Spring 1-1-2018

Toward Rehabilitative Justice: the Journey from De-Habilitated Boys to Re-Habilitated Men

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TOWARD REHABILITATIVE JUSTICE:

THE JOURNEY FROM DE-HABILITATED BOYS TO RE-HABILITATED MEN

by

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B.A., University of Colorado Boulder, 2011
This thesis entitled:

TOWARD REHABILITATIVE JUSTICE:

THE JOURNEY FROM DE-HABILITATED BOYS TO RE-HABILITATED MEN

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

IRB Protocol #14-0359
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Toward Rehabilitative Justice:

The Journey from De-habilitated Boys to Re-habilitated Men

Thesis directed by Professor Janet Jacobs

This dissertation is the qualitative examination of incarcerated men's construction of masculinity across the life course through their experiences of victimization. Using data from thirty life history interviews with incarcerated men who were in a Colorado Department of Corrections rehabilitation program called New Habits (NH), I examine the ways in which respondents developed what I term, de-habilitated masculinity (DM). DM is a version of hyper-masculinity which is cumulatively developed across the life course in a social context of poverty and marginalization and it is initially learned in family systems in which extreme abuse and neglect are the primary and predominant modes of gender socialization. Findings demonstrate how DM is learned in the context of social marginalization and trauma within the family system, achieved during gang involvement, reinforced in the prison environment, and initially deconstructed at NH. I explore the ways in which DM renders boys’ and men’s victimization invisible and contributes to establishing a cycle of violence pathway into gangs and incarceration. The findings illuminate that, when provided with access to rehabilitative programming, incarcerated men have the potential to transform from de-habilitated boys into re-habilitated men. In bringing to light the victimization histories of male prisoners, the goals of this dissertation are to humanize male offenders, to balance society’s perspective of incarcerated men, and to examine the value of rehabilitative justice for the criminal justice system.
This work is dedicated to the men I interviewed at New Habits whose willingness to share their life histories made this research possible. Your vulnerability and quest for change provides inspiration for transforming the criminal justice system.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of Terry who opened doors for me to conduct research at New Habits. Your care for clients and knowledge about the criminal justice system significantly informed my research process. Thank you to my participants who willingly shared their life histories with me in order to provide insight into the lives of incarcerated men. I am honored to have had the opportunity to work with you.

I would like to thank Dr. Janet Jacobs, my dissertation chair, for inspiring me to embark on unknown paths and stretch the boundaries of my intellect. I still remember the first time I went to your office as an undergraduate to ask for advice about my career trajectory. You wisely advised, “Begin with your passion.” This sentiment informed my research path and led me down unexpected and growth-filled roads. Your dedication and belief in me kept me on track to accomplish goals I was sometimes uncertain I could complete. Thank you for your unwavering support and guidance through the twists and turns on my journey. I will forever be grateful to have you as a brilliant mentor in my life.

Thank you to my dissertation committee whose in-depth feedback provides me with a roadmap to guide my future writing adventures. I am grateful for Dr. Sanyu Mojola for helping me expand my sociological thinking and to stand firmly in my findings. Thank you Dr. David Pyrooz for providing research opportunities that have helped me to grow as a criminologist and for your encouragement to continue conducting interview-based research. Dr. Christina Sue—I will never forget your Race and Ethnicity course which deeply impacted me both personally and professionally. Thank you Dr. Victor Rios for being a member on my committee—even though we never had the chance to meet face-to-face—and encouraging me to advance my research. Your work inspires me to continue the writing journey focused on raising awareness about the hypercriminalization of marginalized populations.

I want to acknowledge Molly, my dedicated student who became a transcriber and is now a friend. Thank you for your help on this project—I could not have done it without you.

Thanks to the funding sources who provided financial support for my dissertation research. This work was funded by the University of Colorado Boulder Department of Sociology and two University of Colorado Boulder graduate school awards—Beverly Sears and The Center to Advance Research and Teaching in the Social Sciences.

I absolutely could not have completed this project without the support of my kids, partner, family and friends. There are not words to express the gratitude I feel for my monkeys. You three have been my inspiration, my light, my love, my joy (and sometimes my headache...haha!) throughout this transformative process. I thank you for always encouraging me to pursue my dreams, even when things were turbulent and unknown. Our hugs, tears, intellectual dinner debates and ongoing laughs kept me on track to complete this “Dr. mama” journey. Thanks to my partner, Ua, for being in my life. Through your friendship, devotion, and intellectual challenge, I have discovered parts of myself I never knew existed. I would not have been able to finish this dissertation if it had not been for your encouraging love notes and supportive hugs during my bouts of self-doubt. Each and every day, I am grateful that you are my life-long VIPIC. To my mama and papa—your endless
praise and unconditional love keeps me in pursuit of accomplishing all the goals I dream of conquering. Thank you for always having my back. A giant shout of gratitude is due to my dear friends. Thank you to Jen whose deep conversations inspire me to maintain a stance of curiosity and empowerment. Kendra—one of the most beneficial aspects of graduate school has been developing my friendship with you. I am filled with joy when I reflect upon our weekend trail runs and years of heartfelt conversations. These moments have been a life-line through graduate school and dissertation writing. Last but not least, to all the unnamed family and friends who have cheered me on over the years—thank you, thank you, thank you!
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Not all victims become perpetrators, but virtually all perpetrators have been schooled in the training ground of their own abuse.”
-Real (1998:118)-

“Everybody thinks that we are just inmates, convicts. But the truth is this: I’ve done so much things in my life that I’m not proud of but at the same time I am proud of what’s in my heart. Who I know I can be. I have feelings and I’m human. And I feel like I could be a real good person.”
-Greg, participant-

A. Introduction

i. Social Context and Overview

In the U.S. context of mass incarceration, men represent the majority of the prison population (Carson 2018) and just over three-quarters of the offenders exiting the prison system will recidivate within five years (Durose, Cooper, and Snyder 2014). It is within this context that, in 2015—directly in the middle of conducting life history interviews with incarcerated men for my dissertation research—Barack Obama became the first U.S. president in history to visit a federal correctional institution to talk with male prison inmates in order to gain insight into their experiences of interacting with the criminal justice system (Horsley 2015). Obama’s prison visit highlighted the macro issue of mass incarceration and a recent political shift that supported a qualitative understanding of the individual lives of the inmates who fill our prison cells. As a sociologist, I believe that mass incarceration needs to be approached as a societal versus an individual concern and that President Obama’s prison visit signals the need for critical questioning on the purpose of incarceration and whether or not it is an effective way to rehabilitate offenders. Contextualizing the individual life histories of incarcerated populations will help to catalyze the
prison reform movement and aid in the development of rehabilitation programs, which will in turn help to alleviate the problem of mass incarceration.

Accordingly, this dissertation is an examination of thirty incarcerated men’s life histories across the life course—during childhood, gang involvement, incarceration and in a rehabilitation program. In a snapshot of dissertation findings, my participants’ reported having been raised in communities in which their families were socially marginalized, impoverished, and substance addicted with no options for attending rehabilitation programs. Marginalized and overlooked, school was a side note in participants’ daily lives—the vast majority dropped out during middle school and only one earned a high school diploma. Family members were gang-involved, frequently incarcerated, and violence was a normative reality within their family context, at school, in their communities, and within the prison environment. All of the men I interviewed reported experiencing childhood trauma¹ in the form of abuse and neglect, became gang involved, and the majority spent over a decade and a half of their lives incarcerated.

Within this context, my dissertation findings reveal that participants were culturally socialized into developing what I term, *de-habilitated masculinity*. *De-habilitated masculinity (DM)* is a version of hyper-masculinity³ which is cumulatively developed across the life course in a social context of poverty and marginalization and it is initially learned in family systems in which extreme abuse and neglect are the primary and predominant modes of gender socialization. I argue that DM cumulatively shaped my participants’ masculine identities and contributed to their

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¹Throughout the dissertation I use the terms victimization, child maltreatment and trauma interchangeably. These terms comprise physical, emotional, and sexual abuse as well as neglect and witnessing violence which are defined in Chapter 3 and Appendix C.

² See Chapter 3 for a more detailed description of *de-habilitated masculinity (DM)*.

³ Hyper-masculinity is the “extreme conformity to the more aggressive rules of masculinity” (Wade and Ferree 2015:127). These rules of masculinity are comprised of the “hegemonic” norms (Connell 1987) expected of men in society. Thus, hyper-masculinity is an exaggeration of stereotypical masculine behaviors such as aggression, violence, devaluation of femininity, domination of subordinated masculinities, and the suppression of emotions besides anger and aggression (see Connell 1987; Harris 1999; Pyke 1996; Real 1998; Rios 2009).
pathways into gangs and the criminal system. It was not until participants had access to rehabilitative programming, that they were provided with opportunities to initiate the deconstruction of their DM identities and work toward desistance from recidivistic incarceration. The findings illuminate that those I interviewed have the potential to transform from de-habilitated boys into re-habilitated men, when provided with access to rehabilitative programming.

The goal of this dissertation is to humanize male offenders and balance society’s perspective of incarcerated men—they are both perpetrators and victims—in order to validate the need for the criminal system to move toward rehabilitative justice. In bringing to light the victimization histories of male prisoners, I aim to illuminate the ways in which masculinity constructed through marginalization and victimization contributes to shaping crime and justice in the United States. The qualitative analysis draws upon life history interviews with men who, at the time of our interview, were on a journey toward re-habilitation in a Colorado Department of Corrections therapeutic re-entry program, called New Habits.

**ii. Inspiration, Research Questions and Purpose**

This research began upon my entrance into graduate school. I had just completed an undergraduate honors thesis examining the victimization histories of incarcerated women and an internship working with sexually abused children. I was on a quest to understand violence against women and girls in order to contribute to alleviating the problem. I was not certain of where I would conduct my dissertation research but I had a clear sense that it would be focused on the topic of violence and victimization. With this topic guiding my coursework decisions, I enrolled in every available feminist methods and criminology course offered. In these classes, I observed two critical and well established themes in the academic research we were assigned to read: 1)
There is a multitude of research which reveals that boys and men are the primary perpetrators of violence; and 2) There is a tendency, in qualitative feminist criminological research to examine women as victims and men as perpetrators. These research trends left me wondering why social scientists primarily ask women about their experiences of violence but neglect to ask men why they perpetrate violence. Further, I believed that in order to alleviate violence, we needed to get to the root cause of the problem and ask violent men about their experiences. This line of reasoning was the initial motivation and contextual framing for conducting my dissertation research on the life histories of incarcerated men.

I approached the project implementing the principles of the grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss 1967), entering into my research inductively, with only two broad research questions: 1) Why are boys and men so violent? and 2) What are the experiences of incarcerated men over their life course, as victims? Initially, my primary goal for the research was to find explanations for violent crime among men. I believed this approach would provide insight into the perspective of the perpetrator and thus produce knowledge that could help to alleviate violence against women and girls. I anticipated that questions about their victimization experiences would reveal some evidence of a history of abuse. It has been previously established that incarcerated men report elevated rates of childhood abuse (Harlow 1999; Wolff and Shi 2012; Wolff, Shi, and Siegel 2009). I had no idea that, within the first four interviews, participants would report lengthy histories of severe and frequent experiences of neglect and abuse. As the emerging data guided the research process (Glaser and Strauss 1999), I further delved into the theme of men as victims and de-prioritized the questions targeted toward men as violent perpetrators.

The examination of incarcerated men as victims supplements previous findings which have increased critical awareness about the ways in which criminalization and the disproportionate
Incarceration of men of color\(^5\) has contributed to the U.S. problem of mass incarceration (Alexander 2012; DuVernay 2016; Rios 2009, 2011, 2017; Stevenson 2015). These scholars highlight the disproportionate contact, confinement, and criminalization of people of color in the criminal justice system through discussing the social context of racism, marginalization and exclusion. Rios’ research (2009, 2011, 2017) outlines the process of hypercriminalization of black and Latino boys, describing the ways in which schools, police, and communities label and punish boys of color. Alexander (2012) argues that racism structures the criminal system which has been built upon the history of slavery. In other words, mass incarceration has become the *New Jim Crow*. Stevenson (2015) and DuVernay (2016) investigate dehumanization and the cruel and unusual punishment of offenders of color. Their work proposes that there is a critical need to rethink the laws and regulations which lead black men—an historically marginalized population—into long term confinement and the death penalty. In the context of disproportionate confinement and mass incarceration, the aforementioned scholars examine racism in the criminal justice system to provide explanations for the disproportionate representation of men of color in the carceral system.

My research adds to this significant conversation by raising critical awareness that the problem of mass incarceration is, in part, due to the toxic structure of hyper-masculinity in which the traumatic experiences of boys and men—who represent the majority of the prison population—tend to be unexamined by the criminal justice system. By overlooking male victimization, the trauma histories of male offenders become invisible and subsequently the criminal justice system minimizes the need for rehabilitative justice, which in turn contributes to

\(^5\) According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, for males born in 2001, white men had a 6% chance of serving time in prison at some point in their lives, Hispanic men a 17% chance, and black men a 32% chance (The Sentencing Project 2017).
recidivism. My dissertation highlights that, across all races and ethnicities, 100% of the men I interviewed reported experiencing childhood trauma in the form of abuse and neglect. As such, I argue that, across race, men’s childhood victimization is an essential variable to add to the examination of boys’ and men’s pathways into incarceration. Building upon previous literature arguing that racism has been a significant factor contributing to the rise of mass incarceration, I am inspired to present research which examines the ways in which boys and men’s experiences of trauma shape the criminal justice landscape. In doing so, my research seeks to illuminate the subjugated realities of a marginalized populations which remains unarticulated (Hesse-Biber 2014a, 2014b) and to humanize (Rubin and Rubin 2005) a frequently dehumanized population: incarcerated men who have a history of gang involvement.

In sum, participants’ life histories provide the rich data substantiating my dissertation’s purpose and goals. On one level, my goal is to show that incarcerated men who have a history of childhood victimization and gang involvement have the potential to transform from de-habilitated boys into prosocial, re-habilitated men. On another more macro level, the goal of the research is to contribute to a better understanding of incarcerated men a victims. The findings illuminate participants’ cumulative development of a de-habilitated version of masculinity in which their childhood experiences of trauma were minimized by the criminal justice system and simultaneously their criminality was emphasized. As such, upon participants’ entrance into the criminal processing system, a one-sided approach was implemented which justified retributive, not rehabilitative incapacitation. It was only after several years of serving time in prison that the men I interviewed initiated a turning point in which they agentically gained access to rehabilitative programming and were able to begin their journey toward becoming rehabilitated men. Accordingly, I argue that in this current climate of mass incarceration, my research can provide a
needed perspective on the life experiences of incarcerated men and the importance of moving away from the harsh carceral punishment of traumatized offenders, toward a system of rehabilitative masculinity and justice.

The following sections provide a review of previous research on masculinity, crime, and victimization as well as theoretical approaches which informed my dissertation process.

B. Masculinity, Crime and Victimization

It has been well established in criminological scholarship that men are the primary perpetrators of violence. Newburn and Stanko (1994) contend, “The most significant fact about crime is that it is almost always committed by men” (1). For example, eighty-six percent of armed robberies and seventy-seven percent of aggravated assaults are perpetrated by men and sixty-one out of sixty-two of the mass shootings in the past thirty years were perpetrated by men (Katz et al. 2013). To understand the phenomenon, recent theory building surrounding violence and victimization has incorporated a gender-based perspective which recognizes that masculinity should be included as a critical variable of inclusion for research on men and crime. For example, in, *The Gender of Crime* (2011), Dana M. Britton puts forth the argument that “…[t]he ways men and women commit crime are shaped by gendered inequalities, and men and women do gender by doing crime” (143). In other words, crime is one way that masculinity and femininity is played out by men and women in society. As such, Britton contends that crime cannot be analyzed without addressing gender.

Similarly, in Messerschmidt’s (2014) articulation of what he calls, “structured action theory” he argues that crime is a resource for “doing masculinity” (West and Zimmerman 1987). He maintains, “…a satisfactory theory of masculinities and crime requires an understanding of the meanings boys and men attach to their social actions and how these are related to conscious choice
and specific social structures in particular settings” (22). Significantly, his theory highlights that the meanings boys and men attach to their settings are in alignment with the normative gendered expectations of masculinity. Consequently, boys would be more likely to perceive themselves as perpetrators and in turn would not view themselves as victims because “hegemonic” (Connell 1987) norms of masculinity dictate that men do not want to be perceived of as being weak (Newburn and Stanko 1994). In this respect, I argue that due to the hegemonic or normative model of masculinity within victimology and the criminal justice system, males as victims has been largely overlooked. Accordingly, there are few qualitative studies that specifically address the victimization of boys and men (see McGuffey 2005, 2008; Rich and Grey 2005; Rich and Stone 1996; Richardson, Brown, and Van Brakle 2013; Stanko and Hobdell 1993). The existing research has focused on boys and inner city violence (Anderson 2000; Rios 2011); gender and crime (Britton, 2011); and gender, heterosexuality, and violence (Messerschmidt 2012). These investigations do not explicitly discuss violence as victimization for boys and men. Although they do implicitly point to the intersections of masculinity, crime, and victimization among various other categories of analysis such as race and class.

Of the six qualitative studies written specifically about boys and men and victimization, half are tied to aspects of Elijah Anderson’s (2000) urban ethnography, The Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City, which has become a prominent and foundational reference for those working to understand the intersection of race, class, and masculinity in criminological studies. In this examination, Anderson analyzes the public daily life of individuals living in Philadelphia over a four-year period to understand inner-city young people and why they are inclined toward acts of violence against one another. He finds the law-based social order has been weakened and in its place a “code of the street” has been implemented as a
form of street justice to govern interpersonal behavior and violence. Because the “code of the street” revolves around unwritten rules of behavior which mandate respect, boys are constantly navigating the hostile context of aggression and violence and therefore are at risk for victimization.

It is perhaps of interest to note that Anderson does not describe the boys in his study as “victims”. He uses the term “victim” to highlight macro-level victimization versus inter-personal forms and only in regard to the boys falling victim to racism and prejudice (111-112) and in his discussion about young boys being targets of police interrogation and crime.

Based upon Anderson’s initial conceptualization of the “code of the street,” Rich and Stone (1996) provide a detailed qualitative account of the experiences of African-American boys, ages eighteen to twenty-five, who have been the victims of a violent injury which led to their hospitalization in Boston. Responses to semi-structured interviews revealed that these young men identified with the concept they called “being a sucker,” meaning that if they chose not to fight back or retaliate when challenged or disrespected, they were at further risk of victimization. Rich and Stone convey that, “These young men experience their environment as a hostile place and perceive that if they are seen as weak by their peers, they will be targeted for even more victimization…[C]losely linked to this fear of victimization is the notion of respect” (79). As such, their research is a useful model for building on Britton (2011) and Messerschmidt’s (2014) discussions that incorporate gender into their research on violence and crime.

In more recent work, Rich and Grey (2005) and Richardson, Brown, and Brakle (2013) incorporate Anderson’s code of the street as their theoretical framework for investigating interpersonal violence and victimization among young Black men. Rich and Grey interviewed forty-nine boys, ages eighteen to thirty, to inquire about trauma and violence finding that “…if one fails to actively defend oneself after having been disrespected, one will be victimized by others”
(818). In their interviews of fifteen Black youths, ages fifteen to seventeen, who were detained in adult jails, Richardson, Brown and Brakle (2013) similarly discover the importance of respect as a significant variable in their intersectional analyses of sex, gender, race, and victimization. Uniquely, this study explicitly discusses masculinity and its relation to violent victimization for boys. They contend, “In a culture where masculinity is defined by respect, not showing fear, and not appearing to be weak, [boys] spend much of their waking hours protecting their reputations…[they] must work [their] way up the social ladder through the use of violence or face the risk of greater violent victimization” (e7). This research is particularly significant to my dissertation research because it explicitly incorporates a discussion about masculinity as a structural system in which violence is used to gain status and simultaneously places boys at risk of victimization.

Finally, Stanko and Hobdell’s study (1993) of thirty-three men and their experiences of physical violence concludes that “…criminology’s failure to explore men’s particular experiences of violence is often attributed to men’s reluctance to report ‘weakness’” (400). While it is likely that men are reluctant to report weakness based on hegemonic norms of toughness, I have come to believe that it also has to do with the methodological approach to gathering data. For example, due to implementing a qualitative life history interview approach, the men I interviewed were provided with an opportunity to describe their experiences. As such, they articulated events which would comprise a history of victimization (in accordance with criminological definitions). Had I asked them quantitative, survey-based questions about their experiences of victimization, such as, did you experience victimization during childhood, they could have marked “no” and moved on to the next question. Due to the structure of masculinity dictating that men are not viewed as victims,
they do not perceive of themselves as such. Consequently, it is essential to advance a qualitative approach in order to understand masculinity, crime, and victimization.

In sum, the existing qualitative investigations that examine masculinity, crime, and victimization provide a foundation for my dissertation’s investigation. Previous research has substantiated that men are the primary perpetrators of violence. Simultaneously, they experience frequent victimization, though it is rarely viewed as such. Many qualitative studies have highlighted the significance of incorporating masculinity into research on crime, along with various categories such as, race, class, and heterosexuality. However, what is missing from the field is a direct examination of the ways in which boys’ and men’s experiences of victimization intersects with their development of a masculine identity and how this in turn, contributes to violence and shapes the criminal system’s response. Though examining men, masculinity, crime, and victimization, my dissertation fills previous gaps in the research.

C. Theories of Child Abuse and Crime

The most recent study conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2015) estimated reported child abuse rates for boys living in the U.S. to be one percent (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control 2014). This number is lower than expected as the statistic is comprised of only those incidents reported to U.S. Child Protective Services. A nationally distributed self-report community sample of adults revealed rates of childhood physical and sexual abuse to be 22 and 14% respectively (Briere and Elliott 2003). Victimization rates for boys and men who have become involved in the criminal processing system are much higher. A survey of 3,895 men across ten U.S. state prisons, found that approximately 48% of inmates reported experiencing physical abuse prior to the age of eighteen (Wolff and Shi 2012). Another study conducted in a Harris County Jail in Texas found that of the one hundred inmates who took their
survey on childhood abuse, 59% reported experiencing sexual abuse during childhood (Johnson et al. 2006). It has been well established that incarcerated populations, regardless of gender, report elevated rates of child abuse (Milaniak and Widom 2015; Wolff and Shi 2012; Wolff et al. 2009).

The examination of the relationship between childhood abuse and criminal offending has resulted in three significant theories, which informed my dissertation research. These are: pathways theory (PT), life course theory (LCT), and cycle of violence theory (CVT). Conceptualized by James and Meyerding’s (1977) study of prostitutes (Belknap 2010), pathways became labeled as a perspective in Daly’s (1992) article, “Women’s Pathways to Felony Court: Feminist Theories of Lawbreaking and Problems of Representation” and is now considered a useful theoretical approach. Pathways theory posits that, “…childhood (and sometimes adulthood) trauma can serve as trajectories to offending…primarily focusing on child abuse victimization” (Belknap 2015: 87). By far, the most profound contribution of PT has been in its establishment of the links of trauma and abuse as a pathway toward offending, though the majority of the research focuses primarily on girls and women (see Belknap and Holsinger 2006; Brennan et al. 2012; Carbone-Lopez and Miller 2012; Daly 1992; DeHart 2008; Richie 2012; Topitzes, Mersky, and Reynolds 2011). Through pathways theory, scholars examine the tension between “blurred-boundaries” or the victim-offender overlap, contending that social scientists can move beyond perceiving girls “…as either complete victims of circumstance or blameworthy perpetrators of crimes if we are willing to embrace fluid interpretations and meanings of their life histories” (Gaarder and Belknap 2002:508). Applied to my dissertation research, I found this perspective to be a valuable model for utilizing a gender-specific approach to examining men’s life histories in order to contextualize the relationship between trauma and subsequent offending. Extending the traditional use of PT, which focuses primarily on girls and women, I believe it is critical to examine
boys’ and men’s histories in order to embrace a fluid interpretation of them, not only as perpetrators but also as victims.

In criminology, life course theory as originally conceptualized by Sampson and Laub (1990) and Laub and Sampson (1993), drew upon Hirschi’s social control theory to develop a model of age-graded informal social control. Sampson and Laub (1990) argued that “…while continuity in deviant behavior exists, social ties in adulthood—to work, family, and community—explain changes in criminality over the life span” (609). The basic tenets of LCT are that various life events shape one’s risk of offending. Men’s criminality is shaped over the life course and it is both stable and changes over time. Thus, LCT research is typically longitudinal and developmental, age-specific and age-graded, and it incorporates the concepts of trajectories, transitions, and turning points to contextualize offending behavior (Sampson and Laub 1995). In their book, Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turning Points Through Life (1995), Sampson and Laub define a trajectory as, “a pathway or line of development over the life span, such as work life, marriage, parenthood, self-esteem, or criminal behavior” (8). Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe (2003) conceptualize these terms as follows: “Trajectories, or sequences of roles and experiences, are themselves made up of transitions, or changes in state or role …[and] turning points involve substantial changes in the direction of one’s life, whether subjective or objective” (8).

Since its origin, a multitude of scholarship has incorporated LCT as a frame for examining boys, men and criminal behavior across the life course (Laub and Sampson 2006; Sampson and Laub 1997). LCT also informed my life history interviews, the analysis, and the writing of my dissertation. I drew upon its principles throughout my investigation of boys and men, as these principles related to crime through the consideration of trajectories, transitions, and turning points.

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6 There are over 400,000 articles and books written which apply LCT as a frame from examining criminal behavior across the life course.
across stages of participants’ life course. Specifically, I examined their developmental trajectories during the transitions and turning points of childhood, gang-involvement, incarceration, and then upon their entrance into the New Habits program.

Similar to PT, Cathy S. Widom’s (1989) cycle of violence theory (CVT) substantiates the relationship between childhood victimization and subsequent offending. This theory was originally established through a longitudinal study comparing the juvenile records of 908 individuals who had a validated case of physical and sexual abuse and neglect to a matched compare group of 667 individuals who had no reported history of these forms of abuse. She found that those who experienced child abuse and neglect had a 38% increased likelihood for committing a violent crime. Since her early work in 1989, Widom and others have implemented CVT as a research framework substantiating child abuse and neglect as a valid pathway linking childhood trauma and the reproduction of crime and violence (Fagan 2005; Smith and Thornberry 1995; Topitzes et al. 2011; Widom 2017). Used as a frame for my dissertation, I found the conceptualization of CVT useful in considering the cyclical process of learning violence through the link of maltreatment, which I articulate in the dissertation as the victim-victimizer paradox.

D. Chapter Overview

In the next chapter, I review the methods used for the dissertation. Following the methods chapter, the four data chapters provide findings from my research which reveal the ways in which participants learned, achieved, reinforced and were working to overcome de-habilitated masculinity (DM). In chapter three, I define DM and highlight participants’ socialization into understanding the DM rules through being raised in abusive and neglectful family systems. I characterize how these rules provided the structure in which boys became the unprotected-protector. This chapter substantiates that participants were adultified boys who were unprotected
victims. Chapter four illuminates the ways in which participants were drawn to gang membership due to their previous socialization in abusive family settings which conditioned them to develop into de-habilitated boys. This chapter discusses their achievement of DM and the victim-victimizer paradox embedded within the context of the gang. In chapter five, I discuss the development of participants gangster and criminal masked identities and the reinforcement of DM. As respondents worked to establish respected gangster identities, this master status was enacted in their roles in society. Subsequently, as they moved up the ranks of the gang, they became caught up in “prison world.” In the prison environment, DM provided them with the necessary tools to survive the violence they faced. As such, this chapter illuminates prison masculinity and the solidification of the “criminal mask.” The final findings chapter, Learning to “Drop The Criminal Mask”: The Journey Toward Becoming Re-Habilitated Men at New Habits, examines participants’ desire to change and their motivations for entering into the New Habits program. In this therapeutic setting, they learn to drop their criminal mask and begin their journey toward becoming re-habilitated men. Findings in this chapter highlight the elements of their transformation, the prison programs that allowed them to gain access to New Habits, and the aspects of the program which they believed were helping them become re-habilitated. This chapter argues that there is potential for de-habilitated boys to transform into re-habilitated men, provided they are given institutional structures of rehabilitative support. Finally, chapter seven summarizes the dissertation and concludes by providing suggestions which advocate for society to move toward rehabilitative justice.

E. A Note on Terms

Throughout the process of dissertation writing, I grappled with the use of certain terms in discussing my participants’ realities. As a sociologist, I know it is important to be conscious of the
power of language to reproduce meaning, especially when discussing already marginalized populations, such as gang members and incarcerated men. Thus, I want to emphasize that, throughout the dissertation, I intentionally chose specific terminology which is reflective of terms used by New Habits supervisors and participants’. Because New Habits is a cognitive-behavioral treatment program for criminally offending and substance addicted men (see methods chapter and chapter six for more detail about the NH program), the terms used are based on a philosophy of rehabilitation positioned within the lexicon of criminology.

A rehabilitation philosophy within criminology tends to reject the idea that crime is a free will choice and rather advocates for approaches for addressing criminal behavior through treatment programs and programs aimed at developing ethical values and work skills (Fagin 2018). There is a good deal of evidence to support that a rehabilitation approach is a useful strategy to reduce criminal behavior (Labrecque and Smith 2017; McGuire 2013). In a meta-analysis of over one-hundred programs, McGuire (2013) found that those programs were most effective in reducing recidivism were programs in which a cognitive-behavioral intervention targeted crime-producing risk factors, such as antisocial cognition, antisocial personality and antisocial associates. New Habits is positioned within this model; it uses a cognitive-behavioral therapeutic approach to facilitate cognitive shifts that transform men from being “antisocial” to being “prosocial.”

Thus, in my construction of the term “de-habilitated masculinity” (which I will conceptualize in chapter 3), I drew upon an interview with Terry, a NH supervisor and the gatekeeper for my project. During our interview, we were discussing the relationship between New Habits clients’ histories and their criminal behavior. He stated, “Criminality is a learned behavior. You’ve got to learn this somewhere. It’s cognitive-behavioral. We are all born with a sponge for a brain and you’re soaking up the information whether it’s good or bad. We can’t differentiate. If
the parents don’t know what they’re doing, there’s nothing available to teach kids what to do. So we habilitate and re-habilitate them here.” Out of this conversation, I initiated the conceptualization of “de-habilitation” wherein I view “habilitation” to be a socialization factor within the rehabilitation model of justice. If there is a need for “re-habilitation,” then there is the assumption that there is a lack of initial “habilitation,” hence creating a state of “de-habilitation.” This dissertation outlines the social context in which participants were “de-habilitated” and then “re-habilitated.”

Similarly, as a result of NH ideologies, I use the term “prosocial” throughout the dissertation. The majority of men I interviewed talked about becoming “prosocial” men, which is advocated at NH in juxtaposition to being “antisocial.” Terry used these terms as a way to contrast prison versus NH wherein he stated that “prison is an antisocial setting versus NH, a prosocial setting.” He explained, “At NH, peers use positive peer pressure versus negative peer pressure to create a prosocial setting.” He emphasized the prosocial aspect by sharing an ancient proverb, “By securing the good in others, I continually secure the good in myself.” During participant interviews, I continued to develop an understanding of the concept of a “prosocial” man. One participant, Stephan, illuminated,

Prison is serving time. Here (at NH) I'm trying to actually better myself. It's like I told you, people adapt to their surroundings. In prison it's like you have to be stern and standoffish and aggressive. Here it's not about that. It's not about how big you are or how tough you used to be. It's more about getting your life together. It's more about being a prosocial rather than antisocial man… I used to be antisocial as a motherfucker… You know that's what this place is teaching me. It's teaching me life
skills that I know I'm going to need down the road. It’s teaching me to be non-violent. To be a contribution to society.”

Thus, in light of my research with Terry and the participants, I use the term “prosocial” throughout the dissertation. This term conceptualizes a version of masculinity that is non-violent, non-criminically offending and characterizes a man who strives to secure the good in himself and in others and thus to contribute to society.
CHAPTER 2: METHODS, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

A. Overview and Gaining Access

My entrée into New Habits (NH) began in 2010 when I met one of the supervisors of the program as a University of Colorado undergraduate. The supervisor, Terry, along with NH clients, gave a presentation to my sociology class and I was so emotionally moved and intrigued that I asked the presenter for his contact information for future presentations. During the Spring 2014 semester, I invited NH back to speak to the criminology class I was instructing. The supervisor brought a panel of three men who openly shared their complex histories of struggle and abuse, their acts of violence perpetrated against others, and their hope to overcome their pasts. Once again, I was deeply affected hearing a brief overview of their life histories and had the revelation that NH men could be rich resources for gaining understanding about violence and victimization. Following their presentation, I asked the supervisor if he thought it would be possible for me to come to NH to conduct life history interviews with clients for my dissertation research. Shortly thereafter, he became my gatekeeper (Saunders 2006) for the project. In this role, Terry helped me gain access to the director of the program in order to submit and approve my project proposal, and he was my primary advocate and contact for scheduling and conducting interviews.

This dissertation presents the findings from a sub-sample of thirty out of forty in-depth, semi-structured life history interviews with men from NH. Interviews were gathered between October

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7 This, along with all names throughout this dissertation are pseudonyms to protect the identities of those I worked with in gathering dissertation data.
8 During a presentation to my class, Terry explained that NH calls the men in their program “clients” versus “prisoners” in order to humanize them and reduce the stigma associated with being a felony offender.
9 In the analysis of interview data, I decided to focus on participants who were gang-involved prior to incarceration, and thus the findings presented in this dissertation focus on a sub-sample of thirty participants who met this criteria.
10 For details about NH and participant demographics, see the sections below: “New Habits Setting” and “Participants.”
2014 and September 2016 after the research was approved by the University of Colorado Institutional Review Board (Protocol #14-0359). I conducted a total of 156 hours of interviews which ranged from approximately two to nine hours, and averaged three hours and fifty-three minutes. Additionally, I toured the NH facility, spent time informally speaking with a variety of supervisors and the director of the program, interviewed my gatekeeper, and attended two graduation ceremonies honoring NH clients who successfully completed the program and were transitioning back into the community.

B. Data Collection and Analysis

i. New Habits Setting

New Habits (NH) is a long-term residential therapeutic community corrections program run in Colorado. NH serves adult men in a phase-based behavior modification program addressing substance use disorders, criminal behavior, and areas of life that are impacted by drug addiction. NH clients are referred to the facility by the Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC), the community corrections board, the probation department, or family members. On any given day, approximately half of the one-hundred and twenty-five residents are CDOC referrals and the other half are comprised of men referred by community corrections, probation or family members\(^1\). The program incorporates four highly structured progressive phases that the residents are required to complete. Orientation, which lasts approximately thirty days, comprises assessment, treatment planning, motivational counseling, and teaching the residents the program philosophy. Phase I, lasting around three to six months, develops and strengthens problem-solving skills, identifies and

\(^1\) For my dissertation research, I only interviewed CDOC referred NH clients who previously served time incarcerated; not those who were community corrections or family-based referrals. See the “Sampling” section for more detail.
addresses behavioral problems, helps the men to acquire prosocial attitudes and values, and provides vocational coaching to prepare clients for employment. The second phase or the *Striking Phase*, lasts two to three months during which the men begin in-house job assignments, continue learning job search techniques, pursue full-time employment, and establish and begin to maintain social support systems outside the program. The final stage, *Transitional Phase*, lasts three to five months, and is a period of time where the program places emphasis on re-socialization. The men begin to have increased contact with the community, undergo re-socialization skills and money management training, and are guided through monitored employment placement.

Drastically contrasting their previous living environment in the CDOC, NH men live on an open campus in various “houses” where they are part of a community structure that is designed to develop increasing social and personal responsibility. NH clients become a pseudo “family” as men bunk in rooms together and move through each phase of the program as “brothers.” The NH therapeutic programming is structured by a “community as method” approach where each individual learns to take personal responsibility for his growth and movement through the program, while simultaneously offering support to his peers. In this way, men hold one another responsible and create mutual self-help ties.

Among the NH participants I interviewed, they report that a common narrative shared between CDOC inmates about NH is that while it may be a potential avenue for transitioning back into the community more quickly, it is “the hardest program available.” For this reason, men who enter NH through CDOC as part of their sentencing structure work hard to be considered as candidates for the program, where there are only one-hundred and twenty-five available spaces. CDOC inmates know that if they pursue the NH program and are admitted, they cannot simply skate by and “do their time” to “kill their number” as they may be able to do in prison. NH requires men’s
full participation. Each day begins around 5:30 A.M. and does not end until after 10:00 P.M. Days are structured and regimented and there is very little time that can be spent as leisure time; unlike in the prison setting where much of the day is unstructured “free time” and where men have more “freedom” in their activity decisions. Interestingly, it is not the physically exhausting schedule men report to be the most challenging aspect of NH, but the emotional and psychological rigor the program requires. Many participants admitted, “you have to face your shit” and learn all new ways of behaving. During interviews, I discovered that this is the one critical aspect of the program which makes NH an attractive opportunity for those who are ready to change and simultaneously what results in some men “escaping” (fleeing the program) or requesting to return to CDOC to finish their prison sentence.

Men who graduate from the program are celebrated and revered. To honor the men who complete the program, NH puts on a bi-annual ceremony where members of the community, former graduates, and family members come to share in the joy of their success. Each graduate shares his story with the five-hundred guests witnessing the event. There are tears, cheers, and people sitting on the edge of their seats as attendees learn that, for the formerly incarcerated men, NH has become their “home,” a place of “brotherhood,” and an environment that has provided them with a “second chance” at living a prosocial life. The ceremony is an inspiring, monumental event where graduates finally get to experience a deep sense of pride, and community reverence for what they have accomplished. For the majority of my participants, this is the first graduation ceremony they have ever had the opportunity to participate in; only two out of the forty men I interviewed earned a traditional high school diploma which was presented at a public graduation ceremony. NH takes this into account when constructing the ceremony as a public ritual where the community acknowledges these former “criminals” as brave, resilient and accomplished men. As
such, it was clear that progressing through the program and making it to graduation day was an inspirational pull. For those who complete the program, graduating provides an embodied symbol of each man’s transformation and allows him to transition back into the community with a new identity; not as a “criminal” but as a re-habilitated, New Habits graduate.

ii. Sampling

To recruit participants for my dissertation research, I gave an informal presentation about the project at the NH facility during which I shared how I had met the NH supervisor (my gatekeeper) and that he and a panel of NH men had spoken to my students in a Juvenile Justice & Delinquency class at CU. I conveyed my interest in learning more about the life histories of incarcerated men with the goal of understanding violence and victimization to help reform the criminal justice system. I handed out a flyer providing presentation attendees with written information about the project and detailed the inclusion criteria. Because NH clients do not have access to email, those interested were instructed to leave their name with the supervisor so we could begin scheduling interviews in upcoming weeks. The following day, the gatekeeper contacted me with a list of fifty men who agreed to participate.

Using a purposive sampling method (Singleton and Straits 2005), I drew the first eight participants out of this initial list of fifty. Because my dissertation goal was to examine the life histories of incarcerated men, I restricted participation to NH clients who had previously served time in prison, indicated by being referred to NH by CDOC, as part of their sentencing structure. After the first eight interviews, I implemented a theoretical sampling method (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012; Glaser and Strauss 1999), allowing for the emerging theme of previous gang involvement to guide the sampling process. To examine this emerging theme, I informed my gatekeeper of the new inclusion criteria requesting only participants who identified as having been
previously gang involved, which I defined as “men who self-report that they were gang members, prior to entering the system.” During interviews, participants revealed detailed information about the prison environment and I wanted to investigate further. Subsequently, I added the inclusion requirement that participants must have spent a minimum of five years incarcerated over their life course. Accordingly, I theoretically sampled men who identified as having been previously gang involved and were incarcerated for a minimum of five years over their life course until I reached data saturation (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012; Glaser and Strauss 1999; Lofland et al. 2006) and my dissertation focuses on the thirty participants who self-reported that they were gang-involved prior to incarceration. (see Appendix B for detailed participant demographic information).

Beyond the purposive and theoretical recruitment methods, sampling was dictated by the participants’ programming schedules. Interviews could only occur at a time during the day which did not interfere with programming and during a phase in the program structure where men were at the NH site and not already working in the community. Consequently, based on the determination of my gatekeeper, the majority of the men I interviewed were in the initial phases of the program and were selected based on scheduling availability. An additional variable I could not control in the sampling process was my gatekeeper’s translation of what it meant to be “previously gang involved.” In the middle of a lengthy interview when I began to ask questions about previous gang involvement, I would sometimes discover that this inclusion requirement was loosely interpreted by the men who agreed to be interviewed. Therefore, of those I theoretically sampled for “previous gang involvement,” some did not become gang involved until after they entered the criminal system or were loosely affiliated through having friends who were gang members, so I did not include them in my final sample of thirty participants.
Due to the collection of all forty interviews taking two years to complete, men who participated in the project were not all drawn from the original fifty who signed up after my initial presentation. From what I could determine, a snowball sampling effect (Lofland et al. 2006) had occurred—living in such a small community, word had spread about the interviews and men were eager to contribute to the project. Because part of programming dictates that they become a positive contribution to society, clients were motivated to participate. Additionally, early in the project, Terry asked if I could offer an incentive for participating in the research. I applied for a grant and received funding to provide participants with a $20.00 Target gift card. Fortunately, between the gift card incentive and the program’s “positive contribution philosophy,” there was a constant stream of participants waiting to be interviewed and I never had to implement additional recruitment strategies to gather enough data for the project. Initially I set out to conduct fifty interviews. After forty interviews, however, no new themes were emerging and I concluded that I had reached the saturation point in which all major categories were fully developed and were integrated (Corbin and Strauss 2015), especially within my examination of the thirty life histories of previously involved gang members.

iii. Participants

In total, I interviewed forty adult NH men, all of whom had served time incarcerated and were referred to NH by the Department of Corrections, and were living at the NH facility at the time of the interview. Thirty of the forty participants self-identified as having been previously gang involved and the remaining respondents reported no gang involvement or affiliation prior to incarceration. These thirty participants’ comprise the sub-sample for which my dissertation
findings are based upon\textsuperscript{12}. The racial/ethnic composition of these thirty participants, which was captured by asking respondents—\textit{what race or ethnicity do you identify as?}—includes the following: 37\% White, 23\% percent Hispanic (includes Hispanic or Mexican), 20\% Black (includes Black or African American), and 20\% other (see Appendix B for full description). Participants ranged in age from twenty-nine to fifty-six years old with an average age of thirty-nine. The average age that participants first interacted with the juvenile and/or criminal justice system was fifteen and ranged from as young as eleven years old to twenty-six. Twenty-six out of thirty participants entered the system as a juvenile (they became system involved by being arrested, adjudicated or charged, and/or booked for a juvenile or adult offense); one of these twenty-six received a juvenile life sentence, two were convicted as adults, and the remaining served various amounts of time off and on throughout their juvenile years. Four out of thirty participants entered the criminal system at age eighteen or older. Prior to entering NH, participants were incarcerated for a wide variety of Part I and Part II serious felony offenses\textsuperscript{13} excluding any sexual assault charges\textsuperscript{14}. The length of time served incarcerated over each participants’ life course ranged from six to forty-one years with an average of eighteen years. This calculation included their cumulative time served incarcerated as a juvenile in youth correctional facilities, and during jail and/or prison stays. I was never able to determine the program’s recidivism rates, as NH does not systematically track or record this information.

\textsuperscript{12} See Appendix B, Participant Demographics, for detailed information.
\textsuperscript{13} Participants’ juvenile delinquency and criminal histories were complex and multi-faceted; many reported being arrested up to fifty times and had a lengthy list of charges—far too many to detail here. Additionally, because of the hierarchy rule and plea bargaining, men’s convictions frequently did not accurately depict their actual criminal history. Therefore, I am intentionally not including their current or previous convictions in the participant demographics as they would be a misrepresentation of their criminal histories.

\textsuperscript{14} NH will not take men convicted of any sexual assault charge due to staff not being trained for this type of specialized behavior modification treatment.
iv. Life History Interviews

Life history interviews are the primary data collection method for my dissertation research. The interviewer's primary job is to be a sensitive, respectful listener in guiding the life storyteller's narration” (Atkinson 2012:116). The personal and intimate experience the life history interview provides for the participant is what drew me to implementing this method. Furthermore, because I was interviewing a frequently silenced population, I was motivated to give my respondents the space to be heard and have the opportunity to contextualize their lived realities. In this way, I drew upon Reinharz’s (1992) ideal that, “Interviewing offers researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher” (19). Thus, with the goal of describing the experiences of my participants—inmates who often reside in a marginalized and silenced category—from their unique perspectives, I gathered one hundred and fifty-six hours of interviews from forty participants—drawing on one hundred and twenty-five hours of these interviews for the dissertation analysis which I limited to the thirty previously gang involved respondents. Interviews ranged from approximately two to nine hours, and the average length was three hours and fifty-three minutes. All interviews occurred face-to-face at the NH facility, in a supervisor’s office. The data collection occurred over a two-year period between the fall of 2014 and 2016.

At the beginning of each interview, I presented participants with a consent form which had been approved by the University of Colorado Institutional Review Board. Together, we read through the consent form and I highlighted that all participant identities would be confidential and that their responses were entirely voluntary—they could refuse to answer any question for any reason, take breaks when necessary, and even ask to end the interview if they so desired. I requested consent for interviews to be audio recorded, and all respondents agreed. All men
completed the interview and only one respondent asked for the recorder to be turned off for a few minutes during the interview\textsuperscript{15}. Each interview occurred during one session\textsuperscript{16} in two phases. For the first phase I implemented a life history calendar method (LHC) (Axinn, Pearce, and Ghimire 1999; DeHart et al. 2014) and for the second phase I used a semi-structured questionnaire to guide the interview process.

For the LHC phase, I created a calendar-like grid on poster sized paper (20” x 30”)

headed with column headings including ages across the top—beginning from birth through the current age of the interviewee—and rows along the vertical border which included questions about school, family, work, substance use, victimization history, gang involvement, and their prison experiences. The LHC gives the respondent an interactive feel. During the interview, the LHC was laid out on a table and I would sit side-by-side with the participant and we would fill out the calendar together.

Overall, I chose to use the LHC because I believed it would provide a simple way to organize and structure this phase of the interview. Additionally, it is a feminist method which allows respondents to feel that the process is interactive and interviewee-driven. In my reflections about the research process, I came to realize that one of the most beneficial aspects of using a life history methodology was the interactive relationship that transpired between myself and my participants. Over the course of a several hour interview, participants transformed themselves from “strangers” into “friends.” Men cried, laughed, and reflected in a setting where, had I remained neutral or emotionally uninvolved, they may not have been as forthcoming about their victimization

\textsuperscript{15} This participant was a member of a white supremacist gang and I believe he had heightened concern that what he was sharing would not remain anonymous and could impact him negatively. Thus, I turned the recorder off and on, upon his request. \textsuperscript{16} All interviews occurred in one session, except for one participant who I interviewed in two sessions which totaled nine hours and six minutes. He was the first respondent I theoretical sampled, targeting the theme of “previous gang involvement,” and had also been sentenced as an adult at the age of seventeen, having spent the previous seventeen years incarcerated. Thus, in order to move my research forward, this interview required two sessions so that I could ask a multitude of open-ended questions on the emerging themes of “previous gang involvement” and the “prison environment.”
experiences. The climate of trust I was able to create allowed the majority of my participants to provide deep, rich, hidden histories. Many shared that they enjoyed getting to see their experiences written in calendar form and that it was a useful process where they had the freedom to talk openly about all they have experienced in their lives, without a time limitation or rigid structure.

After completing the LCH phase of the interview, we moved into phase two where I asked participants approximately thirty opinion based questions regarding masculinity and trauma, gang involvement, incarceration, and their experiences of therapeutic recovery at NH. A few questions are as follows: What do you think it means to be a man?; What are the expectations of men in our society?; What are the expectations of boys and men in a gang?; What have you done to cope with the trauma you’ve experienced during your gang involvement?; What kind of a man do you have to be in prison?; How do you feel about your time spent incarcerated?; and How has NH changed you as a man? I ended the interview asking questions about their strengths, hopes and dreams.

Implementing a grounded theory approach, I wrote detailed “jottings” or “field notes” capturing my main impressions of the interview’s content and methodological considerations on emerging themes at the end of each interview (Corbin and Strauss 2015; Glaser and Strauss 1999; Lofland et al. 2006). Additionally, to balance my emotions and avoid becoming overly empathetic with my participants, which could skew my data analysis, I wrote a journal style account of how I was feeling at the conclusion of each interview (Rubin and Rubin 2005:81–82). Throughout the two-year data collection process, I worked to allow for a free-flowing inductive approach where I would conduct an interview, write field notes, journal, examine and analyze the data, and then modify questions prior to subsequent interviews (Corbin and Strauss 2015). For example, after conducting the first four interviews, writing field notes, coding and analyzing the data, I amended

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17 See Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for a full list of questions.
my interview questionnaire as the data revealed that I needed to focus more specifically on asking about various forms of violence and victimization experienced by my participants during childhood, gang involvement, and throughout their time incarcerated. This iterative method occurred multiple times throughout my interview collection process.

v. Transcription, Coding, and Analysis

All interviews were audio recorded so that they could later be transcribed and coded. I personally transcribed ten interviews, and the remaining were transcribed by a professional and semi-professional service. Because I had a large amount of data, I personally paid for seventeen interviews to be transcribed and the remaining thirteen interviews were paid for through departmental funding, which I received during the spring and fall of 2016. Both the professional and semi-professional services signed confidentiality agreements and were in compliance with the terms of participant anonymity. For interviews that I did not transcribe, I listened to the audio recordings while reading through transcripts in order to review the data and make sure that the interviews had been transcribed accurately. All participant audio recordings and the transcribed data have been kept in password encrypted files on my personal computer. The LHCs are stored in a locked cabinet in my office.

For the coding process, I did line by line thematic coding and analytic memoing using NVivo, a qualitative software program. I began by sorting data into coded “nodes” which were thematic categories arising out of the interviews. I practiced this coding approach while analyzing the first fifteen interviews, prior to defending my dissertation prospectus. I coded and memoed, looking for what the data was revealing about my participants’ experiences in order to guide subsequent interviews (Corbin and Strauss 2015). For the remaining twenty-five interviews, I returned to the data with clearer direction, after receiving advice from my committee at the dissertation proposal.
defense. I used a memoing and annotation method to capture nuances in the data. This method enhanced the analysis process, by forcing me to write extensive notes as I coded. Throughout the entire interview collection process, I used a grounded theory methodology, implementing the continuous “strategy of simultaneous data collection and analysis” inductively looking for emerging themes arising during coding and ongoing memo and annotative writing (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012:394).

To begin writing my dissertation, I read through the content in my primary themes, the annotations and memos, and thematically coded my field notes. This provided me with a broad perspective on the collective story my data was telling me and helped me organize a dissertation outline. To write the findings chapters, I created subthemes out of the primary themes I had previously created during the first round of coding. These subthemes are lower level concepts which support the core categories or main themes of the dissertation research and form the structure for theoretical development in the dissertation findings chapters (Corbin and Strauss 2015).

vi. Limitations

One limitation, as briefly discussed in the “Sampling” section, is that the sample of men from which I drew participants was hand-picked by NH supervisors, at various stages. At the initial stage, NH clients were selected from Therapeutic Community (TC) programs (run within the CDOC state prisons), based on their perceived capability of being able to meet the requirements of the program. Second, my gatekeeper, a NH supervisor, selected participants to interview based on the criteria I provided. For men to be selected at the first stage, NH staff believed that their chosen CDOC inmates were ready for the NH program and motivated to participate in the behavior modification process. One of the ideals put forth by NH is that the men give back to the community
and become positive contributors to society. The participants in my study had been told that my research aims to help the criminal justice system to understand the experiences of incarcerated men. Thus, at the interview stage when my participants were selected by my gatekeeper, they were motivated to make a contribution.

Third, it is important to acknowledge NH as an institutional structure which has the power to shape respondents narratives. It is possible that the NH clients may have been biased in their responses to my questions about the NH program. I have no way of knowing whether or not the men I interviewed were encouraged to lean toward positive responses, minimizing their negative views of NH out of fear there would be a consequence. I conducted interviews in a private office without the presence of supervisors. During the interviews, respondents appeared to be speaking openly about their experiences. Further, throughout the research process, no staff member ever asked me about the content of the interviews. That said, there may have been other institutional pressures of which I was unaware that may have shaped or influenced the participants’ responses.

Finally, it was clear that the language and terms that participants used during interviews were informed by some of the institutional ideologies they were learning through NH programming. In other words, NH programing affected the way respondents retold their life histories through the lens of NH philosophies. For example, because NH uses a trauma informed behavioral therapeutic approach, the men I interviewed frequently used terminology such as “trauma” to discuss their histories of experiencing violence. Respondents’ choice of language and terminology was thus informed by what they were learning in the NH program. NH provided my study with a unique population of men who were willing to share their life histories, while it also represents a distinct and select sample of men who may not be representative of other populations of incarcerated men, or men who were previously gang involved and incarcerated. My sample is a
NH selected group as well as a self-selected population. As a qualitative research project, my research population is confined to those who were referred to NH and my dissertation findings are specific to this population. Nonetheless, they shed light on the experiences of incarcerated men with traumatic life histories.

vii. Reflexivity: Positionality and Bias

Throughout the interview process, I often wondered if my status as a woman and an academic would be a detriment or a benefit to how much incarcerated men would be willing to share with me. This reflexive grappling originated from Collins' (1986) contention that it is essential for knowledge production concerning Black women to be produced by Black women. She argues, “[W]hile Black feminist thought may be recorded by others, it is produced by Black women” (309). She articulates that this is because it is impossible to separate knowledge from the material conditions of those producing the knowledge. Collins posits that Black women possess a unique standpoint, one which cannot be fully understood by outsiders who have not been subjected to the same interlocking forms of oppression and subordination. Therefore, my positionality as an outsider had me reflecting upon how my standpoint would affect the research and my understanding of the participants’ life experiences.

To more fully reflect on my positionality as a feminist researcher, I turned toward Harding’s (2014) perspective which poses that “[t]he standpoint of some particular marginalized group can point the way to less partial and distorted conceptual frameworks, methods, rules, and procedures of inquiry” (333). As such, I believe Harding would place my research in what she calls a “starting point for thought.” She also reminds scholars that, “[S]tandpoint theory is not arguing that there is some kind of essential, universally adequate model of the marginalized life from which research should start off…” racially marginalized, ‘poor,’ and ‘women,’ are not homogenous categories;
they include groups whose activities are differently shaped by their class, race, gender, ethnicity, historical period, and cultural milieu” (338). Although my positionality or standpoint cannot be categorized as being an insider in the world of incarcerated men, I have experienced trauma and marginalization throughout my life history, including family violence, gender- and race- based discrimination, and poverty. Although the degree to which my life experiences compare with my participants may widely vary, I would not consider myself a full outsider. I believe that my unique standpoint provided me with less distorted insight and the ability to empathize with my participants.

Aligning myself with the feminist research model that, "Feminist researchers have worked out a research methodology that is gentler and that humanizes both the researcher and the interviewee" (Rubin and Rubin 2005:26), I worked to create a trusting environment where my participants would feel human and safe to share their histories with me. My desire was to provide a space where these “convicts” were free from the constraint of feeling dehumanized and further marginalized by those who study them. This approach was grounded in my academic feminist researcher training and my life experiences where I too had experienced marginalization and often felt silenced and misunderstood. I believe I succeeded in this endeavor—after each interview, I asked the men about their experience of being interviewed. The majority conveyed that they had never shared that much information about their lives with anyone else before and that they benefited from the interview process. Thus, I conclude that even though I never became a full insider, the research provides deeper understanding of my participants’ experiences and is told from their perspectives in a fullness that has not been previously conveyed.

In providing space for the respondents to share the intimate details of their life histories, another challenging research dilemma arose: how unbiased and neutral should I be? The question
of objectivity is continually debated as a topic in qualitative research. As such, I grappled with the “right” amount of empathy and objectivity to uphold throughout the research process. Hearing and writing about the repeated accounts of violent abuse, neglect, and trauma experienced by my participants across their life course and remaining “objective” felt out of alignment with my dissertation goal: to balance the community perspective of male inmates to enhance rehabilitative justice.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) propose:

How objective does the researcher need to be to do good research? A bias against the group or person being interviewed may block access or distort the results, but too much sympathy can also be blinding. On the other hand, neutrality is probably not a legitimate goal in qualitative research. For one thing, it is impossible to attain. Even if a neutral role were possible, it is not desirable, because it does not equip the researcher with enough empathy to elicit personal stories or in-depth description” (13).

In approaching my own work, I share this perspective. Neutrality in qualitative research is not a legitimate goal. Collecting life history interviews mandates empathy and interactive relationship building. While I see the value in maintaining a bias-balanced perspective—working not to fall under the “too much sympathy can also be blinding” end of the spectrum—I consciously situated myself as an ally to my participants through allowing their experiences of victimization and trauma to take precedence over their accounts of perpetration and criminal behavior.

When a participant would share a particularly atrocious account of violence against a woman or another “innocent” person (not a gang member or another inmate), I would recall that most of men I was interviewing had committed several felonious violent crimes over the course of
their lives. In my field notes, I constantly grappled with the victim-victimizer paradox. In grappling with this paradox, I realized that the violent criminal histories of incarcerated gang men has been well documented and that the master status of these men as “superpredators” (DiIulio Jr. 1995) has been solidly embedded into public consciousness. I also came to the conclusion that this is a one-dimensional perspective which needs to be balanced and as the research progressed, I became clearer in my goal that the victim side of these men’s histories needed to be told and to be heard. With this goal in mind, my work is building upon Bryan Stevenson's (2015) ideology put forth in his book *Just Mercy*: “Each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done” (18).
“When I was little, I was about four years old, I was forced to fight….I would go over to Matt and Sophie’s because they were kind of like parent figures in our lives in a way because I didn't really have any. And Matt, he was an alcoholic….started fighting us…like basically for the right to eat at the front of the line; candy, ice cream, cake, beef jerky. Things like that. Basically he always made it where we would fight and we would have to be friends before we went to sleep at night. We had to be brothers. And that was the rule. And whoever was the winner was the hunter and whoever was the loser was the ballerina. ‘Go to your room you little sissy, baby.’ Stuff like that. There was times when there was no rules to fighting except win.”
-David, participant-

A. Introduction

This chapter provides the foundational structure of my dissertation through describing thirty participants’ socialization into de-habilitated masculinity (DM), a version of masculinity initially learned through primary socialization in abusive and neglectful family systems18. Drawing upon participants’ life history interviews, this chapter highlights childhoods in which boys were rendered vulnerable, lacking protection, and were missing learning models for how to become prosocial men. Raised in environments with abusive, neglectful, and substance addicted adults as their caretakers, participants ideas about themselves and what it means to be a man were informed by hypermasculine, un-nurturing, and emotionally suppressing family systems. As such, those I interviewed were never habilitated as young boys to become prosocial men. Instead they experienced, observed, and were taught to abide by the unwritten rules of DM.

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18 Throughout this research, the term “family” does not describe the traditional or fixed definition of a “family” where there is a legal institution of marriage with a heterosexual coupling of parents and children living in the home. Instead, I use the term “family” to describe a primary group of people who occupy the home environment or are frequent caregivers during participants’ childhoods (see Carter 2014; Coltrane and Adams 2008).
This chapter begins by conceptualizing de-habilitated masculinity. Next, I present demographic and descriptive findings which contextualize the traumatic family systems in which my participants learned the rules of DM. I conclude by summing the chapter’s findings.

**B. De-habilitated Masculinity (DM)**

“Socialization is the process of learning social norms and values” (Oetting and Donnermeyer 1998:998). Among sociologists and gender scholars, there is a commonly held belief that gender is learned through a socialization process (Butler 1988; Johnson 2005; Wade and Ferree 2015; West and Zimmerman 1987) and that gender is a system of accountability in which gender shapes human behavior because each person is accountable to the gender-based system (West and Fenstermaker 1995). Gender scholars reason that gender is “an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts,” (Butler 1988: 519) and that gender is relational; we construct and “do gender” in interaction with individuals and institutions within our social setting (West and Zimmerman 1987). According to these learning models of socialization, gender development is a “lifelong process of learning and re-learning gendered expectations as well as how to negotiate them” (Wade & Ferree 2015: 68). In the simplest sense, gender is constructed through enacting the shared meanings of culturally agreed upon norms, rules, and expectations about who men and women are supposed to be and how they are supposed to act (Johnson 2005; Wade and Ferree 2015). Furthermore, gender lies along a spectrum thus, there are multiple masculinities constructing the gender system (Connell 2005). In contemporary U.S. society, “hegemonic masculinity” is the dominant form of masculinity and the version which dictates the masculine hierarchy (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). The normative unwritten masculinity rules associated with what it means to be a hegemonic man today include: “men are aggressive, daring, rational, emotionally inexpressive, strong, cool
headed, in control of themselves, independent, active, objective, dominant, decisive, self-confident and un-nurturing” (Johnson 2005:86). On the socially “normative” end of the spectrum, these hegemonic rules can be summed up as boys and men de-emphasizing feminine qualities through being physically aggressive and tough and restricting emotions and vulnerability (Katz 2006; Katz et al. 2013; Pollack 1998; Real 1998). On the exaggerated end of the hegemonic masculinity spectrum lies hyper- and toxic masculinity. Hyper-masculinity is defined as “extreme conformity to the more aggressive rules of masculinity” (Wade and Ferree 2015:127) and toxic masculinity is the “constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence” (Kupers 2005:714). Along this spectrum, “gender rules” are unwritten norms and instructions of how to behave as a man (Wade and Ferree 2015:61) and are learned in an interactive process over a person’s life course (West and Zimmerman 1987) across social contexts.

Contemporary masculinities scholars have argued that there is a crisis in U.S. culture in which hegemonic male-based violence has become normalized and thus minimized in terms of the negative outcomes the violence produces (Katz et al. 2013; Kimmel 2008; Pollack 1998; Real 1998). The co-director of the Harvard University Gender Research Project and author of, I Don’t Want to Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression (1998), contends:

In a country in which 135,000 children take handguns to school each day, in which every fourteen hours a child under the age of five is murdered, and homicide has replaced automobile accidents as the leading cause of death in children under the age of one, few boys escape a firsthand acquaintance with active trauma….violence is the number one killer of boys and young men. By far the most violent acts, both inside and outside the home, are committed by males. In our culture, almost without
exception, boyhood involves being both the recipient, and the sometimes perpetrator of active trauma (113).

Real argues that in the male-based violent laden society, we overlook masculine violence and the trauma experienced by boys and men, believing that it is an inevitable and natural part of the structure of masculinity. As such, boys’ and men’s traumas are rendered invisible and left untreated, which reproduces the violent structure of masculinity. This hegemonic masculine-based cycle of violence sets the stage for what I term, de-habilitated masculinity (DM).

By far, the most significant outcome of my dissertation research was the gaining of insight into the ways in which masculinity shaped participants’ identity development and forged their pathways into and out of prison. Through conducting life history interviews, I came to learn that participants’ trajectories toward incarceration were established out of their development of DM. In its most distilled definition, DM is a version of hyper-masculinity which is cumulatively developed across the life course in a social context of poverty and marginalization and it is initially learned in family systems in which extreme abuse and neglect are the primary and predominant modes of gender socialization. De-habilitated masculinity is a process of gender identity development which operates in a social system where, for marginalized populations, there is an absence of prosocial institutional support (e.g. community and schools), and this version of hyper-masculinity is criminalized by the justice system. For my participants, DM describes the development of a hyper-masculine identity which was initiated in traumatic childhoods, practiced and achieved in gangs, and then punished and reinforced by the criminal processing system. Ultimately, DM conceptualizes a gender-specific, cycle of violence pathway into the criminal system that is developed across the life course in the absence of institutional social support. Participants raised in a DM system were either directly or indirectly socialized into the following
hyper-masculine DM rules: 1) boys and men are violent; 2) boys and men suppress emotions besides anger; and 3) boys and men are the protectors. These rules align with the current hegemonic hyper-masculinity rules of society, but reside on the most exaggerated end of the spectrum. For the men I interviewed, in the context of impoverished marginalized lives, these rules became essential survival strategies to draw upon in order to navigate their lived realities. As DM men, they learned to embody and enact this violent version of hyper-masculinity because it was their best option given their social conditions.

De-habilitated masculinity takes into account the traditionally overlooked history of childhood trauma experienced by boys and men. In the construction of a hyper-masculine identity, boys who are socialized in traumatic family systems develop an understanding of what it means to be a man through their experiences of victimization. Hegemonic masculinity norms underlying the construction of DM dictate that a victim-victimizer paradox becomes embedded in the structure of DM. If de-habilitated boys have learned to be violent, suppress emotions besides anger and aggression, and are expected to be the protectors, then their victimization often goes unrecognized and is silenced. Accordingly, due to the DM rules dictating that these boys suppress emotions and enact being tough-protectors, they do not view themselves as victims nor do the institutional structures with which they interact (i.e. school and the juvenile or criminal processing system). As such, and paradoxically, de-habilitated boys’ victimization remains invisible and as they age their violent behavior becomes what is enacted and recognized. Ultimately, upon leaving their childhood homes, they respond to childhood maltreatment (victimization) through suppressing their pain and enacting violence and aggression (victimizer) as they embody the rules of DM. In the end, due to the victim-victimizer structure embedded in the rules of DM, I argue that they learn to become “unprotected-protectors.” In other words, it becomes normalized that they are protectors
who do not need protection. Thus, in alignment with the structure of hegemonic hyper-masculinity, pathways theory and cycle of violence theory, DM is a “compensatory masculinity” (Pyke 1996) which highlights the ways in which boys suppress the emotional damage done to them within abusive families by becoming engaged in victimizing, violent behavior which in turn contributes to their pathways into the criminal system where they reinforce their DM identities.

Violent versions of compensatory masculinity have been previously examined by scholars investigating marginalization, masculinity (Majors and Billson 1993) and criminalization (Anderson 2000; Contreras 2013; Rios 2011, 2017, 2009). In these accounts, race-based marginalization shaped boys’ and men’s construction of hypermasculine behavior as they compensated for their lack of access to mainstream upward mobility and social inclusion. More specifically, Randol Contreras, in *The Stick Up Kids: Race, Drugs, Violence, and the American Dream* (2013), highlights the development of Dominican men’s violent masculinity in the context of crack sales, robbery and the pursuit of the American dream in the Bronx during the height of the war on drugs. In this context, crack sales and the violence that accompanied drug transactions became a way for marginalized boys to demonstrate their toughness, earn respect, and strive for the white hegemonically masculine ideal that men should pursue the American dream. Contreras articulates, “Crack dealing, unfortunately, became a source of hope, a way out of poverty, a way into manhood, a way to be good at something when everywhere else we failed” (54). In the context of marginalization, Contreras highlights that drug sales and violence became manhood resources for the Dominican men he studied who were seeking “society’s economic, material, and masculine goals” (70). Significantly, Contreras’ ethnographic account highlights the sociological ideal put forth by C. Wright Mills (1959): “Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both” (3). As such, his work strives to position the
development of masculinity among violent crack dealers and robbers within the socio-historical context of access to upward mobility. According to Contreras, hegemonic masculinity and manhood are equated with the ideal of accessing the American dream. In other words, violent masculinity becomes the best option for upward mobility given these individuals’ social context.

Building on this literature, I argue that in order to understand the U.S. context of violence and mass incarceration, in which the prison system is composed of 93% men (Carson 2018), there needs to be greater understanding of the individual life histories and social contexts of the men who fill the prisons. I find it critical to develop greater understanding of the role of hyper-masculinity as a structural force which shapes the criminal justice system. In *Prison Masculinities* (2001), Sabo and colleagues contend, “Prison violence reflects and feeds wider patterns of male violence within the entire gender order” (Sabo, Kupers, and London 2001b:8) and researchers who have investigated prison as a social space have found it to be a hypermasculine and violent setting (Contreras 2013; Irwin 2005; Sabo, Kupers, and London 2001). My research findings, which establish the concept of de-habilitated masculinity, aim to provide a deeper understanding of hyper-masculinity, victimization, and men’s pathways into and out of the prison system which in turn contextualizes mass incarceration. As such, the remainder of the dissertation is framed through examining participants’ development, achievement, reinforcement and deconstruction of de-habilitated masculinity. My dissertation describes the ways in which de-habilitated masculinity places men on pathways into and out of crime.

Using a life course approach, I begin by examining participants’ experiences of childhood abuse and neglect within the family system. This is a critical starting point because the family is considered to be one of the primary institutions of socialization (Oetting and Donnermeyer 1998) and the “most proximate agent of identity socialization” (Carter 2014:243). As such, the interactive
gender development process begins within boys’ families. Arguably, one role of the family is that it provides socialization models for teaching children prosocial behavior and norms (Oetting and Donnermeyer 1998). In other words, families are expected to habilitate—“to make fit or capable (as for functioning in society)” (Merriam-Webster 2017)—the children being raised in the home environment. Thus, in the family system socialization process, boys’ learn how to “do” masculinity through interactive relationships which provide models for following the unwritten hegemonic rules. For my participants, it was within the context of trauma, marginalization, and poverty that boys developed their hyper-masculinity. During interviews, participants detailed extremely troubled childhoods. Along with their experiences of frequent abuse and neglect, on which the remainder of this chapter focuses, boys were raised in homes where their fathers and stepfathers “abandoned” their families (63%), care givers had substance use problems (87%), and various family members were incarcerated (60%) and/or gang involved (37%). The majority of participants reported experiencing: residential instability—typically due to financial hardship, parents being on welfare, and/or parental incarceration. Most dropped out of school during middle school—only one out of the thirty men I interviewed earned a traditional high school diploma. Further, they were raised in environments in which gangs were a normative part of the social landscape. Overall, participants’ life histories indicated a context in which they learned to “do masculinity” in settings in which prosocial support from their families, schools, and communities was absent. As such, they developed into de-habilitated boys, navigating their realities armed with the DM rules to guide them on their journeys.

In summary, I argue that my participants developed a compensatory version of hyper-masculinity—de-habilitated masculinity—in the macro U.S. context in which the hegemonic norms revere violence and minimize boys’ and men’s experiences of trauma. They developed this
version of hyper-masculinity within a micro family system of frequent abuse and neglect that was informed by poverty and marginalization. Accordingly, socialized through abuse and neglect, participants learned the DM rules that: 1) boys and men are violent; 2) boys and men suppress emotions besides anger; and 3) boys and men are the protectors. These rules were learned within a social context of familial marginalization and poverty wherein there was near total absence of outside social support. Consequently, participants became conditioned to embody DM as they developed into men. Through learning DM during childhood, they were able to draw upon its rules to navigate their environments as they developed their de-habilitated hyper-masculine identities across the social contexts of family, gangs, and prison. As such, across the life course, my participants learned and practiced these rules in a cycle of violence process, as DM became solidified into a masculine identity which contributed to their pathway into the criminal system.

I now turn to my participants’ childhood accounts to describe the family environments in which they were socialized into learning the rules of DM and what it means to be a man through their experiences of abuse and neglect. I highlight this context through providing a brief statistical overview, and then move into participants’ accounts of their experiences of abuse and neglect which taught them the DM rules of violence and emotional suppression. Next, I illuminate how they learned DM rule number three—boys and men are the protectors—through being positioned as the “man of the house” and taking on the role of the unprotected-protector.

C. Boyhood Accounts of Abuse and Neglect

i. Demographic Overview¹⁹

¹⁹ See Appendix C for tables which provide an overview of the types of trauma participants reported experiencing.
Over the course of thirty interviews, I came to learn that neglect and violent abuse during childhood were frequent and normative experiences for each participant I interviewed. I use the following definition of neglect: “Acts of omission and the failure to provide for a child’s basic physical, emotional, or educational needs or to protect a child from harm or potential harm” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2017). Neglect was the most commonly reported form of trauma reported by all thirty participants (100%). In accordance with this definition, I counted participants’ experiences as neglectful when their reports described family contexts where the primary adults in their families were physically absent and/or failed to provide any disciplinary rules to keep their children from harm. Across accounts, neglect contributed to participants developing an understanding of the DM rules through their experiences of being rendered vulnerable through being left alone and unprotected, feeling the need to become the protectors, and observing and being given substances such as cigarettes, marijuana, alcohol, cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin, as children.

Boys learned the DM rule that men are violent through being physically abused and witnessing domestic violence in their childhood homes. To capture physical abuse, I used the following definition: physical abuse is the nonaccidental physical injury to a child and can include actions such as hitting, kicking, or burning which results in physical harm (Children’s Bureau 2016). Physical abuse was reported by 63% of participants. Of notable significance, sixteen out of the nineteen (53%) who reported physical abuse, reported a father-figure as the perpetrator. Six of these nineteen (32%) reported that they were physically abused by a combination of two or more father-figures in their family system. Father-figures included: biological fathers, stepfathers, live-in-boyfriends, older brothers, stepbrothers, grandfathers, uncles, male cousins, and/or a male family caregivers. Adding to the context of violence in the family system, eighteen (60%)
participants reported witnessing domestic violence while growing up with 43% of the perpetrators being biological fathers and 17% stepfathers. Violence—especially being modeled by the male members of the family system—was the normative expectation for the majority of interviewees, which contributed to them learning the DM rules.

All thirty interviewees reported having been raised in family systems where they experienced two to ten of the following forms of trauma: physical, verbal, emotional/mental, and sexual abuse; domestic violence; neglect; absent or missing father and stepfather relationships; familial substance use; gang involvement; and/or familial incarceration. Out of these ten categories, participants reported experiencing, on average, 5.5 types of trauma during their childhoods.

**ii. Learning the Rules of De-habilitated Masculinity**

A foundational theme arising out of interviews was that participants initiated the development of their masculine identities in traumatic family contexts in which they experienced extreme abuse and neglect. Their accounts graphically exhibited childhoods in which opportunities for learning a prosocial version of masculinity appeared to be absent. Caregivers—especially father figures—were unloving, violent, substance addicted, and did not provide emotional support or guidance for them to learn how to become habilitated boys and men. The following sections present interviewees’ unique accounts of having been raised in family systems where they were socialized into learning the unwritten rules of DM.

**a. Boys and Men Are Violent and Suppress Their Emotions**

David only met his biological father a few times after he left the family when David was a year old. Growing up with a mom who was addicted to methamphetamine, he was frequently sent away to a family friend’s house where the father of the house forced him to fight in order to gain his approval. Here David explains the experience:
When I was little, I was about four years old, I was forced to fight. My mom's best friend's family which was Matt and Sophie…they were kind of like parent figures in our lives in a way because I didn't really have any. And Matt, he was an alcoholic. He has kids too which is James, Jason, and Jay. And me and James, we've known each other since we were one…and Matt...started making us fight at four years old… We had to fight each other. Like basically for the right to eat at the front of the line; candy, ice cream, cake, beef jerky. Things like that. Basically he always made it where we would fight and we would have to be friends before we went to sleep at night. We had to be brothers. And that was the rule. And whoever was the winner was the hunter and whoever was the loser was the ballerina. ‘Go to your room you little sissy, baby.’ Stuff like that. There was times when there was no rules to fighting except win.

David continued describing that when he was seven, he hid behind a door with a two-by-four and waited for James to come around the corner. When James ran down the hall of the trailer, David jumped out and hit James in the face with it and James began to bleed profusely. He felt horrible for what he had done to James and worried that Matt (the dad) would be angry at him. To his surprise, instead of Matt helping his son (James) he shamed him and rewarded David proclaiming, “Now you’re my real son. I don’t want a bleeding sissy for a son.” From that day forward James worked to reestablish his dad’s acceptance and respect by beating David more cruelly.

In David’s family system, where the expectation was that the boys must fight to gain their father’s approval, he tacitly learned that boys and men are hyper-masculine and violent. Instead of their father helping James when he was hurt and bleeding, he was labeled a “sissy.” As such, David came to understand the unspoken rule that boys and men should suppress their emotions. Most
directly, by earning the hypermasculine title of “hunter” and watching his brother being labeled as the feminized loser—the “ballerina”—he became socialized into the rules of DM. Through observation and direct experience, he learned that what it means to be a man is to be violent, emotionally concealing, and a protector.

Emmanuel learned de-habilitated masculinity within a dysfunctional family system where multiple father-figures were violent. He reported being physically abused by his father, stepfather, uncle, and grandfather. Notably, he acknowledged that he was pleased that his family taught him to have a “super high tolerance of pain.” Beginning at four years old, his uncle, who was five years older than him and is currently serving two-hundred and sixty years in prison, started using Emmanuel as the test object for his martial arts weapons. Emmanuel did not believe that his uncle was abusing him when he stabbed him with knives, punched him, and hit him with numb chucks to the point of blood and bruises. Instead he valued that it taught him to be a “good fighter.” He proudly stated,

Even to this day, when the last time we [him and his uncle] saw each other…we’d go fist to the face, fist to the body, kicks anywhere to the pressure points. We just train to fight in time of peace and prepare for war cause, he brought me up in it. He’d stab me with forks, knifes, cane me, so I got up a super high tolerance of pain.

In Emmanuel’s family, fighting was revered and at a young age he was conditioned to become a fighter. The more pain he could endure, the prouder he felt. In his case, and in accordance with the rules of DM, Emmanuel learned, as a four year old boy to embody violent behavior and deny his pain.

In contrast to Emmanuel learning the violent aspects of DM from direct physical abuse, Samuel indirectly learned the violence rule of DM from his older brother who was mentally
abusive. Once when Samuel was eleven, his older brother forced him to play Russian Roulette. He recalled the moment:

‘I’ll tell you what, we’re gonna play Russian Roulette….So he takes the bullets out, puts one in there, spins it, whack. ‘Let’s go, let’s go.’ Boom. Pulls the trigger. Does it again. ‘Come on, pull the trigger. Do it.’ He made me pull the trigger. [Crying hard]. He made me pull the trigger.

Samuel’s brother raised him in an environment structured by a lack of protection mixed with violent forms of mental abuse. Instead of protecting Samuel and teaching him prosocial rules of masculinity, Samuel’s brother tormented him throughout his childhood, until he committed suicide when Samuel was incarcerated. Samuel reported trying to keep his brother appeased at all times by not doing anything that would make him angry. Under these conditions, Samuel repeatedly observed his brother’s emotional response to be that of anger, rage, and violence. These tacit lessons conditioned him to learn that masculine emotions within the spectrum of anger are allowed, but that he should hide emotional fear and pain. These teachings were a guide informing him how to embody DM as he grew up frequently interacting with his violent brother as a father-figure in his home.

Whereas Samuel was socialized through mental abuse, Alejandro was raised in a household where physical abuse and domestic violence were condoned. Alejandro reported having been knocked unconscious by his father so many times he could not count. In addition, he witnessed his mother enduring multiple accounts of physical abuse to the point of hospitalization. Eventually, she left Alejandro’s father and the boys, in fear for her life. A poignant memory that stood out in his mind was when his father tried to get him and his brothers to join him in beating their mother:
I remember a time when my dad tried to make us hit on our mom. He was holding her down and told us, ‘You guys [him and his 3 brothers], you need to come hit her. Hit her, hit her, or I’ll fuck you up. Hit her!’ But none of us would so he finished beating the fuck out of her and then he came after us and beat the fuck out of us for not doing what he told us to do.

At age eleven, after his mother had left the family behind, Alejandro’s older brother came into the house and witnessed their father choking Alejandro. Worried their father would end up killing Alejandro, his brother took him from their home and they never returned. Alejandro’s brother went into the military and he joined a gang shortly thereafter. Neither have seen their father since.

It is clear from these accounts that Alejandro was socialized toward viewing men as violent and aggressive. Because his mother was unable to protect herself, or her children, Alejandro experienced increased abuse from his father. When Alejandro’s brother left to join the military, he was totally on his own and left to fend for himself.

Lastly, another respondent, Max, learned that men are violent and suppress their emotions. This was evident in his father’s confusing and abusive lessons about crying, as he describes here:

One thing that was very confusing was we'd get told if we were crying, ‘What are you crying about? I'll give you something to cry about.’ So I was never allowed to cry. One time I was getting spanked with a belt and I didn't cry and he came and told me, he was like, ‘So now you're a tough guy and you don't want to cry.’ So he went and got a two-by-four and started hitting me with it.

This emotionally tough mentality was reinforced through “hundreds of vicious beatings” where his dad would terrorize him. Throughout the interview, Max cried multiple times expressing, “My dad prepared me to be a hardened man.”
David, Emmanuel, Samuel, Alejandro, and Max each highlight growing up in family contexts in which they acquired de-habilitated masculinity through interacting with violent men who were their primary role models for preparing them to become “hardened men.” These interviews revealed that both directly and indirectly, participants’ experiences shaped their perceptions of masculinity and what it means to be a man. Through observing violent behavior and being directly abused or trained to be violent, participants came to understand that the DM version of “doing masculinity” was the normative version. As such, they were being conditioned as young boys to align with the DM rules that boys and men are violent and do not cry as they are expected to be emotionally tough.

b. Suppressing Emotions with Substance Use

In the majority of my participants’ childhood homes, family members were involved in frequent substance use. Due to their involvement with various substances, caregivers were often neglectful and abusive, and sometimes missing (incarcerated) and/or dead. Family role models’ habitual substance abuse suggests that the participants were socialized into drug use at very young ages. In analyzing participants’ histories of familial substance use, I came to understand that, in accordance with the emotional suppression rule of DM, they were raised to view substances as a way to cope, through suppressing and numbing their feelings and emotions. In turn, the substance laden environment led them into a pattern of life-long substance use. Intergenerationally, participants learned to cope through substance use which contributed to their de-habilitated trajectory into manhood. The following accounts elucidate the familial context and process in which participants’ developed a habitual relationship with substances which was motivated by the desire to “numb out” painful emotions.
One participant, Larry, recalled how his substance use began on the first day home from the hospital:

I was told that as soon as my mom brought me home from the hospital, she went out and she left me with my uncles and they would blow weed in my face so I wouldn’t cry. And that was the babysitter. My babysitter from day one was marijuana…I was drinking since I had a bottle…and I remember taking my first hit of LSD when I was about 7…My uncles gave it to me.

Larry’s early socialization into substances kept him involved with habitual substance use for nearly thirty years. He reported that his “drug of choice,” or the one he favored, was cocaine, which he began using when his gang-involved uncles gave him his first line on his thirteenth birthday.

Another participant, Brandon, reported growing up in a home in which his stepfather and mother used and sold cocaine. He described, “[My dad] was always snorting….He'd always have a bag of dope (cocaine) on him. He called it his sinus medication. And he'd stick a Mickey D straw in there and he would sit there and pack it and snort it. And I grew up watching him do this for years.” Being socialized in this setting, he recalled that at twelve years old he was paid an allowance to help his parents package cocaine and ship money in fed-ex packages to drug dealers. He shared, “My allowance as a child was a carton of cigarettes, some weed, some pills.” By age fourteen, he was regularly doing cocaine with his parents and had become a daily user.

Max’s memory similarly highlighted his socialization into early substance use within the context of the family. His parents had gotten divorced at a young age due to intimate partner violence and he chose to live with his abusive biological father. When I asked him about his first memories of using substances, he recalled, “…when I was ten I started smoking weed and – well, I was always drinking because my dad would give it to me in bottles and stuff, but that's when, at
ten, I consciously made the choice to start drinking and smoking weed.” Max continued by conveying that his consistent drug use began by noticing that he felt better when he was high than when he was sober because he did not have to feel anything. The emotional suppression through substances helped him to soothe the emotional pain that was caused by his abuse.

These types of accounts were repeatedly shared: boys were socialized in family systems where caregivers frequently used drugs in front of them, and/or directly gave them to participants. As such, the majority of those I interviewed started using drugs at very young ages, tried a wide variety of substances over their life courses, and became addicted to one or more types of substances. In examining participants’ experiences of indirect neglect, family violence, and substance use, the data suggest that boys learned that drugs were an easy way to numb the pain of living in abusive family systems.

To more thoroughly investigate the development of DM through substance use, I asked the respondents, “Why do you think you used substances?” The most frequent response was that they used drugs as a way to hide the pain of the feelings they wanted to suppress. Richard articulated that he used crack “…to take the pain away—the emotional, physical, mental. I wanted to forget about everything. Or to not think about something.” Adam replied, “To numb out pain,…no self-worth…It was about pain. Emotional pain. You know—I’ll just put a blanket on it for a little while. You know what I mean?” Nick added, “I was feeling fucked up and I didn’t know how to deal with my feelings,” and Emmanuel confirmed, “I didn’t know how to deal with my fucked up feelings.”

These findings support previous research which confirms that experiencing child abuse and neglect is a risk factor for adolescent substance use (Espelage et al. 2014; Ireland, Smith, and Thornberry 2002; Widom, Marmorstein, and Raskin 2006). Previous research has shown that
substance use is a way in which maltreated children sometimes cope with experiences of child abuse (Carson et al. 2008), and that incarcerated populations retrospectively report elevated rates of substance use, prior to incarceration (National Center on Addiction and Substance Use 2010). My research expands on the previous findings by exploring the ways in which participants’ socialization into habitual substance use contributed to their development of de-habilitated masculinity. Having been socialized in family systems in which violence, abuse, and substance use were the norms, there was an absence of care giver modeling for how to cope with pain. Thus, participants were never habilitated with prosocial coping skills and instead directly and indirectly learned to suppress negative emotions through substance use. As such, familial substance use contributed to the development of the emotional suppressing aspect of DM.


In contrast to the infantilization (Goffman 1979) of women, where women are commonly positioned and treated as girls, boys are sometimes placed in “adultified” (Roy et al. 2014) roles in which they are expected to behave prematurely as adult men in their households. In my research, boys were often positioned in the adultified role as the “man of the house” or the “man of the family.” This positioning implicitly taught participants the de-habilitated masculinity rule that boys (adultified as men) are the protectors of the house and/or family. In addition, some participants reported that they were trained to treat girls and women gently while, as boys, they were harshly disciplined and violently abused. This established the idea that boys are more like

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20 Roy and colleagues (2014) examined the life histories of low-income, young Salvadoran and African American men raised in the Washington, DC/Baltimore region. They found that seventy-three percent of the forty-one men they interviewed reported that they were “adultified,” meaning that they “acted ‘like an adult’ by contributing financially, caring for family members, or confronting challenges that required higher levels of maturity, including violence, substance use, or extensive self-care” (61). Fifty-six percent directly stated that they were considered “men of the house” as young boys. Their adultification resulted in the participants experiencing a complicated and confusing transition into actual adulthood, as they had undergone a process of “pseudo-maturity” due to the expectation of them to act as men, even though they were young boys.
men, and girls and women are fragile children, further reinforcing that boys and men are the protectors, which implies that they do not need protecting.

David aptly articulated his adultified role as the man of the family. His father was absent from his life and, as the older brother, David kept his younger brother out of trouble and took on the role of the responsible “man of their family.” He reflected, “I always kept [my brother] out of trouble…I took responsibility and felt that I had to be the man of the family because there was no man in the family there—I mean there was always a different man in my mom’s life. Every week. Every day.” Similarly, Jacob’s biological father died from a drug overdose when Jacob was thirteen. Following his father’s death, he took on the role of the man of the family, protecting his younger brother from their mother’s abuse. Later, when their stepfather died, their mother forced the boys out of the house and on to the street to fend for themselves. When I asked him what the experience was like, Jacob offered this description: “So I took care of [my brother] basically cuz I would just—I was just like a man. I came up with an idea to sell crack because there was so much of it and we could get it anywhere. So I did what I did to make money and feed us.”

Anton was also put in the position of being “the man of the house,” beginning at age seven. His father was incarcerated and his mother’s work schedule dictated that she be gone sometimes for sixteen hours a day. He recalled,

..sometimes [my mom would] leave at 6 in the morning and wouldn’t get off until 9 o’clock, then [she’d] ride the bus…That’s why I say I was pretty much the man of the house when I was at that age until my dad got out of the pen… So when he came home you know I wasn’t looking for no role models…. [so] then I got up outta there cuz now there was a shift. It was like now I’m no longer the man of the house. He’s
the man of the house...and from there it was like straight to the streets. Straight to
the streets.

Neither of Anton’s parents created an environment in which he viewed himself as a boy in need
of protection. Instead, through absence and neglect, his parents implicitly signaled to him that he
was a pseudo-adult as the “man of the house.” After being in this adultified role for so many years,
when his dad returned from prison, his position became challenged. Under these circumstances—
not having been nurtured or protected for years as a young boy— he decided to leave home and
move to the streets to live on his own at the age of thirteen.

Josh’s history illuminated the pattern of fathers teaching sons, through violent disciplinary
measures, that boys are not in need of protection, whereas girls and women are to be protected.
Here, he explains this family dynamic:

My dad cherished women, they were his daughters, his wife, you know what I
mean? One time I hit my sister and that was the first time I got a spanking. I got the
belt. ‘Do not hit women. Go pick a switch.’ I’m like, ‘What do you mean go pick a
switch?’ ‘Don’t hit women.’ I learned my lesson. It never happened again. Cuz you
know, you don’t hit women. That’s it, that’s all.

By being spanked for hitting his sister, he learned that girls and boys are situated differently
as children: girls need protection, while boys are pseudo-men who do the protecting of girls. As
such, Josh equated himself with being a man, although he was a child. This ideology was
reinforced when Josh’s father died in a car accident when Josh was thirteen. At this young age, he
took on the role of the protector of his siblings. When I asked him how he coped with his father’s
death, he shared with me that he did not cry at his dad’s funeral because he had been taught that
men do not cry. After the funeral, however, he went into the woods alone to cry. He never talked
to anyone in his family about his father’s death and felt responsible for his four younger siblings who asked him, “What do we do now, Josh?” He reported that he felt angry and scared about their expectations that he would now be the protector of the family. Nonetheless, he accepted the role having integrated the DM rule that, as a thirteen year old boy, he needed to become the adult man in the family. Placed in this adultified role, Josh concealed his emotions, hiding in the woods alone to mourn the death of his father while trying to figure out how to replace his dad in the family structure.

Similar to Josh, Nick also learned the DM gender rules in a family system where he was harshly disciplined differently than his sister. He recalled that once his dad was remarried, he started to abuse Nick, but not his sister. He always questioned why he was treated differently:

I remember—because even though I love my sister—I remember my dad would not do nothing to my sister at all. And I used to go to him like, ‘Hey man, you're going to have to answer why you treat me different than my sister? All the guys you introduced me to, ‘Mister switch, Mister shoe – introduce her.’ And he'd (his dad) be like, I'm gonna take a look at it. And he never would.

Nick continued telling me that later in life he began to reflect upon the way his dad abused him but not his sister. He approached his mom to ask her why his dad never loved him. He recounted their conversation,

I said, ‘I don't think dad is capable of emotional love.’ And she was like, ‘Your dad is—since you were a kid, he would just look at you like a toy soldier. He wanted to be emotionless and strong and never show fear, pain or hurt. He was always like that with you.’
For Nick, when he experienced his sister being treated differently, he was learning the DM rule that as the protectors boys do not need nurturing. This idea was further reinforced by his father who suppressed his emotions—being strong and never showing fear—and treating Nick like a “toy soldier.” As such, Nick learned that men are aggressive and tough, and that they should only express emotions that were connected to anger.

Through being treated as the “man of the house” and/or differently than their sisters, participants highlighted their experiences of adultification and the lack of protection in their family systems. In adultified-protector roles, boys were prematurely positioned as men, while their sisters were protected as children. In effect, they were implicitly taught the de-habilitated masculinity rule that boys do not need protection because their role is to be the protector.

**d. The Unprotected—Protectors**

My findings indicate that, within family systems structured by the rules of DM, participants are socialized into becoming the “unprotected-protectors.” This paradoxical role dictated that, as adultified boys, participants were raised to believe that they did not need protection but instead that they were to be the protectors. Their direct experiences of violence and indirect neglect (lack of protection) became normative and subsequently their victimization remained invisible to themselves and to those around them. As unprotected-protectors, they were treated and expected to be tough men, even though they were young boys. Most typically, this phenomenon occurred when participants were protecting siblings and/or their mothers from being abused by a man in the family system. Nathan, Kevin, and Jay’s history illuminated this process.

Nathan reported a time when he was six years old and a man broke into his house while his mom was out drinking. He ran into the closet with his five-year-old brother, as his mom had told him to do if this ever happened when she left them home alone. When the man opened the
closet door, Nathan shot him in the neck with the shotgun that was hidden in the closet. For the next five hours, while he waited for his mom to come home, he described watching the life go out of the man, as the blood crept closer to his feet. He cried multiple times sharing this event with me, still feeling conflicted that he murdered someone when he was a child.

Nathan’s history revealed that his primary socialization occurred in a context in which he was taught to be the unprotected-protector. Unprotected, he reported being victim to multiple forms of abuse and neglect throughout his childhood. Alternatively, his mom directly taught him to be the protective man of the house through her directives to bring his younger brother to the closet and shoot anyone who entered their home. In this adultified position, Nathan was a victim of parental abuse and neglect and simultaneously a victimizer who shot an intruder who entered their home. Notably, in his retelling of this act of self-defense, Nathan shared his conflicted feelings about “murdering” the intruder. His inner struggle illuminated the process of the unprotected-protector. Because he had learned that he was to be the protector, he was unable to recognize his position as the unprotected victim.

Domestic violence provided another context in which participants became the unprotected-protector in the family. Kevin, for example, described a time when his father nearly killed his mother and he stepped in to save her life:

I remember one time I came in from outside playing and my mother was crying and he was on top of her and he had a very, very large pistol…pointed at her head and the trigger was pulled back. And I remember running and jumping at, you know, on him and the gun went off and had just missed her head.
Seeing his mother in a vulnerable, life-threatening position, Kevin became the protector. This act reinforced his position as an adultified boy who was responsible for his mother. Through taking on the protector role, he became the unprotected child whose victimization was rendered invisible.

Like Kevin, Jay similarly took on the role of the unprotected-protector during instances when his mother was physically abused by his stepfather, as explained here: “I was always trying to protect my mother from him… When him and mom was fighting I’d jump in between them. He’d grab me by the arm or neck or the head and just swing me away….There was quite a few times that he just punched me.”

In the case of Kevin and Jay, where they protected their mothers from abusive father figures, they were learning that mothers are not capable of protecting themselves or their children from the violent men in the family system. As such, they became violent, in their roles as protectors, while simultaneously learning that boys do not need protection. Thus, the participants were socialized into enacting the DM rules that boys and men are violent and that it is normative for sons to go unprotected.

D. Conclusion

The men I interviewed were raised in family systems in which they reported experiencing extreme abuse and neglect. Not knowing any differently, their family system is what they believed to be normative and their traumatic family context rendered them vulnerable, unprotected, and socialized into believing that what it means to be a man is to suppress their emotions, to be tough and violent, and to take on the role of the unprotected—protectors. In these family contexts participants learned the rules of de-habilitated masculinity as they were not offered “normal” or prosocial models to construct their identities.
Aptly, when I asked Jay where he learned to be a man, he articulated, “I’m almost 60 years old and I never learned how to be normal when I was a kid. Never.” As I questioned further, working to understand what he would have wanted to change in his family system, he replied,

…If I had my father. If my father was going the right direction…Like I wanted to learn how to go fishing with my father or you know have him talk to me about women and what he’s experiencing and what they’re actually worth. Instead of learning the way that I did…If I had had a guy step in. I think I needed a male figure that had a sense of direction.

Jay’s narrative is consistent with the accounts of the majority of my participants who were raised in family contexts in which they never had habilitative opportunities to learn what it means to be a prosocial boy or man from their caregivers—especially father figures. Rather, the rules of de-habilitated masculinity were the primary socializing influences on their identity development. Through their observations and experiences of being the victims of multiple forms of neglect and abuse, they learned that boys and men are violent. Vulnerable to familial socialization into habitual substance use, they learned that one effective way to follow the DM rule that boys and men suppress their emotions, was through substances. In their positioning as “the man of the house” they were blinded to their own need for protection as young boys and adopted the role of the unprotected-protector, enacting violence to protect themselves and their mothers. Ultimately, participants were socialized in family systems where they were taught the rules of DM that fostered their development as de-habilitated boys and young men. This led to their move into gang involvement and eventually prison, a trajectory that will be examined in chapters four and five.
CHAPTER 4: ACHIEVING DE-HABILITATED MASCULINITY: EXAMINING MALTREATED BOYS’ MOVEMENT INTO GANGS

“An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal behavior.”
- Victor Frankl (1959, 2006:20) –

A. Introduction

In this chapter I will examine my participants’ achievement of de-habilitated masculinity (DM) in the process of moving out of their abusive and neglectful childhood homes into gangs. As discussed in the previous chapter, my findings reveal that as boys being raised in family contexts of abuse and neglect, they learned that DM was the normative model of how to be a man. Upon moving out of their homes and into gang membership they embody, reinforce and perpetuate the rules of DM. Having been socialized in the family context into the structure of DM, I argue that my participants were perfectly conditioned to enter into gangs. Their childhood caregivers had not socialized them to function as prosocial members of society and instead had prepared them to survive a future violent reality of gang membership and eventually incarceration. I will apply Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (1977) to describe the ways in which gang life became my participants’ path of least resistance and the most comfortable in which to fit, as they already knew how to abide by the rules. Because those I interviewed were never provided with habilitative opportunities to interact with prosocial institutional structures (e.g. family or school), they had limited knowledge and tools to draw upon in navigating adolescence and so they accessed the DM rules to guide them in their achievement of de-habilitated masculinity.

This chapter begins with an overview of how the family context of abuse and neglect formed the habitus\(^{21}\) for my participants to embody and enact the rules of DM. Next, I contextualize gang

\(^{21}\) Habit\(\text{us}\) is defined in the upcoming section.
life, applying habitus and the rules of DM to make sense of participants’ entry into gangs and their achievement of DM as they navigate gang life. I conclude by summing the chapter’s findings.

B. Childhood Abuse and Neglect, Habitus, and Achieving De-Habilitated Masculinity

There is a large body of research examining the damaging outcomes associated with abuse and neglect for children. In alignment with this research and from a criminological perspective, the detrimental outcomes for boys experiencing child maltreatment have been found to include dropping out of school (Currie and Spatz Widom 2010; Diette et al. 2017; Lemkin et al. 2017; Smith and Thornberry 1995), delinquency (Belknap and Holsinger 2006; Milaniak and Widom 2015; Smith and Thornberry 1995; Topitzes, Mersky, and Reynolds 2012), substance use (Downs and Harrison 1998; Espelage et al. 2014; Herrenkohl et al. 2013; Moran, Vuchinich, and Hall 2004), and gang involvement (Cepeda, Valdez, and Nowotny 2014; Joe and Chesney-Lind 1995; Melde, Taylor, and Esbensen 2009; Thompson and Braaten-Antrim 1998). My sample reflects these common themes found in previous investigations—only one out of the thirty men I interviewed earned a traditional high school diploma, twenty-six out of thirty participants entered the system as a juvenile (they became system involved by being arrested, adjudicated or charged, and/or booked for a juvenile or adult offense) (average age 15.2), all thirty reported becoming dependent on or addicted to substances, and all participants joined gangs prior to incarceration.22

In terms of early education, the most significant theme I discovered when asking participants about their school experiences was their overall lack of having anything to say about school. I found that for many, their lack of school engagement was associated with what they were

22 Recall that my participants were drawn from a sample of incarcerated men who were re-entering society through New Habits, a behavior modification program focused on treating offenders who have historically been substance dependent or addicted. Additionally, I theoretically target sampled NH men who reported having been previously gang involved based on this theme arising during preliminary interviews. Thus, retrospectively, the current findings are illustrative of the association of incarcerated populations exhibiting these outcomes (childhood maltreatment, juvenile delinquency, dropping out of school, and substance addiction).
experiencing in their homes. One participant, Seth, aptly illuminated this collective sentiment. When I asked him—*did you like school when you were a kid?*—he responded by admitting, “School was scary. I got to be around people that had no clue what I did at home. They had no clue. Their life was normal, not mine. And I didn't know how to converse with them, really. I wish I had their life. I envied them.” Participants conveyed that school was a place to socialize and/or sell drugs and that they left due to getting in fights, were fearful of gang rivalry, got suspended or expelled for selling drugs at school, ran away from home, and/or entered the juvenile system. These disruptions prevented most from returning to school.

Literature confirms that it is common for maltreated children to do poorly in school (Currie and Spatz Widom 2010; Diette et al. 2017; Lemkin et al. 2017; Smith and Thornberry 1995) and simultaneously that school can be a mitigating factor for maltreated children (Lemkin et al. 2017; Veltman and Browne 2001). In their review of three decades of research on child maltreatment and school as a factor mitigating the negative consequences for maltreated children, Veltman and Browne (2001) reported that, "The school environment is one of the most important places where maltreated children could find support and positive influences on their lives, leading to feelings of optimism about their futures. It may provide positive and secure relationships with adults and peers and a place where teachers may foster accomplishments, boost self-esteem, and provide new opportunities for personal development" (Veltman and Browne 2001:230).

My participants confirmed previous findings that maltreated children do poorly in school. In their minimal comments about their school history, the vast majority revealed that school was an institutional environment where they found minimal social support. As such, the cumulative disadvantages participants faced in their childhoods was prominent. I concluded that those I interviewed had very few structural opportunities for becoming prosocial boys and men in society.
Indeed, during childhood, my participants’ collective *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977) was an environment in which their primary socializing structure (the family) was abusive and neglectful and their school environment was not reported to be a mitigating institution of social support. As such, they were launched from their childhood homes and straight into the streets armed, not with rudimentary education or prosocial life skills, but with the dispositions of DM as their most valuable resource.

To theoretically articulate what was occurring for my participants, I turned to Pierre Bourdieu’s (1990) concept of *habitus*. He defines habitus as,

“This…Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (Bourdieu 1990:53).

In other words, Bourdieu’s conceptualization of habitus conveys that action and behavior (dispositions which generate and organize practices) are shaped by social structure, that these acts reinforce and reproduce that structure (structuring structures) and that the “transposable dispositions” are unconsciously played out through objective adaptation to the structure.

To further explicate Bourdieu’s “structured structures,” Swartz (2002) uses the example of a child raised in a family of artists as being more likely to develop the ability to interpret, appreciate and criticize works of art than a child raised in a family of professional athletes who are disinterested in art. He advances, “By internalizing the dispositions of these family contexts habitus consists of ‘structured structures’… Habitus generates perceptions, expectations, and practices that correspond to the structuring properties of earlier socialization” (63). Applied to my
participants’ childhood and their family context, one can begin to see how being raised in abusive and neglectful homes, where DM is the predominant dispositional socializing structure, they were unconsciously conditioned to become “structured structures” who were “predisposed to function as structuring structures” in which they reinforce and reproduce DM. In other words, during early socialization my participants internalized perceptions, expectations, and practices which were in alignment with the structure of DM.

In further examination of habitus, Swartz (2002) articulates, “The habitus consists of deeply internalized dispositions, schemas, and forms of know-how and competence, both mental and corporeal, first acquired by the individual through early childhood socialization,” (62). Young (2004) also provides an expansive and summative definition of Bourdieu’s habitus:

“…[A] statement about how individual action relates to external constraints or social structures…how individual action shapes as well as is shaped by social structure…. [H]uman action is performed without conscious awareness. Instead, much of what people do is done because they learned such action as a result of their membership in social groups that regularly function in such ways…[Habitus] is a coherent set of cultural artifacts (beliefs, actions, attitudes) that pertain to members of a social group…[and] is made up of informal and practical cultural traits that allow people to function in their everyday world. This cultural package supplies them with the tools to make distinctions and choices for action…. [B]y virtue of their prior experiences in specific social contexts, habitus, also creates for them some fluid boundaries around what they perceive to be viable or legitimate options for action” (43).
The conceptualization of habitus is that it describes how individuals’ actions are based on the unconscious internalization of a set of rules that were learned during primary socialization. Bourdieu views primary socialization (the family context) as being more formative of learning dispositions, behavior, and skills than subsequent socialization experiences (Bourdieu 1990; Swartz 1997, 2002). Habitus conceptualizes how individuals embody habits, dispositions, and skills based on their life experiences. Individuals act out what they have learned in their social groups. They draw upon the tools provided by their “cultural package” to make situated choices for action informed by the boundaries of what they perceive of as being viable options.

As such, based on the principles of habitus, I argue that my participants have developed and learned the dispositions and rules of DM through growing up in abusive and neglectful homes as their primary socializing structure. The DM rules became their “cultural package” (Young 2004) of tools to draw upon as they moved into adolescence. Because their primary socialization provided them with DM as the normative structural model for how to enact masculine behavior, they left their homes and achieved DM through shifting from being children who were passive victims of child abuse and neglect, to active participants engaged in structuring the structure of DM. In effect, when they become gang members, they reproduce the paradoxical victim-victimizer pattern embedded in the structure of DM. Frankl (1959, 2006) aptly articulates, “An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal behavior” (20). In consort with Frankl and Bourdieu, I contend that my participants were culturally conditioned by their abusive families toward being drawn to gang life. They made the most logical “choice” to enter into gangs based upon their primary socialization into the structure of DM.
C. Child Maltreatment and the Habitus of the Gang

I interviewed thirty men who reported being gang involved prior to incarceration to gain understanding of the context of their experiences during gang involvement. These interviews illuminated multiple similarities in the abusive family and gang contexts. I have concluded that my participants were drawn to gangs because the context of gang life so closely mimicked their family setting. Bourdieu describes,

“Social agents are the products of history…[S]ocial agents will actively determine, on a basis of these socially and historically constituted categories of perception and appreciation, the situation that determines them…[T]he categories of perception and appreciation which provide the principles of this (self-) determination are themselves largely determined by the social and economic conditions of their constitution” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:136).

In other words, social agents rely on their cumulative experience over their life course to respond to new experiences and their self-determinative actions are informed by the social conditions which historically created their perceptions. Adding to this, Bourdieu (1990) articulates, “[In] the objective homogenizing of a group…[there is] a homogeneity of conditions of existence, [which] enables practices to be objectively harmonized without calculation or conscious reference to a norm and mutually adjusted in the absence of direct intervention or explicit coordination” (58).

This describes the ways in which individuals who share social conditions in homogenized groups and are socialized in similar settings will unconsciously—“without calculation or conscious reference”—draw upon what they already know in order to navigate the setting. Social actors in shared social contexts embody similar modes of behavior. In application to my dissertation research, Bourdieu provides a framework for understanding the ways in which the habitus of my
participants’ family context reflects the habitus of the gang context. In both the family and the gang, a sense of familial love and belonging became conflated with violence and victimization in the form of abuse, and neglect. Violence came to be the expected norm and was the primary form of receiving attention from caregivers and gang members.

In the context of their families, participants conveyed a collective account of their desires to belong and be loved, yet they encountered abuse and violence. This sentiment was illuminated by my interview with Seth, when I asked him to describe his family setting. He replied:

I was miserable as a kid. I got tired of being who I wasn’t. I just wanted to have friends and love people…and I just had to put on a mask. My old man taught me about life really quick when I was a kid. We had this chicken coop and the neighbor’s dogs kept getting into our chickens…He told me…I want you to chain them up…So he brings out a shotgun and I'm thinking, oh my God, what is he going to do? [He] shoots one dog in the face and the face just peels back. And I’m like, God. Shoots another one. And he drags these dogs, he peels them and he digs a hole and he drops them in it. And he says, that’s life. My old man sucked. Every sort of love or decency or kindness or gentleness was forced out.

Longing for friends and to be loved, Seth had a mentally abusive father who conditioned him to “put on a mask” in order to navigate his life. Due to his dad modeling violent behavior and an absence of kindness, he shaped Seth’s normative expectation of “family” to be one which lacks a sense of love and instead is replaced with violence. At age sixteen, Seth ran away from home and ended up becoming gang involved with an extremely violent white supremacist gang. Another participant, Alejandro, who left home at age eleven due to violent abuse added, “I always just wanted family, love. I tried to have it, but it didn’t work.” Similarly, Samuel talked at length about
his desire to be loved. He cried multiple times during our interview, reflecting, “I wanted to be loved I wanted to be cared for but…my life has been filled with abuse, hate, and abandonment.”

Participants collectively conveyed that they were missing care and love in their families and that they felt a desire to belong. I found this sentiment to be reflective of their motivation for becoming gang involved. Even though participants had an awareness that pursuing gang membership meant that they would become surrounded by violence, they still decided to join. When I specifically asked—why did you join a gang?—multiple participants admitted that they joined due to a desire to belong, fit in, and be a part of a family. They articulated:

**Craig:** “[I] joined my gang to feel accepted, feel wanted, feel stronger.”

**Stephan:** “Really just to fit in.”

**Nick:** “I felt invisible in my life and like I didn’t belong to nothing that mattered. I was nobody. And I had a deep, unloving feeling. So I just wanted to be a part of something.”

**Tony:** “I just started running the streets because I’d rather be there than at home…and I started meeting other kids around the neighborhood that were involved in gangs. And I was comfortable with those people. They were family…So I joined.”

**Greg:** “I never had a role model. All my older brothers were drunks, and my dad was not there…so my whole life [became] about my homies and my gang….that was the family I invested in.”

**Rob:** “I had that heart for gang life. I had the heart for being accepted…I could have power…and be a part of something.”
**Alejandro:** “The sense of family. The sense of being wanted and the love they showed at that time. To me that was like real family.”

These findings are concurrent with previous qualitative research characterizing the gang as a “family” or a community of companionship (Brown 1978; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Sánchez-Jankowski 1991; White 2009) in which to feel a sense of belonging. I describe this process under the frame of habitus. As a homogenous group (maltreated boys), participants were social agents who became the “products of [their] history” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). They had collectively been raised in abusive family system where they developed similar longings and behaviors to navigate their social surroundings. As unprotected boys who observed and experienced repeated violence, they learned to conflate neglect and abuse with what they recognized as “family.” As such, they actively decided to enter into gangs based on their history of familial socialization into the structure of DM. The expectations of the gang matched what they had unconsciously learned during childhood about the rules of DM—boys and men are violent and do not need protection. Thus, when participants left their boyhood homes, gangs provided a similar setting to enter into where violence and victimization was the normative experience. Ultimately, participants histories of child maltreatment conditioned them to be drawn to the habitus of the gang, which is examined in the following sections.

**D. Gang Life and the Reinforcement of the Victim-Victimizer Paradox**

Recall that in the context of abusive and neglectful family systems, participants frequently exhibited the DM rules by taking on the adultified role of the “unprotected-protector” (see chapter 3). In accordance with the rules of DM—boys and men do not need protection because they are the protectors and boys and men are violent—this paradox signifies the perceptual invisibility of participants as victims while emphasizing their position as victimizers. Constructed during
childhood as the unprotectedprotector, participants continued to perpetuate and reinforce this victim-victimizer paradox during gang involvement. The following sections provide evidence of the reinforcement of the victim-victimizer paradox in the structural foundation of gang life—during gang initiation participants were victimized and then throughout their time as members they became the victimizers.

i. Initiation

The ritualistic initiation into a gang has been previously theorized by gang scholars as a “street baptism” (Vigil 1996), a “rite of passage” (Pinnock 1997) and as a required prospective “ritual” (Decker and Van Winkle 1996). In Vigil’s (1996) life history interviews with sixty gang members collected from twelve “barrios” (neighborhoods) in the Los Angeles area, he describes the “street baptism” as a ritualistic rite of passage—a transformative re-birthing—into a new identity as a gang member. Through being “jumped-in” (beaten up by initiating gang members for a specified length of time), membership becomes publicly formalized and it functions to create solidarity among worthy and “tough” members. Pinnock’s (1997) research, Gangs, Rituals, and Rites of Passage, examines gangs in Cape Town, South Africa from a sociological perspective to understand the symbolic nature of gang initiation and membership. He argues that this process has become a ritualistic “rite of passage” due, in part, to cultural shifts resulting in the loss of fathers and community rituals which transform boys into men. Thus, Pinnock contends that the gang initiation replaces the lost cultural traditions boys are longing for in their transition to adulthood. Decker and Van Winkle’s (1996), Life in the Gang, is a widely referenced qualitative examination of the ethnographic interviews with ninety-nine gang members in the St. Louis area. The majority of participants in their account conveyed that the initiation ritual was similar to Vigil’s (1996)—members were beaten up in order to join the gang. This ritual was implemented to exhibit an
initiate’s toughness during the beating and then the resultant inclusion of becoming part of the gang through embracing the new member once the fighting ended.

Similarly, all of the men I interviewed who were gang involved prior to incarceration reported that they entered their gangs through an initiation ritual. These rituals varied by gang type (Crips, Bloods etc.) but the most common rituals included a threat of violence, directly experiencing, and/or enacting violence. The following accounts illustrate the collective gang entry experiences reported by participants.

One participant, Stephan, highlighted the threat of violence as an initiation ritual. He was told to go wait outside of a building in a dark alley to wait for twelve members to show up and “jump him in” (beat him up). As instructed, he went to the location and waited, but no one ever arrived. Confused, Stephan called a gang member to see if he had the wrong location. He was informed that the gang had spied on him to confirm that he did not back down from this threat of violence. Because he showed up as expected, he had passed the initiation and became a member. The threat of violence initiation strategy was one variation of initiation, but was the least reported.

Parallel to Decker and Van Winkle and Vigil’s findings, the most common entry ritual reported by participants was being “jumped in” through direct physical violence. Most frequently this would be multiple older gang members circling up around the initiate and beating him for a specified amount of time. Anton illuminated:

**Anton**: You had to get circled up which means four people would circle you up, you get in the middle, and go for everything. They would attack you.

**Amanda**: Do you fight back or take cover?

**Anton**: You best just fight back cuz it aint gonna end unless you do.

**Amanda**: When do they stop?
**Anton:** It’s a four minute session.

Ethan similarly recalled experiencing direct violence as an initiation ritual:

**Ethan:** [I was initiated by] getting hit by a two-by-four. There were fourteen people and each one got four shots…You had two guys at some point in time holding your arms and stuff…So you get kicked in the chest, blindfolded, and get knocked over and everything…You had to prove you were tough. That was the whole point of getting involved…A couple caught me in the back of my legs so I couldn't walk right... Both my ass cheeks were two big blisters, just black and blue.

Another participant, Pedro, revealed that his initiation included directly experiencing and enacting violence. First, he had to be beaten up. Then, he had to commit three crimes: 1) burglarize a house; 2) commit a robbery; and 3) shoot at someone—ideally a rival gang member—with a hit (injure or kill someone with a bullet). This initiation process took Pedro three years to complete. By age twelve he achieved the status of full membership in his gang by completing each required initiation ritual.

Stephan, Anton, Ethan, and Pedro’s reports of having experienced threats of violence and direct beatings during gang initiation, highlighted participants’ collective accounts of initiation rituals which fell on the victim-side of the victim-victimizer paradox. I found it significant that participants did not perceive of the violence of initiation as “victimization.” Rather, they recognized that the violence endured during initiation was a required expectation for them to be brought into the “family.” As confirmed by previous research, many of those I interviewed shared the sentiment that the entry experience of being beaten in was “part of the life” and an invited “rite of passage” where they were now transformed through ritualistic physical violence (Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Pinnock 1997; Vigil 1996).
I attributed my participants’ perceptions about initiation to having been socialized into the structure of DM as children, which dictated that they had no expectation of protection and believed that boys and men are to be violent. Again, this provided evidence that they were drawn to the gang habitus through their socialization into the structure of DM as young boys in their abusive family contexts. As such, being physically beaten to belong in the gang “family” rendered their victimization invisible to themselves and to others. It was part of their normative historical conditioning where violence and abuse were conflated with a sense of familial belonging.

Pedro’s initiation—where he was required to enact violence through committing a robbery and shooting at someone with the minimal impact being “a target of a hit”—revealed the victimizer-end of the victim-victimizer paradox. First, he experienced being victim to the direct physical violence of being beaten, then he enacted violence in order to belong in the gang. Interestingly, when I asked Pedro how he felt during his initiation process he admitted,

I was frightened. Like I was frightened of what’s going to happen. Like damn I’m doing something that’s going to change my life for the rest of my life. But I also felt power. Like I just did something that defined me as a man and even though I was a young boy, now I was defined as a man.

This admission revealed his vulnerability in the expectation of enacting violence during the initiation ritual. In order to follow through, he had to suppress his fear and reframed it as a sense of masculine power. In accordance with the DM rules, he suppressed his emotion of feeling frightened and enacted violence to feel masculine power. Illustratively, Pedro moved from being a passive victim in his family context and while being beaten into the gang, to becoming an active participant in the victimization of others through perpetrating a robbery and a shooting. As such,
he embodied the victim-victimizer paradox embedded in the rules of DM and achieved and reinforced de-habilitated masculinity.

In sum, those I interviewed who were gang-involved, shared that their motivations for joining gangs were to be accepted and belong to a “family,” even if it meant being beaten up and/or having to commit life-threatening violent crimes in order to be initiated. Collectively, their gang entry experiences highlighted the victim-victimizer paradox—boys entered gangs through an initiation ritual that included being victims of violence (threat of or direct experience of an attack) and they were simultaneously expected to enact violence, sometimes starting at the point of initiation, and always once becoming a member.

**ii. Membership**

Once participants became gang members, the victim-victimizer paradox continued to be a normative experience. Several gang scholars have established that violence and victimization are integral to being involved in a gang (Decker 1996; Kerig et al. 2013; Pyrooz, Moule, and Decker 2014; Scott H. Decker and David C. Pyrooz 2010). Melde and colleagues (2009) aptly articulate, “[G]angs offer a unique social context in which violence and victimization are viewed as normative” (570). Expanding upon these previous findings, from a sociological and gendered perspective, I found DM and the gang habitus to aid in understanding the victim-victimizer paradox of my participants’ movement into gang membership. Because violence is coded as masculine (Katz 2006) and gang membership is associated with hyper-masculinity, then the normative expectation of gang members is that they are violent. Simultaneously, if gang members are hyper-masculine and violent, then they do not need protection and cannot be viewed as victims. Originating during participants’ childhoods, when they were viewed and treated as adultified
“unprotected-protectors,” gang members’ similarly reflect this pattern in the victim-victimizer paradox.

Over the course of thirty interviews with men who were gang-involved as youths, there was a repeated, collective account of them having experienced and witnessed frequent and extreme violence. Participants reported violence such as physical fights, shootings, stabbings, witnessing gang-rapes and death. Larry summed up his gang memories, “I witnessed a gang rape when I was about 8 or 9…I watched two of my friends die. I’ve seen numerous people shot. I’ve been shot…One of my homegirls that was 8 months pregnant took a bullet for me.” Another participant, Adam, recalled, “I’ve seen guns shot, people bound and left for dead.” Greg remembered, “They (a rival gang) were smashing my head. Kicking and beating me. I woke up in the hospital…they told me my brain was swollen and that I should be dead.” Anton added, “Man, I seen everything from people getting killed, shot, stabbed, beat up, um ran over….I mean I don’t know what I haven’t really seen as far as like gang violence goes.”

Participants described holding their friends while they died, laying wounded in hospital beds, and enduring being shot at countless times. Each of their accounts revealed histories in which violence and victimization were portrayed as a movie-like reality, yet one which they perceived as normative. In addition, I found there to be a near total invisibility in participants’ perceptions of themselves as victims. In Taylor’s (2008) literature review of the violent victimization of gang members, he argued, “Although gang members may not perceive [their] experiences as violent victimization, gang members’ accounts of these processes, however, leave little doubt that they must be classified as such” (129). In agreement with Taylor’s analysis, I contend that while most individuals would view the accounts of boys being beaten, stabbed, shot at, and witnessing rape and death as “victimization,” it is understandable that participants did not view their experiences...
as such. Having been raised in neglectful and abusive homes, they grew up with violence as a normative expectation. Entering into the violence of gang life was a recognizable fit which mimicked a landscape they had previously learned to navigate.

This process was illuminated by Jordan when I asked him how he felt about being shot by rival gang members on two separate occasions. He admitted, “The second time I got shot in the leg I wasn't hospitalized that long... I don't really even think about it unless somebody asks me about it. To me that's part of life, since I've been doing this since I was so young. It's just another day in life.” Having left an abusive home at age thirteen and joining a gang shortly thereafter, violence had become his expected norm. His socialization into the structure of DM conditioned him to rely on his past acculturation to navigate the habitus of the gang environment. Swartz (2002) illuminates, “To rely on habitus means to call for reliability, a kind of technical skill which can be counted on” (66). Jordan, called upon the reliability of the rules of DM—namely, he numbed out, abandoned his need for protection, and treated his shootings as it they were just “another day in life.”

Another participant, Caleb, confirmed Jordan’s sentiment. When I asked him—how do you think your experiences of gang trauma and victimization have affected you—he replied,

I mean it kind of desensitized me a lot. Like normal stuff that would affect somebody wouldn't affect me. It came to a point in time where gunshots would go off and we wouldn't even jump. We wouldn't jump or hide or get scared. And then people were getting messed up, bloodied, like it would be just a normal – we see them and, all right, go about your business type stuff. I just got really desensitized about stuff.
Multiple participants echoed Jordon’s and Caleb’s accounts which illuminated their achievement of DM. Their normalization to violence during childhood maltreatment helped them find a sense of belonging in gang membership, which in turn aided them in their desensitization and numbing to the violence they were encountering in the habitus of the gang. These “technical skills” also helped them suppress their emotions and be unaware of their victimization. Participants’ repetitive responses to the question—*tell me about your experiences of gang violence and victimization*—confirmed this process. Illustratively, when asked this question, without a second thought, they would initiate a conversation about how they had victimized others during gang involvement. It was as if it was inconceivable to recognize themselves as victims of violence. As such, I determined that they had achieved DM through owning the ideology that boys and men are the protectors who do not need protection (invisible victims) and that they are violent (the victimizers).

I also came to understand that participants’ responses to victimization during gang membership revealed how they drew upon their “technical skills” of DM through violent retaliation. This was reminiscent of the behavior they had embodied during child maltreatment when enacting the role of the “unprotected-protector” to shield their siblings and mothers from being abused by men in the family system. As young boys, they were unprotected and their victimization went unrecognized. Instead of learning prosocial ways to cope with these experiences, they were taught to draw upon the DM rule that boys and men are violent, so they enacted this rule to protect vulnerable family members. Similarly, during gang involvement they coped with their invisible victimization through embodying DM in the act of retaliation, reproducing the victim-victimizer paradox.

Alejandro’s account illuminated this process. After running away from home at the age of eleven, due to being violently abused by his father, he joined a gang. When he was thirteen, he and
a group of “homies” were attacked on the street by a rival gang, beaten and stabbed. He described holding his best friend in his lap with a sword through his neck, watching him die. When I asked how he coped, he replied, “I retaliated. Retaliation. Anger. Just pissed off. Just not giving a fuck. Not caring of who I was going to hurt, or who was standing in the way….At that time that’s how I thought I was going to die too. So I was all in... I didn’t even care. I didn’t care if they shot me or nothing….I didn’t even care about people…I just went blank.”

Similarly, after being abused by both his father and stepfather, Caleb left home at the age of nine and shortly thereafter, joined a gang. He reported graphic details of the violence he encountered during his gang involvement, along with witnessing multiple homies die. When I asked him how he coped, he conveyed, “I just didn't care. Altogether it was just too much. And the only way I knew how to deal with it was going to retaliate—I'm going to shoot this person, shoot that person…[I] turned everything toward – it'll be all right, let's go ride. It would be all vented toward vengeance.”

Caleb and Alejandro highlight the process of participants’ achievement of DM and the reinforcement of the victim-victimizer paradox. Through internalizing the dispositions of DM during their primary socialization in their childhood homes, they became “structured structures” who embodied the DM rules and enacted them during gang retaliation. As untreated, invisible victims of both childhood trauma and gang violence, they coped through drawing upon the rules that boys and men suppress emotions and that they are the protectors who embody violence. In effect, participants shifted from being passive victims of childhood trauma, to unprotected-protectors, and then active participants of violence during gang membership. As such, they reinforced the victim-victimizer paradox and successfully achieved DM.
E. Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the process of participants’ achievement of de-habilitated masculinity as they moved from abusive family systems into gang membership. Specifically, I detailed the ways in which those I interviewed were socialized by their family systems into the structure of DM and in turn were drawn to gang membership. Having been raised in traumatic family systems, and overlooked by the school system, participants became social agents who relied upon their cumulative experience of violence and neglect to navigate their lives. In their experiences of violence and neglect, they learned the dispositions of DM and the DM rules became invaluable tools as they moved into adolescence. As products of their history, they were drawn to the habitus of the gang. Comfortably, the expectations of gang life mimicked the context of their childhood homes, providing a sense of familial belonging which was conflated with being a victim to and a victimizer of violence.

In this paradoxical relationship, the DM lessons of the unprotected-protector become their cultural tools and resources for navigating gang entry and membership. In effect, they reinforced the victim-victimizer paradox upon entering gangs and throughout membership. As described, during initiation, they participated in rituals where they were threatened by violence, directly experienced, and/or enacted violence. This reinforced the unprotected-victim side of the victim-victimizer paradox embedded in the structure of DM. On the victimizer-end of the paradox, in response to their cumulative history of unacknowledged victimization, they embodied DM through enacting violent retaliation during gang membership. Effectively, the victim-victimizer paradox is reinforced and reproduced as participants shift from being passive victims to active participants of violence. At this point they have achieved de-habilitated
masculinity by embodying the rules that boys and men suppress emotions, do not need protection, and are violent.

In sum, this chapter’s findings reveal that participants were drawn to join gangs primarily for a sense of familial belonging. Having been socialized by their family systems into the structure of DM and the victim-victimizer paradox, they found gangs to be a setting that they could comfortably navigate. The gang environment offered a social environment in which participants moved from passive agents who were learning the rules of DM in their family systems, to active participants who now achieved DM through becoming violent gang members. In the following chapter, I will explore the ways in which participants’ achievement of DM contributed to their development of a masked identity which was reinforced in the prison setting.
CHAPTER 5: “I JUST HAD TO PUT ON A MASK”: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
MASK, CRIMINALIZATION, AND THE REINFORCEMENT OF DE-HABILITATED
MASCULINITY

“Prison is an ultramasculine world where nobody talks about masculinity.”
-Sabo, Kupers, and London (2001:3)-

A. Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I established that my participants developed de-habilitated
masculinity (DM) in the context of abusive and neglectful family systems. As products of this
history and in alignment with Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) principles of habitus, those I interviewed
were drawn to gangs where they achieved the embodiment of DM and in turn reinforced the victim-
victimizer paradox. Building upon this cumulative process, this chapter examines the ways in
which participants’ achievement of DM developed into a masked identity which contributed to
their entry into the juvenile processing system and reinforced DM as they navigated the prison
environment.

This chapter reveals that in embodying the rules of DM, participants formed a metaphorical
“masked” identity. This masked identity initiated its formation during participants’ performance
as the unprotected-protector in childhood homes where they were neglected and abused by
caregivers. In a cumulative process, as they practiced their performance as the adultified
unprotected-protector, they developed the first layer of their DM mask. Upon leaving their homes
and joining gangs to fulfill their need for familial belonging, they added the next layer of the mask
through achieving the DM rules and enacting the victim-victimizer paradox. During this stage,
participants continued to minimize their normative need for protection as they maximized their
ability to perform as emotionally suppressing and violent adultified boys in the context of gang
life.
As such, participants’ repetitive masked performances solidified into a masked criminal identity. At this stage, the mask began to function as a disguise. As a masculinity costume, this masked performance allowed participants to hide any pain and history of trauma while projecting a gangster criminal identity. In turn, the mask affects the participant “wearing” the mask and the viewer who is observing the mask. Thus, the mask rendered participants’ history of victimization invisible while simultaneously emphasizing their projection of criminality. Thus, the mask contributed to the criminal system’s dehumanization of participants, resulting in their further criminalization. In other words, I argue that in a labeling process, the juvenile and criminal processing system overlooked participants’ need for treatment as de-habilitated boys, and instead punished their responses to childhood maltreatment. Accordingly, participants’ trajectories led them into constant interaction with the justice system that reinforced DM as they navigated the violent prison environment.

This chapter begins with an overview of the literature that conceptualizes masculinity as a mask. I then move into examining the participants’ identity development in association with stigmatization, dehumanization and labeling theory. This discussion provides the framework for examining participants’ construction of the gangster and criminal mask, and the reinforcement of DM as they navigated the prison environment.

B. The “Mask of Masculinity” and De-Habilitated Boys’ Masked Identities

There have been multiple scholarly works examining masculinity as a mask. A critical discussion about masculinity as a tenuous and masked performance was first put forth in Majors and Billson's (1993) research on black masculinity—Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Masculinity in America. Herein, the authors describe black men’s subordinated position in U.S. society as motivation for performing a masked identity which they call the “cool pose”: 
The ironclad facade of cool pose is a signature of true masculinity, but it is one-dimensional. If it fails, masculinity fails. Coolness and manhood are so intricately intertwined that letting the cool mask fall, even briefly, feels threatening. This is the facade that provides security in an insecure world. This is the mask that provides outer calm in the midst of inner turmoil (28).

Majors and Billson’s work aptly illuminates the function of the “cool mask” as a disguise—one in which if it drops, even for a moment, men feel threatened and insecure. Furthermore, they detail that the mask is both a conscious and unconscious performance. They state, “Sometimes being cool may be automatic and unconscious; other times it may be a conscious and deliberate facade. In either case, being cool helps maintain a balance between the black male’s inner life and his social environment” (9). Their conceptualization of the “cool pose” provides a critical foundation for examining masculinity as a disguised and masked performance.

Following Majors and Billson, William Pollack published a groundbreaking book, *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*, (1998) based on two decades of research at Harvard Medical School. His opening chapter—*Inside the World of Boys: Behind the Mask of Masculinity*—outlines the “silent crises” of society in which the “boy code” dictates that boys wear a tough mask to disguise their feelings of vulnerability. He contends, “[Boys are] living behind a mask of masculine bravado that hides the genuine self to conform to our society's expectations; they feel it is necessary to cut themselves off from any feeling that society teaches them are unacceptable for men and boys—fear, uncertainty, feelings of loneliness and need” (5). Significantly, Pollack highlights that by adopting the “boy code,” boys align with society’s expectations that they put on a “mask of masculine bravado.” This mask becomes a disguise or
“an invisible shield” in which boys project self-confidence and “hide [their] shame” and “feelings of vulnerability, powerlessness, and isolation” (5).

Another prominent masculinities scholar, Michael Kimmel, built upon Pollack’s “boy code” in his research on predominantly white, middle-class adolescent boys and young men, ages sixteen to twenty six. His book, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, (Kimmel 2008) presents the findings from four hundred participants who exemplify the principles of what he terms the “guy code.” Supporting previous research examining the culture of masculinity, Kimmel illuminates the ways in which young men are socialized into an unwritten “guy code” in U.S. society where they participate in sports, video games, binge drinking, and pornography to enact their masculinity. Drawing on West and Zimmerman’s (1987) finding that we “do gender” in interaction with others, Kimmel argues that through interactive homosocial relationships, boys navigate guyland guided by unspoken guy codes. Although Kimmel never specifically uses the term “mask” in his research, he does detail the way in which adolescent boys and young men perform their masculinity in a disguised manner, one in which they enact aggression and violence and conceal any feelings of vulnerability. This performance protects them from being perceived as weak or effeminate men which would exclude them from “guyland.”

Jackson Katz is another masculinities scholar who examines the structure of masculinity and its intersection with male violence (Katz 2006; Katz et al. 2013). In his documentary, *Tough Guise 2: Violence, Manhood, and American Culture*, (Katz et al. 2013), gender scholars argue that we must examine the current structure of hyper-masculinity as a root cause of violence. They contend that violence is a structural issue based on the masculine cultural expectations that boys and men put on a tough guise (a masked performance). Katz contends, “[For boys and men], anything short of full-scale emotional shutdown becomes a source of humiliation and shame. In
response, young men learn to adopt … the ‘tough guise’ – the front so many young men put up to shield their vulnerabilities and avoid being ridiculed as pussies, punks, fags, and an endless list of other sexist and homophobic putdowns.” Effectively, the “tough guise” provides a masculine disguise, shielding boys and men’s vulnerabilities to keep them from experiencing shame and ostracization. As such, some act out through violence, which comes to be viewed as normative behavior for boys and men—so much to the degree that violence becomes coded as being a normative masculine trait.

The documentary, *The Mask You Live In*, (Newsom et al. 2015), bolsters and illuminates previous gender scholarship contending that masculinity is a metaphorical disguise keeping boys and men hidden behind a masked performance. In adopting a “masculine pose,” the scholars in the documentary argue that, starting at a very young age, boys are socialized into enacting hyper-masculinity. Problematically, this hinders them from becoming prosocial men and contributes to perpetuating toxic versions of masculinity. Sociologically, they highlight that the mask is a structural issue—not only are individual boys hidden behind the mask harmed, but society at the macro level is negatively affected by societal expectations for boys and men to “man up” and render invisible their feelings of sadness and isolation and their experiences of trauma and abuse.

In sum, these scholars describe the social problem of the current structure of masculinity as being one in which boys and men consciously and unconsciously learn the “boy code” and later the “guy code” and in turn put on a metaphorical and invisible “mask of masculinity” in the construction of their gender identities. For some men, it was a cool pose where they acted “cool” beneath an “ironclad façade” in order to deflect vulnerable feelings of subordination as black men in a white patriarchy. For other boys and men, it was a “tough guise” in which they hid behind violence to align with normative expectations of masculinity to be accepted in “guyland.” In all
cases, the mask of masculinity was found to be an interactional and socially constructed development of an identity in which boys and men performed gender in alignment with masculine expectations—that they hide emotions other than anger and enact violent behavior. Applied to my dissertation research, these masks of masculinity characteristics aided in the articulation of the rules of de-habilitated masculinity.

As such, I expand upon previous scholarship on the mask of masculinity by describing the ways in which my participants developed the “layers” of their de-habilitated masculinity masks across their life courses: first, in the context of abusive family environments; second, upon leaving homes and becoming gang involved; and third, once they entered the criminal justice system. As articulated in previous chapters participants learned the rules of DM in their boyhood homes through family systems which socialized them to become unprotected-protectors who hid their fears and enacted violence. This formed the first layer of their masked identity where they developed an understanding of the rules of DM and began to practice adopting its dispositions. At this point, as social agents who became products of their history (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), participants were drawn into gangs where the next layer of their masked identity developed. At this stage, during gang initiation and membership, they continued to enact DM by embodying its rules and perpetuating the victim-victimizer paradox. In this newfound achievement of DM, they masked their boyhood need for protection, rendered their victimization invisible, and enacted violent retaliation as disguised de-habilitated adultified boys. As participants habitually performed the rules of DM during gang membership, their masked performance became more believable to themselves and onlookers.

Consequently, their repetitive performances and achievement of DM solidified into a masked identity in which they disguised and projected themselves as “gangsters.” Due to society
viewing gang members from a one-sided perspective, as a stigmatized group of dangerous “superpredators23” (DeIulio Jr. 1995), participants came to be recognized as such. In effect, as they internalized the stigmatized label of “gangster,” this “mask” projected their “master status” (Becker 1963) as dangerous criminals and they became captured in a lengthy cycle of recidivistic imprisonment. The stigmatized labeling and identity development process and its association with DM and the “gangster” and “criminal mask” is examined in the following sections.

C. Labeling and the Gangster Mask

Labeling theory considers who holds the social power to label a behavior deviant; how does this label justify specific forms of punishment; and what is the impact of the label on the individual’s identity and future (Bates and Swan 2018)? Labeling theory was developed out of a critical sociological perspective in which labeling theorists took into account issues of social power, inequality, and social control (ibid.). Labeling theory has its origins in Erving Goffman’s research presented in Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity (1963), Howard Becker’s work, Outsiders; Studies in the Sociology of Deviance (1963), and Edwin Lemert’s books, Social Pathology (1951) and Human Deviance, Social Problems and Social Control (1972). More recently, sociologist Victor M. Rios’ research put forth in his book, Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys (2011), applies labeling theory to examine the ways in which marginalized boys living in Oakland are hypercriminalized through what he terms the “labeling hype.” These theoretical perspectives are examined in more detail below to frame how

23 The term “superpredator” was originally conceptualized by criminologist John DiIulio in 1995 in an article titled, “THE COMING OF THE SUPERPREDATORS” in The Weekly Standard. In this article, he put forth a prediction that there would be a significant increase in juvenile crime and used moral panic rhetoric which demonized and dehumanized boys (mostly boys of color and specifically gang members) who were committing crimes. This article and the “superpredator” label caught mass media attention and became a contributor toward increasing get-tough law-enforcement strategies for juveniles. DiIulio’s predictions never came true, but the label had already settled in the minds of society, affecting policy and increasing the problem of disproportionate minority contact for young boys of color (see Haberman 2014).
participants’ development of a gangster and criminal masked identity shapes their interaction with the criminal processing system.

Lemert’s contribution to the development of labeling theory was in his conceptualizations of primary and secondary deviance (Lemert 1972, 1951). Lemert defined primary deviance as the initial act deviance, and secondary deviance as “…a special class of socially defined responses that people make to problems created by the social reaction to their deviance. These problems are essentially moral problems, which revolve around stigmatization, punishments, segregation, and social control” (Lemert 1972:63). Lemert’s secondary deviance built upon Goffman’s (1963) groundbreaking work which established that stigmatization is a process in which a person is labeled as different, blemished, and deviant. This discrediting of person’s social identity has the power to shape social action wherein the stigmatized person is dehumanized. Goffman contended, “We believe the person with a stigma is not quite human (italics mine). On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances. We construct a stigma-theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity” (5) and resulting in a “spoiled identity” (ibid.).

According to Goffman, stigma becomes a regular marker of one’s identity in the identity development process and the person’s “normal” identity is spoiled. Consequently this person’s stigma develops into what Becker (1963) called a “master status” wherein the stigmatized label is the most prominent marker of one’s identity. As the identity becomes spoiled, individuals develop a self-concept in alignment with the stigmatized label. This is related to what Charles Cooley (1902) called the “looking-glass self.” Most simply defined, the looking-glass self describes how, as interactional social beings, individuals perceive of themselves through the eyes of others. He
reasoned that the looking-glass self is established through our imagination and feelings about ourselves which are based on how we believe other people are observing and judging our behaviors (Cooley 1902:180). Adding to these symbolic interactionist perspectives of labeling theory, Victor M. Rios (2011) implements a criminological approach to his examination of the labeling process for marginalized boys of color. He argues,

“…labeling is not just a process whereby schools, police, probation officers, and families stigmatize the boys, and, in turn, their delinquency persists or increases. In the era of mass incarceration, labeling is also a process by which agencies of social control further stigmatize and mark boys in response to their original label. This in turn creates a vicious cycle that multiplies the boys' experiences with criminalization, what I call a labeling hype” (45).

Taken together, these theorists highlight that labeling is an interactive process of an individual’s identity construction within the context of a society that has the power to create a stigmatized label that in turn shapes a reflective identity and punishment practices. These scholars’ perspectives of labeling, identity development and subsequent punishment provide a theoretical framework for understanding my participants’ formation of a “gangster” and “criminal” identity as they navigated their social world across their life course. My research revealed that participants’ identity development began in their boyhood homes where they learned the de-habilitated masculinity rules in the face of abuse and neglect. Due to understanding that boys and men are violent and not in need of protection, they adopted a disguise to mask their pain of invisible victimization. Recall Seth’s (see chapter 4) pertinent articulation where he illuminated, “I was miserable as a kid…[so] I just had to put on a mask.”

Not having found prosocial habilitation in...
their families, nor in the school system, participants’ identities were being developed in a state of social exclusion in which they were shut out of normative institutional belonging. Seeking love and connection, they sought a familiar environment in which to be included.

Consequently, as described in the previous chapter, they entered into gangs. Matching the expectations of their family system, the gang provided a place of belonging where they embodied the DM rules and achieved a more solidified masked identity. Here, through observing and being taught by O.G.s (older and more experienced gang members who had earned the status of “original gangster”) in their gangs, they learned and practiced their “gangster” masked performances. This identity development process was highlighted during interviews. When I asked participants about the expectations of being gang involved, they described a variety of performative explanations. One participant, Rob, relevantly summed, “…you have to have masks you wear.... If you don't then some people are going to jump you. So for different avenues I go in life, I've got to have a mask. I go into a gang-related neighborhood I've got to have a mask. If I go into a black neighborhood I'm going to claim a white mask. Then at least they're (the O.G.s) going to respect me.”

Another participant, Stephan, reported there was a performative expectation that gang members “live up to” a criminal lifestyle—one which was in alignment with the de-habilitated masculinity rules where they enacted bravery to the point of recklessness. He conveyed, “There's definitely expectations of them (gang members) to be brave. Almost to the sense of recklessness…and there's an expectation of them to be a criminal. I mean it's definitely – it's a criminal lifestyle. So what you're trying to live up to is not going to be anything positive.” Craig added, ”You got to have heart. You got to have backbone. You've got to be—like – not afraid. You can't be afraid of anything really…You've got to be violent…Basically you've got to be
intimidating.” In Craig’s description of gang masculinity, he revealed that through the identity development process he recognized that he needed to appear to others as fearless, violent, and intimidating. In projecting these traits, he gained respect from surrounding O.G.s and rival gang members who were observing and “judging” his performance, a process of identity acquisition that reinforced his de-habilitated masculinity.

In imagining that others were assessing their gang performance, participants developed reflective beliefs about themselves in which they were the “hardest gang members” alive. Greg illuminated how this was tied to his feelings of pride and respect from other gang members. He admitted, “It was about respect... a pride thing. Like, for me it was like—I’m the hardest gang member...Wanting to be that alpha dog was a big part of crime for me. I’m that alpha dog. I’m that mother fucker. I’m that gangster that you’re gonna respect.” In developing his identity through the eyes of others, Greg garnered respect by living up to the expectations of gang masculinity and performing as the “alpha dog” who was willing to commit violent crimes in order to be perceived as a legitimate gangster. During our interview, he described a willingness to do whatever job the O.G.s assigned to him to earn his “stripes” (symbols and labels which represent statuses in a gang) and move up the ranks to gain status among other gang members. Greg was successful in his quest—at the age of seventeen he was tried as an adult for two counts of attempted murder, spending the next twenty-two years of his life in prison. His account illuminates that living up to the gangster identity created the desire to earn his stripes and move up the ranks, which necessitated that he commit certain violent crimes that would lead him to prison.

Participants commonly reported that one of the easiest ways to achieve a respected “alpha dog” gang member status was through committing various crimes to get to prison. Violence, crime,
and the resultant incarceration was viewed as an avenue to earn stripes and establish one’s identity as a top-notch gangster. Pedro articulated this process:

“I really asked myself like why am I gang banging?...That’s when I got to the point to where I realized that I want to go to the next level. Like what can I do to make my hood be on top of the game?... Now in the back of my mind what’s even crazier is I felt the only way I was going to reach that achievement of being who I was, was going to prison because I thought that was the coolest thing. All my big homies have done it. Everyone I knew had been to prison. Everyone lived the lifestyle. Oh yeah I’ve been to juvie (housed in a juvenile detention facility). It aint nothing. So I felt I wanted to be in the pen (prison) sometime in my life…So I robbed more and I committed more crimes.”

Here, Pedro describes that by working to take his “hood” (the geographic area that comprised his gang) to the next level, be at the top of the game, and achieve the identity of “who I was” (i.e. the internalized projection of himself as a high-status gang member), it was necessary for him to get to prison. Similarly, Caleb was on a quest to gain the revered identity status of an O.G. through earning his prison stripe. He acknowledged that as a young gang member he believed, “I just really wanted my name to get out there…Like I knew I had to get shot and shoot somebody and go to prison someday to be an O.G..” He explained that, gang members had to become prison involved to have the opportunity to interact with O.G.s. As such, becoming a convicted gang member who made it to prison became an ideal that participants would strive for as young boys. They worked diligently to earn stipes and move up the ranks, solidifying their gangster identities.
In succeeding at moving up the ranks to achieve the O.G. label, participants became entangled with the juvenile and criminal processing systems. This succession was in alignment with the principles of labeling theory. Participants learned the rules of DM, left their homes as de-habilitated boys, achieved DM in their gangs by earning stipes which in turn solidified a masked gangster identity. Putting on a convincing performance, their gangster masks disguised their need for protection, treatment, and rehabilitation. As such, the criminal processing system labeled them, not as “traumatized offenders” in need of re-habitative support, but as “superpredator criminals” in need of punishment. Here primary and secondary deviance (Lemert 1972) came into play. As participants’ masculinity developed in the context of childhood maltreatment and gang membership, their identities became solidified and formed a “mask” which disguised their history of victimization and amplified or projected their criminal behaviors (the initial primary deviance). Participants’ performances grew to be so believable that a one-sided perspective of them as dangerous “superpredators” (DeIulio Jr. 1995) became embedded in their self-conception and in the minds of those in the positions to do the labeling and subsequent punishing (secondary deviance). Thus, participants were dehumanized which allowed for the criminal system to socially control their behavior through punishment and incarceration.

In alignment with Rios’ (2011) research on the “labeling hype” and resultant “hypercriminalization” of boys of color who are in need of a “youth support complex,” my research highlights the ways in which the labeling process shapes punishment philosophies and minimizes the need for a rehabilitative approach to sentencing. My findings suggest that, as traumatized participants developed a “gangster” identity and internalized this label, the system viewed them as dangerous criminals through which they became entangled in a retributive punishment-based
system of incapacitation (Fagin 2018). Because their DM performances projected gangster identities that disguised what hid beneath their masks—de-habilitated and victimized boys—the system did not recognize that participants would have been better treated by rehabilitative-based punishment (ibid.).

Due to the United States’ historic reliance upon a tough on crime punishment philosophy of retributive incapacitation (Clear and Frost 2015), stigmatized labeling resulted in the dehumanization and subsequent hypercriminalization of the men in my study. In turn, these men became locked into a cycle of recidivistic punishment. Across their life histories, they learned the rules of DM to be the normative version of how to be a man. Within this context, entering into prison was perceived as a status gain, an identity accomplishment, and a revered achievement. As such, the participants did not see their need for rehabilitative measures, nor did the criminal system. Thus, punishment appeared to be natural and necessary.

In sum, when applying a critical lens to the process of labeling, one can see that participants were labeled, stigmatized and dehumanized. Society did not expect these young men to develop into prosocial men and accordingly prison became the normative expectation for boys with these histories and backgrounds. At the same time, their experiences in prison further reinforced their identities as tough, violent, emotionally hidden men—DM characteristics that comprised the criminal masks they wore to navigate the “prison world.”

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25 There are five philosophies of punishment guiding the U.S. criminal justice system’s sentencing structures: 1) Retribution—described as an eye-for-an-eye approach; 2) Incapacitation—reducing an offender’s ability to commit criminal acts through punishment that reduces contact with society (for example: incarceration or electronic monitoring); 3) Deterrence—measures—such as regulations and laws—circulated into society so that potential offenders know that if they commit a crime there will be a punishment; 4) Rehabilitation—treatment based punishment to help reform offenders; 5) Restoration—in this most recent philosophy, offenders are to take responsibility for offenses, and work to restore justice between themselves, the victim, and society (see Fagin 2018:192–95).

The majority of participants had numerous interactions with the juvenile and criminal systems. All thirty served time and the average age in which they were first incarcerated was approximately fifteen years old. Among the participants, the longest time served was forty years—thirty-six of which were served consecutively. Others serve comparatively long sentences. As such, those I interviewed had a great deal to say about their time spent in prison and described it to be a harsh, dehumanizing, emotionally void, and violent world. As Thomas articulated, “[In] prison world—just nothing good comes out of it. Nothing good.”

Interviewees collectively described “prison world” to be an environment which comprised “the most violent time” of their lives. During Seth’s fifteen years in prison, he recalled witnessing the following:

**Seth:** I've seen it where cells were filled with blood on the floor. The whole floor is covered with blood. After someone got carved up. I've seen people dropped from tiers. There was a fella that was dropped in a black box and he walked like a baby the rest of his life. He shakes like a trampoline just learning how to walk.

**Amanda:** What’s the black box?

**Seth:** Well there's a certain size box. And you've got to cram the dude in it. You've got to fold him up. And you've got to throw a lock on the box and you throw it from the third tier. And what that's going to do is it's either going to break a bunch of bones in his body or what happens is it's going to hurt a nerve. I’ve also seen mass riots, mass stabbings. Once you see all of this – you don't look at human life the same...I've seen a dude get his neck cut to the back of his spine out in the yard. He dropped like a dead dog. And his neck split open…and all the blood came out…I've
seen people get stabbed in their eye a few different times. The usual…You do it or you get it.

Others added,

**Carl:** I seen a lot of things. I seen people get stabbed, I seen people get beat with locks until they're laying on the floor with blood splattered all over their face. I've seen people get their throats cut.

**David:** I've seen people get murdered in prison. This one guy, he got his larynx crushed and a box smashed on his head. Like I heard him gasping for his last breaths.

**Alejandro:** This dude was just beat—beat so bad and stabbed so many times that the whole room was just basically blood. The whole cell was just blood everywhere and I remember looking on the floor [and it] was just like a puddle over the whole floor…and the way the dude was just sitting in the corner, dead. It just—it was just a fucked up vision I’ll never forget.

Accounts such as these were common. Participants described witnessing events including: inmates being stabbed with shanks; beaten to death with ice pics and “lock and sock beatings” (a combination lock wrapped inside a sock or sometimes on a belt, used as a weapon); fist fights in which inmates were left bleeding, unconscious and sometimes dead; heads being “kicked in” and split open; people left to die because no one was willing to do CPR to resuscitate them; “oil bomb torture” (putting vegetable oil in the microwave to throw at someone to scald them); men thrown off third level tiers; and one participant recalled watching two men being burned alive in their cell because another inmate made a “bomb” out of Vaseline and a fluorescent light bulb and threw it in their locked cell.
In addition to these violent accounts, participants also described the prison environment as a “survival of the fittest” setting in which men learned to be better criminals, and to become the victimizer in order to protect themselves from victimization. They explained:

**Adam:** It’s a criminal type environment. It’s criminal. It’s criminals. It’s a school to be criminal. It’s a school of being a smarter criminal. It teaches you ways to get away with even more stuff than you were already getting away with. It hardens people too. Desensitizes people. More angry. They get beat up in there. Ya know? It’s uh you’re forced to do things. If you’re not strong enough to stand on your own two feet you’re gonna have to join a gang…Ultimately, it’s uh an evil world in there.

**Daniel:** It's like, kill or be killed. In there, it's like you’re at the top of the food chain or at the bottom…It's be a victim or be a victimizer.

**Nick:** Prison is a place where people kind of prey on your downfall.

**Jordan:** Prison? Survival of the fittest.

**Rob:** Prison Life? You’re in a cage with a man that you have to fight, until you can’t. That was the first lesson I learned [about] prison.

As these responses indicate, prison represented another setting in participants’ lives in which de-habilitated masculinity was a valuable structure that was epitomized and reinforced. The victim-victimizer paradox was firmly re-established—this time in an environment where de-habilitated men would “prey on your downfall” and position themselves at the “top of the food chain” in order to not “be killed.” As such, prison was a place where participants added the final layer to their “criminal mask” and strengthened their DM identities. Thomas described that in prison, “You got to keep up this image….A criminal mask.” The “criminal mask,” provided
participants with an effective disguise as it successfully prepared them with the necessary tools to navigate the prison world. They deliberately enacted prison masculinity and put on their “criminal mask,” as a survival strategy. Greg illuminated,

I was pretty much a child when I was thrown into an environment where I had to survive. You know what I mean? And you either adapt and survive or a lot of times you become prey. So you have to turn it up and now it’s all about earning your place in prison. Earning that respect that you need to survive because you’re going to be put to the test at some point.

Daniel further described the masking of emotions: “You kind of cannibalize your emotions because you don't want people to see your weaknesses.” Others confirmed the need to suppress all emotions because they were viewed as a sign of weakness. As Caleb explained, “[Prison] is the worst. You can't show no weakness. You can't show no weakness at all. Never.” Another respondent, Max, describes being thankful that his father had taught him the DM rules of emotional suppression: “[You learn to] just pretty much shut off everything. Because you can't show no emotions. And I just shut down. All the way…Luckily, my dad had prepared me to be a hardened convict in the penitentiary because it was easy to shut down and just be violent.”

Multiple participants illuminated how the prison environment transformed them into even more violent men than they were prior to entering. With the increase of violent behavior and the suppression of emotions came a normalization and desensitization to experiencing human atrocities as Seth reveals in his account:

So in the prison system – a person's mentality when it comes to human life is if someone gets stabbed and is laying on the ground, you walk over and you keep

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26 Recall that Greg was tried as an adult at the age of seventeen for two counts of attempted murder, receiving a forty-eight year sentence of which he served twenty-two years straight, up until the time of our interview.
walking. You don't think twice about it. You don't care. If you get killed on the yard someone else is going to take your place anyway or take that person's place. They will just replace you. So, it taught me to turn fear into hate. It taught me to stuff emotions—put on a mask. Get bigger than your enemy. Get stronger. Be ready at all times to fight. If you show love you get abused.

As this and other narratives report, daily life became equated with a survival performance that resulted in acts of emotionless aggression. Rob poignantly describes this transformation:

Prison definitely changed me. I mean, you’re locked in a cage. It made me a cold hearted worthless feeling person. It made me feel like I better do whatever I gotta do because there aint going to be nobody out there who cares about me…[So], you have to be aggressive, not emotional…It changed me by teaching me how vulnerable you can be and how forgotten you can be. How unimportant and insignificant—you become a number: 118083.

Here, Rob highlighted his perspective of feeling insignificant and dehumanized. Locked in a cage, and treated as a number instead of as a person, he became a “cold hearted worthless feeling person” who was willing to do whatever necessary to adapt. Rob’s account illuminates the effects of the process of labeling and stigmatization on imprisoned men. Following Goffman, when participants become labeled as criminals, they become “not quite human,” and in turn, perceive themselves as others see them. Prisoners such as those in my study, then turn to violence and develop numbness to pain to cope with the dehumanization of the criminal system.

Within this context, men accessed the DM rules, which strengthened their criminal masks, helping them navigate the prison landscape. Through the mask, they projected violence and aggression. Behind the mask, they revealed feelings of hopelessness, depression, anger and hate.
The participants reported that prison made them feel worse about themselves than when they entered. Alejandro conveyed, “It changed me to a hateful person. A really really really hateful person.” Carl added, “In prison I started to feel hatred. Especially when I first went to prison. All the violence, and all the anger, and all the depression…. I felt like there were a bunch of soulless people just waiting to die. It made me hate the system, it made me hate the world for a long time.” Similarly, David agreed, “It's made me more violent. It's made me more negative. It's made me more of a manipulator. It's made me not a better person. I think it made me a worse person. I came out of prison worse than when I went in, for sure. It definitely didn't do me no good.” Participants’ reflections about their time served in prison describe a dehumanizing setting in which their best strategy was to put on a criminal mask in order to project a DM image of violent, emotionally one-dimensional masculinity. Through successfully reinforcing DM, they were able to survive the prison world, even though it left them feeling hopeless and hateful.

E. Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented findings that detail the process of labeling, stigmatization, and subsequent criminalization of the participants. As the respondents worked to achieve a respected gangster identity, their statuses as traumatized de-habilitated boys became hidden behind their gangster masks. Consequently, they viewed themselves as “hard-core” gangsters and the criminal system treated them accordingly. Through embodying DM during gang involvement, the criminal system overlooked their histories of victimization and need for rehabilitation and instead perceived what the mask was projecting—criminal gangsters. In effect, they became labeled and criminalized, which contributed to their pathways into prison.

Within the “prison world” participants relied on the DM rules to navigate an environment that reinforced their masked criminal identities. In a setting characterized as violent, numbing, and
dehumanizing, those I interviewed described a “survival of the fittest” mentality wherein the rules of DM gave them essential tools to avoid further victimization. Problematically, this perpetuated the victim-victimizer paradox and reinforced their de-habilitated masks of violent masculinity. I now turn to the final findings chapter where I will describe how, after spending years in the carceral system, participants recognized that it was necessary to change. This recognition initiated journeys toward becoming re-habilitated men, as the participants gained access to the New Habits program and learned how to drop their criminal masks.
CHAPTER 6: LEARNING TO “DROP THE CRIMINAL MASK”: THE JOURNEY TOWARD BECOMING RE-HABILITATED MEN AT NEW HABITS

“This place (New Habits) is a gift. Some people don’t realize how special this place is. They’re in the business of saving lives, not destroying them. They save lives here.”
-Daniel, participant-

A. Introduction

My previous findings have highlighted participants’ life-course trajectories that cumulatively developed their masculine identities through learning the rules of de-habilitated masculinity in their traumatic family systems and then during gang and prison involvement. In this final chapter, I examine participants’ turning points and journeys toward becoming re-habilitated men through learning prosocial skills at New Habits (NH)—a behavior modification re-entry program. Specifically, this chapter discusses their motivations for seeking entry into NH and the elements of the program which helped them learn to drop their criminal masks. My findings reveal that through entering NH, those I interviewed were provided with a “second chance” to work on themselves in a “family” setting of “brothers” who supported their socialization into a new way of “doing masculinity” (West and Zimmerman 1987). Significantly, they shared that their re-habilitation process was one of the most challenging journeys of their lives. Participants struggled to face their emotions and to consistently practice the new habits they were learning for “doing masculinity” in prosocial ways. Though their paths toward becoming re-habilitated men were gradual and sometimes filled with struggle, they found NH to be an environment of challenge, care and support. Consequently, they felt connected through being treated respectfully which motivated them to stay on course and create a new life—one in which they had the hope of becoming prosocial members of society. In sum, this chapter argues that there is potential for traumatized
de-habilitated incarcerated gangsters to transform into re-habilitated men, provided they are given institutional structures of rehabilitative support.

This chapter begins with a discussion about desistance, turning points, and re-entry which examines the participants’ process of desisting from a life of crime through their experiences with NH. Next, I examine participants’ motivations for being ready to change as well as methods and environmental and cognitive “hooks for change” (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph 2002) in their desistance process. Then, I examine the environmental setting of New Habits and the ways in which it supported and challenged those I interviewed to “craft a replacement identity” (ibid.) in their progression toward rehabilitation. Last, I discuss how participants learned to “drop the criminal mask” on their journeys toward becoming re-habilitated men in the New Habits program. I conclude by summing the chapter’s findings.

B. Desistance and Turning Points Toward Re-Entry

In criminological research, desistance from crime is the examination of the motivations and methods for individuals turning away from crime (Pyrooz and Decker 2011) and the “…sustained abstinence from offending and the reintroduction of former criminals into productive society” (Rosenfeld, Petersilia, and Visher 2008:86). Research on men’s criminal desistance has revealed that it is a process, not a one-time event (Decker and Lauritsen 2002; Moloney et al. 2009; Pyrooz, Decker, and Webb 2014; Rosenfeld et al. 2008; Vigil 1998). In other words, desistance is a gradual, non-linear path. As such, criminologists have recognized the importance of examining desistance through a life course framework as it allows for understanding change over time in terms of trajectories, turning points, and transitions across the life course (Decker and Lauritsen 2002; Laub and Sampson 1993; Pyrooz and Decker 2011; Pyrooz, Decker, et al. 2014; Sampson and Laub 1997, 1995, 1990; Sweeten, Pyrooz, and Piquero 2013). As discussed in chapter one,
Sampson and Laub (1995) define a trajectory as, “a pathway or line of development over the life span, such as work life, marriage…or criminal behavior” (8). Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe (2003) expand to conceptualize these terms as follows: “Trajectories, or sequences of roles and experiences, are themselves made up of transitions, or changes in state or role …[and] turning points involve substantial changes in the direction of one’s life, whether subjective or objective” (8). Since the formulation of life course theory in criminology, it has been widely applied to investigations examining movement into and out of a life of crime (DeLisi and Piquero 2011). In this growing body of literature, one recently acknowledged gap in research is the examination of the process of desistance for gang members (Pyrooz and Decker 2011). Thus, increased attention has been applied to this area of study and yielded valuable information regarding gang desistance. (Decker and Lauritsen 2002; Melde and Esbensen 2011; Pyrooz and Decker 2011; Pyrooz, Decker, et al. 2014; Sweeten et al. 2013).

Within this area of research, I argue that it is important to consider how men’s trauma histories inform their pathways into gang-involvement and incarceration and their turning points and transitions out of prison. In previous chapters, my dissertation findings have revealed that in the context of abusive family systems, participants were socialized into understanding the rules of de-habilitated masculinity (DM) which contributed to their entry into gang membership. In turn, through gang involvement they practiced and achieved DM which influenced their trajectory into the prison system where they reinforced their identities as de-habilitated men. This chapter examines participants’ process of desisting from a life of crime during incarceration by exiting prison through New Habits (NH), a rehabilitative re-entry program. At this critical turning point in participants’ life courses, I found it essential to more fully understand their motivations for
seeking desistance from incarceration as well as the methods they used on their transformational journeys from being de-habilitated prisoners toward becoming re-habilitated men.

As stated previously, there is a plethora of research examining onset, duration, and desistance\textsuperscript{27} from crime and criminal behavior across the life course (DeLisi and Piquero 2011). Men’s exit from prison has most frequently been investigated through the lens of recidivism, versus desistance, and rarely from a life course perspective (Mears, Cochran, and Siennick 2013). As far as I know, there is no qualitative research specifically examining men’s motivations for seeking rehabilitation while incarcerated—which I argue is an indication of the desire to desist and not return to prison. Thus, within the desistance model, the examination of becoming “ready to change” implements a focus on understanding inmates’ motivations (e.g. children and marriage) for changing their behavior during incarceration and the accessible methods (e.g. availability to rehabilitative programs) used to re-enter society and not recidivate. In the context of the development of de-habilitated masculinity across the life course, I examine participants’ agentic motivations for being ready to change and their experiences with rehabilitative programming within the carceral system.

C. “Ready to Change”: Motivations for Desisting While Incarcerated

As described in the methods chapter, all of the participants in the study were clients at New Habits (NH) at the time of their interview. The majority of participants I interviewed arrived at New Habits through four main Colorado Department of Corrections prisons which offer a program called Therapeutic Community (TC). These four facilities generally require inmates to participate

\textsuperscript{27} Until recently, desistance has been the least examined area of these three within scholarship on the life course and crime (DeLisi and Piquero 2011; Eitle 2010).
in TC or similar programming in order to become community eligible\(^28\). TC is a program housed in a separate pod from general population inmates. Therapeutic community inmates’ schedules are structured around daily rehabilitation and recovery programming and the TC population only interacts with the general population inmates during yard time and in the “chow hall” where they eat meals. Generally, TC is a program which is only offered to inmates who are within twelve to eighteen months of their parole eligibility date (PED) and it is frequently at maximum capacity\(^29\). Because TC is a requirement to become community eligible (when there is enough space in the program for exiting inmates), participants informed me that inmates in the program are involved along a spectrum of motivation—some are there to check a mandatory box in order to be released, some are ambivalent, and others are “ready to change” in order to desist and stay out of prison.

Most commonly, men who enter into New Habits from the CDOC arrive through TC. New Habits supervisors run weekly “groups” at TC and inmates who are interested in being chosen for the program, attend these in order to interact with NH supervisors. Therefore, the TC groups provide NH supervisors with an opportunity to “scratch”\(^30\) the men in the group to determine their readiness to change and potential to progress through the NH program successfully.

During interviews, when I asked participants about the process of entering into NH, it became clear that CDOC inmates had to decide that they were ready to pursue the NH program and then take the necessary steps to be admitted. Within CDOC, New Habits has a reputation

\(^{28}\) “Community eligible” means that CDOC inmates are eligible to be released in various ways, such as: into a halfway house; into a community corrections program (such as NH); being monitored under intensive supervised parole (an ankle monitor) or parole.

\(^{29}\) The drawbacks of TC being a rehabilitation program only offered when inmates are approaching release and the need for expanding DOC rehabilitation programs to better meet inmates needs will be discussed in the conclusion chapter, *Toward Rehabilitative Justice*.

\(^{30}\) Terry, the gatekeeper for my dissertation research, described his “scratch” to be asking the men emotionally challenging questions in order to see if they remained controlled and consistent in their responses over several weeks of groups. This provided him with some indication that they were motivated and capable of handling the NH program, which consistently requires men to face themselves, and answer challenging questions honestly.
among inmates of being an extremely challenging program and simultaneously an opportunity to exit prison and become rehabilitated men who desist from recidivistic criminality and incarceration. Men have heard that NH will push them to interrogate their traumatic and criminal histories in order to take responsibility for their actions. Additionally, inmates know there are limited spaces available to enter the NH program. As such, men accepted into NH agentically work to become NH clients—one indication that they are ready to change. In order to pursue entering NH, inmates attend the TC group on the day NH supervisors are running the program. If community eligible and determined to be suitable clients, inmates can transition from CDOC into the NH program.

Seeking greater understanding about participants’ motivations for pursuing re-entry through New Habits, I discovered a variety of reasons they became ready to change. I found participants initial motivations to be compatible with Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph’s (2002) theory of cognitive transformation put forth in, Gender, Crime, and Desistance: Toward a Theory of Cognitive Transformation. Herein, Giordano and colleagues conceptualize a cognitive desistance process through examining adolescents’ desistance from delinquency. Their theory is situated alongside the life course theory of crime and desistance in which they account for an individual’s cognitive shifts which occur throughout the desistance process. They explain that in focusing on the individual, as opposed to the traditional social control framework emphasized within life course criminology, their theory highlights agency in the change process. More specifically, the theory of cognitive transformation takes into account “…the up front’ work accomplished by actors themselves—as they make initial moves toward, help to craft, and work to sustain a different way of life” (Giordano et al. 2002:992).
The theory of cognitive transformation articulates the ways in which agentic individuals change through cognitive shifts that are fostered by “elements in the environment” which they call “hooks for change.” The theory argues that these “hooks for change” are cognitive and environmental catalysts for transformation. There are four types of cognitive transformations: 1) a shift in the actor’s basic openness to change; 2) exposure to a particular hook or set of hooks for change; 3) the hook enables the actor to craft a satisfying replacement self (identity) which is incompatible with continued criminal behavior; and 4) a transformation in the way the actor views their criminal behavior and lifestyle (pgs 1000-1004). Significantly, the theory of cognitive transformation validates that there is a “reciprocal relationship between the actor and environment” (1001) in the desistance process. Individual agents decide they are ready to change, and then look for environmental (institutional) hooks to aid them in their transformation.

As such, I find the theory of cognitive transformation markedly applicable to my dissertation research which seeks to demonstrate that previously involved gang members and “convicts” have the potential to desist and become re-habilitated men through access to institutional rehabilitative support. As I will describe in the upcoming sections, the individuals I interviewed detail how they moved toward desistance through the four types of cognitive transformation. Some became ready and open to change within TC programming while incarcerated. Others initiated their cognitive transformation through “hooks for change” such as, family, children and New Habits programming. Once at New Habits, participants describe the ways in which the NH environment helped them to craft a satisfying replacement self, dropping the criminal mask and constructing a new version of masculinity wherein they transformed their views and behaviors through cognitive-behavioral programming in a setting of support and challenge.
i. Therapeutic Community as an Initiator for Change

According to participants, therapeutic community (TC) helped to initiate readiness to change by disrupting old ways of thinking. In the TC rehabilitation program within the prison setting, participants learned techniques of change through a cognitive therapy (CT) approach. Cognitive therapy focuses on “…modifying the pessimistic evaluations and memories of trauma, with the goal of interrupting disturbing behavioral and/or thought patterns that have been interfering in daily life” (American Psychological Association 2018b). The TC program philosophy parallels cognitive transformation theory, focusing on cognitive shifts in thinking in order to create openness for change. Accordingly, TC was a critical turning point for some of the participants I interviewed. Anton, a participant who was approaching his parole eligibility date and thus was required to attend TC, elucidated that it was through entering TC that he became ready to pursue entry into New Habits. Here he describes the process:

[Before TC], I still wasn’t ready to just change all the way. I ran in the same circles. Then, I started to step away from my old ways one day at a time—struggling here and there. Then when I went to TC, it pretty much took me a little further….I was like, man, I’m actually really ready to make the next move.

Anton’s account, wherein he stepped away from his old life one day at a time, struggling here and there, highlights previous research substantiating that desistance is a gradual process, sometimes fraught with challenges (Decker and Lauritsen 2002; Moloney et al. 2009; Pyrooz, Decker, et al. 2014; Rosenfeld et al. 2008; Vigil 1998). When I asked him how TC pushed him toward being ready to “make the next move,” he described that the TC cognitive therapy curriculum taught him new ways of thinking, which helped him see the possibility of living a life free of criminal activity. In seeing the possibility of becoming a new man, Anton articulated his shift toward openness to
change. Consequently, he met with a New Habits supervisor during group, and shortly thereafter, he transitioned into their program.

Another participant, Jordon, conveyed how, through feeling “tired of prison,” he became open to change and cognitively shifted during TC. He expressed, “I’m just tired of prison. Tired of it. Prison gets old. You’re sitting here for years seeing everybody get older and nothing changes. It’s not working…But in TC I learned that in order to change you’ve got to change the way you think, first and foremost.” As such, Jordan found his “hook for change” through recognizing that if he does not change the way he thinks, he may grow old in prison and thus his life will never change. Bolstering Jordan’s support for TC, Max described how TC uses cognitive switches to help inmates “drop the criminal mask” in order to initiate transformation. Max illuminated, “TC is cognitive—switch your thoughts…. If you stop your thoughts…if you can change your core beliefs of –I’m worthless, I’m horrible, I’m a killer, I’m a bad father—then you can change. And then it (TC) teaches you to drop the criminal mask.”

In chapter five, I detailed participants’ construction of the gangster and criminal mask. Through their accounts, I came to understand that the “criminal mask” is a metaphorical concept that carceral rehabilitation programs use as a strategy to deconstruct hyper-masculinity in the prison setting. The participants I interviewed confirmed that they initially learned the concept of the “criminal mask” during TC programming. Kevin explained, “There's different criminal masks. And each one obviously has a little bit of a different face. But the majority of prisoners are probably a mixture of all of them. This one fits them, that one fits them—when they need it. I started learning about that in TC.”

Importantly, I found that other prison researchers have examined prison masculinity from the perspective of a masked performance. In an ethnographic study of masculine identity
development in the prison setting, Jewkes (2005) contends, “’Wearing a mask’ is arguably the most common strategy for coping with the rigors of imprisonment, and all prison researchers will be familiar with the sentiment that inmates feel it necessary to adopt a facade while inside” (53). Another study examining correctional interventions for incarcerated men through masculinity-based rehabilitation programs explained, “Various metaphors are used, such as mask or armor, to emphasize a distinction between a public and private identity. The armor protects the inmate from revealing vulnerabilities, weaknesses, and other qualities that might undermine a hypermasculine identity” (Karp 2010:66). Correspondingly, participants talked about learning how to “drop,” “break” and “transform” the “criminal mask” through TC and later this practice was reinforced during New Habits rehabilitative programming. The mask concept helped participants to be open to change by cognitively shifting their perspectives on masculinity, thoughts and feelings. As they dropped the mask, they were able to examine themselves and craft a “replacement self” (Giordano et al. 2002) through cognitively adjusting the way they viewed their history of criminality. I will expand upon this theme in the upcoming section—Masculine Recovery: Breaking the Criminal Mask and Learning Re-Habilitated Masculinity.


In order to understand participants’ turning points and motivations for desisting while incarcerated, I asked questions such as—how did you begin the process of entering New Habits, and what made you ready to change? There was a wide variety of responses, which I examine through the theory of cognitive transformation (Giordano et al. 2002).

In life course research on criminality and desistance, family and fatherhood have been established reasons that individuals involved in criminal behavior move toward desistance (Flores 2014; Giordano et al. 2002; Laub and Sampson 2006; Moloney et al. 2009; Sampson and Laub
1990). My participants confirmed that family and fatherhood were recurring “hooks for change” motivating them to desist and seek rehabilitation. Josh detailed, “The way I seen my family get hurt by me being in prison…the way I hurt them. I don’t want to be part of that no more. I want to be part of the solution…. It’s just, you’ve got to break the cycle somewhere.” In Josh’s personal transformation, he reflected upon his actions and the ways in which his incarceration was damaging his family. Subsequently, he decided to break the cycle and become part of the solution by seeking rehabilitation through New Habits.

Similarly, Adam was drawn to change through reflecting upon his role as a father and the hope of creating a different life. He shared, “I wasn’t done until I was done. I had to see everything I went through and gone through—all the trials and tribulations. When I realized that I still had an opportunity to be a good father, it gave me hope that I never had before. I have a lot of hope today. I’m pretty excited to do something different than prison.” During incarceration, Adam examined everything he had gone through and realized that there was still hope for recovery. In the sentiment of hope, he perceived that he could desist and do something different with his life. His hook was fatherhood. Another participant, Emanuel, articulated that his turning point and hook for change were his wife and daughter. He explained, “I didn’t care about life for so long. None of it mattered. And then I had my daughter and I was doing pretty good. But then I had to go on the run and I went back to prison. Now, I had something to live for—my family—my wife, my daughter. So they helped me find purpose and I wanted out.” Like all of the participants I interviewed, Emanuel had been in and out of prison over the course of his life. During his history of serving time in prison, he felt a lack of motivation for desisting. His turning point occurred once he had a family. Now he felt a sense of purpose which hooked him into learning how to break his cycle of recidivism so he could be there for his wife and daughter.
Another notable turning point was the length of the prison sentence. At age twenty-nine, Rob was facing a one-hundred and ninety-four year sentence under the Colorado Organized Control Act (COCCA) for identity theft and financial fraud. He described how he was considering killing himself in prison if he were to receive the full sentence:

I felt dead. I mean that’s it. My plan in my mind was I was going to go to prison, get a gram of heroin and stick it right in my arm and die. Cause I’m not going to do it. I deserved prison for everything I have ever done. But to sit there and emotionally deal with that—the rest of my life in prison…That’s a life changing moment.

Due to a lack of evidence, his sentence was reduced to sixteen years. He recounted his sense of relief and the turning point at the moment he realized he would not be spending the rest of his life incarcerated. He recalled, “That was it for me. I told myself I am never going back after this and I’m going to whatever it takes to get out in less time. I don’t care. Whatever it takes.” Consequently, he worked his way into TC, eventually becoming a para-pro for the program (trained to run groups) and shortly thereafter entered into the NH program.

Parallel to Rob’s turning point, Nathan experienced a change in direction after he received a shorter sentence than expected. Here, Nathan explains his cognitive shift:

I thought I was going to live the rest of my life in prison and then they only gave me ten years. It was a blessing….So I get to the point where I am in prison and I’m thinking, everything that I’ve done up until this point has been a waste. It’s not ok. I’ve invested in the wrong things. What am I going to do? Go back out and do the same shit? Then I’m going to go to prison for real—like for the rest of my life, and they’re going to take everything again. I’ve investing all of my effort into something that’s just pointless. And it took that prison sentence for me to realize what the hell
I was doing. I was in a coma before. That right there, that sealed the deal. I’m not saying I’m going to live perfect but I am not going back to what I did before.

Significantly, Rob, Nathan and many other participants conveyed that they felt they deserved to serve time in prison. However, the length of the sentence influenced their cognitive shifts, motivating them to either “run amok” while incarcerated or to do whatever it took to change their behavior and lead a new life. These findings suggest that prison has the potential to be a critical turning point wherein inmates have the time to reflect on their pasts and be penitent—in alignment with the original purpose of the “penitentiary” (Fagin 2018; Mears and Reisig 2006)—in order to work toward change. Gaining a shorter than expected sentence served as a catalyst for coming out of the “coma” and transforming their thinking and criminal behavior. As such, prison has the potential to motivate inmates to alter their lives, especially if incarceration includes access to therapeutic programming.

One last “hook for change” was the sense of betrayal by other gang members who were either living outside or within the prison setting. As detailed in chapter five, some of the participants worked to get into prison in order to earn respect among higher status gang members. Once incarcerated, the majority remained aligned with their gangs until something happened to shift their thinking about gang involvement and desistance. For example, in the following account, Anton summarized his process of gang and prison desistance: “I’m not going back because I just want to be all the way away from it…I don’t want to have no ties to it whatsoever…Like old friends and all of that. For what? I sat in prison for thirteen years. No money orders. No letters. No nothing.” Anton continued, highlighting how he had “put in his time” for his gang and once he went to prison, they forgot about him. Not one of his gang friends on the outside came to visit, wrote letter, or sent him money to get him through his period of incarceration. This betrayal
became a hook for him to re-align with a new, non-gang version of himself and seek change in TC and NH.

Similarly, Daniel attributed his motivation to change to his experience of gang betrayal. He described a cognitive shift from being loyal to his gang to realizing it was his family, not his gang, that was supporting his transformation. Here, he describes the process:

I just felt betrayed by them. And I lost two years of earned time for the things I did for them. And that pissed me off. I made some choices to be a part of something in there. But I had to start seeing my life outside…I forgot about the free world. And I had misguided loyalties to these guys [his gang] and I should've been giving my loyalty to my sister and brother who were sending me money, taking care of me, buying my shoes, my sweats, whatever I needed. They put everything into me and I let them down [crying]…So, I stepped away from the gang and I'm not going to be that man anymore. I'm going to be a kind, caring, considerate person now to people.

Daniel’s stepping away from the gang allowed him to transform his thinking and take practical action toward shifting out of his gang identity into a new conceptual identity as a “kind, caring, considerate person.” He worked to craft a replacement self in order to desist. The majority of participants’ transformational process described how their gang desistance was one catalyst for seeking change. As they detached from gang involvement, they were able to craft a new replacement identity through seeking rehabilitation in TC. Learning new cognitive skills, the men became hooked into creating a new prosocial version of themselves which was reinforced at New Habits, were there is a no gang involvement policy which is strictly enforced and followed. Participants explained that the no gang involvement policy is adhered to because the consequences
are extreme—if there is any evidence of continuing gang involvement participants are sent back to prison to finish the remainder of their sentence.

D. New Habits: A Rehabilitative Environment of Support and Challenge

On the journey toward becoming re-habilitated men, participants entered New Habits (NH) which provides a rehabilitative setting where men are both supported and challenged. In the NH environment, peers hold each other accountable through “positive peer pressure.” New Habits supervisors set clear boundaries and expectations within an ethic care—humanizing offenders, who they call “clients,” instead of inmates. At NH, clients progress through a phase-based program oriented toward teaching them prosocial skills so that they can successfully re-enter society. New Habits programming is based upon a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) model. Cognitive behavioral therapy concentrates on reconditioning dysfunctional patterns of thinking in addition to teaching new skills for coping and prosocial behavior (American Psychological Association 2018a).

During interviews with my gatekeeper, Terry, and with participants, I learned that the CBT approach utilized at NH is most simply described as a thought—feeling—behavior model. New Habits teaches men to examine their thoughts, perceptions, and resultant feelings in order to modify their behavioral patterns. Terry illuminated, “Criminality is a learned behavior. You’ve got to learn this somewhere. It’s cognitive-behavioral. We are all born with a sponge for a brain and you’re soaking up the information whether it’s good or bad. We can’t differentiate. If the parents don’t know what they’re doing, there’s nothing available to teach kids what to do. So we habilitate and re-habilitate them here.” As such, NH implements various evidence-based strategies to teach

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31 Recall that I interviewed NH clients who arrived at the facility through the Colorado Department of Corrections and so I am only examining the goals for this specific population housed at NH.
clients how to examine their thoughts and feelings to change behavior. In this behavior modification process, men are socialized into a new way of being prosocial men. This begins with cognitive transformation, which some participants initiated during therapeutic programming (TC) in the prison setting. Terry’s explanation illuminated that for some clients, NH strategies involve a “habilitation” process because clients never learned prosocial skills in their family systems or in other social settings. For others, their developmental trajectory provided them some prosocial skills, but at some point, they got off track and therefore require “re-habilitation.”

When asking participants about their experiences at NH, I was most intrigued by the environmental expectations that created a facility in which men exited the “barred” violent prison world, where aggression and violence was the normative expectation, and entered the open campus of NH, behaving non-violently. I learned that at NH there is a zero tolerance policy for violence and threats of violence. My participants called it “the safest place in the world” and confirmed that violence does not occur at NH because if clients engage in violence, they are immediately sent back to prison to complete the remainder of their sentence.

As I outlined in chapter five, participants elucidated that prison is a violent, dehumanizing world where de-habilitated masculinity provided them with essential strategies for survival—namely, suppressing emotions, taking on a protective role, and enacting violence and aggression. By comparison at NH, participants were expected to learn how to “drop the criminal mask” and become “brothers” who homosocially challenged and supported one another in their processes of growth and transformation. The NH program is built around a philosophy of peer-based support which mimics a “family.” These NH elements directly contrast the prison environment where “prison culture breathes masculine toughness and insensitivity, and it impugns softness, caring, and femininity” (Sabo, Kupers, and London 2001a:7). Participants revealed that, through exiting
the prison environment and entering NH, they were able to initiate re-habilitating their masculinity. These findings are consistent with the theory of cognitive transformation wherein I argue that those I interviewed felt safe to be open to change and found a hook for change which enabled them to craft a new identity. At the same time, they learned strategies to help them transform their perspectives and behaviors, moving toward desistance (Giordano et al. 2002). The main overarching environmental hook for change was that NH created a safe, humanizing setting in which participants felt a sense of care, accountability, opportunity and hope for a “second chance.”

Through asking participants about the ways in which NH elicits change in clients, I discovered that their transformation process began with humanization, wherein supervisors and peers believed in them, and the program planted seeds of hope for a better future. Max poignantly articulated, “I'm free here. I get to walk around and be outside. I get to wear something other than green. As terrified and as scared as I am, I can talk with people here who care and who try to help. …The best thing about NH is they gave me a second chance and hope for the future. They believed in me. When nobody else would.” Similarly, Rod acknowledged the difference between prison and NH in terms of the environment, treatment, and opportunity:

Here, I make decisions for myself… I can dress how I want. Eat as much as I want… I can love another person. I can follow the rules and be rewarded for it. They don’t do room searches or wake you up for counts in the middle of the night. They treat you like a human…. I’m a human again. There’s opportunity. I’ve got a hundred dudes waiting to give me a job when I’m ready, I’ve got a hundred dudes I can call on when I’m feeling bad. My peers love me here. They’re not trying to rape to beat or victimize me. It a bunch of weirdos here that care about other weirdos.
Daniel added, “The worst thing about being here is nothing. It’s all beneficial. It helps us understand ourselves better. To accept….The best part of being at NH? They’re here to support you. They don’t want you to go back to prison. They actually love you here. They want you to be successful. They give you what you need to be successful in your life once you leave.”

Other participants echoed these observation:

**Carl:** The best part of this place is that I get to see people who actually care what happens to me which makes me care what happens to other people. It’s been hard for me to trust people and I’m starting to trust.

**Richard:** They want to know what’s wrong with you so they can help you succeed. They honestly care and offer feedback and support you through stress.

**Jacob:** You become human and feel like your reward is that you can change. For the first time in your life, you believe you can change.

**Stephan:** They give you a sense of belonging…They actually care about you as a person.

**Adam:** You can’t escape yourself. You have to look at yourself. Change here is inevitable if you just stay in the program…That’s what the whole deal is geared for…If you’re ready, it’s safe to do that here. It’s the best place in the world to look at yourself.

Significantly, participants’ accounts convey an ethic of care embedded within the homosocial relationships fostered among supervisors and peers at NH. Feeling humanized, in contrast to their experience in prison, they were motivated to change. Through support, care, and a sense of belonging, they began to develop a sense of trust which allowed for them to look at themselves...
and engage in the process of transforming from gangsters and inmates into prosocial community men.

In terms of accountability, participants added a sense of appreciation for the ways in which NH taught them this trait through holding them to high expectations. Seth described, “NH has taught me tolerance. Not to give up and just go on the run or hurt people. Back in the day I wouldn't have ever thought about consequences. Today I do.” Pedro also experienced personal change from the NH expectation of accountability. He conveyed, “The program is a one-hundred and eighty degree turn-around from the life style I chose before. Here, you’re accountable. You hold your brother to higher expectations and everybody influences everybody.” In holding clients accountable, participants felt a sense of responsibility for their outcomes. Because their NH supervisors believed in them—viewing them as men who are able to change—participants worked to live up to these expectations. Breaking their previous embeddedness in the cycle of violence where they were victimized and then victimized others, they felt cared for which in turn had them caring for their brothers in the program.

i. Drawbacks of New Habits

It is critical to highlight that I asked all participants about both the positive and negative aspects of the NH program. As I have described, the majority reported it to be an environment of support and challenge which provided them with the possibility of transformation. However, participants did report some drawbacks to the program and a few held overall negative views. The one drawback most commonly described by participants was a consequence that clients were given called reset. For reset, participants would stand and face the wall for an indeterminate amount of

32 This is a pseudonym to protect program anonymity.
time in order to take a “time-out” to consider new ways of thinking. Reset could be administered by anyone in the program—peers and supervisors—who perceived the person being sanctioned was in need of a reset. Sometimes reset was assigned for obvious reasons, such as a participant not keeping their part of the room clean (a well-known rule), or for a behavior such as “mouthing off” to a “brother.” Other times, participants conveyed that they felt peers were unfairly doling out punishment for unknown reasons and they would stand on the wall for hours without being told when reset would end. Most shared that it was the discretionary uncertainty that they experienced during reset that made them believe it was a problematic strategy to modify their behavior. Furthermore, a handful of participants conveyed that they did not understand the point of the discipline, believing that standing on the wall for several hours was a “childish waste of time,” as if they were in adult time-out. They reported it would have been more beneficial to be in groups and games rather than standing alone at the wall for hours, for reasons they could not understand.

Another aspect of the program that some participants reported to be negative was its structure as a hierarchical, peer-run program. At NH, clients progressed through the phases of the program by taking on increased responsibility and exhibiting a willingness to be “your brother’s keeper.” Thus, as clients progressed, they moved through the phases and were given increased amounts of control over their peers and were simultaneously rewarded for taking on higher-status positions. Because I did not conduct ethnographic research, I was unable to see, first-hand, the ways in which the hierarchy operated within the NH setting. My interview data reveal that most participants found value in the hierarchical peer-run approach, but some reported that certain clients would take advantage of their power in negative ways such as giving lengthy resets without explanation for the reasons why they were doing so. Although NH claims to be a program where “all brothers are equal,” based on these participants’ reports I did consider how the power-
dynamics affected the program structure and had the potential to create negative outcomes. Participants’ reports left me considering the widely known Zimbardo Prison Experiment which highlighted how power-dynamics in carceral settings can have extremely negative effects due to the hierarchical structure and labeling of peers as being in positions of power over one-another (Zimbardo et al. 1971). In the future, I would need to conduct ethnographic research at NH in order to observe interpersonal interactions to better understand the ways in which power and hierarchy affect how the program is run.

In summary, although participants reported some drawbacks to the program, the majority of participants reported NH to be an environmental “hook for change” wherein their experiences of support and challenge opened them up to the possibility of transformation. Feeling respected, cared for, a sense of belonging and hope, they continued their rehabilitation journeys. Along this path, they describe how NH programming helped them to transform their masculinity.

E. Masculine Recovery at New Habits: Breaking the Criminal Mask and Learning Re-Habilitated Masculinity

In chapter five, I highlighted how prisoners developed their criminal masks, drawing upon the rules of de-habilitated masculinity (DM) in order to navigate the violent “prison world” where they described a “survival of the fittest” mentality of violence and aggression. Previous prison research has confirmed my findings, characterizing the prison environment as a setting in which hyper-masculinity is nurtured (Useem and Piehl 2008) and inmates establish their manhood by physically aggressive action against one another (Karp 2010:67). Prison, as a hypermasculine and violent social space, directly contrasts the New Habits rehabilitation environment where men are taught prosocial masculine alternatives. In order to successfully progress through NH and re-enter society, participants must abandon the de-habilitated masculinity rules they learned, achieved, and
reinforced across their life courses, and transform their identities through dropping their criminal masks. Here, Richard articulates the process of identity transformation that he learned through NH programming:

It’s tough because as men we don’t vent. We don’t talk about our emotions and feelings a lot. That’s a good thing about this place (NH)—it gives us a chance to open up a little more and talk and let those emotions out and, you know, kind of soften up a little bit instead of being stuck in these criminal minds and the gangster mentality and all of that. After we break that criminal mask of ours, we can actually get in all that good stuff. Ya know? Cuz there’s dudes that come here that are just clammed up and you gotta keep just knocking away and they’re not wanting to let go. Then, you’ll hit one subject and it’ll (the mask) just break.

Richard conveyed that through “opening up” and talking about his emotions, he cognitively let go of the gangster and criminal mentality. Through a “break” in the mask, he was able to “get in all the good stuff,” meaning he could create a “replacement self” through cognitive behavioral shifts. These shifts allowed him to transform his identity and move toward re-entry as a prosocial man.

Stephan also advanced the idea of transforming masculinity by becoming a “prosocial man.” He reported, “At NH, I'm trying to actually better myself. It's like I told you, people adapt to their surroundings. In prison it's like you have to be stern and standoffish and aggressive. Here it's not about that. It's not about how big you are or how tough you used to be. It's more about getting your life together. It's more about being a prosocial rather than antisocial man.” Similarly, Greg added how NH inspired him to initiate becoming a new man, “I am so grateful to NH for giving me the opportunity to change my life. I needed to change some ways of thinking and I’m here to build a foundation on what it is to be a man outside of prison…They’re helping me get to where I need to
be.” In reconstructing a foundation of understanding of what it means to be a man outside of prison, participants described the ways in which NH taught them how to become prosocial men.

New Habits provides a community where men are socialized into new rules of masculinity. In contrast to the DM rules participants learned in abusive family systems, at NH they learn to let go of their need to be tough, violent, and emotionally shut down in a “family” setting of homosocial peer-positive support. At NH, they are encouraged to share their feelings through various groups and games. Vulnerability is seen as a “break in the mask” and an opportunity to face trauma from their pasts. Dropping the mask allows them to practice cognitive and behavioral shifts where they no longer need to embody a de-habilitated, emotionally suppressing masculinity, and can instead aspire to be relationally connected in a community of male-support and care-based protection.

Ethan recalled a time during a group session when he realized he was emotionally cared for and supported by his peers at NH. He expressed, “I sat here and bawled my eyes out one day during a game. I don't even know where I came in from. Snot running down my face—I didn’t even understand it. But it finally just came out and it really changed my feeling of being alone out here.” In this critical moment, through feeling sadness, Ethan had the opportunity to expand his spectrum of feelings in a supportive group of other men. Thus, his previous feelings of loneliness were transformed, and he had the opportunity to practice a new way of being a feeling man. Pedro admitted that one of his pulls to NH was through hearing that he could share his criminal history in a supportive environment. He acknowledged, “It felt important for me to come to this program. Because to truly be a man of emotions is to be able to let everything off your chest and get it out and put it out in the open and just let go. I’m just now learning how to do it…cause I’ve done so many things that I’m ashamed of…I feel shame for the people I’ve hurt and the damage I’ve created.” In Pedro’s desire to reconstruct a new self—transforming into “a man of emotions”—he
felt the need to share his past with his peers at NH in order to let go of his shame. In this letting go process, he began to reconstruct a new masculine identity which was incompatible with his previous criminal identity.

For the most part, NH is grounded in cognitive-behavioral therapy wherein the focus is oriented toward future-based thinking and learning behavioral skills to transform the self in the present moment. Yet, participants informed me that facing their history of trauma during “trauma group” and games was one critical part of their transformation toward becoming rehabilitated men. Unlike their’ experiences in abusive family systems, violent gangs and prison settings, where they learned to minimize and overlook their victimization histories, at NH they were encouraged to explore how these histories may have contributed to their current realities. Terry explained that, from his nearly thirty years of experience working with offenders in a rehabilitation setting, he has come to realize that “untreated victims become perpetrators.” Therefore, he believes it is critical to consider male inmates’ experiences of victimization in order to help them transform into prosocial men who can successfully re-enter society and become positive contributors to society.

Conclusively, Terry articulately summed up a significant reason why NH is a place where participants feel they had the opportunity to transform into re-habilitated men. By opening up to the possibility of change, those I interviewed were exposed to environmental and cognitive hooks—humanization, care, accountability, and hope—which allowed them to reconstruct their masculine identities. Letting go of their criminal masks, they acknowledged their victimization histories and began to cognitively transform their beliefs about their previous criminal-masculine selves. Through prosocial rehabilitative support and accountability, NH provided participants with cognitive behavioral tools to construct a new version of masculinity and an opportunity to desist from crime and stay out of the prison system permanently.
F. Blocks to Desistance

As I have detailed in this chapter, New Habits provided participants with a rehabilitative setting in which they learned tools to reconstruct themselves as prosocial men so they could create the potential to desist from a life of crime and incarceration. One participant, Daniel, narrated a well-known NH motto that clients would recite to be reminded of these program goals:

Most of us gave our personalities free play in the past. We lost ourselves in selfishness, self-gratification, indulgence and impulsiveness. We lost our sense of self-worth and life's meaning became lost to us. We became desperate. We turned to the family (NH) and the family provided us with a total influence to render stable changes and lifelong shifts away from socially destructive patterns. The goal of the NH family is to offer a complete change in lifestyle which includes: drug abstinence, elimination of antisocial and criminal behaviors and the acquisition of positive attitudes, values and behaviors which reflect honesty, responsibility, nonviolence and self-reliance. These principles will help men to create a meaningful life free from drugs, to gain emotional maturity, to learn to love and be loved and to gain self-worth. We will learn how to be prepared to cope with the world no matter what happens. Only then will we reach the fulfillment of our human experience and become champion men.

On multiple occasions, participants shared their gratitude for the NH program which gave them hope to turn into the men which mottos such as these reflect. Their desire to change and lead prosocial lives through implementing what they were learning at NH was palpable. However, it is critical to acknowledge that although NH provided participants with an opportunity to transform into re-habilitated men, it is not a guarantee, nor fix-all for ending their recidivistic cycles. In John
Irwin’s book, *The Warehouse Prison: Disposal of the New Dangerous Class (2005)*, he argues that “…preparing released prisoners for life after prison, most agree that much more effort and money must go toward education, vocational training, and prerelease preparation. All who have studied the success and failure of ‘rehabilitation programs’ recognize the great need for substantial transitional programs—halfway houses, job training and placement services, after-prison support efforts, mentoring programs, and temporary financial assistance” (256). As such, New Habits fulfills this need through offering a transition-based rehabilitative model which supports reentering men on their journeys out of the system. This, however, is only a starting point. Unfortunately, previous research has documented that felony offenders face multiple barriers to successful desistance when reentering society. These barriers include: stigma and society’s response to a previous criminal history, substance abuse, physical and mental health concerns, returning to troubled families, and a lack of educational and employment opportunities (Baer et al. 2006; Hunter et al. 2016; Travis 2002). These “invisible punishments” (Mauer and Chesney-Lind 2002) create barriers to successful desistance and are considered to be part of the reason that, of the approximately 600,000 inmates who are released from state and federal prisons each year (U.S. Department of Justice 2016), a little over three-quarters are rearrested within five years of release (Durose, Cooper, and Snyder 2014).

The men I interviewed were hopeful, yet shared fears about their futures which were in alignment with previous research regarding barriers to successful reentry and desistance. Participants informed me that they worried about the following: returning to substance use; the pull back into gang involvement because gangs would provide them with a sense of belonging, and financial resources; getting re-involved in antisocial relationships—especially with women who they feared would “bring them down”; job instability; and the stigma of their pasts. While
they felt hope and were learning new skills at NH, they recognized that their journeys would bring challenges that they would have to continually work to overcome.

At this point in the research process, I have no way of knowing if the men I interviewed were successful in their attempts to drop their masks, permanently desist, and develop into the prosocial men they were striving to become in their new lives. A follow up study would need to be conducted in order to ascertain participants’ long term success. That said, as I neared the end of my research, I did have the opportunity to attend two New Habits graduations where I observed the celebratory, tear-filled ceremonies in which clients who had successfully progressed through the program were recognized and honored by NH and the community. I saw the men I interviewed filled with hope as they watched their NH peers provide models for their potential success. Thus, my research indicates that New Habits is a rehabilitative program that provides potential for successful reentry through offering marginalized, previously involved gang members care-based support and access to resources. I believe New Habits provides a useful model for rehabilitative justice.

G. Conclusion

As detailed throughout the findings chapters of my dissertation, I have argued that men developed a compensatory version of de-habilitated masculinity (DM) which was initially learned through primary socialization in family systems in which abuse and neglect were the predominant modes of gender socialization. As de-habilitated boys, participants were drawn into gang involvement which in turn, solidified their identities as gangsters. Wearing a metaphorical “gangster mask,” they were labeled and criminalized, placing them on a pathway into the carceral system. In the prison setting, de-habilitated masculinity was further reinforced. The participants developed a “criminal mask” which helped them to survive the violent “prison world.” In this
chapter, I have revealed how participants became ready to desist, moving away from a life of crime and recidivistic incarceration through cognitive transformations and environmental access to rehabilitative programming. Within various prison facilities, the majority of the men I interviewed participated in therapeutic community (TC), a cognitive behavioral program which taught them new ways of thinking, laying the foundation for further re-habilitation at New Habits (NH). In the NH environment participants felt humanized, cared for, and were held to higher behavioral expectations. Consequently, they learned to “drop the criminal mask” and continued their journey toward becoming re-habilitated men. Overall, participants’ stories of transformation highlight how their individual cognitive transformation and access to environmental assistance were integral to their process of moving toward desistance. In the upcoming final chapter, I summarize my dissertation findings and discuss ways for the carceral system to move toward re-habilitative justice.
“The opposite of criminalization is humanization.”
-Ava DuVernay (2016)-

A. Summary

In the previous chapters I examined the process of participants’ development, reinforcement, and initial deconstruction of de-habilitated masculinity (DM)—a version of hyper-masculinity which was cumulatively developed in the social context of poverty and marginalization and which was initially learned within family systems of extreme abuse and neglect. DM was an identity established across participants’ life course—in the context of the family, gangs, and incarceration—and its deconstruction was initiated upon entering New Habits (NH), a rehabilitation program which taught the men I interviewed how to re-construct prosocial versions of masculinity.

In chapter three, I have shown how participants learned the rules of DM through their experiences of family system abuse and neglect. In this context, they took on the role of the unprotected-protectors as they were socialized into believing that what it means to be a man is to be violent and emotionally suppressing protectors. In chapter four, I highlighted respondents’ transition into gangs. I argued that those I interviewed were drawn to gang life because it provided them with a familiar context, wherein a sense of familial belonging was conflated with violence and victimization. Once participants became gang members, they drew upon the rules of DM to navigate the terrain, achieving DM and reinforcing the cycle of violence through the victim-victimizer paradox. In chapter five, I described the development of participants’ gangster masks which contributed to their dehumanization and criminalization. Instead of the justice system recognizing the need to provide rehabilitative treatment for traumatized offenders who were abused and neglected as young boys, those I interviewed were labeled, leading them on pathways
into prison and recidivistic incarceration. In the prison environment, participants adopted a criminal mask, built upon the rules of DM, in order to survive the violence they faced. In chapter six, I examined participants’ turning points toward desistance and their readiness to change. I described their motivations for entering into Therapeutic Community (TC) as they approached the end of their prison sentences and their decision to work toward becoming re-habilitated men through entering into the New Habits (NH) program. This chapter highlighted the ways in which participants’ agentic decision to change holds potential for them to desist from a life of crime. At this critical turning point, NH provided them with access to institutional rehabilitative support and specifically taught them new ways of thinking through cognitive behavioral therapy. These cognitive transformations provided them with the potential to reconstruct their masculinity in order to re-enter society as prosocial men.

In sum, through drawing upon life course theory, pathways theory and the cycle of violence theory I have shown how marginalized boys raised in abusive family systems developed de-habilitated masculinity which was reinforced across their life course. Findings highlighted the ways in which boys constructed their masculine identities in a violent social context which perpetuated the victim-victimizer paradox and placed them on pathways toward criminalization and incarceration. After multiple years incarcerated and in an effort to desist, participants described the hope they felt at New Habits through being cared for and treated humanely while learning new versions of prosocial masculinity in a “family” setting.

In this chapter I will discuss dissertation informed recommendations for the criminal justice system to move toward rehabilitative justice and future directions for research.
B. Toward Rehabilitative Justice

At the culmination of presenting my research findings, I wish to address the critical macro question: what insight does my project provide regarding where the criminal justice system (CJS) can go from here?

My research investigating thirty men’s life histories is only a glimpse of a small group of people, but their experiences highlight the macro need to move toward rehabilitative justice in the criminal system. Specifically, we need trauma-informed programs. Taking into account that my participants reported alarmingly high rates of child abuse and neglect in their family systems, it is critical that the justice system consider how these childhood experiences of trauma construct pathways into gangs and criminality. My research provides evidence that, due to marginalized boys being socialized into a de-habilitated version of masculinity which dictated that they hide their pain, their victimization experiences remained hidden and contributed to shaping their outcomes. In the majority of interviews I conducted, participants shared that I was the first person they had ever told about their experiences of trauma and that they felt relieved to have the opportunity to participate in an interview for this reason. Furthermore, as I described in chapter six, part of the reason participants were inspired to change at New Habits was due to the program providing them with opportunities to “drop their masks” and share their emotions in a caring environment where they could let go of their one-dimensional version of de-habilitated masculinity. I recognize that caring mentors offering tools to reconstruct masculinity is not the fix-all for reforming the entire criminal system, but I argue that it is a critical rehabilitative starting point.

The stance of reconstructing masculinity to help marginalized men desist from gangs and crime is bolstered by Edward Orozco Flores’ research presented in his book, God’s Gangs: Barrio
Ministry, Masculinity, and Gang Recovery (2014). Herein, Flores examines two well-known community based “gang recovery” programs in the Los Angeles area—Homeboy Industries and Victory Outreach—and their role in helping transform Chicano barrio masculinity. Flores found that these religiously based recovery programs helped men successfully move away from street and gang life into conventional social spheres such as the household, workplace, and church through providing opportunities for these men to reconstruct notions of masculinity. Significantly, Flores highlights how reformed barrio masculinity and desistance is “…not an individual effort, but is rather negotiated through social interaction” (147). Through reform programs and conventional social interaction, previously involved gang men learned new ways of constructing masculinity in order to see themselves as reformed men. Flores’ research suggests that this is one critical step within the masculinity recovery process and one which requires agency blended with structural opportunities through rehabilitative support.

In alignment with Flores’ scholarship, Victor Rios takes into account rehabilitative support in the carceral reform process in his research presented in the books, Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys (2011) and, Human Targets: Schools, Police and the Criminalization of Latino Youth (Rios 2017). In Punished, Rios discusses the need to shift from a “youth control complex” to a “youth support complex.” He argues, the youth control complex is “…made up of punitive interactions between young people and authority figures…marginalized young men’s behaviors and styles were criminalized and subjected them to shame, exclusion, punishment, and incarceration” (158). To address the exclusion and hypercriminalization of marginalized boys he contends that the criminal system shift toward a “youth support complex” wherein social institutions and community members create a “…ubiquitous system of support that nurtures and reintegrates young people placed at risk” (162). In this support model, programs which offer caring
mentors are of critical importance in structuring the outcome of keeping boys out of the prison pipeline. Rios details that in his analysis of the histories of forty boys, only three found meaningful connections with program mentors. Yet, notably these three boys reported that these mentors had been critical in their ability to transform through providing caring relationships which offered access to skills and resources.

In *Human Targets*, Rios advances the idea that in order to decriminalize marginalized boys and help them avoid incarceration it is imperative that the system shifts from a culture of control to a culture of care. In a culture of care, interactions with caring mentors provide essential resources for marginalized populations. Rios’ arguments are concordant with my research finding that New Habit’s ethic of care and support was a critical component of participants being motivated to desist and learn new ways of becoming reformed men. The NH ethic of care was revealed to me repeatedly throughout my research process. On my first trip to New Habits, when I was presenting my dissertation project to NH clients in order to find participants to interview, the director of the program shared[^33] , “We are so happy that you are here and interested in doing interviews with our clients. Most researchers don’t care about criminal men. They think they are throwaways. So they just lock them up and throw away the key.”

I highlight this point because it intersects with an ongoing mainstream belief that male gang members and “criminals” are dangerous “superpredators.” For example, when I would share with individuals outside of graduate school that I was conducting interviews with incarcerated men for my dissertation research, the first question that was typically asked was about my feelings of safety during interviews; the subtext was that I needed to be protected from dangerous criminals. In truth, the experience of interviewing participants completely transformed my thinking about

[^33]: I did not record this interaction so this statement is a summary from my field notes.
violence, masculinity, and incarcerated men. The men I interviewed have committed violent crimes, yet this is not the whole picture of their life histories. In order to transform the system, I believe greater attention needs to be paid to balancing society’s perspectives about criminally offending men. As long as incarcerated male gang members continue to be a demonized and negatively labeled population, then this dehumanizing labeling process will continue to make criminalization seem natural and inevitable. Thus, my work aims to balance the perspective, highlighting the fact that my participants began their lives in the social context of extreme victimization and social marginalization. Through society neglecting to help “habilitate” and care for participants when they were young boys, they developed a de-habilitated version of masculinity which was cumulatively reinforced across their life courses until they had access to rehabilitative programming. It is my sincere hope that in my attempt to humanize offenders through highlighting their histories of victimization, rehabilitative justice will become the most obvious path toward reforming the system.

i. Recommendations

First, we must admit that prison in its current form, is not working. It is well known that the U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world, imprisoning 2.3 million people nationwide (Alexander 2012) and that the majority of inmates—93%—are men (Carson 2018). Currently, data reveals that once released, the vast majority of offenders will recidivate. A U.S. Department of Justice study of prisoners released in thirty states between 2005 and 2010, found that within three years, approximately two-thirds were arrested and 76.6% were arrested within five years for committing new crimes (Durose, Cooper, and Snyder 2014). These recidivism rates reveal that the current method of punitive-based punishment is ineffective and the criminal justice system should re-think its approaches to helping men desist from criminality.
Second, we must acknowledge and address society’s role in the construction of de-habilitated masculinity. I view DM as a consequence of a society which is based on hegemonic notions of boys and men as emotionless, violent, protectors and thus overlooks males’ experiences of victimization. In rendering boys’ and men’s victimization invisible, there are extremely limited opportunities available for emotional support. As my research shows, DM contributed to participants’ pathways into substance use, gang involvement, and criminal behavior, all of which led them toward a life of recidivistic imprisonment. In the prison setting, DM was perpetuated and reinforced. Without intervention through access to rehabilitative support, the men I interviewed shared that there would have been little chance for them to recover. New Habits provided them with cognitive shifts and skills and tools to guide them on a path toward desistance. At New Habits they learned how to become prosocial men who have the possibility of living a life free of crime and violence. Though I do not know if the men I interviewed will desist permanently, at NH graduation ceremonies, I discovered the potential for NH clients to progress through the system successfully. At these events, NH clients who had completed the program triumphantly cried and declared that NH offered them a “second chance” at life through discovering how to become law-abiding, non-substance addicted, community men. For many, NH was the first culture of care setting they had experienced and thus stood out as being a critical catalyst in their transformational journeys from de-habilitated boys to becoming re-habilitated men.

Third, rehabilitation programs need to be culturally astute through being both trauma and gender informed. Gangs and prison are primarily composed of men and my research reveals that these men report elevated rates of having experienced frequent childhood trauma in their family systems. Due to the structure of masculinity dictating that men hide their victimization, those working with incarcerated populations need to understand the dynamics of masculinity and
victimization in order to tailor programming to specific needs. As I highlighted in my research, incarcerated men who are wearing the “criminal mask” are unlikely to perceive themselves as victims and thus rehabilitative treatment needs to be tailored accordingly. For example, at NH, staff members are trained specifically to work with men who have experienced trauma and in turn develop programming accordingly. New Habits’ gender and trauma informed programming was highlighted by NH teaching clients about the “criminal mask” and helping them learn how to “drop the criminal mask” in order to develop a new version of masculinity that was emotionally multidimensional.

Fourth, substance use needs to be decriminalized and become a public health concern instead of a criminal issue. At the macro level, it has been substantiated that the war on drugs has been a significant contributor to the rise of mass incarceration (Alexander 2012) and that this rise most negatively affects impoverished drug users who are “ill-equipped to financially afford drug treatment” (Contreras 2013:240). In the families of the boys I interviewed, the majority of family system care givers suffered from substance abuse issues, while treatment programs were financially inaccessible. Participants conveyed that care givers’ substance use was related to their experiences of being victims of abuse. Parents were commonly under the influence of substances when abusing and neglecting children in the family system. In turn, these experiences led to participants coping through using substances to numb out the pain of childhood trauma. Additionally, family system substance use became a pathway toward parents becoming incarcerated which contributed to participants’ being neglected. Thus, parental substance use was a significant factor in the intergenerational transmission of violence, substance use, and subsequent incarceration. Criminalizing substance use does nothing to address these concerns. Terry informed me that at any one time in the Colorado Department of Corrections there are between eighteen and
nineteen thousand people incarcerated and approximately 86% of these individuals have a drug or alcohol problem. Yet, only about 1% receive treatment. The Vera Institute of Justice reports that in the state of Colorado it costs $39,303 per year to incarcerate a prisoner (Vera Institute of Justice 2018). Reallocating this money toward creating free drug rehabilitation programs could be a step toward helping to minimize addiction, child abuse, and violence that could massively reduce the problem of mass incarceration.

Fifth, there needs to be an increase in rehabilitation program availability and programs should be offered at the front end of incarceration. Participants informed me that rehabilitative programs are not offered at the beginning of their time served (only GED and high school diploma classes are offered). Furthermore, they shared that once they were nearing their parole eligibility date, which is when they are within twelve to eighteen months of release, the programs that they wanted to take were often full. Participants shared that they believed it would be beneficial to create orientation courses about gangs in the prison system and offer community building classes in order to deter inmates from joining gangs and reproducing violence. It would be beneficial to ask incarcerated populations about what types of programs would be most beneficial. The coveted program that I repeatedly heard about was “7 Habits,” which is a rehabilitation personal development course based on Stephen R. Covey’s (Covey 1989) book, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change. Unfortunately, this class was typically full and there was a long waitlist because it was mainly accessible to the participants in the lowest level security prisons. Notably, participants talked at length about wishing the prison system would view them as people who want to learn and grow, just like men in the community. They shared a deep desire to have access to resources that would help them transform their lives, even if the path toward desistance was slow and filled with many challenges. Again, I view this as a need to treat
inmates more humanely and to recognize that they are motivated to change when provided with access to institutional opportunities.

Sixth, the criminal justice system needs to consider the length of prison sentences and increase “good time” incentives into the rehabilitative programming structure. When participants entered prison, if they were given a lengthy sentence with no options for early release due to serving “good time,” they disclosed that they would “run amok” until they neared their parole eligibility date. Thus, I argue that sentencing length and incentivized programming should, at the least, be a continued topic of discussion regarding prison reform. In an historically astute examination of the rise of solitary confinement, Keramet Reiter presents critical debates regarding discretion in sentencing in terms of determinant versus indeterminant sentencing lengths and the need for increased transparency in sentencing discretion (Reiter 2016:59–86). Based on my dissertation research, I agree with Reiter’s argument that we need increased transparency—ongoing, institutionalized oversight of the entire prison system—in order to understand how discretion shapes serving “good time” in the reduction of sentencing for inmates. With transparency and oversight, “good time” incentives could provide offender populations with motivation to desist.

Lastly, in alignment with the transparency discourse, I argue that in combination with helping men “drop their masks,” we need to remove the mask which hides what happens within the prison system. It is impossible to determine ways to increase positive outcomes for incarcerated populations and reduce violence when little is known about what happens inside the prison setting. In the vast body of criminological literature, there is very little research conducted inside the prison setting as it is notoriously challenging to gain access. As previous literature and my research highlights, violence is rampant in the prison environment (Contreras 2013; Irwin 2005; Sabo et al.
As such, until what is happening behind prison walls become visible and widely known, then prison will continue to be a prominent site for reproducing de-habilitated masculinity. If the criminal justice system seeks to reduce violence and mass incarceration, then there needs to be increased understanding of how the system is operating from within. Transparency would be useful for enhancing knowledge about how to reform the criminal justice system.

ii. Future Directions for Research

As I analyzed my data and began the writing process, I found numerous questions arising. There were topics I wished I had more time to examine, but was limited by time constraints in furthering my investigation. Thus, these are useful starting points for future directions in research.

First, I would like to expand the literature on desistance for incarcerated men. Laub and Sampson (2001) articulate, “Understanding the factors that lead to desistance is important in shaping interventions that reduce reoffending among those already involved in crime. This moves the field away from the narrow but now fashionable idea that prevention strategies administered early in the life course are the only feasible strategies to reduce criminal behavior”(Laub and Sampson 2001:3). During my preliminary analysis, I recognized the significance of participants’ discussing their readiness to change and its relationship to shaping rehabilitative interventions. Thus, I pursued conducting focus groups with respondents who were, by this time, in the final phases of the NH program. A focus group would have allowed me to more closely examine the desistance process, looking at change over the course of the program and at a critical turning point when participants’ were approaching re-entry. Unfortunately, due to my gatekeeper retiring and NH hiring a new director, I was informed that I would need to go through a lengthy process to regain access, which was prohibitive in the completion of my doctorate in a timely manner. Therefore, future work could focus on asking targeted questions of reentering men who are in the
transformation process in order to better understand their process of desistance from crime, as adult men.

Second, I was unable to conduct ethnographic research at NH. When I was approximately three-quarters of the way through conducting interviews, I became motivated to observe the daily operations and “games” respondents participated in at NH to better understand programming and its effectiveness. However, when I asked about conducting participant observation, I was told that my availability to attend for only a few weeks, may disrupt daily rhythms and in turn participants’ programming outcomes. I speculate that this barrier was in part due to timing—I would have needed to establish myself as a daily part of NH programming at the beginning of my project so as not to have been a distraction from their daily routines. Accordingly, in future research, I would establish entry into the field in order to conduct participant observation of rehabilitative programming in order to more effectively evaluate the program’s structure. Going forward, I would study how NH incorporates “games” and groups for masculine recovery. I believe that NH is a useful model for helping men transform their lives and as such there could be more in depth evaluative research to understand what the program is doing to help men progress toward graduation and long term desistance.

Third, I would expand my research longitudinally, following participants out of the NH program to investigate their reentry experiences, challenges, and successes. I would implement a life course criminology approach to examine the dynamics of long-term desistance in relation to the collateral consequences of incarceration. There needs to be increased understanding of what happens for those who desist from crime though cognitive “hooks for change” (Giordano et al. 2002)—as my participants demonstrated (see chapter 6)—in combination with the obstacles they face once they have reentered society. Sampson and Laub (2016) argue that at this critical turning
point toward desistance, the ways in which offenders’ criminal trajectories are impacted by social circumstances requires further examination. I believe this theoretical approach would help to create more finely tuned long-term rehabilitative programming. To this end, I seek to understand how marginalized men fare once they are through rehabilitative programming and how society can better support male inmates who have themselves been victimized. I would further investigate those interventions that can lead to fulfilling lives for previously incarcerated men.

Finally, I would conduct research in the prison setting to better understand the experiences of correctional officers, mental health practitioners, and inmates. Ideally, I would want to do ethnographic research in the prison setting to explore masculinity, dehumanization, and prison reform.

C. Conclusion

In summary, through my dissertation project, I learned a great deal about the life experiences of a marginalized and commonly dehumanized population of men who society has constructed as dangerous and possibly unable to be rehabilitated. Through presenting their histories, my aim has been to highlight their traumatic pasts, beginning with their socialization in extremely abusive families, in order to humanize and contextualize their pathways into gangs and crime. In sitting close up with “prisoners” I learned that their pasts did not have to dictate their futures. Through their agentic desire to overcome their histories, the men I interviewed worked to become re-habilitated men. In an ethic of humanizing criminalized men, New Habits provided the participants with the structural skills and tools that they had not previously been given by their families, society, or in the prison setting. As such, participants’ rehabilitative journeys highlight that they are so much “…more than the worst thing [they’ve] ever done” (Stevenson 2015: 18) and that they have the potential to change, when provided with social support to do so.
Ending on a hopeful note, when I asked one participant, Greg, at the end of our interview about his future hopes and dreams, he poignantly articulated, “Everybody thinks that we are just inmates, convicts. But the truth is this: I’ve done so much things in my life that I’m not proud of but at the same time I am proud of what’s in my heart. Who I know I can be. I have feelings and I’m human. And I feel like I could be a real good person.” At New Habits, Greg discovered his humanity and initiated his journey toward reconstructing his identity as a re-habilitated man. My research suggests that incarcerated, previously gang involved men have the potential to change when provided with institutional structures of rehabilitative support. Thus, I believe there is a social responsibility to consider ways in which the criminal justice system can move toward rehabilitative justice and help incarcerated men transform from de-habilitated boys into rehabilitated men.
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i. APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Masculinity & Trauma

1. What do you think it means to be a man; what are the expectations of men in our society?

2. Where do you think you learned how to be a man; where did you learn these expectations?

3. How do you think your experiences of trauma, violence, and victimization have affected you? *Probe: How do you think the trauma you've experienced and witnessed has shaped your behaviors?*

4. How do you think men can be victims? *Probe: Do you see men and women differently as victims?*

5. Do you see yourself as a victim? *Probe: Have you ever seen yourself as a victim?*

6. How have you coped with the trauma you've experienced and witnessed?

Gang Involvement

7. Why would you say you joined your gang?

8. What are the expectations of boys and men in a gang?

9. How has your gang involvement shaped you as a man? *Probe: In what ways would you say your gang involvement has influenced your feelings, thoughts, and behaviors?*

10. Are there any ways you see your gang involvement being a positive influence in your life? Negative?

11. What have you done to cope with the trauma you’ve experienced during your gang involvement? [If not answered in trauma section]

Incarceration

12. Why do you think you’ve committed crimes?

13. Do you see yourself as a criminal?

14. Do you feel that your sentencing was fair?

15. How has your time spent incarcerated changed you as a man?
16. What kind of a man do you have to be in prison?

17. Do you remember the first time you were ever locked up? How did that feel?

18. How do you feel about your time spent incarcerated? *Probe: How do you cope with a lengthy sentence?*

19. [If applicable] How did you handle your time in solitary?

20. Do you see having been incarcerated as helpful in any way? *Probe: Are there any ways you see your prison time being a positive influence in your life? Negative?*

**New Habits & Recovery**

21. Tell me about your experiences with the New Habits:
   - How did you come to NH? [Not the crime, but the method of entering. SKIP if previously answered.]
   - What made you ready to come to NH?
   - What is the most challenging part of the program?
   - What is the best part of the program for you?

22. How would you say NH has changed you as a man? *Probe: Has it changed your thoughts and behaviors?*

23. In your opinion, what are the main differences between serving time in the DOC versus NH?

24. What types of programs would have been helpful when you were a kid or would be helpful in the future?

**Wrap Up**

25. What are some of your strengths that helped you get through tough times, or what are some things you are proud of?

26. What are your dreams for the future, once you are released from the program? *Probe: If you had any one wish, what would it be?*

27. Do you think you would have shared the same information with a male interviewer?

28. Do you have any other feedback for me about what it is like to participate in this interview?
## ii. APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

**Table 1: Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age Entered System</th>
<th>Years Incarcerated</th>
<th>Phase of NH Program</th>
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*Tried and sentenced as an adult.

**Juvenile life sentence.**
iii. APPENDIX C: ABUSE AND NEGLECT DEMOGRAPHICS AND DEFINITIONS

The Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act of 2010 defines childhood abuse and neglect as, “Any act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm” (6). All interviewees reported having been raised in family contexts where they experienced two or more of the following forms of trauma: physical, verbal, emotional/mental, and sexual abuse; domestic violence; neglect; absent or missing father and stepfather relationships; familial substance use gang involvement, and/or incarceration. Out of these ten categories, participants experienced, on average, 5.5 types of trauma during their childhood (see Appendix C: Childhood Trauma Demographics for full detailed description). Neglect was the most common form reported by 100% of participants. In subcategories of abuse and neglect, familial substance use (87%) and then physical abuse (63%). The least common type reported was emotional and mental abuse (27%). Perpetrators of the ten types of trauma included parents, stepparents, boyfriends, grandfathers, siblings, stepsiblings, uncles, cousins, surrogate fathers, a foster mother, acquaintances, and/or in one case strangers.

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</table>
To capture childhood abuse for my participants, I included their reports of physical, verbal\textsuperscript{34}, mental/emotional abuse, witnessing domestic violence and/or sexual. I used the following definitions to quantify my participants’ reports of abuse: \textit{Physical abuse}—nonaccidental physical injury to a child and can include actions such as hitting, kicking, or burning which results in physical harm (Children’s Bureau 2016); \textit{Verbal abuse}—degrading insults or spoken threats which harm children’s sense of safety or self-worth; \textit{Mental/emotional abuse}—injury to the emotional stability or psychological capacity of the child (Children’s Bureau 2016); and, for \textit{Domestic violence} I counted intimate partner violence and other forms of familial violence occurring in the home environment which my participant witnessed as a child (for example, watching siblings being abused by a parent, or a father stabbing an uncle).

I use the following definition of \textit{child neglect (acts of omission)}: “Acts of omission are the failure to provide for a child’s basic physical, emotional, or educational needs or to protect a child from harm or potential harm” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2017). In accordance with this definition, I counted participants’ experiences as neglectful when their reports described family contexts where the primary adults in their families were physically absent and/or failed to provide any disciplinary rules to keep their children from harm. I counted cases where respondents directly stated “I was neglected,” reported experiencing sexual abuse\textsuperscript{35}, and/or dysfunctional household contexts where family members were using substance either with or in front of respondents.

\textsuperscript{34} In retrospect, I believe that the emotional/mental and verbal abuse reports are underreported due to participants focusing on their histories of more severe forms of abuse—specifically physical abuse. After completing data collection, I realized that my questions about emotional/mental and verbal abuse were not emphasized during interviews and thus, participants may not have shared these experiences with me.

\textsuperscript{35} I include sexual abuse in the “neglect” category because these experiences were the result of parental neglect where the adults were absent and did not provide a safe environment where participants were protected from sexual abuse. None of the participants were sexually abused by their parents.
Nine out of thirty (30%) of men interviewed reported childhood sexual abuse. I used a broad definition to record childhood sexual abuse, which is as follows: sexual activity which occurs between a child and a person in a position of authority or an adult (Finkelhor 1994; Finkelhor et al. 2014). Out of the nine cases of childhood sexual abuse, perpetrators included: female babysitters; older female gang acquaintance(s); one case where the participant was raped by two adult male strangers; and one by a female adult family friend.

Familial substance use was the second highest form of trauma reported by participants. Twenty-six respondents (87%) reported being raised in familial environments where frequent and/or excessive substance use was normative behavior which resulted in parents neglecting to provide for their basic needs and/or protect them from harm.

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36 There is a great deal of variation in operational definitions of what constitutes “childhood sexual abuse” and use this one as it provides a broad definition which highlights that the perpetrator be in a position of authority in relation to the child.