ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents the results of in-depth qualitative interviews with twenty-three formerly imprisoned men regarding their lived experience with prison conflict and the pain of incarceration. The results suggest that prison is a gendered ‘total institution’ (Goffman 1961). The pains that men experience in prison are uniquely gendered in that the deprivations imposed by incarceration—deprivation of autonomy, liberty, goods and services, heterosexual sex, and security (Sykes 1958) – in the reverse, define idealized masculinity as it is currently socially constructed: self-reliance, independence, toughness or invulnerability, material and economic success, and heterosexual prowess. From these shared deprivations emerges a gendered code of conduct that perpetuates a hierarchy among incarcerated men by constructing violent masculinity as a subcultural norm. The results suggest that the gender code in prison represents a set of rules that create opportunities for men to police each other’s gender performance and make claims to masculine statuses. Because status is inextricably tied to survival in this context, many men feel pressured to perform violent masculinities in prison despite privately subscribing to a non-violent sense of self-concept. The results suggest that violence is an expressive and instrumental resource for men in prison. A gender theory of prison violence, methodological findings, theoretical implications, ethical considerations and the short and long term aftermath of violent prison conflict are discussed.
I have so many people I would like to thank. Thank you to my graduate supervisor, mentor and friend, Dr. Vincent Sacco. You have offered unfaltering support, advice and guidance throughout the eight years that I have been a graduate student at Queen’s University. It is tremendously difficult to express the extent to which I am grateful and honoured to have had the opportunity to know you and to call myself your student. You are truly irreplaceable and loved by so many students, faculty and staff at Queen’s. I am forever indebted to you for your kindness, compassion and humour and I will take forward the many lessons that you’ve imparted as I continue in my academic career. Once again I find myself struggling to adequately convey in words the depths of my sincere admiration for you as a scholar, mentor and person – and once again, words are insufficient. Thank you so much for everything you have done for me and for being the most superb mentor and just simply the best person ever.

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

MEN IN PRISON

Men are responsible for the vast majority of violence in Canada and most often their victims are other men (Sacco and Kennedy 2012). For some men, the use or threat of violence may be crucial to daily survival in male-dominated subcultures defined by structural disadvantage, victimization risk or lack of access to the protection of law (Anderson 2000; Carr et al. 2007; Majors and Billson 1993; Jacobs and Wright 2006; Kennedy and Baron 1993). Canadian prisons are particularly threatening and dangerous places for incarcerated men (Cooley 1992; Garrison 2014; Ricciardelli 2014). Masculinity is besieged from all sides in a prison setting; prisoners are subject to enforced compliance to authority, decreased opportunities for autonomy, independence and heterosexual pursuit; separation from families and children and generally little access to political and economic power (see Sykes 1958; Ugelvik 2014; Ricciardelli 2014; Michalski 2015). With few other resources for self-protection, violence and the body become important instrumental and expressive resources in the struggle to claim masculine dominance, gain upward mobility in the prison social hierarchy and survive incarceration.

This research attempts to illustrate the ways in which prison conflict – particularly violent conflict – is part of a process of masculinities construction in a setting threatening to masculinity. A key claim advanced is that the violence that incarcerated men experience is rooted in and a reflection of the taken for granted character of violent masculinity that is normalized in mainstream culture (Katz 2003, 2013 Dagirmanjian et al. 2016). That men in prison experience violence to a significantly greater degree than men in the free community is not necessarily an indication that imprisoned men have acquired a distinct set of values or beliefs supportive of violence – but rather, that many incarcerated men experience a lack of access to resources to protect themselves and
accomplish masculinity in non-physical ways. I attempt to detail the ways in which men’s pains of imprisonment are uniquely gendered in that the shared deprivations that prisoners experience as originally defined by Gresham Sykes (1958) – deprivation of autonomy, heterosexual relations, goods and services, and security – in their reverse, describe the characteristics of ideal masculinity as it is currently socially defined: self-reliance, independence, heterosexuality, economic and material success and toughness or invulnerability.

Men and masculinities are symbolically – and quite literally - under attack in prison. The prison itself is an environment that men experience as painful: they are subject to forced intimacy with strangers, forced compliance with authority, strip searches, and deprived of many opportunities for self-determination and independence that are a taken for granted part of everyday life for many people in the free community (such as deciding when to eat, when to go to bed, what to wear, et cetera). Incarcerated men experience physical assault, psychological victimization and sexual violence at the hands of other incarcerated men (and sometimes prison staff) at rates that are cause for great concern.¹ Within the prison subculture these events are significant in that they mark out particular groups of men as subordinate and dominant in the prison social hierarchy. Men who are gay, non-white, young, economically disadvantaged and combinations thereof are particularly marginalized in prison as they experience higher rates of violence and exploitation; this illustrates the way in which conflict, violence and victimization work to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity and the survival of those who most closely conform (at least publically) to its script.

Making sense of the extent of victimization and violence in a prison context requires understanding conflict as a gendered phenomenon. Men’s stake in a conflict situation in prison is intimately tied to survival; conflict negotiations are part of a process of constructing and

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¹ See a summary of research in Chapter Two.
dramatizing a masculinity that conforms to ‘the inmate code’. Social status becomes an important source of power for inmates who experience limited access to other forms of capital (Michalski 2015). Publicly demonstrating gender conformity with the informal norms of the prison environment is significant as a means to achieve status within the prison social order – regardless of whether individual men privately subscribe to these hypermasculine, hyperviolent constructions of what it means to be a ‘real man’. Surviving in a culture that demands rigid adherence to a masculine code also explains how so many men in this study find themselves engaged in violent interchanges despite their non-violent sense of masculine self-concept. For these men, maintaining a masculine façade itself is an additional and important source of hardship and painful part of their incarceration experience.

The results of the study are based on in-depth interviews with twenty-three formerly incarcerated men. The interviews yield rich data and the sample represents a diversity of men’s lived experience in prison. The men in the sample have experience in prison spanning thirty days to over thirty years. Their self-reported criminal histories include an array of crimes ranging from petty theft and drug related crimes to arson, sexual assault and murder. Some men in the study have been recently released from prison while others have spent many years in the free community since their last period of incarceration. Their stories are unique though they share several common threads; in particular, each person had been involved in violent conflict in prison in some way regardless of a prior history of violence and each reported tremendous pressure to enact an invulnerable masculine façade. As illustrated in Chapter Seven, many of the men reported that their prison experience affected their relationships and interactions with people in the free community post-incarceration. The men reported feeling angry, on-edge, short-tempered and importantly, paranoid and suspicious of others.
Though the data are rich, the small sample size is a limitation of this study. Victims of violence are often hesitant to tell a researcher about intimate and painful details of a victimization experience or any information that they are accustomed to keeping secret (Waters 2015). In addition, a number of significant factors distinguish previously incarcerated men from other victims of violence, thus making them particularly difficult to access. Because of the stigma of criminal offending, men with incarceration experience might be well aware that they are often considered “blameworthy victims” by outsiders (Loseke 2003). It is possible that awareness of the stigma of a criminal label deters some men from sharing their victimization experiences with a researcher. Second, men with incarceration experience may be particularly reluctant to discuss sensitive topics because of their lived experience with the danger of vulnerability. As the results illustrate, incarcerated men learn very quickly that even the minutest display of emotional vulnerability can jeopardize their personal safety in prison; in turn, these experiences shape the interactions that they have with people in the free community. Especially for men who have been recently released from prison, emotional vulnerability might be avoided at all costs and strangers (including researchers) might be met with distrust and suspicion.²

Additionally, men who continue to be involved with criminal activity post-incarceration might be reluctant to contribute to a research study if they have concerns that their disclosures could in some way activate formal legal control. Thus, it is reasonable to anticipate that interviews with researchers who are perceived to be associated with any faction of the criminal justice system might be avoided by some ex-prisoners (Schlosser 2008). Considering this, as well as my interest in asking men to critique the prison system, I used a sampling strategy that excluded recruiting through any agencies related to Corrections Canada. While this strategy generated rich data, the

² The relationship between paranoia, suspicion and the referral process are discussed in more detail in Chapter Four: Methodology.
sampling process was long and arduous as I took many steps to build the rapport and trust necessary to elicit deep disclosures. The time consuming nature of the sampling process resulted in a smaller than desired sample size. Men who have recently been released from prison are often living complex lives defined by uncertainty and instability and are otherwise negotiating a number of complex and intersecting problems that make second and third meetings difficult to establish. Many times in the process of building rapport I lost contact with the prospective participant due to arrest or incarceration. Chapter Four explores my methodological strategies in greater detail and offers an overview of gender dynamics that operate in the sampling and interview process.

Chapter Three details the theoretical context of the analysis with an emphasis on interrogating the concept of hegemonic masculinity and presenting conflict as part of a performance as well as a situated and gendered transaction. The chapter also reviews the relationship between masculinity, prison culture and the production of survival strategies and suggests that men in prison face an important dilemma in their attempts to stay safe – survive now or survive later? These themes are elaborated in the analysis presented in Chapters Five through Seven. Chapter Five presents Part One of the results: the pain that men experience in prison and how the deprivations and hardships that prison life poses threaten men’s sense of dignity and masculinity. This Chapter offers two insights: the pains of incarceration are emasculating and the pain of feeling emasculated is criminogenic. Chapter Six explores the so-called ‘inmate code’ as a set of expectations regarding men’s gender performance in prison, the unequal distribution of power that is afforded men contingent on their conformity with the code, and the violent and non-violent conflict management strategies that men adopt for self-protection in response to the emasculation process that characterizes imprisonment. This Chapter also evaluates prison as a
‘hypermasculine’ space and suggests that the men enact multiple masculinities in prison and find ways to resist the violent masculinity that so many men feel pressured to perform.

Chapter Seven considers the short and long term aftermath of the pains of imprisonment and violent masculinity; in particular, the way in which violent conflict produces precursors for new conflicts in prison and the ways that men continue to be harmed by their experience with violent prison masculinities during post-incarceration. Chapter Eight suggests new theoretical statements that might inform a masculinities theory of prison violence. Here, I offer theoretical, methodological and social implications of the analysis and make suggestions for future research. Finally, in Appendix A, I present a detailed evaluation of some of the ethical complexities involved in the present study and a warning for the future of professional ethics, prison research and ethics review boards.
MEN UNDER ATTACK

Violent conflict is particularly salient in the lives of incarcerated men. Compared to men in the free community, imprisoned men are disproportionately involved in violent interchanges both as victims and aggressors (Cooley 1992; Annual Report 2013-2014). Conflicts among incarcerated men are shaped by and in turn define the subcultural norms of conduct in a prison environment. As the following chapters will demonstrate, men’s personal troubles and conflict strategies in prison are also important reflections of broader cultural notions of what it means to be a ‘real man’. This chapter reviews literature that establishes the intersecting ways that men (and masculinities) are under siege in prison; these include physical, sexual, and psychological forms of victimization as well as harms posed by the practices of correctional facilities themselves. The second part of the chapter highlights the way in which the conflicts between men that produce these harms function to assign men to dominant and subordinate positions within the prison social hierarchy. In the context of a daily competition for survival that characterizes prison life, conflicts become crucial moments for self-presentation and thus self-protection; as such, many prisoners make routine use of one of the few resources available to them: violence.

The Prison Setting

The environmental context and formal prison practices play a role in shaping the nature of violent interchanges between incarcerated men. Overcrowding in prison strains institutional resources and encourages competition between prisoners over scarce commodities and space. As prisons become more densely populated, prison resources such as food, sanitation, air quality,
medical care, and recreation, rehabilitation and work opportunities are spread thin. It is not surprising that an unhealthy, crowded prison setting that aggravates medical conditions (Brinkley-Rubinstein 2013; O’Hara et al. 2016), increases psychological distress (Gillespie 2005; Haney 2012; de Viggiani 2007; Sykes 1958; Pare and Logan 2011), fosters animosity, tension and aggression between inmates and staff (Annual Report 2013-2014; Hannah-Moffat and Klassen 2015; Martin et al. 2012), and creates competition over scarce resources (Cobb 1985; Lawrence and Andrews 2004), would provide fertile conditions for frustrations and stress to manifest in conflict and violence.

The Correctional Investigator of Canada notes that prison crowding is “linked to higher incidences of violence, prison volatility and unrest” and that assaults and the use of force by correctional staff have increased as a result of the problem of double-bunking and crowding (Annual Report 2011-2012). In a critical review of double bunking, the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers argued that the practice is “unsafe, ineffective…and will inevitably prove problematic” (UCCO 2011:3). According to qualitative reports, violence occurs when inmates are frustrated with a lack of privacy due to crowded conditions; as one officer explains “[w]hen a man’s space is violated, he tends to become more aggressive” (Martin et al. 2012:98). Kinkade, Leone and Semond (1995) reported similar findings in their study of American sheriffs’ perceptions of jail crowding. Of the 189 sheriffs surveyed, 84% believed that crowding results in violence between inmates, and nearly the same percentage (81%) believed that crowding is related

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3 Strained resources have an effect on crowding experiences among inmates and may affect some more than others. Wooldredge (1997) found that socially isolated inmates with fewer visitors were more likely to feel crowded. This is exacerbated in a high density prison that may not have available space or staff to accommodate visits between inmates and their families (Griffiths and Murdoch 2009; Annual Report 2013-2014). Overcrowding also puts an incredible strain on correctional officers, who report that prisons with too few staff and too many inmates compromise prison management and safety (Martin et al. 2012) and undermine positive relationships between inmates and staff (UCCO 2011). Consequently, correctional officers who feel the effects of crowding and strained personnel resources may be more likely to rely on static security measures and aversive forms of control (Ellis 1984; Hannah-Moffat and Klassen 2015) that may lead to further frustration and tension between staff and inmates (Martin et al. 2012). As one correctional officer explained, “[t]he more inmates there are, the more time it takes for officers to feed, count, supervise, and organize health care, which leave inmates locked in dorms for longer” (Martin et al. 2012:98). In Canada, lockdowns can “last several days or weeks” (Michael 2012) which means inmates remain idle in their cells without access to resources or visits.
to violence between inmates and prison staff (Kinkade, Leone and Semon 1995). Correctional officers interviewed by Martin and colleagues (2012) agree that crowding leads to violence among inmates.

Overcrowded prisons have been described as “factories for producing negative men” (Cobb 1985: 79). Empirical research supports the claim that there is a positive relationship between prison crowding and aggression (Cox et al. 1984; Lahm 2008) and between assaults and crowding (Gaes and Mcguire 1985) or spatial density (Tartaro 2002).\(^4\) Meta-analyses reveal that inmate violence and misconduct result when prison management and security are compromised (Franklin, Franklin and Pratt 2006; McCorkle, Meithe and Drass 1995). In a crowded prison setting characterized by unpredictability and goal interference (Cox et al. 1984), inmates may be less able to cope with routine stressors or “friction points” (Bottoms 1999). Chronic crowding is an environmental stressor that increases the impact of acute stressors, such as daily hassles or arguments with others (Lepore, Evans and Palsane 1991). In a chronic double or triple-bunked living arrangement, interactions with staff and other inmates become strained and the potential for violent outcomes in daily social interactions is heightened. For instance, Lawrence and Andrews (2004) find that inmates who experience crowding are more likely to perceive others’ behaviours as aggressive or violent. Their study of seventy-nine male prison inmates from medium and maximum security institutions suggests that inmates who have higher expectations of personal space are more likely

\(^4\) Still, due to methodological and empirical inconsistencies the direct effect of crowding and density on prison violence is debated in the relevant literatures (Franklin, Franklin and Pratt 2006; Wooldridge and Steiner 2009). Some studies indicate that the effect of crowding or density on prison violence is weaker or stronger depending on other institutional and individual variables. Gaes (1994) argues that many studies do not consider intervening mechanisms that could account for a relationship between prison violence and crowding. For example, Tartaro and Levy (2007) found that spatial and social density are less important indicators of reported prison assaults than the location of the prison, racial composition of inmates, and ratio of inmates to correctional officers. However, they suggest that this could be a function of strained resources; it may be that rather than formally processing assault incidences, correctional officers are dealing with them informally.
to experience crowding and more likely to interpret an event as aggressive and the actors involved as “hostile, intentional, [or] malevolent” (Lawrence and Andrews 2004: 281).5

Prison crowding poses numerous problems for prisoners who have limited resources for negotiating interactions within these increasingly confined spaces. Alonzo Cobb Jr., prison activist, writer and former prisoner, makes a moving comparison between prisons and chicken farms; he describes the problem of prison crowding in the following way:

…these farms hold 14,000 chickens, 5 to a cage. Some chickens are denied food and water by the others and have to be moved if they are to survive….Like chickens, prisoners are graded and classified, and officials try to cram as many as possible into a limited amount of space…inmates are classified, the same as chickens: death row; high maximum security, maximum, close, medium, and minimum and trustee (1985:74).

Cobb’s comparison between prisons and chicken farms speaks viscerally to the claim that prison crowding “means more than too little space and too few resources” (Clements 1982:74). In addition to the numerous problems of prison security and management, it is clear that the current double and triple-bunking trend in Canada raises important questions of basic human dignity,
which is undoubtedly threatened when a person is forced to sleep near and use an often unsanitary or clogged toilet in the presence of one or more persons sharing a single occupancy cell (Annual Report 2013-2014).

Unable to leave the prison, prisoners must find ways to survive in conditions of prolonged environmental stress. Longitudinal social psychological literatures demonstrate that individuals enduring exposure to chronic environmental stressors, such as high residential density, are more susceptible to negative psychological health effects and less able to cope with minor, daily social stressors and hassles (Lepore et al. 1991). A crowded atmosphere might impede a person’s ability to become acculturated to prison life to the extent that suicide becomes a viable option (Gaes 1992). Empirical studies indicate that the number of suicides increase in crowded and violent conditions, particularly in supermaximum and maximum prisons (Dye 2010), and that overcrowding generally is a “critical feature of prison environments that dramatically raises the risk of prison suicide” (Huey and McNulty 2005: 507). In Canada, the rate of double bunking has increased by nearly one hundred percent in the past few years in federal institutions and the suicide rate is seven times that of Canadians generally (Annual Report 2013-2014).

The recent developments in Canadian prison policy that affect the living arrangements of inmates have had an impact on the prison social context in which disputes arise. As prisoners continue to feel the negative consequences of increasingly crowded and understaffed prisons in Canada (Annual Report 2013-2014), “the vulnerable can easily become more vulnerable, and the healthy can soon become unhealthy” (Iftene and Manson 2012:1).\(^6\) Cramped living quarters in prison strain available resources, threaten prisoners’ psychological and mental well-being, and

\(^6\) For example, heightened concerns among inmates regarding the spread of HIV in prison provide fertile grounds for conflict because inmates may have anxieties over sharing a cell with an HIV infected prisoner and/or may be misinformed about how HIV is contracted (Derlega et al. 2010). Worsening health conditions in prison strain available healthcare resources and limit inmate access to essential services (Iftene and Manson 2012) and visits (Annual Report 2013-2014), in turn increasing anxiety and stress among inmates, who may use drugs as a coping strategy (Crewe 2005; Fischer et al. 2006).
jeopardize basic human dignity. Additionally, prison crowding and double-bunking is criminogenic: those most likely to be double-bunked are young, male prisoners, who are less likely to have an education beyond grade eight, more likely to have been subject to the harsh conditions of solitary confinement, and also more likely to have their parole revoked compared to other prisoners (Annual Report 2013-2014). Put another way, angry, young, disadvantaged males - who are according to decades of criminological research more likely to be both criminally active and criminally exploited – are being packed increasingly more tightly into confined spaces in which they must negotiate daily living. The inadequate and often degrading conditions that characterize the prison environment provide fertile grounds for physically, sexually and psychologically exploitative relationships to develop among incarcerated men.

**Physical Attacks**

Canadian correctional facilities are dangerous places for men who live in them, both in terms of threats to physical and emotional well-being, and the risk of criminal victimization and exploitation. Research consistently demonstrates that a male federal inmate in a Canadian prison who is between “fifteen and sixty-four is more likely to die a violent death while in prison than is his counterpart on the street” (Cooley 1992:8-9; Annual Report 2013-2014). According to official documentation, the homicide rate for federally sentenced inmates is 22 per 100,000 (Annual Report 2013-2014), whereas the male homicide rate in the Canadian population is significantly lower: 2.38 male homicide victims for every 100,000 male Canadians. Similarly, because prison conditions are likely to exacerbate existing health and wellness problems such as drug addiction (Gillespie 2005) and depression (Haney 2012) it is not surprising that the Correctional Investigator

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7 While the homicide rate for federally sentenced inmates by sex appears to be unavailable, the fact that 93% of those federally sentenced are men (See http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2016001/article/14318-eng.htm) suggests that the combined rate (22/100,000) is an adequate measure of the male federal inmate homicide rate as well.
of Canada (2013-2014) finds that prisoners often turn violence on themselves: the suicide rate for
federal inmates is nearly seven times the rate among Canadians generally (70 per 100,000
compared to 10.2 respectively).

The 2011-2012 report of the Correctional Investigator of Canada indicated that in the
previous four years the rate of reported assaults in Canadian prisons had increased by 33%. The
incidence of serious bodily injury has increased by 19% in the last few years and rates of reported
self-injury have increased by 56% (Annual Report 2013-2014). Serious sexual and physical assault
in Canadian prisons have been linked to recent overcrowding problems and conditions of
confinement; specifically circumstances in which “procedures for assessing personal suitability
and compatibility for shared cell assignments were found to be incomplete, inappropriate and/or
lacking in proper documentation” (Annual Report of the Correctional Investigator 2011-2012:
30).8 According to the Correctional Investigator, common themes in reported assaults in Canadian
prisons include gaps in security practices, monitoring and assignment of double bunk cell
The Correctional Investigator has also noted that the use of pepper spray in 60.4% of all use of
force incidents in the previous year suggests an increasing reliance on “inflammatory agents”

Between 2013 and 2014, there were 1,293 documented assaults among federally sentenced
prisoners (Annual Report 2013-2014). While official data give some sense of the extent of violence
in federal penitentiaries (Annual Report 2013-2014; Report of the Correctional Services of Canada
Review Panel 2007), these estimates are limited in that they only reflect incidents that are officially
reported. Subcultural norms inhibit prisoners from reporting assaults to correctional staff, even

8 At least one of these cases involved an inmate homicide (Annual Report 2011-2012).
when injuries require immediate medical attention.\textsuperscript{9} One of the most comprehensive Canadian studies that draws on inmate self-reports on the prevalence and incidence of prison violence and its relationship to prison norms is Dennis Cooley’s (1992) study, \textit{Victimization behind the Walls}. Cooley’s (1992) research on violence and social control in prison reports on the results of 117 interviews with Canadian inmates in maximum, medium and minimum security facilities. The study reveals that during a twelve month period, those in his sample had suffered 107 victimization incidents, with personal victimizations (robbery, assault, sexual assault, threats) accounting for 61\% of all victimizations (Cooley 1992:122). Of personal victimizations, 82\% were assaults or threats of assault (Cooley 1992:123). Interestingly, assaults (including being punched, kicked, hit with an object, or stabbed) accounted for a higher proportion of victimizations than threats of assault (Cooley 1992), which suggests that in a prison context, physical violence is likely to be carried out when threatened.

More recent scholarly research from the United States gives some indication of the nature and extent of prison violence that can be expected in the Canadian context if plans to expand or overfill penitentiaries continue (Annual Report 2013-2014; Piché 2014; Lynch 2015). American studies suggest that the risk to an inmate’s safety and security include harm to or theft of property, as well as sexual and physical victimization and that many of these risks exceed those posed to non-incarcerates (Catalano 2005 in Wolff et al. 2007). A male prisoner’s risk of physical assault is over 18 times that of males in the general population and rates for female inmates is over 27 times that of their non-incarcerated counterparts (Catalano 2005 in Wolff et al. 2007). Wolff and colleagues’ (2007) study of 13 prisons for men and one prison for women in a mid-Atlantic American state found that 20\% of female inmates and a quarter of male inmates had experienced

\textsuperscript{9} In response to a question about physical injury sustained as a result of an assault, more than one participant in this study replied: “I stitched myself up”, an option preferable to seeking medical assistance.
physical assault by another inmate while incarcerated. Over a 6-month period, 20% of inmates in their sample reported being hit, slapped, kicked, bit, choked, beat up, or hit/threatened with a weapon (Wolff et al. 2007). In a later study, Wolff and Shi (2009a) found that theft was the most common form of victimization among male and female inmates (48% and 24.3% of their sample respectively) followed by being hit, bit, kicked, or threatened with a shank for males, and being threatened with harm by a loved one for females. Similarly, Perez and colleagues (2010) report that in their sample of 247 male and female incarcerates across eight correctional facilities, 32% of the total sample reported that they had been victimized in some way by staff, inmates or both. Compared to females, males in the sample were significantly more likely to be victimized and significantly more likely to be victimized by prison staff. Clearly men in prison routinely experience an alarming degree of physical attacks from other male prisoners and correctional staff.

Sexual Attacks

Sexual assault and/or the fear of sexual assault is a threat to male prisoners generally (Human Rights Watch 2001; Ireland 2002; Kerbs and Jolley 2007; Worley, Worley and Mullings 2010). Rates of reported sexual victimization in American prisons are inconsistent, ranging from one to four percent, but averaging less than five percent (Wolff and Shi 2011). Nearly fourteen percent of Hensley, Tewksbury and Castle’s (2009) sample of 174 male inmates in minimum, medium and maximum security prisons in Oklahoma had been sexually targeted. In a second study of incarcerated women, the same researchers found that 4.5% of the 243 inmates they surveyed had been sexually victimized and 2% reported having been sexually victimized by another inmate (Hensley, Castle, and Tewksbury 2003). Walsh and colleagues (2012) reported slightly higher rates of sexual victimization in their study of female incarcerates in a Midwestern American state prison. Of the 168 inmates, 9.5% report being coerced into sex with another inmate, 12.5% report
engaging in unwanted sexual contact to obtain protection in the prison and 24.25% report an experience of forced sexual contact.\textsuperscript{10} Additionally, prior experience of sexual coercion is a risk factor for sexual coercion and unwanted physical contact in prison (Malacova et al. 2012). In a study of 2,018 male prisoners in New South Wales and Queensland, a third of the participants feared sexual assault before entering prison, 7.1% were currently fearful, and 53 men in the sample had been frightened into unwanted sex (Richters et al. 2012).

Male inmates are more likely to be sexually victimized by prison staff than their female counterparts and are twice as likely to report being beaten up by staff than by other inmates (Beck 2011; Wolff and Shi 2009a). Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (2006) compared self-reports of 382 males and 51 females who had experienced sexual coercion while in prison. Of their sample, almost 75% of male inmates and 57% of female inmates reported being sexually coerced more than one time while incarcerated (the average number of reported incidents was 8.6 for men and 3.9 for women) (Struckman-Johnson and Struckman Johnson 2006). According to the study, men are more often the perpetrators of sexual violence against other men in prison and conflicts that produce a sexual victimization outcome sometimes involve multiple aggressors (Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson 2006). In the worst-case incidents of sexual victimization reported by male prisoners the majority of perpetrators were other inmates (72% of cases) and in a minority of cases prison staff (8%). Similarly, Hensley, Koscheski and Tewksbury’s (2005) study of male inmates in a maximum security facility reports that a significant minority are targeted for sexual victimization, and of those targeted or threatened sexually, half are eventually sexually assaulted by another inmate.

\textsuperscript{10} Recently, Wolff and Shi (2011) reported that 4% of male inmates and 22% of females reported sexual victimization perpetrated by other inmates and 7% of males (8% of females) reported sexual victimization perpetrated by staff; which suggests that earlier estimates by Hensley, Castle and Tewksbury (2003) (which did not include victimization perpetrated by prison staff) could be low.
In the Canadian context, Cooley’s (1992) report suggests that male federal inmates experience sexual assault at a rate of 51.28 per 1000 prisoners. However, considering the drastic increase in “double bunking” practices during the two years following Cooley’s report (20% of the total incarcerated Canadian population was double bunked by 1994), the 93% increase in double-bunking over the past few years (Annual Report 2013-2014) and the observation that crowding is “linked to higher incidences of violence…volatility and…the spread of infectious diseases” (Annual Report 2011-2012) it is likely that Cooley’s (1992) report is a gross underestimate of the incidence and consequences of prison sexual assaults in Canadian prisons today. It would appear that the double-bunking crisis in Canada is related to serious incidents of sexual victimization. The Correctional Investigator noted three cases of serious sexual assault in which procedures for assessing cellmate compatibility were insufficient and complaints from both inmates were disregarded (Annual Report 2011-2012). One of these sexual assaults resulted in a homicide and in another “the victim was mentally challenged and appears to have been preyed upon by his cell mate” (Annual Report 2011-2012:28).

Arguably, such attacks represent a small portion of actual sexual victimizations in Canadian prisons. Four factors suggest that prison sexual victimization or the threat of it is a routine part of prison life and hence unlikely to be interpreted as a report-worthy crime: 1) there are numerous terms that reflect the commonplace nature of sexual threats in prison; these include, “wolves”, “punks”, “fags” (Clemmer 1940), and more recently “hammerhawk”, “hound”, “kid” “showerhawk” (Michael 2012); 2) prisoners report being persuaded or frightened into sexual victimization (Richters et al. 2012; Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson 2006) and rape may be socially accepted as a consequence of backing out of sexual deals (Trammell 2012); 3) norms against “snitching” or “ratting” (Sykes 1958) prevent reporting in an instance where a
victimization is interpreted as a crime; and 4) research suggests that sex may be an accepted part of economic exchanges or means of paying off prison debt (Kerbs and Jolley 2007; Richters et al. 2012). The findings presented here suggest that threats of sexual violence are a regular feature of prison conflict and in some cases these threats are carried out by both inmates and staff.

**Psychological & Emotional Attacks**

In addition to physical and sexual victimization, psychological victimization, aggression and/or ‘bullying’ are important features of prison life in both youth and adult correctional facilities in Canada and internationally (Häufle and Wolter 2015; Kerbs and Jolley 2007; Cooley 1992; South and Wood 2006). While there may be little consensus among prisoners as to what constitutes ‘bullying’, Edgar and colleagues (2003) suggest that the term can loosely be defined as involving situations in which one individual establishes a position of dominance over another through a process of intimidation, and that the power derived is exploited over a period of time. Kerbs and Jolley’s (2007) interviews with older male inmates revealed that 40% had been insulted, 25% had been threatened, and 19% had been labelled in a way that could invite physical harm. Bullying and other strategies of psychological victimization by inmates include overt acts of aggression such as physical violence (Ireland and Archer 1996) or subtle yet consequential tactics such as negative labelling (Bowker 1980) and gossip or rumours (Ireland 2000). Psychological bullying may be the most frequent form, especially in maximum security prisons (Ireland 2000); and some have suggested that within the context of “total institutions” (Goffman 1961) such non-physical mechanisms of informal social control are preferable as they are less detectable by prison staff (Häufle and Wolter 2015). South and Wood (2006) found that over half of their sample of 132 male prisoners in the UK had been both perpetrators and victims of bullying. Similarly, two-thirds
of inmates in Allison and Ireland’s (2010) study had bullied other inmates, while 80% of their sample had responses indicative of bullying experience.

The simultaneous ‘bully/victim’ status characterizes the experience of youth in detention centres as well (Häuflé and Wolter 2015) and is consistent with the relationship between victimization and offending more generally (Sacco and Kennedy 2012). Prison is a social setting supportive of psychological intimidation and bullying; predatory relationships involving violence or threats of violence are likely to develop during the course of day-to-day interactions (Allison and Ireland 2010; Shields and Simourd 1991). Indeed, the array of negative labels within the repertoire of prison vocabulary speaks to the routine nature of intimidation and bullying behavior in prison subculture. Labels are powerful victimization tools in prison; being called a “snitch”, “rat”, “furback” or “stoolie” (Michael 2012) can indicate to others that one is untrustworthy and hence an appropriate target for violence. Other terms such as “goof” in the Canadian prison context, have duel meanings as both an invitation to fight and the most insulting name an inmate can be called (Michael 2012: 321). Various terms in prison speak to strategies or responses to bullying; in Canada, these are phrases such as “taking it dry” (not responding to insults), requests to “up it” (surrendering something), being “muscred” (forced to give up or submit to something), and attempts to “cut someone’s grass” (to benefit from someone’s good fortune without their permission) (Michael 2012).

**Characteristics of Vulnerable Men in Prison**

The physical, sexual and psychological attacks that men routinely experience in a prison setting are significant for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the victimizations described here are inherently harmful to men in obvious ways and the unforgiving, cramped, prison setting in which men are confined offers little in terms of resources to deal with these problems. More
interestingly though, is the subcultural significance of these attacks in the production of a gendered prison social order among incarcerated men. The personal troubles of individual men in prison reflect a dynamic pattern of social relationships among men at the subcultural level as well as wider cultural expectations of men generally. Race, class, age and other variables determine which groups of men in prison are most likely to be victimized and thus relegated to subordinate positions in the prison social hierarchy.

Inmates live under dangerous conditions of forced intimacy with strangers in which they are subject to a “constant round of explosive situations…[and a] daily routine of exploitation that characterizes most correctional institutions” (Bowker 1980:31, 58; O’Donnell and Edgar 1998). Likely unable to escape prison to avoid this situation, incarcerated men must strategize to protect themselves against being dominated and victimized by other men in the same situation. While a strict separation of ‘victim’ and ‘victimizer’ is problematic (Edgar et al. 2003; Sacco and Kennedy 2012), those who more often become victims of prison disputes that produce a violent outcome tend to be young, racial/ethnic minority males (in Canada) (Wooldredge 1998). Inmates victimized by staff in particular are more likely to be non-white males housed in a maximum security prison (Pérez et al. 2010). Prisoners who are consistently more likely to be involved in violent disputes generally may be those serving shorter sentences who have an extensive criminal history, a history of victimization, and/or some gang affiliation (Schenk and Fremouw 2012; Steiner et al. 2015). It does not appear that the characteristics of victims/victimizers in a prison context deviate significantly from those in the general population; similar to the free community, prisoners involved in incidents of violence/victimization tend to be young, risk-taking, economically disadvantaged, racial/ethnic minority males.
Male inmates are more violent (Harer and Langan 2001 in Lahm 2008; Schenk and Fremouw 2012) and more likely to be victimized (Pérez et al. 2010) than their female counterparts; this is consistent with the relationship between violence and gender more generally (Sacco and Kennedy 2012). In a study of thirteen prisons for men (and one prison for women), Wolff and colleagues (2007) found that while inmate-on-inmate victimization prevalence rates were similar for men and women, men’s experiences were more likely to involve weapons. This is consistent with studies of sexual violence in prison that indicate male victims are more often drugged by their perpetrators (18% of men versus 2% of women), held down (44% versus 38%), and have had a weapon used against them (Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson 2006). Men are more likely than women to be both the perpetrators and victims of sexual violence while incarcerated and are more likely to report rape as the worst-case incident of sexual victimization that they have experienced in prison (54% compared to 28%) (Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson 2006). Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (2006) found that 91% percent of male and 51% of female incarcerates in their sample who had experienced sexual coercion were victimized by a man (Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson 2006). Male inmates have the highest rate of sexual victimization perpetrated by staff (Wolff et al. 2006) and men are also more likely than women to be sexually exploited by staff and inmates who collaborate together (12% versus 0%) (Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson 2006). Overall, research suggests that sexual victimization in a prison context is gendered as “sexual coercion in prison is a more violent situation for men than women” (Struckman-Johnson and Struckman Johnson 2006:1611).

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11 In an earlier survey of 1,800 inmates in the United States, Struckman-Johnson and colleagues (1996) found that 22% of male and 7% of female incarcerates had been forced or pressured to have sexual contact.
12 Other research suggests that female inmates are more likely to be sexually victimized by another inmate (Wolff and Shi 2011).
Younger men in prison are more likely than older men to report being victimized by at least one type of prison incident (Cooley 1992). Young inmates are more likely to be the victims of physical violence (Wolff, Shi and Siegel 2009) and are more likely to carry a weapon while incarcerated (Griffin and Hepburn 2006). Age is the most consistent factor in studies of sexual victimization in prison (Hensley et al. 2009) and victims tend to be relatively young (Hensley, Tewksbury and Castle 2009). A study of 174 inmates in Oklahoma found a median age of 18.5 years for sexual targets and an average age of 20.5 years (Hensley, Tewksbury and Castle 2009). Male and female inmates who have experienced sexual victimization are on average between 33-34 years of age (Hensley, Koscheski and Tewksbury 2005; Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson 2006). However, inmates who have experienced sexual victimization perpetrated by prison staff in particular tend to be considerably younger (under 25 years) (Wolff et al. 2006). In federal penitentiaries in Canada at present there are no special housing units or specialized support to address the unique needs of younger prisoners who are often in “vulnerable situations…[and] continue to endure difficult conditions that threaten their safety and undermine humane custody” (Annual Report 2013-2014:40).

While research consistently supports a negative relationship between age and prison violence (Wooldredge 1998; Schenk and Fremouw 2012), older inmates may face unique victimization risks not shared by their younger counterparts (Kerbs and Jolley 2007). In a study of 65 older inmates, Kerbs and Jolley (2007) found that older inmates tended to share or loan money (Kerbs and Jolley 2007); this increases victimization risk (Cooley 1992). A small percentage (10.8%) reported having been punched, kicked or threatened with a weapon or sexually harassed and 1.5% reported having been raped or coerced into sexual activity to repay debt. Twenty-nine percent of older inmates reported being cheated or conned and 27% reported being
victimized by thefts (Kerbs and Jolley 2007). It may be that older prisoners are particularly vulnerable to theft due to difficulty securing their property; many live in open, minimum security facilities and have deteriorating eyesight which makes it difficult to negotiate combination locks (Kerbs and Jolley 2007). Additionally, older inmates are more likely to suffer from ailments such as arthritis, which is associated with increased risk of victimization in prison (Pare and Logan 2011).

In terms of race and ethnicity, Aboriginal and Black people are grossly overrepresented in Canadian prisons; 21% of incarcerates are of Aboriginal descent (43% in the Prairie Region) and 10% are Black (Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator 2011-2012; 2014-2015) compared to 3.8% and 3% of the Canadian population respectively (Statistics Canada 2006; Annual Report 2014-2015). Aboriginal inmates are involved in 28.4% of “use of force” incidents between staff and inmates and are twice as likely to be involved in gang activity (Annual Report of the office of the Correctional Investigator 2011-2012), which is a risk factor for involvement in violent incidents of any kind (Pérez et al. 2012). In Canada, Black and Aboriginal prisoners are more likely to be young (between 18-25 years) and have lower levels of education (Annual Report 2013-2014). In the American context, white inmates are more likely to be victims of physical assault in prison (Wolff, Shi and Siegel 2009) and white inmates who participate in the prison economy are more likely to be violently victimized than other inmates (Copes et al. 2011). Non-white inmates are more likely than white inmates to be victimized by staff (Wolff, Shi and Siegel 2009). With respect to sexual targeting and abuse, 73.1% of targets in an American study of male inmates in a maximum security prison were white (compared to 67.6% of the sample) (Hensley, Koscheski and Tewksbury 2005). For sexual victimization, 58% of inmates in Hensley, Tewksbury and Castle’s (2009) sample were white (compared to 44% of the sample) and 29% were Black
(compared to 39% of the sample). Black inmates are less likely to be sexually victimized in prison than other inmates and more likely to perpetrate sexual violence against white inmates (Hensley, Tewksbury and Castle 2009).

Additionally, sexual orientation is relevant to an inmate’s risk of sexual victimization (Hensley, Tewksbury and Castle 2009; Hensley, Koscheski and Tewksbury 2005). Alarid’s (2000) study reveals that gay inmates were more likely to experience sexual harassment while bisexual men were more likely to fear incarceration. These fears are reasonable considering research suggests that bisexual inmates are overrepresented among inmates who are sexually victimized. Sexual targets in the study by Hensley and colleagues (2009) identified as heterosexual in 42% of cases compared to 78% of the sample while bisexual incarcerates targeted for sexual victimization comprised 42% compared to 13% of the sample. Research suggests that bisexual or gay prisoners may be less likely to report an experience of sexual victimization (Fowler et al. 2010). Though research on the experience of transgender prisoners in Canada is sparse, research in the American context suggest that transgender prisoners are doubly punished by harsh conditions of confinement (Rosenberg and Oswin 2015), compare unfavourably on health variables and may be particularly marginalized within the prison environment (Sexton et al. 2010).

Finally, a risk-taking inmate is likely to be targeted for victimization more generally (Kerley, Hochstetler and Copes 2009). For example, prisoners who use heroin, referred to by some inmates as “smackheads”, are among the most stigmatized and vulnerable to victimization (Crewe 2005). Inmates with low self-control may also be risk-takers who engage in potentially dangerous behaviour such as provoking or antagonizing others without considering the probable consequences (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990), and male victims of property crime in particular are more likely to immediately react to a victimization (May, Rader and Goodrum 2010). Risk-taking
is predictive of having something stolen or vandalized, being threatened with violence or being swindled out of property/commissary, and temper is a significant predictor of being involved in physical fights/retaliation and carrying/storing a weapon (Kerley et al. 2009).

Risk-taking in correctional settings is related to participation in the underground prison economy (Cooley 1992). Gambling is a normative part of prison life that plays an important role in illicit prison transactions (McEvoy and Spirgen 2011). In interviews with 55 male inmates, McEvoy and Spirgen (2011) found that when prisoners incur gambling debt they sometimes engage in intentionally disruptive behaviour in order to be sent to solitary confinement where they can avoid victimization at the hands of their creditors. If a prisoner who owes money attempts to secure a transfer to another institution in order to avoid payment and is found out, he runs the risk of violent assault (McEvoy and Spirgen 2011). In another recent study of victimization and participation in the prison economy, Copes and colleagues (2011) found that victimization (being robbed, threatened, or assaulted) is predicted by involvement in buying and selling prison contraband; prisoners who loan money, are in debt, or do not have enough money for goods are most at risk of suffering violent victimization at the hands of other inmates. Conversely, inmates who have paid job assignments (Pérez et al. 2010) or sufficient funds to pay others to do their work (Copes et al. 2011) are less likely to be victimized, particularly by staff (Pérez et al. 2010). The current maximum rate of daily pay in Canadian prisons is $6.90; after deductions, the pay for an average inmate in Canada in the prison industry is approximately 40 cents an hour (Annual Report 2013-2014). It would seem that among prisoners “those who are poor are more likely to be victimized” (Copes et al. 2011:13).

In sum, prison is an unhealthy, dangerous and often violent place in which multiple forms of deprivation and victimization are normal features of men’s day-to-day lived realities. Canadian
prisoners face a higher risk of violent victimization than their non-incarcerated counterparts and are more likely to have serious physical and psychological problems that are caused or exacerbated by the conditions of confinement. The studies outlined here indicate that imprisonment is harmful to men but that these harms are differentially distributed according to race, socio-economic status, sexuality, age and ability. Not all inmates have an equal chance of being on the receiving end of disputes that produce a violent or victimizing outcome; but in navigating clashes in confinement, all prisoners are constrained by the norms and expectations specific to the prison social environment. The next chapter sets up a theoretical framework for understanding prison conflicts as situated and gendered transactions.
CHAPTER THREE:
THEORY

MEN IN CONFLICT

Men’s lived experience with incarceration is uniquely gendered (Ugelvik 2014). Men must negotiate the day-to-day realities of living in close quarters with other men in prison; and as in the free community, they must perceive and interpret potentially risky situations and develop strategies to protect themselves emotionally, physically and psychologically (Ricciardelli et al. 2015). These strategies ultimately shape and are shaped by gendered social norms, codes and interaction rituals that operate within the prison environment. Prison has been described as a “violent culture of masculinity” (Comack 2008: 141) and a ‘hypermasculine’ space in which men must exercise constant hypervigilance with respect to their gender self-presentation (Ricciardelli 2015). Any break in a masculine façade could potentially invite victimization from other men seeking to elevate their own status within the prison social hierarchy (Haney 2012). Thus how men respond to and engage with conflict in a prison setting is intimately related to gender presentation and survival. This chapter presents theoretical context for the analysis with particular emphasis on masculinities theory and conflict as a situated and gendered transaction.

Theories of Masculinity

In sociology and criminology, the idea that men have a gender at all went largely unrecognized until the 1970s when feminist theorists began to critique male sex roles and patriarchal structures that disadvantaged women (Greig and Pollard 2017). These critiques

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13 Gender refers to the collection of thoughts, beliefs and behavioural expectations socially assigned to gender categories (Tepperman, Albanese and Curtis 2014). While ‘sex’ refers to anatomy, ‘gender’ is socially created; a product of social definition constituted through a complex relationship between language, social control and social construction (Berger and Luckman 1967). Though gender categories are generally conceived of as socially created, for many years this was disregarded in theories of crime and violence that tended to take men for granted as the normative base for theorizing. For example, early explanations of women’s offending have been critiqued for failing to acknowledge the ways in which women’s law-breaking reflects their gendered lived experience (Chesney-Lind 2006).
inspired a Men’s Liberation movement which sought to evaluate the ways in which traditional masculinity encouraged men to suppress emotions and define intimacy with other men as dangerous or problematic (Sawyer 1970; Farrell 1974). By the mid-1980s, in response to the women’s movement and in part growing from the Men’s Liberation movement, some men started to advocate for ‘men’s rights’ by suggesting men needed to reclaim a ‘lost masculinity’ (Greig and Pollard 2017). Men’s Rights advocates claimed that social structures such as the legal system favoured women over men and that men, not women, were the ones who were truly oppressed in this ‘war’ against men and boys (Greig and Pollard 2017).

The negative reaction of some men to feminist critiques of gender inequality have been described by gender scholars as an anti-feminist backlash (Faludi 1991; Katz 1999). This expression of men’s gender-based political organizing has been critiqued for assuming a narrow and homogenous white, heterosexual, middle-class vision of masculinity, failing to challenge the gender structure, and ignoring the ways in which masculinities are multiple and diverse (Greig and Pollard 2017). Additionally, the concept of a ‘sex role’ has been critiqued for linking the dichotomy male/female to biology as opposed to social relations and for inhibiting social change (Connell 2005). By the late 1980s these critiques began to be addressed and masculinities studies evolved to take on a more pro-feminist character. Contemporarily this approach to theory and research continues to grow in complex and diverse ways.

Raewyn Connell’s (1995) seminal statement on hegemonic masculinity is one of the most enduring and significant contribution to masculinities studies. Connell (2005) describes hegemonic masculinity as an idealized form or most socially accepted way of doing masculinity. In other words, hegemonic masculinity is the dominant masculine script in a given context to which all other expressions of masculinity are subjugated. Hegemonic masculinity then, is not an
expression of masculinity with secure descriptors, but “the masculinity that occupies the
hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations” (Connell 2005:76). Implicit in her
definition is a recognition that gender does not exist prior to social interaction but is constituted
through social relations, rituals and exchanges (Connell 1995); in short, hegemonic masculinity
involves a pattern of practices, not merely a set of expectations or an identity (Connell and
Messerschmidt 2005).

Connell’s work suggests a distinct break from the fixed, homogenous masculinity implied
by the Men’s Rights and Men’s Liberation movements of the 1970s. In contrast, Connell argues
that masculinity is multiple, fluid, and continuously under construction. Importantly, she argues
that the making of masculinity is situated in relations of power both between men and women and
also between and among men. In this way, hegemonic masculinity is comprised of external
hegemony (institutionalized dominance of men over women) and internal hegemony (dominance
over subordinate masculinities) (Demetriou 2001). From this perspective, gender - like all social
reality (Berger and Luckman 1967) - is an accomplished and fluid construct; continuously
negotiated and changing over time (Kimmel 1987; Messerschmidt 1993).

As masculinities are organized hierarchically and relationally constituted, Connell (2005)
recognizes that they are additionally stratified according to race, social class, physical and mental
abilities, sexuality and so forth. The dominant expression of masculinity (hegemonic masculinity)
atop a gender hierarchy ultimately reflects “ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions and
persuasion” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832). The hegemonic ideal as it is currently
socially accepted is characterized by participation in the paid labour force, heterosexuality,
dominance, self-reliance, control and competition (Connell 2005) whereas traditional or
‘emphasized’ femininity tends to be its opposite – nurturance, submissiveness and dependence
(Jhally 2010). Ideal ‘manliness’ is defined by social actors in pursuit of these characteristics as distinct from and superior to womanliness and in contrast to other expressions of masculinity. Though few men actually embody the hegemonic ideal, they are nonetheless subject to social pressures to achieve it (Newsom 2015). The concept of hegemonic masculinity “expresses widespread ideals, fantasies and desires” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 838) and men face ridicule from their peers and sometimes violent victimization if they display non-conforming traits (Katz 2013; Messerschmidt 2000).¹⁴

Connell (2005) identifies three important constructs in her discussion of dynamic masculinity: complicity, subordination and marginalization. Some groups of men are subordinated by those who more strictly adhere to the hegemonic pattern; yet all men are privileged by the “patriarchal dividend” or general subordination of women that the hegemonic structure perpetuates (Connell 2005). So while there is a hierarchy of masculinities in which some expressions of masculinity are subjugated to the dregs of this stratified system, relationships among men are complicit in perpetuating a hegemonic project that disadvantages women (Connell 2005). A third dynamic in the relationship between gender, hegemony, subordination and complicity is marginalization. The construction of dominant and subordinate masculinities is a social process; and as such, is constituted in relation to broader patterns of social relations such as class, race, sexuality, abilities and so on. These structures are central to the relationship between groups of men, the social production of masculinities in particular contexts, and in perpetuating the disadvantage of marginalized groups. For example, Connell argues that oppression forces gay masculinities to a subordinate position in the gender hierarchy among men: “[g]ayness…is the

¹⁴ For example, the documentaries Tough Guise and Tough Guise 2 by Jackson Katz as well as the recent film The Mask you Live in (2015) directed by Jennifer Newsom each illustrate the pressures on boys and men to conform to idealized masculinity and the way in which failure to conform can translate into ridicule, violence and victimization.
repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity, the items ranging from fastidious taste in home decoration to receptive anal pleasure” (2005:78). An array of argot constructs gay men and some heterosexual men and boys as feminine and thus outside the “circle of legitimacy”; such terms include: *pussy, fag, wimp, nerd* et cetera (Connell 2005; Katz 2013). Marginalization intersects with masculinity and both are relative to the power and perceived legitimacy of the dominant group (Connell 2005).

Raewyn Connell’s work on hegemonic masculinity has established her as one of the leading scholars in gender studies (Demetriou 2001). The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been applied in empirical research spanning a number of substantive areas including media studies (Park 2015; Hanke 1990), sports (Hirose and Kei-ho Pih 2009) sexualities (Currier 2013) and prison sociology (Comack 2008; Michalski 2015; Ricciardelli et al. 2015). Despite its popularity, hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical construct has received a number of important and useful critiques (Christensen and Jensen 2014; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Messerschmidt 2012; Moller 2007). Demetrakis Demetriou (2001) argues that hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical concept needs to be interrogated; rather than conceiving of a hegemonic masculinity that creates a binary between ‘hegemonic’ and ‘non-hegemonic’ masculinities he argues that the concept should be expanded to address hegemonic masculinity as a ‘hybric bloc’ that unites diverse masculinities in a strategic alliance to perpetuate patriarchy. Further, Demetriou (2001) extends the concept by suggesting ‘external’ (men’s dominance over women) and ‘internal’ (men’s dominance over men) functions of hegemonic masculinity. He argues that Connell’s (1995) original statement on hegemonic masculinity neglects to address how the two forms work together or how marginalized masculinities contribute to the construction of hegemonic masculinity (Demetriou 2001). To illustrate this, Demitriou points to the way in which gay masculinities have been incorporated into
the ‘hegemonic bloc’ and how patterns of hegemonic masculinity can change by incorporating elements from others (Demetriou 2001). In this way, there is a dialectical pragmatism that defines the reciprocal way that masculinities are constructed and interact (Demetriou 2001).

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have suggested that the concept of hegemonic masculinity could be reformulated in a few key areas. The first is the gender hierarchy as it is conceived in the original statement of hegemonic masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt argue that future research needs to continue to interrogate the complexity implicit in relationships among contrasting constructions of masculinity. In this way, research can better recognize the agency of marginalized groups and durability of non-hegemonic masculinities. Secondly, the authors argue that more attention needs to be paid to the interplay between masculinities at the local (face-to-face), regional and global levels. Connell and Messerschmidt call for more attention to the ways in which masculinities are embodied (for example in sport and leisure) and “the possibility of democratizing gender relations, [and] of abolishing power differentials, not just of reproducing hierarchy” (2005:853).

Theories of Prison Culture

Both the pre-prison experiences of inmates (Irwin and Cressey 1962) and the shared problems that arise from prison conditions themselves (Sykes 1958) are important in understanding the social norms of inmate culture and how inmates adapt to or are assimilated within a prison environment. Prisoners often have backgrounds characterized by low socio-economic status, family dysfunction, mental health problems and substance abuse. Inmates may have existing health and psychological problems that they bring with them to prison which are in turn exacerbated by the inherent deprivations and dehumanizing nature of the incarceration experience. It has been long recognized that the prison setting poses numerous shared problems
such as the deprivation of security, autonomy, and freedom (Sykes 1958) and the perversion or subversion of masculine identity (Sabo, Kupers and London 2001). An integrated model that considers both pre-prison and prison-specific dynamics as well as situational and contextual factors best explains the nature and structure of inmate culture in which routine conflicts emerge and take shape.

The term *Prisonization* was introduced by Donald Clemmer (1940) in his classic work *The Prison Community*. Clemmer defines *prisonization* as “the taking on in greater or less degree of the folkways, mores, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary” (1958:299). Two models have been proposed to explain the process of prisonization and to account for the source of prison norms and culture. The deprivation model suggests that prison social norms emerge from deprivations unique to the incarceration experience and that the prison environment shapes prisoners’ attitudes and beliefs (Sykes 1958; Goffman 1961; Clemmers 1940; Rocheleau 2013). The shared ‘pains of imprisonment’ (Sykes 1958) from this perspective contextualizes prison deviance and non-conformity. For example, deprivation based research suggests a link between prison violence and misconduct and prison gang membership (Gaes 2002; Tewksbury et al. 2014); visitations (Cochran 2012); sentence length (Jiang and Fisher-Giorlando 2002); boredom and conflicts with staff (Rocheleau 2013).

The importation model (Irwin and Cressey 1962) emphasizes the relevance of pre-incarceration factors in shaping attitudes and social norms in the prison environment. For example, research has addressed the relationship between prison violence and age (Schenk and Fremouw 2012), education levels (Cunningham and Sorensen 2007), neighbourhood characteristics (Boessen and Cauffman 2016) and criminal history (DeLisi et al. 2004). Situational models underline the relationship between people and their social environments and recognize that prison
subcultural norms emerge from contextual variables such as crowding, staff characteristics or prison architecture (Morris and Worrall 2014; Hancock and Jewkes 2011; Steinke 1991). At present, there is support for both approaches and scholars agree that explanatory models that integrate importation and deprivation variables are most useful (Blevins et al. 2010; Lahm 2008).

Gresham Sykes’s *The Society of Captives* (1958) is the most widely cited work on prison deprivation. Based on research in a maximum security prison, Sykes (1958) argues that inmates are stripped of support networks upon entrance into prison and that numerous “pains of imprisonment” (deprivation of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy and security) threaten basic needs and force inmates find ways to adapt to a life in prison (Sykes 1958). New prisoners share the experience of “status degradation” (Garfinkel 1956) upon entrance to the prison as they come to accept their recently acquired inferior social position and learn the informal and formal rules in their new place of residence. From this shared process, certain patterns of inmate behaviour develop; these are sometimes referred to as “structural accommodation” (Cloward et al. 1960). A set of informal rules, or codes of conduct, emerge alongside structural accommodations as strategies for negotiating a diversity of new and unique deprivations solidify, and an informal network or system takes shape (Sykes 1958). In this model, the values that underlie the inmate code are situational because they are theorized as emerging from prison conditions that in many ways deny an inmate’s basic needs. For instance, recent research on the pains of imprisonment suggest that lack of stimulation, concerns for safety and conflicts with prison staff are related to prison violence and misconduct (Rocheleau 2013).

According to the deprivation model, prison is a “total institution” (Goffman 1961) and the shared pains it inflicts foster an “inmate code” (see Cooley 1992) by which inmates maintain an informal order, negotiate the shared problems of incarceration and coordinate their activities in a
common environmental sphere. The inmate code includes norms such as minding your own business or ‘doing your own time’ by not gossiping, snitching, losing your temper or intervening in others’ business (Sykes 1958). Other norms prohibit exploiting fellow inmates (keeping your word, not thieving from cells) or trusting correctional officers (Sykes 1958). However, there is mixed support for the “inmate code” (Cooley 1992). Cooley (1992) argues that while informal rules exist in Canadian prisons, the inmate code does not represent the experiences of all inmates. He found support for some rules such as “do your own time” but less support for rules such as “don’t talk to guards” (Cooley 1992). Other rules thought to be part of an inmate code were supported by as few as 10% of the inmates in Cooley’s study and two informal rules of survival in prison (“avoid the prison economy” and “don’t trust anyone”) frequently cited by prisoners are not previously included in descriptions of the inmate code. This suggests that the code is changing (Owen and Mackenzie 2004) and may be less uniform than previously thought (Cooley 1992).

Deprivation models have been criticized for ignoring the relationship between patterns of behaviour external to the prison setting and one’s actions while incarcerated, as well as the extent to which the “latent culture” of a prison is shaped by offenders’ previous experiences (Becker and Geer 1960). For instance, Irwin and Cressey argue that the behavioural aspects of prison culture are “not peculiar to the prison at all” in the sense that the prison code could be understood as part of a criminal code more generally (1962:142). This argument implies that prison culture does not evolve in a vacuum; rather, people bring their values and experiences with them, which in turn shape inmate culture, reactions to prison life and chances for survival (Owen and Mackenzie 2004). For instance, adopting prison subcultural norms may be easier for inmates with previous incarceration experience (Garofalo and Clark 1985). “Closed system” explanations, such as the deprivation model, may be inadequate for explaining prisonization and its consequences because
the adoption of a prosocial or antisocial role is mediated by factors external to the prison itself, such as post-prison expectations (Thomas and Foster 1972).

Irwin and Cressey (1962) questioned whether solutions to the problems of imprisonment are to be found in the prison itself; they argued that more attention should be paid to strategies for prison problem solving that arise from the “latent” rather than manifest prison culture. If inmates “carry culture with them” (Becker and Geer 1960:305) into prison, the social identities and values imported from their shared experiences in an “outside” group could produce numerous subcultures in a new group setting. For example, it may be the case that latent culture is “mobilized…brought into play and applied to the new problems arising for group members” in prison (Becker and Greer 1960: 306). In other words, problem-solving may take various forms depending on the resources and experiences of the latent subcultural group to which disputants belong.

Participant observation analyses support importation theory. Owen and Mackenzie (2004) found that inmates who were able to use middle class skills such as courtesy and civility (developed during pre-incarceration experiences) were better able to negotiate some arenas of the prison controlled by prison authorities. Research also suggests that importation variables shape the culture of an institution and predict certain forms of prisoner misconduct and violence (Walters and Crawford 2013). For example, Jacobs’s (1974) study of a maximum security prison details the reconfiguration of social organization following the introduction of Chicago street gang members who brought particular values, rivalries, hierarchies and behaviours with them into the prison. More recent studies suggest importation variables predict some types of institutional misconduct (Walters and Crawford 2013) and gang-related misconduct in prison (DeLisi et al. 2014) and violence (Mears et al. 2013). Situational, or contextual perspectives focus on the environmental predictors of misconduct and violence such as conditions of confinement, coercive experiences
(Day et al. 2014), staff characteristics (Beijersbergen et al. 2013), and institutional capacity for control (Griffin and Hepburn 2013).

To summarize, there is empirical support for the situational, deprivation and importation models (Camp and Gaes 2005; Cooley 1992; Jiang and Fisher-Giorlando 2002; Lahm 2008; O’Donnell and Edgar 1999; Steinke 1991; Walters and Crawford 2013). As a result, a number of extensions and integrations have been proposed (Blevins et al. 2010; Kigerl and Hamilton 2016; Lahm 2008). The debate over the point of origin of prison culture is important because each side presupposes a solution to managing prison problems. It is reasonable to expect that the informal norms which support a more violent situation in men’s prisons reflect the dynamic between importation, deprivation and their uniquely gendered experiences. Men import broader cultural notions of masculinity upon arrival at the prison and the shared deprivations that men acutely feel as a result of incarceration in turn shape expectations of masculine performance in prison. 15

The Concept of Conflict

Conflicts are primarily “disagreements between and among individuals” (Borisoff and Victor 1989:xiii). In this way, conflicts can be understood as part of a competition to define a situation as well as the competing parties’ respective roles within a conflict. Sociologist Donald Black argues that conflict occurs when a grievance is expressed or “whenever someone engages in conduct that someone else defines as deviant or whenever someone subjects someone else to social control” (Black 1998:xiii). Conflicts involve different interpretations of the morality of a situation and attempts on the part of competing parties to harness definitional control of that

15 It is also noteworthy that while research on the inmate code has focussed mainly on men’s prisons (Sykes 1958; Faulkner and Faulkner 1997; Johnston and Savitz 1978), some studies suggest that a convict code exists in women’s prisons as well (McGuire 2011; Wilson 1986). Violence and victimization continue to be a routine part of prison life for both men and women (McGuire 2005). Both male and female inmates value ‘doing your own time’ by staying out of ‘the mix’ (i.e. the drug and sexual rackets) (McCorkle 1992; Owen and Mackenzie 2004) and across correctional facilities, reputation is considered the “centrepiece” to survival (Owen and Mackenzie 2004).
situation. Thus, conflict underlies the construction of social reality (Berger and Luckmann 1967) and can be interpreted as an emergent process; it makes little sense to consider ‘victim’ and ‘offender’ as mutually exclusive roles that are settled in advance of a conflict, and much more sense to view the production of and assigning of actors to these categories as a process under continuous negotiation.

The outcome of a conflict is a product of the actions, behaviours or contributions of all of the parties involved, including the eventual offender and victim.\(^{16}\) Considered this way, conflicts, including those that produce a victimization outcome, are interpreted here as events with precursors, transactions and aftermaths (Sacco and Kennedy 2012). Conceptualizing prison conflicts as events is useful because it allows for a comprehensive analysis of factors that precede conflict (in terms of what the statuses, roles, and experiences that disputants bring to an interaction), shape the conflict interaction itself (decision making, interpretations, and role of third parties) and how the outcome of a conflict (reactions) reconstruct or reshape the social backdrop against which new conflicts emerge. In other words, the socio-cultural context and stages of an interaction are relevant to how actors make meaning of a dispute and the type of outcome the dispute will produce (Athens 2005).

Violent victimization is just one of a number of possible outcomes of social interaction in prison (Kennedy and Forde 1999). A conflict may or may not result in violent victimization and in many contexts in free communities conflict is unlikely to produce a violent outcome (Baumgartner 1988). Most conflicts do not produce violence; “skirmishes” or “tiffs” underscore the rarity with which tense encounters produce “actual violent engagements” (Athens 2005:669).

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\(^{16}\) While victimization theories have been criticized for ‘blaming the victim’ for their own victimization, it makes theoretical sense to consider the ways in which all parties to a conflict contribute to the outcome of that conflict. Traditional criminology tends to adopt an “offender-centred” approach to the study of crime; in contrast, theories of victimization consider the relationship between ‘victim’ and ‘offender’ and the contributions of the eventual victim to the production of a criminal event (Sacco and Kennedy 2012).
Still, the potential for violent interactions can be understood as existing and emerging from everyday interactions (Kennedy and Forde 1999). Kennedy and Forde’s (1999) routine conflict theory illustrates this point; their perspective assumes that “incremental choices” are made during the course of our social interactions and that these series of choices can lead to either positive or negative outcomes (Kennedy and Forde 1999:32). For instance, Luckenbill (1977) has illustrated how homicide follows a pattern of interaction shaped by the choices of parties to the event: 1) one person decides to make an opening move to which the other person takes offence; 2) the offence is interpreted as intentional; 3) a retaliatory move (challenge) is made to “save face”; 4) a “working” definition of the situation as suitable for violence is established; 5) a physical interchange ensues; and 6) the transaction is terminated when the eventual victim falls. Luckenbill’s (1977) work shows throughout stages of criminal homicide both parties made choices to continue rather than terminate the conflict. Similarly, building on the work of Goffman (1967), Luckenbill (1977), Tedeschi and Felson (1994), and Messerschmidt (1993), Athens (2005) identifies five stages of a violent interaction more generally that are completed to a greater or lesser degree depending on the combatants’ relationships to each other and the social hierarchy in which the transaction takes place. Athen’s (2005) discussion of violent engagements, skirmishes and tiffs illustrates the way in which a potentially violent encounter produces or fails to produce violence. In both examples the outcome of a conflict is contingent on choices made through the stages of a conflict event.17

To understand conflict events in a prison context, decisions must be understood as a product of the values, beliefs and experiences that people bring with them to prison (such as

\footnote{17 Conflicts may also involve third parties who influence the outcome of a dispute (Athens 2005; Luckenbill 1977; Sacco and Kennedy 2012). For instance, Black notes that forms of conflict can be between two competing parties (with a unilateral or bilateral flow of social control) or between the primary parties to the conflict and an intervening third party, such as a judge or bystander (Black 1998).}
constructions of masculinity imported from mainstream culture) and the prison cultural context in which decisions about conflict are made (such as expectations among prisoners regarding how ‘real men’ solve problems in prison). Participants in a forming conflict may stress one of many aspects of an issue by isolating particular causes of the problem and advocating for specific solutions which may or may not involve criminal victimization/violence (Best 1995). Such strategies are contingent on the prisoner’s stake in the conflict, position in the prison social hierarchy and access to conflict management resources. Masculinity is intimately tied to survival in a prison setting and is often the central issue at stake in conflicts between incarcerated men.

**Prison Conflict & Violent Masculinities**

Masculinity is under attack from all angles in a prison environment. As Sykes (1958) famously argued in *The Society of Captives*, prisoners are subject to a loss of autonomy, independence, endure forced submission to authority, and various other deprivations including opportunities for heterosexual relations and the deprivation of goods and services. These deprivations are uniquely gendered for male prisoners because each are central to one’s status as a man – independence, dominance, authority, self-reliance – these are the essence of hegemonic masculinity. Because ‘maleness’ is continuously contested or threatened in prison (Bandyopadhyay 2006), dominant masculinity must constantly be “produced and reproduced” (Collier 1998:18). The challenge for male prisoners is that the prison social context continually threatens masculinity while simultaneously structuring and constraining opportunities to express

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18 For instance, the increased use of voluntary segregation among Canadian federal inmates has recently been constructed by institutional authorities as a problem residing within inmates themselves. Authorities claim that a lack of responsibility or active interest in correctional programming on the part of individual inmates has produced the increase in voluntary segregation; correspondingly, the solution is to devise incentives for inmates to work to rehabilitate. This is a particular interpretation of the problem with a specific solution; the use of voluntary segregation could also be interpreted as a problem lack of access to safe living quarters in the general inmate population (most voluntarily segregated inmates are reported as generally fearing for their safety) requiring actions that address safety concerns in the general inmate population (Report of the Correctional Services of Canada Review Panel 2007).
or achieve a masculine status. In this type of environment, resources to accomplish one’s status as a ‘real man’ are scarce and prisoners face tremendous pressure to maintain a masculine self-concept while managing a tough masculine self-presentation to others who may seek to exploit any perceived weakness for their own advantage.

One approach to constructing an aggressive masculine self-presentation is through non-violent psychological, emotional or social attacks. Psychological “games”, such as line cutting (Kerbs and Jolley 2007) or calling someone a stigmatizing name (Bowker 1980) may be part of a performance played in a larger strategy for survival in prison. Goffman’s (1959) work shows how social interactions have a game-like quality in the sense that actors make what can be understood as offensive and defensive moves. For instance, prisoners might try to cope with the threat of victimization by forming alliances with particular groups within the institution (Ricciardelli 2014). In a prison setting, psychological “games” and initiation rituals may be a way that inmates allot social roles and determine the trustworthiness and intentions of new incarcerates (Kaminski 2003). Because the experience of imprisonment is characterized by deprivation of security and autonomy (Sykes 1958) and threats to inmates’ social identities and masculine statuses (Butler 2008), such bullying strategies (psychological victimization, intimidation, and threats) may be important resources and instrumental means of self-protection. Empirical literatures support this claim; for instance, South and Wood (2006) found that bullying was positively related to perceived social status; inmates who more highly valued prison status were more likely to be involved in bullying (either as perpetrators or victims). In other words, inmates who have a higher stake in the prison social order (prisonization) are more likely to use psychological victimization (and in turn, be victimized) in order to achieve status.
Prisoners must attempt to “construct varieties of masculinity through specific social interactions inside the prison milieu” (Messerschmidt 2001:71). Violent conflict situations (particularly when in view of other prisoners) are important sites of masculinity construction because despite the many deprivations that prisoners routinely experience, the one resource that remains at a prisoner’s disposal is the physical body. Sociologists Richard Majors and Janet Billson (1993) argue that when men experience intersecting disadvantage, and have little expectation of education, employment or other means by which they might accomplish masculinity the body becomes a very important site in the projection of their power. Their analysis suggests that these intersecting disadvantages inform the aggressive physical posturing, what they call the ‘cool pose’, that defines the physical style of inner city Black men. A similar statement can be made about imprisoned men – as they too experience intersecting and structural disadvantage and have few resources outside the physical body to assert masculine power.

Imprisoned men might find the ability to demonstrate a physical aggressive demeanor that suggests the capacity for violence is an important way to claim some measure of power and control in an environment that denies independence, autonomy and security. A prisoner may benefit from aggressive posturing, violence (Bowker 1980), threats (Cooley 1992), or bullying (Ireland 2002) as a means of claiming a dominant masculine status and defining oneself as an inappropriate target for physical victimization despite strong feelings of emotional vulnerability (Ricciardelli, Maier and Hannah-Moffat 2015). Indeed, “the willingness to fight and the capacity for combat are measures of worth” in a prison context (Toch 1998:170). Thus prisoners try to respond to perceived risks in ways that construct an empowered, rather than a submissive, masculinity (Ricciardelli, Maier and Hannah-Moffat 2015). For some prisoners, the strategic use of violence is an important resource for self-preservation and masculine identity and thus has both an instrumental and
expressive purpose. For example, in Sykes’s (1958) classic study of a maximum security prison he found that male prisoners used violence strategically to deter others from harming them, to maintain an image of toughness in the face of insults, to exploit others for material rewards (robery) or to secure sexual gratification.

In a prison environment that denies access to emotional support networks, material and economic resources, and resources for reaffirming a masculine identity it is reasonable to expect that the strategies prisoners develop to deal with conflict situations would also reify hypermasculine (Karp 2010), “ultramasculine” (Lutze and Murphy 2004) or “destructive masculinities” (Seymour 2003). For instance, because “snitching” to prison authorities violates the inmate code and constitutes grounds for (further) victimization, an inmate’s need to be perceived by others as a “manly” man – to achieve a hegemonic masculine identity- is clearly intimately connected to conflict negotiation strategies and concerns for personal safety (Toch 1992). Inmates must “act tough, lift weights, and be willing to fight to settle grudges…weakness leads to being labeled a victim, and weaklings are subject to beatings and sodomy” (Kupers 2001:114). In this context it is unlikely that men will seek help from prison authorities because to do so would violate masculine prison codes (self-reliance, perseverance) by admitting helplessness, which in turn threatens their masculine status and physical safety (Toch 1998; Addis and Mahalik 2003).

While codes that manifest as “caricatures of masculinity” (Toch 1998) clearly serve short term expressive and instrumental goals, they “deviantize” some forms of emotional self-expression. Consequently, because discussing one’s pains, vulnerability or needs with “the wrong man could lead to betrayal” (Kupers 2001:114) prisoners can become trapped in their own minds (Evans and Wallace 2008) and such emotional inhibition potentially undermines their reintegration upon release (Karp 2010). Succinctly, Haney summarizes this potential:
Prisoners regularly witness the severe consequences that can befall those who appear weak or vulnerable. They may correctly infer that revealing too much about themselves provides others with knowledge that can be used to exploit them. In response, many fashion an emotional and behavioral “prison mask” that is unrevealing and impenetrable. Yet the emotional flatness that is so instrumental in prison may be difficult to relinquish in the outside world, where it is problematic in social interactions and personal relationships. The hypervigilance and suspicion that prisoners employ as a necessary survival strategy may create permanent and unbridgeable distance between themselves and other people (Haney 2012:6).

The relationship between the more violent state of affairs in prisons for men and the deprivation of resources to accomplish a masculine status speak to men’s distinctively gendered experience of incarceration. The deprivation of masculine identity, along with numerous other collective and individual pains of imprisonment, creates competition among inmates for access to scarce resources and status. Canadian prisoners are being incarcerated in ever more physically restricted living quarters in prisons and remand centres. This new strain on resources in an already high-stress, high-tension environment could mean that wearing a “prison mask” and adopting a tough façade may be some of the few remaining tools of self-protection to which a prisoner has access.

As in the free community, the power of a man at the top of the gender hierarchy is legitimized and sustained in opposition to those at the bottom; this is accomplished through a variety of mechanisms and strategies available to men. In prison, shared deprivations translate into scant resources for securing and maintaining status which makes intimidation and violence viable options. Thus violence in the prison context shapes interactions between men, enforces a hierarchy among them, and reflects broader social constructions of hegemonic masculinity. Violence and other modes of domination in prison then can be understood as “part of the normal routine which is sustained and legitimated by culture of masculinity” (Sim 1994:105). Messerschmidt argues that “[s]ocial structures organize the way individuals think about their circumstances and generate
methods for dealing with them” (1993:77). Projecting a violent masculinity, or “performing badness” (Weenink 2015), to gain status in the absence of other resources to establish masculine dominance (such as economic or material success) is characteristic of some men’s behaviour in male dominated domains more generally (Copes, Hochstetler and Forsyth 2013; Weenink 2015). For example, bar fights among men represent symbolic attempts to maintain honor and status, prevent negative labelling and build up an honourable reputation (Copes, Hochstetler and Forsyth 2013). Thus, the normalization of violence is not unique to a prison environment; rather, violent prison masculinities reflect the production and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity more generally in that dominant masculinity is always “constructed in relation to subordinated or less powerful men” (Jewkes 2002:55).

**Staying Safe(r) in Prison**

Due to practical deprivations as well as stringent codes of behaviour, male prisoners do not have access to many of the literal or symbolic resources with which people protect themselves in the free community. Research suggests that people take avoidant, protective or defensive measures to protect themselves from criminal victimization (Ferraro and LaGrange 1987; Rader and Haynes 2012) or avoid conflicts that could potentially produce a violent or victimizing outcome. For instance, women who have been sexually targeted might try to avoid known perpetrators of sexual harassment or locations where they have been victimized (Stanko 1985). Defensive actions might include target hardening techniques designed to deter potential offenders or make targets inaccessible (Sacco and Kennedy 2012). Purchasing a guard dog, installing deadbolts or carrying pepper spray are examples in this respect (Sacco and Kennedy 2012). Victims of crime might adopt strategies to reduce the stigma of their victim status (Hannem et al. 2015; Taylor, Wood and Lichtman 1983). These include downward social comparisons, focussing on selected dimensions
of victim status that make one appear advantaged, creating hypothetical ‘worse worlds’, comparatively evaluating one’s reaction to their victim status to other victims, and constructing benefit from a victimizing event (Taylor, Wood and Lichtman 1983). Victims might also adopt help-seeking strategies to avoid re-victimization that might include disclosing victimization to doctors, police, and social services and seeking social or economic support from friends and family (Kaukinen 2002, 2004).19

Incarceration prevents prisoners from adopting many conventional strategies for minimizing or avoiding conflict in which they might end up a losing party. Inmates are physically constrained by the prison; obviously they cannot lock their doors or purchase a guard animal, and reporting potential danger or incidents of victimization to prison authorities might be constructed by others as “snitching” and actually exacerbate victimization risk; particularly in men’s prisons where hegemonic masculine ideals (like in the free community) are constructed in a relational way and tied to survival. Alternate dispute resolution mechanisms - if they exist in the prison - may not be used by prisoners who fear that seeking the intervention of an official third party could be perceived as “weakness”. Because avoidance is difficult in a physically constrained space it is foreseeable that “persistent, visible disputes” will escalate to potentially violent confrontations (Silberman 2001:325), particularly in an environment where ‘getting tough’ and projecting an image of oneself as having a capacity for violence (McCorkle 1992) are among the few available resources for self-protection and goal accomplishment.

The norms of conflict management that develop among inmates often clash with formal prison rules of conduct. For instance, a prisoner who expresses anger to defend a friend may be perceived as ‘tough’, ‘invulnerable’ and principled by other inmates but regarded as a

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19 Avoidance and defensive strategies may also differ along gender lines (May, Rader, Goodrum 2010).
troublemaker by prison authorities (Loper and Gildea 2004). A problem arises in that the informal norms that govern conduct in prison effectively force prisoners to make a choice between surviving now (capitalizing on violence/victimization as one of few resources to stay safer) or surviving later (achieving parole/reintegration). Additionally, problem solving is a uniquely gendered experience in that conflict management scripts in prison are shaped by normative masculinity in prison subculture. Because hegemonic, or normative, masculinity is relational (Connell 2005), conflict situations can also be read as crucial opportunities to present oneself as embodying a masculine ideal defined by an inability to be victimized with impunity by other men.

The dilemma for prisoners is that resources for dealing with prison problems must be mobilized delicately and in such a way that the means by which self-protection is maximized reflects an acute awareness of the particular nuances of inmate culture as well as regard for formal prison rules. In other words, problem solving in prison involves a degree of skillful maneuvering between formal rules and informal norms as the struggle for daily survival must be balanced with avoiding behaviour that draws negative attention from prison staff that could jeopardize early release. The dilemma is one of short term versus long term survival; and how to best strategize for immediate survival without endangering the potential for freedom from the very circumstances that create such a predicament. Resources to accomplish this goal are scant; however, a review of relevant literatures indicates that inmates do negotiate disputes, kafuffles, clashes and outright confrontations in confinement in ways that are consistent with prison subcultural expectations. These scripts appear to be organized around two common themes - safe space (avoidance; finding literal or emotional refuge) and saving face (adaptive; responding immediately to threats, instrumental use of violence/victimization).


**Safe Space & Saving Face**

Generally, strategies for coping with victimization or avoiding conflicts that could potentially produce a victimizing outcome can be adaptive (action oriented), maladaptive (escape/avoidance) or accommodating (Pimlott et al. 2005). Pimlott and colleagues (2005) note that while adaptive strategies that are oriented towards removing a stressor or solving a problem are often conceptualized as positive and pro-active approaches to problem solving, these can be dangerous or damaging strategies in the prison context. For instance, reporting sexual victimization perpetrated by a staff member (adaptive/action-oriented response) may invite retaliation (Pimlott et al. 2005); thus, alternate strategies are devised. Inmates may avoid repeat victimization by overdosing on drugs (and being sent to a hospital) or displaying compliance in sexual victimization by staff to protect their chances of parole (Pimlott et al. 2005). Similarly, Ireland, Archer and Power found that negative behaviour may serve an instrumental function for inmates involved in bullying relationship; they note that exhibiting troublesome behaviour “increases the possibility that both victim groups will be disciplined and either watched more closely by staff or be removed from the wing to another location” (2007:228). Strategies such as drug use, of course, have implications for vulnerability to other sorts of prison victimization (Crewe 2005), and can become a precursor to new conflicts.

Finding safe space and protecting oneself against offenses to face are important ways that inmates deal with prison problems. McCorkle (1992) identified two types of personal precautions to prison violence that are consistent with these themes: passive precaution (spending more time on one’s cell, avoiding certain areas of the prison) and aggressive precaution (‘getting tough’, using weapons, lifting weights). Strategies to deal with conflict can include avoiding risky areas of the prison compound, committing to self-imposed solitary confinement, and requesting to be
transferred to another prison or sequestered in protective custody (McCorkle 1992). Male inmates who adopt passive strategies tend to be older, have fewer friends, and have previous victimization experience, while younger inmates with fewer incarceration experiences are more likely to adopt aggressive precautions (McCorkle 1992). For instance, one study found that 50% of male inmates and 22% of female inmates across 14 American prisons reported carrying a weapon for protection (Wolff et al. 2007). Thus, it would seem that strategies for dealing with prison problems are relevant to individual characteristics and pre-prison experiences that inmates bring with them upon incarceration (importation). However, problems and means of coping with them also manifest from the prison environment and in the aftermath of conflict between inmates, new conflicts can emerge between inmates and prison authorities.

Correctional Services of Canada (2007) reports that inmates who voluntarily request to be placed in a segregation unit have typically accumulated a ‘debt’ in the underground prison economy and/or “generally fear for their safety” (2007:23). From the perspective of Corrections Canada officials, voluntarily segregated inmates “threaten violence if released from segregation and refuse to accept any proposed alternative” while enjoying housing conditions “almost identical to those elsewhere in the penitentiary, without having to resolve the issues that brought them to segregation” (2007:23). Prisoners, however, are less likely to view segregation as a luxury than one of the few ways to avoid victimization without being accused of “ratting” to prison authorities. Corrections Canada claims to be committed to providing a “safe, secure environment” (2007:23); however, clearly prison is neither a safe nor secure space for those who live there. The tragic irony is that what from the perspective of vulnerable inmates, are attempts to minimize or avoid violent altercations are to prison authorities determinants of an “environment of voluntary

Other safe space strategies might involve participating in prison programs. While Kwon and colleagues’ typology of inmate motivations for attending religious services is only tangentially related to conflict management in prison, a quote from one of their participants suggests potential relevance:

I was informed about the program at the entrance orientation, but I was not much attracted to the program. Although my family members recommended me to take the program for my spiritual growth, frankly speaking, I decided to take the program to find more secure space in prison (a female inmate in her 20s) (Kwon et al. 2010: 392).

Participating in prison programs (and hence, minimizing time spent in riskier areas of the prison) is a reasonable strategy for self-protection considering research suggests that criminal victimization among inmates is location-specific. In a study of sexual coercion, Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (2006) found that 31% of men and 29% of women inmates in their sample were sexually victimized in their own cell, 6% of men and 10% of women were victimized in the yard or gym, 13% of men were victimized in the shower, and 10% of women were victimized in the laundry room. Inmates may be acutely aware of areas of the prison that lack adequate supervision or are otherwise “criminalisable spaces” (Van der Wurff et al. 1986 in Allison and Ireland 2010) in which they might be easily be drawn into a potentially victimizing

20 Sadly, it would also seem appropriate to include prison suicide as a type of avoidance strategy. In a study comparing inmates who had attempted suicide and those who had not, Leibling (1992) found that those who attempted suicide were less able to cope with a prison environment: they had more problems with other inmates and were less likely to describe other inmates as friends. Leibling (1992) also found that those who were more likely to attempt suicide were also more likely to spend more in their cells. It would seem that Leibling’s (1992) findings also reflect behaviours that some inmates use to avoid interactions that could produce a violent outcome. Tragically, perhaps it is the case that safe space or avoidance self-help strategies are also risk factors for prison suicide. This is reasonable considering avoidance and seclusion imply making fewer friends in prison and research suggests that isolated or vulnerable inmates are at increased risk of victimization (Kerbs and Jolley 2007) and suicide (Green et al. 1993).
conflict situation. Accordingly, strategies might be developed (such as attending religious programs) in order to avoid such areas of the prison.

It might also be that the most marginalized of inmates adopt recreational activities to assimilate into prison life and project an image of conformity with prison subcultural norms. In a study of gambling among incarcerated sex offenders, Williams and Hinton (2006) suggest that they join gambling rings to relieve boredom, but also to socialize and gain acceptance from their peers (thus reducing risk of criminal victimization). Passive, safe space strategies might also include avoiding participation in the underground prison economy (Cooley 1992; Copes et al. 2011). In the American context, in the first systematic study of prison violence as self-protection, McCorkle (1992) found that 77.7% of his sample of 600 male inmates believed that they could reduce their risk of being involved in a violent encounter by keeping to themselves. Forty percent of McCorkle’s (1992) sample avoided certain areas of the prison where there are large numbers of prisoners and decreased supervision. One strategy to draw the surveillance of correctional staff for protection or be moved to a more secure location is to capitalize on the instrumental function of negative behaviour. For example, Ireland, Archer and Power argue that “[d]isplaying negative behavior to staff…increases the possibility that both victim groups will be disciplined and either watched more closely by staff or be removed from the wing to another location” (2007: 228). It could be that ‘disruptive’ behavior from the perspective of prison staff, is from a prisoner’s perspective a mechanism of self-help that does not contravene prison subcultural norms that would invite victimization.

Because prison conflicts often erupt following a status/masculinity challenge, such self-protective passive strategies might also put an inmate at risk of being labeled a suitable target for exploitation. Hence, a prisoner may attempt to insulate themselves against victimization by
“getting tough” and building up an ultra-masculine reputation by displaying a willingness to use violence or bullying, and by immediately reacting to perceived slights or insults; these are part of a repertoire of defensive, face-saving strategies for survival in prison. In McCorkle’s (1992) study of personal precautions against victimization in prison nearly seventy percent of inmates “got tough” to avoid victimization; many did so by carrying a weapon (25%) or lifting weights (50%). Inmates with hotter tempers are less likely to be victimized, possibly because of their ability to create a “loose cannon” persona (Kerley, Hochestetler and Copes 2009) and those who are unable to project a violent image are more likely to experience victimization as a result of conflict (McCorkle 1992).

Another ‘get tough’ strategy is to join a deviant group (gangs) within the prison (Cohen 1955). Violence and toughness enhance masculine status and in a prison context, aggression could be a defence mechanism (Butler 2008) or proactive means of self-protection (Bowker 1980). Toughness and the instrumental use of violence in prison provide many benefits including enhancing self-image by playing out a masculine role, providing economic gain (though robbery, thus reducing some of the effect of the pains of imprisonment), or even early release from prison in cases where the inmate is aggravating enough to prison staff to secure a recommendation (Bowker 1980). It could be that the material benefits of adopting an “exploiter” role insulate inmates from becoming involved in conflict situations carrying a risk of violent victimization. For instance, while participation in the prison economy increases risk of victimization (Cooley 1992), prisoners who are able to secure sufficient funds to pay others to do their work have reduced risk of physical victimization (Copes et al. 2011). If exploiters increase their economic capital by romantically manipulating staff they might in turn be better insulated against conflicts that produce physical victimization. Similar to the free community, it would seem that those with more
economic resources are better able to avoid victimization or cope with losses resulting from criminal victimization (Sacco and Kennedy 2012).\footnote{Lifting weights and “getting tough” might not be the only way that inmates use their bodies and reputations deal with conflict in prison. In a study of sex and sexuality in a women’s prison, Pardue, Arrigo and Murphy (2011) suggest that sex might become a bartering tool that women use to secure protection or avoid victimization. Some women in their study experienced sexual exploitation in the form of compliant or reluctant sex with authority figures, while other women initiated sexual relationships with staff as a way to secure things that they needed (Pardue, Arrigo and Murphy 2011). In another study of “turners” (inmates who befriend staff and encourage rule infraction), Worley, Marquart and Mullings (2003) suggest that while “heartbreakers” initiate romantic relationships with staff to build emotional bonds or overcome heterosexual deprivation and “bellraisers” start relationships with staff for excitement, “exploiters” initiate relationships with staff to secure access to contraband for sale in the underground prison economy.}

Other aggressive, status-enhancing or self-protective proactive strategies for maintaining face include bullying and psychological manipulation (Ireland 2002) or ‘prison games’ (Bowker 1980; Kaminski 2003). Attempts to label other prisoners as “rats”, “punk’s” or “snitches”, seek to establish a moral high ground by diminishing another prisoner’s masculine status or reputation, are important resources for self-protection because the terms construct others (as opposed to oneself) as a morally blameworthy and appropriate target for social control (Loseke 2003). Psychological victimization among male inmates include line-cutting (85% in one study), insults (40%), threats (25%) and being negatively labelled (Kerbs and Jolley 2007). The ability to become impervious to insults is an important part of surviving psychological victimization in prison (Bowker 1980). Even brief instances of emotional vulnerability that threaten to penetrate a well-crafted “prison mask” are dangerous because prison is an environment where resources for self-protection are scarce and any potentially damaging information or indication of “weakness” will be exploited by others seeking to enhance their own reputations (Haney 2012). The ability to react “quickly and forcefully to seemingly insignificant insults or minor affronts” can truly be a matter of life or death in prison (Haney 2012:6).

While ‘getting tough’ by maintaining an aggressive, violent or hypermasculine front can be instrumental in accomplishing goals and minimizing victimization, like safe space strategies,
these can create new conflicts among inmates and with prison staff. For some inmates, a ‘tough’ reputation increases the risk of involvement in potentially victimizing conflict situations. Kerbs and Jolley’s (2007) study shows an elevated risk of victimization among older inmates with past reputations as dangerous offenders; younger or newer prisoners might take advantage of older inmates’ age-related disabilities in the hopes of enhancing their own masculine status by harming a dangerous, respected elder. Psychological games and other forms of institutional bullying may initiate “character contests” (Goffman 1967) that provide men with an opportunity to make claims to a dominant masculinity. Being labelled a “snitch” could exacerbate, or “ratchet up” a conflict and lead to more serious victimization. Backing down from a conflict undermines a “tough” reputation; if the conflict produces a major victory the inmate who ends up the ‘victim’ is in turn relegated to a subordinate, vulnerable position within the prison social hierarchy, thus making him a suitable candidate for subsequent victimization (Athens 2005; Lutze and Murphy 2004). Hence, the aftermath of a conflict situation is consequential in terms of assigning new roles or statuses in the gender social order that shape the course and nature of new conflicts.

Whether a prisoner adopts a passive avoidance strategy or active “get tough” strategy for self-protection, neither can be considered particularly effective considering that the constant threat of victimization in all forms characterizes prison life and rates of violent victimization continue to exceed those in the general population. The routine violence that characterizes the prison environment has been described by Bowker as a “constant round of explosive situations and pressures…the forms of prison victimization are related so that each becomes a causal factor in the other, forming an insane feedback system through which prison victimization rates are under constant pressure to increase” (1980:31). Bowker’s (1980) description of the “insane feedback system” by which prison victimization operates resonates with a constructionist, event approach
to the study of conflict. Precursors to a conflict, such as an inmate’s attempts at preventing victimization or the history of the relationship between two parties, influence the conflict situation as do the transactions (Sacco and Kennedy 2012; Luckenbill 1977), incremental choices (Kennedy and Forde 1999) and interpretations of an opponent’s behaviour made throughout the stages of a conflict transaction (Goffman 1967; Athens 2005).

The perception of risk and choices that prisoners make in a conflict situation are shaped by their status in the prison social hierarchy – which itself is a product of shared threats to masculinity posed by incarceration, defined through face-to-face interactions between men in prison and reflected in broader cultural notions of manhood. The next chapter details my methodological strategy for sampling men with incarceration experience, conducting and analyzing in-depth qualitative interviews with the men, and ethical issues salient to the research process. In particular, the chapter details the way in which men ‘do gender’ in the context of face to face interactions in an interview conversation and the methodological implications of gender dynamics in qualitative work.
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

PRISON RESEARCH

Research with incarcerated or previously incarcerated people poses a unique set of practical and methodological problems. Jeffords describes this group as potentially “difficult to access, difficult to trust, or difficult in the sense of eliciting useful information” (Jeffords 2007:88). Second, prisons themselves are “hard to access” (Trulson et al. 2004). A number of research studies and articles which provide ‘tips’ for research with incarcerated persons suggest that prison authorities are hesitant to permit access to social researchers (Broadhead and Rist 1976) and research using methodologies over which they have little control (Trulson et al. 2004). Prison administrators might fear that a researcher could become involved in illegal behaviour, be taken hostage or be injured (Dilulio 1987). Administrators might also have concerns that the research is at odds with the prison’s philosophies and ‘adapting’ the research question is sometimes a consequence of strategizing to preserve ongoing access. Given that one of the purposes of incarceration is imposed limitation on freedom of liberty and freedom of association, Wright and colleagues argue that it should not be surprising the “the same walls that work to close prisoners within an institution also work to keep people out” (Wright et al. 2015:113).

When prisons permit access to researchers, they do so as a great favour as they might have many concerns and little to gain (Fox et al. 2011). Consequently, access to prison facilities is most often granted to researchers who have a contact or an established reputation (Trulson et al. 2004; Martel 2004) or are working for the organization (Trulson et al. 2004; Jeffords 2007). Some prisons have their own institutional review boards from which they must seek permission for an outside researcher (Fox et al. 2011) and prisons might attempt to impose restrictions on research that limit analyses (Hensley et al. 2003). Gaining access or even making contact can take a year or more
Dilulio 1987; Fox et al. 2011; Trulson et al. 2004) and limits on access to opportunities for prisoners to share their lived experience “often appear to be imposed arbitrarily and without recourse” (Wright et al. 2015:114). There are many documented stories of researchers who have been denied access to penal institutions; particularly when the methodological approach is qualitative in nature (Yeager 2008; Wright et al. 2015). This has inspired many criminologists to embrace a methodological framework centering on access to information (thought the ATI Act) as a means of penetrating the borders of the prison system in Canada, as opposed to seeking access to prisoners (Larsen & Walby, 2012; Wright et al. 2015).

The Research Process

The rationale to interview men with incarceration experience rather than those currently incarcerated is twofold. The primary research question pertains to how men make sense of and negotiate conflict situations in a prison context but also how scripts developed in a carceral setting shape ex-prisoners’ conflict scripts post-incarceration. In other words, part of this research addresses how prison experiences are exported upon release. Conflict management styles developed in prison may be at odds with conflict situations that occur during the course of a person’s post-prison experiences. Understanding this tension may have important implications in terms of a prisoner’s reintegration into the free community. For this reason, an exploratory, qualitative approach aimed at generating thick descriptions of men’s lived experience with incarceration and conflict is most appropriate for this research. Second, when I started planning this research project I did not have the social capital apparently crucial to penetrate and gain access to a prison setting (Martel 2004), though I did have some contacts both personal and professional that could connect me with men who have incarceration experience. This chapter addresses 1) the research process and questions of sampling, access, coding and analysis; 2) the gendered dynamics
that shape an interview conversation; and 3) research ethics including issues of confidentiality, voluntary participation and informed consent.

**Sampling**

Targeted or “snowball” sampling is widely recognized by qualitative researchers as the most appropriate sampling technique to study deviant, hidden or hard to access groups of people (Watters and Biernacki 1989; Schulenburg 2016; Ellard-Gray et al. 2015). The technique operates such that a researcher makes initial contacts and generates a non-probability sample through a process of referrals (Schulenberg 2016). Hard to reach populations are those that are difficult for researchers with an outsider status to access; such populations might also be hidden and/or vulnerable if they perceive the research topic to be sensitive and therefore risky. *Hard to reach, hidden and vulnerable* are terms that are often used interchangeably in the research literature (Watters and Biernacki 1989; Dawood 2008) though they pose different types of methodological problems. Snyder (2013) makes a useful distinction between these terms: *hard to reach* refers to “a population that is difficult for the researcher to access”; *hidden* refers to a “population with no defined limits”; and *sensitive subject*, which might be read as vulnerability or powerlessness is “a subject that some people prefer not to discuss publicly; usually because they perceive a risk associated with self-disclosure” (2013:35). Moreover, asking people to discuss a topic that they are typically accustomed to keeping secret is a barrier to generating a desired sample size (Waters 2015).

Men with incarceration experience may represent a hidden or vulnerable population though not necessarily. Incarcerated men may be nearly impossible for researchers to access (see Wright et al. 2015) particularly when the research is qualitative or is oriented toward critiquing the prison system. Though incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people are not necessarily a hidden
population in the sense that they are a population without defined limits (criminal records define
this population) they are literally hidden by prison walls and prison gatekeepers who in many ways
prevent access to outsiders (see Wright et al. 2015). Men who are not currently incarcerated who
have lived experience with the prison system are still a hard to reach population due to both their
physical and social location. Non-incarcerated men with lived experience in prison may be hard to
reach due to physical location if they reside in rehabilitative housing or halfway housing (such as
that offered through the John Howard Society) which have their own institutional gatekeepers.
Men with incarceration experience may constitute a vulnerable population due to the stigmatized
nature of a criminal record and the risk of social or legal harm if they identify their experiences
with current criminal activity or victimization; such social dislocation makes them hard to reach.

Distrust of the research process potentially compounds barriers to access posed by potential
participants’ legal and social vulnerability. Men’s negative experiences with incarceration are
well-documented (see Sykes 1959; Ugelvik 2014; Crawley and Sparks 2006). A researcher who
is perceived to be ‘with’ the penal system in any way may rightly be met with mistrust and
suspicion; this is a reasonable expectation considering the history of distrust toward researchers
among other vulnerable populations (Ellard-Gray et al. 2015) and the way that researchers have
demonstrated blatant disregard for vulnerable populations and human dignity in the past (see
Humphreys 1970; Osborne 2006). Secondly, the sensitive nature of the research project itself may
be a source of concern for prospective participants which in turn can be a barrier to sample
generation (Thompson and Collins 2002; Sydor 2013; Waters 2015). Participating in an interview
in which incarceration experience, the stigma and pains of imprisonment, and experiences of
victimization and abuse are central points of focus may also be perceived as potentially
emotionally taxing to discuss or socially risky to disclose.
Additionally, participants may be willing to share their experiences in an interview but not necessarily willing to refer the researcher to other friends and acquaintances (Groger, Mayberry and Straker 1999; Presser 2004). An example from Mike, a twenty-five year old ex-prisoner who was incarcerated for drug trafficking, illustrates this type of resistance and hurdles to snowball growth:

Alicia: So do you know anyone that you could hook me up with? For the research?

Mike: I know a lot of people but none that will do it.

Alicia: How come?

Mike: Honestly, they just won’t. They won’t do it…It’s like a combination of the jail attitude not giving a fuck, it’s just bad policies. Even if they were on top of their shit, there’s still some stuff that’s gonna happen, right?

Alicia: So you think people would be hesitant to talk to me because of confidentiality, plus it’s a burden?

Mike: Yeah, I know a guy that just got out. He was on a murder rap, and he’s been in for like eighteen months. He’s been out for two months now. He’s one of my really good buddies too, I know a couple guys like that but I know they’re not going to do it. They’re still really deep in the shit, they’re still fucking selling drugs, they’re probably going around killing people and shit, so they’re not going to do it. Not even anything. You know how you were saying people won’t sign your paper [consent form] because they don’t trust? Take that paranoia and times it by ten and that’s the people that I’m talking about. They won’t say a word to you, they won’t… My friends, they would do it for free if they were interested, but they’re too paranoid, right? They think that if they open up with you they’re going to end up back in jail. Even though this [the research] is a jail kind of thing. They’ll be kind of guarded, I don’t even think they’d do it… You know what, I probably know some people and if I think of anyone that would. Honestly man, if you want to interview crackheads and shit I think I can hook you up with that. I know lots of old customers that have been in and out of jail their whole lives…. So if you want to interview people like that, yeah…I’ll see what I can do.
Though Mike was willing to ‘see what he could do’ to assist me, he perceived many barriers to successful referrals including hesitation due to current criminal involvement, paranoia, and apathy among men he knew with incarceration experience related to more serious crime. Unwillingness to refer generally could be due to a concern for the potential referees’ safety in regards to participation in the study, or a perception that the referee would not be willing to engage with an opportunity to share lived experience in the context of a research interview, or a perception that the referee does not have what the researcher is “looking for”, or would not see the merit in the project. These were common barriers to referrals in this study.

The referral system that characterizes the ‘snowball’ sampling method also has the potential to over-emphasize the cohesiveness in social networks and groups (Griffiths 1993) and can miss important ways in which some components of a population are atomized and why (Waters 2015). Mike’s offer to refer me to “other” ex-offenders who are “like that” speaks to the way in which men with incarceration experience are compartmentalized in terms of a hierarchy of criminal offending. Second, I found that participants who had a history of drug use associated with their criminal offending and who were committed to a rehabilitative program, particularly Narcotics or Alcoholics Anonymous, were willing to refer me to others within this particular subculture; however, these participants had made active attempts to distance themselves from other ex-inmates whom they described as ‘from their past’. Such responses suggest that the population of men with incarceration experience is atomized or at least compartmentalized, in that many are disconnected (or actively trying to disconnect) from a clearly defined social network of ex-prisoners. Because of this, researchers using snowball sampling to locate previously incarcerated individuals should make attempts to start many diverse snowballs in order to avoid the potential for homogeneity in the sample.
It might also be crucial to roll many smaller snowballs in order to generate a sample with greater diversity of men with incarceration experience and to avoid prematurely concluding that saturation has been reached. For this reason, I find that the ‘snowball’ analogy insufficient as it implies a kind of linear progression which can create distortion in a sample when participants in a chain share similar characteristics (Waters 2015). It might be more useful to roll multiple snowballs that fracture and splinter into new directions. A better analogy might be a sampling tree that allows for different branches to grow and develop. This approach is also beneficial to protecting confidentiality as it reduces the number of contacts in a sample who can identify each other, which is a limitation of snowball sampling generally (Tolich 2004; Pernod et al. 2003; Biernacki and Waldorf 1981).

The sampling strategy used in this research began with my own previously established professional contacts in the non-profit industry who were able to connect me to a number of people with incarceration experience, who then referred me to others. Some of these men were living in or working in halfway houses. In addition, I have a number of contacts in my personal and family life who have been in prison and were valuable in connecting me to men with incarceration experience. I also met many potential contacts through luck and by simply talking about my research and my life; informal conversations with acquaintances, friends, and people I met in my day-to-day life lead to a number of referrals, though not all of these meetings are reflected in the final sample.

Finally, I attempted to start an initial snowball by contacting non-profit agencies (in which I had not previously been employed) such as John Howard societies (in various cities) as a means of making initial contacts; this avenue was less fruitful than the others.22 In some ways, during

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22 Of the total sample of twenty-three participants I met three participants at community events, two participants through contacting non-profit agencies, and eighteen participants through snowballs initiated by referees in my personal network.
meetings with such representatives I felt as though it was difficult to define the methodology and purpose of the study, given that the research question is exploratory in nature. I perceived tension in terms of attempts to control my methodological approach. For example, one person, although clearly attempting to be helpful to the study, suggested that I advertise a “pizza party” and invite potential participants to “come down for lunch and an interview”. The rationale that this person offered was that “the guys will never talk to you unless you give them something” (excerpt from field notes).

I opted to more heavily rely on snowballs initiated through my personal contacts as I found this to be less challenging to my view of ethical conduct in sampling, rapport building and reciprocity. That these avenues are more fruitful is not surprising considering our closer relational distance. This finding is consistent with Jacques and Wright’s (2008) theoretical model that posits that “[t]he more a criminological researcher has interacted with a criminal and his or her associates, the more likely a criminal is to be recruited for an interview…and the more valid and plentiful the data obtained” (2008:33-34).

The final sample is comprised of twenty-three men with incarceration experience ranging from thirty days to more than thirty years including time spent in remand centres, minimum, medium, and maximum security institutions, in the general prison population, protective custody, and segregation units. The amount of time that participants spent in custody is an estimate based on their responses to my questions. I found that during the course of interviews, asking a question about the total length of time incarcerated was not, for most participants, an unanswerable question. Two participants have incarceration experience in the American system as well as in

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23 Similarly, a second gatekeeper who operated a building that was inhabited by a number of men with incarceration experience suggested she could refer me to them if I agreed to not “judge them” or ask particular questions that she listed, such as the charge for which they were convicted.

24 This is a typical response that reflects how participants answered my question about length of time incarcerated: Almost half my life. I’m sixty-two, so I spent at least thirty years. After the States I came back to Canada. I got deported out of the States. Then I did two provincial bits, then I did four years incarcerated for manslaughter, as well as a drug beef, and the twenty years – so four, twenty eight, yeah about thirty years in total (Earl). This style of response did not appear to vary across length of incarceration time, though some respondents equated length of incarceration time with institutional setting: It would be hard for me to do the math and tell you how long overall, because all my bits were small in length (Billy). Three – just under three years I guess. Two years one and then there was the nine months. And there were little two weeks here and there. Three
Canadian prisons. Participants ranged in age from twenty-three to mid-sixties. This small sample represents only those with whom I was able to conduct a formal audio-recoded interview and from whom I had collected consent via a consent form (see Appendix C). Recorded interviews totalled forty-three hours, which, after transcription, produced five hundred and seven single-spaced pages of data. These data do not include numerous conversations had in the months and weeks prior to the interview itself, or the numerous stories that were told during the rapport building stage before consent had been collected in the form of a ‘consent document’ approved by the General Research Ethics Board at Queen’s University. The process of rapport building, which is so crucial to developing trust and gaining access is hindered by the form in which consent has been required to be collected for this project and in a real way accounts for the smaller than desired sample size.25

The length of time necessary to build rapport with potential research contacts was in part contingent on the way in which I came in contact with them. For example, participants whom I had known personally required little more than a phone call asking for an interview. Typically if I was meeting someone for the first time, I would suggest we meet to discuss the project so that the person was made aware of my research goals. During initial encounters I stressed that the project was independent work I was undertaking as part of my PhD project, and not affiliated with or sponsored by Corrections Canada.26 These initial meetings to build rapport are important and were often used to plan out a time to meet and importantly, a place to conduct the formal interview. Consent forms were signed before an interview was conducted. I had many informal ‘interview’
conversations during the rapport building stage that preceded the scheduled interview. On a number of occasions I had been in contact with a person through text messaging and met with them several times before an interview location was secured and suddenly I would lose contact. In some cases, I decided to “let it go” (Owton and Allen-Collinson 2014) if I felt my texting without a reply had gone on too long. Many times I would learn from another participant that the prospective participant had become incarcerated. Numerous conversations that were had are not included in these data because though I feel consent was gathered verbally, such complications disrupted the scheduling of a formal interview during which point consent was collected via a signed document.27

**Interview Location**

A goal of interview analysis is to “explicate how meanings, their linkages and horizons, are constituted within the interview environment” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:80). If the interview data are to be of use in providing a window into men’s lived experience with prison, it is crucial that the interview ‘environment’ or setting be conducive to deep disclosure. An interview is a situated transaction in which participants in the interaction negotiate the definition of the situation (Goffman 1959); thus, interview exchanges and the meanings ascribed to them are shaped by the context (location) in which the interaction takes place. The location of an interview sets the tone of the conversation and the context in which meaning is built up and in this way the “location selected should be seen as part of the interpretation of the findings” rather than merely a technical matter of convenience and logistics (Herzog 2005:25). Reflecting on her study of female Palestinian citizens of Israel, Hanna Herzog argues that the “ability to traverse social boundaries” is characteristic of qualitative interviewing, as such the “physical location in which the interview

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27 See Appendix A and C.
is conducted is one of the most concrete expressions of this process of boundary-crossing” (2004: 27-28). In her view, the interviewer and interviewee are “partners” in organizing the interview event and in “consolidating the knowledge…[t]he choice of interview location reflects the attitudes, tactics, and negotiations of the interviewees within the parallel power structures of research (interviewer-participant)” (Herzog 2005: 28-29). Picking a location for an interview is thus a very important, but under-researched methodological decision that should be considered in terms of its relationship to questions of reality and power (Herzog 2005).

Men convicted of criminal offences are among the most stigmatized, unheard groups in society. In a socio-political climate where it is increasingly difficult for researchers to gain access to prisoners (Wright et al. 2015), the decision about the location for interviews with ex-prisoners is one that needs to be considered very seriously. Without an interview location selected primarily on the basis of a participant’s comfort there is a risk of undermining disclosure, silencing participants and potentially reproducing the power inequities that qualitative work is so often geared toward subverting. Additionally, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2010) it is a researcher’s ethical duty to minimize the risk of harm to participants. Particularly when the nature of an interview involves vulnerable groups and sensitive questions, great care should be taken to secure an interview location of the participant’s choosing and where they will be most comfortable. Especially if a participant is not ‘out’ about their criminal record, asking sensitive questions about incarceration in a public locale determined by the interviewer suggests disregard for the participant’s welfare. Researchers suggest that interviews “dealing with highly emotional, sensitive or private issues, are best conducted in the home of the participant since such a setting offers a sense of intimacy and friendliness” (Herzog 2005:27).
Interviews were held in a location where the participant felt most comfortable; this rationale is consistent with other research with vulnerable or stigmatized groups (Trammell 2012; Herzog 2005). In the summer months I often interviewed people in public parks; interviews also took place in restaurants that have private rooms, my car, and in some cases participants’ homes or offices. For the most part I made attempts to interview men where they were most comfortable and at a time and place convenient for them. If I felt uncomfortable with a participant, I exercised judgement about whether to pursue rapport building at all and about an interview location. Informed consent was collected via a consent form at the beginning of each interview. Interviews were audio-recorded. I explained to participants that the audio-recording would help me to focus on our conversation (as opposed to writing copious notes) and that it would only be heard by me. Though the audio recorder has been described by some as an “intruder” in the research conversation (Weiss 1994) none of the research participants expressed concern with its presence other than one participant who made a joke about whether I would transcribe sounds associated with bodily functions and another who commented playfully “let the interrogation begin!” when I turned on the device.

**Qualitative Interviewing & Gender**

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) identify two approaches to interviewing. One approach is to treat the interview participant as a “vessel of answers”; a receptacle of information from which the researcher must systematically extract the needed material (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:7). Alternatively, interview participants can be perceived of as active contributors to the interview conversation in which “meaning is not only conveyed but cooperatively built up, received, interpreted and recorded by the interviewer” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:11). I consider qualitative interviewing to take the latter form. Researchers are active participants in meaning-
making particularly because they must scrutinize research decisions and how actions, conditions and contingencies shape an interview conversation (Charmaz 2008). For example, it is likely that sharing my views on the prison system, when asked, or disclosing I have had a family member who has been incarcerated ‘built up’ interviews (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) and facilitated deep disclosure from the participants. Disclosing my views helped to build rapport; William compared our interview to an experience he had living in a recovery house:

I see students who are trying to get training to work in the recovery field. One of them sat in on the group, nice girl…but you could tell she was totally out of her element. She had no, even inkling of what it was all about. She couldn’t relate, and so soft spoken. How is this person possibly going to function with a bunch of addicts and possibly be of any good when she’s scared of her own shadow? ... I felt such a disconnect...that’s why I like what you’re doing. You’re not afraid to get in the trenches and how better to learn about criminology than talk to a bunch of criminals? That’s the only way you’re going to learn about a problem.

William’s comments support the finding that participants may be more or less reserved in their disclosures contingent on how a researcher conduct themselves (Frankenberg 1993) and on how a participant constructs the researcher’s motives, opinions or feelings (Presser 2004). Second, his comments speak to the importance of the interviewer’s ability to present themselves as relatable and genuinely interested in the participants’ lived experience. It may not only be counterproductive to treat an interviewee as a “vessel of answers” (Holstein and Gubrium 2008), but ethically problematic in that it denies the humanness of an interview conversation. Overall, I tried to construct myself as ‘willing learner’ who respected the value of the men’s lived experience.

One factor that might have shaped the course of rapport building, trust and the data generated in interview conversations is gender. In the referral process, this was relevant. Comments from one participant, to whom I was referred by a personal friend suggest that my physical appearance may have operated as some kind of “aesthetic capital” (Holla and Kuipers
2015) during the sampling phase of the project. When asked if he knew other men who might be interested in participating in the research project he responded: “For sure, the guys in the house [recovery house] will be like, ‘What? Pretty girl!? Sure I’ll do it’”. It might also be possible that an opportunity to contribute to a research project in the context of an interview with a female interviewer is attractive to men with parole restrictions living in all-male recovery and halfway houses. My gender may have also been relevant in terms of data generation and the depth of disclosures during interviews. In a study of convicted rapists, Scully and Marolla each interviewed participants and found that in interviews conducted with the female interviewer (Scully) participants “volunteered more about their feelings and emotions” (1984:532). In a book on the topic, Scully further suggests that the men appeared to “find it easier and more natural to talk to a woman” (1990:12). Scully and Marolla’s (1984) findings are consistent with the experiences of female researchers who report greater disclosure on the part of their male interviewees because they are a woman (Arendell 1997).

On many occasions, participants displayed vulnerability in terms of discussing experiences of victimization, suicidal feelings, feelings of sadness and loneliness. Hegemonic masculinity is marked by toughness and constructed in relation to other men (Connell 2005). It is possible that a woman interviewing men with lived experience in a setting where masculinity is constantly challenged may have greater success in eliciting narratives that illustrate male vulnerability. For example, one young participant became emotional recounting an experience of being injured during a conflict with a correctional officer and what that was like for him. I suspect because of my gender, he was more willing to express vulnerability in recounting his story:

Sam: I spent a couple of days in medical observation in a fucking wheelchair [stress in voice, laughs nervously], ah I hate this [recounting the story]. This brings back bad memories.
Alicia: Do you want to stop?

Sam: No [firmly].

Alicia: Are you sure?

Sam: Yes [recomposed]. So yeah, basically I had to fucking bring my plastic chair that was in my room over to the shower and try to undress myself which is really hard to do when I can’t move my leg.28

However, unlike Scully and Marola’s (1984) findings, and despite the sensitive details of incarceration experience that some participants disclosed to me (being physically victimized, feelings of despair and loneliness), some participants were skeptical that I would be able to elicit information with regards to topics such as sexual assault simply because I am a woman. Earl, an older participant who has spent nearly half of his life in American and Canadian prisons, explained:

Alicia: Do you think that there are a lot of, or any, unwanted sexual-

Earl: [interrupts] Absolutely.

Alicia: I ask this question to people and I sometimes hear that it is something they have heard of but that it is nothing that has happened to them or that they’ve tried –

Earl: [interrupts] Well, they’re never going to tell you anyways. Think about it. You’re a lady, you’re talking to a guy and he’s going to tell you that he got fucked in the ass? Excuse the expression - you know what I mean? It ain’t happening.

I also found that my gender was relevant to the extent that men capitalized on the interview situation and research relationship as a masculine resource for affirming their gender (Messerschmidt 2000) and moral identity (Presser 2004). Several of the participants became protective of me because of the nature of my research and that I conduct interviews with men with

28 Additionally, at the time Sam knew me as an ex-girlfriend of one of his friends; this may provide support for Jacques and Wright’s (2008) theoretical model that posits the closer the relational distance between the researcher and participant the more valid and plentiful the data.
incarceration experience. Several participants warned me to “be careful” when meeting other men who had been in prison, or warned me to meet other men in public because there are “sick fucks out there”, or claimed that other men with incarceration experience are untrustworthy liars. In a protective manner, another participant inquired as to whether I had ever been “hit on” by any of the men in the sample. These expressions of concern are important because they construct the men’s moral selves and their masculinity in relation to ‘other’ ex-prisoners who are constructed as untrustworthy, disrespectful, sexually forward or dangerous. These findings are consistent with Presser’s observation that the male prisoners in her study, both current and ex-incarcerated, “used and created opportunities in the interview to resist their problematic classification” (2004:83). In other words, these expressions of concern for me and my research methods could be read as an exercise in constructing one’s masculinity in opposition to subordinate masculinities; as well as a strategy to distance oneself from the stigma of a criminal designation. Other protective behaviours such as Earl’s insistence that he walk on the outer part of the sidewalk similarly highlight the way in which these research encounters are gendered.

My gender is a contingency that shapes the “narrative practice” of interviewees; that is, how their stories are told and how the interview setting shaped the context in which stories were constructed (Gubrium and Holstein 1998). Here, I draw on Gubrium and Holstein’s (1998) “analytical bracketing” strategy to identify ways in which my gender might shape how a participant’s story is being told (in the Results chapters, I consider the what aspect of narrative construction). One way that my gender shaped how stories were told in interviews is evident in the way that some men appeared to censor their language or use vague descriptors. The following interchange with Ryan illustrates this point:

Alicia: When you were in federal did you share a cell with someone and what was that like?
Ryan: Sharing a cell? Humiliation. Because things were done right there.

Alicia: What do you mean?

Ryan: [laughs] …Um… [pauses]

Alicia: Don’t be afraid to offend my delicate sensibilities [jokes; smiles]

Ryan: [laughs in relief] Okay, well they masturbate, right? Like you hear stuff too, ‘oh, you’re going to get assed’ [sexually assaulted] but that never happened.

This interaction is typical of the way in which some men evoked purposefully vague or euphemistic descriptors possibly in the hopes that I would fill in the details and spare the discomfort of discussing topics such as male masturbation and sexual harassment or assault. This interchange also represents the collaborative way that narratives are edited during interviews (Marvasti 2002). Ryan and I made respective discursive moves in building up the narrative: his vague descriptor (‘things were done’) was countered by my directive editing (‘what do you mean’) which required Ryan to accomplish the details of his story despite my gender. In this example, and other times, when I perceived that participants might be attempting to use polite euphemisms to narrate their experience I often countered with humour to try to encourage detailed disclosure. This interchange between Ryan and I illustrates the co-constructed nature of interview exchanges in that the meaning of words exchanged emerge, develop and take shape in a “continually unfolding” and collaborative, constructive process (Holstein and Gubrium 1995).

On other occasions, gender contoured the direction of a narrative in that participants appeared to engage in sudden positional shift (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) from the perspective of an interviewee telling a story to an interviewer, to a man telling a story to a woman. At points during the telling of a story our respective genders appeared to suddenly become more apparent or ‘pop in’ to the interview, which prompted some participants to backtrack the narrative in an attempt
‘save face’ (Goffman 1959) and undo a perceived offense. Two examples from participants illustrate this finding:

Sam: [at the end of a lengthy explanation of a conflict situation]…He started it and I stuck up for myself. If I would have not stuck up for myself and backed down and acted like a little girl [stops abruptly]. Excuse me, not that girls are weak –

Alicia: It’s okay. [waves hand]

Sam: [promptly continues story]

Alicia: [following Dustin’s usage of the word ‘bitch’ in a story] So, it’s like a double insult, you’re not a man, you’re a bitch –

Dustin: Yeah [hesitates; looks at me] it’s pretty derogatory…

Alicia: I’m not offended, I’m just trying to understand [laughs slightly; smiles]

In such instances where participants assumed my feelings or thoughts based on my gender I tried to use short prompts to encourage them to continue with the story (such as “it’s okay”, or “no worries”) to avoid derailing the narrative or to reaffirm or foreground my interviewer status (“just trying to understand”). Other times I encouraged further disclosure by reiterating the research goals and my primary interest in stories of their lived experience.

At points in the interviews, there was a sense that the participants were concerned that an outsider such as myself could really understand how conflicts erupt in a prison setting. Recounting stories outside of the context of a prison environment, some participants described altercations over cups, pencils, chocolate bars and other small items as “pathetic” or “stupid”. More than one person described the prison as “like an elementary school” or “high school times fifteen”. Participants demonstrated awareness that their descriptions of conflicts over items such as pencils or chocolate bars could be perceived as petty or trivial. In the process of describing such altercations, some people became concerned with their impression management (Goffman 1959)
and that as an outsider I might perceive such stories in a negative way. When this happened, I would encourage the narrative by giving some indication that I thought I understood their perspective. For example, after Scott described his experience with an altercation involving a Styrofoam cup that escalated to violence, I perceived that he might think I thought it was petty. I offered, “it’s a different context in there [prison]” to which he replied in relief, “Yes! Exactly! You have to do that or you just get picked on in there!” and continued the explanation. These narratives illustrate that participants may need validation (Corbin and Morse 2003) as they engaged in positional shifting (Holstein and Gubrium 2008) throughout the interview process and as they reflect on their experience with conflict from the perspective of a prisoner, an ex-prisoner and as a research participant explaining conflict to an outsider or a woman.

Finally, some scholars have suggested that an “open-ended interview with a woman” could be constructed by interviewees as a “platform for masculine self-portrayal” (Presser 2009:254). In some ways I did experience this during interviews. I found evidence that the rapport building phase and interview encounters at some points were ceased on as opportunities to recount, relive, or sometimes “rationally reconstruct” stories of criminal involvement (Cromwell, Olson and Avary 1991). For example, one participant told a lengthy story about allegedly stealing the tour bus from the popular rock band, Billy Talent, in which he emphasized his ability to evade detection and the subsequent praise he received from his acquaintances. Similar to Presser’s (2004) findings, some male participants in my research study appeared to take pleasure in recounting humorous or close-call stories from their criminal past in which they were able to depict themselves as clever or sneaky. Like Presser, I was “invited to appreciate the fun aspect of the crime” (2004:89). These ‘war stories’ could be a part of a participant’s masculine self-presentation and construction; but
they might also be read as important indicators of increasing trust and rapport. A few participants noted that they “don’t get to talk about these stories anymore” and welcomed my genuine interest.

To summarize, though qualitative scholars often emphasize the importance of reflexivity in the interview process, the way in which gender shapes interview encounters – particularly women interviewing men, and more specifically women interviewing men with incarceration experience appears to have received very little scholarly attention. My research findings suggest that the gender of women interviewing men with incarceration experience is relevant to the extent that it shapes the process of narrative editing, sensitive disclosures, and positional shifting in an interview situation. Some evidence suggests “aesthetic capital” may be relevant to recruiting men who live in halfway and recovery housing that mimic the homogeneous sex demographic in a prison setting. These findings appear to provide support for Jacques and Wright’s (2008) theoretical model of the role of relational distance in recruiting non-incarcerated law-breakers or those with a criminal record. These findings also support Presser’s (2004) discussion of the interview situation as an important site of social problems work and identity construction.

Coding & Analysis

In total, audio recorded interviews sessions with the twenty-three participants generated five hundred and seven pages of single-spaced transcribed text.²⁹ The group of participants is diverse and yet their experiences in prison share several connective threads. Though the samples size is smaller than desired, I did reach a point at which themes of conflict management style, conflict resources, content and form of conflicts and the shared experience of the conflict setting had reached some redundancy. In qualitative work the goal is to sample until a point of saturation has been achieved in that little new information is being garnered from additional interviews.

²⁹ There is no independent way to verify the veracity of my research participants’ accounts; however, given their sensitive disclosures, motivations for participating, and the level of trust and rapport that was established, I have no reason to doubt their claims.
Saturation is a term meant to dictate sample size as well, yet the concept has been poorly operationalized and there do not appear to be explicit guidelines as to how saturation is to be represented numerically (Guest, Bunce and Johnson 2006). Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) systematically addressed this issue and found that in their sample of 109 interviews, theoretical saturation was reached by the twelfth interview (at this point 92% of the codes for all 109 interviews had been established). However, Guest and colleagues (2006) noted that their sample was relatively homogenous and had narrow views.

Qualitative data analysis and coding have been described by methodologists as “fluid and emergent” (Schulenberg 2016:308) in the sense that it is a non-linear, iterative process. Coding qualitative work involves ‘fracturing’ the data or reducing it to manageable pieces and allowing themes to emerge, much like images from a stereogram. Microsoft word was used for data fracturing, analysis and coding. First, I coded the data according to sensitizing concepts which served as a starting point. Sensitizing concepts offer a “general sense of reference” (Blumer 1969:148). One sensitizing concept I used is ‘conflict setting’; this included pieces of narrative relevant to understanding the factors that shape the context or setting of prison conflicts such as pains of imprisonment, relationships with correctional staff and length of time incarcerated. Another sensitizing concept I used to initially fracture the data was ‘conflict resources’; this included pieces of narrative that expressed various strategies for self-protection. I also coded data according to conflict outcome in terms of disputes that resulted in violent and non-violent outcomes, victimization and bullying, and made comparisons to get a sense of the extent to which conflicts are governed by the so-called ‘inmate code’ (Cooley 1992). This resulted in a number smaller word documents along different preliminary themes which could then be compared and assessed in terms of how concepts relate.
The goal of interview analysis is to generate thick, descriptive narratives geared toward interpreting social action in its context. Part of interview analysis involves assigning purpose and intent to the actions, events and conflicts described by participants in order to capture and illustrate “the thoughts and feelings of participants as well as the often complex web of relationships” that form the context of their experiences (Ponterotto 2006:543). I attempted to analyze the data in a way that themes emerged to tell a story of the men’s gendered experiences with conflict in prison. The goal is for thick description to lead to thick interpretation and meaning, which I hope in the following chapters has the effect of rendering the problems of Canadian prisoners and complexity of prison conflict among men comprehensible to the reader.

Research Ethics

Reciprocity & Participant Motivation

There is little scholarly research on the motivations of ex or current prisoners to participate in prison research or whether gender is a contingent factor in this motivation. Copes, Hochstetler and Brown (2012) investigated American inmates’ perceptions and experiences with participation in research interviews and found that benefits reported included psychological satisfaction, an escape from the boredom or monotony of prison life, and monetary gain. In some ways, my findings are consistent with Copes and colleagues’ findings (2012). A key motivation that some participants cited as an attraction to participate in the research project was the knowledge that the research was confidential and therefore afforded an opportunity for disclosures that might not otherwise be heard. Similarly, in my study the participants constructed me as a sociological stranger (Cressey 1983; Simmel 1921), or more specifically, a safe stranger who could be confided in under the protection of confidentiality and relational distance. For example, Brendan, a man in his mid-thirties who had spent fourteen years in prison, explains this attraction:
Brendan: I connect with them [men living in a halfway house where he used to live] because I’m not staff. I was in prison. I have experience. I’m not there to gather information from them and stuff.

Alicia: Unlike me? [jokes; laughs]

Brendan: This is different. You’re not asking ‘what have you done and never for caught for?’…You’re a stranger. Stranger is good because I have no connection to you. I can tell you my story and I know when it leaves it leaves with you. That’s why I have no qualms about sharing because I know you’re a complete stranger to me.

Two key propositions in Jacques and Wright’s theoretical model of the relationship between relational distance, recruiting and interviewing are: “Recruitment to a study increases as the relational distance between researchers, recruiters and criminals decreases” and “Data quantity and validity increase as the relational distance between researchers, recruiters, and criminals decreases” (2008: 28, 32; emphasis in original). My findings appear to support these propositions at the stage of recruiting and sensitive disclosures (see above). However, in terms of disclosure, my exchange with Brendan suggests the opposite: that increased relational distance is conducive to data generation because of the appeal of the anonymous stranger and possibly the perception of decreased social risk. In short, increased relational distance translates into less danger of “worlds colliding”.

Ex-inmates have many stories that they are discouraged from sharing outside of the context of confessing to or apologizing for criminal activity. A research interview may be attractive as an opportunity to share lived experience without the fear of legal or social consequence. I found that participants were motivated to participate in the interview because they wanted to be heard, to tell their stories or to help me with the research, which they perceived to be for a “good cause”. In this way, these findings are consistent with Copes and colleagues’ (2012) findings that inmates

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30 See the sitcom television series Seinfeld, Season Seven Episode 8: “The Pool Guy”
perceive emotional benefits from having someone to talk to. The men’s willingness to participate in the research extended beyond the initial interview. Every participant agreed to being contacted with follow up questions. In one lengthy interview I stopped to ask if I could ask “one more question” the participant responded that I could ask “five or six more questions” and that I could call him any time even if it were to ask a single question. This willingness may reflect the men’s construction of the interview itself as evidence of their altruistic, moral character; in other words, the interview may be important resource in identity construction (Presser 2004). It could also be that talking with someone who shares a common interest and is genuinely intrigued by your views is itself an inherently positive and attractive experience.31

Participants might also be motivated to contribute to a research study because they perceive it as a way to achieve some personal or spiritual goal. Several participants who were involved in Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous found value in the interview process; one participant described me as “helping [him] practice [his] twelve steps” and another described the interview as a “a mini step five”. Others such as Aaron, who had been incarcerated for fraud, described the interview in terms of fulfilling a spiritual requirement:

You’re part of my mea culpa, my restitution back, my good karma. This is just for me. I took, took, took for many years and now it’s time to give back. You asked… and I’ve tried to help.

Though I had not implied or suggested to participants that this research would or could ‘change the system’, some participants interpreted the research as having intrinsic value despite being skeptical as to whether it would improve the situation for prisoners in Canada. For example, after expressing some regrets for his life’s path, Brendan described his participation in the research project in this way: “It’s for a good, good cause. It’s for your thesis, your dissertation. The prison

31 Schlosser (2008) notes receiving a letter from an inmate indicating that he felt better about himself after having an opportunity to discuss his problems in the context of the research interview.
Another young participant, Mark, who had spent a month in prison after being involved in a public riot, had this to say about the project:

I agree with what you’re doing, I just don’t think it’s going to make a difference. When it comes down to jails and stuff, it’s all about money…I don’t think it will make a difference [my research] but you have to try. You have to hope. But hope is like something you hope for – you don’t know if it will make a difference but you hope it will.

It appears that participants tended to be motivated to contribute to the research project because of a desire to have their lived experience with prison heard [even if it was just by me], to be involved in some kind of effort to effect change. Some were willing to help me out of pure altruism, or to illustrate that they had nothing to hide, or because they knew me personally or through a friend. Ex-prisoners’ perceptions of the research process is an under-researched area; still my findings are consistent with previous research that suggests some emotional benefit to research participants with incarceration experience (Copes et al. 2012; Schlosser 2008).

Finally, during the course of the research it was suggested to me by some research participants, and others who had experience working with ex-prisoners in the context of agencies such as the John Howard Society, that I would have little luck learning anything from ex-prisoners without providing monetary compensation. For example after asking if I pay people to be interviewed, Mike, a former drug dealer, suggested:

The thing is, if you want [to interview] the kind of people I’m talking about – street people – they’re probably going to want something out of it…Every time I needed something from them I had to give them something.

To some extent, this is consistent with research that suggests monetary compensation can be a motivation for interview participation (Copes et al. 2012). However, I was never asked for

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32 At the time of the interview Canada’s Prime Minister was Stephen Harper.
compensation by any of the research participants, some of whom were homeless at the time of the interview, unemployed or otherwise economically disadvantaged. Lack of compensation was never offered as a reason for refusal to participate in the research study. If during the rapport building stage I met prospective participants at a restaurant or coffee shop, I would pay for the meal to show that I appreciated their time and participation. However, one participant asked how much I make to teach courses and upon learning the answer insisted that he pay for lunch.

I did not offer monetary compensation for the interviews though I did express reciprocity in the form of offering rides, attending court dates and of course, verbal notes of appreciation. On one particular occasion, a young research participant needed a ride to the hospital to see his dying father. I drove him to the hospital and waited in the lobby while he visited. On another occasion, a young participant needed a ride to a job interview and was concerned to go alone because he had developed a fear of police and the interview location was near a police station. In work detailing the potential benefits and risks of qualitative interviewing, Corbin and Morse (2003) note that meaningful reciprocity is contingent on the wants and needs of the research participant. Reflecting on their combined experience of fifty years of interviewing, Corbin and Morse observe that research participants may want something in return for their participation though they not be consciously aware what this is. Participants might desire validation that they are a good person, information, to unburden themselves, or the “hope that telling their story will help others” (Corbin and Morse 2003:342; Comack 2008). These are common themes peppered throughout various interviews with men in my study. The following interchange with Will, a man in his late-fouries incarcerated for theft and drug related offences, implies several of these desires:

William: Do you know anything that a guy like me could participate in?
Alicia: In what manner?
William: In any manner, if I could be of any help in an academic situation, if you ever come across anything like that. I am also interested in volunteer work, so if you come across any volunteer work and think of me.

Alicia: I don’t know about volunteering…but sometimes in university classes people come in and talk to the students about being incarcerated and what that’s like.

William: I’d love that. I don’t know if I have anything to offer –

Alicia: Of course you do. You’ve just told me so many valuable stories about the system, and what that’s like and the process of coming out of that system. It’s very interesting.

William: I’d love to do something like that.

Similar to Corbin and Morse’s (2003) observations, this interchange with William suggests that he wanted information regarding further opportunities to share his experiences as well as validation that his contributions have value. For the most part, it seems reciprocity was most appreciated in the form of social support or favours, as opposed to financial compensation.

Confidentiality & Informed Consent

Protecting confidentiality and identity of research participants is a staple of ethical conduct in research with human beings (TCPS2 2010). Confidentiality is of even greater significance when research participants reflect what is sometimes termed a ‘vulnerable population’ such as those who are socially stigmatized, disenfranchised or marginalized. Men with incarceration experience are a vulnerable population in this sense. Researchers need to protect participants against physical, social, legal and emotional/psychological harm that might result from their participation in the research project (TCPS2 2010). There are a number of ways that I attempted to protect my research participants against the risk of any of these harms. First, I collected informed consent via a ‘consent document’ as required by the University’s Research Ethics Review Board. This document
informed the men of potential risks that I identified to the best of my ability based on my knowledge of the research literature and lived experience with conducting qualitative research in the past (see Horton 2013) as well as the potential risks identified by the REB. 33

I used a two-safe system to protect confidentiality: in one safe, I kept the signed consent forms with identifying information and in the other the audio files. My rationale was that if anyone were to break into the safes this would prevent them from matching the participant’s identity to their audio file. Additionally, I protected my participants against harm through the interview location selection process detailed above, and by exercising patience in the rapport building phase of the research process. I carefully nurtured the relationships I had with the men –sometimes over a period of months or weeks - so that no one felt uncomfortably confronted with sensitive questions before trust had been built. A final way I attempted to protect the research participants and confidentiality is by diversifying my sampling strategy and sampling across multiple provinces so that participants were less likely to be able to identify each other in any future publications. The next chapter presents the results of the research and attempts to reveal the ways in which pains of imprisonment, masculinity and survival intersect and shape the nature of violent conflict in prison.

33 To a large extent, creating an informed consent document with a list of risks is a hypothetical endeavour given the exploratory nature of the work – and also my lack of lived experience with incarceration and reintegration. It would seem those best positioned to identify risks are the participants themselves – though people representative of the communities that criminologists study are rarely included in the REB review process (see Appendix A).

34 A detailed analysis of questions of harm, confidentiality and informed consent as it relates to the relationship between the principles of ethical research as identified in the TCPS2, the research ethics board review process, and the future of qualitative work with current or ex-incarcerated people is included in Appendix A.
CHAPTER FIVE:  
RESULTS  
PART ONE

MEN IN PAIN

The pains that prisoners experience are well-documented (Sykes 1958; Michael 2012; Ugelvik 2014; Warr 2016) as are the impact of imprisonment on a prisoners’ loved ones in the free community (Chui 2010; Murray 2005). Still, there remains little scholarship on men’s gendered experience of prison hardships and harms (Ugelvik 2014) or how these pains and strains are causally related to violence (Rocheleau 2013). The results suggest that the attacks on men identified in Chapter Two – threats to physical, psychological and sexual safety and environmental stressors such as scarce resources, crowding and tense relationships with prison staff are threatening to masculinity and dignity. These multiple and intersecting hardships produce stress (Haney 2012), aggression (Cox et al. 1984 Lahm 2008) and a decreased ability to deal with minor stressors, hassles and daily social interactions (Lepore, Evans and Palsane 1991); in turn, these become an additional sources of strain that incarcerated men must negotiate while living in confinement with other men in greater or lesser degrees of pain.

This chapter advances two insights with regard to men’s lived experience with the pain of incarceration. The first is a contribution to the discussion regarding the unique ways that pain is gendered for men in prison. The pain that men experienced as a result of incarceration is contoured and informed by broader cultural expectations of what it means to be a ‘real man’. Imprisonment is said to involve multiple deprivations: deprivation of autonomy, liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, and security (Sykes 1958). Considering these deprivations in their reverse (independence, dominance, economic and material wealth, heterosexual pursuit/prowess, and toughness or invulnerability) reveals that imprisonment is ultimately a process of emasculation
that strips away men’s sense of manhood and self – symbolically divorcing men from their previous masculine identities while imposing a new set of rules and routines enforced by prison authorities and others in the prison subculture. Prison is not only a total institution – a “forcing house” for changing men (Goffman 1961) - it is also a painful and gendered total institution.

The second insight is the criminogenic nature of men’s gendered pains of imprisonment. In particular, the deprivation of security – or alternatively, the forced physical, emotional and psychological vulnerability that men experience – manifests in a ‘prison mask’ that men wear in an attempt to regain some measure of control over their bodies and minds. As identified in Chapter Three, the personal front that men put on publically is characterized by a tough demeanor, aggressive posturing and a willingness to fight. For many men in my study, the emasculating nature of imprisonment that necessitates this mask is itself an additional and important source of pain. This ‘pain of hypermasculine hypervigilence’ is particularly difficult for men who subscribe privately to a more complex and non-violent masculinity. Indeed, the personal front that men put on is painful; yet as Chapter Six: Results Part 2 demonstrates, it is instrumental to survival in that the violence it produces also serves to protect.

**Gendered Pains of Imprisonment**

*Freedom of Autonomy & Self-Determination*

Independence, autonomy, toughness and self-reliance are important cultural markers of manhood (Connell or Messerschmidt; Wilton and Evans 2014). Boys learn this at an early age through interactions with parents (Kane 2006), school sports (Connell 2008), peers (Oransky and Maracek 2009; Pascoe 2011; Stoudt 2006) and the media (Katz 1999; 2013). Numerous examples in popular culture illustrate the consequences of failing to be self-reliant (Katz 2013) and research supports the loss of self-reliance for men as a painful experience (Ostrander 2008). The need to be
‘tough’ and independent is defined through social interactions between boys and men (Connell 2005). An important way that boys learn the virtue of self-reliance and toughness is by witnessing the consequences of failing conform to these expectations. Terms such as “pussy”, “fag”, “wimp” and “bitch” are used to degrade boys and define their gender non-conformity as problematic (Katz 2013; Pascoe 2011). These insults function to police gender and ensure that the dominance of the idealized form of masculinity goes undisturbed.

Part of the deprivations of prison include a loss of autonomy and personal control over everyday decisions: what time to get up in the morning, when to shower, what to wear, what to eat for breakfast and so on. Some men in the study found this to be the most difficult part of incarceration; sometimes more painful than the experience or threat of violence, or even the prospect of death. Here, Mike and Scott articulate the relationship between the imposed lack of autonomy and the feeling of being emasculated and infantilized:

That was horrible for me…I’ve been independent my whole life and that was horrible to have that [autonomy] taken away from me. My whole life I always liked to be in control. To have that taken away for the first time in your life and it’s not by choice, it’s by force - it does take a toll. Definitely. It’s not easy mentally. That was one of the hardest parts. Even dealing with the violence, that is stressful too. [Mike]

…you can see that they [other prisoners] try to put on a front to try to be all tough and stuff in prison. To me, you’re at your weakest point. You can’t really get any worse off than that [imprisoned] other than dead, and that might not even be as bad. You don’t feel like a man. Your masculinity is taken away because you have no control over anything. Not that I’m a control freak, but you want control over yourself. That’s what I think being a man is. You have control over yourself and you’re not being told when you can and can’t go to the washroom because when you’re in a waiting cell to go to court and you radio to them, they’ll say ‘yeah, just wait’ and it could be an hour and a half, or two hours before you get to go to the washroom. So, you feel way less of a man. [Scott]

Many men resented the forced compliance with prison rules and routines and their lack of control over the most mundane and insignificant aspects of daily living. Particularly when prison
procedures were paired with a lack of explanation, some men felt frustration with what they perceived to be the mean-spirited and arbitrary imposition of trivial rules and practices:

Even in Seg [segregation], they throw the lights on at six in the morning. In seg! That’s torture, why would you do that? The person in there is trying to sleep as long as they can because they have nothing to do. They wake you up at six just so you’re up and you have nothing to do for the rest of the day but sit there and stare at the wall. Then it’s lights out at ten. Your lights on are two hours earlier than the general pop, and your lights off are two hours later. Why? You know? Why would you do that? They make it so you can only sleep so much, but it’s all you want to do because you have nothing else. It’s stupid. [Ben]

For others, the compliance with rules enforced by authority figures and other incarcerated men represented an important loss of power. Chris and Earl explain this feeling:

Most guys that are in there [prison], they have a life going on, on the street, then all of the sudden they’re ripped out of there and thrown in here [jail]. They have control out there. They have everything going on, their cars, their bank accounts, their dogs and cats- in here they’re powerless. Some people have a hard time accepting that.

When you get into any institution it’s all about rules. When to get up, when to go to sleep, when the lights go out. When to stand up to do counts, when to eat your breakfast, lunch…there are a lot of rules and they are constantly being changed…There’s a lot of rules. Too many rules; which doesn’t go over well with a lot of the guys because we don’t like rules. We broke rules, right?

The various rules to which men are subject in prison and to which they must comply are experienced by men as acts of subordination; the exact opposite of acts that signify their membership in the dominant gender group (see Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Combined with feelings of loss, powerlessness and pain are questions of the imposed vulnerability that accompanies this loss of power.

For some men, the deprivation of self-determination and control that they had in the free community is a significant source of feelings of anxiety, emotional and physical vulnerability and fear of victimization:
I was already used to watching my back and stuff, but not to that degree [in prison] where you don’t even have a minute of peace…any time I was not in Seg, I could get took out, [violently attacked] and even when I was in Seg, these guys, you never know. They’ll sneak in and you’re fucked. That was the most stressful part…When you’re out you can control things, you can keep stuff in control. But when you’re in jail you have no way of actually being on hand, things can fall apart so fast. Everything just falls apart like that. [Ben]

The men in the study were acutely aware of the potential that deprivations of autonomy, liberty and access to information could translate into vulnerability and violent attacks from other men. For instance, Pat noted the significance of lack of contact with the outside world: ‘Not knowing…that’s the biggest… everyone is on edge. At any given time anyone could explode for no reason.’

Below, Ben and Scott comment on the relationship between control, deprivation and public displays of aggression. Similarly, Earl, a man in his sixties who had been incarcerated in American and Canadian prisons for nearly half of his life, explained succinctly how the painful loss of independence, autonomy and liberty translated into violence in a prison context:

…we feel like we need to be strong [physically] and dominant even more, because we feel like we’re fucking, just a bunch of little bitches. Fucking rats in cages, like we have no control. We feel like we have no control, therefore, we must control what little we have around us and that is, each other. [Ben]

…the guys that put a front on in there just do it to cover up, to hide what they really feel…the guys who show extraordinary masculinity in there just do that because they feel inferior and feel the need to do that because they want to feel more like a man. [Scott]

It’s violent… It could be out of frustration because every day you’re told when to go, when to come back, when to stand to for count, you’re told when you can go out and exercise. You know what I mean? Yes, there are rules in society. But if you do this day after day, year after year, decade after decade, after a while you get a little pissed off. I refer to it as a couple of dogs in a room, you throw them a bone once in a while, maybe some meat or water. Then you decide to let them out. They’re not going to be wagging their tail, they’re going to bite you on their way out and they should. [Earl]
These statements suggest that a loss of control and self-determination is difficult – perhaps the most difficult aspect of incarceration – because of broader expectations of male dominance and independence. The men in my study found this aspect of incarceration painfully emasculating particularly when they perceived themselves as having a great degree of control over their lives and relationships in the free community.

**Loss of Goods & Services**

Sykes (1958) identified the lack of access to goods and services as depriving in terms of the significance that material possessions have to a person’s sense of self and identity. He describes material goods as “so large a part of the individual’s conception of himself that to be stripped of them is to be attacked at the deepest layers of his personality” (1958:69). Contemporarily, this statement holds so much more relevance given that consumption and the ability to conspicuously display wealth have become important cultural markers of success. For men, the deprivation of goods and services and the imposed poverty that accompanies incarceration are doubly painful considering that economic success and prowess are defining characteristics of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005). Status symbols such as clothing and cars dramatize this power in the free community but in a prison environment that renders these displays impossible men must seek out other ways to showcase their power.

Rob, a man in his mid-thirties convicted of drug trafficking, reflects on his transition from home to prison:

I’m a very materialistic person…then not having anything [in prison]…not having any possessions. Not having anything to call your own felt very weird for me…I went from a 2600 square foot house with a big screen in every room, and a king size bed…I would be sleeping and there would be women jumping into my bed. It was a good scenario. I went from that to the [a remand centre] and even thinking back…it gives me a little bit of anxiety because it is such a terrible place…It was so demeaning and degrading. It was disgusting. It really was…I thought about my
bed all the time…It literally fucked my shoulder right up from sleeping on those disgusting mattresses. They’re not even mattresses, they’re *mats*. That’s what they are. Which you know, at least I got a *mat* [sarcasm]. It was bad. I love my pillows. Everything on my bed, you can pet it and be like ‘oh, this feels good’. I like textures when I’m sleeping. It’s very important to me. *Very* important. You’re naked in your bed - and what? Do you want scratchy sheets? Nobody wants that shit. Also, on top of that you have females or multiple female coming over - you don’t want that.

Interestingly, Rob’s comments illustrate the way in which the deprivation of goods and services undermines masculinity by threatening economic power and by extension, heterosexual privilege and prowess.

A second important way that the deprivation of goods and services was felt by men related to their sense of dignity and self-worth. For some men, the quality of prison food, or deprivation of sufficient amounts of food was a painful reminder that they are *Others*, sub-humans who have forgone their “claim to the status of full-fledged, trusted member of society” (Goffman 1958: 66). From the perspective of the institution, imprisoned men may be allotted the required caloric intake for an adult male to have their basic needs met; but the quantified way that food adequacy is assessed is difficult for some men:

It’s not even enough calorie-wise… the food is disgusting and it’s such little portions. There’s this stuff they have rotini – you can ask anybody who has been in jail about rotini, most guys will not eat it. I took everybody’s portion that I could, it’s not even a meat…they use this TVP, total vegetable protein shit, to make this rotini, that’s like their meat. From what I hear, it is banned in the States, banned in Europe, banned in Australia, because it’s known to cause cancer…[Scott]

When you keep somebody on the edge of *fucking starvation*… there were a few times there I tried to go to sleep because I was so hungry. On a Friday night, your dinner is at 4:30…Saturday morning your breakfast is at 10:30, so you go for eighteen hours without eating. That’s pretty much a *fucking day* without having any food, unless you have canteen in your cell. A lot of guys can’t afford canteen. It depends on how much money you had on you when you got arrested, or if you have someone to put money in your account. It’s just, fucking, *you starve*. I don’t know if they do it purposely, or what the point is… some guys hoard bread, so there are two loaves basically dedicated to the back table, you’re supposed to get two pieces of bread at each meal, or something along those lines, but you only want to eat bread and margarine so much…Then guys hoard the shit, and it’s gross….It’s just enough
to keep you going, to string you along and it just tastes like shit. It’s fucking gross; completely inhumane. I wouldn’t feed that to my fucking dog half the time, and a lot of the times you don’t even know what it is. It’s disgusting. That’s probably the most inhumane thing. I’d rather eat dog food.

Several men in the study felt degraded by the food available because they had heard rumors it was carcinogenic, genetically modified, unfit for human consumption or looked and tasted like “pig anus” [Mark]. Others interpreted the food services as a purposeful and malicious attempt on the part of prison authorities to degrade and dehumanize them; a symbolic attack on their status as human beings. The intervals between meals is clearly demoralizing. As Scott illustrates, this pain is more acutely felt for men without financial resources to purchase foods from the canteen; as a result, control of the little food that is available becomes an important marker of social status in prison and some men will forcefully take food from vulnerable inmates in order to display their power to others.

Food service was particularly degrading for men during lockdowns. Rob recalls how he felt sub-human receiving meals from the correctional staff through the bars in his cell:

One of the things I remember feeling really shitty about, I remember it struck me as just so [pauses for words] – animalistic? Treating us like animals…During lockdowns they would feed you through the bars. It was paper plates wrapped in saran wrap and then they would slide it through the bars. Then they would come with the milk; powdered milk that was already mixed and they would pour it in a plant watering can through the bars. That just struck me – this was – you’re an animal. That’s how you feed a rabid animal. You don’t even go into their cage. I remember that striking me.

**Heterosexuality, Relationships & Family**

Heterosexuality is a defining characteristic of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005). As illustrated in Chapter Three the dominance of some groups of men is perpetuated through social interactions that define hegemonic masculinity as heterosexual (and thus superior to
homosexuality, which is equated with femininity). Prison deprivations are threatening to displays of heterosexuality and dominance for a number of reasons. First, prison undermines heterosexual prowess through the deprivation of goods and services (as illustrated in Rob’s case above). Second, the mere absence of women, in Sykes’s terms, renders the male prisoner “figuratively castrated by his involuntary celibacy” (1958:70). Additionally, beyond heterosexual sex, prison reduces men’s opportunities for interactions with women generally, which may be an important part of self-construction.

Comments regarding the homophobic nature of the way that men joke with one another in prison illustrate some of the anxieties that some prisoners have regarding the long term imposed celibacy that they experience and the potential consequences of deprivation for their sexuality and by extension, masculinity:

We’re just a bunch of fucking guys together. We joke around about it all the time. Very vulgar graphic, explicit gay shit all the time…Some people in there are in denial about it too. They think that just because they fuck people in jail, that doesn’t mean they’re gay. It’s just like a jail thing. There’s a joke in there: if you have ten years or more you have a licence to fuck another man in the ass or get head and not be gay. We used to joke around about that. [Ben]

A lot of it [the way men relate in prison] is gay talk. Joking around about being gay because there’s no women in prison. It’s just a lot of jokes. I still do it now. Guys are being locked up for years on end and there are no women around. Isn’t that the point of prison though, no girls? [Jeremy]

The extent to which prison humour is characterized by homophobia speaks to the anxieties that some men have about forced celibacy and its implications for their own sexuality. Insults and homophobic jokes (and violence against gay inmates) may be an important part of the way some
men display their heterosexuality in a setting threatening to this aspect of their masculinity.35 These findings are consistent with other research on men and identity more generally (McCann, Plummer and Minichiello 2010),

Similarly, some men in my study talked about their feelings about being separated from girlfriends, wives and women generally in ways that both reified traditional, hegemonic masculinity and revealed a more complex masculinity in prison. Several participants’ comments reflect traditional notions of ‘real men’ as the ‘breadwinners’ or providers for a family and how their incarceration undermined this masculine trait. Mike explained how he prepared in anticipation of not being able to provide financially for his girlfriend during his incarceration and Ben explains the threat that female correctional staff – particularly those perceived to be lesbian women - pose to the ‘natural order’ of things:

I knew I was going to have to go the whole time [serve his full sentence in prison], so I was just trying to tie up ends and shit. I didn’t know how long I would be going for so I was just trying to figure things out…I was living with my girlfriend at the time so I didn’t want her to have to go and find money after to pay rent. So I paid six months’ rent, I paid all the bills, I put a thousand dollars extra on the hydro and cable, all that stuff so she wouldn’t have to worry about it. [Mike]

Some of them [correctional staff] are just straight fucking rug-munching, lesbian hate-all-men types…on top of this lack of masculinity and feelings of inadequacy, the only females that there are in your life are kind of untouchable [as staff and presumed lesbians] and treat you like shit and run you. Men are predominantly, the dominant side in relationships most of the time. That’s the natural order of things, although some people will debate that… I’m just saying for a lot of men in there [prison] having women being so dominating over you, on top of all those other factors of masculinity, all just add up to and contribute to our feelings of inadequacy and unmanliness. Which makes maybe, in turn, makes us feel us feel like we need to be strong [physically] and dominant even more, because we feel like we’re fucking, just a bunch of little bitches. [Ben]

35 For instance, Ben noted: “when an actual gay guy comes onto the unit it makes everyone extremely uncomfortable. Everyone is extremely homophobic, they want to punch him out. The funny thing is that when you go to federal, some of the craziest people in there are gay and you’d never want to fuck with them. They’d slit your throat and cut your head off in two seconds...”
These comments suggest that for some men being separated from women in their lives was a gendered experience because it threatened their ability to provide financially. In turn, being confronted with women working in a professional capacity in the correctional institution was a constant reminder for other men of their disrupted position of dominance in terms of the threat that powerful women pose to aspects of traditional masculinity (such as economic prowess and heterosexual pursuit).

For others, some men’s negative attitudes and actions toward women or women working in a male-dominated arena did not resonate with their sense of masculinity and dealing with such attitudes was an additional source of discomfort. For example, Ryan and Dustin’s comments suggest that some prisoners, in the absence of women, tell stories that emphasize their dominance over women in an attempt to gain the respect of other men:

They tell stories of parties, or girls they’ve been with, cars they drive, houses they live in…a lot of guys would make shit up to seem cool. [Sam]

They talk about things that they did on the outside. How solid they were, the beatings, the stabbings, the robberies. I think that was a huge part that made them feel like a man. Oh, ‘I smacked my old lady around’ blah, blah, blah. That’s stuff I would be like ugh – You think that makes you tough and a man? [Ryan]

There are so many men in prison and the talk amongst the inmates always leads to derogatory comments about women. The way guys treat their girlfriends and their wives, it’s disgusting. It’s a whole new area that I was not exposed to in my previous life, so being thrown into a prison and all these men degrading women and talking bad about them, it’s like wow. But I just learned to go along with it. [Dustin]

Social interactions between men create, sustain and maintain definitions of masculinity that are superior to and apart from femininity. These displays of dominant masculinity are disconcerting to men like Ryan and Dustin who do not privately subscribe to this image of masculinity though are publically complicit in perpetuating the hegemonic masculine project.
Deprivation of sexual relationships is a pain that often intersected with men’s gendered experienced of the loss of independence, autonomy and control. For example, some men worried about the faithfulness of their partners while they were incarcerated and other prisoners were quick to seize this opportunity to cultivate their fears:

I definitely have concerns…I’m a little worried with [his girlfriend]…She keeps telling me that she will wait for me, but given her past it makes me wonder: Will she be able to go four months without having sex? … If I go for six months, will she be able to keep it in her pants for six months? Should we go on a break for six months and then I don’t need to be worried so much? I don’t want to go on a break with her [saddened tone]. [Interview with Mark before his first time in prison]

There’s only twice my girlfriend went out to clubs and I was jealous in there thinking about guys hitting on her and I’m not going to be able to do anything about it. And the guys in there [prison] were like ‘yeah, your girl is getting penis right now’ and it’s like fuck off, I don’t want to hear that. [Another prisoner] would talk about how he is worried his girlfriend is sleeping with all his friends, but he had been in jail for seven years. It’s like, how do you expect a girl to stay with you if you’re in jail for seven years of your life? You can’t expect her not to go out and have fun if you’re in there the whole time. [Interview with Mark, after prison]

Some participants commented on the strain that other men experience with worry over the activities of partners in the free community either in terms of unfaithfulness or not being there to provide. Ultimately this strain was a factor in some men’s decision to sever relationships with loved ones in the free community altogether:

Most guys are possessive people…they have to have ownership. Attachment issues. They’re still trying to hold onto something. In jail you own nothing. So that’s the only thing they have in this world and they try to hold onto that… You’re in here for five years, let her go. Let her do her thing. Let her move on. Some people still hold onto that and still try to run their old lady’s lives from jail. Quit calling her a hundred times a day. You’re being a stalker now. Who’s there? Who you with? What are you doing today? What are you doing tomorrow? [Chris]

When you have a girl on the outs and you don’t know what she’s doing, and especially if she’s not holding it down, as they say…it was a nightmare being in there and not having any power over anything. You know? I learned quick when you’re doing time, don’t have anything to do with anyone on the outs. Don’t put
yourself through that hell. Most guys do. Most guys have girlfriends and that’s why they’re on that phone all the time and they’re stressed right out about stuff they have no control over. So the best thing to do if you’re going to do time is to sever all ties...put all that other shit out of your mind because it’s just going to make your time go slower...as hard as that can be, to do the time, you’re going to be worried about who is winning the bread, who is taking care of your girl? [William]

Several participants discussed the pain of living in a prison geographically isolated from their families and partners or the pain of trying to comfort a loved one in the free community who was concerned for their safety.

Again these problems are uniquely gendered for men as a painful lack of autonomy and control underlies their concerns. Mike and Mark, two men in their twenties, discuss the difficulty of maintaining a romantic relationship from prison and Dan discusses maintaining a front to his mother:

Me and my girl were really serious too. That’s stressful too, that’s its own stress. My lawyer at that time was telling me that I was probably going to get three to four years in jail. So that’s stressful to be separated for that long. It’s hard. Especially when you have limited phone privileges, everything. You see each other through glass, you know? That’s not a situation you want to be in. No girl wants to be in a situation where they have to be in a relationship like that, right? [Mike]

[girlfriend] was very worried while I was in there. She kept saying ‘you sound like you’ve changed’ but I can’t tell her I’m not acting the way I used to because if I was like ‘Oh baby I love you so much’ then everyone is going to make fun of me in jail. So, I had changed and I told her when she came to visit me ‘I can’t talk to you like that when I’m in here’. She said, ‘I know but you just sound so different, you’re a dick now’ I said ‘I know, I’m not a dick...I’m trying to survive’. [Mark]

[on the phone; Dan tells another inmate to keep it down] Now, everybody in the room just looked at me like why did you just sign your own death warrant...I’m talking to my mother and she’s like ‘Dan is everything okay?’ Of course, you don’t give any idea to your mother...[but] he’s just looking at me deciding which way he’s going to kill me so I just said ‘You know what ma, I got to get going we’re having a card game after dinner’ and she said ‘oh that’s nice, I don’t want to keep you from cards’...I walked back [to the cell] and felt like I was walking the plank...
These comments suggest that men’s experiences negotiating outside relationships in prison are difficult and complicated by the contradictory expressions of masculinity that they enact privately and publically. Prison clearly inhibits men from expressing multiple masculinities and this is a painful part of maintaining relationships while incarcerated. The irony in Mark’s survival strategy is that while the deprivation of opportunities for heterosexual pursuit are limited in prison and threatening to masculinity, any display of heterosexual affection for a woman on the outside could be interpreted as a weakness and ridiculed by other men.

Many men spoke about their feelings of loss and love for women in their lives and their responsibilities for their children in an emotionally vulnerable way that suggested a more complex masculinity. For example, Scott described his frustration about being in prison in relation to being separated from his son and concern about his son’s mother’s ability to care for him while he was incarcerated. He worried about things like whether his son had presents for his birthday party or whether in his absence his son’s mother was being careful with him near the stairs and other potentially dangerous areas of the home. For Scott and others, visits from family were particularly aggravating and a painful part of their prison experience:

You’re separated from your family and you’re so far away and you never really had visits. You used to get half an hour twice a year. Half an hour, and you were sitting in a fucking room, with a fucking screen between you and four chairs is the visit room…and a pig sitting beside your fucking family! That’s your visit for half an hour, so yeah, it’s pretty uncomfortable. [Lee]

It made it worse almost. You’re doing fine and then you see the person and you start talking. Sometimes you break down before you see them, sometimes you break down before they’re leaving because you just don’t want them to go. They’re a familiar face, someone you love. When I was there it was through Plexiglas and it was just so impersonal…you just want to be able to touch somebody or give them a hug. [Scott]

Feelings of sadness, anger, loneliness and simply missing physical human contact [outside of violence] were painful parts of incarceration for men. Additionally, some men felt pain in the
knowledge that their families and loved ones feared for their safety and were ‘doing time too, on the outside’ [Pat].

Privacy & Vulnerability

The lack of privacy in prison was a source of concern for men in the study primarily because it constituted another source of degradation and symbolic rejection from full personhood but also because it meant that as part of a daily routine the men’s most intimate and vulnerable moments – urinating, defecating, and showering – were dangerously on display for other men and correctional staff to witness and potentially exploit:

It was degrading. You know, showering with another man? There’s no such thing as privacy in jail. [Chris]

[Alicia: Do you miss things like that, a regular toilet?] With a lid on it. Yes, because the toilet has no lid on it. You can make your own lid out of cardboard but they confiscate that because it’s contraband, potentially. You can put a sheet or a towel over it, but you definitely miss your own toilet because, there’s no seat on it, no lid…there is a door right there and a little window that they come check in. You usually hang a flag for your cellmate, or you put a little piece of toilet paper on the door so that they know that you’re going to the washroom and they don’t come in, but it still happens that the guards will look in there. [Scott]

Showering is a difficult and painful activity for some men. Some felt sexually violated by female correctional staff whom they perceived to be viewing them in inappropriate ways while they were naked. Scott and Ben explain the feeling of being watched in the shower:

When you’re having a shower, there’s actually one female guard - that fucking - I caught her hammerhawking more than once! She would always walk by when guys were in the shower and peer in there… I know there are male staff in women’s prisons, but can they look in their showers? Because we’re men they can, I guess?... It should be a little more private…I don’t know. [Scott]

There are showers in there that are side by side. There are female guards. If they want to hammerhawk, I guess they can. That’s what you signed up for. Obviously

36 For example, Mark, a young man in his twenties who had never experienced prison prior to our interview, recalled a story of both male and female friends crying for him at a “going to jail party” because they feared he would “change” in prison.
there’s going to be…[pauses] a guy has to get cleaned up. You’re pretty much on display. It’s kind of bogus, right? Like, I don’t know. You don’t have no privacy.

[Russell]

A second source of vulnerability that accompanies a lack of private shower facilities translated into a fear of sexual victimization for some men. Ryan explains his fears about being sexually exploited by other men in the prison:

If it happened, what am I going to do? Three guys jump you, what are you going to do? … I mean, showering and you’re undressing you’ll get side to side looks and a guy will look you up and down and in my head I’m like ‘Oh fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.’ But I mean maybe he’s just some little pipsqueak, but in that moment it’s like ‘oh shit’ [laughs]…Even to this day, I don’t shower long. I have a set pattern of things that I do and it’s less than ten minutes.

The fear of sexual assault in men’s prisons is a source of anxiety and the lack of privacy in the shower facilities compounds this concern. Though the men felt violated by female correctional staff viewing or supervising them in the shower they seemed to have little knowledge as to whether this contravened their rights. Overall, a lack of privacy intersected with feelings of being degraded and dangerously exposed to correctional staff and other prisoners who could exploit this vulnerability for their own gratification or advantage.

**Liberty & Forced Intimacy**

The loss of privacy intersects with the loss of liberty and dislocation from loved ones in the free community. Sykes (1958) notes that confinement and the loss of liberty are twofold: first a prisoner is confined by the institution, disconnected from the outside world and from friends and family; and second, prisoners are confined within the institution. Crowding is one way that men are being increasingly confined within an institution (Annual Report 2013-2014); it is a serious source of hardship and threat to their human dignity:
In many cells you will get urinated on because it is a short cell...you want your head
to be down by the door because it really stinks in the cell. You can wash those mats
a thousand times but they will still stink. If you’re on the floor you want your head
to be near to door to get more of a draft, but the toilet is always near the door so you
will be sleeping with your face underneath the brim of the toilet and you’ll get pissed
on all night... So you end up putting your feet at that end and then your feet get
urinated on. It’s just too small. I was on the floor a lot. It wasn’t nice. [Dan]

It’s pretty hard to sleep when buddy’s puking and shitting beside you. You know?
I’m sorry to be so graphic, but it’s the truth. He can’t sleep, he’s tossing and turning
and pacing the cell. I’ve heard guys screaming in the middle of the night because
they’re dope sick. I was one of them. It’s terrible, it’s absolutely terrible and I
wouldn’t wish it on my worst enemy. Heroin, the physical withdraws are
unbelievable, not sleeping for seven or eight days, with ten to fifteen minute sleep
in your stomach. Crawling skin. Your legs – you’re like a flounder. Like a fish out
of water you can never get comfortable for days on end – and you wonder why
people [cellmates] get angry! [Chris]

Several men who slept on the floor in a triple-bunked cell living arrangement experienced being
degraded and urinated on by other men using the shared toilet in the cell. These men tended to
have low social status in the prison or were newly incarcerated. Triple and double bunking are
experienced by prisoners as degrading and also potentially dangerous if they find themselves
sharing a cell with someone who attracts the attention of the correctional staff. For example, Aaron
notes that ‘there’s guys that have drugs, or if you’re with a dummy who always has the cops hitting
up your cell and searching it or whatever because he’s a fool.’

Other concerns include living in conditions of forced intimacy with a stranger who presents
noxious stimuli and thus an additional source of strain. Rob, explains his feelings of repulsion:

…forced intimacy with someone like yourself, is just fine [smiles]. But forced
intimacy with some ugly, stinky, disgusting human being? I think anybody can
understand nobody wants to do that. Some of these people - just to look at them
makes me physically ill. You know what I mean? …I’d wake up and there would
be guys doing the fucking chicken on the ground from whatever [drugs], guys
falling over and cracking their heads... If there were three people to a cell, two on
the bunks one on the ground. Almost no room to walk around. Only two flushes an
hour, in the toilet and there’s three people in the place? [cell] That in itself is criminal. It should be at least three [flushes per hour]. [Rob]

In these circumstances, crowding, frustration and concern regarding the illicit activities of cellmates become sources of concern and vulnerability that can easily translate into aggression, hostility and violence. As Pat explained:

Inmates can be in a cell together, but triple is too much. That’s wrong…Most inmates…they can barely live with themselves and as part of society. How can they live with two people or three people in a cell?

**Isolation & Segregation**

A second source of confinement within the institution is segregation. Uniformly, the men in the study who had experienced administrative segregation described it as lonely, depressing and degrading; but as the next chapter will illustrate, many tried to become confined in a segregation unit as part of a larger strategy for survival. Several quotes from men in my study illustrate that administrative segregation is a painful experience that was mentally, emotionally and physically abusive. Lee, a man in his sixties who had been incarcerated before capital punishment was officially abolished in Canada, recounts his experience of mental and physical anguish, abuse and survival living in segregation (‘the hole’):

They fire hosed me pretty good…I’d say ‘Give me a bar of soap! You cock sucker’ you know? They had to come down there and do their counts and checks or whatever, wearing fucking raincoats so I couldn’t get them, because that’s all I had left. But that’s how desperate…how fucking crazy you got to get when you’re stuck in a fucking cage, with people shooting you with fucking fire hoses, poking you with sticks and you’re throwing shit at them, for six months in a row.

…Another time in the hole, I broke my hand and they put a cast on it without setting it. Why set the fucking thing? That’s the kind of shit they do to you. So you get bitter and twisted, you know? They changed the thing now so they don’t keep people in the hole for years or months, whatever anymore. But when I was there they did, in 1969-68. Me and [name]…we did seven months in the hole. You know? That fucks your head up too, months and months.

One day I’m hanging onto [name] door, because you’re just so fucking – my cell was way on one end all by myself not even near the guys in the hole, one day I
managed to get on the other side of the wall for some fucking reason, so I ran over to [name] cell and I hung onto the handle and I said ‘Hey L---! It’s visiting time! Exercise time! You got a visitor!’ I’m hanging on his door trying to have a conversation and they’re beating me with clubs to try to make me go back to my cell. I’m just ignoring them like they’re not even there.

Just fucking craziness, playing around because there’s nothing better to do. Just laughing, [motions hanging] that was a big joke because they still had hanging back then. They didn’t take out the hanging until 1970 but they hadn’t hanged anyone since ’62. Chances were we weren’t going to get hanged, but we’d just fucking make a joke out of it “Hey L--- [motions hanging]”. Yep [laughs], you know? That’s pretty crazy in itself.

Segregation continues to be a correctional practice in Canadian prisons and its use has increased in recent years (Annual Report 2013-2014). Though official policies on length and duration of stay in a segregation unit have changed since Lee’s experience, the stories of other men in the study who have more recently experienced solitary confinement as well as other recent Canadian research (Kelsall 2014; Reiter and Koenig 2015) suggests that prisoners continue to be seriously harmed by this practice.

Several men shared their stories of feeling degraded by the experience and perceived the punishment as gratifying to prison staff:

It was hell. Seg is disgusting… As part of your research have you ever went inside and seen segregation cells? People like, put human shit on the walls and stuff, and it’s just there. I’m not going to clean it. And the prison people don’t clean it. So it’s like, who knows from how long there has been human shit on the walls? They expect you to live in there, sleep in there and everything. Eat there….it’s filthy. Prison staff don’t clean it. They expect you to clean it when you go there. Say the guy is like, has mental problems or something and he was in that cell and is not capable of cleaning up after himself. They won’t clean it, they’ll expect the next guy to clean it, or the next one after that. If you want to keep laying there and not touching it you can, but it’s gross. They don’t care. And it’s not just one cell – I went to like three different ones, and some of them were nasty. One of them was clean and two of them were nasty. So I’m guessing there is a large percentage of them that are like that. It’s disgusting. [Ben]

They’ll fuck with your head as much as they can. The food that they give you is shittier than in general pop. It’s four hours late…half frozen. It was so gross in seg,
Imagine getting a meal and there are ice chunks in it. You’re not going to eat that, you know? No matter how hungry you are. And of all the things they could give you, they give you meat and five or six times it was half frozen and not edible. You know? It’s frozen meat, you’re not going to eat that. So I went to bed sometimes with eating just the bread. Just the piece of bread that comes with it. They don’t care, especially if you’re in seg. They don’t care if you’re fed or comfortable. They want you to be uncomfortable, as much as possible. [Ben]

It’s hard… anyone that says seg doesn’t drive you a little bit crazy is lying… You’re already in a bad situation. You’re already in jail, to get to that point a lot has gone wrong. To get to that point a lot in your life has gone wrong too. If you’re in there, it’s depressing man. And you have nothing but twenty-three and a half hours of the day to think about that. It takes a toll on you mentally, it definitely does. [Mike]

Men in my study were not only pained by their segregation experiences, they expressed concern that the way in which they dealt with these emotions could potentially create conflict with others upon reintegration if they were to reveal the extent to which they had been harmed. Even in the depths of despair in segregation, the need to maintain a tough front remains crucial:

You kind of shut yourself down [sighs] I don’t know how I survived it, but you have to. It's not a matter of surviving, you have to; you have to endure it. You just think about how everyone in there right now is surviving it and you will too. You can’t cry or show weakness, those actions will affect how you get by in the yard too when you finally get out of segregation. You have to hold your chin up and get by. [Todd]

Segregation is a mentally and emotionally taxing experience; it is physically painful, and threatening to basic human dignity. Such issues are rarely successfully problematized by claimsmakers. In light of the conditions described here, it is not surprising that prisoners who experience segregation have significantly higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation than those in the general prison population (Bonner 2006). Segregation is also emasculating, infantilizing and degrading as men are forced to wear paper dresses referred to as ‘babydolls’ and eat frozen meat in a cell dirtied with human feces. Additionally, as Todd’s quote illustrates, the ways that men deal with the powerful and negative emotions associated with a segregation
experience is also gendered because despite these tremendously difficult circumstances if they show ‘weakness’ in any way upon return to the general population they run the risk of being defined as a vulnerable man who lacks the ‘toughness’ to resist victimization.

Pain of Gender Hypervigilence

The veil of invulnerability that so many men wear in the free community is exaggerated in a prison setting. Boys learn at a young age that to be a ‘real man’ they need to be tough in the face of ridicule and can only show emotional vulnerability in the presence of others in the most extreme circumstances such as in the event of the death of a loved one. Though more sensitive and emotionally complex expressions of masculinity may be gaining traction in some male-dominated subcultures (Swain 2016), in a prison context defined by immediate threats to survival, traditional expectations of manhood such as self-reliance and toughness are in a real way tested on a daily basis. For many men in the study, the task of routinely putting on a tough front despite deep feelings of vulnerability and sadness was a painful and harmful experience.

Every participant in the study commented on the problem of expressing emotional vulnerability in prison as one of impression management (Goffman 1959). Here, Sam discusses the prison subcultural context as a ‘snake pit’ that necessitates a hypermasculine front:

Sam: It’s a whack on your testosterone levels. They skyrocket. When you’re a guy and you’re with nothing but dudes all day, every day, it’s like being thrown in a snake pit. It’s weird – you can’t be the man that you usually are, you have to up that like ten times in most circumstances. It’s hard to explain.

Alicia: Can you think of an example that would help explain it?

Sam: Well, when I busted my leg [as a result of an assault by a correctional staff] a lot of guys were telling me to suck it up. They were joking, but that’s one instance. You can’t be weak, you can’t show emotion.
Similarly, Dustin describes the relationship between perceived vulnerability and sharing feelings of any kind:

Dustin: I’ve always been quite vigilant… about what I talk about and with who. I don’t want to share my feelings or personal thoughts with someone and have them use that against me.

Alicia: Do you think it is a problem for people to talk about their feelings in prison?

Dustin: Oh for sure, because you’re supposed to be the man, you’re supposed to be tough, and you don’t have feelings. You have this wall up all the time. For a lot of years, I did too. I never smiled, I always had a scowl on my face and I walked around with a chip on my shoulder, because you had to, right? You have to keep that wall up.

Alicia: What happens if you don’t have that wall up?

Dustin: I would feel vulnerable, and I don’t want to give anybody ammunition to use against me. And, just the general, guys don’t talk about their feelings and in prison especially because you don’t want to be weak, or seen as someone who can crack easy. So you have to keep that façade up all the time. And it does get tiring. I count my blessings now, I left prison and I left my total personality there too. I never took my prison personality out, I left that behind me.

As is well documented (Ricciardelli 2014; Bowker 1980), the results reveal that prison norms appear to inhibit displays of emotion of any kind, apart from aggression and anger. Sam and Dustin, like most men in the study, acknowledged that the invulnerability that defines the prison mask was part of a persona, a personal front or façade that they adopted for survival and distinct from their private or post-prison sense of masculine identity.

The men in the study uniformly agreed that public displays of emotional vulnerability in the form of crying are one of the most dangerous actions that one could take in prison. Todd, a man who self-identified as a ‘mover and shaker’ with a great degree of social status in the prison, explained:
Alicia: You can’t cry?

Todd: No, you can’t cry, not for nothing.

Alicia: Did you ever cry in prison and did anyone ever catch you doing that?

Todd: No.

Alicia: What would happen if someone was crying in prison?

Todd: They would get labelled weak and you would have a rough time. That’s what they prey on. If you’re weak and can’t stand up for yourself you get preyed on… [because others] try to make themselves feel better or stronger in some way.

Other men revealed that they did cry in prison; often as a result of dealing with the pains of incarceration as opposed to a specific negative event. Ryan recalled; ‘only alone I would cry [in prison and out] never in front of my buddies’; he elaborates in this interchange:

Alicia: Were you sad in prison?

Ryan: I was sad the whole time. I didn’t know how to deal with it. That’s what I said, when nobody was around and I was in my cell the only thing I knew to do was cry. Just, God get me out of here. I was praying from the fox hole, and I did that a lot.

Alicia: Would you cry in your cell?

Ryan: Oh yeah. I wouldn’t be loud about it. I’m pretty sure guys have walked by and seen but they didn’t say anything about it. I’m pretty sure they did too. Pretty damned sure. But no one cried in front of each other. On the phone, I remember older guys like 50s and stuff like that talking maybe with their kids that they haven’t seen in a long time; that happens [crying]. I’ve seen that, but it’s like, you don’t say anything. Fuck. I felt bad.

Even in extreme circumstances such as having experienced segregation, a violent victimization by another prisoner or staff member, or learning of the death of a loved on the outside or in prison, public crying was not an option for any of the men I interviewed, though several did admit finding moments to cry in private. Here, William describes having food thrown at him while
receiving the news of his mother’s death over a prison phone, and Aaron comments on other men’s reactions to the death of his wife while he was incarcerated:

Crying in front of a bunch of hardened criminals is not a smart thing to do. They would take it wrong, they would think that because they’re throwing condiments at me that I’m crying. Then I would be a real victim. They wouldn’t stop until they broke ya. If you show any kind of weakness in that environment then they’ll just pick away at you until you break down. It would be a feeding frenzy after that. That’s the worst thing you can do is show any kind of emotion like that. [William]

You don’t [cry or show sadness]. That’s another sign of weakness. It’s - when my wife died while I was inside, some guys said ‘sorry to hear’ but that was it. Don’t go looking for sympathy because they’re not going to like that either. They don’t want drama in here. [Aaron]

It would appear from Aaron and Ryan’s comments that showing concern for other men’s pain is a potential vulnerability as well; this is another way that gender expectations in prison inhibited compassion and intimacy between men in prison and contributed to some men’s overall feelings of isolation.

Alan discussed the problems of finding space to feel emotion when dealing when detoxing from a drug addiction in prison:

When you first detox is that you’re so emotional. You haven’t been in touch with your emotions in so long and then suddenly they all come flooding at you. It’s scary…I was really lucky that I had G--- as my roommate because I could be emotional in front of him. You have to be just plain, straightforward, no depth whatsoever. You can’t show any emotion, it’s true. [Alan]

While Alan agrees that showing emotion of any kind can invite danger in prison, his comments suggest that some prisoners are afforded a degree of leniency. Alan reported that he had a reputation for being a successful drug dealer in the gay community and luckily his cellmate was a friend from the free community he had known for many years.

The pain of constantly monitoring any display of emotion that could be perceived by others as a sign of weakness (and hence invite victimization) is distinctively felt by imprisoned men
because it is so obviously tied to rigid expectations of gender performance in a prison context. Perhaps the most articulate expression of this pain comes from twenty-three year old Ben, who talked at length about his lived experience with survival on the streets and in prison:

It is emotionally, and mentally and physically draining that every single day you have to go onto that unit with that face, that mask. You have to do that tough guy thing and you constantly have to be watching your back and you can’t just relax and be goofy and silly – or even say the word goofy! It is draining, it is exhausting to have to do that for so long and you miss just being able to fucking be yourself. You know what I mean? No one can be themselves in jail, nobody. You always have to put on some sort of mask. You have to put on some sort of *metaphysical armour* that protects you from the shit that you see in there and the way things are to the point that there is nothing other than this. There is nothing out there. There are no parks, or beautiful women or families or girlfriends. There’s no Africa or Asia or Australia, there’s no oceans or water. There is nothing other than this fucking unit. Nothing else exists. Because that is the only way we can exist so that we don’t become claustrophobic and lose our minds and have panic attacks at the thought that we cannot leave this place; therefore, there is nothing else other than this place. Nothing else exists. That’s the only way we can handle it and it’s exhausting being like that for so long.

As Ben’s comments illustrate, the prison mask is painful part of the way that men survive in prison.

The way in which Ben describes the ‘metaphysical armour’ he wears is consistent with research that suggests that a tough façade in prison protects men against victimization (Haney 2012).³⁷ Ben’s comments also suggest another cruel irony in that the mask of invulnerability – while it may serve to protect men emotionally or psychologically from the routine violence that they witness – also ultimately creates emotional pain by undermining their very sense of identity as men and as people. For example, before his first prison sentence, Shane reflected:

> If a person comes at me, I will have to be outside of whoever I have been in my entire life and I will have to do viciously violent things to send a message to everybody else, right?

³⁷ Other men noted that given the lack of privacy in prison there is little refuge from this performance: ‘It was tiring doing time...just trying to keep on top of myself in there. Sometimes I just wanted to be by myself and just lay there ...you’re always hustling. There’s always lock downs. There’s always someone being stabbed. And, there’s always close calls. I got stabbed a couple times.’
In contrast, Lee, a man who had spent nearly thirty years in prison including months of abuse in segregation cells, explains how the lack of feeling [the prison mask] in his view enabled transcendence of pain:

…for some people it’s more stressful than others. I was pretty good at just not feeling anything, you know. Actually, once you get to the point that you don’t give a fucking rat’s ass about anything, that’s freedom. That’s the best right there. You know, to go into the parole board, for example, and to be able to walk in there and tell them to go stick it up their fucking ass. *Fuck you*. That’s it. ‘*Dig him up and I’ll kill him again*’ that’s what I told him, you know. That’s freedom, for me. I didn’t have to worry about nothing, I was free.

*Captives & Captors*

Relationships with prison staff were a painful part of incarceration for most of the men that I interviewed. The majority of men reported at best antagonistic relationships with staff and at worst physically and emotionally abusive relationships. They described a range of interactions: some recalled rare moments of assistance, others described horrific incidents of physical violence.

A minority of men in the study had tenuous but somewhat amicable relationships with prison staff who on occasion used their authority to ease certain difficulties that prisoners had; still, these the men perceived such favours as self-serving and did not consider staff as a resource in the event of serious problems:

I would never, ever fucking report anything. That’s a quick way to get punched out, choked up and sent to PC or the hospital. [Ben]

They don’t say it, but you can go down and talk to the guard working there and say, *‘Can I have so and so as my cellmate? This guy is an idiot’* and they’ll do that. I think they try to keep the trouble down, because it’s more paperwork for them if something happens. [Grant]

I actually got along with some of the guards…you can build a bit of a rapport with them… some of the guards were actually pretty good guys, they would give us extra
breaks here and there and make TV night a little bit more interesting, just generally trying to be a decent human being and show a little bit of dignity…but it’s when something goes wrong that you can’t talk to them. That’s not okay. [Chris]

One person I interviewed recalled an offer of help from a correctional officer. Alan described an incident in which he visited the prison dentist who worked on his teeth in a room with other inmates. He was called back later and informed that the dentist had made a mistake: he had used a freezing needle on Alan that he had also used on an HIV infected inmate. Terrified as a gay man who had numerous friends die of AIDS in the 1980s, Alan did recall a female correctional officer stating her concern for his situation and offering her badge number should he wish to pursue legal action.

Most of the men felt frustration and anger as a result of their relationships with staff. In some ways the distance between correctional staff and prisoners stems from the fact that the staff enforce the deprivation of liberty, autonomy, privacy, and goods and services that the men find emasculating. In other ways, the distance results from a need to conform to the inmate code. Several men explain:

They’re babysitters…you cannot talk to them. If you get caught talking to them, you’re going to – excuse my language – but you’re going to get f*cked up. You are going to get f*cked up. They got their side, you got your side, right? You do not talk to them. It’s up to you to pick a side and if you are a prisoner, you best stick with the prisoners or you are not going to do good time. [Todd]

Some of them like to make you – to push your buttons and try to make you crazy and others are cool people and you can talk to them even though they say it’s not a right thing to do. But if you have the right guard on for a week everything will be fine, but it’s like the next week you might have a shitty guard on and it makes everything really hard for the unit and people. She or he will just do random things to make everyone’s life harder. [Jeremy]

Many men recalled incidents of situations in which they felt the correctional staff were purposefully attempting to make their time in prison more difficult. Many of these grievances
centred on the perception that what little autonomy or goods that they had was being undermined by correctional staff:

When we’d get the newspaper in the morning, she wouldn’t even let us read it in the morning. She would be like, ‘I’m going to read it first then you guys can read it’ She would sit there and take her time for like half the day before she would give it to us, and sometimes she would take parts of it out. We were like ‘listen you fucking goofy bitch, this is our newspaper, it is here for us’ Like, how are you going to take our newspaper and tell us you’re not going to give it to us? Like, go buy your own fucking copy, you know what I mean? [Ben]

This one guard was telling me to make my bed, and I was like ‘it’s not even time for cell inspections yet, I’ll make it when I’m ready. It’s not even ten o’clock yet. Go away’ and we argued for about fifteen minutes and she was like ‘I am going to put you in segregation’ I just shook my head and made my bed…she comes into my room and starts flipping everything over...shaking out all my clothes. I was like, ‘Why aren’t you doing that with all the rest of the cells?’ She was like ‘I can do whatever I want’. She trashed my room. I cleaned it after and that was that. It pissed me off a little bit, actually it pissed me off a lot. [Sam]

The prick ones just try to overpower everybody. Like, ‘Oh, you can’t leave your juice jug on the table’, ‘Why not? We’re using it’ ‘Well okay if you’re using it but as soon as you’re done using it you have to wash it out, you can’t have anything on the table’. They just need something to bitch at. [Scott]

In addition to comments that suggest that prison staff sometimes undermine the prisoner’s autonomy and relationships in the pettiest of ways [denying newspapers; switching letters to various girlfriends], other behaviours suggest that the men felt degraded by some of the routine interactions that they had with prison staff:

Oh sure, I’m a fucking piece of shit. ‘Yes, master. Yes, boss’ [imitates]. That’s kind of what you have to do. [Rob]

I started hating the guards because they stood behind the glass, they screamed, they gave us a hard time for nothing. Basic rule infractions, but it’s the way they came across. They had their pack mentality too. Three or four of them would come on the unit and single guys out…In my opinion they would really berate some of the guys, really belittle them and name calling back and forth. [Shannon]
I got in trouble lots of times because they just power trip over the stupidest things… I’ll be like, ‘I accidentally dropped [his toothbrush] in the toilet, can I grab another one?’ They’re like ‘you already got a toothbrush, I’m not giving you another one’. I’m like, you’re not going to let me brush my fucking teeth, are you kidding me? [Ben]

Some of the men worried that this treatment from officers could result in a self-fulfilling prophecy for prisoners and undermine any possibility for change.

I don’t give a shit what she thinks. It doesn’t do anything to me inside but the next person who isn’t as intelligent as I am, what it does it is brings you back to ‘oh I’m just a drug dealer? That’s all I am, I’m just a fucking piece of shit.’ I think that’s criminal in itself, they shouldn’t be able to say that shit. Okay fine, you’re on day parole and you’re selling drugs and you’re a bit of a scum of the earth. Fine. I still think it’s unprofessional. But somebody that’s doing pretty good? Are you kidding me? [Rob]

The men in the study experienced these interactions with correctional staff as degrading and threatening to autonomy. Some recalled incidents in which they felt the actions of correctional staff put them in serious danger of violent victimization from other prisoners.

As soon as I get there the guard is like ‘Oh, it’s your first time’ like, really loudly so all of the rest of the guys on the unit can hear it. I was just like ‘fuck’ and I looked around and all the guys were staring at me, fucking vultures…that was a scary moment. [Mark]

The Canadian county jails are tougher than the prisons. It’s more violent. The provincial guards are as bad or worse than the inmates. They provoke a lot of the problems…telling other guys about charges that some people are on and in most cases, it’s not true, but if they don’t like a certain inmate the cops will tell them, ‘Hey we need this guy to plea. We don’t have enough on him so make it tough on him in there’ …they can’t go straight out and say ‘hey, this guy’s in for a sex beef’ but they would hint at it…if they put a sex charge on you the other inmates go from there, it spreads like wildfire. [Aaron]
Many men in the study had witnessed masculinity challenges between prison staff and prisoners that escalated to physical violence; such incidents generated fear of assault from prison staff that in many instances deterred reporting a victimization.

I watched him completely start a fight with an inmate and that was completely criminal. Literally...I guess they told the guy to pass his tray and the guy was like ‘fuck you. Come get it’. So they were like ‘excuse me? Fuck you, come get it’. They were like you bring that chair over to me right now. The guy was like ‘you don’t know who I am, you don’t know what I’ve done’ and then the three striper [correctional staff] was like ‘I don’t give a fuck what you’ve done. Get that tray over to me right now’. It escalated above that and they beat the crap out of the guy...you know how many guards showed up? Thirty-five. [Shannon]

A bunch of guards showed up and they handcuffed me and threw me in the hole...I thought they were going to beat me. They beat guys pretty bad for that [perceived threats]. So they had me in this stupid fucking wrist lock that they do. I was like ‘I just want to let you guys know right now I’m not resisting and if you try anything half my family is lawyers, so.’ And they were like ‘Oh yea, tough guy?’ Yeah man, I’m not resisting whatsoever...I was serious, I’m not going to let these guards beat me up and then walk around...I’m not one of these scrubs that cops [correctional staff] can beat the shit out of. Cops will beat the shit out of these guys. It’s just absolutely horrible to do to somebody. [Rob]

Lee, a man in his sixties who had spent nearly half his life in prison and who was released in 1989, recalls violent abuse from correctional staff during his time in a segregation unit:

They were rude man, when they were torturing me that time, they would fucking handcuff me by my legs to the floor then they would come around and throw the fucking mop pail of water on you, then they would come and – I don’t know where they got the fucking hockey stick from – but they would come with a hockey stick and fucking jab you in the back as you’re laying there. They turn that white noise on you, oh fuck, you’re just freezing and it was so fucking cold in there, they take all your clothes and throw a fucking pail of water on you and you’re just fucking laying there [motions shivering]. Then you get your four slices of bread eh? Into the water. Can’t say we didn’t feed you. We went through that shit.38

38 A lengthier description of Lee’s experience in segregation can be found on page 99-100. Similarly, during his time in an American institution Brendan experienced horrific abuse at the hands of prison staff; he shares a story of victimization following a lockdown: ‘They sweep it [personal items] all up into this big pile and they put it in garbage bags. They don’t care. Photos of your kids, letters, stuff like that. That upset me and I got into it with the officers and they literally beat the shit out of me. They put a bag over my head, dragged me into a separate cell and beat the shit out of me. They took my feet and put them across the track and rammed my feet with the door. So they broke my feet. The tops of my feet just broke. Shattered the tops. Then they knelled me down on the bench and they just started beating me up with sticks because I got upset and fought back
I asked some of the men who had experienced violence from prison staff if they reported the incident to police or filed a claim. Sam, a man in his early twenties who had been recently released from prison, recalled an incident in which a correctional officer shook a mechanical lift he was working on in the prison. Sam fell off of the piece of machinery and seriously injured his knee; he became emotional recalling the incident (see our conversation on pages 69-70). I asked him if he followed up on the issue:

I called about ten lawyers when I was in jail, none of them wanted to take the case all because they don’t want to go up against the jail. There was nothing really I could do. I called ten lawyers and they all said the same thing, I basically gave up hope.

Sam’s response echoes the reaction of others who had been victimized during their time in prison; Dan, a man in his fifties convicted of sex crimes against children, explains:

You have no powerbase…no rights…you can’t tell them to write something down in a report…You have no power whatsoever. So when you leave, what is written down in that report is the truth; it becomes the truth.

Each of the pains described here constitute a threat to masculinity (as defined by heterosexuality, control, toughness and invulnerability); and each are ultimately deprivations of security in and of themselves in that they compromise a prisoner’s masculine status - the centrepiece of men’s survival in prison. Consistent with the literature (Haney 2012) the results reveal that one of the ways that men deal with these pains is by creating a façade of invulnerability that they present to other men in the prison through insults, aggressive posturing and violence. Here, I have also detailed the painful ways in which men experience the pressure of constant hypervigilance

Because I didn’t want them doing that to my stuff. That really upsets me when they go in there [your cell] and take your stuff because of some other incident that happened in the prison. Brendan did not report the victimization because he feared more serious repercussions.
regarding their public expressions of violent masculinity.\textsuperscript{39} Next, I address the second central question of this chapter: How might the pain of doing gender in prison translate into violence?

**Emasculation, Pain & Violent Conflict**

Many men and boys are socialized to externalize their problems in aggressive ways (Kimmel 2008; Katz 2013) and research suggests that men’s anger is predicted by fear of other emotions (Jakupcak et al. 2015). In a prison context, men experience pressure to wear a ‘prison mask’ as they routinely witness the negative consequences of appearing ‘weak’ (Haney 2012). Given the perceived risks associated with emotional vulnerability or submissiveness (Haney 2012) and heightened expectations to perform violent masculinities in a prison context (Ricciardelli et al. 2015; Sim 1994; Weenink 2015), it is not surprising that anger is the key emotion associated with the pain of deprivation that the men in the study report. Chris suggests that violent conflict gives men an opportunity to deal with the multiple pains of incarceration that they experience while maintaining conformity with expectations of violent masculinity:

If you give me attitude it will give me a reason to get rid of some anger that is going on inside of me. Plus, you’re in jail. If you come across as a bitch, you’ll be treated like a bitch. If you come across as weak, you’ll be treated as weak. They’ll bounce you off and throw you in PC. I’ve seen lots of guys come in off the streets. They’ll come in and the next day you’re gone… I got beat up a lot in there… Buddy came up to me in my room, boom! Didn’t like me I guess, that’s the thing, you don’t need a reason. It’s a way to vent their anger and to play the tough guy role.

Chris’s comments suggest that the pains of imprisonment produce a kind of generalized anger that easily translates into violence in this setting.

\textsuperscript{39} Chapter 6 illustrates the instrumental and expressive functions of this mask.
Similarly, Mike’s comments illustrate the way that multiple pains intersect and translate into violence toward other men. Here he reflects on the pain of maintaining a relationship with his girlfriend while in prison, the loss of control, boredom and violent conflict:

It’s everything in life, when you’re in [prison] everything adds up and you have nothing but time to think about it. When I’m out here [free community] and something is bothering me or I have a problem, first of all I can do things to fix it…there’s actually something you can do to change what’s going on.. Secondly, I can do things to take my mind off of it. When you’re in [prison], it’s a helpless feeling. You feel helpless because you can’t get out...You can’t change anything. You can’t control anything and on top of that you have nothing but time to think about it. If something is bugging you, it’s going to bug you the whole day, and the next day, and the day after that because there’s nothing else going on. That kind of shit can stress you out. Especially since, you know, it leads to fights and stuff.

Earl elaborates on the how feeling threatened can translate into violence:

There were times that I felt threatened…if you sit around and wait for the threat to happen, you could be in a lot of serious trouble; if you take the threat, and you hit it right on the nose, that’s a whole different ball game.

The deprivation of autonomy paired with the deprivation of relationships and a lack of stimulation, in Mike’s estimation, leads to fights [physical violence] among men in the prison; Earl’s comments support his sentiment.

When interpersonal problems interact with the deprivations of prison life, eventually the negative feelings that imprisoned men experience can manifest in aggression and violence over what they have described as “the littlest things”, including chocolate bars, pencils, coffee or reaching over someone else’s food. Boredom can be a significant source of stress for male prisoners in particular because without anything to do they are left alone with their thoughts. Idle, unoccupied time is dangerous for male prisoners because of the need to maintain an invulnerable persona. Men expressed concern that if they spent too much time thinking about their situation, they could become emotionally vulnerable and thus open to victimization from others. For several reasons, boredom and a lack of stimulation are painful and possibly criminogenic: 1) the monotony
of jail life and a lack of opportunities to engage in activities that might boost self-esteem or reaffirm a sense of masculinity (such as paid employment) is a form of deprivation; 2) a lack of stimulation is threatening to men’s public gender presentation – too much idle time can manifest in emotional reflection and sadness, which if detected by other men could be interpreted as vulnerability; and 3) men must strategize to fill idle time and avoid this problem, and since personal safety is a chronic concern this time can and is used to make weapons for self-protection.40

The results suggest that boredom is relevant to the relationship between, pain, conflict and violence. Some men in my sample discussed becoming “stagnated” as a result of prison life characterized by ‘the same thing every day, [the] same scenario’ [Earl]. For instance, Mark feared that the monotony of prison was affecting his intelligence:

Being trapped in that room for sixteen hours a day. I was getting anxious. I think I was becoming stupid. I started not being able to do simple addition, we were sitting there playing crib writing out our scores and I’d be like ‘thirteen plus twelve is...’ and I felt like I was just becoming stupid. There is nothing in there to keep your brain stimulated, everything is just brain-dead and nothing but stupid fucking people in there. I was one of the only people in there who had been to high school, most of them hadn’t even been to high school.

Several men described their attempts to alleviate boredom as “pathetic”. Scott recalled something referred to as the ‘raisin on a string game’,41 while Rob described more mundane activities:

Well, it’s pretty pathetic but I just walked laps around the fucking unit. The units there are pretty small, like, I just walked back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. I can’t sit down and watch tv all day. Some guys can, but those guys are all medicated up. They’re just sit there and watch the idiot box. But there’s only so many channels you get, and you’re in a little cell. You just go stir crazy. That was...

40 During his thirty years in prison in Canada and the United States, Earl saw many types of weapons: “It’s amazing how much creativity can come when it comes to making weapons...vital spots in your neck, your eyes, your heart. A pen. A pencil, it’s over. You don’t need a knife, it helps. Some guys, they have swords! How the fuck do you make a sword? It’s unbelievable but I’ve seen it”. Other examples include cans of tuna in a sock, sharpened metal and melted toothbrushes, and one person even described how to make a gun from paper.

41 Alicia: Why do you think people cause drama in there? Scott: Bored. Boredom. Like, when they play the raisin on a string game. They got one guy there, he was, everybody got along with him. But they got a raisin from the Raisin Bran in the morning, and they got a long string from one of the sheets and they tied it around the raisin. It was a piece of string about six or seven feet long and he swallowed the raisin, and the string just kept going down, and down until he got it so it was just at his lips, then he started pulling it back up and when it got to where that little flap is, for when you’re breathing or swallowing, I don’t know what it is called, he got to there and then he yanked it out. He ended up throwing up a little bit into a garbage can but fucking, it was entertainment. [pauses] It sounds pathetic, but that’s entertainment in there. Everybody was fucking laughing [laughs]. Yeah, it’s boredom, so you’re going to do something whether it’s good, bad, as long as it’s entertaining. Whether it’s making a weapon or whatever, it just kills time, right?
brutal, being in that place. There’s just so little to do. You can doodle, like I was drawing out some football plays for coaching and stuff but, there’s only so much you can do before you just go nuts. [Rob]

Another way that men deal with the pain of boredom is by telling stories. The gossip, rumors and stories that men tell other men in prison about their sexual conquests, or material items that they had on the outside serve two purposes: 1) to regain some measure of control in response to being deprived these things; and 2) to alleviate boredom by creating amusing conflicts and thus opportunities to display power and dominance. For example, Russell explains this relationship as “creating mayhem”:

There’s nothing better to do other than create conflict, or get someone sent down to seg or whatever. It becomes its own soap opera. It’s something to do. You’ll get put up to punching the next guy out who comes in. Or they’ll take a weaker guy to earn some sort of respect. Or they’ll say hey we want you to go punch this new guy out because this is what he did or they’ll say something and make up some shit or whatever and away you go. If you don’t do it, you’ll probably get beat up…there was never a moment where I felt safe because you never know what people are talking about.

Another source of conflict that nearly all of the men in the study mention are the phones. This is because the telephone is one of the only ways in which men can gain access to information regarding their families and loved ones on the outside and some measure of control over their lives. As illustrated earlier in the Chapter, the whereabouts and activities of girlfriends and partners in the free community is a significant source of stress and anxiety and men feel emasculated by a lack of control over these relationships. Second, speaking on the phone is a public performance and men may have to negotiate multiple masculinities simultaneously (i.e., showing affection to a girlfriend or responding emotionally to learning about the death of a family member while maintaining a tough front to other inmates).
The significance of the phone in maintaining social relationships intersects with deprivation of relationships, boredom and masculine performances in important ways. For example, Aaron and Chris describe how these factors quickly escalate to physical conflict:

Guys like to phone their wives or their girlfriends and talk to their kids and there are arguments...some guys in there would take the phone up for ten of fifteen minutes and they’d be babbling about nothing and there is a line-up of six, seven, eight guys waiting to use the phone...get off and let the next guy use it...some guys would say ‘get off the phone’ and they would get smashed. [Chris]

Arguments in jail [are] usually over stupid little shit. The phone. You’re living on the phone all day long, I’d say ‘fucking get off the phone’. And then it depends on how they react. If he said, ‘no fuck off, get it later’ I can’t allow someone to talk to me like that in there [jail]. You’re going to let that guy punk you off like that? It’s a system where everybody is bored. They love to see action like that. If there is any time to push someone else into causing some chaos, they will. [Aaron]

Ryan noted that conflict is welcomed as a way to alleviate boredom: ‘Everybody loves a train wreck, right?’ Additionally, conflicts over phones can be important status moments in masculine performances. For instance, one young man recalled being violently attacked when he used a phone with a knot tied in the cord because he failed to recognize the knot indicated another man’s ownership of the phone.

The loss of liberty generally is another painful experience that produces anger that possibly manifests as violence. As Scott explains:

You’re in this box and it’s just depressing. You start thinking about why you’re there and it makes you angry. It doesn’t help you to reflect and think ‘I need to change’ it makes you think, ‘Fuck. I’m going to kick somebody’s fucking ass when I get out. This is fucking bullshit’. It’s just an angry environment and it makes you more pissed off.

Earl’s comments echo this statement:

Now they’re getting more violent because a lot of the institutions are double bunking. And triple bunking, imagine that! That’s crazy!...you’d probably never know the real stats, like violence because of double bunking...I bet you the numbers
are high...let’s face it: you put three dogs in a room...and you open that door, what do you think it going to happen? They’re going to try to get out and they’re going to bite you because they’re pissed off. I would imagine! You know? I think people are the same way; if you keep them in a cell for x amount of years they’re going to be pissed off. You’re going to have troubles.

Similar to other domains conducive to violence in which multiple people with different amounts of power and intimate knowledge of one another co-exist (such as the household) (Sacco and Kennedy 2012), crowded cells can easily produce violent conflict. For example, this interchange between Mike and I highlights the way in which such circumstances can produce violence between men regardless of their criminal status:

Mike: There are conflicting personalities and you’re stuck together in a tight space. A lot of guys and a lot of testosterone. Eventually there’s going to be fights. I think if you throw forty college students, not even criminals, but forty college students together in a place like that eventually a lot of them will get into fights too.

Alicia: They did do that… [describes the Stanford Prison Experiment]42

Mike: That’s middle class kids, right? Now take the people I’m with. Take those kids out and put in a bunch of murderers, drug dealers and gangsters and see what’s going to happen. It’s obviously not going to be a pleasant situation.

The results also suggest that living in crowded living conditions with other angry men threatens men’s sense of dignity and autonomy over their lives which potentially erupts in violent conflict as a means to regain control and demonstrate dominance. This environment creates conflict that is resolvable with violence because it is a way to expel a noxious or offensive roommate from the cell and thus secure more personal space:

So many people don’t get along with their roommates and they just end up punching them out. That’s what they do, you just smash them out to get them to leave. Some dirty skid guy comes in and some other guy who has been in the cell for a long time, and this new guy is all disgusting and gross. [Jason]

He called me a goof! If he wouldn’t have called me a goof I probably would have just turned it off and said ‘Look I’m trying to sleep’ but he was like ‘No, I want the TV on you fucking goof’ so [motions violence] I smashed him... these little things that cause all these problems. It’s two guys in a cell, we’re not going to get along every time [laughs] There’s one toilet, two guys! Sometimes there are three guys, and you wonder why people are going to the hospital and dying in jails. You can’t put three people together in a little five by something cell, there’s going to be an altercation... I’m not double-bunkable. I came in and I made that very clear to the guards, the first time I came in and they put me on the range and put me in a cell I smashed the guy and they threw me in the hole. I did two weeks in the hole and then I said, ‘Look, I’m not double-bunkable. I don’t play well with others’ and I got my own cell after that. [Chris]

Violence is a way for men to deal with the pain of confinement and crowding that achieves instrumental goals (expelling a person from a cell) while claiming masculine dominance. More generally, loss of privacy is painful and threatening to men’s sense of masculinity as it creates vulnerability and rouses fear of sexual assault. Not surprisingly, this fear can translate into aggression and displays of toughness in response to this deprivation:

It’s the first thing you learn, that you don’t look in someone’s cell, but how do you learn that if you don’t look in someone’s cell? So I made the mistake... I just got spat right in the face... ‘what are you looking in my house for?’ and I don’t know the rules. I don’t know anything. It’s not like you get a sheet of paper saying ‘Welcome to [federal] jail, we hope your stay is...’ you know? [Dan]

The relationships that the men in my study had with the majority of prison staff with whom they interacted was a source of pain that exacerbated the pain of the loss of self-determination and feelings of being degraded by the prison and its representatives. The pain that resulted from these interchanges could be considered criminogenic. For example, being denied access to the phone by correctional staff in the event of the death of loved ones is painful and angering; for some men,

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43 In turn, violence can cause lockdowns. Lockdowns lead to an additional source of strain and prompts violence against men who caused the lockdown. Brendan explains: “So now, we want to find out what happened. Not only are we not allowed out. Who did this? What happened? Usually a message will come down that this person did this because of a gambling debt or something. That happens a lot. So usually, then we find out – was it our race that did it? Was it the whites that did it? Was it the Mexicans that did it? Was it the blacks that did it? There’s a lot of people that lose visits when you’re locked down. You can’t see your families. You don’t get mail, no phone calls, nothing. So it [lockdown] causes a big thing and we have to find out who caused it and what it was about. So if it’s your own race, then you have to handle that situation. If I found out it was a white person I would be pissed off because then it’s on me too.”
these are tipping points (Tittle 1969). Lee recalls this incident during his lengthy period of incarceration in ‘the hole’:

My dad had just died…I wanted to go to his funeral or do something, but instead I’m sitting in the fucking hole. I got thrown in the hole because I wanted to make a phone call but ‘No, No time’. So I took the bucket of shit and I fucking threw it at the guard’s head.

Shannon, who had more recently been released from prison, recalls his generalized anger toward the prison staff and how this translated into conflict that put prisoners in danger:

Shannon: I was just fucking pissed off. I put all my mattresses and stuff by the door, I lit it on fire – I had a lighter – I lit it on fire which was stupid because I almost died because the smoke filled my room. They came in with their masks and tanks on, ripped me through the burning muck and took me off to seg.

Alicia: What were you mad about that made you light the fire?

Shannon: Nothing in particular, I just wanted to piss them off…there was an us and them mentality, there were no good guards there. They’re fucked up too…the shit that they…they would dry fire the AR in the bubble, they would go ‘click, click, click’ [pretending to shoot prisoners] That’s a form of intimidation, right? I grabbed my water bottle and whipped it at the glass. They’d say ‘what the fuck are you doing?’ I’d say ‘what the fuck are you doing?’ Then I’d go to seg on a serious charge of intimidation that they made up. I did a lot of fourteen to thirty day seg bits there.

Finally, the multiple and intersecting pains of imprisonment that men experience: loss of liberty, autonomy, dignity, the emotional, physical and psychological toll of exercising constant hypervigilance with regards to potential breaks in a masculine performance; being belittled, degraded or harmed by prison staff; dealing with the fear of physical and sexual assault or that the prison experience will change their very identity in some fundamental way – and being disconnected from family and loved ones on the outside - might be more than the average person can withstand. Ryan described dealing with depression and desperation in prison:
It [prison] was all mentally defective…that’s what got me to a place where there was complete shut downs. My eyes were like a void cheque, there was nothing behind them…no spark, no nothing. At moments maybe it was there ‘I can do this’ – but then, nothing.

He went to talk to the doctor about his suicidal feelings but then recanted his statements for fear of being put on display in the ‘nut ward’ which he described as ‘complete humiliation at its finest’. He recalls: ‘when I went and talked to the doctor I was like ‘I was just joking’, but I wasn’t. I wanted to kill myself’.

Considering all of this, some violence can be a result of having nothing left to lose: ‘…he doesn’t give a shit, he’s lost his kids, maybe he’s lost his family because of his incarceration’ [Dustin] or it could represent one final strategy to alleviate pain in a way that continues to conform with gender expectations of men in prison and in society more generally:

Ryan: Complete depression…so a lot of times in my mind I was like ‘I’ll be lippy to everybody and maybe that one guy over there will just do it’ [kill him], you know?

Alicia: You tried to incite violence –

Ryan: Toward me, yeah. In jail I was at a point where I wanted to die.

Sadly, the conversations I had with Ryan suggest that a desire to die could produce violence because unlike suicide by some other means, instigating violence serves this goal in a way that conforms to expectations of gender performance in prison. Additionally, this finding is consistent with research that suggests men are more likely than women to use violent suicide methods such as guns and hanging (Denning et al. 2000; Tsirigotis et al. 2011).

44 Here, Earl elaborates on how violence is related to having nothing to lose: “Sometimes if a guy I angry he’ll wait for another guy to go to a certain place but a lot of the times they don’t wait for shit. If a guy is doing a life bit and he’s gotta stab somebody, he’s just going to go and do it. Whether he’s going to spend time in the SHU, it’s irrelevant.”
In sum, Results: Part One of the research suggest that the gendered pains of imprisonment as men experience them translate into violence and conflict in a number of important ways. Prison is a gendered total institution in that the pains it presents are emasculating for men; and for a multitude of reasons vulnerable masculinities are dangerous in a prison setting. The men experience constant worry: *Are you going to make it through the day? Are you going to get jabbed? People snap for no fucking reason* (Pat). Thus, responses to these strains often represent efforts to regain control, gain or re-gain status, or protect oneself emotionally in ways that maintain a tough façade that conforms to gender norms in prison and is therefore unlikely to elicit social control from other dangerous, angry or emasculated men in pain. Because masculinity is relationally constituted (Connell 2005), the men’s survival strategies typically contain some factor that is exploitative, violent or harmful to other men. Each pain of imprisonment identified here is threatening to masculine dominance in prison – thus the pain that men experience is particularly relevant to any explanation of prison violence and likely violence among men more generally. The next chapter considers Part Two of the results: the nature and form of conflict interactions between men, resources for dealing with trouble in prison and how men’s strategies for conflict management reflect conformity or resistance to the gender expectations in prison, otherwise known as the ‘inmate code’.
CHAPTER SIX:  
RESULTS  
PART TWO  

MEN IN TROUBLE

This chapter attempts to disentangle the complex relationship between pain, masculinity, violence and conflict at the micro-social level in a prison setting. I detail the routine nature of violence in the men’s lives, identify the informal codes of conduct that govern norms of masculinity and relationships between men in prison, and the dynamics between deviance and social control that shape men’s socialization and acculturation within the prison. This section also details the connection between men’s social status in the prison and their gendered perception of risk and the consequences and costs of violating the prison code. Finally, I compare violent and non-violent conflict management strategies, men’s micro-resistance to the deprivations of prison life and the narrow expression of masculinity so many feel pressured to perform.

Routine Violence

The study is comprised of men who have spent time in remand centres, minimum and maximum security institutions across a period of time ranging from the late 1960s to 2014. Total time served in custody ranged from thirty days to over thirty years. Men in the study ranged in age from twenty-two to mid-sixties. They were incarcerated for crimes with varying degrees of severity: stealing cheese from Safeway, public rioting, arson, assault, drug trafficking, sexual assault against children and multiple homicide. Regardless of time served, institution, criminal history or other variables like age or socioeconomic status every person in my study reported that they had witnessed and been involved in a violent altercation in some way in prison. In each case, the impetus for violence appears to be a response to a perceived threat to masculinity.
The men in my study report being acutely aware of the chronic, omnipresent threat of danger that imprisonment poses and the way in which violence can erupt during the course of daily routines and in response to the tiniest perceived affronts to face. Men described the majority of the violence that they witnessed as caused by “nothing” or “the stupidest things”:

Yeah, it is a very dangerous place. You can do the smallest things and get in trouble for it. You know, you could put your toast in the toaster before somebody else and it can lead to getting a beating. The stupidest things like that. [Grant]

…there were these guys he had beef with and they were basically trying to kick his ass. One night before hand he put a metal coffee pot in the freezer and it was full of water, so in the morning it was frozen and he grabbed this coffee pot and went up behind the guy and smashed him in the fucking head with it, it did some pretty good damage to the guy and then they jumped him in the shower, five guys and they broke his jaw…it’s just what goes on in there. [Scott]

I’ve looked in cells and seen people just lying in pools of their own blood. It’s fucked…Broken arms and legs, people fucking knocked out cold and taken out on a stretcher…I’ve seen people stabbed up…One guy in the unit next to me…He took his tv and smashed his roommate’s head in while he was sleeping and he died. Yeah, I’ve seen some pretty gruesome shit man, people – you see some pretty gruesome fights. Just blood squirting out of people’s heads and shit, you know?...Countless, countless, countless fights. Literally the epitome of the word countless. I can’t even count how many. And it’s bad, I’ve seen about five or six people taken out on stretchers, fucking people who have been stabbed up in the face and they’re escorted out of their cell with a towel over their face drenched and dripping in blood. Fucking, so much shit man, people stabbed up, hot buttered; all sorts of shit. I think I was in six or seven fights. [Ben]

I’ve seen people put hot butter in the microwave to the boiling point and throw it in someone’s face. There’s all sorts of shit. That’s the harshest one, or butter and sugar together. When it gets to a boiling point and it becomes liquid, good luck. [Pat]

The men in my study reported that they had witnessed tremendous violence and dealt with the chronic fear of not knowing when violence could happen, over what or against whom. Violence occurred during the men’s daily routines; while they were showering, having breakfast or asleep in their cells. Several men described violent altercations they had with other men over coffee, juice, or use of the microwave.
Again, part of the way that men dealt with the routine exposure to horrific scenes of violence was by building up a tough persona and putting on the prison mask. The mask, or the wall as it is sometimes referred to, protects against violence but also serves as an emotional defence mechanism. Ben explains shutting out thoughts of the free community \[\text{there is no Africa, no Asia, no beautiful women}\] and donning the mask as a way to deal with violence and strain. Importantly, this coping mechanism conforms to masculine codes of self-presentation in prison.

The mask and the suit, the metaphysical armour that you wear...\[\text{the trauma of witnessing violence}\] is part of what it is protecting. This [prison] is your world, this is all that there is in this entire world and everything in this world is completely normal. Fighting is completely normal. Seeing people’s heads bashed in is completely normal. \text{That’s what you tell yourself.} That is how I’ve made it through everything in life, by making it not a big deal. I’m looking at years in prison, my ex-girlfriend is looking at life in prison. Immigration wants to deport me right now. My family and friends are dying all around me, like all this fucking shit. It’s normal, man. \[\text{[Ben]}\]

The chronic presence of victimization combined with the gendered pains of imprisonment informed the process by which men become “acculturated” to the prison environment. As a process of structural accommodation, a code that defines ‘real men’ emerges and governs prisoners’ conduct regardless of their private inhibitions about the values it embodies. The results suggest that the social norms that govern interactions between men in a prison setting are informed by broader constructions of manhood in mainstream culture.

\textbf{Codes of Prison Masculinity}

Despite Earl’s suggestion that prisoners “don’t like rules”, there are numerous informal codes and rules that prisoners create and maintain by socializing new inmates into the prison culture. Each of these rules appear to be a response to the threats to masculinity that the deprivations of prison life create. These rules are often enforced with violence and this type of social control most often reflects an attempt to ‘save face’ in a way that conforms with gender
expectations (either proactively or in response to a perceived affront). In turn, violent interactions perpetuate and reinforce a gender prison code that maintains a hierarchy among dominant and subordinate men. The results suggest several codes that are consistent with previous literature (Trammell 2013; Ricciardelli 2014) as well as Canadian research that reveals that despite the voracity with which codes are enforced, they are routinely broken (Cooley 1992).

*Being solid* is one important code that a number of men in the study mentioned. Being solid was defined in the following way:

Solid means be a person who’s not a dickhead, or a snitch or a thief. Be somebody reliable and keep your mouth shut. [Shane]

Solid is, you don’t rat. Not just crimes you’ve done but inside too. If the guards come and ask you questions about another inmate, you don’t know. Go and ask him. That’s solid. In other words, be yourself; what you’re supposed to be. [Aaron]

As these quotes illustrate, being solid is often defined in terms of conformity and in relation to other men who are unsolid and hence not real men. These included men who had spent time in protective custody, had stolen goods or property from other inmates, who had spoken to correctional staff under circumstances not considered appropriate, informed on another inmate for any reason, and most importantly men who had a been convicted for a sex crime against children. Some older men expressed concern that inmate solidarity was eroding and that the notion of being solid was changing or taking on an inferior character:

In the old days, you go to court. They give you a sentence and you stood up. In other words, you didn’t testify against your co-accused. That was solid. Today solid is used a little bit different... you can’t *tell me* you’re solid, you gotta prove it. When I say prove it, I gotta know you *for years*. Solid is exactly what I told you: you don’t testify against your friends. We made the choice to do this crime, we got caught. Now we gotta do the time. That’s all there is to it, and that’s the way it used to be. Today, I would never do crime with 99% of the people if I was still involved. Three out of four of them are gonna turn over, guaranteed. [Earl]
…when I was in [prison] in 1991 there were very few snitches, now the snitches outnumber the solid guys! If you get into debt you drop a kite on a guy that’s what you do. It’s every inmate for himself, they’re not even against the cops [correctional staff] anymore. Solidarity is a thing of the past, in both countries. [Aaron]

The results suggest that being solid is a form of masculinity that men enact though exchanges with other incarcerated men and their actions in the free community which shape the reputation that they bring with them to the prison. Being solid is a benchmark of a ‘real man’; one who does the right thing and conforms to the prison script. The paradox, as it is for men in the free community, is that “the test of being real somehow comes down to how well you live up to a made-up script” (Katz 2013:20).

A second important norm of prison that several men identified is expressing solidarity with other inmates by not notifying correctional staff of any activities they might be engaged in that could elicit formal social control. This is referred to as not ‘ratting’. Ratting is read as an indication that a person is not solid and in turn, not a real man. Other synonymous slang in the Canadian context include “cheese-eater” or “furback” (Michael 2012).

Alicia:  Why do you think this idea of “ratting” is so important in prison?
Grant:  Because it’s them against us. They have their set of rules [the prison] and the prisoners have their set of rules…if you go and talk to the guards about something, it can get you killed. You don’t want to be known as a rat. If you are, you’re in trouble. You’d be checking in, they’ll put you in PC.

Men were expected to uphold this norm regardless of the circumstances even if they had witnessed fatal violence, were in danger or victimized by other men or needed medical attention for a serious injury. For example, Brendan was seventeen when he was incarcerated as an adult in a federal institution in the United States. He experienced a sexual assault by his cellmate, an older man in
his sixties. When the correctional staff asked him what happened, he replied that ‘he tried to make me suck his dick’. I asked Brendan if the correctional officers offered to press charges against the man, to which he replied: ‘Oh no. I wouldn’t have let them do that. Press charges. Because then you’re a snitch. If you press charges then you’re a snitch. It doesn’t matter what they do.’

Drawing attention to a situation that could potentially elicit formal social control from the correctional staff is another type of ratting referred to as dry ratting. Sam, a twenty-two year old man, explains:

Don’t be a dry rat. Like, say I was beating someone up and they start screaming, not directly at the guard but the guard hears it. Or if I beat them up and they get a black eye and they come on the range and the guard sees it and asks who did it, that’s being a dry rat. [Sam]

Enacting behaviours that suggest a rat masculinity signal to other men that one is claiming a subordinate position in the prison social hierarchy; he is not solid, not a real man, and hence he is vulnerable to victimization with impunity. Men who had been physically victimized learned to cover their injury by telling correctional staff that they had ‘slipped, fell out of bed’ [Grant]. Prisoners routinely witness the cost of being unsolid; several men shared examples of situations in which they avoided being labelled a rat or a dry rat:

Shannon: The guy went in there [shower] to stab him, buddy was doing him through the curtain and he didn’t really know where he was hitting him. Buddy came flying out of the shower and he had stabbed him, he had a big hole in his neck. He made it down the hallway the guy got him a few more times, then he made it down the hallway banged on the door and then fell, dropped…the guards…dragged him down the stairs and then the helicopter came. It’s pretty scary. I knew it was going to happen.

Alicia: Did you say anything about it?

Shannon: Nope. Never said nothing about guys planning violence.

Alicia: What would have happened if you alerted the correctional staff that this was a planned stabbing?
Shannon: It probably would have happened to me! I would have went to protective custody...not an option.

Many men had examples of being injured and not seeking medical attention because it would be dry ratting that could lead to dangerous rumors that invite victimization or prompt an investigation that could lead to a move to another facility. Todd recalls literally sewing himself up in prison following an incident in which another man stabbed him in retaliation for a previous stabbing that Todd had done:

Todd: You don’t want no questions marks about you. If you go to the medical there’s going to be a question mark and then rumors fly in jail. Takes a whole lifetime to build a reputation and one rumor can destroy that.

Alicia: So rumors are a dangerous thing in jail?

Todd: Oh yeah, very dangerous.

Alicia: What kinds of rumors do people spread in jail?

Todd: Guy’s a rat. That guy talks to police. That guy’s family is cops. That the guy’s a child molester...[if] they want you out of the way, they’ll try to spread rumors around you.

This conformity with the norms against dry ratting and the way in which Todd solved the problem of his injury by sewing himself up also reflects conformity with broader expectations of masculinity that are threatened in prison (autonomy, self-reliance); he explains:

I’m not going to seek medical attention. I sewed myself up. You get pretty self-sufficient in there. We look after our own, we don’t want to look for help.

In the previous chapter I identified that the deprivation of privacy as gendered in that it translated into vulnerability and roused fear of sexual victimization. A norm that appears to emerge from the deprivation of privacy and reflect the men’s attempt to regain some control over their immediate circumstances is a rule against rubbernecking.
Rubbernecking is when you walk by a room and look in. Don’t be a rubber neck. That’s a rule in jail. You never know when you’ll walk by and see a guy with another guy on his knees…If they’re going to do that [have consensual sex or commit sexual assault] I ain’t going to say anything to them. You’re better off keeping your eyes straight and not rubberneck. Don’t be a pervert…You’re invading a person’s privacy when you look into where they are and to some people and that’s all they have in there and because they have it they own it very viciously. So they will be vicious about defending it, you know what I mean? [Chris]

Others expressed concern that if they were to glance into someone’s cell it could be construed as disrespectful, possibly signal homosexuality, or invite violent retaliation. Rubbernecking ‘is punishable by getting smashed out’ [William]. Other aspects of the prison code that men reported included things like ‘being extremely hygienic and clean, to the point of obsession’ [Ben], not stealing, not reaching over other people’s food, not flushing the toilet after certain times or flushing it too many times. Another offence is whistling in prison; you can’t whistle in jail you’ll get thumped out for that [William]. Whistling reminds men of their painful lack of liberty and freedom: You don’t whistle because birds whistle and birds are free [Dan].

Together these norms of behaviour could be interpreted as a code of masculinity because many of the rules appear to protect that which the prison system denies: autonomy, control, independence and so on. These are losses that men experience as painfully emasculating, as detailed in the Chapter Five. Though the code includes notions of solidarity among inmates (being solid; not ratting) it also serves to perpetuate the unequal distribution of power among prisoners by awarding status based on the degree to which a prisoner is able to demonstrate his conformity with an idealized and hegemonic masculinity (being solid). As illustrated here and in Chapter Five, many men exercise constant hypervigilence with regard to their gender presentation, and some men actively police the gender presentation of others. The code itself thus creates opportunities

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45 Cheeriness of any kind could potentially be met with violence; Ben recalls: ‘On Christmas morning, my first Christmas in jail somebody was acting too happy and cheery, saying “Merry Christmas” to people and someone fucking knocked him out with one shot. The dude was shaking and convulsing on the ground. It was too cheery and people didn’t like that.’
for status conference and status degradation: making claims that another man has violated the code by being unsolid – in other words, initiating a masculinity challenge – means a chance to “put on a credible manhood act” and possibly survive another day in the ‘snake pit’. In Chris’s words the code is ‘...not really rules but a way of survival’.

**Learning the Code**

Masculinity challenges commence the moment a person enters the prison and inexperienced prisoners must learn quickly if they are to survive: William recalls, ‘immediately when you walk on the range, people are eyeballing you and if you show fear, you’re going to get victimized’. Men learn the prison code in a number of ways. I asked the men about how they learned the norms of the prison subculture when they went to jail. For some, the set of informal norms that governed their interactions with other men on the street or in other male-dominated subcultures and domains was more or less consistent with the prison social norms. Others learned the norms of the prison when their inadvertent non-conformity elicited violence or other forms of social control. Still, others had the benefit of mentorship from other prisoners or former prisoners who gave advice on what to expect.

I learned the hard way… I learned not reach over people’s food by getting stabbed in the hand with a fork. That’s how I learned [laughs]. It’s not like buddy said ‘you know, you shouldn’t be doing that because next time I’m going to stab you in the hand with a fork’…What am I going to do? Go to the guard ‘oh buddy stabbed me in the hand with a fork’ [imitates] No, you’d get punched out. [Chris]

Often the norms of behaviour were contingent on the status of individual men or the circumstances of the situation. The men in the study reported that the rules were broken often; people did indeed steal in prison and inform prison staff.\[46\] The informal norms that operate in

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46 In one extreme incident, Todd called for the help in response to witnessing “...the worst thing I’d seen in jail...I watched six black guys pull a female guard into a cell and start raping her. It was pretty traumatic. That was an incident where I actually yelled out that a guard was in trouble.
prison are also often contradictory in nature and different for men contingent on their social status in the prison; this created a situation in which some men became even more hopeless:

Just do your time. Don’t always be secluded in your cell. Guys get annoyed at that…One guy was like ‘Man, there’s brooms all around. Sweep. Do something’. But then, even that – it’s like ‘oh look, he’s showing off’…that [reconciling contradictory codes] was a hard thing to get through. [Ryan]

I asked him, what are the rules? Tell me what I need to know. First time in, man. He said ‘don’t run the water after ten o’clock or flush the toilet. Don’t – when you get up in the morning, let the far table get their stuff first’. They call it the bus. It’s a table with eight seats on it. Table number one is entitled to things first. You don’t touch their stuff before they’re done…You’d get a warning first, hey man this is how it works. The second one is whap! At the same time, it depends on who you are. [Chris]

Consequences for violating the code vary according to the social status of the offending party; men with less social status in the prison, those who had little prison experience, few friends or resources, found it difficult to conform to the contradictory way in which the code is enforced. Other people described learning how to relate to other men in prison, how to joke without eliciting violence, and how to gain status through the illicit drug trade.

As illustrated in Chapter Five, the stories that men tell in prison are important ways that men do gender in prison in response to being deprived access to material wealth or opportunities for heterosexual pursuit. Many men noted that people make up stories for status ‘to seem cool’ [Sam]. Stories, gossip, and urban legends also play important roles in perpetuating the prison social order and maintaining conformity with the prison code. Several men told stories about violence in other prisons or their own but were not sure if they were true; or heard them second-hand from a

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That’s something that they [correctional staff] shouldn’t have to… just the screaming noise. I actually think if I could have got in that cell I would have helped her out. That’s crossing a line. She was in trouble and that’s really not something you should do.”
friend. These stories served to perpetuate the hypervigilance that they exercised in terms of monitoring their gender self-presentation:

…This one guy was rude about the juice one day and refused to give a guy a cup or something. The brooms there, you can unscrew them and it is kind of sharp at the end. He went and unscrewed a broom, and *fucking impaled it through his face.* Over *juice.* So that’s like, pretty fucked up! I wasn’t there when it happened, but it was one of those really popular stories that everyone talks about. I know of the guy who did it, I don’t know him personally but I know of him. [Ben]

Other stories were coloured with themes of spectacular displays of masculinity; such as a member of a provincial football team who challenged an entire unit of prisoners to fight him if they had a problem with his sexual assault conviction. Some stories were moral warnings about the costs of being ‘weak’ in prison; such as stories of sexual assault. Other stories were presented as humorous tales of the often degrading struggle for daily survival; such as being caught in compromising or vulnerable situations by correctional staff while attempting to smuggle drugs.47 Such stories are important ways that men learn norms and expectations in prison and deal with the gendered pains of imprisonment.

**Staying Safe(r): General Strategies**

The men in my study strategized to protect themselves in ways contingent on the resources available to them. Some men felt the transition from their outside life to prison was smooth as they had the social capital necessary to protect themselves:

Todd: I remember I was scared when I first went there. But I remember the first day there, it was like I was surrounded with my own people. I just learned how to live in prison, how to get by with no money, just making brews and hustling dope. It was a very easy time for me. I was well-liked, I got along with everyone. I was considered one of the shakers and movers in there. Just because the connections I made.

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47 Shane told a story of a prisoner attempting to smuggle drugs in an Easter-sized Kinder Egg. With his pants removed, while expelling the egg, he was caught by a correctional officer.
It made my time and paved the road for me to do jail time good. I knew how to live in there and I knew the dynamics of everything.

Alicia: You mentioned that you sold drugs in prison and made homebrew – was that a way that you stayed safe?

Todd: It was a survival mechanism, to stay safe. You hang with the higher ups. There’s a pecking order in there and everywhere you go. The ones that have the contraband and the dope in every house [cell], that’s the higher ups in the pecking order. If you’re up there, you can’t be touched.

Other men like Chris described strategies to become aligned with men like Todd, who had a reputation as a mover and shaker in the prison; alternatively, men with some degree of status tried to distance themselves from contaminating others:

You just try to get in with the – I don’t want to say ‘decent people’ because fuck, you’re in jail – but you just try to get in with the guys that are the big wigs on the tier because then you can stay safe. You get in with them, you eat good, if you have problems you talk to them, you go to the gym with them, you help make dinner with them and stuff like that. I guess you could say, be a part of it, as retarded as that is. [Chris]

I’ve seen some of my childhood friends in PC…there was this one guy…he and his friends got really drunk and they murdered this little thirteen year old kid…just a little innocent white kid with glasses. I was like you guys are fucking goofs man. I was playing hand ball in the yard and he came and banged on the window…I just shook my head and walked away from him. We call it the dark side. Oh he went to the dark side... But it’s worse than that, he’s a fucking goof I don’t want to associate with someone like that, fucking murdered little children for no reason? That’s fucking goof shit. Clown shit. [pauses] [Ben]

Men with status and well-established reputations for violence that they had developed over time on the street and in various prisons or as a result of their criminal connections were less vulnerable to exploitation and victimization; these men did not become friends with men with unsolid charges. Other men tried to associate themselves with men with status as a means of protection by association.

As in the free community, reputations are built over a period of time; it can take years to gain the respect that affords protection in prison. In this way, men with limited or no incarceration
experience or who are not well integrated into a friendship network within the prison have a more
difficult time protecting themselves. Dustin is a man in his early thirties who explained how the
reputation he had crafted over the previous decade continued to protect him following the loss of
his eyesight; he explains:

I have a certain reputation, everyone who has known me knows that I don’t take
shit lying down. I earned that respect; so, I’ve never lost that respect, I’ve never
ratted, I’ve never broken any of the prison codes.

Men who had a degree of respect for being solid were able to gain status within the prison and thus
dominance over other men through their involvement in the underground drug trade. Being skilled
in organizing the delivery, distribution and sale of drugs in prison was an important way that men
survived; by gaining status, aligning themselves with other powerful friends, and securing some
measure of economic and social power. Similarly, men like Aaron, Dustin and Ben were able to
capitalize on a skill set in order to insulate themselves by increasing their value in the prison social
system. In addition to building up a solid reputation, Dustin is skilled in cooking and baking and
used this to make friends and money in prison. Aaron and Ben had experience with writing, filing
documents and handling paperwork and often helped other men with their legal cases, petitions,
grievances against the prison and letters to family. Importantly, Aaron also felt he gained some
small measure of control and exercised resistance to authority by ‘rattling the cages’ of prison
staff in this way.

Men in my study had mixed feelings regarding involvement in the drug trade. Those who
imported these skills from the outside and were connected with a network of alliances found it a
helpful way to survive; others regarded it as dangerous in the potential it has to attract attention
from prison staff, or the trouble one might find in terms of unpayable drug debts were they to
become involved as customers in this economy. Some considered smuggling drugs or other
contraband into the prison as a way to avoid victimization upon entry; Shane, who had served time in prison for burning down his house, explains:

Shane: I was also told, if you’re going to jail to load up.
Alicia: What does that mean?
Shane: Fill your bum. If you’re going to jail bring in packages. Bring whatever you can, tobacco. Especially if you have federal time. If you can bring in things you will make your ride. There are guys that will beat the crap out of you if you come in with nothing. I never did it…they call it hooping.

Other general strategies that men had for self-protection involved following the prison rules as they understood them. When asked about how they stayed safe, several men reiterated their intention to conform to the norms of the prison culture and avoid trouble by being ‘the best inmate’ [Shannon] as measured by this standard. For example:

Have respect and keep your circle small. I’ve heard that more than a few times from some of the lifers. The more people you talk to, the more beefs that you get dragged into, the more drama, the more people stopping by. [Rob]

Do your own time. It means mind your own business…when you start meddling in other people’s affairs, it’s just like on the outside. Nobody likes that. [Shane]

My strategy was just to stay quiet. I come out to eat and I go back in my cell. A lot of guys do that and the rest of the guys that are out playing cards are all pals and it’s all about jail because that’s their life and they just eat it up. I don’t want no part of it. I just did what I had to do, stay quiet and stay out of everybody’s way. It’s the best strategy. [Russell]

Other men tried to be honest and up-front about their charges in order to avoid rumors that they were unsolid [a sex offender or a rat]. For example, Shane, a man convicted of arson after burning down his house, recalled that he tried to let other men in the prison know the details of his crime before there were any questions of his solidness that could invite victimization:

I need to own it. I can’t hide it from anybody – especially the animals. That’s the worst part of this whole equation. That’s the unforgiveable part of this. If I don’t
own that and let people know it will come back and bite me in the ass but if I beat you to the punch, then you can’t interpret it any other way...if you conceal it, they think you must have done something bad because you’re hiding it...[described being in pain] all I need now is to be in jail and have some guys thinking ‘oh yeah, that guy murdered animals’, that’s a bad crime in prison...by confessing, the truth will set you free. [Shane]

The control of discrediting information is a serious source of concern for men in prison with charges that could be perceived as unsolid by other men.

Ultimately, the most significant self-protection strategy that men had was simply symbolically or literally defending their manhood (being solid, being a real man) through the vigilant maintenance of a tough front. Mike explains:

You just have to be alert, really alert, always be smart, and always watch your back. If you’re scared – like, if you’re scared, man, you’re going to end up getting hurt. You just can’t be scared. You just have to be really alert, really smart, always looking over your shoulder...Always ready, and if you have to, ready to fight. You can’t hesitate. If you hesitate, you’ll get stabbed in there... if they got the chance they wouldn’t hesitate.

This strategy produced (and inhibited) a great deal of violence.

**Code Violations: Masculinity, Social Control & Conflict**

Violations of the gender code of conduct in prison are often met with violent expressions of social control that define particular men as social deviants. These men are defined as inferior and relegated to subordinate positions in the prison social hierarchy. The results suggest that part of the reason that men’s gender performance is policed with such voracity by other men is that violations of the code symbolize or signify resistance to the hegemonic definition of masculinity on which the unequal distribution of power and resources is predicated in prison. Some men have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo in prison in order to protect their privilege, and others fearing victimization are complicit in perpetuating inequality in this way in the interest of
staying safe. Each of the conflicts in which violence was produced centred on some question of respect and power, and the perception that another man is attempting to undermine or degrade the other party (often publically) in an effort to secure some measure of status for himself. Thus masculinity challenges, violent or not, are significant in the creation and re-creation of dominant and subordinate groups of men.

**Being Tested**

Toughness or conformity to the gender code in prison is played out in masculinity challenges in which men put on credible manhood acts that claim membership in the dominant masculine group. Testing one’s position against other men is a way to achieve this goal. Newly admitted prisoners in particular, are tested in a number of ways. Consistent with other research, these games determine which men will play the various social roles that exist in an institution (Kaminski 2003). The results suggest that initiation rituals reaffirm the heterosexuality of men who instigate them by capitalizing on other men’s fears of sexual assault in prison:

> I mean, we would fuck with people. Some of the heavies would *fuck* with people. One of the first months I was in there one of the heavies was joking about how he went into the computer room and there was a new kid on the unit, young kid and he whipped out his dick and was like *‘if you want to stay on the unit you have to suck my dick right now’*. He practically made the kid cry…He wasn’t serious, he was joking. [Ben]

Several of the men in the study recalled incidents where they had been sexually taunted, harassed or assaulted; others recalled humiliating and frightening other men into submission in this way. For instance, Ben recalled another ‘hilarious’ story of a friend who crawled naked into the bed of a new inmate as a ‘joke’. The disproportionate violence that gay men experience in prison could be informed by the threats to sexuality that prison poses. Other examples include stories of violence against gay men in prison, socialization rituals that involve sexual threats, and the array of prison
argot that defines men with any display of non-conformity with heterosexual expectations as subordinate or inferior.

Other initiation rituals served to maintain some men’s dominance by signifying their knowledge of and conformity with the code by tricking another man into violating it:

We used to fuck with people so hard, all the time. We get these phone cards and they’re voice activated … it’s so nuanced, even the tiniest little thing different and it won’t work so it gets really frustrating. So what people ended up doing was making blow cards. When they did the voice activated thing they would just go [blows] and blow into it and it always got it right. So what we used to do to people is tell them it’s a whistle card. You have to go up and whistle into it [laughs]. These fucking poor bastards would go on the fucking tier and they’d be sitting there whistling into the phone like [whistles] and like, the whole unit stops and stares at them and people start yelling like ‘Shut the fuck up or we’re going to smash you out!’ [laughs] Right, so then they’re like ‘oh fuck’. Yeah, you can’t whistle in there.

Guys will play jokes on [new inmates] like ‘Hey, you got you swim trunks?’ ‘No’, ‘Oh you got to go ask for your swim trunks because there is swimming on Thursdays’. So you go oh okay, ask the guards for swim trunks and they’ll go ‘The boys are fucking with you. There’s no swimming pool.’ [Shane]

These types of tricks serve to communicate to new inmates that they are in dangerous territory by portraying those who play the tricks as clever, more experienced in the norms of the battlefield, and hence impenetrable. ‘Fucking with people’ is a performance that asserts a claim to dominant masculinity by positioning subordinate men in dangerous and humiliating situations while at the same time alleviating boredom and building up protective alliances with other dominant men (heavies who are entertained by the trick).

Intimidation and bullying are common ways that some men survive in prison; by performing dominance over other men, they in turn enhance their own status by making a claim to a superior position – or signify to other men that the territory [prison unit] has been claimed. This is a particular problem for men who are unaffiliated with powerful others (such as those who are in gangs or associated with a network of drug dealers in prison or outside):
If you’re picking on someone – I guess it would be a status thing. It shows that you’re not scared to fight, and you’re not afraid to stand up for yourself. Usually the guys that are picking on people, they’re bullies, and they’re weak people. So they usually go for the weak people. Some of them won’t fight back. [Chris]

Then they throw other guys in the mix with them [gang members] and those guys who are coming in they have to fight for their meals...They’ll take their meals and give them a bag of noodles and tell them to piss off. ‘No I want my meal’, well then you get thumped out. Then you don’t get no noodles or your meal. The guards know what’s going on...they don’t want to change the system. [Shane]

Intimidation and bullying are strategies to achieve status that some men used and others experienced. William recalled having condiments thrown at him by other men while he was talking to his sister on the phone about his mother’s death: ‘I had already missed the funeral...I was trying not to cry on the phone and I got these tattooed up gangsters throwing things at me, condiment packages and stuff’.

**Rumors & Dangerous Labels**

Rumors are a significant source of anxiety for men in prison. The fear of acquiring a discredited stigma is justified considering others are quick to capitalize on the opportunity to publically reaffirm their dominant group membership by violently victimizing a person perceived to be a sex offender or a rat:

Somebody puts something on you in there, you’re stuck with it. You could destroy a guy if you get three or four guys to say you’re a skinhound. That’s it. That’s what you are. If they put that jacket on you, you wear it right? You’ll suffer the consequences; if they don’t like you they’ll make something up.

Aaron and Dustin recalled producing their ‘paperwork’ in response to incidents in which another inmate accused them of having been convicted of sex crimes; both men responded with evidence of their solid character. Dustin explains:

A lot of the gossip in prisons are, you’re either a rat, or you’re a sex offender, and this or that until you prove otherwise. I had this one guy...he was going around
saying I was a hound. He didn’t even know me from a hole in the ground, so I took
my criminal file and I went into his house and I threw it on the desk and I said
‘here’s my criminal record, where’s yours?’ He was like, ‘well, uh’ and I was like,
‘No, I want to see it’ and he’s like ‘well I don’t have it’ blah, blah, So I said, ‘you’re
going around calling me a hound, when you’re a hound and you’re trying to hide
it?’ I said, ‘No, that’s not working.’ So that problem got dealt…you don’t go around
accusing me of being a hound when I’m not. [Dustin]

According to the men in my study, by far the most dangerous stigma in prison is being convicted
of a sex crime; and worse, to be admitted into the general population with this stigma. ‘Rats’ and
‘hounds’ are ‘on the very low end of the totem pole’ [Dustin]. Several men in my study described
their great disdain for men with sex related offences, particularly those against children. Their
actions against them indicate that sex offences are the epitome of unsolid; the definition of what a
man is not. Aaron recalls the fate of men with sex related convictions:

If they don’t kill them, they’re going to beat them to the point that they wish they
were dead. I saw one guy that is a complete vegetable. Two guys found out about
him and got him in the TV room and just gave it to him. He’s just done now. He
might as well be dead.

Men with these crimes were met with fatal expressions of social control; men who were wrongfully
accused of these crimes protected their reputation violently. Men with lengthy sentences who had
lived in prison long term appeared to have the most negative attitude toward sex offenders whom
they did not want to live with in the general population. Lee recalls:

Lee: I got into a beef with a guy, basically it turned out he was a fucking
skin hound, which is – I don’t know if you know the terminology,
but he’s a fucking rape-o. I killed him. I beat him to death. And then
I got an extra thirteen years for that.

Alicia: How did the beef with the skinhound start?

Lee: Well he shouldn’t have been in the fucking jail to begin with.

Alicia: So he was in the general population?

Lee: Yeah, he snuck into the general population – they tried to integrate
these fucking creeps with normal people…It don’t work. They’re
still doing it today, and people are still paying the fucking price for
it. It’s ridiculous, because they know, if you throw a fucking skinhound in with a normal guy, the skinhound is getting killed. Automatic. It’s just the way it is...nobody wants these fucking guys around. That’s the way it is. If you throw a fucking diddler in there with me I’m going to fucking beat him to death every time. That’s just the way it is. Simple.

Dustin’s comments echo Lee’s sentiments:

Child molesters get mistreated the worst, which I believe is justly so. I’ve done it myself. I’ve gone after a diddler, just because he’s a diddler, no personal reasons or nothing. If you want to rape women and children, well, you’re going to get yours. Pedophiles and rapists don’t do good time in prison.

Some of the men suggested that the prison staff were complicit in maintaining the violent rejection of sex offenders from the general population as well as violence in response to sexual crimes that happen within the prison:

Yeah, like there was a guy in [a province] max who, he tried to fucking – he put a knife to a kid [younger inmate] and tried to fuck him, in the pen. So we set him up and fucking broke every bone in his body... That was hilarious, we had him in the gym and a couple of guys worked him over just like fucking professionals. Like, fuck. I was just by the door eh, but it was brutal...it wasn’t even tolerated by the fucking warden...they had a fucking meeting in the gym and the warden says ‘blah, blah, blah’ whatever, and ‘as far as this guy that just got this beating’ he said ‘I’m only going to ask you guys this once, who did it?’ and that was it. [Lee]

A lot of people these days are integrated, child molesters, rapists, sometimes they kind of sneak in [to general population]. And sometimes a guard would even say, there’s one next door to you. And we’ll deal with him. I’ve always been that guy to do those things...someone has to take care of him. Someone has to take him out, it’s wrong, it’s not a good thing. They’re to be in protective custody. [Jeremy]

Other men described correctional staff leaving newspapers with circled stories that were meant to indicate ‘this guy is in here with you...get him’; often these were ‘unsolid’ men who would subsequently get violently checked off or bounced off the range by other men. Undoubtedly, sex offenders are among the most marginalized and subordinate men in the prison.
Fighting Words

Some words in prison carry serious connotations and put men in a position of having to respond violently or accept that they own the label and by extension accept membership in a subordinate and inferior gender category. In Canadian prisons, the most serious of all words is: goof. Every person in the study recognized this to be the most threatening attack on masculinity. A person uttering the word in the direction of another man is making a claim that the other man is inferior and unsolid. Especially when spoken in the presence of other men, goof is interpreted as a serious offence to face and from here a working agreement to violence is established and a character contest begins (see Luckenbill 1977). Much is at stake in conflicts initiated with the use of this word as ‘losing’ the interchange results in status degradation that invites victimization and ridicule. Here Shane and Aaron explain:

Goof is the word that means its go time. You could call somebody anything, you’re an absolute dickhead, you’re a tool, you’re the worst kind of human being – you can say whatever you want to somebody and they’d be like that’s okay. But, ‘you’re a goof’ [challenge] ‘I’m a goof?’ [perceived offence to face]. Those are fighting words. It implies everything insulting in one word to convicts. I do not understand why. Goof is the word that holds the secret to violence. [Shane]

If you turtle or walk away then what they’re saying is true [that you’re a goof]…One guy calls a guy a goof, that’s fighting words in Canada. If you don’t go [fight], then you’re ostracized at the very least... If a guy calls you and says ‘hey, come on, we’re going’ and you don’t go [fight]- then, again, he’s weak. You don’t want to be weak…if you’re running your mouth and you get called out on it and you don’t go, then you’re weak, or a guy calls him a goof. That’s what you say to a guy to get him to go. Usually you go into a cell and take care of business and then it’s over. [Aaron]

Altercations that involve the word goof are status conferring moments that can quickly escalate to more serious violence when one of the respective parties uses a weapon to compensate for a size difference:
He called me a goof! Inside you don’t say that to anyone, that’s rule number one…he called me a goof and he gave me a bitch slap on the side of the head, I didn’t see it coming. Then he walked into the common room, the games room…I grabbed a cue stick and I whacked him out over the head. It’s a precarious situation right? People are getting angry, good days, bad days. Just nothing – nothing at all can set someone off…I had to [use a weapon] there’s nothing I could do going up against this young guy. He’s a big boy [laughs]. I went to seg and I did my seven days and when I came back up I was fucking, a hero. Boom! I’m on the head table, I’m doing good. I’m watching my back. People look up to that. I took out one of the biggest guys there, it was cool. It helped my time go past. [Pat]

_The Criminal’s Handbook_ is written by C.W. Michael, an author with extensive experience as a prisoner in the Canadian criminal justice system. Michael defines the word _goof_ as “the most insulting name to be called in prison; also an invitation to fight” (2012:321). My findings support this and I will also add that this is particularly insulting to men because of the masculine inferiority that the word implies. In other contexts this word refers to a silly or stupid person who makes mistakes or spends time idly; this contrasts markers of hegemonic masculinity – independence, self-reliance, and competence. Indeed, in prison a goof is *not a Disney character*.

**Violence as an Instrumental & Expressive Resource**

In many ways violent masculinity is constructed as a cultural norm (Katz 2013); thus, it should not be surprising that some men who are systematically denied access to legal means of resolving disputes use violence instrumentally to exercise social control (see Jacobs and Wright 2006; Rosenfeld, Jacobs and Wright 2003). Sociologists have explored the complex ways in which violence among men in positions of structural disadvantage reflect attempts to reduce violence and victimization and maintain order and a degree of social stability (Anderson 2000; Jacobs and Wright 2006). Prison is a violent place largely populated by men who experience intersecting social disadvantage. The sociological significance of violence in prison lies in the expressive and instrumental function that it plays in this setting. Men in the study use violence expressively to
define others’ behaviour as wrong or to make a public claim to masculine dominance. Instrumentally, violence is a resource for proactive or reactive self-protection used to secure survival resources or avoid violent victimization. Here, I explore the symbolic and practical ways that violence protects men in prison.

In a prison context, only the strong survive, and strength is measured by an ability to defend oneself violently or use violence to gain status and respect. It is a form of symbolic communication that tells other men that they are impenetrable survivors:

It’s a life. It’s life inside and guys that spend a lot of time in there, that’s all they know. It’s all based on respect and lack thereof. And, if you lack thereof you’re dealt with and you’re dealt with in a – there are consequences. Physical consequences and that’s the only language that people in jail understand. You don’t talk it out, that’s how you speak to people in there- with violence. You get beat and that’s all there is to it. Only the strong survive basically…Violence is the international language. It doesn’t matter if you’re black, white, Chinese, or if you speak English even. It doesn’t matter. You understand getting punched out and that’s how it works. If you’re the biggest badass in prison at least you’re something, right? [Russell]

Sociologists have demonstrated the ways in which crime and violence are resources which some people use to express social control; to define another person or their behavior as morally inferior or wrong (Black 1989; de la Roche 1996; Jacobs and Wright 2006). Violence serves an important expressive function in prison because it communicates the norms of conduct in prison and the consequences for breaking the rules. For example, informal mechanisms of social control in prison work to deviantize thieves.48 Theft threatens another man’s property and by extension his ability to put status on display. Violence defines this norm:

Alicia: If someone steals something like that, like a chocolate bar, how would you respond?

48 Or worse, box theft [theft from a cell].
Dustin: It would be an automatic fight. If I found out that someone stole from me or I caught them red-handed, it would be dealt with right then and there. There would be no ‘let’s go for a walk and talk about it’. No, you stole from me and now you’re going to pay the price.

The violence that characterizes prison life enforces the prison norms and encourages conformity; and paradoxically prevents further or more serious violence from erupting. Here, Lee explains:

People are not always violent but sometimes they are. You can work it out with people and sometimes you can’t work it out. It depends on what it’s about. Usually, it depends on how fucking far you want to go. One time, I don’t know what was going on with these three cocksuckers, I got into a beef with one of them and three of them came up to my fucking cell and I don’t know what the fuck they were planning to do to me, they had a bar, a pipe… but I managed to get one of them, my thumb into his eye and I said ‘back off and get the fuck out or I’m pulling this fucking eye out’, you know? Take your pick, you can have no eye and you can get me, but I’m taking your fucking eye on the way. They backed off and then it got settled later, right, with nobody dying…I just said ‘what the fuck?’ you know, the beef was between me and one other guy. He didn’t want to fucking go one on one, fuck off then, you know? Done. And his buddies just apologized and that was it. It was already sorted out, and this guy tried to get these other people to join his campaign right, they didn’t want to go the fucking distance. They were there to support him as long as he’s going to win. But, as soon as it looks like somebody’s going to start losing eyes and stuff then it’s a whole different thing. That’s the reason why it got settled, either you dummy up and or I’ll fucking bury you. That’s the reason why it stopped initially, ‘you want to keep going? I’ll fucking kill you right now’ or you can kill me, I don’t care which one.

Violence and aggression are also used against prison staff in circumstances where a prisoner perceives that he is in imminent danger. For example, Scott experienced an allergic reaction to rubber gloves while incarcerated. The other men were concerned by the irritation on his skin and threatened to violently coerce him to leave the unit. He explains:

I was on the gang range… the guys saw my hands and they were like ‘What the fuck is wrong with your fucking hands? You better fucking, get that fucking sorted out or you’re fucked’ Right? They’re going to beat the shit out of me [to secure transfer to a different range or protective custody]. I asked to go to healthcare and they said they could get me down there in a few days, so I was like ‘No, I need to go now’ Again, they were like ‘fill out the paperwork, we’ll get to you eventually’. I had my
plastic cup and fork and knife and spoon in my hand, and I fucking threw it at the staff and I said ‘No I need to go fucking now!’ So then they took me down and fucking threw me in the healthcare seg [segregation] in there.

Aaron recalled a similar life threatening situation that erupted over a spider bite.

In the absence of other means of conflict resolution (escape, avoidance) violence becomes an important preventative measure in quelling further or more extreme violence. One important function that preventative violence serves is the protective maintenance of a tough façade – the prison mask that is so central to prisoners’ limited emotional and physical security. Earl explains the expressive function of violence in this way and Brendan recalls forming a plan upon entry to a maximum security facility at seventeen [in America]:

I stabbed a number of guys inside…it’s something that you have to put out there because it was a form of protection too. If people seen that you were willing to go out there [use violence], like I broke a lot of knee caps inside too… So, if people seen, you had this what do you call it – façade. They know who you are, they know you’re violent. All those people that I stabbed and hit with a baseball bat, I could have killed them too, but I didn’t. Instead I injure them. So if you have this façade, if you have this ‘you can’t fuck with this guy’ façade and it’s also a tool, a survival tool. Right? Word gets around, just like on the street, you don’t want to fuck with this guy because he will step out, he will do something. So it’s a tool, it helps. [Earl]

My plan was to hurt somebody. Right away. So that others would be fearful, they won’t think I can be pushed around. There as a situation where I had an opportunity to do something. We were all in the shower… I looked over and I saw this black guy taking a razor blade out of the holder and he was putting it onto a toothbrush while he was shaving. He was two sinks over, and there was another guy in the shower. I was watching him and he was taking this razor blade and putting it on this toothbrush. I was thinking what the fuck is he going to do?… I look over and he was going to attack this white guy. There’s a rule in there, you can’t let someone attack your race. You have to do something about it. You don’t sit there and let it happen. The guy in the shower was white and he was going to turn around and stab him. So that was my opportunity to go do something. I took care of that black guy and I took care of him I got respect from that. [Brendan]

As Dustin and Earl’s comments illustrate, violence serves as an important mechanism for building up a tough, impenetrable façade, gaining the respect of other men in the prison and
importantly acquiring the status necessary to survive in this subculture. Violence in many ways defines one as a real man, a solid man who stands up for himself, is not victim, and survives the most difficult and violent circumstances. This is a familiar construction of manhood that plays out in a number of popular films in mainstream culture (particularly the war genre).

Violence also serves an important instrumental function in maintaining status once it has been accomplished. Using violence to punish someone who has violated the prison code in a way that threatens another, more powerful, man’s masculinity is a way to protect a reputation that might take years to accomplish. Men who developed a reputation for propensity to use violence were afforded a degree of protection against violence; still, even men with status felt they had to use violence instrumentally in appropriate circumstances in order to maintain this persona and prevent others from usurping their power:

Alicia: What kind of reputation do you think you had in prison?
Brendan: Someone to be feared. That’s the way I built up my persona, to be feared. For people to be fearful of me. I’ve had guys try to take me on.…that’s what happens is you get into a position [of authority]. You have the keys [means] you control a certain area of the prison…He didn’t like the way I was running it and he wanted to come after me. He wanted to take the keys away from me. He wanted control over the car – the population of guys you’re looking over. …So as soon as they came in it was a big brawl. We had knives. People got hurt. A guy got stabbed. He got hauled off and I never heard from him again.

Without using violence to reaffirm one’s conformity with the dominant masculine script, powerful men face the potential for the relentless harassment and testing that plagues men with less power in the prison social hierarchy. For example, Dustin recalled a conflict over cigarettes that escalated to physical violence. He noted that the other man was in the wrong and had he not responded violently there would be serious consequences:
People around the prison would catch wind that I backed out of a fight or I allowed this guy to take advantage of me. And if that was to happen even once, then other people are going to come around and try to test me all the time. I was past that point. I don’t need to prove anything but he did try to come onto me and so I took care of it. He lost his carton and he lost the fight.

The results suggest that inciting violence is ironically an important avoidance strategy in conflict management. Outright avoidance, in public view of others, such as backing down from a fight, suggests weakness and hence membership in a subordinate gender category. For many men checking off into protective custody is not an option because it is perceived to be the most status degrading move in the chess game of survival in prison. Admitting oneself openly to protective custody means admitting one is unsolid, a goof. This is a stigma that follows a person for years, across prisons and can come with serious violent consequences in criminal circles in the free community and jail. Mike explains the stigma of checking off into protective custody when you have a reputation among criminals:

People find out. It is not an option. It’s not an option for most people. I wouldn’t do it, I would rather quit. At that point in my life [a gang member], I would rather just die than do that because it would just ruin your whole life…my friends wouldn’t talk to me…it just means that you’re scared, I don’t know. It’s mostly sexual assault guys, pedophiles and shit that are in there. So first of all, you don’t want to live with people like that…I wouldn’t want to be there even if it wasn’t so damaging [to reputation]. I still wouldn’t want to be around people like that…if you ever end up on a regular range again, the next time if you are ever incarcerated. If anyone finds out, if they get to your paperwork, or someone knows…[Mike]

Men who were not connected to a successful criminal network or had little status in the prison were less hesitant: if you think you’re about to be seriously hurt, you might want to consider checking off the unit [William]. Mark who had no previous incarceration experience or criminal connections and who was incarcerated for thirty days for his involvement in a public riot; he requested to be admitted to protective custody following a death threat on his first day in prison.
Solid men, however, cannot publically run from a conflict in prison; so, an option is to put on a performance – to incite violence in a way that attracts the attention of the correctional staff and hence results in a move to a segregation unit. This is known as a solid check off:

Checking off is not necessarily going into PC. It’s saying *please move me units because I am scared to be on this unit*. That’s not tolerable. Sometimes people will do something called a solid check off which is something that is very frowned upon and we [solids] don’t like that. It’s when you go and scrap – because we always go to the cell to scrap out because we don’t want the DVR to catch it or to see it - so in a solid check off sometimes it is right in front of the bubble, in front if the guards. They want to leave the unit but they don’t want to check off necessarily, they’ll just punch somebody in the head and scrap them out right in front of the guards so that the guards will move them. But it’s a solid check off because they did it right in front of the bubble, but people don’t like that because they still know what they’re doing. So they get to move units – it looks like ‘I’m knuckling up’ [building a tough front] - but no, you’re doing it in front of the guards so that they can move you units.

Mike explains his use of the solid check off in response to hearing a rumor he was going to be stabbed in the shower:

I just randomly hit a guy just to get out of the range. I wasn’t going to check out [PC], right? If something like that happened [shower threat] the only way you can get out of the range and still keep your reputation is to just get in a fight. Any fight. Just find a guy, grab him, and beat him up and they’ll [staff] drag you out and put you somewhere else, right? They’ll put you in seg for like a week. So pretty much every unit that they sent me to, the same thing would keep happening. There are three or four main guys, the warden, then the couple guys they have the stripes, under the warden, there’s like three or four guys. Sergeants, or something…so that guy [correctional staff], he knew what I was doing [by getting in fights] but he still kept sending me to different ranges. They should have just left me in seg. I did that, then the next place, because these guys already spread the word throughout the whole jail [that he is a rival gang member] so every time, the next morning I would get in a fight on purpose and try to get sent back to seg…[Alicia: when you were fearing that someone would stab you, did you have any other options in terms of how you could get out of that situation?] No, it was either check into PC or keep doing what I was doing.

Violence, as a conflict strategy, is gendered for men. The solid check off, if undetected by other inmates, accomplishes two things: 1) it presents violent masculinity in conformity with the prison
code [expressive violence]; and 2) it results in a move to a segregation unit where one is
temporarily protected from more extreme violence from other inmates [instrumental violence].
The gendered nature of violent conflict management also explains why violence among men tends
to escalate in the presence of third parties; the results suggest that men feel pressure to perform
violently in front of other men in order to gain status and respect – to save face – and also, inciting
violence in the presence of men with access to formal means of social control could result in
avoiding victimization in a way that continues to conform to a hegemonic masculine script.

Rumors or threats that one is in danger warrant serious concern for prisoners. Consistent
with the analysis of literatures presented in Chapter Two, the results of my study suggest that
threats are typically acted on in prison. This is likely due to the fact that the painful and
emasculating deprivation of privacy and liberty that men experience obviously means that there is
a constant presence of many male third parties. The presence of other men witnessing a potential
fight is criminogenic in a prison context because as illustrated in the previous chapter, men are
bored in prison and will welcome any opportunity to alleviate this pain. Other inmates, as third
parties to a conflict interchange, also often have a vested interest in policing the gender
performance of the combatants: they encourage violent displays of aggression because this
conforms to social expectations of ‘real men’ in prison. Finally, third parties bear witness to the
outcome of a masculinity challenge and men know full well if they refuse to escalate a situation
or back down from a fight they are in grave danger of being labelled ‘weak’ or vulnerable and thus
open themselves to further victimization in the aftermath of the original conflict. Ben explains:

Empty threats don’t really happen in jail. If someone is threatening you, it will turn
into a beef pretty quick. I can’t remember a whole lot of times someone being like
‘fuck you, you’re a goof’ or ‘I’m going to smash you out’ or ‘you’re getting done’
and it not turning into a fight. The thing is in jail everyone watches you, and it’s so

49 No matter how ‘pathetic’, recall the raisin-on-a-string game.
quiet that when an argument goes down, even a voice gets raised a little bit, everyone can hear. *All eyes are on you.* That’s a big part of the external factor of it, why so many times it turns into a fight because everyone expects you to fight, and you know everyone expects you to fight. So whether you want to or not, almost every time someone starts arguing it turns into a fight, you rarely ever see empty threats because other people will get mad and want to punch you out. Like, ‘*oh you’re talking all big and you guys G-bombed each other, you guys threatened each other, you guys are both clowns*’. There has to be a deciding, ‘winner’ or whatever.

Another type of third party is relevant to the escalation of violent conflict in prison: *heavies.* A heavy is “a prisoner who is or thinks they are a big shot” (Michael 2012:321). Violent interchanges might result in prison from a command from a heavy to two men of lesser status who are often invested in gaining traction in the prison social order. These orders could be to serve the entertainment needs of men with status, expel an unsolid from the realm of real men, or to resolve a previous beef between respective parties. Ben recalls his experience:

Alicia: What do you think fights are about in prison?

Ben:  

[laughs] Honestly, they’re about nothing. Some of them are about absolutely nothing… ninety percent of them are sanctioned by the guys at the back table. They have to give the go on it, otherwise both the guys are fucked. They’re not going to be able to get back on the range. Because when a fight happens, you get locked down and if it’s a bad fight you can be locked down for a long time and you’re inconveniencing everybody…Sometimes, the fights would go down because I was told to go check people off units. I was one of the youngest, smallest guys and that’s how it works in there. If you’re new or young and impressionable or anything, then they make you go put in work, like earn your spot there. They do that to a lot of the young guys. Sometimes I was told ‘*oh this guy’s a rat*’ or ‘*this guy’s no good, you have to go check him off the unit*’. So, I wouldn’t even know this guy or anything but I was told to do it so I had to. I would go into his cell and just lace him up and tell him ‘*you got to go*’.

In sum, violence serves several important functions in maintaining the prison social hierarchy and inducing conformity with the gender prison code. Ordered violence reinforces the power of dominant men and provides an opportunity for men lower in the hierarchy to showcase their worth. Instrumental violence allows men put on a masculine performance for others and preserve or create
a tough façade - or escape a violent situation without publically losing face. Violence is an expression of conformity in this setting; a means by which men do gender in an environment that relentlessly attacks them in painful and emasculating ways.\textsuperscript{50}

\textbf{Non-Violent Conflict Options & Costs}

Despite the tremendous pressure on men to perform violently in prison, violence is not always considered by prisoners to be necessary or appropriate in all circumstances. Some men had secured a remarkable degree of social status in the prison because of their violent reputation and did not have to engage in violence themselves in order to control other men or maintain their power. In short, the invulnerable or idealized masculinity to which they had made claims was successfully accomplished and accepted as ‘fact’ by other men. Thus, the results suggest that non-violent conflict resolution options in many ways \textit{grow out of violence}. Violence is neither senseless nor random as it is sometimes claimed to be (Best 1999). Prison violence is strategic, complex and in significant ways functional in maintaining social order and masculine hegemony while perpetuating an unequal distribution of power among men. In prison, violence both produces and prevents violence.

Degrees of social status, resources and power in prison are significant in shaping whether a prisoner has access to non-violent conflict resolution options. Earl, a man who had successfully established reputation for violence both on the street and in prison, explains:

\begin{quote}
When you’re on your own you have to step it up a notch because there’s nobody there to protect you. If most of the guys are mean, you have to be meaner. If you’re willing to take it to a different level, which I was, because I had to protect myself. I’m not looking for excuses, but that’s the way it was. That’s the way I survived. So I took that from outside to inside. Ever since I started getting involved with crime, to be honest with you, I had no problem with that aspect of it. Being mean, or
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{50} See Chapter Five: Results Part One.
meaner. Again, it was a tool. I’m emphasizing this tool, it was a tool. Later on in life if I just raised my voice, a lot of times that was enough. ‘He’s pissed off, we don’t want to get him pissed off’. I didn’t have to physically do anything because I’d already done it for the last twenty years. I had a temper and I had done [violent] things but later on in life it worked out to my advantage. [Earl]

The men in my study who reported extensive criminal histories and connections both inside and outside the prison (such as Dustin, Earl, and Todd) found to a great degree they were able to rely on their violent reputations to avoid violence; with the rare exception of enforcing the rules violently in situations where their power was directly challenged by another man.

Men with less social status than the heavies or the movers and shakers were only able to use nonviolent conflict management options when there was little to no risk of a loss of masculine status in the interchange. Some of these conflicts included situations in which the opposing party accepted the subordinate masculine position. Sam’s conflict over a television remote illustrates this dynamic:

Somebody stole my tv remote. I made a deal about it I went on the unit and said whoever took my remote is a fucking scumbag. Basically I was calling out whoever stole it. If one of them did steal it and didn’t say anything, then that means they’re a bitch. No one ended up fessing up, so obviously whoever did steal it is a little bitch. I went on the range, I had a shower or something and I went back to my room and my remote was back. Someone snuck it back there. I just accepted that my remote was back and I was happy.

Similarly, non-violent conflict strategies were possible if a man had recently made a successful claim to dominant masculinity. If a credible manhood act was perceived to be accepted by other men as a sign that one is solid, then the man might felt less pressure to react violently to minor violations of the code. Aaron explains:

Aaron: I went to the hole for 60 days for something I didn’t do and I kept my mouth shut. When I got out I am supposed to be taken care of...they wanted me to rat him out and I’m not going to do that. When I get back to the yard- in the States, when you go to the hole they [staff] take everything from you, from your cell and your locker.
They go through it to make sure there’s not contraband and it’s boxed up, but all the good stuff is gone. Of course, when I came back to the yard, I’m the solid guy and they’re [other inmates] supposed to make sure everything is replaced, but it wasn’t. That’s the code.

Alicia: What did you do about that?

Aaron: Nothing. I don’t look weak by not doing anything, they already know I’m not weak otherwise I would have ratted them out. I let it go, I could have demanded it, I could have gone to the shot caller and said ‘hey, you have to make this right’ but I didn’t bother with it.

Alicia: How do you decide what to let slide and what to not let slide?

Aaron: Anything personal. A guy’s stealing from you, if you don’t do anything about it everyone is going to steal from you.

As Aaron’s story illustrates, non-violent conflict resolution options are possible in situations where a prisoner had achieved a degree of status, is not in immediate danger of being victimized, and the code violation at issue does not centre on respect or a question of masculinity that could invite further problems with a non-violent response.

Other circumstances where non-violence is used include conflicts resulting from a drug debt in which there is no issue of a challenge to masculinity (no threats to take away the keys) but rather a potential disruption to business. Situations in which a drug debt is not paid sometimes resulted in a violent victimization, but not always as powerful men retain a vested interest in continuing to secure economic capital in this way while avoiding formal social control. Dustin explains:

You’re going to have to take your beating and it’s usually two or three guys on you. So, you’re either going to have to take your licks and you still have to pay your debt. You still have to pay no matter what. But that’s rare. Guys want to get paid but they don’t want to force someone to check in, they don’t want all that. They don’t want the heat, they don’t want the man to know what is going on; so there are a lot of negotiations.

Non-violent responses to minor irritations by cellmates were also likely in situations that occurred outside the view of other men [in cells] and where men perceived the other party to the
conflict as having less power or status [often a roommate or a person with drug addiction issues];
and thus posed little threat to masculinity or dominance. In other words, there was less at stake
when acting non-violently in the conflict situation than by acting violently:

Ben: I was in there with a lot of crackheads; super dirty, fucked up people. Bugs. Bugs are what we call mentally ill people, they act weird. I was in there [cell] with this one heroin addict, and me and my buddy… we were laughing because this guy was sleeping on the floor and every once in a while he would just whip out his dick and start jerking off. We were like ‘this guy just has no shame’; there’s two other dudes in the cell and you’re just beating off in front of us?

Alicia: Did you say anything to him?

Ben: I said ‘slow down’ or something and he tried to get up in my face about it and I told him to fuck off. I didn’t want to fight him though because I’m trying to go for bail and shit and the last thing I need is another charge ‘Oh, by the way, your honour, he also punched out some crack-head in the holding cells, do you want to give him bail?’

Similarly, Scott recalled an incident in which he became irritated with his cellmate following his
relentless re-telling of stories about being a war veteran from Iraq who had been discharged after
being shot in the ankle with an AK; a story that Scott interpreted as ‘bullshit…. if you get shot in
the ankle with an AK, you’re losing your fucking foot, for one. He was just really weird, right?
The cellmate took two helpings of soup, which annoyed Scott:

So when he was walking by I shouldered him and he got soup all over himself. I said ‘fuck, you might want to leave some for somebody else, eh?’ He got all pissed off and got in my face and I just told him to fuck off. I kind of knew he wasn’t going to hit me or anything so I just turned my back to him and said ‘fuck you’…. [the cellmate was released and returned days later] He’d leave the cell and his TV would be on loud as all fuck, he’d have it blasting…Just disrespectful right? I just kept closing his door which would either lock him out of his cell, or I’d try to lock him in there and he kept getting all pissed off and so he came up to me like he was going to do something. I told him to go pound sand basically, and called him a bitch. He tried to be all tough but didn’t do anything about it. I was like, you’re not going to do anything just fuck off.
Clearly in situations where there is little at stake in terms of a loss of masculine status it is possible for men to choose a non-violent option. To engage in violence in such situations would not result in a gain in status or a loss; so violence tended not to be an outcome in these circumstances.

Conversely, if men perceived a conflict opponent to have a significantly greater degree of power, and thought they had much to lose by initiating or responding violently, they were likely to opt for a non-violent option that showed deference. On many occasions, Ben used non-violence to de-escalate conflicts in a way that both showed respect for the other man’s dominance and power while not conceding too much of his own:

Once in a while you’ll come in and then there will be some heavies on the unit that will push your buttons and see how far they can push you. The [a gang] guy that I became really good friends with and roommates with, he used to bug me all the time. Everyone was on his dick because he was like this big time gang member and fucking, whatever. One day when we were in the elevators going down to yard, I got mad at him. I was like ‘Yo, I don’t know why you always try to talk shit to me’ because he was always like ‘oh you think you’re so gangster’ and I was like ‘I never once acted gangster in front of you. When do you ever see me walking around acting like a tough guy...I don’t appreciate what you’re saying to me’. I said it in such a way that I was standing my ground and I said it in front of everybody too, I was telling him what’s up but being polite enough that it didn’t have to resort to a fight. Everybody really respected that. He just kind of smiled at me and was like ‘chill the fuck out, I like you which is why I talk to you like that’ He said ‘if I didn’t fucking like you, you’d fucking know it.’ He said it just like that. Ever since then, even though he was saying I do it because I like you, he eased up a lot after that. We became good friends after that.

Though Ben did engage in violence at the request of heavies and in numerous other situations; where he could, he tried to use non-violence and resolve problems in a way in which neither of the parties lost their claim to a masculine status.

That is another thing I want to tell you – I give this advice to so many people, I will swear to this I cannot even tell you how many huge bees and problems that this has gotten me out of, but I will swear by it until the day I die: pulling somebody aside and calmly telling them that what they’re doing is bothering you. Like some pre-school, like your mom teaches you in kindergarten shit.
This non-violent strategy was most effective when there was less need to put on a masculine performance for the benefit of others. Outside of the view of third parties who create pressure to escalate conflicts to violence, men are able to negotiate conflict in ways that maintain their sense of manhood while quelling violence:

Alicia: Do you think it makes a difference when you sort out problems alone versus when other people are around?

Ben: Oh a billion, trillion percent. It is always better one on one because when you have other people there, people feel like they have to prove shit, they have to look tough and they can have in mind things that other people told them, like ‘oh this person is a bitch you should smash them out’, and that other person is sitting right in front of them so they’re influenced by that too. Whereas, when it is one on one it’s just completely you and that other person, there’s no external factors, there’s no mitigating factors, no other variables in the equation it’s just you and the other person and if you are the instigator of the conversation, whatever you do begets what the other person does. So if you come humble and no ego, it’s like a snake charmer, you’re like going to get that same effect from the other person.

Ben was able to avoid violence while maintaining a sense of superior intellect over his opponents [like a snake charmer]. He stressed that he attempted to use this strategy only in situations where the word goof was not used [where there were no direct challenges to masculinity]. Often this was an attempt to avoid further violence in the aftermath of an initial conflict: *I sucked up my ego and whatever because now [violence] is just got me in a whole bunch of drama and ego and politics I don’t want to be a part of.*

Men with little or no social status or resources were often met with violence when they resisted a violent masculinity or enacted non-violent strategies to stay safe. At the same time, men who had convictions that garnered little respect from others (typically men convicted of petty crimes related to drug addiction) sometimes avoided violence because other men had no status to gain by fighting them. In a situation where there are drastic power imbalances, some men opted
for a non-violent conflict strategy by showing deference and ‘knowing their place’ in relation to other men. William’s comments reflect this position:

I’m not going to provoke an argument about it…I usually put myself on the lower end of the hierarchy just to stay safer. I’m not going to try to be any higher than they decide that I am.

Such strategies are interesting because while they serve the most pressing short term goal of avoiding violent victimization; they are complicit in perpetuating a prison hierarchy that harms all imprisoned men.

Finally and most hopefully several men were motivated to use non-violent words or actions as a means of expressing a more complex masculinity that resists hegemonic constructions. Pat’s survival strategy reflects a more emotionally vulnerable, compassionate masculinity:

I made cookies and I did a lot of things. I made art. I am an artist so I made some art on people’s envelopes for a little money – for canteen. A bag of chips or a pop…they send their letters out to their girls and I would draw fancy flowers, and roses, and doves… I gave the cookies out, just for PR [laughs]. If people are having a bad day, or whatever. There’s a lot of people who are just kicked to the curb because they’re not bright, or they’re not at the head table, they’re just scum, you know? But they’re still people right, needless to say. I’m a father right; a nurturer, a caregiver. A guardian. [Pat]

Two other men attempted to resist violence in ways that confronted homophobia and de-escalated conflict either with humor or direct conversation. Mark, a heterosexual man in his twenties, uses a strategy that challenges homophobia by exploiting other men’s fears in ways that are humorous and de-escalate conflict:

Mark: He stared me down and I gave him winks [laughs hysterically] just winks every now and again, and he would be like ‘You’re fucked. One of these days you’re going to get smashed’ blah, blah. For the last week I was there I didn’t even talk to him, I just ignored him and he would come up and say stupid shit like ‘oh hard to talk with a dick in your mouth, eh?’ I just ignored him and each time he talked to me it took less and less time for him to run out of shit to say. You
know what I mean? He would pick on people and they’d say something back and he would just keep feeding and feeding, then he would come to me and he was trying to get me to fight him…That’s when he really started up and he just quicker and quicker ran out of things to say until he would finally give up and walk away.

Alicia: How did you come up with the winking thing?

Mark: [laughs hysterically] I like winking at people! If it’s a girl I’ll do it to get her attention, if it’s a guy I’ll do it to creep him out [laughs] He would stare at me, and I was like, what do I do? Do I stare him down and then we’d just be staring each other down? So I’ll just wink at him and see if he does anything. He would say some words at me, some talk but he wouldn’t actually do anything.

Mark’s strategy is creative and unique yet potentially dangerous. In every other instance of sexual taunting that was presented in the interviews there was an element of aggression and intimidation. Possibly because of his affable demeanor, Mark was well positioned to resist homophobia and violence by using humor to diffuse conflict.

Alan is a gay man in his forties who was arrested for drug related charges. He takes a direct approach in resisting and rejecting heterosexuality as a defining characteristic of hegemonic masculinity while at the same time upholding the value of prisoner solidarity:

I was playing cards with a group of guys around a table and there was one guy around the table who was my buddy from the outside who know everything about me…one guy out of the blue piped up and said ‘So it must be really weird being a cellmate with that fag’. I was like ‘No, not really, I know him from outside’. They were like ‘Really? You know him?’ I was like ‘Yeah, he was a friend of mine’ and they were like ‘Isn’t it weird being cellmates with a gay guy?’ I was like ‘Well no, not really considering that I am’. It just kind of came out that way because I wasn’t going to let him go down alone. At that moment in time it was time to come out because I’m not going to let these guys start berating my friend for being gay considering I’m gay. If we’re going to go down, we’re going down together. He was like ‘Really?’ then a couple of the other heads at the table look up from their cards and they were like ‘Really?’ and then one of the guys at the table said ‘Alan [and his partner] are really cool, and so is [the cellmate], I’ve known them for years. If you have a problem with them you have a problem with me too’. That was the end of it, no one had a problem. That was the moment that things changed for me in jail.
These important displays of resistance suggest that prison masculinity is complex; men enact multiple masculinities in prison and solve problems in violent and non-violent ways. The stereotype of prisoners as homogeneously hyperviolent is complicated by the emotional vulnerability that the men showed with loved ones on the outside, their candid expressions of the pain of incarceration, and overt resistance to idealized manhood as violent and heterosexual. These men’s stories show how masculinities are created and re-created in prison as well as the harm that men experience by being thrust into an environment that demands and rewards displays of aggression, independence and a lack of need for other people.
There’s no fucking end to it. I used to say, I’m on a merry-go-round and it doesn’t fucking stop, you know? Like, how do you get off this fucking thing? You can’t get off. - Lee

The aftermath of violent conflict comes with immediate and long-term costs and consequences for men who have experienced incarceration. In the short term, violent conflict might have the effect of quelling further violence but it also feeds into the precursors for new violent incidents to erupt that continue to put men at risk of violent victimization and harm. In the long term, the hypermasculine hypervigilance that the men practice produces significant emotional and behavioural consequences that men continue to negotiate upon their release into the free community. In the long term many men continue to experience the gendered pains of incarceration in a way that suggests tremendous post-traumatic stress. In this chapter, I present the experiences of men in the aftermath and their reflections on life post-incarceration.

Men in the Aftermath

The conflict management problems that incarcerated men are confronted with centre on the issue of survival - not only in the immediate conflict situation, but also in the long term aftermath of their actions in prison. Incarcerated men deal with the pains of emasculation that the prison experience presents, as well as navigate a code that in many ways grows out of these collective pains and provides a way to regain some semblance of masculinity defined by self-reliance, independence, toughness and control. However, the men in this study enact multiple masculinities during the course of situated transactions with other men in which parties to an
interchange work out respective roles and statuses. Men expressed vulnerability and opposition to the displays of hegemonic masculinity that the prison code demands; sometimes these efforts were resistant, other times they reflected a deference that served to perpetuate the entire premise and structure on which the unequal distribution of power and security rests.

Survival can be conceptualized in a number of ways; the men in the study used the term to refer to immediate physical well-being as well as their capacity to withstand trauma emotionally and psychologically. Survival can also refer to the ability of a man to maintain a sense of masculinity that is integral to self-concept. Despite the violence in which they engaged, many men expressed a non-violent masculinity and worried about the ways that the prison environment would change [Mark] them into something they had been outside of their entire lives [Shane]. The problem for incarcerated men is how best to negotiate problems in prison in ways that provide a degree of protection in the immediate circumstance (violent victimization) and avoid formal social control (institutional charges that result in more prison time)\(^\text{51}\) while retaining the very sense of who they are as a man and a person. The aftermath of prison violence suggests that surviving now and later is quite difficult indeed.

**Old Violence & New Problems**

As illustrated in the previous chapter, violent conflict resolution often produces the effect of temporary safety in the short-term in that it insulates men against further violent attacks by establishing a successful claim to masculine invulnerability or by instigating a transfer to a segregation unit. Though violence is an expressive and instrumental strategy in quelling further

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\(^{51}\) I asked Aaron: *How do you settle disputes without racking up institutional charges?* He replied: *You can’t, you try to but there are some cases where you just got to go to the hole...Either you’re weak, or they’ll think you’re weak, but if somebody challenges you, ya you got to go [fight] and ya you go to the hole and pick up an institutional charge and the parole board will look at it, but if they’re looking for a reason to deny you they’ll find one.*
violence and maintaining social order; it also has the effect of redistributing power among men which can result in new attempts to regain status. In other words, in the short term violent conflict resolution produces the precursors for new problems which may or may not be resolved violently.

Sometimes violence had the effect of conferring status and stopping the harassment or bullying a prisoner was experiencing. Here, Scott explains how he reacted to being bothered by another prisoner and Ben describes the respect he acquired as a result of losing a fight:

There was a guy who was in there for murder… he was kind of getting under some people’s skin and…he threw his coffee cup at me, like just a Styrofoam cup and I grabbed him and threw him on the ground and as he got back up I grabbed him again and threw him on the ground…I just kept throwing him and he got super fucking timid and scared right, and he was like ‘What’s your problem, man?’ [imitates] I’m like ‘Don’t throw stuff at people’. I never had a problem with him after that. [Scott]

[describes a game in which prisoners whip balls at each other] I was like ‘yo, watch the fucking line man’ and he’s like ‘are you trying to get loud with me on the unit?’ so he punched me in the face, we started fighting a little bit, he’s like ‘you’re a dry snitch, you’re trying to fight in front of the cameras’…I was like ‘fuck you, let’s go to the cell right now’ So we went to the cell and we scrapped it out for a good five or six minutes or something, which is a long fight…and fuck, he just shit kicked me [but]…everyone on the unit ended up giving me mad respect because I didn’t rat out, they guy was like twice my size and older than me. Like, if you punch out somebody smaller than you people are like ‘whatever’ but if you go toe to toe and you show heart then they give you mad respect. I took my beats, he couldn’t even take me to the ground. [Ben]

Other prisoners who had spent several decades in prison suggested that even though violent conflict strategies can result in solving a problem by making a successful claim to masculine dominance, it also produces more violence. Lee explains:

You get a bit of notoriety or whatever but it doesn’t mean shit. It just means that any time you get in a beef after that you have to kill the person because people know that you’re capable of killing and now if you get into a fight with them you have to kill them. Simple as that…if you don’t they’re going to kill you. That’s how it ends up being. There’s no fucking end to it. I used to say, I’m on a merry-go-round and it doesn’t fucking stop, you know? Like, how do you get off this fucking thing? You can’t get off. That’s what it’s like, it’s like being on there and it just keeps fucking
going. And it doesn’t matter how many people you can put in the ground, there will be another one coming along for whatever fucking reason. [Lee]

Others suggested that violent responses to small conflicts can have wide-reaching effects that span across correctional institutions. Aaron, a man in his forties who had been incarcerated for his long-term involvement in a string of frauds and was incarcerated in both Canadian and American prisons, shares this story:

You have to be careful what you do. There was this fight one time over a remote control. The Blacks started a riot. It was their day to have the remote. There was one tv, so they could change the channel. So they have one day that is theirs, one day is ours. So they were watching basketball and one of the Mexican guys got pissed off. There was nothing else to watch because the Black guys were always watching basketball. So went and started something with the guy. It started a big riot that went on from prison to prison. From San Diego all the way up to LA, over a remote. It started a big riot between the Mexicans and the Blacks. It was crazy.

The aftermath of non-violent conflict management strategies also appear to produce and subdue further violence, either in the short or long term.

The way things kind of happen is a lot of the time people will be like ‘yeah, it’s cool’ and the next thing you know like two hours later you’re getting your cell rushed by like three other guys and you get punched out. A lot of times people will tell you it’s cool in the moment, anything, sometimes beefs, it’s like ‘okay, I’m a goof’ then a couple of hours later they’ll rush your cell.

It appears that regardless of how the men respond to conflict the chronic deprivation of security persists; this heightens the state of anxiety and self-protective hypervigilance that so many men practice and are harmed by in prison. Pat’s story suggests that ultimately, the pain of hypermasculine hypervigilance produces more aggression and violence in its aftermath:

There is no place that is safe. You never know. I had just had a beef with somebody, and argument with somebody on my range. Then I was walking to the doctor and someone tapped my shoulder, I turned around and punched him [automatically] I thought it was an inmate, but it was an officer. Next thing I know I’m jumped, my teeth went flying out… But I jumped, right? I’m by myself you don’t know who is behind you – you defend yourself…I got in shit from the guards, I got knocked around for weeks…[Pat]
The Pain of Violence

The short term aftermath of a conflict situation in which violence was or was not used also has emotional costs for imprisoned men. Many men described guilty or mixed feelings over having used violence in prison while maintaining that there was no other option. Similar to the way that contract killers (Levi 1981) or soldiers (Kooistra and Mahoney 2016) might reconcile this dissonance, incarcerated men are harmed by the violence that they produce and tend to frame the violence in terms of survival and neutralize negative feelings through a denial of responsibility (Sykes and Matza 1957). Here, Brendan explains his feelings about violently victimizing another prisoner who sold his drugs to a younger inmate who was about to be released from the prison:

I had to [use violence]. He sold it to that kid and I was just like I can’t believe you did that. It’s so wrong, right? The kid’s like seventeen. He’s going home too in a couple of days. Imagine if he got hooked up on heroin? Which he probably would have. But the father of the kid wrote me a letter and thanked me for what I did. That was nice to have. That made me feel good. I felt pretty bad about it. Like, I don’t feel good about the stuff that I did. You still feel bad. I regret a lot of things I did. But I had to, it’s survival. That’s what I say in my mind. That I had to, it justifies it for me in my head, to feel better. Leaving that guy paralyzed and brain damage and all that, that isn’t something that I wanted. I had to do it. I would have gotten a beating had I not. I have to show authority and leadership and the rules. If I broke the rules myself I’d be in that position. It sucked, calling the shots on people that did wrong things. Gambled with somebody they weren’t supposed to, you can’t gamble, you don’t have any money, you don’t have any food, how are you going to pay your debt? And they still do it. It can cause a riot, it’s more than one person gets hurt. Ten people could get hurt instead of one. It’s reducing violence by punishing one person. [Brendan]

Many of the men in my study experienced negative, long-term emotional consequences as a result of the violence they witnessed, experienced or produced. That men who use violence against others are harmed by that violence is a reality that often goes unrecognized. For example, Brendan, a white man, discussed with me the “terrible things” he did to Black men in [an American] prison in order to survive. He expressed tremendous remorse paired with feelings of having had no other
choice if he were to survive. His feelings are so intense that he said if he thought I were Black, he would never have agreed to the interview for that reason.

Some men describe moral conflicts while incarcerated; situations in which they were asked by men with more power to be violent in ways that they did not want to – or to violently victimize someone that they cared for. This creates a conflict for men because they are forced with a decision: be violent or have violence brought upon them by others. Ben explains two situations in which he experienced the emotional pain of violence he had engaged in:

Two different times I was told to go check somebody off the unit that I didn’t want to do because two different times they were my friend… You usually just get a kite that says ‘this guy’s a goof’. Or, we’ll be walking by another unit and we’ll see him in the yard and they’ll point like this [motions] and they’ll make the checking sign which means ‘check him off’ or ‘he’s a check off’. Either way, it means it’s fuck him up and check him off. So this one guy, thankfully it got cancelled, this Native dude, he’s old school OG. He was like ‘you’re the youngest, and the newest to this unit you have to do it.’ I was like ‘oh I really don’t want to, he’s my homie’…it got cancelled for another reason so I didn’t have to do it… Then this other guy I knew him for only three or four weeks, but we talked so much and he was such a nice guy and then we got news [from another prison], we got a kite or whatever and they’re like the guy you’re on the unit with is a big time rat. He narced out some huge operation, like this ain’t even some small time shit. He legit got to go and like, in a fucking stretcher too. I was like, oh fuck. I felt so bad. So they made me and this other big fucking chubby dude do it…[he was] in the shower naked. I went in there and I felt so bad about it, and he was all smiles when he saw me there too. But at the same time, I just tried to remind myself ‘this guy is a fucking rat goof’. He’d rat you out in two seconds, don’t feel bad for him.

To some extent prisoners are able to reconcile these feelings by denying the victimhood of the person they have hurt and by framing the violence in terms of a survival strategy (Sykes and Matza 1957; Goffman 1974). Ben continues to deal with the long-term emotional costs of violence in prison: it’s normal, that’s what you tell yourself.
**Problems & Pains Post-Incarceration**

The results suggest that once men have been released the gendered pains of incarceration combined with the experience of violent conflict shape their conflict management strategies in the free community. Chris recalls his experience with transitioning from survival in prison to survival outside of prison:

I didn’t know how to work, I didn’t know how to talk to people. Fear of people and economic insecurities riddled me. *You’re out to get me, you’re out to hurt me* and there was no way I was ever going to be vulnerable with people. No way that I was ever going to let you know that I was fearful. Those are survival tactics, but those survival methods didn’t work for me in a productive lifestyle.

Part of this stems from the *‘jail mentality’* that the men export when they leave the prison; the effects of which appear to be related to the length of time incarcerated and the extent of the trauma that the person experienced. Some of the men in the study had spent decades of their lives in prison. Lee explains how his prison experience drastically shaped the way in which he interprets the world:

The way I used to think is not the way I think today for sure. I had this whole fucking prison mentality that doesn’t even make any sense at all now. But it took a long time to figure that out. Fuck, did it ever take a long time…I don’t know if you understand or if anyone has ever told you, if you’re aware of what that is like, for someone who has a *prison mentality*. A prison mentality as opposed to a normal fucking person?

Lee’s comments echo the sentiment of other men who had spent significantly less time in prison. Grant commented on the difficulty in returning “…*back to what I believe to be the real me; but that hardness is in there*”. Others noted that prison made them short-tempered, more violent and that this had an impact on their everyday life [Sam]. Dustin comments on his transition to the free community:

It was very difficult and actually it still is. The way I perceive the world around me, the way I perceive people. If somebody does something for me, I’ll say no, because to me, by somebody offering me something they can have that to hold over me… I still struggle and I still have days where it’s like I feel like I’m still in prison sometimes, and my family has to say *‘Dustin, you’re not in prison anymore, stop*
talking like that’. I get paranoid, I think my neighbour is watching my house or something, I get stash spots, just because I’ve done it for 13 years, that’s what I know, that’s how I survived. So, slowly trying to adjust from prison thinking into society thinking it has been a challenge. [Dustin]

These comments suggest that men continue to feel angry and on guard after their incarceration experience. Scott and Grant’s experiences echo Dustin and Sam’s sentiments:

That’s one thing I notice when I got out, from being in jail – I was always able to laugh anything off [prior to jail] I was always the jokester and laugh about anything. Now, my girlfriend and I, she is very sarcastic, and before I went to jail that was me to a tee. But since I’ve been in jail, I take things a lot more seriously, a lot more seriously. If somebody says the wrong thing, I’m instantly defensive. I don’t like being in confined spaces as much, not confined but closed spaces.

I’m kind of a relaxed guy, but in jail it hardens a person. You have to, to survive. It makes you a harder person. It makes you rough around the edges. It gives you a bit of an attitude, and it’s still with me some days. Some people notice it...It [jail] made me that way. It made me not afraid to say things to people. So that first day of shopping, I couldn’t find anything and I copped an attitude with her ‘there’s nothing fucking good here’ or something like that [laughs], I’m serious! Not realizing, hey okay, you can change back to being a human being again...It makes you a hard person in the way you think, because you have to adapt to survive and you have to become very hard. Very linear thinking, no emotion. You know, no laughing. You just have to become a very hard person. Very rough. That’s really not the way I was, but you have to adapt if you want to survive. I had to spend a year and a half doing that and sometimes it still comes out of me... it can come out at the wrong time and I don’t even know I’m doing it sometimes.

The prison mentality and the experiences that men had in prison shape their conflict management strategies in the free community in a number of significant ways. Uniformly, the men connected these strategies to their experience with the violent survival mechanisms that they developed in prison. Below are some examples of how men deal with conflict in their daily lives, and how they struggle to distance themselves from their prison mentalities:

Jail influences how you react to things a lot. When you get out you’re more short-tempered, you’re like ‘Yo this guy just said this fucking thing to me’. Like, who the fuck does he think he is, I’ll fucking smash him out right now because everything in jail is dealt with through violence, but you can’t deal with things out here through
violence. Violence is the ultimate cop, judge and executioner in there; that is the only trial right there, that is your sentencing and your conviction. Fighting is the ultimate fucking problem solver in there. [Ben]

Prison. That’s not reality, that’s prison. This is reality, you’re not locked in a box with some random guy you don’t even know. You’re not on a unit 24 hours a day. In there if you don’t do something it looks bad on your part. Out here… it’s normal, you can’t react that way and do things like that. I’m trying to change and not act that way….It’s different if you’re on the street…in prison you can’t put up with stuff. [Jeremy]

Dustin, a man in his thirties who had spent nearly fifteen years in the Canadian correctional system, explains a conflict with a neighbour that he had after being released from prison:

It’s been a struggle. It’s been a year, I’m doing good now but I still have days where I mentally slip back into prison mode. I’ve had a couple of conflicts here that I’m actually proud of myself that I dealt with properly, but a few more seconds and it could have went backwards. One guy kept borrowing cigarettes off of me and I finally told him, I said ‘You know what, I don’t care what you spend your money on, but we make the same money, I’m not supporting your habit anymore’ and he got all defensive about it and he stormed off, I’m like [gestures ‘what?’] That’s a bitch move. So I went to his apartment, you don’t walk away pissed off like that, you know, we’re dealing with this right now. He’s like well how do you want to deal with it? And he was a big guy, and I’m like, ‘hey, let’s go to the park and fucking throw down right now’. He’s like, ‘What? No! Where is this coming from?’…I crossed the line there and we’ve talked about it since, and we’re friends again. He knew [about his prison time] just from the tattoos and talking to me…now he knows kind of where I came from and why I react the way I do.

For some men who had spent more time in prison – several decades – negotiating conflicts in the free community often resembled the strategies that they used in prison, though the context in which words and threats were uttered had changed. Lee describes how he interpreted potential danger in a manner similar to the interpretations he made in prison; despite the lesser chance in the free community for threats to be acted upon:

Lee:  Unfortunately when I got out of jail I thought: you know, people are stupid! You bump into a guy outside and he says ‘fuck off or I’ll kill ya’. So yeah - then I fucking end up stabbing the guy six times.
Outside, because he said that. Somebody said to me ‘What the fuck? Are you crazy?’ and I said ‘Well, didn’t you hear what he said?’ To me it means, what you say is what you mean. But apparently, a lot of people [outside] don’t mean [what they say] and I found that out later. It took a long time to figure that out because in jail if you say ‘I’m going to kill you’ well you best be doing that because by morning, you’re going to be dead. Simple. You know?

Alicia: So the way that you would deal with problems on the outside…

Lee: It don’t relate to jail [describes an altercation over pizza that escalated and resulted in an attempted murder charge]. Maybe under normal fucking circumstances, a normal person would have maybe ran away, or something. I just told them ‘don’t fuck with me or I’ll fucking bury you.’ You know what I mean? Like, ‘do you understand what I’m telling you about here? If you mess with me I’ll do you in here.’ Apparently, they didn’t get it.

Numerous other stories share the common theme of prison life shaping the way in which men interpreted and reacted to potentially threatening situations on the outside. Sam, recalled a story in which a glance on public transit from a stranger escalated to a violent interchange:

We got off the train and he is basically laying there in a puddle of his own blood…I never saw the guy again [pause] I don’t think I would have beat him to that extent if jail didn’t make a friggin’ impact on my mind.

**Resilience & Resistance in Post-Prison Masculinities**

Many men struggled to distance themselves from their prison mentality and enact a non-violent, compassionate masculinity in the free community in their jobs and relationships. I asked Mike how he distanced himself from violence and crime in the aftermath of his incarceration; he responded:

Mike: I came out [of prison], one of my buddies had got picked up for murder. Three or four of my friends died, and the other one got picked up for murder, so pretty much everyone that I was rolling with was dead or in jail.

Alicia: I’m sorry about your friends.
Mike: Ah, shit happens. Can’t really do anything, right? That’s the thing, it’s a matter of time [until you end up dead] If you’re actually trying to do stuff that’s on a little bit of a bigger scale [drug dealing]…my first friend died and he was seventeen. They got kidnapped and shot in the head. Shit like that happens. They got kidnapped and shot in the head, execution style and left in a mountain. In an abandoned car, and left in the mountain. They just left them there and they were found two days later and their heads were blown off. I was eighteen at that time…so that was hard. When you’re 18 and it’s two kids that you grew up with, I used to hang out with them every day…I think I’ve had over ten friends die. So, it just becomes whatever.

After experiencing the death of many friends who were also involved in criminal activity, Mike was in a situation in his post-incarceration where he found himself with an opportunity to disconnect from his criminal past. He told me:

I’ve been out of trouble for a long time. What I am trying to do is try to get my record expunged…but it’s hard, you have to convince [a judge] that it is getting in the way of something that I want to do. What I want to do is go to law school if I can…that’s what I want to do once I am done my degree.

Mike wants to study criminal law.

Other men like Pat and William continued to struggle with addiction related issues but expressed a great desire to be involved in helping other men who had become involved in drug use or had become part of a gang. William expressed the desire but was unsure how a guy like him could help. Pat often used his abilities and passion to make art for others in the prison; though many times his art was destroyed by the prison staff:

When I was inside I did a mural on the whole wall. I jacked markers and pens and pencils. I accumulated all these colours and I did a mural on the whole wall. It was…mountains and the downtown core. And Jimmy Hendrix, Bob Dylan. The spirits in the sky. On Friday night the warden comes by and they were so fucking impressed, but they said – they knew what I was doing but they didn’t stop me, my mural. They said ‘We’d love to keep it but here’s a tooth brush. Wash the wall’…but they liked it, they took pictures and everything [laughs].
Pat described other works that had themes of nature and freedom; his poetry described of pain an addiction. Pat described his love for art and poetry and wanted to design a series of anti-gang hooded sweatshirts. Acting on these desires are difficult for Pat and William given their disadvantaged economic circumstances; at the time of the interview William was unemployed and living in a recovery house and Pat was homeless and living in a public park.

Similarly, following their incarceration experience both Shane and Ben pursued a career in music. On many occasions, Shane shared his music with me; his songs are imbued with themes of love, pain, loss, and incarceration and healing. Ben is a talented hip hop artist who is involved in public performance battles with others working in this industry. He performed several of his songs for me: themes of incarceration, loss of relationships and inner turmoil are central to many of his works. During our interviews Ben talked about his love for music and poetry that resonated with his life and incarceration experience and problems with the criminal justice system:

A centre as a correctional, rehabilitative place, you need to have resources and programs and things that will allow the growth of that rehabilitation. That’s just common sense, you’re just trying to make a flower grow without sunlight. That’s what the resources are, you gotta give the flower air and sunlight and room to grow. Instead, you’re just going to put it in a little fucking dark room and be like ‘Grow’. That just reminded me of that Kendrick Lamar song, have you heard of Kendrick Lamar? He’s a really dope rapper, he’s like “poetic justice, poetic justice. If I told you a flower bloomed in a dark room, would you trust it?” I love that, that’s how I feel like. I’m the flower in the dark room, I’m the rose that grew from concrete. I’m that one out of a fucking hundred million that every statistic and every reason why I should not be as sound minded, and as intelligent and progressive as I am. A lot of people just have one aspect of it, maybe two. I have every aspect of it: lack of family, lack of support, jail, foster care, drugs, violence, gangs, fucking minority [racial]. You name it and I got that against me.

He tells me he thinks that many men with incarceration experience ‘are literally broken kids inside’. He described his frustration with the public, the government and stereotypes of people who had been incarcerated and he sees music as a way to draw attention to these social problems:
‘People need to wake up, man…everyone…you have to make them want to care …that is the source of the solution that’s why I want to inspire people through writing and music.’

Like Ben, Dustin, Grant, Todd and Shannon wanted to transform their experiences with crime and incarceration in a way that could positively affect others; particularly men with lived experience with the prison system. Dustin recalled the relationships he made with men in a halfway house. Grant and Shannon have worked toward credentials certifying them to work in drug recovery houses, often with men who have experienced incarceration. Grant explains how his incarceration experience shapes the work that he currently does with men with drug and alcohol addiction issues:

Alicia: How does your prison experience affects the work that you are currently doing, do you gravitate towards people with addictions who had been incarcerated?

Grant: Yes. All the time. I can tell if they’ve been in prison. What I try to do, when I do the intakes, I say you’re in here now, this has nothing to do with the street anymore, nothing to do with jail…you don’t need to live like that, to think like that in here. It’s very difficult for them to drop [the prison mentality] because it’s a way of survival. I can’t take that away…but I can recognize it, which is a powerful thing, just recognize it and tell them I’ve been there too. I try to talk to them from my heart. I congratulate them and shake their hand.

Todd, who had spent over a decade in prison and was considered a mover and a shaker on the unit, now operates a halfway house and works closely with men transitioning in and out of prison. He is a very busy person and so our interviews often took place in his work office and were frequently interrupted with phone calls regarding the men he was responsible for in the house. He described the need to change the prison system and the internal struggle that he felt in attempting to help other men navigate their relationship with prison and violence:

It’s built for violence, you have to take care of yourself. Even the guards put down the weaker inmates…and use the words ‘that one’s a skinner’ ‘this one’s a goof’…
we have a client who has been with us for 18 months and he was doing really good, but he’s going to prison…he’s a really nice, polite young kid and we were talking about it, how he has to harden up…because he will get eaten alive in there. He will do fine out here because he is a nice guy, always tried to help out people and everything else. But they’ll eat him up in there. I was telling my boss that and I was thinking about the conversation that I had with you…I started wondering if I should tell the client about this and give him the head’s up? And make him hard? Is that the right thing to do for him? Because then I would feel like I was promoting violence. But this kid doesn’t have a violent bone in his body. So it’s kind of sad. You know he’s going into a bad environment… I don’t know what to say to this kid before he goes in [to jail]…He has changed his life around. He has two little girls, he just had two little babies while he was with us… I just don’t know what to do with him. To give him the head’s up. I don’t know the best way to protect him. Do I tell him to go in there and put on a false front and be hard? Or just be yourself?

Todd’s comments reflect the continued struggle that men have in the free community after experiencing the violence of incarceration and that activists have in trying to affect change. To use Lee’s analogy, the merry-go-round continues to spin as men continue to deal with the impossible decision to survive now or survive later.

The results of part three suggest that prison violence has an impact on the difficult transition that men have into the free community. The prison environment creates a situation in which men feel pressure to resolve conflicts with violence and this carries into their lives on the outside. Many men used violence instrumentally and expressively for self-protection in the short term in prison; in the long term the violence that they experience and witness has an impact on their day-to-day living, how some men dealt with new conflicts, and how they perceived themselves. The aftermath of the violence of incarceration also reveals tremendous resilience and resistance to the tough, invulnerable and hyper-violent masculine script that so many prisoners feel compelled to conform to and perform. Their stories suggest the ways that men enact multiple and diverse masculinities contingent on the context and resources available to them. In the free community many of the men
tried to relate to other men in emotionally vulnerable and diverse ways and enacted compassionate, caring and loving masculinities.
CHAPTER EIGHT:
CONCLUSION

*Did prison offer you anything useful?*

*‘The front door on the way out’ - Sam*

This research illustrates the multiple ways in which men with incarceration experience construct and enact a diversity of masculinities in prison and during post-incarceration in the free community. The results suggest strongly that hegemonic constructions of masculinity that exist in mainstream culture feature centrally in prison conflicts regardless of the violent or non-violent outcome that they produce. Every man in this study, regardless of charge or length of time incarcerated had been involved in a violent interchange in prison that was initiated by a real or perceived threat to masculinity and status. This final chapter considers a masculinities theory of prison conflict and prison violence and suggests implications for future research.

**A Masculinities Theory of Prison Conflict**

The results illustrate the way in which the pains of incarceration are gendered for men in that acculturation within the prison total institution is essentially a uniformly emasculating process. The results also suggest that the ways in which masculinity is threatened in prison – through the deprivation of relationships, goods and services, autonomy and liberty, privacy and isolation, relationships with prison staff, and painful symbolic reminders that prisoners are sub-human Others – are in and of themselves criminogenic. With limited economic and political capital men negotiate these intersecting pains through violence, intimidation, and aggressive posturing toward other men and in other ways that reflect attempts to regain some claim to masculinity and status; or less often, to reject violent hegemonic masculinity as an ideal construction of manhood.
The informal norms and expectations of gender performance that define the subcultural context in which disputes arise (the so-called ‘inmate code’) are reflected in and shape the competition among men to define masculinity in prison. Social expectations of conduct are gendered in men’s prisons and such norms govern interactions between men while creating opportunities for men to challenge others on their gender performance. Masculinity challenges in prison hinge on issues of respect for another man’s claim to status and particularly when performed publicly, such challenges are significant events that assign social status to men – a form of capital inextricably linked to physical, emotional, and psychological survival in prison.

A result of the complex and violent ways that masculinity is constructed and enacted in prison is the maintenance of a code of gender performance that creates categories of subordinate and dominant men (such as heavies, heads, solids, bugs, rats and goofs). The consequences and costs of these statuses and masculinities are varied but at the same time uniform: men with power felt pressure to perform in ways that conform to the gender code (violently enforcing rules to maintain a tough reputation; constant concern that another man will attempt to usurp the power and control so central to survival); men who were most marginalized in the prison social hierarchy also feared violent victimization, and men in the mix with a median degree of status feared being put up to violence by men with power or becoming victims themselves. New inmates, or fish, with little knowledge of the system and limited social capital feared victimization and were tested in a number of sexually threatening and humiliating ways by other men who exercised constant hypervigilance with respect to potential threats to their masculinity and security.

Violent conflict can result in the redistribution of status and a redefinition of roles in a prison hierarchy regardless of the extent of the physical harm sustained. Inequality in stature between combatants in an interchange can result in the smaller prisoner being awarded respect by
other men for *not backing down*. Conversely, a man who displays his physical prowess by literally beating another man into submission stands to gain status by making a public claim to membership in the dominant gender group; over time, these claims can result in the successful construction of a reputation defined by invulnerability that other men accept and fear. However, the *heaviness* or *solidness* of these men can prompt others to challenge the authenticity of their claims and disrupt their power in an attempt to gain or regain status for themselves. Thus, the cycle continues as precursors to conflict gestate in the immediate aftermath of violent and non-violent interchanges between imprisoned men.

Several men enacted resisting masculinities in an attempt to derail this cycle through non-violent means of conflict resolution. Non-violent resistance expressed through dialogue in the face of confrontation appears to be an option when significant power imbalances between men exist; if a dominant prisoner perceived he had little to gain in terms of status as a result of engaging in a violent interchange with a subordinate man he might decide to *show mercy*. A non-violent conflict resolution strategy also appears possible when the combatants’ respective claims to masculinity are not at stake or to be determined in the aftermath of the interchange. Thus, a non-violent outcome can be produced when one party shows displays of deference or respect for another man’s power and the other accepts. However, non-violent responses sometimes mask intentions to react violently at a time and place in which formal social control is less likely to be activated.

Prisoners are not uniformly violent in their conflict management strategies, nor do they interpret violence as an appropriate response in all cases. Still, like violent means of social control in prison, the results suggest that non-violence in a prison setting also affirms and maintains a gender code that privileges violent hegemonic masculinity and recreates groups of dominant and subordinate men. Some evidence suggests that hegemonic masculinity borrows from subordinate
forms during conflict situations; finally, in rare and hopeful cases, non-violent conflict strategies can be subversive and challenge homophobic, violent and dangerous prison masculinities in significant ways.

The results and analysis suggest a masculinities theory of prison conflict wherein conflict management strategies reflect men’s gendered perception of risk and are constrained by a prison subculture that produces and perpetuates these risks - and in turn, dangerous masculinities and inequality among imprisoned men. Resolving the question of men’s violence in prison requires interrogating constructions of masculinity more generally and the way in which subordinate and dominant masculinities are enacted contingent on the resources at men’s disposal. Though violence occurs among many groups of men and across a diversity of social domains, prisons are particularly conducive to violence for a number of reasons. At the micro-social level of analysis: 1) this setting is stressful to men in that it threatens masculinity and security while providing scant resources for self-protection and conflict management; 2) men are confined in close proximity with little access to privacy that they might use to protect themselves in their most intimate moments; other men are quick to use any intimate knowledge or discreditable stigma to try to gain upward social mobility for themselves; and 3) social relations within prison are hierarchical in nature; a heterogeneous population of prisoners (in terms of age, race, abilities, socio-economic class, criminal history et cetera) are living together and some have more power than others.

At the macro-social level, an explanation of prison violence needs to account for ambivalent cultural attitudes toward violence that happens in this setting. Like other domains such as the household (Sacco and Kennedy 2012), violence is tolerated in a prison setting in a way that it is not in other settings like most workplaces, shopping malls or public parks. Additionally, prisoners are members of a stigmatized group that may be viewed as deserving victims of violence
by virtue of having been convicted of a crime. The successful construction of prisoners as uniformly blameworthy others paired with a lack of public knowledge about the extent or nature of violence in prison, and a political climate that supports punitive criminal justice measures that undermine basic human dignity also clearly play a part here. Finally and perhaps of most relevance to the analysis is the normalization of violent masculinity in mainstream culture.

**Socio-Political Climate & Conditions of Confinement**

Prior to 2006, official Canadian policies emphasized social causes of law-breaking behaviour and the Canadian government’s responsibility to ‘reintegrate’ offenders (Webster and Doob 2015). However, more recently the political and social climate is increasingly characterized by a punitive, as opposed to restorative or reintegrative, attitude as law-breaking and criminal behaviour are reconstructed as individually determined – the product of rational choice (Webster and Doob 2015). Webster and Doob suggest that this is evidenced by the *Limiting Pardons for Serious Crimes Act* and the *Safe Streets and Communities Act*, and the replacement of the ‘Faint Hope Clause’ by the *Serious Time for the Most Serious Crime Act* which removed the possibility for people serving time for murder to have their parole ineligibility period reduced. Additionally, if the *Protecting Canadians by Ending Sentence Discounts for Multiple Murders Act* (Bill C-48), if passed, would make life without parole mandatory in some cases. At the level of correctional institutions, this punitive character is supported by the results of this study; the pains that men experienced as a result of incarceration are conducive to violence within the institution and appear to have a criminogenic effect in term of how some men deal with conflict situations in the free community post-incarceration. As Dustin explained it: *they bring you in, turn you into a monster and kick you out, and expect you to be rehabilitated.*
It would appear that there has been an ideological shift towards greater punitiveness on the part of Canadian policy-makers and public opinion in Canada reflects this punitive ideology in important ways. The label “offender” is increasingly seen as a permanent identity, a master status, constructed in contrast to the image of the praiseworthy law abiding Canadian (Webster and Doob 2015). The public’s view of crime is significant to understanding the creation and legitimation of policies that affect the lived experience of Canadian prisoners. Doob (2000) and others (Varma and Marinos 2013) have noted the importance of context in assessing public opinion on sentencing and punishment. Opinions polls have demonstrated that Canadians feel sentencing is too lenient, though research also shows that the public has little knowledge of what sentencing is (Doob and Roberts 1989). Anthony Doob (2000) has argued that the lack of public information on sentencing contributes to the public’s lack of knowledge regarding what sentencing entails. His research shows that when survey questions offer an opportunity for respondents to consider sentencing in the context of its effects and costs, alternatives to prison sentences are considered more favourably (Doob 2000; Doob et al. 1989).

The public appears to be conflicted on sentencing as a blanket policy (Bill C-10 for instance); research suggests that people support harsher sentences but also proportionate sentences (Barber and Doob 2004). This is significant because a more punitive public attitude toward law-breaking behaviour appears to be paired with a lack of knowledge on sentencing outcomes and practices, and a lack of systematic access to sentencing information (Doob 2000). As a consequence, a perception of lenience could translate into public apathy toward the painful, marginalizing, and stigmatizing lived experience of many Canadian prisoners and the growing body of criminological research that illustrates the detrimental effects of incarceration on sexual,

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52 Similarly, in the American context a recent study by Miller and Applegate (2015) reveals that public attitudes toward young offenders are divided; simultaneously showing support for less severe penalties for some young people, but also support for “adult time” for “adult crime”.
The results of the present study suggest that the norms of prison culture create a situation wherein men use violence as a strategic and instrumental resource to display masculine dominance and secure the social status crucial to self-protection in this dangerous environment. Importantly, regardless of whether the men had a prior history of violence or had been incarcerated for violent crimes every participant in the study had been involved in a violent interchange in prison. The results thus stand in stark contrast to political rhetoric and public opinion that espouses the need to incarcerate and punish men in order to prevent the violence they might bring upon others. Not only does it appear that incarceration is ineffective as a deterrent for violence; the results suggest that imprisonment encourages non-violent offenders to become so and that imprisonment increases the likelihood of violent interchanges post-incarceration.

**Future Research**

*Theoretical Implications*

The analysis suggests a number of implications for future research in masculinities and criminological theory, studies of men in conflict and qualitative methodology. Part of the results suggest some prisoners are able use non-violent conflict management strategies in ways that challenge violent and homophobic masculinities in prison. Mark’s story of resistance shows how...
humour helped him to avoid victimization by capitalizing on another man’s homophobia in a way that challenges heteronormativity and de-escalates violence. This finding is important because it is the only instance reported in which a non-violent conflict strategy inhibited further violence without perpetuating the hegemonic structure that produced it. Future research must explore the potential for conflict resolution in ways that reduce violence and disrupt rather than maintain the dangerous idealization of violent masculinity that exists in prison.

Liam Kennedy’s (2016) recent analysis of the Angolite, a Louisiana State Penitentiary prison newsmagazine, illustrates the complexities of men’s lives in prison in terms of the emotional depth that they show in their friendships, writing and artwork. The results support many of Kennedy’s findings: men in my study also showed complexity in the way they expressed their feelings through artwork, song and poetry, and their desire to help other men navigate the pains of imprisonment and reintegration. The results also support Kennedy’s observation that although men enact a more emotionally vulnerable masculinity when they were permitted to do so the “hypermachuline prison code also continued to shape the face that prisoners presented in public” (2016:159). I have presented evidence here of the pain of this hypermasculine hypervigilance and the dissonance that men feel in enacting a masculinity that does not resonate with the one to which they personally subscribe. Future qualitative works should explore in more depth the creative ways that Canadian prisoners express themselves during their incarceration as well as the pain of putting on a tough façade, and how prison masculinities change over time.54

54 A recent example of non-violent masculinity is found in the moving documentary Herman’s House that depicts the life and struggle of Herman Wallace, a member of the Angola three, who spent nearly forty years in solitary confinement. Herman’s House charts the development of a relationship between Wallace and Jackie Sumell, an activist who critiques the practice of solitary confinement through her artwork and shows. The documentary also shows the way in which Herman reflects on his lived experience with violence and over time develops and enacts a non-violent, compassionate masculinity in order to help other men in the prison during the few times he was permitted in the general population.
The results suggest that the degree of social status that a prisoner has shapes opportunities to enact non-violent masculinities. Prisoners who had established a reputation for violence found opportunities to use non-violence, as did those who had very little social status. Future research might consider the relationship between social status and conflict in prison more generally and in terms of how displays of masculinity shift over time and in relation to the degree of status a prisoner loses and accrues. Similarly, the results suggest that men enact multiple masculinities contingent on the resources available to them and whether deviations from the gender social script would put them in danger of losing status and thus eliciting violent victimization. Future research should consider the criminogenic nature of such ‘status degradation ceremonies’ in a prison context (Garfinkel 1956).

A second finding related to the question of social status and violence is the degree to which third parties shaped whether conflicts escalate or de-escalate. For instance, ex-prisoners in the study reported that they are careful to enact violence in their cells, outside of the view of correctional staff (unless the violence was part of a dry ratting strategy to avoid further violence). The men in the study felt tremendous pressure to perform in violent and hypermasculine ways when others were watching; the potential for the loss of status is central to how conflicts escalated to violence in the view of other prisoners. In some cases, violence was inhibited if it was not approved by heavies. Future research should consider the relationship between the social status of third parties and the potential for conflict to escalate or de-escalate as well as the way in which this might relate to correctional officers’ use of violence against prisoners.

Chapter Five provides qualitative evidence that the pains of imprisonment are gendered for men and that these pains might be criminogenic for a number of reasons. Future quantitative work might consider the relationship between these pains and various forms of victimization in prison.
– including theft, criminal harassment and sexual and physical assault in particular – to determine if indeed a causal relationship could be established and whether some pains are more or less criminogenic than others, or how they might intersect. It might be of use to future researchers to explore this relationship in the context of strain theory (Merton 1938; Agnew 1992). The results suggest that in important ways the pains of imprisonment inhibit men from achieving subcultural goals to which they aspire (social status). Violence could be considered an innovative adaptation (from the perspective of outsiders); or a conforming means to goal attainment as I have presented it here. Additionally, future researchers might consider general strain theory (Agnew 1992) to explain the way in which negative relationships between men produce emotions conducive to violence.55

Another theoretical direction could be to consider the ways in which responses to the gendered pains of imprisonment that men experience produce attempts to regain some measure of control over their lives. The results present numerous examples of violent resistance that suggests an attempt to reclaim autonomy and self-determination. For example, Lee recalls his experience of being confined in ‘the hole’ for many months and the abuse he received at the hands of correctional staff. Several examples in his story illustrate defiant resistance efforts that suggest an attempt to regain some control in response to a serious control deficit (Tittle 1969):

This is degrading, but this is the depths you go to okay? I’m down in the fucking hole, I got nothing left…so every time I spit on a guard or something, they give me more charges and they write it on a piece of paper, so I take the paper they gave me and shit on the fucking paper and throw it at them.

Lee’s story and other examples are consistent with Charles Tittle’s (1969) control balance theory. Future research might consider how control balance theory can further our knowledge of the way

55 For example, the loss of a valued relationship such as in the event of the death of a loved one; relationships that produce strain, such as bullying relationships in prison; or relationships that introduce noxious stimuli such as sharing a cell with someone the prisoner finds offensive; or resulting from relationships where another prisoner threatens to take away something positively valued – such as goods or status.
in which control surpluses and deficits shape the nature of deviance and crime in a prison context among prisoners and correctional staff.

The results also illustrate the utility of event-analysis approaches in the study of violence, conflict and the relationship between victims and offenders (Sacco & Kennedy 2012). Violence in a prison setting is clearly a social event that involves multiple parties that bring their own gendered perceptions of risk, experiences of pain, and degree of social status to an interchange. These factors shape the way in which men interpret each other’s actions or inactions as affronts to face and whether it requires a violent response (Goffman 1959); the results suggest that in a prison context, violence is appropriate in situations where the perceived affront threatens masculinity in some way. The results illustrate clearly the way in which conflict negotiations in prison create precursors for new conflicts in which the losing party might save face and regain some claim to a dominant masculine status. In the long term aftermath, the men in the study continue to experience the pains of a gender performance they put on in prison; this in turn shapes how they negotiate new conflicts in the free community. Future research should continue to explore violence as a gendered event.

Methodological Implications

The present study makes a methodological contribution in terms of illustrating the way that gender structures and shapes qualitative sampling and interview conversations. In terms of sampling I found support for the benefit of both increased and decreased relational distance in snowball techniques (Wright 2008). I interviewed appeared to be candid in their responses and expressed emotional vulnerability and depth likely because of our close relational distance, the ways in which we met and the time I spent nurturing the relationships prior to an audio recorded interview. However, one person said that he felt more comfortable because I am a stranger and thus he perceived less social risk involved in participating in the study. Methodologists should
more closely examine relational distance in sampling; particularly as it applies to work with vulnerable or hard to reach populations. A second methodological contribution concerns the way in which gender shapes the nature of an interview exchange. I found gender to be relevant to the sampling strategy as well as the narrative editing that occurred during the interviews. Again, methodologists should explore this dynamic in more depth; particularly questions pertinent to the dynamics of women interviewing men with incarceration experience.

In terms of conceptualizing violence, future researchers might consider what violence means to current and ex-prisoners. Scholars have recently noted that people tend to use the word violence to refer to behaviours that they view negatively (Tripplet et al. 2016). Constructionist scholars have long recognized the way that behaviours are differentially constructed in relation to the broader social context and political climate. For example, Stephen Pfhol (1977) and others (Best 1993; Johnson 2003) have documented how certain behaviours toward children came to be defined and accepted as abusive when they had not previously been. The way that prisoners perceive and name particular actions as violent must be understood in relation to the subcultural norms that shape interactions between men in prison and the particular circumstances that potentially ‘violent’ behaviours are enacted. Men in my study used an array of words and phrases (done in, checked off, dealt with, fucked with, et cetera) to refer to conduct that I would call violent victimization but that they might not. For example, Shannon noted ‘a lot of guys get hurt for doing stupid things, but basically they deserve it so there isn’t a lot of victimization there’. Future researchers should consider the way that prisoners use language to define concepts like violence and victimization and how this is related to subcultural norms and expectations of gender performance in this environment.
Social Implications

A final note concerns the violations of human dignity that appear to be happening in men’s prisons. During the course of this project, I heard many stories from the men of being physically victimized, psychologically taunted, and sexually exploited by prison staff in ways that I would define as threatening or assaultive [such as the men’s experiences with being viewed in the shower by female correctional staff or one participant who was subject to seemingly arbitrary strip searches that could be described as excessive in relation to his fellow prisoners’ experiences]. Future research should address the ways in which imprisoned men resist these cruelties. The results of this study suggest that men exercised resistance to this type of control and victimization in primarily non-violent ways out of fear of violent retaliation from prison staff. Rob recalls how he dealt with the repeated strip searches to which he was subjected:

I got stripped searched all the time. All the time. I don’t know how many guys would be there and they’d be like, who’s getting strip searched, uh [his last name] I’d be like are you fucking kidding me? You haven’t found one single thing and you’re going to strip search me again? I never had anything and this would be a couple of times a week…what they do is they tell you to run your hand through your hair [motions] they tell you to put your tongue up and down [motions] and they’ll tell you to grab your balls and pull them up and down, and then turn around and bend over and cough. I remember this sequence, so I was like fuck it – I am going to do this every single time until they stop… I go in the room, and this time they actually closed the curtain and then turned around I was going like this [motions – simultaneously rubbing hair, pulling his genitals, and flipping tongue up and down with crazed expression] and I’m buck naked, like ‘this is what you want to see isn’t it?’…I did it one more time and then they stopped doing it [strip searching him]. They were like this guys is creepy [laughs]. Win for me [smiles].

Other stories suggest micro-resistances that draw attention to the ways that men feel violated by having their bodily integrity interfered with in this way and how humor might operate as a mechanism of both self-protection and resistance. Mark explains: Every time the guards would
Other realities of daily life that I would describe as humiliating and painful violations of human dignity include Mark’s recent experience of being denied access to a washroom which resulted in him defecating in the view of other prisoners; men sleeping in triple-bunked cells in which there is little space to avoid being urinated on; men being served frozen meat in segregation units dirtied by human feces; and the general state of insecurity and deprivation in which men are forced to exist in prison. Researchers working in this area ought to report their findings to lawyers to determine the extent to which such incidents constitute a violation of certain protections in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms; particularly Section 7 the “right to life, liberty and security of the person” as well as protections against “cruel and unusual punishment”. Men who have suffered these abuses ought to be entitled to compensation from the government in response to the cruel ways that they have been treated. Lee’s story in particular, draws attention to the abuses that Canadian prisoners have historically suffered (see Osborne 2006).

Concluding Remarks

In sum, prison creates a situation in which large numbers of often young, angry men, often with previous histories of violence, abuse, drug addiction and other structural disadvantages relevant to racism and economic inequality – who are armed with an impressive array of weapons crafted from the most innocuous items like pieces of paper or sticks of butter – are crammed into increasingly tight spaces with other disadvantaged and angry men, and subject to enforced submission to a series of emasculating and degrading prison rituals in which they have little control

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56 See pages 99-100; and 111.
57 Considering all of this; the social implications, the pains of imprisonment and the violence described in this study, future researchers might also continue to investigate the ethical implications of the strange phenomena of prison and crime tourism (see Sacco and Horton 2013).
over their bodies or themselves. On top of this, incarcerated men are forced to undergo this experience by correctional officers (often men) who enforce rules and represent the interests of a political structure that constructs retributive and punitive criminal justice measures as the obvious solution to the ‘crime problem’. This is paired at best with a lack of public knowledge of violence in prison flowing from the way in which the claims of prisoners and prison activists are marginalized in media claimsmaking arenas – and at worst, public apathy regarding prisoners’ statuses as human beings deserving of equal human rights and protection against criminal victimization. It is hoped that the present study has shed light on some of these intersecting issues and suggested useful avenues for future research on the problems of men in prison.
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A number of concerns relevant to research ethics and research integrity emerged during the course of the research. Relative to the history of sociological inquiry more generally, the formalization of research ethics review regarding research with human “subjects” that is pervasive across Canadian research institutions is a recent development. The *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2 2010) governs all research with human beings across all disciplines in Canada. The TCPS2 identifies justice, respect for persons, and concern for welfare as three core principles of ethical research. Flowing from these guiding principles are requirements that researchers inform participants of the potential risks of harm and benefits of the research, that researchers take reasonable steps to minimize or eliminate the risk of harm to participants, and that researchers ensure that participation is voluntary and consent informed. Faculty and students who endeavour to conduct research with humans must submit an application detailing the proposed research to their institution’s Research Ethics Board, whose members adjudicate the application according to their interpretation of the stipulations outlined in the TCPS2.

The development of official documents outlining formal ethical protocol for research with human subjects in Canada in part emerged from the atrocities perpetrated by physicians and other scientists against humans during the Nazi regime. Post-war “biomedical horror stories” (Palys and Atchison 2014) that came to light during the Nuremberg trials included accounts of medical practitioners subjecting captives to the severing and exchange of limbs without anaesthetic, submersion in ice baths to the point of death from hypothermia, sterilization via chemical irritants, or x-rays, and the purposeful infliction of diseases, among other horrors, each perpetrated in the
name of advancing science. Such egregious examples of medical experiments carried out with “clipboards and observational protocols” (Palys and Atchison 2014:63) rightly sparked outrage and facilitated the development of the Nuremburg Code which is among the first official statements on research ethics. The Code included guiding principles such as provisions regarding voluntary consent and the need to weigh the risks of the study against the benefits to society, which were meant to regulate scientific activity in the name of preventing such abuses from recurring.

A number of examples of grossly unethical medical experimentations are easily found in the North American medical research history in the post-Nuremburg context. Most notably, the oft-cited Tuskegee study in which the United States Public Health Service commissioned a longitudinal study of untreated syphilis; though a cure was discovered during the course of the research, this information was concealed from participants as researchers continued to systematically observe their deterioration (Palys and Atchison 2014). The study prompted further development of formal ethical codes in the form of the Belmont Report which outlines ethical principles centring on justice, beneficence and respect for persons (Babbie and Benaquisto 2014). Examples of unethical treatment of humans in the name of science are documented in Canadian research and similarly involve the exploitation of vulnerable groups often housed in “total institutions” (Goffman 1961; Osborne 2006). Between the 1950s and 1970s Canadian prisoners were the test subjects for studies of toxicity levels in food additives, clinical drug trials and experimental drug trials (Osborne 2006). Patients at psychiatric wards in Montreal in the 1960s were unknowingly subject to government-sponsored lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) experiments for the purposes of learning the effects of “brainwashing” (Babbie and Benaquisto 2014). 58

58 Additionally globalization raises ethical questions regarding the exploitation vulnerable groups in developing countries (see Emanuel et al. 2004).
Three iconic cases are often presented as typifying examples of ethically problematic research in the social sciences. The first is Laud Humphreys’ (1970) famous study of gay sex in public washrooms in which he posed as a voyeur. Without consent, Humphreys recorded licence plate information of the men who frequented the washroom and went to their homes under the guise of conducting a public health survey in order to discover more about their personal lives. The study attracted much ethical critique primarily for the deceptive way in which Humphreys collected the information and the potential risk of harm posed to his subjects (Palys and Atchison 2014). Two other famous studies are often cited in discussions of research ethics: Stanley Milgram’s (1963) behavioural studies on authority in which research participants were led to believe that they were obligated to administer painful electric shocks to other participants; and second, Philip Zimbardo’s (1971) famous Stanford Prison Experiment in which participants in the randomly assigned role of “prisoner” or “guard” became so distressed that the study was terminated in a matter of weeks. Such ethically problematic research became illustrative of the need to evaluate research prospectively (Librett and Perrone 2010) and are routinely cited in undergraduate research methods textbooks as classic examples of ethical misconduct (see Babbie and Benaquisto 2014).

Incidents such as these were folded into arguments in favour of the creation of regulatory bodies that could assess the ethical merit of research projects according to a standardized, formalized code of research ethics; such claims appear to have originated in the period following the Tuskegee controversy (Palys and Atchison 2014). In Canada, the formalization of research ethics regulation began in 1998 with the introduction of the first Tri-Council Policy Statement that outlined ethical conduct for all researchers conducting research with human participants which further outlined issues of confidentiality, harm, informed consent, and the need to weigh the
potential risks and benefits of a research study. The original TCPS was subject to some criticism around these guidelines which prompted a revised, second edition of the policy (TCPS2) which was released in 2010, underwent multiple revisions and is now a 216 page document that continues to govern research. At face value, it would appear that a formal body of research ethics to which all work is subject could offer some protection for human beings that become the subject of research studies; however, the formalized, bureaucratized nature of the institutional ethics review process has been strongly critiqued by scholars for undermining scholarly research, disadvantaging qualitative work, jeopardizing the dignity of research participants and potentially the entire mission of academic scholarship and teaching.

Ethics Creep & Qualitative Work

In recent years scholars have expressed grave concern with “ethical norming” (van den Hoonaard 2001) and the increasingly bureaucratic nature of institutional ethics review regulation (Bledsoe et al. 2007; Schlosser 2008; Haggerty 2004; Allen 2008; Murray et al. 2011; Halse and Honey 2007; Guta et al. 2013; Palys and Lowman 2011); and in particular, the implication of this trend for qualitative work (Taylor and Patterson 2010; Librett and Perrone 2010; Ells and Gutfreund 2006) and the welfare of research participants (Dingwall 2008). Many of these works describe the research ethics approval process as increasingly taking on a highly bureaucratic, rationalized form (Bledsoe et al. 2007; Haggerty 2004). Kevin Haggerty, a Canadian scholar and Research Ethics Board (REB) member, argues that the Canadian ethics review process is characterized by “ethics creep” which implies an outward expansion and intensified regulation of research activities. He argues that these tendencies are demonstrated by the expanding scope of research ethics protocols, the construction of ‘harm’ REBs, informed consent provisions and the assumption that participants will always remain ‘anonymous’. Some scholars argue that this
regulatory creep is a form of organizational survival (Dingwall 2008) in that REBs function to prioritize concerns of institutional liability over questions of ethical conduct and human welfare.

Researchers’ ‘compliance’ with research ethics protocols, as defined and interpreted by REBs and IRBs, is determined in a bureaucratic manner. Bledsoe and colleagues compare the bureaucratic nature of the ethics-approval review process to highly complex, high risk, organizations:

…these organizations seek to pre-empt the unexpected through the art of anticipatory ‘sense-making’ of materials in their earliest stage of formation. Scrutinizing pools of amorphous elements that lie as little more than suggestions, they search constantly for signs of potentially harmful emerging configurations. Spotting those with the remotest chance of causing harm, they take swift pre-emptive action to disrupt them in their unformed phases…their goal is to allow only those patterns to emerge that will produce safe, familiar outcomes (2007:606).

Professional ethics were once governed by discipline-specific codes, professional standing of the researcher and their practical experience and training. REBs are increasingly successful in constructing social science research as “risk-producing”. The centralization and bureaucratization of research ethics “marks a move away from a system based on an assumption of professional competence and responsibility to one based on institutionalized distrust” (Haggerty 2004:393). This is a problem because quite clearly there is a fundamental tension between the goal of university researchers and faculty to create an environment that encourages ideas and knowledge generation, and the goals of the REBs to regulate creativity, manage risk, and ensure predictability (Bledsoe et al. 2007). Qualitative research, in particular ethnographic research, is emergent, unfolding and embraces the unexpected as potentially fruitful avenues of inquiry; this is inconsistent with a review processes rationalized toward predictability, uniformity and risk-management.
One tendency in the ethics review process that illustrates this schism is the manner in which “risk of harm” is constructed by REBs (Haggerty 2004). The problem arises from the misleading way that ‘risk’ is conceptualized; Haggerty argues that in social science “[r]isk has a precise meaning, most commonly associated with actuarial sciences where statistics about previous events are used to analyze the likelihood of future untoward potentialities” (2004:402). In other words, risk of any kind is typically determined on the basis of empirical evidence about the probability of an outcome; however, in Haggerty’s experience, consistent with the rationale provided by the REB in this research, determinations of ‘risk’ by a REB “involve almost no consideration of empirical evidence of risk” (2004:402). The effect is that “pronouncements about the ‘risk’ of research projects are more akin to a subjective imagining of potential scenarios” (Haggerty 2004:402). Because “it is possible to anticipate that a vast array of research might be stressful or upsetting to someone, researchers can be required to establish protocols to manage a host of highly speculative harms” in the absence of an empirically supported, substantiated claim of risk on the part of REBs (2004:401; emphasis in original). For example, despite the fact that my research spanned across a number of Canadian provinces, in my review application for this research I was asked to produce “contact info for counselling services participants can access in the case of an upsetting experience in interviews” (REB correspondence April 2013). Such hypothetical approaches to risk ignore evidence from scholarly works that detail the way in which “risks are often contained and mitigated by the benefits that participants receive by telling their stories” (Corbin and Morse 2003:341).

The bureaucratization and ‘risk-envisioning’ characteristic of the ethics review approval process is a special problem for researchers using innovative ethnographic methods (Librett and Perrone 2010). Particularly those studying deviant or stigmatized groups, the ethics review framework can make it more difficult to conduct work that is actually ethical (Fogel 2007). For
example, initially I was required by the University’s ethics board to use my work telephone number instead of my cellular phone number. The rationale provided by the REB was as follows: “It’s a question of security best practices”. This is problematic for a number of methodological and ethical reasons. First, it is unreasonable to assume or expect that research participants be available only during a researcher’s working hours. Second, I am less able to secure confidentiality with a work phone in a shared graduate student office. Additionally, using a formal university office telephone number introduces an undue level of formality which is not conducive to rapport building. Indeed, I found that text messaging was an important mode of communication during the rapport building phase of the research. Finally, restricting communications with participants to a work phone number is hardly conducive to ethnographic and field research that takes place in a natural context. In their letter, the REB did not define “security best practices” in relation to phone numbers nor did it provide evidence or logic supporting cell phone use as a security issue – or how risk of harm to the research participants might be generated by cell phone use.

Another way the REBs ‘risk management’ is reflected in their review of my application was the requirement that interviews be conducted in a public place. Initially I submitted a proposal indicating I would hold interviews “at a location of the participant’s choosing”. The REB responded:

The meetings should be in a mutually agreed upon PUBLIC location, not only to ensure your safety, but also to establish a relationship of equals – not on either the interviewer’s OR the participant’s “home turf” – that would allow for a more successful interchange (REB correspondence April 2013).

This initial response from the REB is problematic for a few reasons. First, according to the TCPS2 research ethics are supposed to be about protecting the welfare of research participants, minimizing the risk of harm to participants, and ensuring that participation is voluntary and consensual. Not only do the REB comments construct safety only in reference to me, the reviewers neglected to
exercise reflexivity as to the ways that holding interviews in a public location could undermine the welfare and dignity of the research participants. Particularly when interviews address questions of a sensitive nature such as victimization experiences, degrading or painful experiences, and involve participants who belong to members of a socially stigmatized group – such as men with incarceration experience – great care should be taken to ensure an interview location where the participant is most comfortable (Herzog 2005); *this* practice suggests ethical reflexivity.

The REB’s claim that a public location would “allow for a more successful interchange” is not empirically supported as a blanket statement. The interview location should be determined by the nature of the research and the participant’s comfort level (Herzog 2005). It is also a methodological decision relevant to the building up of meaning in an interview rather than a question of scheduling or convenience. The “success” of an interchange in relation to the location or setting of the interview is clearly contingent on the degree to which questions posed are of a sensitive nature and the preference of the participant. Many esteemed criminologists and sociologists have interviewed participants in their homes (Venkatesh 2008; Trammell 2012) or even lived with participants (Whyte 1943). In such cases, researchers use their intuition and judgement, as I have in this study, to determine whether a location feels unsafe (Weiss 1994). The REB in this case provided no explanation or empirical evidence to suggest a relationship between researcher safety and public interviewing. I completed my Master’s research at Queen’s University as well – as part of that project I submitted an application for ethics review to the same REB proposing to interview people (both men and women) who practice flesh hook pulling and other body modifications (see Horton 2013). The location of the interviews as it pertains to my safety – or the location of interviews at all – was never raised as an issue in this application. Nor was my cell phone use.
At a minimum, these observations support arguments regarding the inconsistency with which REBs review qualitative research proposals (Corbin and Morse 2003). Likely, it illustrates the way in which “risk of harm” is largely a product of the subjective imaginings of potential worst-case scenarios – unrestrained by empirical evidence - on the part of REB members (Haggerty 2004). The security risks relevant to the interview location and cellular phone use identified by the REB in this project remain unclear; it would appear that given the similarity in research methods, and the stigmatized or deviant nature of the research participants in both my PhD and MA research projects, the only distinguishing feature is that participants in this project have a (known) criminal record. Scholars have identified the ways in which the ethics-approval review process privileges some methodologies and paradigms over others (Corbin and Morse 2003; Boser 2007) and make decisions “outside the scope of their federally mandated mission” (Librett and Perrone 2010: 734). It does not advance knowledge of ethical practice to ignore that social inequalities “apparent in other social arenas are likewise embedded in academia” (Schlosser 2008:1503). Future research should investigate empirically whether ethics-review applications for qualitative research with non-incarcerated people with criminal records result in a significantly disproportionate assessment of “risk” by REBs compared to other applications where the presence of a criminal record is not explicitly identified. Such research could potentially provide insight into the ethics-review application process and questions of undue stereotyping of members of stigmatized groups who have already paid their supposed “debt” to society.

**Informed Consent & Confidentiality**

Like highly complex, high reliability organizations, IRBs are machines for risk management rationalized toward creating wide margins of safety (Bledsoe et al. 2007). Another way that ‘risk’ is managed is through informed consent. According to the TCPS2 “consent must
be obtained from participants prior to the conduct of the research” (2010:27). Article 3.12 of the TCPS2 stipulates that consent needs to be documented typically in a “consent form”; however, it does provide an exception to this method:

Written consent in a signed statement from the participant is a common means of demonstrating consent, and in some instances, is mandatory. However, there are other means of providing consent that are equally ethically acceptable. In some types of research, and for some groups or individuals, written signed consent may be perceived as an attempt to legalize or formalize the consent process and therefore may be interpreted by the participant as a lack of trust on the part of the researcher. In these cases, oral consent, a verbal agreement or a handshake may be required, rather than signing a consent form.

Despite this, the practice of documenting consent with a consent form is highly normalized and expected by REBs and is the subject of a number of critiques of the ethics review process (Dingwall 2008; Haggerty 2004; van den Hoonaard 2001). I served on my own institution’s Research Ethics Committee at the departmental level for three years and during this time I did not review a single application from a faculty member or a graduate student without an attached consent form.

Consent forms are highly problematic in qualitative work; particularly if that work involves stigmatized groups such as those with a criminal record or who are involved in criminal activity. The insistence on consent forms produces unwarranted hardships on the participants and the researcher; additionally, the creation of a written record of an interview potentially “destroy[s] natural anonymity” (van den Hoonaard 2001). Bledsoe and colleagues (2007) note that consent forms are subject to intense review by research ethics committees in that language, individual words and formatting are scrutinized. Introducing consent forms into a research relationship can be off-putting particularly when there is close relational distance between the researcher and the participant. In theory, consent forms are supposed to protect the research participant against harm, but in practice these forms are often met with mistrust or suspicion and can do great damage to the
carefully nurtured rapport a researcher may be developing with a participant. Additionally, there may be cultural barriers to collecting written consent (Corbin and Morse 2003). In my study, I found that participants’ concept of consent was much different than that envisioned by the REB; when presented with the consent form, one participant in my study asked:

What is this form about? Why do I need to sign this form? I mean, [another participant] vouched for you. If I sign this form, that means I don’t trust [the referee].

This participant did sign the form “for me” but it is evident from his perspective that the document was offensive and devoid of meaning as it relates to the question of consent.

Another concern with the consent form process is the extent to which it undermines the sampling process and potentially reproduces marginalization. Members of a stigmatized group, such as men with incarceration experience, may want to have their stories heard but not want to sign an official document. Researchers have noted many examples of participants refusing to sign consent forms because they believe that the form could put them in social or career jeopardy (Librett and Perrone 2010) or because they were offended by the implied lack of trust and respect (Dingwall 2008). People who are currently involved in criminal activity, despite the rhetoric that the form protects participants, may be hesitant to sign an official document of any kind – despite the trust that may have been developed with the researcher. This is not an unreasonable concern, given that consent forms potentially create a risk of confidentiality breaches particularly when the forms have to travel between locations. Some researchers have found a way around consent forms. Because the TCPS and REBs do not require that ethnographers and other qualitative researchers check government issued identification, some researchers have given their participants an option to sign the consent form and represent themselves in “any identity they choose” (Librett and Perrone 2010). In my study, I did not check government identification when consent forms were
signed by participants; I have no way of knowing if the names recorded were their legal names, or if participants opted, at my offer, to put a name.

Part of this problem stems from the lack of expertise in qualitative methods or insight into stigmatized communities or subcultures among some REBs (Schlosser 2008). Though required by the TCPS2 to have at least one “community member” who is supposed to “broaden the perspective” of the REB by reflecting the perspective of the participant (TCPS2 p. 72), many REBs fail to appoint people with any insight into the communities that criminologists routinely study (Palys and Lowman 2011). Criminologists Ted Palys and John Lowman of Simon Fraser University note in their reflections on the TCPS2, the ‘community member’ typically appointed to Canadian REBs is likely to be an upper or middle class person, retired academic or local politician “who operates as much on the basis of media stereotype as any other REB member” (2011:6). Further, there is no guarantee that an REB will include scholars with qualitative research expertise who might bring perspective to the problems of written consent forms in a field setting – and “decisions about criminological research are still being made in part by epidemiologists and biochemists” (Palys and Lowman 2011:7). Schlosser (2008) met this challenge squarely in defending her grounded theory method in prison research to an REB without representatives from the social sciences.59

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59 Another question relates to when the research begins; if consent must be collected (via consent form) prior to the start of the research, what does this mean for rapport building? Particularly for ethnographic work, a researcher may already be forming relationships when the idea to study a phenomenon academically is inspired. Another problem is the scope of consent forms. My consent form indicates that participants are consenting to an audio-recorded interview of a specific duration. But what of the conversations had in the weeks and months of rapport building, or those that follow? Is the researcher to secure a new consent form for each interaction? The problem is that the consent form format, implies a definitive start and end date to the data collection phase.
Professional Ethics & REBs

My application to conduct research with men who have been incarcerated was approved by the Research Ethics Board at Queen’s University, but not without negotiating a number of hurdles in attempts to maintain methodological control of the study in a way that I perceived to be most conducive to ethical conduct. My experiences are consistent with Bledsoe and colleagues’ observation that emergent, exploratory qualitative work and other “social science research paradigms fit poorly into the thrust of medically-driven IRB protocol templates and language” (2007:592-593). Additionally, in my experience submitting and reviewing ethics applications, the process appears to have less to do with real discussions about ethics and ethical conduct than it does with formatting an application to the correct institutional language. Gary Allen suggests that “somehow ethics has become about expertly filling out a form for a committee, rather than an ongoing active reflection on important issues and their application to useful practice” (2008:107). Is the research ethics review process an exercise in “checking off boxes” and “unquestioning rule following” (Allen 2008:115)? At best, this seemingly meaningless and cumbersome process “stifles the initiative of some of…[the] most enthusiastic students” (Haggerty 2004:397); at worst, it teaches new generations of undergraduate and graduate students how to fill out forms rather than to exercise reflexivity and develop sound ethical judgement.

Researchers may have to face a choice “to conduct innovative research in their fields or to meet the requirements of their institutions’ IRBs” (Bledsoe et al. 2007:594). The hurdles to ethics approval posed to qualitative researchers in particular has had a deterrent effect on innovative

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60 However, a subsequent application to amend my project in order to interview a man who was currently incarcerated who was referred to me by a participant, was denied. I met with a representative of the REB to inquire as to the rationale behind the rejection of the application and I was told that interviewing incarcerated men is a “higher ethical risk”. When I pressed for further explanation as to what the specific risks are and how I might mitigate these risks I was told “because it’s prison it’s a higher ethical risk”. Discouraged by this tautological reasoning, I gave up on having this amendment approved and the lived experience of the currently incarcerated person who wanted to contribute to the research is not included in this study.
scholarship and teaching. The ethics review application process is perceived by researchers as a “necessary evil” (Scholsser 2008) or something to be avoided altogether in favour of analyses that do not involve human participation. Though institutional ethics approval is most often eventually granted “the process has become so highly bureaucratized…[that] the effect upon potential research directions has become undeniable” (Librett and Perrone 2010: 729-730). Delays in the ethics review process over the wording and language of consent forms and time wasted with attempts to convince ethics boards of the soundness of respected qualitative methodologies unfamiliar to them (Schlosser 2008) compromise researcher productivity, disrupts student careers and “blunt[s] the essence of many intellectual traditions” (Bledsoe et al. 2007:594). This appears to put a particularly acute and undue burden on qualitative research. For example, “the insistence on the part of ethics committees on knowing the exact questions they are putting to interviewees…[may] be quite impossible to put into practice” (van den Hoonaaard 2001).

The one size fits all model of research ethics (Palys and Lowman 2011) does not recognize the heterogeneity in research participants or the context in which questions of ethics are negotiated. As Allen explains “[i]t is simply disingenuous to assume that a central proscriptive rule can offer applicable solutions to the ethical challenges a researcher will face” (2008:111). Not all topics and interviews are likely to generate the same degree of distress (Corbin and Morse 2003). These problems have prompted scholars to make calls for separate ethics review boards for ethnographic proposals or that existing review boards mandate the inclusion of ethnographers (Librett and Perrone 2010). Others argue for the end of regulation altogether on the grounds that it censors free speech and inquiry in a way that is fundamentally wrong (Dingwall 2008); and potentially threatening to democracy itself in the way that universities are “systematically handicapped” in the “competition between information providers” such as journalists, who do not operate under the
same types of constraints (Dingwall 2008). If Haggerty is correct, the future of REBs may “follow
the pattern of most bureaucracies and continue to expand, formalizing procedures in ways that
increasingly complicate, hamper, or censor certain forms of non-traditional, qualitative, or critical
social scientific research” (2004: 393).

In sum, it seems the consent form process and possibly the ethics-approval review process
itself is a pseudo-event (Boorstin 1961) in that it creates “rituals of controlling risks that hardly
exist, in order to show that they were properly regulated” (Bledsoe et al. 2007). Ironically and
alarmingly, this process appears to have little to do with actual ethical practice or protection of the
research participant (van den Hoonard 2001) which some have described as “the most disturbing
manifestation of the effort to regulate creativity” (Bledsoe et al. 2007: 636). These trends in the
standardization and bureaucratization of research ethics are more than a matter of inconvenience
or hoop-jumping; it may foreshadow the death of participant observation, ethnography and other
qualitative methodologies “at the hands of ethical regulators” (Katz 2006), produce a “chilling
distortion of research” (Bledsoe et al. 2007:593) and fail to provide opportunities for student
researchers to think critically and reflexively about issues of professional ethics in research
practice. Ethical regulation may actually threaten to perpetuate power inequalities that innovative
qualitative methodologies aim to disrupt; in other words, “[w]hen we give up doing participant
observation with vulnerable or socially marginal groups because of the regulatory obstacles, then
a society becomes less well-informed about the condition of those it excludes” (Dingwall
2008:10). Consequentially, such constraints on scholarly research inevitably “structure what truths
can be spoken and by whom” (Haggerty 2004:392). None of this is good news for prisoners or
qualitative sociologists interested in studying prisoners, ex-prisoners, or other hard to reach groups.
APPENDIX B:

BIOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

William: I met William at a homelessness awareness rally. At his suggestion, our interviews took place in the evening in an empty donut shop near the recovery house where he lived. William appears to be Caucasian. William is a man in his mid-forties who self-reports that he has been in and out of prison throughout his lifetime. When I asked William how much time he had spent in prison he reported: “It would be hard for me to do the math and tell you how long overall, because all my bits were small in length. Nothing more than nine months but there was a point in time…that I was spending a lot more time in jail than out in the real world.”

Mike: Mike was twenty-five years old at the time of our interview. He appears to be of Southeast Asian descent. Our interview took place in an empty restaurant. Disclosing how I met Mike could jeopardize confidentiality. He self-reports that he had been arrested for various crimes related to kidnapping, extortion, and drug trafficking and gang-related crimes. Mike spent time in the general population and segregation during his incarceration. According to our conversations, the approximate time that Mike was incarcerated appears to be in the range of 4-5 months depending on if one counts time spent in remand centres and awaiting trial.

Dan: Dan is a man in his fifties who identifies as white. According to newspaper reports (and Dan) was arrested and charged with crimes related to sexual assault on a minor and luring a child and child pornography, and gross indecency. Newspaper reports indicate that Dan spent one year in pre-trial custody and was sentenced to two years in a federal institution. I met Dan through a non-profit organization and our interviews took place in a private boardroom as well as in the bleachers of an empty sports field. Dan spent time in the general population and protective custody during his incarceration.

Scott: Scott is a man in his thirties who appears to be white. I met Scott through a personal friend. Scott reports that he was incarcerated for crimes related to a domestic disturbance involving an altercation with is ex-girlfriend over their son. The exact length of time that Scott was incarcerated is unclear; but he reports that it involved a combination of prison time and community service. Our recorded interview took place in a public park. Informal conversations took place over coffee. He spent time in the general population and segregation during his incarceration.

Alan: Alan was in his late-forties at the time of our interview. He identifies as gay and appears to be white. He reports that he has been arrested numerous times for charges related to the possession of drugs but was convicted once and spent a period of time in prison of approximately three months plus time spent awaiting trial. Our audio-recorded interviews took place in a public park.
Ben: Ben is a man in his early twenties who self-identifies as an ethnic minority. I met Ben through a personal friend. He reports time spent in juvenile detention centres and adult prisons. His involvement in criminal activity appears to have begun early in his life and continued into his twenties. He reports having been arrested and charged with an array of crimes related to the vehicle theft, armed robbery, breach of parole conditions, possession of drugs for the purposes of trafficking and aggravated assault. Our interviews took place in public parks and restaurants. He spent time in the general population and in segregation during his incarceration.

Russell: Russell is a heterosexual white man in his forties. He was unable to recount the exact number of times he had been arrested or charged with crimes though he describes “100%” of his crimes as thefts or robberies committed to support a drug addiction. Our audio-recorded interview took place in a public park. At the time of the interview Russell was living in a recovery house. He spent time in the general population segregation during his incarceration.

Pat: Pat is a man in his fifties who appears to be white. At the time of our interview Pat was unemployed and homeless. He reports that he has been arrested a number of times for assault charges. Pat was unable to recall the exact amount of time he has spent in prison. Our audio-recorded interviews took place in a public park where Pat was living. During his incarceration he spent time in the general population and segregation. I met Pat a non-profit event.

Sam: Sam is a heterosexual man in his early twenties who identifies as Aboriginal. He reports that he has been arrested and charged a number of times for crimes related to drug possession and breach of bail conditions. He was incarcerated for approximately six months. Our interviews took place at his home and during walks, and in public parks. He spent time in the general population and segregation during his incarceration.

Earl: Earl is a man in his sixties who appears to be white. Earl reports that he served approximately thirty years in total between American and Canadian prisons for crimes related to drug possession, trafficking, and manslaughter. He reports that he has a reputation for violence and a degree of status in prison and in the free community. His claim is corroborated by my personal contacts. He spent time in the general population and segregation during his incarceration. We met several times for lunch. Our audio-recorded interview took place in his office.

Ryan: Ryan is a man in his thirties who appears to be white. He reports that he was first incarcerated at the age of nineteen. He reports that his total time serves is approximately three years for crimes related to fraud, gun possession and assaulting a police officer. Our meetings took place in public parks, coffee shops, in my car and during walks.

Jeremy: Jeremy is a man in his thirties who appears to be white. I met Jeremy at a non-profit event. Our audio-recorded interview took place in a public park. He reports that he
has been incarcerated intermittently and in total for approximately twelve years. His crimes began as a youth and continued into adulthood. He reports that his crimes are related to drugs, gang involvement, violence and robbery.

**Dustin:** Dustin is a man in his mid-thirties who identifies as having part Aboriginal heritage. He reports that the total period of time he was incarcerated is approximately thirteen years. His reported crime include: aggravated assault, assault causing bodily harm, armed robbery with a hand gun, drug trafficking, assault causing bodily harm, possession of a deadly weapon, and possession of narcotics. I met Dustin through his association with a non-profit organization. Our interview took place in a green space outside his apartment building.

**Brendan:** Brendan is a man in his mid-thirties who identifies as white. He reports that he was first incarcerated in an adult American federal institution at the age of seventeen for possession of a handgun. Due to institutional charges, he ended up spending approximately twelve years in prison before being deported to Canada. He spent time in the general population and segregation during while he was incarcerated. Our audio-recoded interviews took place in a restaurant with a private table, over coffee and during walks.

**Rob:** Rob is a man in his early thirties who appears to be white. He reported that he made a conscious effort to not track the total time that he had been incarcerated. He was incarcerated on two separate occasions for a total period of approximately five years. He reports that his crimes are related to drug trafficking.

**Shannon:** Shannon is a man in his thirties who appears to be white. He reports that his criminal involvement started at the age of thirteen and that he has been incarcerated in juvenile and adult correctional facilities. He reports that his crimes related to drugs and gang activity. The longest consecutive period of time for which Shannon was incarcerated was approximately five years. Shannon spent time in the general population and segregation while he was incarcerated. Shannon and I had numerous conversations over lunch, in parks and during walks. At the time of the audio-recorded interview Shannon had been free of heroin use for four months and had completed a twelve-step program. He currently works in the recovery field and is engaged to be married.

**Mark:** Mark is a heterosexual man in his mid-twenties. He reports no criminal involvement other than destruction of property and looting of a jacket which occurred while he was intoxicated and involved in a large scale public riot – crimes for which he was convicted and spent thirty days in prison. Mark spent time in protective custody during his incarceration.

**Grant:** Grant is a man in his forties. He reports that he had a period of time in his life where he was incarcerated on and off for drug related crimes and robbery. He currently works in the recovery field and reports that his experience in the prison system help
him to connect with clients. Our audio-recorded interview took place in a public park.

**Chris:** Chris is a man in his forties who appears to be white. He reports that he spent two years in prison in addition to “rubby bits” on and off over a twenty year period. He reports that his crimes are related to theft and the possession and sale of illegal drugs. He describes his crimes as related to his drug addiction. Our interviews took place over coffee and in a band-shell in a public park. At the time of our interview Chris was employed and involved in a recovery program.

**Shane:** Shane was forty-nine at the time of our interview. He reports that he was charged and arrested for arson after burning down his home. He spent a period of time in a minimum security facility in addition to a sentence of three years on probation. Shane is a professional musician. Many of his songs reflect his lived experience in prison.

**Todd:** Todd is a man in his forties who appears to be white. He reports a lengthy period of incarceration: “I’ve don’t a lot of federal, provincial and state time as well. I really haven’t tallied it but I would say somewhere around eighteen, or nineteen years”. His criminal involvement started at the age of fourteen and persisted until four years prior to our interview. Todd reports that his crimes were related to possession of narcotics and credit cards (presumably fraud). During his incarceration he reports serving time in the general population as well as in segregation (for a period of six month). Todd reports that he had a reputation as a ‘mover and shaker’ in the prison system and the free community. Our audio-recorded interviews took place in Todd’s work office. He currently works in a halfway house for ex-prisoners.

**Aaron:** Aaron is a man in his fifties whom I met at a public forum on prison justice. Aaron reports that he has been incarcerated in Canada for an approximate total period of two year and an approximate total period of five years in the American prison system. Aaron reports that his crimes are related to grand theft and frauds spanning a decade. Our audio-recorded interviews took place over lunch, in public squares and during walks. Aaron spent time in the general population and segregation during his incarceration.

**Lee:** Lee is a man in his sixties who appears to be white. He was incarcerated for a period of twenty-three years and nine months plus several “provincial bits”. The most serious crime for which Lee was convicted is the murder of another prisoner. He reports numerous incidents in which he was involved in violence in the prison and in the free community. Lee spent time in the general population and in segregation (a period of eight months) during his incarceration. Our audio-recorded interview took place in my car over coffee as Lee reported that he did not feel comfortable talking about the sensitive details of his incarceration in a public place.
APPENDIX C:
LETTERS OF INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

Letter of Information

**Project Title:** Men’s Experiences of Conflict in Canadian Prisons  
**Researcher:** Alicia Horton, PhD Candidate, Queen’s University

The purpose of the study is to document men’s opinions and experiences with conflict in a prison environment. You are invited to participate in a digitally recorded interview lasting between 1 to 2 hours. You will be asked questions about your experience with conflict during your incarceration and post-incarceration experience. There is no compensation for your contribution. It is possible that discussing your incarceration experience during the interview could include sensitive or personal topics. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You are not obligated to answer any of the research questions for any reason.

Your participation is confidential; all identifying information will be replaced with false names or codes. Before taking part in the interview you will be asked to sign a form indicating your consent to participate in the study and for your interview to be digitally recorded. Digitally recorded interviews will be destroyed once they have been transcribed and made anonymous by the researcher (Alicia Horton). Files will be stored in a locked cabinet and/or safe accessible only to the researcher and her academic supervisor, Dr. Vincent F. Sacco. Your identity will remain confidential and no identifying information will appear in the data or presentation of the results.

Thank you very much for your participation in this research project. Your contribution is very valuable and will help to enhance our understanding of the experiences and needs of men with incarceration experience.

Any questions about study participation may be directed to:

- Alicia Horton, Principal Investigator, Email: 7adh1@queensu.ca, Phone: 613.483.0909 or 778.872.4798
- Dr. Vincent Sacco, Academic Supervisor [Email: saccov@queensu.ca Phone: 613.533.6000 ext. 74492]

Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to:

- Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 613-533-6081.

This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethical guidelines, and Queen's University policies on ethical research.

Sincerely,
Alicia Horton,
Principal Investigator

Consent to Voluntary Participation Form

Project Title: Men’s Experiences of Conflict in Canadian Prisons
Researcher: Alicia Horton, PhD Candidate, Queen’s University

Please read this consent form carefully before you decide to participate in the research study.

The purpose of the study is to document men’s opinions and experiences with conflict in a prison environment. You are invited to participate in a digitally recorded interview lasting between 1 and 2 hours. You will be asked questions about your experience with conflict during your incarceration and post-incarceration experience. There is no compensation for your participation.

Your participation is voluntary. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. You are not obligated to answer any questions for any reason. There is no penalty with withdrawing from the study. If you decide to withdraw from this study all information you have contributed will be erased from the digital recorder and hand written notes will be shredded. Your signature below indicates that you are aware that your participation is voluntary.

Your participation is confidential. Your participation in this research project is completely confidential. All identifying information will be replaced with false names or codes. Digitally recorded interviews will be destroyed once they have been transcribed and made anonymous by the researcher (Alicia Horton). Transcribed files will be saved to a memory stick and stored in a locked filing cabinet or safe accessible only to the researcher, Alicia Horton, and her academic supervisor, Dr. Vincent Sacco. Your identity will remain confidential and no identifying information will appear in the data or presentation of the results. Your signature below indicates that you are aware that your participation in this study is confidential.

Your signature below indicates that you are aware that if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research project you can contact the following:

Questions about the research project:

- Alicia Horton, Researcher
  Email: 7adh1@queensu.ca
  Phone: 613.483.0909
  Mail: Room C501 Mackintosh Corry Hall
       Department of Sociology, Queen’s University
       Kingston, Ontario
       K7L 3N6

- Dr. Vincent Sacco, Alicia’s academic supervisor
  Email: saccov@queensu.ca
  Phone: 613.533.6000 ext. 74492
Mail:  Room D525 Mackintosh Corry Hall
       Department of Sociology, Queen’s University
       Kingston, Ontario
       K7L 3N6

Questions about ethics or your rights as a research participant:

- Chair of the General Research Ethics Board
  Email: chair.GREB@queensu.ca
  Phone: 613-533-6081

Your signature below indicates:

- You consent to participation in the research project titled Men’s Experiences of Conflict in Canadian Prisons.

- You understand that the interview could deal with sensitive issues relating to your incarceration experience and you agree to assume this risk.

- You consent to a digital voice recording of your interview.

- You have read the letter of information and have had any questions about the research project answered to your satisfaction.

- You are aware that your participation is voluntary, confidential, and you may withdraw at any time without consequence.

- You are aware of who to contact if you have any questions, complaints or concerns about this study or the research procedures.

- You are aware that this study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethical guidelines, and Queen's University policies on ethical research.

I have read the above information and I consent to participation in this research study:

Name: ______________________________ Signature: ___________________________

Date: ______________________________

Thank you very much for your valuable contributions to this research project.
APPENDIX D:
RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER

April 10, 2013

Ms. Alicia Horton
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Sociology
Mackintosh Corry Hall, Room C501
Queen’s University
Kingston, ON K7L 3N6

GREB Ref #: GSOC-106-13; Romeo # 6007851
Title: "GSOC-106-13 Men’s Experiences of Conflict in Canadian Prisons"

Dear Ms. Horton:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GSOC-106-13 Men’s Experiences of Conflict in Canadian Prisons" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen’s ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at https://services.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Adverse Event Report). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To make an amendment, access the application at https://services.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Amendment to Approved Study Form. These changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or romeo@queensu.ca for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

John Freeman, Ph.D.
Professor and Acting Chair
General Research Ethics Board

cc: Dr. Vincent Sacco, Faculty Supervisor
    Dr. Rob Breamish, Chair, Unit REB
    Anne Henderson, Dept. Admin.