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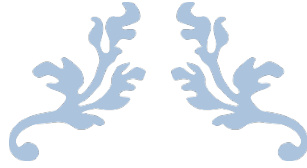


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DECONSTRUCTING HYPERMASCULINITY:

COMBATTING THE WAR ON BLACK MEN



Senior Honors Thesis

Written By

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Abstract

This research project aims to interrogate the rationale behind Black men's disproportionate engagement in crime and violent behaviors. To do this, I aim to debunk hypermasculinity as the media and Police's predominate rationale for Black men's participation in violence and crime. Although narratives of hypermasculinity have become more insidious across time and space since the slavery era, they still contribute to the pervasive perception of Black men as savage hoodlums who are undeserving of success outcomes. The concept of hypermasculinity asserts that Black men have a biological, innate disposition to incite harm. To deracialize and demystify current stigmas of hypermasculinity that plague Black men, I conducted fifteen in-depth interviews of Black-identifying, young men from the Southside of Chicago who have participated in illicit behaviors. Due to the proliferation of gun violence that is negatively impacting Black men's life chances, Chicago emerges as an important sociological site. In addition, the Southside of Chicago is a case study for understanding larger social phenomena such as the systematic killing of marginalized people and urban violence and inequity. From my interviews, I discovered how these men's efforts to combat the war enacted against them by racist structures and institutions were circumscribed by the racialized pigeonhole of the label 'hypermasculine'.

By exposing Black men's rationale for engaging in illicit behaviors, contemporary race scholars will have a new avenue for examining the social context as a production site for their uneven engagement. Moreover, Black men's motivations for engaging in illicit behaviors will provide a nuanced lens to understanding the multifactorial and contingent nature of criminality. I argue that Black men's disproportionate engagement in gun violence and crime is out of necessity and not desire. The hypotheses that ground this argument are threefold: (1) *The*

labeling process associated with hypermasculinity is racialized and predisposes Black men to a life of crime and failure, (2) Hypermasculinity, as a rationale, is inherently flawed because it does not include a discussion of Black men's social context as contributory to their engagement in gun violence and crime, and (3) Combatting the war on Black men requires a city-wide restructuring of how finances and other resources are allocated, along with adaptations to public, penal, and education policies.

If we accept these premises to be true, Black men are finally able to move beyond the stereotype threats of hypermasculinity and emerge as producers of knowledge and positive contributors to society. From my interviews, I found that sweeping narratives of Black men as hypermasculine negatively impact the ways in social welfare, education, and penal policies are written, which insidiously shape Black men's inability to garner success outcomes. Through exposing how the laws enforced by of our alleged fair and equal justice system are implicitly biased, I argue that Black men have become targets of enduring structural racism and a new form of mass imprisonment called neoslavery.

Key Words

Hypermasculine • Social Context • Black Men • Criminal* • Southside Chicago • Neoslavery • Policy • Poverty

Historical Context

Historically, the character of the Black male has been delineated as bestial, ferocious, dangerous, and criminal. During the slavery era, white people played a major role in constructing the Black man as uncouth; therefore, unfit for participation in civil society. Moreover, slave-owners viewed the Black male body as otherworldly and as a threat to white female fragility. As such, miscegenation laws were implemented to prevent undesirable sexual encounters between Black men and white women.¹ Black men struggled to move beyond the confines of stereotypes that attempted to relegate their humanity and invalidate their “freedom”.² This was due to pervasive narratives of hypermasculinity that were premised on the belief that Black men are innately (biologically) deviant, aggressive, and predisposed to inciting harm and violence. These racialized conceptions of Black men’s worth have become far more insidious across time and space, such that Black men’s style of dress and individuality have become points of contention amid the media, Police, and racist institutions and structures looking to deem these men oppositional.³ This has given rise to more pervasive stereotypes that are strategically used by racist, powerful structures to diminish Black men’s worth and access to social capital.

Contemporary Background

A major flaw of hypermasculinity, as a rationale for Black men’s uneven engagement in gun violence and crime, is that it does not include a discussion of Black men’s social context as contributory to their engagement. Instead, it is used by the media, policymakers and racist structures to support the notion that Black men are innately (biologically) deviant and

¹ “The legislature established sanctions against both parties to miscegenous relationships and for

² Blackmon, Douglas A. 2008. *Slavery by Another Name: the Re-Enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II*. New York: Doubleday.

³ Anderson, Elijah. 2008. *Against the Wall: Poor, Young, Black, and Male*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

predisposed to a life of crime and inciting harm.⁴ Black men are being linked to images of savage hoodlums, gangster rappers, thugs, miscreants, and sexual predators. These notions of Black masculinity have permeated the mainstream media and attempted to condemn Black men.⁵ Furthermore, the carceral state that mass imprisons Black men has emerged as a form of neoslavery.⁶ Black men are disproportionately going to prison for minor offenses and are facing dire sentencing disparities.⁷ Despite our democratic society, we are left wondering: what about the right to a fair and speedy trial composed of a jury of one's peers? What happened to the 13th amendment?⁸

Unfortunately, education, social, and legal policies have insidiously promoted and exacerbated a new era of condemnation and confinement for Black men that leaves them with no other option than to prioritize survival by any means necessary.⁹ As Black men continue to be regarded as hypermasculine and unworthy of equality by racist institutions and structures, policymakers feel justified in their argument that there is no need to improve the state of Black

⁴ Markus, Hazel Rose and Paula M. L. Moya. 2010. *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

⁵ Johnson, Devon. 2015. *Deadly Injustice: Trayvon Martin, Race, and the Criminal Justice System*. New York: New York University Press.

⁶ Blackmon, Douglas A. 2008. *Slavery by Another Name: the Re-Enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II*. New York: Doubleday.

⁷ Tonry, Michael H. 2011. *Punishing Race: a Continuing American Dilemma*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁸ "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." Formally abolishing slavery in the United States, the 13th Amendment was passed by the Congress on January 31, 1865, and ratified by the states on December 6, 1865." Taken from: Anon. n.d. "Primary Documents in American History." *13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Primary Documents of American History (Virtual Programs & Services, Library of Congress)*. Retrieved October 19, 2016 (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/13thamendment.html>).

⁹ Gabbidon, Shaun L. and Helen Taylor Greene. 2005. *Race and Crime*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

men's living conditions. As such, law enforcement agencies often exclude the social context when assessing the rationale behind Black men's disproportionate engagement in illicit behaviors. In turn, law enforcement agencies erroneously deem these Black men incapable of taking care of and protecting their surroundings and, in turn, are deemed unworthy of remediation or social support services.

This unfortunate social reality for Black men encourages them to enlist a life of crime due to feeling that society has disregarded and abandoned them. Black men are engaged in an incessant war on poverty where they lack the essential resources necessary for improving the conditions of their livelihoods. Being young, Black, and male places both visible and invisible markers of disposability onto Black men living urban, underresourced communities of color who lack access to financial capital. Society's preconceived notions and negative depictions of Black men are amplified if these men have a criminal record. There is nearly no chance that Black men will be able to find a job or alternative pathway to enlisting a life of crime if they have gone through the penal system. In these ways, hypermasculinity still thrives in our alleged post-racial society and insidiously determines Black men's social status, need to engage in illicit behaviors, and their treatment as second-class citizens.

Introduction

Case Study: The Southside of Chicago

Over the last decade, Chicago has functioned as a “Dual City” – a popular, diverse, and incomparable tourist hub and a domestic site for the war on terror.¹⁰ Gun violence has emerged as an epidemic on the Southside of Chicago that not only targets urban communities where crime rates are abnormally high, but also threatens the national safety and security. As of January 2016, there have been around 5,233 shootings across the Southside of Chicago.¹¹ Likewise, there have been 951 shooting-related homicides.¹² The highest proliferations of gun violence have been in the following neighborhoods: Englewood, Woodlawn, and Park Manor, which are predominately Black communities.¹³ No other race comes close to experiencing these levels of gun violence and homicide.¹⁴ A census study from 2010 found that 75% of the victims of gun violence were Black.¹⁵ Similarly, 71% of the murderers involved in gun-related violence were Black.¹⁶ An astonishing 90% of the victims of gun violence were male with 45.5% of them falling between the ages of 17-25.¹⁷ By analyzing this data alone, it is easy to assume the correlation between young, Black men and engagement in gun violence. That is, Black men have no consideration for humanity due to the excessive rate of Black on Black violence. However,

¹⁰ Sassen, S. (2001). *The global city: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press.

¹¹ Data taken from: Anon. n.d. “Crime in Chicago -- Chicago Tribune.” *Shootings -- Crime in Chicagoland -- chicagotribune.com*. Retrieved October 19, 2016 (<http://crime.chicagotribune.com/chicago/shootings/>).

¹² Data taken from: Anon. n.d. “Crime in Chicago -- Chicago Tribune.” *Crime in Chicagoland -- chicagotribune.com*. Retrieved October 19, 2016 (<http://crime.chicagotribune.com/chicago/homicides>).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Data taken from: Foley, Devin. 2016. “Chicago: 75% of Murdered Are Black, 71% of Murderers Are Black.” *Intellectual Takeout*. Retrieved October 19, 2016 (<http://www.intellecualtakeout.org/blog/chicago-75-murdered-are-black-71-murderers-are-black>).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

this data does not explore why these Black men are disproportionately engaging in gun violence and crime.

These findings alone only account for the demographics of the individuals enmeshed in gun violence. In tandem with this data, it is important to examine the concentrations of poverty throughout the Southside of Chicago to gauge if there is a correlation between a lack of access to resources and enlisting a life of crime. The United States has national thresholds of poverty at both the individual and family level to assess and determine the state and government benefits that are available to people suffering from severe rates of poverty. For instance, a family of four is living in poverty if it earns \$23, 283 or less.¹⁸ Likewise, a single individual must earn \$11,945 or less to be considered as living in poverty.¹⁹ A study based on 2014 census data found that the communities of Englewood, Woodlawn, and Park Manor had poverty rates over 60%.²⁰

In addition, it is equally important to consider the availability of jobs and educational opportunities for individuals who are suffering from impoverishment. Many of Chicago's top-performing Charter, Private, and Career Academy schools are displaced from urban, marginalized communities on the Southside of Chicago and located in the Central Business District (CBD) or the affluent Northside. This presents young Black men living on the Southside of Chicago with many unforeseen obstacles when attempting to access these schools, such as crossing race, class, gang lines, and potentially dangerous territories.²¹ The countless safety

¹⁸ Data taken from: Dodge, John. 2014. "Poverty Rates In Many Chicago Neighborhoods Near 60 Percent." *CBS Chicago*. Retrieved October 19, 2016 (<http://chicago.cbslocal.com/2014/04/22/poverty-rates-in-many-chicago-neighborhoods-near-60-percent/>).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Data taken from: Dodge, John. 2014. "Poverty Rates In Many Chicago Neighborhoods Near 60 Percent." *CBS Chicago*. Retrieved October 19, 2016

threats surrounding attending a *better* school serve as a barrier for these young men by excluding them from accessing resources and job or educational opportunities post-graduation. As a result, many young Black men find themselves attending neighborhood schools that lack resources, full-time teachers, enrichment opportunities, and extracurricular activities that could decrease these boy's likelihood of enlisting a life of crime. Considering that educational attainment is one of the earliest predictors of an individual's likelihood for success, it is critical to think about alternatives for Black young boys who are unable to access a secondary or post-secondary education.

The census study from 2014 also found that Black young men with a high school diploma that work 40 hours a week for 52 weeks of the year at minimum wage will make an average of \$17,160 in Illinois.²² However, this annual income does not support the average cost of living in Chicago, which includes rent (mortgage), utilities, groceries, personal expenses, and any additional bills (i.e. car payment, phone bill, cable bill etc.). Certainly, the annual income for individuals without a high school degree is dismal. The reality is that most legitimate jobs that offer benefits and a decent wage will not hire people without a high school degree.²³ As such, Black men end up disproportionately targeted by the policies and laws that are supposed to protect them and provide them with access to adequate resources. Black men are required to risk their safety to attend a good school because education reform is not likely to occur in urban, impoverished communities that have been condemned by larger society. Moreover, Black men

(<http://chicago.cbslocal.com/2014/04/22/poverty-rates-in-many-chicago-neighborhoods-near-60-percent/>).

²² Shedd, Carla. 2015. *Unequal City: Race, Schools, and Perceptions of Injustice*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

²³ Pager, Devah. 2007. *Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

who do have a high school diploma are receiving insufficient pay for their labor, which is not sustainable for the maintenance of their livelihoods. Black men end up in a vicious cycle where they are forced to pursue illegitimate forms of work to provide for their families.²⁴ Arguably, this is not out of an innate desire to engage in illicit behaviors, but out of financial necessity.

Black men remain trapped in toxic social environments where enriching educational and work opportunities are few and far between. Considering the social reality of being Black in modern America, which is not wholly dissimilar from the Jim Crow era, Black men usually must risk their lives to gain access to opportunities for upward mobility.²⁵ Furthermore, stigmas of Black men as hypermasculine and unfit for participation in civil society remain pervasive and are strategically used to predispose them to a life of failure. As a result, Black men become relegated to their urban, impoverished communities that are displaced from the mainstream. These areas have high concentrations of gun violence and crime because individuals are searching for resources and finding frustration. Their outlet and means for garnering attention, support, and intervention becomes enlisting a life of crime.

This thesis aims to expose this unfortunate reality for Black men who feel like enlisting a life of crime is the sole viable option they have. On the Southside of Chicago, Black men are trying to navigate their neighborhood, life opportunities, and encounters with the law amid high rates of poverty and class stratification.²⁶ By exposing these harsh and inadequate realities of Black men's social context, the findings this project posits will allow the media, Police, and racist institutions and structures to critique and dispel hypermasculinity as a rationale for Black men's engagement in illicit behaviors. Once we understand and prioritize the reasoning behind

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Shedd, Carla. 2015. *Unequal City: Race, Schools, and Perceptions of Injustice*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

²⁶ Ibid.

Black men's disproportionate engagement in gun violence and crime, true remediation can occur (at both a structural and policy level). However, this requires powerful entities to move beyond their racialized preconceived notions of Black men and their worth, which was formulated during the slavery era and has become more insidious across time and space. In doing so, Black men can emerge as more than a stigma and label and can finally gain a sense of belonging and participation in a society that was founded on the extortion of their labor, enslavement, and maltreatment.

Theoretical Frameworks

This project employs a qualitative methodological approach of in-depth interviewing to understanding the multifactorial and contingent rationale for Black men's uneven engagement in gun violence and crime. Particularly, this project aims to divulge and analyze Black men's reasoning for enlisting a life of crime that is atypical from sweeping notions of hypermasculinity, which claim that Black men are innately deviant. To accomplish this, it is important begin with a theoretical lens for understanding how hypermasculinity functions, particularly how the label 'hypermasculine' has manifested itself across time and space. Moreover, to address the role of the social context, we must look at who and/or what Black men deem responsible for their engagement in illicit behaviors. To do this, we must first understand if and how Black men attribute culpability. This will give volume to Black men's experiences in urban, underresourced, impoverished locales who have sought out a life of crime in response to lacking an essential resource. Through exposing the intentions behind Black men's engagement in illicit behaviors, we will be able to see that their involvement in gun violence and crime is not guileless and is complex, multifaceted, and cannot be easily remedied. Lastly, this project will examine the policies that have been implemented to decrease the likelihood of Black men's engagement in gun violence and crime, but have exacerbated the inequalities that have led them to illicit behaviors in the first place.

Labeling Theory

To understand the power that the marker 'hypermasculine' has in shaping the social, political, and financial outcomes for Black men we must understand the sociological Labeling Theory.²⁷ Howard Becker coined the Labeling Theory in 1963 to describe how despite deviance not being inherent to an act, there is a tendency for majority people (i.e. the white elite) to label

²⁷ Becker, Howard Saul. 1963. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. London: Free Press of Glencoe.

minority people, or those seen as deviant, based on social norms. In other words, definitions of criminality are established by those in power through a formulation of laws and their interpretation. Becker found that people come to identify or behave in ways that reflect how others label them.²⁸ For example, labeling someone as ‘criminal’ has negative impacts on the formation of their self-concept. The person may begin to internalize the label of ‘criminal’ and begin engaging in illicit behaviors. Moreover, this can lead to larger issues of social abandonment as people begin treating the individuals with the label of ‘criminal’ differently. The problem arises when people in power misapply the label of ‘deviant’ because of widespread racial stereotypes or personal prejudice. As a result, sweeping narratives of criminality become inextricably linked to certain targeted groups of people; typically, the oppressed, marginalized, and poor. This not only negatively impacts their access to the mainstream and resources, but it damages their social perception and ability to enact the same freedoms, rights, and enriching systems as the people without the label of ‘deviant’ or ‘criminal’.

Historically, the label of hypermasculine has been used to distinguish Black men from white men. Slaveholders crafted Black men in an antithetical image – one that was unhuman, vile, carnal, boorish, and criminal – everything that *good* white people were not. Given the nature of slavery, in which Black men were considered and treated as white men’s property and source of labor, society trusted and widely accepted the stigmas that were associated with Black men regarding their worth. These images gained largescale visibility through the media and sensationalized caricatures of the time. Currently, Black men are still trying to become more than a stigma. Despite the label of hypermasculine being more covert since during the Jim Crow era, it still exists and is a huge determining factor in Black men’s social status.

²⁸ Ibid.

In *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, bell hooks discusses how the mainstream media and culture indoctrinates fear of Black men and rewards them when they act in accord with the public's fear.²⁹ For example, Black men's participation in gangs and subversive street culture (i.e. saggin' their pants, rappin' to Hip Hop music, wearing baggy clothing etc.) is not necessarily out of desire or interest, but as a means for attaining the society's standard of 'coolness', which, within the Black community, is antithetical to whiteness. However, Black men's participation in gangs and subversive street culture, for whatever reason, evokes and reifies the public fear of the Black male persona as dangerous. This stigmatizes the Black men who do not act in accord with the label of hypermasculine. As a result, the Black men that actively combat the stereotypes that permeate their community end up facing the same discrimination, maltreatment, and alienation as the Black men who capitalize off the negative images.

As hooks maintains, the greatest threat to Black men in America is patriarchal thinking and practices. Therefore, Black men should break the machismo demands and values of patriarchal culture and take on a feminist methodology that involves radical self-love and self-examination. However, this is challenging considering the host of troubling social dynamics that teach Black men that violence is the key to survival. Therefore, it becomes important to examine the social context as a production site for Black men's uneven involvement in illicit behaviors.

Attribution Theory

While it's unclear who coined the social-psychological Attribution Theory, its earliest appearance can be traced to 1958 by Fritz Heider.³⁰ Attribution theory is concerned with how people explain events as they do. Heider held that people are all naïve psychologists trying to

²⁹ hooks, bell. 2004. *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. New York: Routledge.

³⁰ Heider, Fritz. 1958. *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. New York: Wiley.

make sense of the social world around them.³¹ As such, people tend to see cause and effect relationships even where there are none. There are two main types of attribution that Heider set forth: Internal Attribution and External Attribution. Internal Attribution is a process of assigning the cause of behavior to an internal characteristic as opposed to outside forces (i.e. personality traits).³² For example, we attribute the behavior of a person to their motives, beliefs, and personality.

External Attribution involves a process of assigning the cause of behavior to some situation or event outside of a person's control.³³ For instance, when we try to explain our own behavior we make external attributions, such as situational or environment features. Other scholars have regarded Attribution Theory as the process necessary for understanding and attaching meaning to other's behavior or our own. For example, Fiske & Taylor (1991) argue that "attribution theory deals with how the social perceiver uses information to arrive at causal explanations for events. It examines what information is gathered and how it is combined to form a causal judgement".³⁴

Oftentimes, the Internal Attributions a person has for themselves are in conflict with the External Attributions that others perceive. Therefore, it is important to have a system of checks and balances in place for regulating one's own dispositional attribution in relation to what society views as socially desirable and acceptable.

As it relates to the social context, it is important to understand how Black men attribute blame to their social environment as a conduit and production site for their engagement in gun

³¹ Taken from: McLeod, Saul. 2012. "Attribution Theory." *Simply Psychology*. Retrieved October 19, 2016 (<http://www.simplypsychology.org/attribution-theory.html>).

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Fiske, Susan T. and Shelley E. Taylor. 1991. *Social Cognition*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.

violence and crime. Many policymakers and law enforcement agencies view Black men as responsible for the deplorable conditions of their social milieu. Therefore, Black men emerge as unsalvageable – or unable to receive remediation and support. On the Southside of Chicago, Black men are suffering from a war on poverty and unable to gain access to resources essential for improving their livelihoods. As a result, Black men do not have legitimate forms for work, school, and enriching opportunities readily available and accessible. In large part, Black men enlist a life of crime because they do not have an alternative avenue for survival. Also, Black men are mass incarcerated more than any other demographic and suffer to reenter society and break the cycle of violence and crime. Mainly, this is because our legal system condemns ex-convicts and excludes them from full participation in society even though they have paid their dues while imprisoned. It is increasingly challenging for Black men to find and keep a job after being released from prison. Many employers will not hire a person with a past criminal record. If they do, the person will likely get paid ‘under the table’ or less than minimum wage because they are viewed as a liability. In a society where Black men are continually punished and condemned, it becomes nearly impossible for them to move beyond external attributes.

In the book, *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*, Richard Majors and Janet Mancini found that Black men do not receive the same outcomes as white men even though they hold the same set of virtues and define masculinity similarly.³⁵ They found that both Black and white men view themselves as breadwinner, provider, procreator, and protector; however, Black men lack the means to adequately fulfill these roles.³⁶ As a result, many Black men have become frustrated, disillusioned, and alienated from mainstream society. These Black

³⁵ Majors, Richard and Janet Mancini. Billson. 1992. *Cool Pose: the Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*. New York: Lexington Books.

³⁶ Ibid.

men's deeply seated feelings continue to be circumvented and overshadowed by white men that feel Black men are responsible for their own demise. These evasive practices disallow culpability to be attributed to the white people who perpetuate narratives of hypermasculinity, law enforcement agencies, and policy writers who believe that Black men deserve the severe conditions of their social context.

Black men are left feeling like it's their responsibility to repair the conditions of their neighborhood. These reparations cannot be made with minimum-wage jobs alone; therefore, many Black men take on illegitimate forms for work to restore resources and wealth back into their communities. In addition, racist structures' external attributions of Black men as innately deviant and disposed to incite harm do so without an examination of the factors that have led to them engaging in illicit behaviors. To combat this, it is important to expose and critique the policies that have been implemented within urban, underresourced communities of color that have failed to repair the inadequate living conditions that Black men have been forced to endure.

Broken Windows Policing

The Broken Windows model of Policing emerged in response to the criminological Broken Windows Theory. The theory was first introduced in 1982 by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling and holds that small-scale, low-level crimes such as vandalism and public drinking have adverse effects on additional crime and antisocial behavior.³⁷ Therefore, to prevent more serious crime from occurring; it is important to monitor urban environments and create an atmosphere of law and order. For example, a successful strategy for preventing vandalism is to address problems when they are small (i.e. repair broken windows within a short time or clean up

³⁷ Wilson, James Q. and George L. Kelling. 1982. "Broken Windows: the Police and Neighborhood Safety." *Atlantic Monthly* 29–38.

the sidewalk every day to prevent litter).³⁸ It is believed that when people care for and protect the spaces they feel invested in; the area will eventually become safer. If the broken windows and vandalism remain prevalent, then it is assumed that communities simply do not care about the damage. Regardless of how many times the windows are repaired, the community is responsible for investing their time into keeping the community safe.³⁹ Wilson & Kelling regarded these individuals involved in maintaining order as ‘community watchmen’ and ‘vigilantes’.⁴⁰ The Broken Windows Theory has also been used to implement several reforms in criminal policy, including the controversial ‘Stop and Frisk’ by the New York Police Department.⁴¹

The Broken Windows Theory assumes that physical condition of the landscape allows criminals and intruders to gauge whether the people in the community have social control and responsibility over the maintenance of their surroundings. Police have tried to dissuade criminal activity by increasing their surveillance practices and arrests of ‘suspicious’ individuals in high-crime zones – low-income, impoverished communities of color. This is the Police’s attempt to express that criminal activity is unwanted and intolerable. However, this has created an adversarial relationship between law enforcement officials and Black men, who are usually the individuals stopped, questioned, and frisked by the Police because they are dangerous, armed with a weapon, and looking to break the law. Most people stopped by Police are actual members of the community and are not looking to incite any harm. Still, the Police’s ‘Stop and Frisk’

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “A brief, non-intrusive, police stop of a suspect. The Fourth Amendment requires that the police have a reasonable suspicion that a crime has been, is being, or is about to be committed before stopping a suspect. If the police reasonably suspect the person is armed and dangerous, they may conduct a frisk, a quick pat-down of the person’s outer clothing. See *Terry v Ohio*, 392 US 1, (1967).” Taken from: Anon. n.d. “Stop and Frisk.” LII / Legal Information Institute. Retrieved October 19, 2016 (https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/stop_and_frisk).

practices remain steeped in racialized stereotypes that have predisposed Black men as the likely perpetrator of violence and crime.⁴²

In *Banished: The New Social Control in Urban America*, Katherine Beckett and Steven Kelly Herbert found that Broken Windows Policing does not reduce crime and does not address the underlying conditions that generate urban poverty⁴³. *Banished* is one of the first explorations of the insidious tactics that enhance the power of police to monitor and arrest countless urbanites⁴⁴. Beckett and Herbert hold that with the availability of affordable housing decreasing and urban poverty becoming unavoidable, marginalized groups will continue to occupy public space in American cities. Powerful entities readily condemn these oppressed groups because they allegedly negatively impact property values and public safety policies. Zero-Tolerance policies and Broken Windows Policing efforts emerged to ‘clean up the streets’⁴⁵. However, these policies banish oppressed people from occupying public space. If they can return, they become likely subjects of unwarranted arrests.

Similarly, in *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*, David Garland found that crime has not only changed, society has too, especially public attitudes towards crime and criminality.⁴⁶ That is, public policy and the cultural meaning of crime and criminals have drastically shifted over time. Garland employs the term ‘volatile economy’ to discuss the current culture of the society we live in, which is a combination of personal freedom

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Beckett, Katherine and Steven Kelly Herbert. 2010. *Banished: the New Social Control in Urban America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Garland, David. 2001. *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

and relaxed social controls.⁴⁷ This economy has been shaped by two social forces: (1) distinctive social organization of late modernity and (2) neoconservative policies that come to dominate the U.S.⁴⁸ These forces present challenges to governing contemporary societies. For example, Black men who depend on state-sanctioned welfare and security benefits are viewed as taking advantage of the system. We live in a democracy where Black men should be guaranteed as much access to government assistance as any other demographic; yet, they are mass incarcerated, criminalized, and prejudiced more than anyone else. In an unfair system of checks and balances where Black men's personal freedoms are circumscribed by social controls that work to condemn their existence, Black men become involuntary participants in neoslavery.⁴⁹

Literature Review

Deconstructing Hypermasculinity

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Blackmon, Douglas A. 2008. *Slavery by Another Name: the Re-Enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II*. New York: Doubleday.

For the purposes of this thesis, I adopt Aída Hurtado and Mrinal Sinha’s (2016) description.⁵⁰ Hurtado and Mrinal use machismo and hypermasculinity interchangeably. They define machismo as, “a hypermasculinity that obliterates any other possible influence on men’s attitudes and behaviors”.⁵¹ Machismo is used to define men in the larger social narrative.⁵² This unfortunate reality excludes them from participating in the creation and broadcasting of their self-image. Although Hurtado and Mrinal focus on intersectional Latino masculinities, I find their definition of hypermasculinity applicable to Black men on the Southside of Chicago because it aptly illustrates how the mere label of ‘hypermasculine’ supersedes any other [positive] identity markers that could be attributed to men such that they solely become viewed as hypermasculine. In addition, these authors aim to provide a more nuanced understanding of how men can overcome structural obstacles and contribute to social justice movements.⁵³ Their critical examination of the flaws of our ‘fair and equal system’ along with making recommendations for how men can obtain enriching opportunities for upward mobility are often left out of the literature. It is important to consider how Black men can move beyond the limitations of their social context and the stigmas that predispose them to a life of crime and failure, so they can emerge as valuable members of and contributors to society.

To accomplish this, I critically examined and challenged the stigma of hypermasculinity and its enduring effect on Black men since the Jim Crow era. Black masculinity has been contentious since our nation’s inception. In *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*, Khalil Muhammad held that Black people were always

⁵⁰ Hurtado Aída and Mrinal Sinha. 2016. *Beyond Machismo: Intersectional Latino Masculinities*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

⁵¹ Ibid. Pg. 3

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

depicted as a threat to modernity.⁵⁴ For example, excessive arrest rates were “proof” of Black people’s inferiority.⁵⁵ In *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty*, Dorothy Roberts argued that slavery was a state-sanctioned right to interfere with the Black body.⁵⁶ Black people’s freedom over their body was circumscribed by white slaveholders that would argue, Black people’s failure in the promise land of opportunity was a result of pathology – or an inherent, persistent desire to incite harm. Moreover, contemporary urban development and social policies were fashioned out of an exaggerated conception of Black criminality.⁵⁷

In *Deconstructing Tyrone: A New Look at Black Masculinity in the Hip Hop Generation*, Natalie Hopkinson argued that the hypermasculine and hypersexual figure of Tyrone became an expression of Black masculinity during the 1960’s.⁵⁸ Tyrone, once the militant revolutionary of the Civil Rights Era, evolved into the ‘pimp’ and ‘thug’ of the Hip-Hop age.⁵⁹ As a result, Black men became seen through the media lens stereotype – “all muscle, all defiance, an archetype converted to a hit single”.⁶⁰ Elijah Anderson (2008) argued that to understand this we must look at the pre-civil rights forbearers more closely.⁶¹ Black people of the 50’s began to emerge and challenge the system, which contributed to the figure of the Black male becoming ambiguous

⁵⁴ Muhammad, Khalil Gibran. 2010. *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Roberts, Dorothy. 1999. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Vintage Books.

⁵⁷ Muhammad, Khalil Gibran. 2010. *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁵⁸ Hopkinson, Natalie and Natalie Y. Moore. 2006. *Deconstructing Tyrone: a New Look at Black Masculinity in the Hip-Hop Generation*. San Francisco: Cleis Press.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid. Pg. 29

⁶¹ Anderson, Elijah. 2008. *Against the Wall: Poor, Young, Black, and Male*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

and fearsome.⁶² The social distance that was created as a result increased the alienation and marginalization within the Black male underclass.⁶³

Hopkinson's desire to examine Black masculinity from a variety of perspectives is valuable. Particularly, she looks at 'baby daddies', gay Black men, and Black men in various settings (i.e. school, work, and jail) to show how multifaceted Black men are. These findings could contribute to a more nuanced discussion of how Black men's understanding of their own masculinity and what it means to be a 'man' aligns or conflicts with the larger social perception of Black masculinity. Athena Mutua (2006) nuanced the question of what it means to be a Black man in terms of racial and gender identity.⁶⁴ She cited critical race, gender, and feminist scholars Patricia Hill Collins, Michael Eric Dyson, and Mark Anthony Neal who have examined how Black masculinity has become demonized.⁶⁵ Specifically, Mark Anthony Neal (2013) argues that the ways Black masculinity have been read and misread through American pop culture is complex.⁶⁶ Neal finds that Black men are bound by their legibility⁶⁷. That is, the most legible Black male bodies are the one's rendered as criminal and in need of policing and containment.⁶⁸ These stereotypical connotations of Blackness and maleness provide easily identifiable images of Black men in an era defined by shifts in racial, sexual, and gendered identities. Through a close examination of pop culture icons Jay-Z, R. Kelly, Luther Vandross, and the television show *The Wire*, Neal argues that positive representations of Black masculinity

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Mutua, Athena D. 2006. *Progressive Black Masculinities*. New York: Routledge.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Neal, Mark Anthony. 2013. *Looking for Leroy: Illegible Black Masculinities*. New York: New York University Press.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

can break the links in the public imagination that creates stigmas toward Black men.⁶⁹ As such, Mutua's method could have been expanded to include in-depth interviews of a wide array of Black men who understand and define their masculinity differently from one another. This would allow for Black masculinity to emerge as complex and antithetical of sweeping narratives of hypermasculinity.

While the literature on the criminalization of Black masculinity is extensive, there is a gap in the scholarship on the limitations of hypermasculinity as both a concept and rationale for Black men's uneven engagement in illicit behaviors. Particularly, there has been limited explorations of Black men's social context as contributory to their engagement in illicit behaviors. The closest examination of this is by Thomas Shapiro in *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality*, Shapiro found that racial inequality persists in the areas of asset accumulation (i.e. inheritance, savings accounts, stocks, bonds, home equity, and other investments).⁷⁰ Along with racial discrimination, this negatively impacts the lives of Black families by perpetuating the cycle of poverty and invalidating the gains earned in schools and on jobs. Shapiro's method involved conducting 200 interviews with families from Los Angeles, Boston, and St. Louis along with national survey data of 10,000 families to show how racial inequality is transmitted across generations.⁷¹ He found that without significant wealth, Black people remain trapped in communities that do not allow them move up the social ladder despite how hard they work.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Shapiro, Thomas M. 2004. *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁷¹ Ibid.

To remedy this, Patrick Sharkey (2013) argues that a new urban policy is necessary for dismantling the intergenerational transfer of neighborhood inequality.⁷² Sharkey holds that recent political decisions and current social policies have led to severe disinvestment from Black neighborhoods, which has allowed residential segregation to persist and economic opportunities to significantly decline.⁷³ While both authors shed light on the urban inequity that Black people disproportionately face, they do not make the connection of how these social realities are contributory to their engagement in illicit behavior. Moreover, it would have been compelling for Shapiro to examine how masculinity is taught and transmitted across generations to assess where Black men learn ‘how to be a man’ and how their understanding of manhood is projected onto and received by society in unintended ways.

Scholarly examination of racially biased education, social, and political reform policies are crucial to our understanding of Black men’s inability to become more than a stigma. Given that these policies cause more harm than relief, Black men remain a target on America’s racial landscape. Instead of criminalizing Black men by rationalizing that they are hypermasculine, we must look to policies that have been unable to remedy the inadequate conditions that lead Black men to enlist a life of violence and crime in the first place. In *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*, Victor Rios found that Latino and African-American boys are caught in an ongoing cycle of delinquency in a legal system that confines their opportunities for success.⁷⁴ Rios questioned how boys can develop a sense of self in the midst of crime and intense policing,

⁷² Sharkey, Patrick. 2013. *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress toward Racial Equality*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Rios, Victor M. 2011. *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. New York: New York University Press.

including punitive school policies.⁷⁵ Similarly, Ann Arnett Ferguson (2000) found that Black boys were disproportionately getting in trouble and suspended from the nation's school systems at alarming rates.⁷⁶ She questioned how students can endure school when educators believe there is a "cell with their name on it."⁷⁷ Rios followed a group of forty 'delinquent' Black and Latino boys for three years to understand the lives of young men in their developmental stage and to eliminate the culture of punishment that has been engrained in their daily lives and interactions.⁷⁸ Relatedly, Ferguson engaged in three years of participant observation research of 11 and 12-year-old boys who have been demarcated as 'bound for jail'.⁷⁹ Ferguson wanted to gather an extensive account of daily interactions to understand, from the perspective of Black, young males, how it feels to be labeled as unsalvageable.⁸⁰ Rios found that Black and Latino boys were profiled, punished, and harassed at young ages, even before they committed crimes.

In accord with the labeling theory (Becker, 1963), this led Black boys to act in accord with the negative markers that society expected of and placed upon them.⁸¹ On the contrary, Ferguson found that instead of internalizing these labels, Black boys began to look critically at schooling to evaluate the meaning and motivation behind the labels that have been attributed to them.⁸² Likewise, Rios found that the very system that limits opportunities for Black and Latino

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ferguson, Ann Arnett. 2000. *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

⁷⁷ Ibid. Pg. 12

⁷⁸ Rios, Victor M. 2011. *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. New York: New York University Press.

⁷⁹ Ferguson, Ann Arnett. 2000. *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Rios, Victor M. 2011. *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. New York: New York University Press.

⁸² Ferguson, Ann Arnett. 2000. *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

men can encourage resistance and an elevated consciousness that motivate some to transform their lives and become ‘productive citizens’.⁸³ Still, it seems that Carla Shedd’s (2015) explicit focus on the role of schools in reinforcing or ameliorating the social inequalities that shape the worlds of Black youth would offer insight on how oppressive structures can be modified to adequately service and meet the needs of marginalized students.

Combatting the War on Black Men

To decrease Black men’s subjugation and treatment as second-class citizens, it is crucial to understand the social realities of Black men living in urban, impoverished, and crime-ridden communities.⁸⁴ However, much of the literature on urban poverty, inequality, and racial and residential segregation does not move the discussion to a macro level to examine how the social context is important to understanding the stigmas that predispose Black men to a life of crime, failure, and hopelessness. There has yet to be a study critiquing how hypermasculinity, as a rationale, does not fully explain Black men’s disproportionate engagement in gun violence and crime. Nonetheless, the literature exposing the toxic milieu of Black men is extensive and imperative to future policy amendments.

One of the unfortunate social realities of Black men on the Southside of Chicago is that they suffer from hypersegregation in their neighborhoods. As such, they are unable to become homeowners and live in safer, ethnically-inclusive, and affluent neighborhoods. This negatively impacts these Black men’s ability to gain upward social mobility or a fair share of the ‘American Dream’. In *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, Nancy Denton and Douglas Massey found that the high rates of poverty amongst Blacks is linked to deliberate

⁸³ Rios, Victor M. 2011. *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. New York: New York University Press. Pg. 85

⁸⁴ Ibid.

segregation.⁸⁵ They discuss how the Black ghetto was created by whites to isolate growing urban Black populations. Despite the *Fair Housing Act of 1960*, segregation was perpetuated through a combination of individual actors and institutional and government policies.⁸⁶ Denton & Massey coined this process as hypersegregation, which is defined as the “systematic segregation of Blacks that led to the creation of the underclass community.”⁸⁷ Black residents of the ghetto were forced to adapt to their increasingly harsh environment and, in turn, would evolve attitudes, behaviors and practices that further marginalized their communities.

From this we have a framework for understanding Black men’s engagement in gun violence and crime as a result of being negatively influenced by the pervasive social disorder in their neighborhood. Robert Sampson (2012) supports this through his argument that individual outcomes are not a result of atomistic choices and reflect contingent decisions that unfold within “spatially grounded social structures and institutionalized processes that limit options for reducing existing inequalities.”⁸⁸ By contextualizing individual actors, Sampson can explore the extent to which neighborhoods influence larger social phenomena such as the systematic killing of marginalized people and urban inequity.

Scholars Martinez, Anderson and Wilson are renowned for their staunch positions on causal factors for uneven rates of [gun] violence and crime in urban locales. These scholars’

⁸⁵ Denton, Nancy A. and Douglas S. Massey. 1995. *American Apartheid*. Paris: Descartes.

⁸⁶ “Fair Housing Act—prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin and sex. Intended as a follow-up to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the bill was the subject of a contentious debate in the Senate, but was passed quickly by the House of Representatives in the days after the assassination of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. The act stands as the final great legislative achievement of the civil rights era.” Taken from: Anon. 2010. “Fair Housing Act of 1968.” *History.com*. Retrieved October 19, 2016 (<http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fair-housing-act>).

⁸⁷ Denton, Nancy A. and Douglas S. Massey. 1995. *American Apartheid*. Paris: Descartes. See page 9.

⁸⁸ Sampson, Robert J. 2012. *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

viewpoints are often placed in conversation with one another because of how incongruous they are. While Martinez argues the culture of poverty is causal to Black males' enactment of gun violence and crime, Anderson examines the role of the underground moral order that Black men adhere has on their *need* to use gun violence and crime as a mean to an end. On the other hand, Wilson examines the effect that racialized social welfare policies including, penal and education laws, have on Black men's use of gun violence and crime as a response to ongoing disparities in their ability to access essential resources. Cid Martinez (2016) found that severe rates of poverty are causal to inter-city conflict and violence.⁸⁹ In *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*, Elijah Anderson expands upon this claim and argues that inner-city violence is not sporadic but regulated through an informal, but pervasive, code of the street.⁹⁰ The code of the street is established through an individual's ability to command respect (power). When Black men are unable to access legitimate forms of work that pay a decent wage, they experience feelings of alienation and hopelessness such that they enact a code of the street to combat the stigma of their race. Elijah Anderson (1991) argued that this dilemma stems from Black and whites struggle for moral community.⁹¹ Black people, just as much as whites, desire a viable community where they have access to enriching opportunities; however, the racialized perception of Black men as 'hypermasculine' and innately deviant, leads whites to believe that Black people do not value, protect, or preserve their communities.

⁸⁹ Martinez, Cid Gregory. 2016. *The Neighborhood Has Its Own Rules: Latinos and African Americans in South Los Angeles*. New York: New York University Press.

⁹⁰ Anderson, Elijah. 1999. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

⁹¹ Anderson, Elijah. 1991. *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

These social stigmas have led to the conservation of the inner-city ghetto and the incessant plight of Black males.⁹² Black men have sought conflict mediation through the informal social control of avoidance, whereby Black men start to believe that they deserve the harsh realities they are surrounded by, so they evade any opportunity to challenge the system.⁹³ To combat this, Martinez argues that we must examine how “vibrant social institutions” (i.e. churches, gangs, and local politicians) have reduced conflict to a manageable level. On the contrary, William Julius Wilson (1987, 2009) argues that only public policy can change these racial stakes by reforming the institutions that reinforce them.⁹⁴

Black men continue to be targeted by the war on drugs, declining communities, and a flawed criminal justice system that functions as a contemporary structure of racial control, which perpetuates their status as second-class citizens. Michelle Alexander (2010) finds that racial justice has not ended in America; it has just been retitled.⁹⁵ She supports this through the argument that the election of Barack Obama has signaled a new era of colorblindness. In *The Many Colors of Crime: Inequalities, Race, Ethnicity, and Crime in America*, Ruth Peterson, Lauren Krivo, and John Hagan argue the importance of remembering that race and ethnicity govern how and why crimes are committed and enforced.⁹⁶ Peterson et al. claim that race and ethnicity condition the laws that make certain behaviors criminal, while influencing the

⁹² Wilson, William J. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: the Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wilson, William J. 2009. *More than Just Race: Being Black and Poor in the Inner City*. New York: Norton & Company.

⁹³ Martinez, Cid Gregory. 2016. *The Neighborhood Has Its Own Rules: Latinos and African Americans in South Los Angeles*. New York: New York University Press.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Alexander, Michelle. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: New Press.

⁹⁶ Peterson, Ruth D., Lauren Joy. Krivo, and John Hagan. 2006. *The Many Colors of Crime: Inequalities of Race, Ethnicity, and Crime in America*. New York: New York University Press.

perception of crime and those that are criminalized. Also, race and ethnicity decides who becomes a victim of crime.⁹⁷ This sheds light on the racialized processes behind why some individuals are more likely to be defined as criminal. Robert J. Sampson and John Laub (1991) argue that racialized criminalization practices provide a foundation for rethinking criminal justice policy, which does not include the importance of childhood behavior and adult social factors when determining criminality; both of which are essential to understanding stability and change in crime and deviance throughout the life course.⁹⁸

In *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Inequality*, Loïc Wacquant argues that these forms of penal policy are in response to social security. Therefore, the expansion of the prison was a political strategy aimed towards restructuring and strengthening the workforce.⁹⁹ From this we can begin to consider the climate of fear that shapes our national social security. We can begin to ask what, and, more importantly, who we are being safeguarded from. Given that Black people are subjected by mass incarceration, and, in turn, labor exploitation in prison, it seems that most penal policies are protecting society from trepidation surrounding Blackness. In *Punishing Race: A Continuing American Dilemma*, Michael Tonry argues that these “crime control policies” that disproportionately affect Black Americans are predicated on a lack of white empathy for Black people and from racial stereotypes.¹⁰⁰

Similarly, Loïc Wacquant (2008) argues that public policies have fostered racial separation and urban abandonment such that the Black ghettos of Chicago have experienced

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Sampson, Robert J. and John H. Laub. 1993. *Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turning Points through Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁹⁹ Wacquant Loïc J. D. 2009. *Punishing the Poor: the Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

¹⁰⁰ Tonry, Michael H. 2011. *Punishing Race: a Continuing American Dilemma*. New York: Oxford University Press.

increased marginality.¹⁰¹ He states that this stems from the decomposition of working-class territories suffering from mass unemployment.¹⁰² As wage labor becomes more fragmented, a new regime of marginality is fueled. To combat this many other forms of racial injustice in America, Tonry recommends the following proposals: (1) Police must stop racial profiling, (2) The emphasis of drug law enforcement must be shifted to focus on treatment and prevention, (3) Mandatory sentencing laws must be eliminated, and (4) Sentencing guidelines must change to allow judge's discretion. With these recommendations in place, Black men will be able to gain the institutional, political, and social support essential for improving the disastrous realities that plague their neighborhoods, while locating alternatives to enlisting a life of crime.

¹⁰¹ Wacquant Loïc J. D. 2008. *Urban Outcasts: a Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality*. Cambridge: Polity.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Limitations in the Literature

Within the sociological field, the literature surrounding Black men's uneven engagement in gun violence and crime has been misleading. On the one side, scholars argue that Black men enact gun violence because they are facing a war on poverty. The infamous 'culture of poverty' rationale holds that marginalized people are involved in a self-perpetuating poverty cycle deriving from a pathological lower-class structure.¹⁰³ The major weakness of this argument is that it bypasses the multitude of toxic social conditions and stigmas that Black men endure daily and narrowly focuses on severe rates of poverty. Moreover, the 'culture of poverty' argument holds that Black men are impoverished because of their own atomistic choices. In turn, many scholars have argued that Black men can overcome social barriers for attaining upward mobility by choosing to pursue enriching work and school opportunities as opposed to illegitimate forms of work. However, this does not examine accessibility concerns, particularly for Black men that have a criminal record and struggle with reentry. On the other side, scholars reason that gun violence is a byproduct of the current state of urban, impoverished underresourced communities of color. That is, gun violence is an effect of the increasing presence of social disorder. However, this does not include an analysis of the actors behind the proliferation of gun violence or a discussion of their rationales for engagement. Specifically, how narratives of hypermasculinity have adversely contributed to Black men's self-concept and need to enlist a life of crime.

This thesis aims to bridge and expand upon these two major points of sociological inquiry by arguing that Black men's disproportionate engagement in gun violence and crime is in response to an internalization of the label of hypermasculinity, which predisposes them to a life

¹⁰³ Stack, Carol B. 1983. *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*. New York: Harper & Row.

of crime. I argue that hypermasculinity is inherently flawed and should be a point of contention amid race scholars in the 21st century because it does not include any discussion of the social context as contributory to Black men's uneven engagement in illicit behaviors. Dissimilar to the extant literature, I argue that the social context includes more than an exploration of Black men's poverty rates. The social context also examines how the presence of social disorder in the neighborhood works in tandem with flawed, racialized public policies to insidiously encourage Black men to enlist a life of crime.

From this, the multifactorial and contingent nature of criminality will be exposed. Also, more nuance can be given to popular sociological debates on Black men getting involved with gun violence simply because they are poor. Indeed, Black men are experiencing a war on poverty, which shapes their burgeoning accessibility concerns regarding gaining access to resources essential for improving their livelihoods. However, this unfortunate social reality is a result of contradictory, racialized public policies, which have circumscribed the alleged rights and freedoms that Black men have access to. For instance, educational and penal policies continuously predispose Black men to a life of crime, while doing little to improve the conditions that relegate Black men's positionality and worth and lead them to criminality in the first place.

Hypotheses

In consideration of the limitations expressed in the foregoing section, I set forth the following hypotheses:

1. *The labeling process associated with hypermasculinity is racialized and predisposes Black men to a life of crime and failure.*
2. *Hypermasculinity, as a rationale, is inherently flawed because it does not include a discussion of Black men's social context as contributory to their engagement in gun violence and crime.*
3. *Combatting the war on Black men requires a city-wide restructuring of how finances and other resources are allocated, along with adaptations to public, penal, and education policies.*

Methods

To support the hypotheses I set forth, I conducted fifteen in-depth interviews of Black young men from the Southside of Chicago between the months of January and March of 2017. The men who participated in these interviews found through a snowball sample. Snowball sampling is a non-probability method of data collection in which research subjects can make referrals of individuals who be beneficial to participate in the study. In this way, my research subjects were active participants and I was unable to bias the sample by cherry-picking individuals that I personally knew from the neighborhood. The only controls I had is that the individuals selected must identify as a Black male, live on the Southside of Chicago, and are between the ages of 17 and 30.

To ensure the safety of my research participants, I allowed them to choose pseudonyms for themselves. If they did not choose or want a pseudonym, I referred to them with a standardized tag: P1, P2, P3 and so forth. The 'P' stands for participant and the number that follows represents the order in which I interviewed them (i.e. P1 = the first participant that I interviewed, so P5 = the fifth participant that I interviewed). While I could have selected names for these individuals, there was still a chance that I could bias the study or, inadvertently, cause erroneous assumptions to be made about the identities of these men based on the name I assigned them. Furthermore, I wanted to grant these men agency to choose how they were referenced in my analysis. After conducting the interviews, I was sure to remove any biographical information that could expose the identity of the participant. This included, but was not limited to, addresses and street names, specific locations/hangout spots on the Southside of Chicago, nicknames, name of high school, family member names, and any private information such as social security numbers, birthdays, and any other evidence that could link the person to engagement in illicit

behaviors. To assist with this, I allowed my research participants to choose the locale they wanted to be interviewed. The locations these men chose included their home, school, or a coffee shop outside of the neighborhood. It was crucial that my research subjects felt safe and comfortable throughout the interview process. However, if there was any point that they no longer wanted to take part in the interview, they were given the option to opt out. However, none of my interviewees reneged on completing the interview. As a token of my appreciation for participating in the research study, I provided each interviewee with a free snack and/or beverage.

The interview consisted of fourteen sections of questions. The first question of each section is the main point of inquiry, while the rest of the questions in the sections are follow-up questions if something was not clear or I wanted them to further expand upon certain points they mentioned in their previous response. **Please see 'Appendix 1' attached for the full set of interview questions.* The interview questions were geared towards understanding Black men's social context and how it has impacted their engagement in illicit behaviors. The interview is all-encompassing and includes the following topics: neighborhood conditions, access to school and work, home life and family, financial security, illegitimate forms of work, leisure activities, interactions with the law, self-image, and thoughts on society's view and treatment of Black men. From this set of questions, I was able to expose many of the inadequacies that plague Black men's lived experience, including their inability to gain access to resources essential for improving their livelihoods.

The answers to these questions allowed me to confirm the correlation between the systemic criminalization, punishment, and enslavement of Black men and their increasing need to engage in illicit behaviors. The interview questions were structured to present the social

context as all-encompassing. The end of the interview intentionally inquired about Black men's self-image to understand how they viewed themselves in the world. Were these Black men walking stigmas that perpetuate narratives of hypermasculinity or were they aware of the labels that have been placed upon them by society? If it is the latter, how were these Black men combatting this unfortunate social reality? That is, how do Black men overcome the narratives that predispose them to a life of crime and failure? To answer these questions, I placed the testimonies of Black men at the forefront of this research project. From here, the media, Police, and racist institutions and structures can begin to see that Black men's rationales for engaging in illicit behaviors are multifaceted, complex, and valuable. As these Black men began to attribute culpability to the inequality-reproducing structures and laws (i.e. Broken Windows Policing) that have failed them, these findings will contribute to public policy proposals that can support and protect them.

Defense of Methodological Approach

In crafting an apropos methodological approach for my research project, I looked to various scholars doing similar work that have contributed innovative findings to the scholarly field. For instance, in *Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago*, Laurence Ralph's method involved talking with the people whose lives were irreparably damaged by gun violence to understand how they cope and can be better assisted.¹⁰⁴ Ralph interviewed mothers, grandmothers, pastors, activists, and gang leaders to have a more complete narrative of how people of color are living with both physical and psychological injuries for the rest of their lives.¹⁰⁵ In-depth interviewing is a valuable, underutilized sociological method. To understand

¹⁰⁴ Ralph, Laurence. 2014. *Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

the lives of marginalized people, it is best to gather information directly from the source, particularly considering how the media exploits their narratives.

In tandem with in-depth interviewing, David Harding (2010) conducted an ethnographic study of adolescent boys growing up in two very poor areas and one working-class area.¹⁰⁶ Harding's findings from the first two poor neighborhoods are the most relevant to my project. He found that violence in the neighborhood and identification divide the city into spaces: safe, neutral, and dangerous. As such, social relationships are developed by residential space. Carol Stack (1983) took this a step further by doing an anthropological study of the poorest section of an African American community to examine the family dynamics of second-generation, impoverished urbanites who depend on welfare benefits.¹⁰⁷ Through this method, Stack could describe the kinship networks through which family members exchange essential goods, services, and cash that allow them to survive in a community characterized by social disorder. These scholars' methods align with mine given their ability to examine the pervasiveness of negative social stigmas in the Black community and how they have shaped and embedded inequality into institutions such that Black people's ability to access resources is limited.

In *The Stickup Kids: Race, Drugs, Violence, and the American Dream*, Randol Contreras used participant observation in order to offer both a personal and theoretical account for the rise of the 'Stickup Kids' along with an exploration of casual factors for their involvement in violent behaviors.¹⁰⁸ This method is useful for my methodological approach given its ability to weave together history, biography, and social structure. Particularly, personal biography is not often

¹⁰⁶ Harding, David J. 2010. *Living the Drama: Community, Conflict, and Culture among Inner-City Boys*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

¹⁰⁷ Stack, Carol B. 1983. *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*. New York: Harper & Row.

¹⁰⁸ Contreras, Randol. 2013. *The Stickup Kids: Race, Drugs, Violence, and the American Dream*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

included in the literature and is not usually considered an effective method of data collection; however, it is valuable for the researcher to have an interpersonal relationship to their work. This will allow their findings to not only be statistically significant, but also resonate with people at a socio-emotional level.

Likewise, In *Down, out, and under Arrest: Policing and Everyday Life in Skid Row*, Forrest Stuart divulged how he was stopped fourteen times during his first year working in Los Angeles for standing on the street.¹⁰⁹ One of the women Stuart interviewed was stopped over 100 times and arrested 60 times for sitting on the sidewalk, which was an arrestable crime in Los Angeles. Stuart questioned what purpose did these arrests have for Juliette on society.¹¹⁰ The brilliance of this work is its ability to examine everyday people who are wrongfully profiled, policed, and arrested for enacting their freedoms. For instance, Stuart discusses how the government cuts financial support for citizens, but spends an excessive amount of money on policing the poor and building prisons.¹¹¹ As a result, we are at a time where distrust between the Police and residents of low-income, underresourced communities of color is unprecedented. One of the major strengths of Stuart's work is his vulnerability in including his own experiences in Skid Row with being policed. Behind the accolades and achievements, Stuart shows that not even he is exempt from wrongful policing. This speaks volume to the alleged fair and equal society we live in.

¹⁰⁹ Stuart, Forrest. 2016. *Down, out, and under Arrest: Policing and Everyday Life in Skid Row*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Analysis of Findings

Note

An integral determinant of the success of this research study is predicated on making sense of Black men's social context despite its expansiveness and variability. Although I limited my case study to the Southside of Chicago and controlled for who could participate in this project via operating a snowball sample, it was particularly challenging to weave together a comprehensive, yet nuanced, narrative of Black men's experience with racial injustice, urban inequity, and a general lack of access to resources, which all work in tandem, I argue, to create the perfect storm of disenfranchisement that predispose them to a life of crime. Considering the inevitability of a project of this caliber and magnitude lacking perfect cohesion, I find it important to highlight the multifaceted and complex nature of Black men's experience on the Southside of Chicago, especially how these narratives problematize our current conceptions of masculinity and criminality.

To do this, I will not be analyzing my findings in accordance to the order of the interview. While the structure of some subsequent sections may correspond to the layout and order of the interview questionnaire, this is not the case for all the analysis. The overarching structure of my analysis was created in consideration of the following. Although these men come from and/or live in urban, impoverished communities of color, their experiences are staunchly distinctive. Though, some disparaging facets of their livelihoods, in respect to being limited in their ability to gain opportunities for upward mobility, are quite analogous. These similarities, in part, were due to either a lack of access to society's powerful institutions or a hypervisibility propagated through the media's exploitative rhetoric aimed at delineating Black men as unsalvageable and unfit for participation in society. This hypervisibility comes in the form of delineating Black men as hypermasculine – or innately deviant with a predisposition to incite

harm and violence. In lieu of this, it is important that this project exposes how Black men are unable to function and engage in their own racial formation in a society that condemns their very existence based on preconceived notions about their value. From here, I will have the tools necessary for constructing policy recommendations aimed towards providing Black men with the reparations they are owed as well as a renewed opportunity to seek out advantageous opportunities that can promote them out of social, economic, and political marginalization.

Analysis

To do this, we must first interrogate the living conditions of Black men, which foster their disenfranchisement in every sphere of society. When asked to describe their neighborhood, each of the interview subjects identified living in a predominately Black, impoverished community that lacked sustainable resources. One research participant, T. Dot, who is twenty years old and a current college student stated,

“I guess I stay in a working-class community. It’s mainly Black people. We don’t got a lot of resources inside of our community but we have a lot of resources outside of our community like recreational centers, studios, and stuff. We got a lot of food deserts in our community. The people are relatively nice. It’s a lot of old people in our community. Those are the people that have seen us grow up – me and my family. We have a lot of violence in our community like gang violence but it’s not as bad as some other places. Other than that, it’s pretty decent.”

Interesting to note, T. Dot mentioned living amid a food desert and not having access to grocery stores that offer fresh produce and quality food. Later, when asked what he encountered on his route to school, T. Dot stated,

“You know I would notice that there are a lot of fast-food restaurants...like the bad fast-food restaurants like McDonalds and Burger King and Harold’s Chicken. You wouldn’t see any Pete’s Produce or Mariano’s in African-American communities, which isn’t good. In communities up North, you don’t see a lot of fast food restaurants – you mainly

see a lot of grocery stores with fresh produce. That was always interesting to notice because you put these chains of restaurants where there are a lot of Black people residing because you make the most money there. It's the most unhealthy, but you'll make a lot of money there.”

This is indicative of local government's lack of care and involvement within communities, like where T. Dot is from.

Instead of refurbishing the food deserts and offering low-income, impoverished communities the chance to buy adequate groceries that could assist in the promotion of their health, development, and well-being, they build fast-food restaurants that offer subpar food at a bargain price. This also leads community members to distrust local government because they feel relegated and abandoned considering the lack of essential resources they are afforded. T. Dot also notices how in more affluent neighborhoods, particularly on the Northside of Chicago, there are more grocery stores. This is suggestive of Black people's treatment as undeserving of access to fresh produce and groceries due to the conditions of their neighborhoods and their meager financial status. However, residential segregation continues to be a pervasive in society, especially racial and economic stratification within major metropolitan areas like Chicago. Therefore, most Black people living in urban, impoverished communities of color are forced to reside there and lack control over their mobility.

Because of this, most Black people in Chicago are relegated to the Southside while whites typically live up North. This is reminiscent of the North/South divide of the Slavery era. The South constituted a cesspool of degradation because of the Black people that were enslaved and relegated to life on the plantation, while the North represented prosperity and opportunities for upward mobility. Even after the culmination of legally-sanctioned Jim Crow slavery, Black people's move Northbound was not sustainable. In contemporary society, Black people who

struggle to make a living wage in cities on the East and West Coast, and increasingly in the Midwest, find themselves moving back down South where the cost of living is more affordable.

When asked whether they like where they currently live, these Black men's responses varied. Most of the research participants identified liking their community, but felt as though they could "do better". One research participant, P4, who was 19 years old and working at a local Post Office, identified liking where he lives, but ultimately wanting to move because of the scarce availability of resources. P4 stated,

"I like it but I would like to change because, um...[sic] I would want to change where I live because it's not a lot that goes on in terms of outreach programs to branch you out and diversify you and expose you to other kids and programs. We don't really get a lot of that, so that's the reason I want to move, especially for my little brother and sister so they can have better opportunities in the community."

The pressure to afford better opportunities to his siblings was a driving force in P4's desire to move out of his home community. Another interviewee, Bashy, who's 27 years old and currently on house arrest for violating his parole, stated, "Yeah I love where I live at, but I know I could do better. Like I could be somewhere better like where [sic] other people at." Both interviewees identified lacking essential resources and access to the opportunities that are inequitably distributed to more affluent communities. In turn, despite how much these men value their home communities, their survival within them was circumscribed because of how underresourced they are.

In addition, Luther, a current Junior at a Midwestern college, noted that his neighborhood had alarming rates of crime and violence surrounding it, but he was able to locate peace on his block. He stated,

"My home just got recently broken into, but it was a string of occurrences because a lot of people on my block house got broken into in January. For years, it was so quiet on the

street – there would only be a few things happening on the street. People would be playing in the street or smoking in the street. You could go out and look at the stars, so I liked it for the peaceful aspect. We always lived around violence though. We lived in a part of the community that was not as violent as some other parts. My older brother got robbed at gun point like two blocks away from our house, but that never happened to me. We would run and play basketball up and down the street, but there would be these occurrences. Other than that, it was peaceful. No matter where I lived though, we always heard police sounds – like always.”

T. Dot shared a similar position of his home community being quieter and more peaceful versus where he went to school. He stated, “In Urbanland, there’s also a lot of gangbangers, so you’ll see people standing on the corner and things like that. It’s more busy. Um, it’s more active. It’s more...what can I say. There’s more action if you will. My neighborhood is more peaceful; it’s more quiet, but in Urbanland there’s always something going on. There’s also police on every corner.” P12, a 29-year-old Uber driver, shared,

“At my first house, I lived there in elementary school, it was small and there were rats in our house. The neighborhood was raided with violence. One time I saw someone get gunned down in front of my house and when I looked out of my window, there was blood everywhere. I was kept very insolated. I was held at gunpoint cause I disobeyed my parents and did something I shouldn’t have. It was done [sic] by these guys I used to play basketball with. When I was alone they told me to give them my money, but I told them I didn’t have any money and they pulled a gun on me and said, ‘you lucky I’m going to spare your life.’”

All three research subjects, while complete strangers and live in different neighborhoods on the Southside of Chicago, identified being surrounded by an overwhelming amount of violence. Certainly, this reality contributes to the negative outlook that society has on their neighborhoods because of the pervasiveness of the violence that borders them. Still, these are the places that these men consider home in which they can find peace, safety, and security amid the mayhem

they were exposed to daily. Luther went on to note how playing basketball in his community helped him evade “countless” life-threatening situations. He stated,

“Basketball was a very community-tying thing that saved me from getting jumped countless times. We would pull out the rim in front of my house and hoop every Sunday night and kids from all different blocks would come and play. There was one time I was walking from school and some guys approached me at gunpoint again with the intention to rob me and they asked where I’m from and I told them my block name and they said, ‘oh you hoop over there, you’re good’ [sic]. That was another instance where basketball saved my life.”

In addition, both T. Dot and Luther noted hearing Police sirens their respective communities on the Southside of Chicago. This is quite peculiar considering that both men identified living in safe havens that were quiet “with not much going on”; however, they were still heavily policed and surveilled. While one could argue that this was a preventative tactic of the Police to dissuade the spreading of violence into these men’s respective communities, perhaps something more insidious is liable; violence was not being policed in these quiet neighborhoods, Black men (the *likely* perpetrators of violence) were. From these men’s lived experiences within their neighborhoods, it seemed like they had been relatively safe all their lives – at least safer than they were in the communities that bordered their neighborhood. If this was the case, why would the police waste time and resources patrolling these men’s respective communities instead of some of the surrounding neighborhoods where violence and crime was rampant?

Considering this unfortunate reality of Black men, it is important to consider how Black men become inextricably linked to deviant and illicit behaviors such that their very existence warrants the presence of law enforcement. This is particularly interesting to consider when there is no threat of imminent harm or reasonable suspicion that a crime is likely to occur. Many of the

interviewees did not mention feeling safer with the police present in their neighborhood. Bashy was asked whether he considered his home environment to be safe. He responded, “Um, while I’m here yeah, but when I’m gone nah. With that being said, if I’m in the house or something, then it’s safe. If I’m gone somewhere or I’m out and about, I don’t feel too comfortable with leaving my Grandma here by herself.” When asked what was his view of authority and law enforcement, T. Dot responded, “I don’t really like the Police cause they kill Black people. Like I see the police and I go the opposite way. I don’t even call the Police if I’m in trouble, I call somebody else. As far as authority, I have respect for authority. People get into authority positions for different reasons and it’s important what you do with that authority.” Both interviewees do not perceive the Police to be an advocate for them in a time of crisis.

In the case of Bashy, he feels the most comfort when he’s around the house to look after and care for his Grandmother. He was uncomfortable with the notion of the Police ‘taking care of’ or protecting his Grandmother even though it is their duty. As far as T. Dot, he identified a desire to avoid the Police by any means necessary. Generally, amid my interviewees there seemed to be a fear of the Police as if they posed more of a threat than a remedy to the proliferation of violence and crime. Interesting to note, T. Dot viewed the Police and an authority figure as mutually exclusive, noting that he had respect for authority so long as they were using their power to do good. I’m left with the following query: if the increased presence of the Police in urban, impoverished communities of color poses a threat to the current law and order through inciting more harm than good, then what type of accountability are Police taking for the perpetual fear and discomfort that their presence evokes?

In respect to familial dynamics, many of the research participants identified having close, tight-knit bonds with their family. However, most of the interviewees grew up in single-parent

households where a matriarchal figure was tasked with caring and providing for them, their siblings, and all the household expenses. Considering this finding, I wanted to interrogate the relationship, if any, that these men had with their fathers or male figures in their lives. My findings were quite telling of the lack of positive male influence in these men's lives. This is critical for understanding the transition to manhood (i.e. how boys learn how to become men) and how that newfound understanding of masculinity manifests itself in society, particularly one in which there are pervasive, negative stereotypes that delineate Black men as hypermasculine. If, in fact, these men are acting in accordance with hypermasculinity's presuppositions, I argue that they are not learning or inheriting these traits from their fathers because they are not in these boy's lives. This debunks the claim that Black men have an innate (biological – passed down through generations) tendency to incite harm.

When asked to describe his relationship with his family, Charlie, who's 24 and currently unemployed stated,

“We all pretty close like we all get along for the most part, but we all go through things. I'm closer to my Mom and my little brother and sister more than anything, like I'm closer to them than I am my Dad. I talk to my Mom every day. I talk to my brother every day. Like with my Dad, we talk to each other once a month – that type of thing. But we all look out for each other.”

Because of the non-traditional relationship that Charlie has with his Dad, it is reasonable to assume that his father has been unable to teach him about manhood. In addition, it is uncertain that Charlie would even want to learn about being a man from his Dad considering that he has not been fully present in his life. Also, from the limited encounters he had with his Dad, Charlie noted getting into many physical altercations that “would get real bad”. Charlie physically fighting his father is telling of his lack of respect for his father's position as a parent and

authority figure; therefore, he, beyond a reasonable doubt, learned about manhood from an alternative source.

Luther, on the other hand, grew up with a step Dad as his father figure while his biological father was incarcerated for stealing a car. Still, Luther identified having a distant and tumultuous relationship with his step Dad, which negatively impacted the development of his social skills and understanding of manhood. He stated,

“My real father left when we were about five or six. Our mom said that our Dad didn’t want to see us anymore because he would say he wanted to meet up with us but nine times out of ten he wouldn’t show up. That left a scar in me that didn’t heal until recently. Now, my step father is in the picture and for a long time I resented him cause I felt like he wasn’t an adequate parent because I was psychologically and physically abused. My relationship with my step Dad was socially awkward and it made me and my little brother not as communicative. Every time he would come around we would get tense like, ‘oh is he going to punch or is he going to pinch us, is he going to fuck with us or mess with our heads’. Anything would warrant a whooping. There was something else going on that he was trying to project onto us. This made us have poor social skills.”

Perhaps, most interesting is Luther’s understanding that there was something innately wrong with his step Dad that caused him to “project” his frustrations onto his family. Many young men internalize the behaviors and actions that occur within a dysfunctional home setting and believe that they are the cause of them; however, the behaviors that Luther described of his father are usually pathological and stem from childhood abuse or neglect. Luther expressed that he learned of his step Dad’s coarse childhood at a family meeting this past summer. Before then, he identified his home being,

“Emotionally and physically unsafe. Emotionally unsafe because I felt like I could never express how I felt about anything until the family meeting we had in the summer. That was years of built-up stuff. Physically unsafe because he was a walking bomb – anything could set it off. But if there’s anything my step Dad taught me it’s how to believe in God

and work ethic. Those were two of the best things I learned from him. With my mom, I felt like I could always confide in her and she was a rock for me. Now, I feel a lot safer at home but it was a rollercoaster for a while.”

Even though Luther learned valuable lessons from his step Father, namely to believe in God and the importance of hard work, this was not enough to overshadow or erase the memories of his step Dad’s violent past that affected his social interactions. Like many of the research subjects, Luther gained solace, protection, love, and support mainly from his Mother. Usually, women are not only tasked with providing shelter, clothing, resources, and support to their children, but they, disproportionately, must teach their sons how to be men in society.

In respect to having financial stability and an adequate education, the testimonies of these men are emblematic of the unfair society that we live in which legitimate forms of work and attending school, despite, its claims, are not the *great equalizers* for Black men. Most of the research participants still living at home with their parents identified having only enough money for clothes and food – nothing beyond that. For instance, T. Dot’s Mom currently works for Uber after quitting her job at a bank once her own Mother fell ill. His Dad works but does not provide for his family financially. As far as education, T. Dot’s Father did not complete high school and his Mother finished two years of college but was forced to leave once she got pregnant with T. Dot. This is a common narrative within Black families where one or both parents must sacrifice their ability to gain opportunities for upward mobility because they have children and greater responsibilities to tend to.

Even P12, who was not a first-generation college student whose step Dad went back to college to complete his Bachelor’s degree in theology and Mother got a Master’s Degree, noted pursuing college was not going to alleviate all the financial burdens that plague him and his family. He went on to state “my dad is a pastor, so it’s free labor, like at his church they don’t

believe in paying a salary. For my mom, she couldn't really ask for more cause she didn't feel comfortable. Even though my dad gets paid to be a truck driver, too, a truck driver [sic] with a theology degree can't really ask for more." This automatically inculcates a financial deficit into the intergenerational transfer of wealth within Black families. That is, Black families struggle to provide their children with the opportunities and resources they need to improve the conditions of their livelihood; therefore, wealth disparities become intergenerationally engrained and nearly impossible to fully escape. For example, Bashy discussed how his daughter was his biggest financial responsibility. However, because he is on house arrest his ability to work, and therefore, provide for her financially, is diminished. Even though Bashy has dreams of being an entrepreneur through owning his own lawn-care business, the chances of him gaining work experience or a loan to jumpstart his business are abysmal because he has a criminal record. When asked what he was convicted of he said, U UW (Unlawful Use of a Weapon), which is a violent crime in Illinois, thus making him look even more menacing to society. This not only further negatively impacts the perception that he is a criminal and miscreant, but it circumscribes his ability to fully reenter society. Instead of exploring why it is that Bashy felt the need to use a weapon, namely his lack of trust in Police as a legitimate form of law enforcement that can protect him and his family, society writes him off as unworthy of participation.

While unjustifiable, it makes sense that Bashy, like many of the other men interviewed, have illegitimate sources of labor to provide for themselves financially. For instance, P7, who is 18 and currently finishing his last year of high school, said that selling drugs and "cracking cards" would make him an average of \$5,000 a week. Cracking cards involved stealing individuals credit card information and using it to make unwarranted, illegal purchases. With that money, P7 would assist his Mother with bills and buy jewelry, clothes, and shoes. When asked if

he found this form or work helpful, he noted that there are perks to having access to quick money, but said the consequences of jail time, being robbed, or getting shot were not worth it, so he must be careful. Important to note, the consequences, while frightening, were not enough to get P7 to cease his engagement in illicit activities. When asked what he would need to stop engaging in a life of crime, Woody, a 24-year-old male who is currently unemployed, stated, “I would need like... probably like to be in a better environment. Better things for my daughter that she can learn from. It ain’t too many people out here ready to teach the kids like I used to get taught and stuff like that. They’ll just tell you and it just be over it. I don’t like that – I like for them to learn something.” As explicated in the following, school – the golden institution of learning – did not present itself as the bearer of prosperity for these Black men or their progeny.

Unfortunately, school did not present itself as an alternative to these men’s need to engage in illicit behaviors to gain sustainable resources and improve the detrimental conditions of their livelihoods. While many of my research participants liked school for the most part, they did not find it beneficial or able to offer them the ability to immediately remedy their financial woes. In addition, school was a site for the reproduction of narratives of hypermasculinity that predisposed Black men to a life of crime. For instance, two of my research participants attended male high schools that, they identified, harbored toxic notions of masculinity. P3, a 22-year-old day-care teacher mentioned that at his alma mater, X Academy, “There was also a lot of testosterone going around so boys would fight and gangbang, but I guess it was a normal high school for an all-boy’s school.” While he noted that the school taught him how to be professional because of the strict uniform requirement of suit jackets, a tie, trousers, and dress shoes, he did not capitalize off school’s true benefits like learning good study habits. Overall, P3 regarded high school as an “OK experience”. It is quite frightening to think that the presence of gangbang

and fighting over turf was delineated by P3 as customary. From this, it is easy to understand how conceptions of masculinity and standards for Black men's behavior in society can easily become inflated. Also, if young boys only have violent, hypermasculine perceptions or models of men (i.e. men who fight all the time and are aggressive and violent), how can we blame them for normalizing these behaviors and acting in accord with what they are exposed to?

Teachers and administrators were not much assistance in remedying this social reality for Black young men either. Bashy noted, "It wasn't like grammar school where they help you learn, they tell you to do something that's that. You gotta figure it out on your own or ask your friend or something like that. It ain't like it posed to be." In this way, teachers were often complicit in many of the disparities that young, Black men experienced in the classroom by not considering the additional guidance they needed based on the variant lived experiences that they carried with them (unlike some of their peers). Black men's experiences in the classroom also inadvertently deepened their view of the education system as useless. Furthermore, this newfound viewpoint supported their need to take on illegitimate means of gaining success outside America's Exceptionalism equation of hard work + education = success, which had not worked for them.

There is also a direct feedback cycle between these young men's social context and their experiences with schooling. Some of my research participants who attended neighborhood schools identified getting into many fights and being suspended from school because of turf wars between rivaling gangs in their community that manifested itself in school. Bashy had a normalizing response, stating, "That's how it used to be. It used to be like that. It was like some people didn't like me because of the type of people I hang with and stuff like that or they might see that I'm doing better than them and be hating." There was also a lack of concern towards getting suspended from school for fighting. P14, a current Junior in high school, had an

interesting response, “at the time I didn’t really care cause I still got good grades. As long as like.... I did want I wanted to do. If I wanted to fight, that was fine. If I didn’t want to fight, that was fine. If you get into a fight, as long as you win it don’t matter if you get in trouble.” When I asked about his family’s response to his suspension, he stated, “Just like...they ask me what happened and I’d tell them. They would always tell me if somebody mess with me to tell and if it happens again to tell again but if it happens a third time beat them up, so I never really got in trouble for that type of stuff. But me getting in trouble for detentions and stuff stopped after sophomore year.” Considering that P14 never received punishment for his aggressive behavior in school (i.e. getting suspended for fighting), it would make sense that he viewed these behaviors as normal or, as his mother encouraged, a self-defense mechanism.

This is particularly interesting considering that single mothers raising sons usually teach or encourage them to ‘fight back’ or ‘defend’ themselves against bullies because it is the advice they would expect a father to impart to his son. However, because P14, like many of the other research participants, grew up without their biological fathers in their lives, it is nearly impossible to presume what their fathers would teach them in this situation. Therefore, we must remember that a significant portion of the Black male population learns how to ‘be a man’ from their Mother who, while good intentioned, has no personal experience with manhood other than what they have seen propagated in the media or based on their own morals and beliefs systems, which are innately different from that of a man.

There was also a feedback cycle between the deplorable state of these Black men’s communities to life behind bars in the penal system. Essentially, living amid the mayhem and disorder of their neighborhood was no better than being incarcerated. One of my research participants, P8, a 28-year-old self-acclaimed motivational speaker, when asked how was his

neighborhood was like prison, stated, “Umm, basically everybody had they own gang. You messed with people or you didn’t. You went over there or you stayed over here. It’s the same way.” He went on to say, “I ain’t gone stunt like with prison, I ain’t gone say its aight [sic] cause I don’t wish that shit on nobody but it’s cooler than being in the county. It ain’t like what people think it is like (i.e. people being on that gay stuff). It ain’t even like that, it’s what you make it. It’s like being in the real world. You got friends or you don’t. You got motherfuckers that like you or you don’t.” The correlation between urban, impoverished communities and prison is reified through the ways in which the Police are overactive within these neighborhoods often hyper-patrolling Black males as ‘suspicious’, threatening, and likely suspects or perpetrators of criminal activities. For instance, T. Dot, when asked if the Police ever stopped questioned or frisked him, he stated,

“I never been frisked before, but I’ve been pulled over in my car but that was just for speeding. They’ll be rude or assume that because I have a nice car it’s not mine and it’s been stolen or they’ll follow me around because I play my music loud. Um, like one time I got pulled over and the police was following me for no reason and um, they had pulled me over [sic]. When I know the police following me, I’ll pull over at somebody house and park my car in their driveway and slowly walk up the stairs like it’s my car, so I did that, but he stopped me before I could park. He has asked me whose car it was and I said mine. He pulled me over for a headlight but he was questioning me about where I was going and then he said he never seen a kid my age driving a nice looking car like this but he was really talking about cause I was Black.”

This is exemplar of the extent to which Black men must go to prove their innocence to a Police Officer, who other than responding to broken taillight or a routine traffic stop for speeding, have no just cause or reasonable suspicion of guilt to interrogate these men. Still, this goes to show how some Police Officers (un)consciously project their implicit racial bias onto the Black male body which transfers their position from invisible to visible *subject*. This hypervisibility of Black

men within their own communities indoctrinates a culture of fear whereby their cultural expression and individuality is criminalized. For example, as T. Dot alluded to, the Police would follow him because he was playing loud music, which was unthreatening and did not incite mayhem, disorder, and arguably, did not ‘disturb the peace’ since it occurred in the late afternoon when he was on his way from school.

In addition, as T. Dot astutely noticed, the Police was not surprised, as they had lead on, because he possessed a nice car at such a young age, but were most likely surprised that a Black male had access to nice belongings. This perpetuates the notion that Black men do not care about themselves, their property, or the people around them. Carelessness, in this sense, usually becomes conflated with the Police’s view of Black men as lawless. Even more, Black men’s first brush with racism and injustice is usually connected to the Police, who are supposed to be the law enforcers that ‘protect and serve’. T. Dot illustrates this in his reaction to the Police Officer who pulled him over, stating,

“I was respectful, just trying to get out of the situation so I could get home because I was just coming home from school. That’s crazy, though, now that I think about it, I never had anybody say nothing like that me before cause I was Black. It ain’t nothing I can do about it though. I was just wondering, why me? But as long as I got out of the situation safe, that’s all I can ask for.”

Again, I am left wondering where is the Police accountability for inciting these feelings of fear and discomfort amongst the people they are supposed to be serving? Why are Black people, Black men, especially, the most fearful of the outcome of their interactions with law enforcement? If the Police are not following the rules and guidelines surrounding their role as a national authority figure, how do they expect their constituents to follow them?

To answer the latter question, I asked my research participants who they feel makes the rules in society that they are supposed to adhere to. Overwhelmingly, these Black men attributed

regulatory power to multiple entities outside of the Police or law-enforcement agencies. One interviewee, P15, who was 18-years-old and affiliated with a major gang, mentioned the Police with uncertainty, but ultimately noted that the elders in the community held the power, stating, “Maybe the Police...I don’t know. Probably the elders. They seen the kids grow up, so if the old folks say something the kids gone respect them like, that’s Grandma, that’s OG.” Another interviewee, Rino, who was 25-years-old and taking care of his ill Grandmother, mentioned,

“What governs us is the beliefs that we’ve accepted into our societal mind [sic] and once you accept the belief and act in accordance with the belief, then it’s true. We live in this invisible world of beliefs, ideas, and concepts that are outdated. The fact that I can’t wear locs at my job. If I want to color my shit blue with periwinkle stripes, I can do that shit. These beliefs don’t serve us anymore. As long as the main societal systems keeps perpetuating those outdated beliefs, we’re going to act in accord with them.”

Rino was more introspective than other interviewees and viewed Black people as autonomous beings with the power and authority to create their own set of rules and regulate their own behavior. Although not explicitly stated, I believe Rino was also alluding to color-blind racist ideologies that permeate society’s major institutions that harbor “outdated” and ahistorical conceptions about the worth and positionality of Black men in society as second-class citizens. As Rino illustrated, this can be supported through Black men’s inability to wear their natural hair in dreadlocks in the workplace because of the perception that it will foster of Black men as uncouth, animalistic, and otherworldly.

This is also exemplar of stereotype threat, which was coined by Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson in 1995.¹¹² Stereotype threat discusses the risk of conforming to a stereotype, or

¹¹² Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(5), 797-811. doi:10.1037//0022-3514.69.5.797

negative characteristic, about one's group.¹¹³ Another interviewee, Bashy, noted that he was unsure of who makes the rules in society, but he would like to meet the person responsible. This led me to believe that he was currently unsatisfied with the ways in which the rules are currently being enforced. Yet, because Bashy had no idea of who held the discretionary power to make the rules that govern society, he had no way of ever voicing his concerns and making sure his quandaries received the visibility and attention they deserved.

This is particularly interesting considering the pressure on Black people to be law-abiding, yet if they have no understanding of the extant chain-of-command or the Police's role as law enforcers, how can they ever be in adherence to the 'law of the land'. Simply put, this is yet another accessibility concern for Black communities who do not trust the law to be on their side in times of a crisis. Most importantly, if Black men are not viewing the Police as the law enforcers and rule makers in their communities, how are the Police viewed when they enter these neighborhoods? For the most part, Police are assigned to patrol, surveil, and 'protect' neighborhoods that they are unfamiliar with or have never resided in before; therefore, they are usually uninformed about unspoken laws, or 'codes of the street'.¹¹⁴

In addition, they are not informed on neighborhood dynamics, pre-existing accountability efforts like community policing, or what community members need and how the Police's position in the neighborhood could help, not hinder, their ability to access those resources. In these ways, Police are considered outsiders entering territories that has pre-established rules and regulations. Instead of trying to make sense of these neighborhood dynamics, Police Officers come in and believe that heavy surveillance tactics and the interrogation of community members

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Anderson, Elijah. 1999. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

who ‘resemble criminals’ will foster a good-faith relationship between them and the people they are serving. One of my interviewees, P13, a 22-year-old male who works at a cellphone store, when asked about the rationale the Police gave for stopping and questioning him, stated, “They just make up anything. Like they say, ‘we just stopped you because you looked suspicious’. How I look suspicious walking around in my neighborhood where I been living for 20 something years?” I went on to ask P13 about the outcome of this encounter with the Police and he stated, “They kept messing with me because they mess with people to see how much they know and how far they can go with people.” I asked another interviewee, P5, a 26-year-old drug dealer, about how these types of interactions with the Police inform his view of their role in his neighborhood and he stated, “I don’t think it’s really fair. The police be wishy-washy. They’ll say one thing and mean another and you know they be trying to play that good cop, bad cop and all that other type of stuff.” He went on to note that he does not feel like the Police has his best intentions at heart.

Even from the perspective of a young, Black male who never had a harmful interaction with the Police still harbored negative views of their role and presence within his community, which is telling of the purported fair and just society we live in. Luther divulges,

“In my home community, I’ve never been a target of anything but some of these police officers are corrupt. What attracts people to power? What attracts people to have control over someone’s life or death? Usually, kids who never had power and they use that as an excuse to have control over people. It’s about what you do with that power like control their unconscious biases. It’s about how we merge our different views together to make a transformative difference.”

Luther raises critical queries that must be answered to retrieve justice in society. If the Police are going to be accountable, not only to the community they were assigned but to the people within them, they must embark on a process that begins with self-reflection, specifically questioning

what attracted them to a position of power and how they can use that power to diminish and not produce harm. This process of introspection should conclude with how the Police can revitalize urban, impoverished communities of color through privileging the stories, lived experiences, and concerns of the people residing within them. This will only occur if the Black men within these communities are decriminalized and treated as equal participants in society. As these Black men have illustrated in the foregoing, there are alarming similarities between the Prison Industrial Complex and urban, impoverished communities of color in respects to the level of maximum security, the hypervisibility and subjection of ‘suspicious’ Black male bodies, and the unwarranted, racist encounters that Black men have with the Police. To ensure the restoration of justice to these communities and prevent them from becoming prisons without bars, ideologies of hypermasculinity must be delinked from Black men.

As a starting point for accomplishing this, it is critical to understand how these Black men self-identify and define their own image, style, and persona. More important to note, the ways in which Black men’s self-attribution of machismo differ from how the Police, media, and racist institutions and structures project hypermasculinity onto Black male bodies. Aída Hurtado and Mrinal Sinha’s definition of hypermasculinity is useful here to understanding the type of hypermasculinity that the Police and society operationalizes to delineate Black men, which eradicates all other traits and characteristics of manhood.¹¹⁵ Therefore, Black men are not seen as dynamic characters with goals, potential, or marketable character strengths. Instead, Black men’s very existence is perceived as antithetical to good, law-abiding citizens and, in turn, it becomes a tool to write these men off as lawless, unsalvageable, and lacking of humanity. T. Dot’s testimony substantiates this. When asked how he thinks society views Black men, he stated,

¹¹⁵ Hurtado Aída and Mrinal Sinha. 2016. *Beyond Machismo: Intersectional Latino Masculinities*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

“Like violent, aggressive, uneducated, scary. Only negative things.” I went on to ask if he felt like there was any truth to these viewpoints and T. Dot sated, “The only reason I think it is true is since society views all these Black men like that and portray them like that in the news, Black men get tired and start to fall in line with what they see. You just throw your hands up and say forget it. Since they look at me like that, why not. I think that’s the reason some of that stuff happen.”

The concerns that T. Dot expressed can be best expressed through the labeling theory, coined by Howard Becker in 1963.¹¹⁶ The labeling theory is usually operationalized in respect to the attribution of deviant identity traits; therefore, it is premised on the belief that people act in accord with the labels used to define them (i.e. if a person is deemed a criminal, they will accept the label as a personal identity marker and take on criminal traits). As such, T. Dot believes that the reason Black men attribute criminal behaviors to their own identity is in response to society’s codification of them as criminal, innately deviant, and hypermasculine. As T. Dot noted, it gets to a point where Black men can no longer combat the war against them alone, considering how pervasive the stigmas are that aim to relegate their worth in society, which places them back into the shadows of second-class citizenship. I asked T. Dot what would he say to people who held that view of him and he stated,

“I’d say that they don’t care for real. I don’t even open my mouth. Like, don’t you know how we got the lil ID cards in college or whatever to rent a laptop or take out a book it just show the respect that they have for Black people or whatever cause I only see it happen to Black people [sic] like every time I hand my ID card to somebody and then the scan it, they’ll put it down on the table and not even hand it back the same way I handed it to them or not even look me in my eye. That’s just the lil microaggressions I experience

¹¹⁶ Becker, Howard Saul. 1963. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. London: Free Press of Glencoe.

on campus and I get tired of it. I don't say nun about it cause if I say something about it and get to fussin' that's what they expect me to do: angry Black man always mad at the world thinking everybody against em so it's hard not to fall into any type of category."

T. Dot, like many of the other men I interviewed shared similar fears of perpetuating the 'angry, Black man' motif. Despite T. Dot's hard work to access higher education and destigmatize societal beliefs that Black men cannot garner successful outcomes, he still faced racialized microaggressions.

It is in this societal refusal to humanize Black males that lead them to believe they are not valuable contributors to society; therefore, will never obtain sustainable access to resources despite their attempts to climb the social ladder. Also, T. Dot has identified a fear of falling into a 'category' in society, which is a contentious point of inquiry considering how external attribution discourages individuality and pressures Black men to conform to meet societal expectations of behavior, style of dress, speech, and intellectual capacity. Therefore, it is an effect of racism to use the categorizations, that racist institutions construct, to support the belief that Black men are hypermasculine. That is, racist ideologies get perpetuated through the exclusivity and inaccessibility of institutions and structures that could advance Black men out of their demise. However, Black men are positioned as undeserving for placement within these institutes. What does this mean for the Black men who do not fulfill the stereotypes that society places upon them? How can Black men evade categorization?

One interviewee, P9, an 18-year-old senior in high school, when asked how he defined the image he was going for, stated,

"I would define my style and image as me. I'm goofy, I'm creative, I'm outgoing, I'm hardworking, I'm smart-working. I love moving. I love helping people. My style is me. I'm from Chicago, but I'm not your average person. I like to wear skater-style clothes; like very slim fitting. This summer I'm going to revamp my entire wardrobe and get a lot

more business attire, dress attire, stylistic attire. I'm a deacon at my church, so I want to revamp that. My style is very unique. I'll be wearing a lot of crystals."

It was interesting the he positioned his image as antithetical of what was pervasive in Chicago, stating that he was not the average Chicagoan. I went on to ask what other people thought of his image and his response was, "Some people may assume that I don't know. I try not to get caught up with what people assume or think about me anymore. I want people to assume I'm a heartfelt guy. I'm a sensitive guy – very loving. I want my image to reflect that." Although optimistic, society's view of Black men has been unwaveringly negative. Bashy noted, "Other people may not like it [my style] cause I just keep it real. I don't sugar coat nothing. Either you gone say how you feel or you not gone say it." Even P9 noted that society views Black men

"as something that they're afraid of. Not even just Black men but Black women, Black trans. We're awesome, like the ingenuity of the (Black) spirit. I think society views Black men, unconsciously, as these thugs who have nothing good going for them, cracking cards, don't care about family. I want to change that with the way I treat my family, the way I treat my friends, the way I treat my girlfriend. When I tell people that I'm a mediation teacher, the look that are on people's faces. I want society to see Black men as something not to be feared, but something to accept."

It is powerful that P9 wants to change larger society's views of him and other Black men through exhibiting care to his loved ones as well as through deracializing the norms that society harbors about Black men's worth and positionality. It is a pervasive belief that Black men are 'lazy bums' with nothing good going for themselves, which is also used to maintain the whiteness and exclusivity of structures.

When asked where he thought these pervasive beliefs stemmed from, Bashy's response was quite interesting,

"Like it all started way back then. Way back then, so like.... I couldn't even tell you. It all tell you in the Willie Lynch letter about how it all was gone be, so it started way back

then. It was already in effect before I was even born. Cause it's just like with anybody. They could say white people do criminal stuff like white-collar crime. That don't mean he ain't got no goddamn job or nun like that or he ain't making his own money or nun. He just supposed to do what people say he should do? (rhetorical question) Cause I'm Black, they think I'm robbing, stealing and selling drugs just cause I'm Black."

Luther added that society's belief in Black men's disenfranchisement, "comes from your own inferiority that you're projecting onto another canvas. Sometimes the best way to deal with things is to project it onto other people. It's all rooted in a deep fear that we're going to steal your women, take over. It's rooted in survival." The Willie Lynch letter, *The Making of a Slave*, that Bashy referenced was delivered by William Lynch on the bank of the James River in the colony of Virginia in 1712.¹¹⁷ Lynching was coined after William Lynch and was a popular way of killing someone (usually by hanging) during the slavery era as punishment for an alleged offense that would not go to trial. The Willie Lynch letter outlined the "cardinal principles of making a negro", predicted how slavery would be institutionalized for 300 years, and how Black people would always be considered and treated as subservient to white people.¹¹⁸

As Bashy alluded, this letter aimed to give white people control over Black people indefinitely through maintaining Black people's status as 'negro' and 'slave' despite any progress that they made to combat these pigeonholes. Like Luther mentioned, there is also a persistent view of Black men as threatening, violent and aggressive, which is historically rooted in the notion that Black men were going to "steal white women". The protection of white female fragility in the slavery era has manifested to a fear that Black men are going to gain superfluous control, autonomy, and freedom. As Bashy identified, even though these beliefs predate our

¹¹⁷ The Final Call. (n.d.). Retrieved March 25, 2017, from http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/Perspectives_1/Willie_Lynch_letter_The_Making_of_a_Slave.shtml

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

modern manifestations of the fear-evoking, criminal Black man, they remain pervasive and negatively impact current generations of Black men. Even in the post-Jim Crow era, Black men remain enslaved through the perpetuation of narratives of hypermasculinity that, although are more covert across time and space, aim to degrade their humanity at all costs. Luther, when asked how he views other Black people, optimistically stated,

“I feel like you can neither help nor hinder your skin color. I feel like that only thing that you can help or hinder is your mind. I see Black people as these amazing, beautiful brilliant people just like I see white people. I’m not gone say I don’t see color because that’s a dumb ass statement, but I don’t see no one as superior or inferior. Past the skin color, what do you have that I have? A heart. Everything on earth has a heart so everything should be loved. If I look at you just based off the color of your skin, I’m missing the whole fucking point completely.”

Interesting to note, Bashy and Luther both mentioned white people in their assessments of equality. In respect to Bashy’s testimony, while the perception of white people who commit white-collar crimes is not overwhelmingly negative, Black people struggle to elicit the same leniency in how society perceives them, especially if they committed a ‘violent crime’. T. Dot’s insights on their fairness of the justice system can lend a hand here, “I don’t think the judicial system (is) fair for anybody to be honest. Like that lil white swimmer dude who only got 3 months and he was supposed to get 6, but his father went to Yale and was colleagues with judge. If a Black person would have raped somebody or sexually assaulted somebody, he would have been under the jail.”¹¹⁹ Black people with a criminal record become inexorably linked to

¹¹⁹ Miller, M. E. (2016, March 31). All-American swimmer found guilty of sexually assaulting unconscious woman on Stanford campus. Retrieved March 12, 2017, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/03/31/all-american-swimmer-found-guilty-of-sexually-assaulting-unconscious-woman-on-stanford-campus/?utm_term=.b84016f30ed2

delinquency, even if they are a one-time offender. As noted earlier, this negatively impacts their ability to fully reenter society upon their release from prison.

P11, a drug dealer/repeat offender, noted that, he has an Uncle whose been in prison for 45 years for allegedly killing a Police Officer. P11 believed that this sentence was not fair “for the simple fact, they didn’t have the proper evidence, they just said this and that’s what they went with.” How ironic that when Black people are slain by Police Officers, who often cannot substantiate their claims or justify why they chose to murder versus arrest the person, the Police Officer gets off scot-free. Police Officers are hardly reprimanded for their use of brutal force that, usually, results in the death of Black people. While this research project does not condone or defend the murder of a law enforcement officer as a remedy to the plight of Black men or level the playing field, in thinking about who has access to fairness, equality, and justice, we must be critical of why it is rarely Black men on the receiving end. I argue that the continual punishment of Blackness, mainly through the vehicle of mass incarceration, is a state-sanctioned tactic to institute a form of neoslavery.

Therefore, it is crucial to understand how the regeneration of a slavery system not only affects Black men economically in respect to access to mobilizing opportunities and financial resources, but also in respect to their long-term career goals. Ideally, P8 would like to be a lifestyle entrepreneur. When asked about the qualifications necessary for such a job, P8 stated,

“To believe in yourself. I know that sounds cliché, but your beliefs shape your reality. I love to meditate. I always knew I was creative. I always knew I was artistic and meditation helped my growth. No one ever told me that I could create my own business. My parents told me be a doctor, lawyer, or engineer because it’s practical. What if I wanted to own my own business? No one ever told me I could do that. Even friends and people I looked up to said they didn’t think I could do it. Why the fuck not? What the fuck is this bullshit? Bet! That was my attitude. I started grinding and started with what I

know. I knew people and asked if they wanted a meditation session. For 30 minutes, \$10, for an hour, \$30. My first client was one of my teachers in high school and I expanded from there. Now, that's what I want to do. I'm looking at the Social Media aspect of it and keep making programs like how to transmute depression and not do it using an unsustainable source.”

Certainly, P8 has very optimistic goals, but the reality remains that he is operating in a society that does not see value in his existence, yet alone the immense goals he has for himself. By no means is this trying to deter P8 from being a lifestyle entrepreneur, but it is important for him and other Black men alike to garner sustainable resources in society as a platform for making their long-term dreams come true. However, some of my interviewees feared the risks involved with gaining resources by discussing the outcomes of friends or family members who have “sold out” or attributed middle-class (white) values, completely dissolving their Black nationalism or distinct identity traits to meet societal expectations.

Nonetheless, most of my research participants remained optimistic about their career trajectories. When asked what his ideal career, P4 stated,

“Well, I want to be a nurse anesthesiologist. That's my ideal career. I don't wanna be a Doctor cause I don't wanna be in school that long. I want to be in the medial field because when I interned at University of State, I used to work closely with the nurses and they're amazing. The Doctors are cool too, but the nurses get to spend more time with the patients and they're more charismatic. It just sparked my interest.”

Yet, as illustrated in the foregoing, Black men must work nearly ten times as hard as their white counterparts to be perceived as subpar. I asked P4 to reflect on the trajectory of his career path to determine if the work he was doing now was like what he wanted to be doing his whole life and he stated, “Definitely not. They just help me have some money. As a young adult, it's important to have some money for responsibilities, to do fun things, and go out and enjoy yourself.”

Indeed, as a young adult it is important to have money for leisure activities; however, as

illustrated, as a young, *Black* man it is important to build a strong foundation to optimize their potential for accomplishing their short and long-term career goals. Within the white populace, we usually see men interning at fortune-500 companies, having early access to networking sites and opportunities, and building a sustainable career for themselves at a very young age. In addition, white young men usually have intergenerational wealth and financial security to fall back on in the event of a curveball. Black men, unfortunately, do not have much room for error. Every (in)action of Black men is causal to their ability to gain success outcomes. However, Black men are in a position in society where they cannot necessarily gain access to unpaid, skill-building internships and work opportunities that directly relate to their career field because they are consumed by the need to financially provide for themselves and their families by any means necessary, even deviant measures. As such, Black men are unable to fulfill most pre-requisites that the jobs they want to pursue require. Black men are not at fault for this bleak social reality.

Instead, we must look to the ways in which financial resources and mobilizing opportunities are allocated within predominately Black, urban impoverished communities. Undoubtedly, we are sure to find some discrepancies between the resources Black men on the Southside of Chicago have access to versus more affluent, predominately white communities on the Northside. When asked what needed to make his dream of owning a lawn-care business come true, Bashy stated, “I need access to people with money who have the same plans as me. I’m doing lawn care so I need people in the business who know how to take care of lawns and stuff like that.” However, given that Bashy is currently on house arrest for violating his parole, the negative impact on his time away from the ever-changing labor market is intensified. T. Dot identified needing, “My Mama help – she helped pay for my college education and my Grandma even though she dead. I also need the help of the people here (at school) like my advisor and the

few friends I got in order to keep pushing through and the connections I make.” In addition, as a Black male entering a STEM-related field, T. Dot stated, “I definitely need a tutor. I need... I gotta go to office hours all the time. I gotta study hard. I don’t really got study habits, so I ain’t as smart as a lot of these kids here. I gotta exhaust my resources to be close to average, not even average.”

This internalized inferiority that T. Dot feels is most disconcerting, especially considering how hard it is for Black males to advance through the higher education system that is predominately white and elitist. Not only is T. Dot accomplishing this (to the best of his ability), but he is also pursuing the natural sciences, which are exclusively white and isolating. This is quite impressive considering T. Dot is a first-generation college student who was unable to gain insights, guidance, or assistance on navigating college, especially as a Black male. Despite this, T. Dot admires and wants to make his Mother proud,

“Cause even though she didn’t finish college, she was still successful. When she had me she was 20 and in her second year of college and she left school, and started working in a bank and then she worked hard for two years and became manager of the bank. She did well for herself even though she didn’t have an education. She lied her way through to make a way for us. She always overcame and back then we were financially stable until some other things happened. She still always took care of us no matter what.”

Similarly, Bashy noted his admiration for his Grandmother and sister “because they strived for the best. Even though they didn’t have much, they still... you’ll be thinking they had a million dollars cause of how they act.” It was evident that despite not having a father-figure or positive male role model present, that these men still were able to gain a great deal of wisdom and support from the maternal figures in their lives.

When asked if he felt the money that his family made was enough to provide for him and his family’s cost of living, Luther stated, “Shit, no. Somehow, they make that shit work. There

would be times my mom didn't eat. If there was only food for three of us, she wouldn't eat and just go to bed hungry. I would see that as a kid and recognize what's going on, but I wouldn't say anything. You know, not eating so your kids can eat – that's love.” While these Black women have done and continue to do an outstanding job providing for and instilling core values within their children, particularly their Black sons, we are left wondering when and how their transition from boyhood to manhood transpires? Is this process premature or, perhaps, uninformed? In our current racialized American society, Black men's opportunities for success are circumscribed by mass incarceration, the promotion of targeted laws and policies that are counterproductive and predispose them to a life of crime, and an inequitable distribution of sustainable resources in predominately Black, urban impoverished communities of color. Considering this, it appears that Black men learn masculinity through a process of punishment, hypervisibility, and discriminatory strategies enacted by major racist structures and institutions.

Conclusion

Conclusion 1: The labeling process associated with hypermasculinity is racialized and predisposes Black men to a life of crime and failure.

As illustrated by my research participants, the label of hypermasculinity not only insidiously works to shape the ways in which Black men are perceived in society as innately deviant, aggressive, and likely to incite harm and violence in their respective communities. The marker of hypermasculinity also predisposes Black men to a life of failure whereby enacting violence becomes their sole means of gaining access to sustainable resources that are essential to improving the conditions of their livelihood. Even my research participants, who have attempted to combat the war on Black men through pursuing higher education and/or working legitimate jobs, have identified that this means for attaining success is often transient or circumscribed by larger structures and institutions that perpetuate racist ideologies as a strategy to limit their access to or participation within them. Furthermore, these men often do not make a living wage via sources of legitimate work and must seek out extralegal means of making a sustainable livelihood for themselves. The stereotypes of Black men as lazy, unproductive, and difficult to work with limit their ability to gain success in the workplace, which translates into their inability to gain opportunities for improving their socioeconomic status.

An important aspect of this research project that sets it apart from the work of other urban sociologists trying to gain an understanding of disproportionate rates of gun violence and crime within urban, impoverished communities of color is that my project involves privileging and prioritizing Black men's process of racial formation and the ways in which they shape their identities in the world. Important to note, these Black men are engaging in the creation of their own identities amid a society that continues to perpetuate a "slave" or "neo-Negro" categorization of Black masculinity that defines Black men as bestial, violent, aggressive, and

unhuman. In lieu of this, Black men often struggle to make an identity for themselves in complete opposition to the prevalent stereotypes that devalue Black men's worth that are propagated in the media. Also, the *slave* identity marker presupposes that Black men have not progressed over time since the end of legally-sanctioned Jim Crow segregation and should remain treated as subservient to larger society. This is important to consider in conjunction with the emergence of the carceral state and the mass imprisonment of Black men as a form of neoslavery.

In addition, unlike other social-psychological research on Black men's patterns of deviant behavior and disproportionate rates of engagement in criminal activities, my project places Black men's lived experiences and narratives at the forefront of the research study. Instead of making assumptions about why Black men get involved in illicit behaviors, which would perpetuate narratives of hypermasculinity in the media, I ask these Black men what is their rationale for engagement as well as their objectives for participating in activities that threaten their physical safety as well as the safety of those around them. This not only gives Black men the opportunity to debunk popularized perceptions of Blackness as violent, but it also provides them with a form of agency and power over their narratives that society has consistently attempted to invalidate and coopt.

Moreover, when my research participants were asked to describe their style and image, the descriptors used were overwhelmingly positive. These men viewed themselves as loving, caring, laid-back, and selfless. As it relates to style of dress and clothing, many of these men identified as being different than other Black men in Chicago; the study participants often wore more relaxed clothes or their fashion styles shifted based on their mood. Some of these men were not even cognizant of style of dress being correlated to the image they wanted to portray to the

surveying world. However, when asked how others perceived their style or image, the responses were overwhelmingly negative. These Black men found that people perceived them as thugs, criminals, violent, aggressive, and savage hoodlums. It is not enough for Black men to be relegated to the margins of every sector of society, but their style of dress is also becoming a contentious point of inquiry used to delineate and, simultaneously, demote these men's worth and value in society.

In a society predicated on the values of self-determination, free speech, and freedom of expression, it is critical to examine who has immutable freedom and whose rights are coopted by larger systems and structures that refuse to view Black men as equal participants in society. I am aware that social change and large-scale progress occurs in variant gradations across time and space. However, it does not seem like the pigeonhole that society placed upon Black men since the first group of African slaves crossed the Atlantic has become any less pervasive. Instead, I argue that society's predispositions of Black men as being second-class citizens and subservient to whites has manifested across time and space, taking on different covert forms.

As illustrated by some of my research participants, the continual subjectivity and hypervisibility of Black men is largely at the hands of Police Officers who over-patrol safer, quieter predominately Black communities because they attribute the presence of Black men to increasing rates of crime and violence. Therefore, Police Officers are not targeting neighborhoods factors that lead to the proliferation of gun violence; instead, they are targeting Black people in urban, impoverished communities under the supposition that they are responsible for the presence of social disorder. In this way, Police Officers are not enacting their primary duty to protect and serve within these communities. Instead of trying to understand why social inequalities plague the Black experience such that enacting violence becomes a social

reality for Black men, these Police Officers exacerbate the issue and further deepen the distrust between Black men and law enforcement through criminalizing Blackness. It is by way of the correlation and inextricable linking of Blackness to criminality that narratives of hypermasculinity become perpetuated in the media and society overall.

Even for the Black men I interviewed who identified partaking in gun violence and crime (i.e. drug sale, ‘cracking cards’, theft etc.), they were not engaging in these activities with the intention to incite harm or violence. Much of their engagement in gun violence and crime was out of necessity and not desire. As I will illustrate in the following section, these men’s social context created the perfect storm that allowed gun violence and crime to be their sole sustainable option for elevating their social status and gaining access to resources for their families. This is especially important in light of intergenerational wealth disparity that, almost inevitably, predisposes these men to a life of failure. To interrogate why a life of crime and violence almost becomes an inevitable social reality for Black men across the Southside of Chicago, we must critically look to Black men’s social milieu, which I argue, fosters their engagement in illicit behaviors like gun violence and crime.

Conclusion 2: Hypermasculinity, as a rationale, is inherently flawed because it does not include a discussion of Black men’s social context as contributory to their engagement in gun violence and crime.

The media perpetuates racialized narratives about why Black men enact violence and crime in their community, namely because they are ‘naturally aggressive and predisposed to criminality’ as hypermasculinity presupposes. However, I found that these men attributed much of their *need* for engaging in illicit behaviors to the deplorable state of their communities. Beyond the physical state of their communities being in utter disrepair, these Black men

identified having inaccessible schools, scarce resources, food deserts, and a lack of career-building opportunities. Their white counterparts, on the other hand, have access to or have been exposed to all those benefits in their youth. In addition, given that intergenerational transfers of wealth, knowledge, and resources were so inadequate in my research participants' lived experiences, they lacked essential opportunities for social mobility. For the men who were attempting to elevate their social status, they believed that society's continual need to categorize them as deviant would lead to one of two outcomes: their inability to create a life for themselves outside of their social pigeonhole or their continued need to use illegitimate forms of work to gain access to financial mobility and resources.

Likewise, Black men also identified not having the same access to education and employment opportunities that could positively benefit their career trajectories. In turn, these men ended up working menial jobs and not finding value in school, so they pursued extralegal means for gaining quick cash and access to resources. Whereas white people's social priority is having a nice home, a nice car, and excess wealth to flaunt, Black men's main priority is financial security by any means necessary, even by deviant measures. Important to note, this does not verify hypermasculinity's presuppositions that Black men are innately violent and deviant; instead, it should raise the question of why these men feel like enlisting in a life of crime is the only option that have for securing financial comfort and the ability to provide for themselves and their loved ones.

In assessing Black men's rationale for engaging in illicit behaviors, it is important to consider how Black men do not have choice in where they live. Most Black men are forced to live amongst co-ethnics given the pervasiveness of residential segregation and racial intolerance found within white enclaves and suburbs that disallow mixed neighborhoods. Given that Black

people are the predominate racial group that straddles the poverty line due to low income levels and a lack of accumulated wealth, they are relegated to communities with homes that have suffered from foreclosed homes, abandoned buildings, and low-income affordable housing complexes. In turn, the property values within these areas are extremely low; if the houses fall into disrepair it is unlikely that they will be fixed. Since property taxes are used to fund schools, Black, impoverished communities are not able to house top-performing schools with full-time teachers and resources that can help Black youth have an alternative to the mayhem and disorder that surrounds them.

For the Black men I interviewed who left their neighborhood to attend school in a more affluent community, they found that the risks they encountered en route to school made education unappealing to them overall. The average distance between most of my interviewees home and school was an hour. It is likely that these Black men had to cross (in)visible gang lines and endure unforeseen obstacles going back and forth to school daily. Many of interviewees discussed being robbed or held at gun point on their route to and from school. The culprits would ask my research participants where they were from and encouraged them to go back to their respective community and not return. Because of this, the young, Black were not able to actualize their full potential in school because they were focused on their physical safety. In addition, Black youth found that they were getting punished and suspended from school at rates disproportionate to their peers due to fighting. When asked why these young men felt the need to fight, they mentioned it was out of necessity to protect themselves and their turf. Most interviewees felt a sense of pride and belonging within their communities; however, this personal investment in their communities did not offer much of a return.

Given that Black communities house high concentrations of poverty, they are not able to afford recreational centers, community service programs, youth outreach programs, or many other social welfare services that can provide Black youth opportunities with social skills, leisure activities, and hobbies. Beyond this, these Black men struggled to gain access to grocery stores that offer fresh produce and healthy, fresh food options. Instead, some of my interviewees discussed how fast-food chains were commonplace within their communities. On an unrelated yet important note, this social reality is a causal factor for high concentrations of diabetes that plague Black communities. Black men's leading priority, then, becomes centered on elevating themselves out of financial disenfranchisement by any means necessary. These Black men see that school and menial jobs are not affording them the opportunity to do this, so drug sale and theft become a pathway for garnering quick success outcomes. This does not mean that these Black men are hypermasculine and should be condemned by society – it does mean that there needs to be a redistribution of how resources are allocated across communities. How can urban, impoverished Black communities thrive if they are not invested in or given the tools that can allow Black men to garner success outcomes?

Conclusion 3: Combatting the war on Black men requires a city-wide restructuring of how finances and other resources are allocated, along with adaptations to public, penal, and education policies.

As this project sets forth, a war has been declared against Black men. Black men are at war with power structures that disseminate racist ideologies, which aim to degrade the men's worth and social value. Black men are at war with the penal system that continues to mass incarcerate them for petty offenses and will not release them for time-served. Black men are at war with local and federal government officials who do not offer Black communities

advantageous resources that could dissuade their residents' involvement in illicit behaviors.

Black men are at war with the media that makes unwarranted claims about them based racialized ideologies of Black masculinity. Given the overwhelming disenfranchisement that permeates the lives of Black men, it is nearly impossible for Black men to gain access to resources, financial assistance, and opportunities to improve the conditions of their livelihood independent of local government intervention. However, the solution cannot be providing reparations to Black communities that only provisionally fix the problems. There must be accountability on behalf of local government for the ways in which the detrimental conditions of Black men's social milieu have been exacerbated by being last on the government officials' short list of priorities.

Mayor of Chicago, Rahmn Emmanuel, views the proliferation of gun violence in Chicago as an indicator of Black men's lack of care for their own lives and the lives of those around them. However, before making this sweeping claim; the rationale behind Black men's uneven engagement in illicit behaviors should be more closely examined. Black men have been making due with the little they have been afforded for far too long. One of my research participants, T. Dot, said it most aptly, "I gotta exhaust my resources to be close to average, not even average." Many of my interviewees noted the social, economic, political, and educational differences they have seen in various communities across Chicago. The conditions of Black men's neighborhoods are often a constant reminder of their social position at the bottom of the class hierarchy. Under the premise that Black people do not take care of their neighborhoods, local government intervention services have been limited. I argue that if the state of these men's communities were vastly improved and the people within them had access to mobilizing opportunities, rates of gun violence and crime would diminish. However, if we continue to allow Black people to have living conditions akin to bestial subjects like hypermasculinity presupposes, there will always be

a need for primitive, violent means of survival like engaging in life-threatening behaviors such as gun violence, drug sale, and gang participation.

This, in large part, is why Black men remain relegated to the margins of society – no one is willing to help elevate their social status. It is almost as if society is comfortable with the narratives of hypermasculinity that predispose Black men to a life of failure. Not many people are willing to be critical of their longstanding beliefs. Why, in an alleged post-racial society, have we allowed racialized narratives of hypermasculinity to pervade the media and delineate the value we should attribute to Black men? Why are people not combatting the war that has been enacted against Black men through giving them opportunities to debunk the stigmas that marginalize them? Perhaps, these questions will never be answered. However, as a critical sociologist who, through in-depth interviewing, have observed the plight of Black men firsthand will never cease being cynical of post-racialists that believe race is no longer a point of contention in society.

Black men continue to have their agency stripped away from them by being forced back into historical roles of servitude and being treated as second-class citizens unfit for participation in civil society. Considering this, to combat the war that has been enacted against Black men, the media, Police, and racist structures and institutions must begin viewing Black men as equal members of society who possess valuable skills and traits to offer, not only their respective communities, but even the unlikeliest of arenas. These entities are the perpetrators of racialized narratives of hypermasculinity, not Black men. They create labels and categories for Black men to fit into because people do not understand Blackness in all its nuances and complexities. Therefore, it becomes easy to punish, criticize, and condemn Blackness because it is unfamiliar, atypical, and has derogatory historical underpinnings that did not get erased with the formal end

of chattel slavery and Jim Crow segregation. Black men encounter adversity in most spheres of society—economic, political, and social. Being involuntarily enslaved should not be one of them. Therefore, the state must make concrete efforts to decriminalize Black men, namely through the adaptation of existing laws and the implementation of new education, penal, and social welfare policies that aim to humanize Black men and level their playing field in society. From there, we will be able to see large-scale social change that provides Black men an opportunity to demystify and deracialize pervasive narratives of hypermasculinity.

Final Thoughts

Considering the foregoing, it is abundantly clear that larger society has been uncompromising in its perception of Black men as hypermasculine and hazardous to society. The civil, human, and inalienable rights for which Black political leaders fought so arduously, continues to be circumscribed by a sickening desire of the state to punish, criminalize, and target Blackness. The end of chattel slavery and Jim Crow segregation did not obliterate Black men's encounters with injustice. In fact, Black men are becoming hypervisible by the media and Police, where their efforts to attain a positive self-image are being circumscribed. Although these racialized tactics of the state to delineate Black men as unhuman have become more covert over time and across space, they remain ubiquitous. Moreover, these beliefs are underwritten by laws and policies that limit Black men's access to sustainable resources that can directly improve the conditions of their communities.

In assessing the rationale for why Black men's disproportionate engagement in gun violence, crime, and perpetuating social disorder, I have been unable to pinpoint hypermasculinity as the root causal factor in Chicago's current War on Crime. Through hearing the testimonies of fifteen Black men, I have found that their engagement in illicit behaviors is in

response to the conditions of their social milieu and the incessant need to financially provide for themselves and their families, not an innate tendency to incite harm or violence. As illustrated, these Black men were not afforded access to comparable mobilizing opportunities as their white counterparts. Therefore, pursuing crime, violence, and other illegitimate forms of work became a necessity and not a desire or deranged pleasure for these Black men.

In addition, Black men who are actively trying to combat the war against them have found their legal means of doing so unsustainable. In large part, this is because there are one-sided, exploitative media portrayals of Black men that foster Americans' implicit racial bias, which predisposes Black men to a life of crime and failure. There exist policies that are supposed to grant Black men equal standing in society; however, those very policies have facilitated the emergence of neoslavery. As my interviewees divulged, rates of mass incarceration in Black communities are abnormally high. Disproportionately, Black men are arrested for illicit use and sale of drugs more than any violent crime. Likewise, Black men are targeted by the Police in their own communities, which most of them considered to be safe havens until the presence of law enforcement. Police officer's incessant desire to criminalize and punish Blackness without understanding its complexities is a huge reason that narratives of hypermasculinity continue to be widespread in the media. The ways in which society continues to force Black men to conform to meet its expectations and racialized categorizations is emblematic of historical indentured servitude. In a society that bolsters globalization, diversity, and guarantees prosperity for all, these tenets of American Exceptionalism appear to never have been intended for Black people.

Perhaps most disheartening is Black men's cognizance of this bleak social reality. As hard as Black men have tried and continue to try combat the war enacted against them, their efforts have done little to dissuade society that they are not predatory, violent, lawless, lazy,

uncouth, and uncivilized. While unjustifiable, can we blame these Black men for seeking ulterior means for gaining access to resources essential to improving their livelihoods? If Black men have not received intervention from local government officials, the state, the education system, law enforcement agencies, or larger structures and institutions that wield the flow of wealth in our economy, what are Black men to do but make a life for themselves independent of, and often in opposition to, these forces?

The media, Police, and racist institutions and structures can change, broaden, and redefine their preconceived notions about the worth of Black men. People's unwillingness to change, however, is telling of the ways in which society benefits from the extortion, exploitation, and devaluation of Black men. Black men should not have to negotiate or leverage their freedom to gain positive visibility and access to a share of the "American Dream". Blackness is not antithetical to or undeserving of claims to Americanness, citizenship, and justice. However, the unwavering condemnation of Blackness in the media, and in turn how policies get written, leads me to believe that the United States of America is profiting from the devaluation of Black people in a way that institutes a system of neoslavery. As the war enacted against Black men unfortunately carries on, Black men must continue to fight not to become complacent in their ongoing struggle for equity and equality in every sector of society, especially considering our economy was constructed, in large part, on their labor.

Future Directions

In retrospect, I earnestly tried to make this research project narrow in focus yet broad enough to paint a multifaceted, nuanced portrait of the social context that enables Black men's need to engage in gun violence and crime. However, there are many directions that this project could manifest into. Namely, I'm interested in collecting more in-depth interviews to elicit where Black, male youth learn the transition to manhood. Many of the men I interviewed did not explicitly note what entities played a role in their transition from boyhood to manhood, but they acknowledged and paid homage to their mother who was usually a single parent. If, in fact, Black men accredited their mothers as being the person who helped them develop the skills necessary for becoming a man, it would be interesting to collect the advice, tips, and feedback that these women imparted to their sons. While I agree that women are very nurturing and can offer these men useful advice on how to care for, love, and take care of themselves and their loved ones, but I do not think women, due to innate, biological differences, can teach boys *everything* they need to know about being a man.

In addition, I'd be curious to examine the role of the school and neighborhood as production sites for the characteristics of hypermasculinity that Black men learn, normalize, and assert. As my research project sets forth, Black men came to view school as only being able to provide them with short-term success, if at all. Also, most of the Black men I interviewed noted that they were disproportionately punished in school for being tardy or fighting. Considering this, I would like future iterations of my research project to focus on updating the work of Ann Arnett Ferguson in *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*.¹²⁰ While her

¹²⁰ Ferguson, Ann Arnett. 2000. *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

book is still quite relevant given that school remains a contentious site in the reproduction of narratives of hypermasculinity, I think it would be interesting to examine the extent to which schools have become even more toxic across time and space. I'd be curious to see if not only negative, derogatory attributes of manhood are ascribed to Black men in school, but whether racialized tracking still occurs in classrooms, if Black men's freedom of expression is circumscribed, or whether they are being punished and criminalized for petty, non-threatening offenses. This feedback cycle between neighborhood disorder, punishment in school, and achieving success outcomes limits Black men's opportunity to actualize their full potential and fully gain access to the resources that school could provide them with.

In respect to these Black men's neighborhood being a production site for hypermasculinity, I would be interested in isolating occurrences of neighborhood violence to delineate their causal factors. Given that most of the schools, resources, and employment opportunities that these men were engaged in were at least an hour way from their home, they were likely to encounter mayhem, social disorder, and crime and violence en route to their destination. For example, these men would cross gang lines and treacherous territories to get to school just to end up fighting at school over turf wars and being sent home. Interesting to note, many of research subjects could not discern between the prison yard and their back yard. Bashy, who was currently on house arrest for violating his parole, discussed how in both his neighborhood and in prison there were threats of imminent harm, the need to fight over turf, to identify which gang you were affiliated with, and to be on the lookout for undependable law enforcement agents.

Likewise, many of my research participants have criminal records for past offenses or are currently engaged in illicit behaviors. As my research project has argued, this was not because

these men are innately deviant and likely to incite violence and crime, but to make a stable life for themselves and their loved ones. This leads me to believe that the horrendous condition of these Black men's social context is another tactic of the state to keep these men behind bars even though they are supposed to have inalienable rights and freedoms. If Black men are experiencing confinement and overwhelming disparities within their own neighborhoods, this would support one of my central arguments that neoslavery has been instituted throughout urban, impoverished communities of color. The 13th amendment, which abolished legally-sanctioned slavery will be useful here. There is an exception clause embedded into the 13th amendment that penalizes the institution of slavery or involuntary servitude unless used as punishment for a crime.¹²¹ This is one of myriad examples of how racially-targeted agendas get covertly written into laws.

I acknowledge that a project that solely focuses on the ways in which neoliberal penal, education, and social welfare policies that aim to demote the value of Black men through criminalization may risk losing its sociological grounding. However, I think this work is necessary for future policy adaptations to be made. Black men continue to be stuck at the bottom rungs of every sphere of society; therefore, there must be interdisciplinary approaches to scholarship, both in terms of theory and method, to understand why and how Black men continue to be entrenched in a war against them. It is unreasonable to expect Black men to combat the war against them alone, but this has been their social reality considering they are constantly denied opportunities to advance themselves out of the margins of society. Instead of instituting sweeping policies that are allegedly for the betterment of society, we should look to creating universal, altruistic policies that do not only target interest groups or the elite 0.1%. These

¹²¹ Armstrong, Andrea. "Race, Racism and The Law - The Thirteenth Amendment: Slavery, Involuntary Servitude, And the Convict-Labor Exception". *Racism.org*. N.p., 2017. Web. 20 Mar. 2017.

policies must be accessible to all people. To do this, society must change their view of Black men as unhuman. Black men should be considered as equal participants in society. As illustrated in this project, Black men fought arduously to project a positive image of themselves in society – one that is loving, caring, hardworking, and intelligent. However, their individual efforts to destigmatize Blackness were circumscribed by larger racist institutions that pressured Black men to neatly fit into categories aimed at delineating their worth and painting them as savage hoodlums, lazy, violent, and delinquent.

In addition, the media played a destructive role in propagating slave-like images and narratives of Black men in the media. The Southside of Chicago became regarded as Chi-Raq, equating rates of gun violence in Black communities as akin to the current War on Terror in Iraq. This was not only a misnomer, but it overshadowed Black men's view of their home communities as relatively safe and unthreatening. Many of my interviewees noted that they were surrounded by high concentrations of gun violence and crime; however, there was not any alarming rates of violence within their community. Police Officers were also complicit due to the hypervisibility they ascribed to these men's neighborhoods. Instead of directing their patrolling and surveillance efforts to the communities where there were disproportionately high rates of violence and crime; the Police opted to enter these men's only safe haven and target them with claims of 'suspicious behavior' to justify their use of stop and frisk, unwarranted interrogations and arrests, and use of brutal force.

I look forward to building upon this research project in graduate school, which will allow me to shed positive light on Black men as well as expose the toxic conditions of their social milieu that foster their *need* to engage in illicit behaviors. This work intends to further destigmatize and deracialize narratives of hypermasculinity that predispose Black men to a life

of crime and failure as well as create a platform for these men to gain sustainable access to resources essential to improving the conditions of their livelihood indefinitely.

I affirm that I have adhered to the honor code in this assignment,
Aliyah Abu-Hazeem

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

1. Describe your neighborhood.
 - a. What type of people live in your neighborhood (in terms of race, class, gender, and age)?
 - i. Describe your relationship with your community members.
 - b. Do you like where you live?
 - c. How far is the closest grocery store?
2. Describe your relationship with your family.
 - a. Who do you live with?
 - b. Is your home environment safe?
 - c. Does your parent(s) or guardian(s) work?
 - i. What is their job?
 - ii. How much do they make?
 - iii. Is this enough money to support you and the cost of living?
 1. Do they receive any government or state-issued financial benefits?
 - a. If so, do these benefits help?
 - iv. What is the highest level of education your parent(s) or guardian(s) completed?
3. What is the distance between your high school and home?
 - a. What/who do you encounter on your route to school?
 - b. Describe your school.
 - c. Do you find school beneficial for you?
 - d. What are you involved in at school?

- e. How do the teachers and administrators treat you at school?
 - f. Describe your relationship with your peers.
 - g. Have you ever served detention or been suspended from school?
 - i. What was the alleged offense?
 - ii. How often are you ‘punished’ in school?
 - iii. How does this make you feel?
 - 1. How does this make your family members feel?
 - a. What was their response to your punishment?
4. If you work, what is the distance between home and work?
- a. What type of job do you have?
 - i. How did you first learn about this job?
 - ii. Is this job similar to what you want to be doing your entire life?
 - iii. What is your ideal career?
 - 1. What are the qualifications you need for this job?
 - a. Do you possess these qualifications?
 - 2. What is your pathway to this career?
 - b. Does your current job pay minimum wage?
 - i. Is your pay rate enough to support yourself and/or your family?
 - ii. What does your financial responsibilities consist of?
 - c. Do you have employee benefits at work (i.e. health insurance, paid sick leave etc.)?
 - d. Do you have other means of making money?
 - i. What are they?
 - ii. How much extra money do you make?

1. What do you do with this money?
2. Is this extra money helpful?
 - a. In what ways?
5. Have you ever been arrested?
 - a. What was the offense you were charged with?
 - b. How long were you in prison?
 - c. Describe what the living conditions in prison were like.
 - d. Were those conditions similar or different to the ones in your neighborhood?
 - i. In what ways?
6. Do you have friends or relatives imprisoned?
 - a. What were they convicted of?
 - b. How long is their sentence?
 - i. Do you think their sentence was fair based on the crime they “committed”?
 1. Why or why not?
 - c. How does their imprisonment make you feel?
7. What do you do for leisure activities?
 - a. How did you first learn about and get engaged in these activities?
 - b. How far are these activities in relation to your house?
 - c. How often do you get to do them?
 - d. Does your family know about/support your engagement in these activities?
8. Has the Police ever stopped, questioned, and frisked you?
 - a. What was the rationale they gave for this?
 - b. What was your response?

- c. What was the outcome?
9. What is your view of authority and law enforcement in your neighborhood?
- a. If not the Police, who do you think makes the rules?
 - i. What are the rules?
 - ii. Do you follow these rules?
10. Who is your greatest role model?
- a. Why do you admire them?
 - b. Do you aspire to be like them?
11. How would you define your style (image)?
- a. Do you think your image is 'cool'?
 - b. What do other people think of your image?
 - i. What is your response?
12. What are you going to do next?
- a. Is furthering your education an option?
 - i. Why or why not?
 - b. How do you plan on making your dreams come true?
 - i. Whose help do you need?
 - ii. What are the resources you need access to?
13. How do you think society views Black men?
- a. Is there any truth to this viewpoint?
 - i. In what ways is it true or untrue?
 - b. Where do you think this viewpoint comes from?
 - c. What would you say to people with this view?

d. What is your view of other Black men?

i. Does anyone hold similar views as you?

1. Who are they?

14. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments you would like to add?

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