participants will be provided the opportunity to review the final transcripts of the first interview, focus group, feedback presentations, and any other times conversations may have occurred between researcher and participants in regards to the study. The participants will then sign a transcript release form where in they acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what was said or intended to say. Participants are advised that any quotations used in the reporting of research results will contain no information that would identify participants. It is at this time that participants may also refuse to allow the information to be used. This procedure will be repeated with the second interview and focus group discussion.

Participants will also be given a Picture Release Form that will be signed for all photographs that the participant wishes to be made public.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning this study, you are free to ask at any point; you are free to contact the researcher at the number provided if you have any questions at a later time. (need to include the ethics approval # and how to get a hold of the ethics office in case of questions.)

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

_____ (Name of Participant)	_____ (Date)
_____ (Signature of Participant)	_____ (Date)
_____ (Name of Researcher)	_____ (Date)
_____ (Signature of Researcher)	_____ (Date)

## APPENDIX F

### Secondary Participant Photograph Release Form

Title: Through an Indigenous Lens: Understanding Indigenous Masculinity and Street Gang Involvement

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have been notified that my photograph was taken for the study entitled “Through an Indigenous lens: Indigenous male gang identity on the prairies”. I have been informed by the photographer that my picture was taken, and they have explained the project as well as any implications that may occur. I hereby authorize the release of this/these photographs to Robert Henry to be used in the manner described in the **Consent Form**. I agree that Robert Henry may display these photographs publicly or publish them, in print or digital form, in relation to this project, or future research publications. I understand that at any time in the future that I may contact Robert Henry and have my said photographs removed and destroyed. I have received a copy of this **Photograph Release Form** for my own personal records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Secondary Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Photographer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX G

### Transcript Release Form

Title: Through an Indigenous Lens: Understanding Indigenous Masculinity and Street Gang Involvement

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal and focus group interviews in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said during these sessions with Robert Henry and other participants. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Robert Henry to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher

## APPENDIX H

### Photograph Release Form

Title: Through an Indigenous Lens: Understanding Indigenous Masculinity and Street Gang Involvement

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the photographs to be used in the study entitled “Through an Indigenous lens: Indigenous male gang identity on the prairies”. I hereby authorize the release of these photographs to Robert Henry to be used in the manner described in the **Consent Form**. I agree that Robert Henry may display these photographs publicly or publish them, in print or digital form, in relation to this project, or future research publications. I understand that at any time in the future that I may contact Robert Henry and have my said photographs removed and destroyed. I have received a copy of this **Photograph Release Form** for my own personal records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **APPENDIX I**

### **Initial Interview Guide**

Title: Through an Indigenous Lens: Understanding Indigenous Masculinity and Street Gang Involvement

- 1) The age of the participant. – This is to determine if age variance of participants. Will help in the definition of who participated in the study.
- 2) At what age they began to be drawn to the gang and at what age they felt the need to leave the gang for good. – Help to determine how many years the individuals were involved in the street gang lifestyle. The question will also help to engage the participants into focusing on the reasons for joining and leaving.
- 3) The push/pull factors which influenced their choice. – Look to understand the different spaces where effective prevention and intervention could have taken place. Also look to expand on the role of social institutions in Indigenous gang formation.
- 4) The impact of the gang on identity and masculinity. – This concept may need to be explained as some individuals may not have an idea of masculinity. Will be worded as, ‘How did the gang shape your ideas of what it was to be a man?’.
- 5) The role of traditional Indigenous symbols in gang identity and/or recruitment. – Try to understand what role if any traditional Indigenous imagery has on the construction of gang identity. Did the participants use particular images to encourage others to join, or to strengthen their connections to an Indigenous heritage?