

# 1. BRINGING MASCULINITY INTO VIEW

It is October of 2001 and social anxieties are running high. U.S. President George W. Bush has declared a “War on Terror” in the wake of 9/11. American and British forces have begun bombing raids of Afghanistan in a bid to wipe out suspected terrorist camps. Closer to home the daily newspapers are featuring reports of crime in the streets. A woman is raped on her way home from a party. A man is knifed outside a local bar.

It seems that violence is everywhere. It also seems that men are its perpetrators. But in the midst of all this anxiety, most people are managing to go about their daily activities. Mine happens to involve heading to a nearby prison to interview some of the men there. My plan is to talk to them about, of all things, violence. I want to find out about their lives and the factors that brought them into conflict with the law, and how violence figures into that equation. The pages that follow are constructed around those interviews from the fall of 2001. I talked to nineteen men housed in different parts of the prison, and they gave me their time and shared their stories and insights.<sup>1</sup>

Now, in relaying what the men had to say, I am conscious that it might be convenient to simply treat them as the “Criminal Other,” as being very different from so-called “law-abiding citizens.” After all, these are men convicted of a range of criminal offences—including thefts, robberies, and assaults—and some of them have spent the better part of their lives in prison. Categorizing the men that way would maintain a distance between “them” and “us.” It would also most likely involve asking questions about their difference, about whatever individual pathology or psychological weaknesses led them into prison. Because it is men that I interview, and because men seem to be at the centre of so much of the violence that occurs in society, it might also be an easy move to construct an analysis that pins the blame on men-as-a-group, to assert that males are by their very nature or essence prone to violence and crime.

I am not taking those approaches here. Instead, what I show is that much like all males in our society, the men I met with are engaged in a complex and complicated process of constructing their identities as “masculine” actors. To this extent, they share a lot in common with other men as they endeavour to respond to the pressures to “be a man” in our culture while navigating the particular social contexts and conditions in which they find themselves. What makes that journey more complicated, however, are the ways in which the resources and strategies available to these men have been circumscribed by their race and their class. And I believe that the men’s resort to violence must be situated within this context.

Categorizing the men as the Criminal Other or locating their violence within some inherent male essence is problematic for another reason. While each of the men talks about his own use of violence, they also all relay experiences of violence being done *to* them, not just by other individuals but also by institutional processes and systems. This is especially the case for the Aboriginal men, who make up the majority of the men I interviewed. For these men, the historical processes of colonialism and colonialization<sup>2</sup> continue to leave deep scars on their communities and their identities. Only by moving beyond the narrow confines of the Criminal Other and an essentialist construction of men can we begin to appreciate the wider manifestations of violence. This is especially so given that all of the men whose stories I will tell here share in common the status of “prisoner.”

As the work of a research project unfolds it often begins to take on larger proportions. Indeed, while my initial interest here was to explore issues of masculinity and violence in men’s lives by looking at the factors that brought them into conflict with the law, the work soon broadened to include the ways in which these issues play out in the prison context. What I came to understand is that *prison itself* is a gendered space, one in which violence figures prominently. It is also a gendering experience in which the pressures on men to “do” masculinity are even more intense and exaggerated. These insights have led me to ask difficult questions about the current fascination with the resort to incarceration—especially of racialized and economically marginalized men—as a response to social anxiety.

### **Social Anxiety and the Resort to Incarceration**

Events such as 9/11 and the U.S. War on Terror are by no means the only sources of social anxiety in our time. Other developments are having ruinous effects on people’s lives. As several writers (see, for example,

Broad, Cruikshank, and Mulvale 2006; Harvey 2005; Broad 2000) document, globalization and related neo-liberal economic policies have led to an increasing precariousness in the labour market. While McJobs (Ritzer 2004) characterized by part-time work with few if any benefits, limited-term contracts, and low wages predominate at the bottom end of the labour market, economic restructuring and downsizing have undermined the career paths and job security of middle-class workers. These socio-economic changes have produced heightened levels of inequality. As a Statistics Canada survey of assets, debt, and wealth documented, millions of families and individuals are now living on the brink of financial disaster while a small proportion of people are accumulating huge slices of the wealth pie. Social analyst Steve Kerstetter summarizes these data:

All in all, Canadians had total personal wealth of more than \$2.4 trillion in 1999, or an average of \$199,644 for each family unit. The actual distribution of wealth, however, was anything but equitable. The wealthiest 10% of family units in Canada held 53% of the personal wealth, and the top 50% controlled an almost unbelievable 94.4% of the wealth. That left only 5.6% to be shared among the bottom 50%. (Kerstetter 2002a: 1; see also Kerstetter 2002b)

With the disappearance of secure, well-paying jobs and the stable communities that went with them comes increased social anxiety, which easily translates into a fear of crime. Indeed, even though crime rates have been declining in recent years (Silver 2007), crime stories have become the regular fodder of media reports in which acts of interpersonal violence—robberies, sexual assaults, murders—figure prominently. Opinion polls frequently rank violent crime as a major concern of the citizenry (Stein 2001). Politicians increasingly base their election platforms on a law and order agenda premised on the need to “get tough” on crime.<sup>3</sup>

In the face of these socio-economic changes and heightened social anxiety the response of the state has not been to strengthen the social safety net to ensure that people have access to the resources they need. The response, rather, has been to unravel it. Since the mid-1990s, for example, various provincial governments in Canada have implemented cutbacks to social welfare in the form of limits on eligibility and decreased benefit rates for social assistance, more intensive monitoring in the form of welfare “snitch lines” designed to encourage individuals to report suspected abusers, and increases in the penalties attached to the “failure” to participate in work or work-related activities (Chunn and Gavigan 2006;

Mosher 2006; Mosher and Hermer 2002). Instead of strengthening the social safety net, state officials have, it would seem, tended to respond to increasing public anxiety and insecurity by resorting to incarceration as a solution to societal ills. As Loïc Wacquant (2001: 404) points out, prisons have become the primary mechanism for containing “the disorders created by mass unemployment, the imposition of precarious wage work, and the shrinking of social protection.”

In the United States the population of state and federal prisons increased about six and one-half times from 1972 to 2000, from less than 200,000 to over 1.3 million, and the incarceration rate increased from 93 to 478 per 100,000 people (Wood 2003: 17). In 1995 alone the United States spent some \$55.1 billion on new prison construction (Taylor 1999: 189). While Canadians might believe that we imprison fewer people than other countries do, internationally Canada has one of the highest incarceration rates after the United States and Russia. In 2000, Canada imprisoned its population at a rate of 118 per 100,000 people, compared to a European average of 84. Canada imprisons young people at four times the rate that we imprison adults, and ten to fifteen times the rate of European countries. The rate of incarceration in provincial prisons has risen 102 percent since the 1980s. In 2004/05, adult correctional service expenditures in Canada totalled \$2.8 billion. The largest proportion (71 percent) of those monies was spent on custodial services (CAEFS 2007; Beattie 2006).

This resort to incarceration has both class and racial overtones. In the United States, prison has taken over the function of the Black ghettos as an instrument of control and containment. According to one study, “Black men made up 6% of the national population but have accounted for over half of new admissions in state and federal prisons every year since 1989” (Wacquant 2001: 404–05; see also Wacquant 2000). About one-third of all Black males in the United States will experience state prison in their lifetimes (Snider 2004: 229). In Canada, prison has become for many young Aboriginal people the contemporary equivalent of what the Indian residential school represented for their parents (Jackson 1989: 216). Although Aboriginal peoples made up just 3 percent of the Canadian population in 2004/05, they accounted for 22 percent of admissions to provincial jails and 17 percent of admissions to federal prisons. This overrepresentation is most acute in the Prairie provinces. In Manitoba, Aboriginal peoples made up only 11 percent of the population and a whopping 70 percent of sentenced custody admissions in 2004/05 (Beattie 2006).

Along with the class and racial overtones of this resort to incarceration

tion, what is also obvious is that prisoners are overwhelmingly males. Even a cursory look at prison statistics tells us that men and boys make up the vast majority of those imprisoned. In 2004/05, men represented 95 percent of admissions to federal custody, 90 percent of provincial/territorial sentenced admissions, and 89 percent of remand admissions in Canada (Beattie 2006). Similarly, about eight in ten youth court cases and admissions to correctional services involved males in 2002/03 (Reitano 2004: 6). Indeed, what often goes unacknowledged in discussions of public concerns over the nature and amount of crime in society is its gendered character. Fears of crime can readily be distilled down to a fear of *men*, especially the familiar folk devils: gang members, rapists, wife beaters, drug dealers, and robbers. Even the way we talk about the issue invokes a masculine language. As Richard Collier (1998: 167) observes, calls to “get tough” on crime are more often than not accompanied by cautions against the feminized (or emasculated) alternative: being too “soft” on crime.

While public anxieties and insecurities have clearly been channelled into a concern about crime and violence, and a primary strategy adopted by state officials to respond to this concern has been incarceration, we actually know very little about what goes on behind prison walls. The news media are partly to blame for this oversight. As Maeve McMahon (1999: 6) notes,

While the news media frequently focus on what is happening with respect to crime, policing, and the courts, attention to what is happening in prisons is far less common. Moreover, when the news media do focus on prisons, it is typically in the context of a major problem being experienced in running the system (as, for example, when a major riot takes place).

But criminologists also share responsibility for our lack of knowledge about what goes on inside prisons. As Gordon West (2006: 4) points out, a quick survey of the major Canadian criminology texts reveals an “astounding dearth of empirically grounded, descriptive material on how prisoners in Canadian penitentiaries actually live, experience, understand, and organize their lives.” Looking at the U.S. context, Wacquant (2002: 385) maintains that the ethnography of the prison has become “not merely an endangered species but a virtually extinct one.” Despite an earlier history of prison research (see, for example, Clemmer 1940; Sykes 1958; Irwin 1970; and Jacobs 1977), including a rich tradition of prison writing by inmates (such as Eldridge Cleaver, Angela Davis, and Malcolm X), contemporary researchers have tended to turn their attention more

to diffuse social control mechanisms than confinement.<sup>4</sup> Influenced by Michel Foucault's (1979) argument in *Discipline and Punish* that the prison was being displaced from the centre to the periphery in the emerging "disciplinary society," scholars have focused on how forms of social control play out in sites such as schools, welfare offices, and workplaces. Life inside the prison, it seems, has become more and more invisible, and at a time when—contrary to Foucault's prediction—more and more people are being sent there.

As Wacquant (2002: 388) also reminds us, it is also not enough to simply study the prison as a "world unto itself." What goes on inside prison is intricately connected with processes occurring in the wider society. Its social influences and effects involve a complex co-ordination from other organizations, "from the family, labor market and neighborhood all the way to the bureaucratic and political nerve centres of the state." To this I would add that the prison is less than a "world unto itself" in another important way: those who are its captives may regularly traverse the divide between "inside" and "outside," in the process carrying with them their knowledge and the imprints of that carceral experience.

While statistics can tell us that prisoners are most likely to be racialized and economically marginalized men, then, we need to know more. What have their lives been like? What are the factors that brought them into conflict with the law? How have they managed their experiences of incarceration? Even more to the point, given the prevalent concerns about crime and violence in society, and the reality that those targeted as the main culprits are male, we need to inquire into exactly how masculinity and violence figure in the lives of these men.

This book sets out to explore the lives of men who have been made the subjects of the resort to incarceration as a solution to social anxiety. I premised it on the belief that if we are to find answers to the questions raised by that incarceration, we need to map out a theoretical terrain that attends to the ways in which masculinity and violence play out in men's lives—both inside and outside prison walls. This leads us to a consideration of how men, masculinity, and crime have been theorized in criminology.

### **Men, Masculinity, and Crime**

Criminologists have long known that males engage in crime far more frequently than do females, and are far more likely than females to be found behind prison walls. Yet, until recently, the maleness of their subject matter has escaped close scrutiny. As Maureen Cain (1989: 4) put it, "Men as males have not been the objects of the criminological gaze."

Close scrutiny of prison research supports this assertion. As Joe Sim (1994: 101) observed, when prison studies have been conducted they have concentrated on “men as prisoners” and not “prisoners as men.”

It was the feminist critique of criminology that put the relation between men and crime—or what is often referred to as the “sex question in criminology” (Allen 1990)—front and centre on criminology’s agenda. Initially, this critique took the form of documenting the invisibility of women in criminological accounts (Bertrand 1967; Heidensohn 1968 and 1985; Adelberg and Currie 1987 and 1993; Naffine 1987; Gelsthorpe and Morris 1988; Daly and Chesney-Lind 1988; Comack 1992). Mainstream theories, it was pointed out, were really “malestream” because they were decidedly premised on the criminal as male, with women positioned as an anomaly or afterthought. Despite the use of generic terms—such as “criminal,” “defendant,” or “delinquent”—criminology has historically been about men. More often than not, mainstream criminologists simply gave no consideration to women. When women did come into view, they were understood in relation to a male standard or measuring rod—and typically judged to be lacking.

From this initial critique feminist criminologists went on to generate a rich literature concerned with developing distinctly women-centred theory and research within criminology. The work sought to expose how the gendered nature of women’s lives in a patriarchal society affected both their risk of victimization at the hands of violent men and their involvement in crime (see, for example, Chesney-Lind and Rodriguez 1983; Stanko 1985; Miller 1986; Adelberg and Currie 1987 and 1993; Gilfus 1992; Richie 1996; Comack 1996; Chesney-Lind and Sheldon 1998). This feminist work eventually extended to include a call to “gender” crime more broadly. Women, it was held, were not the only ones with a gender; men’s lives too needed to be understood in gendered terms. In this regard, while mainstream criminology had been characterized by its neglect of the female, critics pointed out that the discipline’s aptitude for explaining male patterns of offending was just as troublesome. As Judith Allen (1988: 16) noted, “Men’s criminality can be discussed in terms of their class, their race, their age, their religion, education, occupation or marital status; but the role of their membership in a *sex* is never investigated.”

During the 1990s, criminologists responded to this challenge by initiating studies of men, masculinity, and crime. At the forefront of this effort has been James Messerschmidt (1993, 1997, 1999, 2004, and 2005).

*The Work of James Messerschmidt*

In his endeavour to contribute to the development of a “feminist theory of gendered crime” (Messerschmidt 1993: 62), Messerschmidt designed a theory situating men’s involvement in crime within the context of “doing” masculinity. His work includes a number of notable elements.

- *Locating men’s efforts to frame their identities in a broader structural context.* Messerschmidt adopts sociologist Anthony Giddens’s concept of “structured action” to resolve an issue that continues to haunt social thinkers: how to theorize the seeming disconnect between social structures (such as capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism) and individual agency (the location and wilful action of individuals within those structures).

Following Giddens, Messerschmidt (1993: 62) conceptualizes the relation between structure and action as reciprocal: “As we engage in social action, we simultaneously help create the social structures that facilitate/limit social practice.” This conception moves us away from simply seeing social structures such as capitalism or patriarchy as “things” that act upon us. Rather, while the particular social contexts in which we find ourselves can enable or constrain our actions, at the same time our own actions can work to maintain or change the nature of our relations with other individuals.

For instance, we may live in a society in which racism, because it has been institutionally imbedded over time through practices such as colonialism, limits and constrains the lives of Aboriginal peoples. But that racism has only been able to exist because individuals, especially non-Aboriginal people, act in ways that reproduce and perpetuate it.

Moreover, rather than conceptualizing structures as separate yet interconnected (as many feminist theorists have done), Messerschmidt (1993: 64) suggests that divisions of labour based on class, gender, and race are *simultaneously* produced in the everyday interactions of social actors. This conception avoids imposing a hierarchy that would suggest that one form of inequality or oppression is more significant than another. It also allows us to recognize that individuals do not frame their identities in singular terms (for instance, I am female/I am white/I am privileged by my class position). As well, while we can examine people’s lives through the lenses of gender, of race, or of class, we need to remember that no one perspective is complete if it does not bring the others into view.

- *Framing the making of a gender identity as a contingent and situational process.* Following on the work of ethnomethodologists Candace

West and Don Zimmerman (1987; see also Fenstermaker, West, and Zimmerman 1991), Messerschmidt views gender as a “situated accomplishment.” While sex is understood as the social identification of individuals as men or women, gender is the accomplishment of that identification in social interaction: “We coordinate our activities to ‘do’ gender in situational ways” (Messerschmidt 1993: 79).

For instance, how we dress, the mannerisms we use, and even the ways we walk are means by which we can signal to others our identification as men or women. In the process, individuals come to realize that their behaviour is accountable to others, and, as such, “They construct their actions in relation to how they might be interpreted by others in the particular social context in which they occur” (1993: 79). In a culture that believes there are but two sexes—male and female—this accountability will involve living up to the gender ideals that have been tied to each sex; that is, behaving “as a man” or “as a woman” would in a given situation. Moreover, because we accomplish masculinity and femininity in specific social situations (although not necessarily in circumstances of our own choosing), these products are never static or finished but are continually under construction, especially as we move through the life course.

- *Conceptualizing the particular forms that masculinity takes as culturally and historically specific and tied to the relations of power between men and women.* Here Messerschmidt draws on the work of R.W. Connell (1987, 1995, and 2000), specifically the concept of “hegemonic masculinity.” Connell was interested in theorizing how a particular gender order—a “historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of masculinity and femininity” (Connell 1987: 98–99)—comes to be reproduced in society. Connell suggested that male dominance in the gender order is achieved by the ascendancy of a particular idealized form of masculinity that is culturally glorified, honoured, and exalted.

Hegemonic masculinity refers not just to a set of role expectations or an identity; it is a “pattern of practice” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832). Different from a male sex role, this cultural ideal may not correspond with the actual personalities of the majority of men, and may well not be “normal” in a statistical sense because only a minority of men may enact it. In these terms, sports heroes, movie stars, business tycoons, and even fantasy figures (such as the X Men or Superman) can offer representations of masculinity that come to be normative in the sense that they embody “the currently most honored way of being

a man” and require all other men to position themselves in relation to these representations (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832).

Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to women and what Connell (1987: 188) refers to as “emphasized femininity.” This is a femininity organized as an adaptation to men’s power, and it emphasizes compliance, nurturance, and empathy as womanly virtues. As well, because men will “do” masculinity according to the social situation in which they find themselves, different types of masculinity—complicit, subordinated, and oppositional—exist in relation to the hegemonic form. For example, while hegemonic masculinity valorizes heterosexuality, a key form of subordinated masculinity is homosexuality. In these terms, it makes more sense to speak of masculinity in the plural—as *masculinities*. According to Messerschmidt (1993: 117), “These different masculinities emerge from practices that encompass different resources and that are simultaneously based on different collective trajectories.” Nevertheless, because “most men benefit from the subordination of women, and hegemonic masculinity is the cultural expression of this ascendancy” (Connell 1987: 185), most men engage in practices that attempt to sustain hegemonic masculinity.

- *Viewing crime is a resource for “doing” gender.* Messerschmidt argues that it is in the process of “doing” masculinity that men simultaneously construct forms of criminality. He explains: “Because types of criminality are possible only when particular social conditions present themselves, when other masculine resources are unavailable, particular types of crime can provide an alternative resource for accomplishing gender and, therefore, affirming a particular type of masculinity” (1993: 84). Accordingly, he puts this theory to work to understand varieties of youth crime, street crime, corporate crime, sexual harassment in the workplace, wife beating, and rape (Messerschmidt 1993) as well as applying it in case studies involving the lynching of Black men in the U.S. South in the late nineteenth century, the life of Malcolm X, violence among working-class girls in gangs, and the decision to launch the space shuttle *Challenger* in 1986 (Messerschmidt 1997). Key to his analysis is the thesis that gendered power is central to understanding why men commit more crimes and more serious crimes than women do: crime is one practice in which and through which men’s power over women can be established, and the different types of crime that men may commit are determined by the power relations among them (1993: 84).

*Messerschmidt's Critics*

Although considered to be an “extremely important” development (Hood-Williams 2001: 53) in theorizing the sex specificity of crime, a development that “without question, made a significant contribution to the criminological debate on masculinities” (Collier 2004: 291), Messerschmidt’s work—especially his use of the concept “hegemonic masculinity”—has nonetheless come under heavy criticism by other criminologists.

Tony Jefferson (1994, 1996a, and 1996b), for one, points to the potential psychological and emotional costs associated with men’s efforts to “do” masculinity. He notes that pressures on men to live up to the “patriarchal masculine ideal,” to be a “man’s man,” can create considerable feelings of insecurity and vulnerability. Jefferson (1994: 12) cites the example of falling in love: “Here the need for and dependence on another is posed most starkly, in direct contradiction to the notions of self-sufficiency and independence central to hegemonic masculinity. It is almost as if to succeed in love one has to fail as a man.” This recognition of the difficulties that men can experience in relating to dominant models of masculinity, according to Jefferson, points to the need for a theory of masculine subjectivity that is capable of connecting social and psychic processes.

Jefferson demonstrates his point through an analysis of the biography of Mike Tyson, who transformed himself “first from a pudgy, passive, lisping schoolboy—the butt of local bullies—to a feared neighbourhood bully and thief, and then to a boxing prodigy who went on to become the youngest-ever [at the age of 20] world heavyweight champion” (Jefferson 1996b: 153). He argues that Tyson cannot be explained solely by reference to his structural location as a poor Black boy from the American ghetto, and aims to show “how subjectivity can be both a product of various social discourses, and of unique personal biography” (Jefferson 1996b: 158).

Jefferson understands Tyson’s transformation as being connected to his adoption of the “tough guy” discourse, wherein toughness connotes “one’s ability to survive on the streets” as well as “the ability to meet and resist physical challenges” (1996b: 160). An identification with a “bad boy” image enabled Tyson to socially succeed in the world of boxing, with its “hypermasculine ethos.” But Tyson’s identification with boxing was not just about winning, money, or power; it was also a way of suppressing feelings of powerlessness and anxiety. For instance, just before the 1982 Junior Olympics Tyson remarked, “I’m ‘Mike Tyson,’ everyone likes me now.” Jefferson (1996b: 164) suggests:

Tyson desperately wanted it to be true that “everyone,” but especially those close to him, liked him as a person; but the response of “everyone” close to him, in teaching him to control and surmount this fear in the ring, only convinced him that the “truth” of his identity lay only in the boxing ring, as the “complete destroyer.” Then, and possibly only then, in the act of destroying another man, the psychic anxiety underpinning the feared passivity could be (if temporarily) assuaged, and the delight of all those close to him, and his fans, could be “good enough” testimony of love

While boxing provided a socially acceptable (and decidedly masculine) venue for Tyson to resolve his contradictory feelings (passive quitter/complete destroyer; gentle/vicious; needy/needing no one), matters were far less straightforward outside the ring. As Jefferson notes, Tyson was particularly ill-equipped to deal with the fame and fortune accompanying heavyweight championships. His troubles eventually extended to include a conviction and six-year prison sentence for rape.

Jefferson’s work highlights the complex and variable nature of men’s experiences and emotions. Men (like women) can be assertive or timid, hateful or loving, confident or unsure. While not denying the social costs of men’s actions (violence against women is one prominent example), we need to keep in mind that men too have their troubles and uncertainties. Jefferson’s insights also showcase the kinds of pressures, contradictions, and tensions that boys and men encounter in their struggles to live up to the “patriarchal masculine ideal.” Without an appreciation of this complexity, we are confined to a view of men as “always already empowered” (Collier 1998: 295).

Nevertheless, while Jefferson draws on psychoanalytic theory to explain the psychological dimensions of men’s relating to various constructions of masculinity, that theory does not provide the only framework available for the job.<sup>5</sup> In responding to critiques made by Jefferson and others, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 843) note, “The concept of hegemonic masculinity originally was formulated with a strong awareness of psychoanalytic arguments about the layered and contradictory character of personality, the everyday contestation in social life, and the mixture of strategies necessary in any attempt to maintain hegemony.” So long as the concept of hegemonic masculinity is not reduced to a single dimension of gender relations and/or treated as if it is a specification of a norm, it can be used to recognize the complex and complicated nature of subjectivity.

Richard Collier (1996, 1998, and 2004) takes Messerschmidt to task

for his tendency to overemphasize the negative or undesirable traits associated with “doing” masculinity. Messerschmidt, for instance, argues that hegemonic masculinity “emphasizes practices toward authority, control, competitive individualism, independence, aggressiveness, and the capacity for violence.” As Collier (1998: 22) notes, what men are not seen as “doing” is a masculinity that might in any sense be interpreted as positive. In responding to this criticism, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 840) state: “Most accounts of hegemonic masculinity do include such ‘positive’ actions as bringing home a wage, sustaining a sexual relationship, and being a father.” They suggest that it would be difficult to see how hegemony—ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion—could be realized solely by violence, aggression, and self-centredness, since fundamental to the conception of hegemony is the active consent and participation of subordinated groups.

Nevertheless, Collier’s critique provides an important caution against the dangers of reducing masculinity to a fixed entity or a set of personality traits. Understanding masculinity primarily in relation to a set of negative traits can too easily lead to a kind of essentialist position that views “real men” as inherently oppressive, dominating, and violent. It may well be, for instance, that for some boys and men (especially those marginalized by race and class position), a search for independence constitutes a positive trait emanating from a desire to escape the oppressive conditions of their existence. We need, therefore, to resist demonizing *all* men simply *because* they are men—which means being continually mindful of the particular social contexts in which boys and men find themselves as they endeavour to “accomplish” masculinity.

Criminologists have also been critical of Messerschmidt’s use of hegemonic masculinity to explain the causes of crime. John Hood-Williams (2001: 43) makes the point that crime is a highly generalized notion that “puts together disparate practices and invites us to treat them as if they were similar.” Men are seen as “doing” masculinity through engaging in such varied practices as the rape of women, property theft, corporate crime, violence towards other men, and even football hooliganism. As Collier (2004: 292) notes, “To account for such diversity in terms of men ‘accomplishing’ a gender identity is asking a great deal of the concept of masculinity.”

In addition to these concerns, Messerschmidt’s treatment of the category of “crime” leads to other difficulties. In his book *Masculinities and Crime: Critique and Reconceptualization of Theory* Messerschmidt (1993: 84–85) makes a particular statement three times in the space of two pages: “Crime is a resource that may be summoned when men lack

other resources to accomplish gender.” He seems to be suggesting that crime is akin to your computer’s default option—it is something that is automatically selected. At the same time Messerschmidt is setting up a dualism: law-abiding behaviour is the norm and criminal behaviour the exception. Such a dualism operates to obscure the similarities between so-called law-abiding and criminal behaviours—especially in relation to “doing” masculinity. These similarities become evident, for instance, in the different venues in which violence can occur. While some men engage in violence in the context of the bar scene, other men resort to violence on the hockey rink. While both constitute assaultive behaviours, violence at the bar is far more likely to result in criminal charges than does violence in hockey.<sup>6</sup> In short, Messerschmidt’s theorizing does not problematize what actually constitutes “crime.” Even in his later works (Messerschmidt 1997 and 2004), he entertains no theoretical discussion of crime as a category of analysis. Instead he only situates it as a “resource” for enacting gender.

Collier (1998) locates Messerschmidt’s work as a key component of what he calls “the masculinity turn” in criminology, referring to the recent body of work exploring the relationship between men and crime by means of an explicit foregrounding of the concept of masculinity. Sceptical of this turn, Collier (2004: 297) maintains, “It is open to question, ultimately, just how adequate the concept of masculinity is” when analysts seek “to explain, understand, or otherwise account for the crimes of men.” Instead of “gendering crime,” he argues, we need a “sexing of the criminal.”

### *Sexed Bodies and Embodiment*

Drawing upon poststructuralist theory, the “sexed bodies” approach (Daly 1997) aims to transcend the sex/gender distinction contained in Messerschmidt’s account. Making a distinction between sex and gender, as feminist philosopher Judith Butler (1990) argued, does nothing but reproduce as gender (man/woman) the assumption of a pre-discursive sexual difference (male/female). In other words, “The distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (Butler 1990: 7) because the term “gender” commonly refers to “sex,” that is, the cultural meanings ascribed to bodies sexed as male or female. For Butler, then, gender is the *performance* of the cultural significance of sex. Through this act of performativity we construct ourselves as male or female, masculine or feminine, according to socially constituted norms and practices. In short, we become subjects from our performances and the performances of others towards us (Alsop, Fitzsimons, and Lennon 2002: 99).

To focus on sexed bodies is to showcase how our bodies are more

than just markers of difference (as male or female). In these terms, *embodiment* is considered central to our sense of self; it is our way of “being in the world” and therefore an essential part of our subjectivity or identity. Feminist theorists such as Iris Marion Young (1990) and Moira Gatens (1996) have pointed out that the way in which we experience our bodies is not direct or unmediated; how we experience our bodies as male or female is a reflection of both our personal histories and the culturally shared notions of certain bodily forms. For instance, Young suggests that many of the ways in which females relate to their bodies come from the experience of living in a patriarchal society in which women are continually under threat (especially in terms of their sexual safety) and constantly exposed to the male gaze (whereby women come to see themselves and their bodies as they think men see them). In these terms, femininity and masculinity are ways of living in differently shaped bodies, and our identities as women and men are formed as ways of giving significance to different bodily forms.

Despite Collier’s harsh verdict on the limits of “masculinity” as a theoretically useful concept, Messerschmidt went on to revise his theorizing on men, masculinity, and crime in his later writing, especially in relation to this issue of “embodiment.” In his book *Flesh and Blood: Adolescent Gender Diversity and Violence* (2004), he proposes to “bring the body back in” to criminology—not by “sexing the criminal” but by “embodying gender.” In this regard, Messerschmidt (2004: 31) notes that by focusing on how bodies can be inscribed through discourse, postmodern writers such as Collier (1998; see also Young 1996) “have successfully challenged the notion of a ‘natural’ pre-social body by showing that our conceptualization of the ‘criminal’ often is discursively ‘sexed’ in particular ways.” Yet, according to Messerschmidt, “How the body is experienced in everyday life regrettably is overlooked.” What is missing are “the social processes and practices through which the body becomes meaningful to the social agent himself or herself; how the body is lived in everyday life disappears, thus forgoing any conceptualization of how crime is actually embodied” (Messerschmidt 2004: 31). In short, postmodern writers such as Collier have replaced a “natural essentialism” with a “discursive essentialism.” With the body constituted as whatever discourse constructs it as being, it is the discourse—and not the body—that becomes the focus of examination. Messerschmidt therefore proposes that we concentrate on embodiment as a lived aspect of gender, on the ways in which our bodies constrain and facilitate social action and therefore mediate and influence social practices. As Connell (1995: 52) noted, masculinity involves “a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions,

certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities of sex.” In these terms, the physical sense of “maleness” (and “femaleness”) is central to the social interpretation of gender.

Messerschmidt’s revised theory, then, conceptualizes “doing gender” as both mindful and physical: “The body is a participant in the shaping and generating of social practice. Consequently, it is impossible to consider human agency—and therefore crime and violence—without taking gendered embodiment into account” (Messerschmidt 2004: 49). Utilizing case studies of two white working-class boys and two white working-class girls involved in assaultive violence, Messerschmidt (2004) applies his revised theory of gendered embodiment to understand how motivations for violence (and non-violence) emerge in three different sites—the home, school, and street—in the life histories of these youth. In the process, he is able to show “how gender difference is not simply constructed between boys and girls (as most criminologists contend), but it is also prominent among boys and among girls as well as individually *across* the three settings” (2004: 131).

In a more recent collaborative work, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) draw attention to the “geography” of masculinities: the ways in which masculinities are reproduced at the local, regional, and global levels. While the local is “constructed in the arenas of face-to-face interaction of families, organizations, and immediate communities,” the regional is “constructed at the level of the culture or the nation-state,” and the global is “constructed in transnational arenas such as world politics and transnational business and media” (2005: 849). Corresponding to each level of analysis is a particular research strategy: ethnographic and life-history research; discursive, political, and demographic research; and research on globalization, respectively. As well, links exist between each of these levels. For instance, Connell and Messerschmidt suggest that hegemonic masculinity at the regional level “is symbolically represented through the interplay of specific local masculine practices that have regional significance, such as those constructed by feature film actors, professional athletes, and politicians” (2005: 849). One example of the interplay between local and regional hegemonic masculinities is sport: “In Western societies, practice at the local level—such as engaging in professional sporting events—constructs hegemonic masculine models (e.g., ‘star athletes’) at the regional level, which in turn affect other local settings” (2005: 850). In these terms, paying attention to the geography of masculinity—the different levels at which masculinities are reproduced (and their interconnections)—adds a significant dimension to our understanding of hegemonic masculinity.

Messerschmidt's theorizing offers a useful starting point for thinking about men who are the subjects of criminal justice intervention. It calls attention to how men's involvement in crime is connected to broader structural features and power relations (of not only gender but also class and race) and at the same time is tied to culturally dominant and contested constructions of what it means to be male in contemporary society. With this understanding of Messerschmidt's theoretical approach (including some of the cautions raised by his critics), we can turn to the present study.

### **The Standpoint(s) of Men in Prison**

In framing this study my initial purpose was quite specific: to interview men in prison to learn about the violence in their lives—their own use of violence and that which had been directed at them, as well as the meanings they attach to these experiences. My interest was in understanding the men's standpoints. How did these men become who they are? In particular, my interest was in exploring the connections between masculinities (the ways in which the men enact their gendered identities) and violence (the use of interpersonal force). Given that much of my previous work focused on the issue of men's violence against women and was aimed at uncovering the standpoint of women in prison with respect to their experiences of violence (Comack 1996), this project seemed a logical step.

Standpoint analysis has been an important epistemology for feminist criminologists interested in exploring the lives of women who come into conflict with the law (see, for example, Gilfus 1992; Richie 1996; Adelberg and Currie 1993; and Comack 1996). While standpoint feminism has assumed a number of forms, the overall intention has been "to place women as knowers at the center of inquiry in order to produce better understandings of women and the world" (Naffine 1997: 46). In learning more about the lives of criminalized women and the "miles of problems" (Comack 1996: 134) that brought them into conflict with the law—problems with alcohol and drug use, histories of violence and abuse, lack of education and job skills, struggles to provide and care for their children, and, for Aboriginal women, the ongoing impact of racist colonial practices—feminist criminologists took pains to distance their work from formulations that located the source of women's problems in individual pathologies or personality disturbances. Instead, the structured inequalities in society that contour and constrain the lives of women provided the backdrop for understanding women's involvement in crime. As British criminologist Pat Carlen (1988: 14) phrased

it, “Women set about making their lives within conditions that have certainly not been of their own choosing.”

Given that standpoint analysis has developed in criminology with the express purpose of working towards an understanding of the lives of criminalized women, adopting it for a study of criminalized men might well seem to be a questionable move. Yet, in many respects, to do so represents an extension of the logic of standpoint feminism. In the same way that the lives of criminalized women need to be better understood, so too do the lives of criminalized men. While criminalized women encounter structured inequalities that operate to contour and constrain their lives, so too (albeit in differing ways) do criminalized men. As Sandra Harding (2004: 9) points out, “Because different groups are oppressed in different ways, each has the possibility (not the certainty) of developing distinctive insights about systems of social relations in general in which their oppression is a feature.” Although she was writing in reference to the diversity of work carried out on women’s experiences, Harding’s comments are also applicable to the situation of racialized and economically marginalized men.

Nevertheless, one feminist objection to adopting a standpoint analysis for a study involving criminalized men is that these are (more than likely) the very same men who have played a part in the victimization of women. Indeed, it is the case that some of the men whose stories will be told here have engaged in dastardly deeds—including child sexual abuse, the rape of women, wife beatings, assaults, and robberies. To this extent, public concern is justified, as are the calls for those who have committed acts of interpersonal violence to be held accountable for their actions. Yet, in the same way that feminist criminologists have roundly rejected formulations that locate the source of women’s problems in individual pathologies or personality disturbances, so too must we question whether it is sufficient to simply fall back on convenient labels like “the rapist” or “the wife beater” or “the gang member” to make sense of the actions of criminalized men. Such categories can provide an effective means of establishing a distance from these men—as the Criminal Other they are well deserving of the strong arm of the state—but these labels can also lead too easily to that same individualizing and pathologizing of men’s actions, with the consequence that other significant factors are quickly lost from view. As I will show, men’s use of violence is far more complicated and complex than can be captured in reductionist notions of individual responsibility or psychological abnormality.

The use of violence by these men, as we shall see, has much to do with their struggles to frame their identities as males. Indeed, issues

that pertain to living out their lives as men figure prominently in their narratives, and one prominent thread in this respect is their attitudes towards and relationships with women. The men are afforded power and privilege *because* they are sexed as male, and to this extent *they share much in common with other men*. But it is not simply a matter of how the dominant culture dictates “being male” or the acting out of particular “masculine scripts.” As their cases show, the men encounter particular pressures, tensions, and contradictions in their endeavours to “do” masculinity—and these features are very much contoured by the kinds of resources and strategies that are available to them. In particular, the men’s class and race play themselves out in their lives in crucial ways. Almost all of the men I interviewed were working-class, and the majority (fourteen out of nineteen) were Aboriginal or Métis. The men’s social locations have conditioned their choices in a number of different ways.

Pressures to “be a man” have a distinctly social referent, and men’s efforts to succeed at this project are profoundly influenced by class and race; the men’s struggles (and successes) at performing masculinity—including their use of violence—must be located within this broader social context. Such efforts have brought these men into conflict with the law and into prison, which itself is both a gendered space and a gendering experience.

### **Out There/In Here**

In the course of my meetings with the men, and in listening to what they had to say, I found the issue of space or location becoming more and more prevalent. Some of the men had spent the better part of their lives in prison, and had much to share in terms of what that experience involved. Many of the men were also well aware of the differences (and similarities) between their lives in prison and outside of it. The interviews thus shed light not only on the men’s (gendered, raced, and class-compounded) identities and how violence figures in that equation, but also on the intricacies of how masculinities and violence play out in these very different spaces. In this respect, the men’s insights have much to offer for our understanding of the impact of incarceration strategies on those who are made subject to them.

The dualism of “out there/in here” was a predominant theme emerging from the interviews, and it provides the main organizing device for the discussion. All of the men were “in here”—in prison—for criminal offences ranging from mischief, break and enter, and theft to armed robbery, aggravated sexual assault, and assault causing bodily harm (not all

of which they admitted to having committed). During the course of our conversations in discussing their lives, many of the men referred to “out there” versus “in here.” But “out there/in here” is not a simple bifurcation. “Out there” references school, work, family and domestic relationships, gang affiliations and street life, the bar scene, drugging and drinking, and criminal activity. Men’s violence takes particular forms “out there.” As well, the pressures on the men in performing masculinity are specific “out there.” The men also experience “in here” differently. For some of them, prison has become a familiar and comfortable space. For others, it is a scary and threatening place. The ways in which violence and masculinity play out—both outside and inside the prison walls—have a specificity.

My purpose, then, is to reveal the standpoints of men who have been made the subject of the resort to incarceration as a solution to social anxiety. I ask questions about who these men are and how they became who they are, considering their biographies or histories to this point in their lives. In the process the study locates how violence figures in their lives—both their own use of violence and the violence that has been directed at them. At the same time, because all of the men are intimately familiar with the experience of prison, I look into what that experience has involved, especially in relation to the men’s efforts to “do” masculinity and the place of violence in that undertaking. What the following pages reveal, then, are the tensions that exist for these men as they endeavour to navigate the spaces of “out there” and “in here.” At the same time, I raise questions about the current use of imprisonment. I believe strongly that to the extent that prison merely exacerbates rather than resolves these men’s troubles, we need to seriously question the move to incarcerate as a mechanism for containing social disorder.

## **Notes**

1. See the Afterword for a discussion of the research process.
2. Marlee Kline (1992: fn10) notes that the literature frequently conflates the terms “colonization” and “colonialism.” While colonization is the process of the taking of lands and resources for exploitation, colonialism is the domination of one group over another. In other words, these are two distinct yet related social processes. Kline therefore suggests that the terms colonialism and colonialization be used when referring to the processes of European domination of the First Nations in Canada.
3. For instance, “getting tough on crime” was a key element of the Conservative party’s platform in the 2006 federal election (see, for example: City News 2006).
4. There are, of course, exceptions to this tendency. One is a recent collection edited by Don Sabo, Terry Kupers, and Willie London (2001) that brings together the writings of professional scholars and prisoners to explore prison

masculinities in the U.S. context.

5. It is also a theoretical framework that has been subject to an extensive critique (see Messerschmidt 2005).
6. While it is the case that violence in hockey has resulted in criminal charges of assault (for instance, in the case of Boston Bruins player Marty McSorely), these instances have generated considerable controversy speaks to the highly contentious and disputed nature of what gets defined as “crime.”