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Doing time, Doing Gender: Hyper-masculinity as a Coping Strategy among Male Prisoners

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**Doing Time, Doing Gender:
Hyper-masculinity as a Coping Strategy among Male Prisoners**

Adina Ilea

**Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the MA degree in Criminology**

**Department of Criminology
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Abstract

This thesis assesses the role conceptions of masculinity, more particularly hyper-masculinity play in male prisoners' strategies for coping with the challenges posed by a virtually unisexual prison environment. The study used eight autobiographies by former male prisoners who served sentences in either Canada or the United States in the last forty years. The findings were gathered using a qualitative three-stage coding process and were analyzed using masculinity theories. The results reveal that male prisoners use both hyper-masculine, violent coping strategies and non-violent strategies depending on the circumstances. Critical masculinity theory is better able to explain the violent strategies rather than the non-violent ones. This research is significant because it illuminates the impact of gender on male prisoners' lives and their abilities to cope with imprisonment. The results can be used to inform both treatment and policies regarding male prisoners' incarceration.

Introduction

In this thesis I explore the concepts of masculinities and hyper-masculinity in the context of prisons for men in contemporary Canada and the United States. More specifically, I aim to assess whether there are other models of coping with the prison environment besides the hyper-masculine model described in the prison masculinities literature. This thesis uses the concept of masculinities, implicitly juxtaposed with the concept of femininities or that which is “not masculine”, to facilitate an understanding of male prisoners’ strategies of coping with, and adapting to, their prison environment.

The notion of gender, as applicable to men, has received relatively little attention in criminological research and theory compared to that accorded to women. Messerschmidt (1993) argues that “when criminology addresses gender it speaks exclusively of women, with little or no attention directed to the impact of gender on men” (p. 61). Lutze and Murphy (1999) urge criminologists to “stop viewing gender bias as applicable only to the evaluation of women, and begin exploring how sex-role stereotypes influence men negatively and inhibit treatment attempts to change antisocial male behavior” (p. 728). This thesis uses the concept of hyper-masculinity (Toch, 1998; Jewkes, 2005) to explore how sex-role stereotypes of men as strong, stoic and courageous (among other attributes) influence male prisoners’ interactions with each other and with prison staff and ultimately influence their attempts to deal with their new circumstances of life as prisoners.

In *Chapter One, Theoretical Framework: Critical Masculinity Theories*, I present an overview of masculinity theories and provide the foundation upon which the rest of the research will be based. Theorists of masculinity typically argue that masculinity is an elusive but dynamic social construction often defined by its opposition to femininity.

In *Chapter Two, Literature Review: The Prison Environment and Prisoners' Coping Strategies*, I describe previous research on the conditions of imprisonment in male prisons and the strategies that prisoners use to cope with these conditions. I give special attention to the issue of prison violence as it pertains to masculinity and to prisoners' coping strategies.

In *Chapter Three, Methodological Approach*, I explain the methodological approach of the research, including the questions which propelled this research, the data and method of analysis that I used in attempting to answer these questions and the strengths and limitations of the research design. I derived my data from male prisoners' autobiographies and analyzed these data using qualitative coding methods.

In *Chapter Four, Research Findings*, I present the findings of this research, focusing on both the violent and non-violent strategies that prisoners use in their attempts to cope with their new environment.

In *Chapter Five, Discussion and Analysis*, I focus on the roles violence and masculinity play in prisoners' coping strategies. I also aim to assess the usefulness of masculinity theories in explaining male prisoners' coping strategies.

In the *Conclusion*, I summarize the main points of the research study, focusing on the significance of the findings and what future research in this area may explore.

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework: Critical Masculinity Theories

The purpose of the chapter is to provide the framework upon which male prisoners' coping strategies will be analyzed. Before exploring masculinity in the prison setting, it is useful to define masculinity in general terms.¹ In this chapter, I begin by attempting to develop my own definition of masculinity using a form of critical gender theory (critical masculinity theory) that views masculinities and femininities as socially constructed in particular socio-cultural contexts. Compared to positivist theories which take the objectivist and essentialist stance that masculinity is "what men actually are" (Connell, 1995, p. 69), critical gender theory focuses on typifications related to contingent understandings linked to socio-cultural norms pertaining to such factors as gender, sexual orientation, age, class, ethnicity, race (sociologically understood), and religion (Messerschmidt, 1993; 2001; Connell, 1995; Fracher & Kimmel, 1998; Kaufman, 1998).²

After presenting a general definition of masculinity to serve as a sensitizing concept, I continue the chapter with a discussion of two specific concepts related to masculinity (hegemonic- and hyper-masculinity); in particular, how these two concepts can explain the prison environment and more importantly, male prisoners' behaviours.

Masculinity: Definition and Characteristics

Analytically, for critical masculinity theory, understandings of masculinity and femininity linked to biology are typically of lesser interest than understandings of the way behaviour is alleged to be socially organized according to gender, class, race and other

¹ This study does not claim to deal with masculinity in a universal sense; rather it looks at masculinities contextually as they are conceptualized in particular settings in Canada and the United States.

² Connell (1995, p. 69) states that positivist theories serve as the basis of masculinity/femininity scales in psychological testing which makes assumptions of what is masculine and what is feminine based on traditional views of gender roles.

factors and the way different segments of society perceive and respond to such behaviour (Fracher & Kimmel, 1998).

Understanding masculinity contextually, that is as primarily socially and culturally shaped as opposed to a universal biologically driven phenomenon, leads to a view of masculinities as actively constructed and reconstructed from earliest childhood to life's end. This constant process of social construction has various consequences: first, boys and men often experience insecurity regarding their masculinity, in both conscious and unconscious ways (Kaufman, 1998); second, they sometimes fear that their masculinity may be 'lost' or 'stolen' (Messerschmidt, 1993; 2001); third, particular understandings of masculinity may be tested such that boys and men feel compelled to enact and display signs affirming their understanding of an idealized boyhood or manhood (Messerschmidt, 1993). Common strategies for doing so are denying or minimizing feelings and avoiding behaviours that can be interpreted by others as weak and therefore, feminine or homosexual (Kupers, 1993; Lehne, 1998; Kaufman, 1998), and engaging in stereotypically masculine actions such as aggressive behaviour (Kaufman, 1998; Toch, 1998; Kimmel, 2000). I discuss these strategies below.

Disengaging from the 'Feminine'

Hegemonic or idealized masculinity assumes the denial of emotions and behaviours which can be perceived as feminine or indicative of a homosexual or bisexual sexual orientation. Kaufman (1998) argues that hegemonic or idealized masculinity can be considered a "reaction against passivity and powerlessness, and...a repression of a vast range of human desires and possibilities...that are associated with femininity" (p. 7). Indeed, being active and aggressive are traditionally associated with masculinity while passivity and inactivity are traditionally associated with femininity (Kaufman, 1998). This association,

particularly in certain male-dominated occupational settings (e.g., the military, the police, team sports) and unisexual societies such as prisons, leads many men to be constantly on guard and to suppress a “whole range of human needs, aims, feelings, and forms of expression” (Kaufman, 1998, p. 8). Men may be inclined to block certain emotions and the possibilities for discharging their emotions may be greatly limited by the strength of social norms in male-dominated settings. Kaufman (1998) argues that men are more likely to express their feelings with women with whom they are in intimate relationships, such as wives or girlfriends, than with other men.

Being emotionally guarded starts in adolescence, when boys attempt to repress any feelings or behaviours that may be associated with femininity and passivity and exaggerate those associated with masculinity (Kaufman, 1998). Boys are generally socialized to link being weak with being feminine. During their childhood and adolescence, boys’ insults to one another often centre on words such as “loser”, “chicken”, “girlie”, “fag”, “pussy” and “queer” which have connotations related to femininity, homosexuality, and, more generally, a low level of competency (Kupers, 1993, p. 49). Even in adulthood, insults among men often involve likening the insulted man to the role of a woman, for example, “What a pussy” (Kupers, 1993, p. 47). This shows that among men, the “worst thing a man can call another is a woman” (ibid). A striking instance of this is provided by Professor Michael Petrunik (personal communication) who recounts an example of one of his students at an Ottawa Senators hockey game challenging the competence of a player by yelling “get a purse”.

Disengaging from ‘feminine’ feelings results in “a whole range of emotions [being]...transformed into anger and hostility” (Kaufman, 1998, p. 13). Although anger and hostility are emotions, they are ‘manly’ emotions which are ‘allowed’ in the masculine

repertoire. They are the polar opposite of emotions such as sensitivity and sensibility, which are traditionally associated with femininity (Lehne, 1998).

Men's apprehensions about appearing feminine may also generalize to the fear of being perceived as bisexual or homosexual. Traditional notions of masculinity affirm heterosexuality and negate effeminacy, homosexuality, and bisexuality (Kaufman, 1998). Homophobia, defined as the "fear and hatred of gays and lesbians" (Kupers, 1993, p. 45), maintains a traditional view of manhood and masculinity which excludes homosexual or bisexual orientations or identities. It also acts as a barrier between men of all sexual orientations (ibid) and can be responsible for the limited "expression and affection by men" (Lehne, 1998, p. 246). Out of a fear of appearing feminine or homosexual, men who self-identify as heterosexual may avoid engaging in behaviours that might be interpreted as feminine (Kupers, 1993; Lehne, 1998). This fear can contribute to strained relationships between men and to a high degree of competitiveness and can help explain why some men perpetually enact a masculine façade (Messerschmidt, 1993; Lehne, 1998). For example, Terry Kupers (1993) notes that in his practice as a psychotherapist many men have told him that they wished they had closer friendships with other males, but then added that they did not want him to think that they were homosexual.

The ramifications of these beliefs are not slight. Kupers (1993, p. 45) argues that "homophobia plays a part in [men's] isolation and inability to sustain meaningful same-sex intimacies", while Lehne (1998, p. 246) argues that repeatedly desisting from accepting and displaying emotions that might be considered feminine, and therefore, gay, can actually lead to the cessation of these types of feelings. Therefore, homophobia can function as a delineator of acceptable and unacceptable masculine behaviours, actions and appearances (Kupers, 1993; Lehne, 1998). An interesting finding of this research is that homophobic

attitudes are expressed not only toward men perceived to be homosexual but also toward those considered to be heterosexual in order to “enforce social conformity in the male role, and maintain social control” (Lehne, 1998, p. 245).

Engaging in the ‘Masculine’

While men may attempt to avoid being perceived by others as feminine and/or homosexual, they may try to enact and display their masculine status by engaging in aggressive or violent behaviours, since these are traditionally associated with masculinity. In a sense, if men fear appearing feminine, acting aggressively can dispel such fears.

Additionally, the use of violence to resolve conflicts can be seen in numerous examples in modern society. From invasions and wars to capital punishment, violence is often taken for granted as a viable solution for resolving conflicts between individuals, between individuals and the state and between nation states (Kaufman, 1998). Kaufman argues that “men’s violence is situated in a society, or societies, grounded in structures of domination and control” (1998, p. 6). Violence between men signifies that some, if not most, relationships between men are based on power. This begins in childhood when boys experience aggression from their peers, which necessitates that they develop ways of dealing with these situations. Irrespective of how they learn to cope, these experiences can cause boys “an incredible amount of anxiety and require[] a huge expenditure of energy to resolve” (Kaufman, 1998, p.10). Kaufman (1998) argues that the message that boys take with them as they grow into men is that other men are rivals and enemies.

An additional explanation for men’s violence relates to the fragile nature of masculinity. While masculinity does not necessarily lead to violence—indeed many men engage in little or no violence (while some women do)—for some, insecurity about their masculine status can impel them to engage in such behaviours. Compared to the image of

men as universal power-holders over women, research on rape and domestic violence has found that paradoxically, many men often feel powerless (Kimmel, 2000). These men are more likely to engage in violence “when they feel a loss of power to which they feel entitled” (Kimmel, 2000, p. 41). Kimmel concludes that masculinity is not necessarily about power, but about the “experience of entitlement to power” (ibid). In this context, engaging in violence against others can be a “means of trying to affirm their personal power” (Kaufman, 1998, p. 9).

Masculinity Influenced by Certain Characteristics

Irrespective of the types of strategies (either disengaging from the ‘feminine’ or engaging in ‘masculine’ behaviours) that men may use to display their masculinity or to guard against its loss or theft, their ability to do so is influenced by the relational character of masculinity. Masculinity is dependent on specific circumstances and is enacted and displayed depending on these circumstances; it is a continuous and interactional process, which is “renegotiated in each particular context” (Messerschmidt, 2001, p. 67).

Furthermore, the ability to enact masculinity relies on characteristics such as race, class, sexual orientation and access to power. Depending on these characteristics, access to certain resources for enacting masculinity is limited or nonexistent. This means that for some men, in some situations, only specific forms of masculinity are available, encouraged or permitted (Messerschmidt, 2001). In some circumstances, and depending on characteristics such as those described above, legitimate means of enacting masculinity are not readily available (Messerschmidt, 1993). In such cases, some men may engage in violent and/or criminal activities in order to enact and display masculinity (Messerschmidt, 1993). This supposition is especially significant for prison research because, as Messerschmidt (2001) theorizes, prisoners have limited access to resources for enacting masculinity and therefore have to

redefine and renegotiate what it means to be ‘manly’. For example, prisoners’ status may not provide them with the reputation it did in the outside world, or may even work against them; their sexual orientation may not have been problematic on the outside but may place them at risk for their safety and may require that they engage in different and more obviously “masculine” behaviours.

Hegemonic Masculinity

While the above definition of masculinity is a good start in explaining how masculinity is both perceived and enacted in Western contexts, two additional concepts—*hegemonic- and hyper-masculinity*—complement this definition by explaining both the power differentials between various masculinities and the ways exaggerated forms of masculinity may be engaged in by male prisoners.

The attempts of men to convey and enforce ideal forms of masculinity in communicating with others, both male and female, is referred to as “*hegemonic masculinity*” (Messerschmidt, 1993; Connell (1995). The term *hegemony* in this instance describes the “*cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life*” (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Although *hegemony* can be achieved through force or threat of force, more commonly it is the “*successful claim to authority*” that characterizes *hegemony* (ibid). When ‘*hegemony*’ is fused with ‘*masculinity*’, a new term, *hegemonic masculinity* results, referring to

the masculinity that occupies the *hegemonic* position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable [and...] the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 1995, pp. 76-77).

A significant feature of hegemony is ‘complicity’, the idea that although very few men fit hegemonic masculinity, they all benefit from the “advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women” (Connell, 1995, p. 77). However, Connell (1995) does not specify whether this ‘complicity’ is conscious or unconscious, although it would make sense that it is not a deliberate action on the part of all men but a characteristic of patriarchal civilizations.

While hegemonic masculinity is the “ideal” type of masculinity that men may aspire to, there are various other masculinities which are subordinated and marginalized (Connell, 1995). Men who are regarded as homosexual, bisexual, or effeminate clearly fit this category but membership in non-dominant racial or ethnic categories or socially marginalized socio-economic categories may also be viewed, in particular contexts, as departing from the ideal. Hegemonic masculinity is dependent on ‘subordination’ and ‘marginalization’ since authority cannot be achieved unless there are those over which to exercise it or those that are pushed to the margins. For example, homosexual masculinities are subordinated to heterosexual masculinities; since hegemonic masculinity assumes that homosexuality is an inappropriate form of femininity, homosexual masculinities are at the bottom of the gender hierarchy while heterosexual masculinities are at the top of the hierarchy (ibid). Gender also intersects with race and class to create marginalized masculinities (ibid).

Since hegemonic masculinity makes specific reference to idealized forms of masculinity and the differential power relations between men, it is a useful concept in understanding that not all men and not all types of masculinities are equal. Hegemonic masculinity points towards this inequality and allows us to understand not only that there are marginalized and subordinated masculinities, but that without these masculinities, hegemonic masculinity (the ideal type) could not exist. Therefore, the concept of hegemonic masculinity

is useful for the study of the role of masculinity in Western male prisons. Using the concept of hegemonic masculinity it could be hypothesized that in the context of the prison, the hegemony of men over women found in the outside world will not result in a cohesive male group, enjoying their distant hegemony over women, but will actually result in the designation of some men to subordinate and marginalized positions and others to dominant and authoritative positions. Although men may have an advantage over women, men are not a cohesive group with identical access to power; some men may have limited access to resources for enacting masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity suggests that there are those men who are dominant and those who are subordinate. A question that Connell's research does not answer is whether a positive or neutral masculinity can exist, and how such masculinity would be characterized.

While hegemonic masculinity theory may be useful in analyzing the role masculinity plays in prisoners' social interactions, it lacks concrete supporting evidence and examples of *how* masculinity changes in prison and what its role may be in prisoners' coping strategies. Therefore, it does not provide the necessary tools to analyze the role masculinity plays in these strategies. This is understandable considering that Connell (1995) conducted his research not with prisoners or former prisoners but with civilian men. And while Messerschmidt (1993) built his theory specifically to address criminology's blindness regarding gender and crime (as pertaining to males) his theory is meant to "present new theoretical tools for comprehending crime committed by men" (p. 62). Neither author provides answers to some pertinent questions: do different types of prisoners experience hegemonic masculinity differently? Are prisoners constrained into 'choosing' 'manly' behaviours in order to cope with imprisonment? What are some other ways that men cope with incarceration?

Hyper-masculinity in Prison

The concept of hyper-masculinity can complement both the abovementioned definition of masculinity and the concept of hegemonic masculinity. While hegemonic masculinity exemplifies the relationships between various types of masculinities, and especially the relational character between the 'ideal' masculinity and homosexual masculinities, hyper-masculinity exemplifies how men may engage in certain behaviours to embody that ideal.

Although hyper-masculinity is a term often encountered in the masculinity literature, few studies provide a concrete definition of it. I will use Yvonne Jewkes' (2005) definition which states that hyper-masculinity is "a personal code of behavior based on confrontation and force rather than negotiation and respect" (p. 62). In prison, it can be said to represent a situation "in which "normal" values and behavioral patterns of powerful men take on an extreme form in the face of powerlessness against the institution" (Jewkes, 2005, pp. 61-62).

Hans Toch's (1998) concept of hyper-masculinity describes not only the prison culture, but also the ways that prisoners interact with others. Drawing on Mosher and Tompkins' 1988 research on the psychology of the 'macho' man, Toch (1998) theorizes that prison culture is based on a hyper-masculine ideology. The macho man sees the "world [as] divided into the strong and the weak, the proud and the shamed, the brave and the cowardly..." (Mosher & Tompkins, 1988 in Toch, 1998, p.173). In Western male prisons, violence has become normalized and the prison culture dictates that some circumstances justify a prisoner's use of violence (Toch, 1998). This is especially true if the prisoner is insulted or "taken advantage of", in which case, the prisoner cannot overlook the incident nor can he ask for help (Toch, 1998, p. 168). Asking the staff for help is not a viable option since the prison culture discourages interactions between prisoners and staff (Sykes & Messinger,

1960). Ignoring the incident can result in further injury since in the prison culture, “vulnerability attracts predation and fear invites exploitation” (Toch, 1998, p. 169). On the other hand, the prison culture views a prisoner’s readiness and ability to fight as indicators of “worth and of self-worth” (Toch, 1998, p.170). Toch (1998) argues that male prisoners are aware that being able to take action in the face of insult is linked to indices of masculinity while inaction and fear are linked to femininity. In a way, this exemplifies the relationship between ‘ideal’ or hegemonic masculinity and the marginalized and subordinated masculinities described by Connell (1995). Prisoners’ ‘worth’ is also related to their self-worth and self-esteem. In sex-segregated, closed institutions such as the prison, the values of the group become the values by which one judges oneself (Toch, 1998). Providing the example of adolescent delinquents, Toch explains that

the group fills a vacuum [and] peers are substitutes for the adult support that is absent, unwelcome or both. The content of the normative system can evolve as a way of dealing with abject failure implicit in the sacrifice, unavailability, or unachievability of prestigious and satisfying goals (1998, p.171).

Although the circumstances of adolescent delinquents and adult prisoners are different, Toch’s theory can be applied to the prison environment. In prison, social interactions and the norms of the prisoner culture figure predominantly in prisoners’ lives. Their families and some of their friends outside of prison are no longer part of their immediate environment and whatever goals and aspirations they had before entering prison are temporarily on hold. Even if animosity exists between prisoners, fellow prisoners’ opinions might still be significant.

In addition, prison life is characterized by “restrictions, frustrations, and affronts to self-esteem” (Toch, 1998, p. 171). In order for prisoners to deal with these deprivations, they may have to employ a hyper-masculine façade, which is basically a caricature of masculinity

and a “display of manly virtues” (ibid). Toch calls this the “ideology of hyper-masculinity”, which is evident in prison in the way that those who show weakness are more likely to be the targets of repeated attacks of violence. Toch (1998) argues that by attacking a weaker prisoner, the attacker can achieve two things: “(a) one shows contempt for the man’s demeaning “femininity,” while (b) one reassures oneself that one is different (i.e., nonfearful) from one’s target” (p. 173). Since hyper-masculine values are prized by the prison culture, masculinity is often tested by others. Toch (1998) argues that this testing often involves prisoners’ readiness and ability to engage in physical altercations. The prison culture is most likely to bestow a high status “on those who best live up to the prescriptions of the masculine script” (Toch, 1998, p.174). Masculinity can be both tested and contested by others, something that can propel men to prove their masculinity in the most obvious of ways, such as engaging in physical altercations.

Although hyper-masculinity would seem to help prisoners cope with prison by avoiding victimization, Toch argues that hyper-masculinity in prison “is a recipe for bankruptcy and no-win stalemates” (1998, p.177). Acting hyper-masculine can result in prisoners spending more time in segregation and can contribute to mental health problems (Toch, 1998). However, Toch argues that prisoners generally have little choice but to act hyper-masculine. In the United States, Toch argues, prisoners are the products of a society in which violence is normalized and which promotes the association of masculinity with aggressiveness and power and femininity with passivity and weakness. He argues that prisoners are unlikely to change and become less hyper-masculine before society changes, so that it is up to society to change first (Toch, 1998, p.178).

The above discussion leaves us with some questions. For example, if men’s opportunities for expressing their feelings are limited and men are weary of expressing their

feelings, in an environment such as the prison, in which their definition and perception of masculinity may be threatened, how do they cope? In prison, men lose the very relationships in which they may have allowed themselves to be emotional, namely those with their children, their partners, and their parents. How do they cope with the loss of this social support? If some men only share their feelings with women, than the sex segregated environment of the prison may not only inhibit them from expressing their feelings, but may actually bolster their insecurity and vigilance against their co-habitants.

Another issue which deserves close attention is the dichotomous nature of traditional gender roles: men as powerful and aggressive and women as weak and passive; men are assumed to display strength and stoicism in the face of misery while women are socially allowed to show fear and vulnerability. Therefore, to display feelings such as fear, uncertainty and vulnerability in prison is to put oneself at risk of being perceived as weak and feminine and therefore less than a man. The homophobia in society is magnified in prison because of the limited available resources for enacting masculinity. Male prisoners' anxiety regarding their masculinity may be exaggerated because they do not have access to the same resources for embodying masculinity as they did in the outside world. This chapter has provided the theoretical basis upon which to analyze the role of masculinity in male prisoners' incarcerated lives. The paper now shifts in focus to empirical research on the subject of coping and attempts to extract from this research as much as possible an accurate picture of both prison life and prisoners' coping strategies.

Chapter Two: Literature Review: Characteristics of Imprisonment and Prisoners' Coping Strategies

Objectives and Outline

The objective of this chapter is to provide an overview of how previous research has conceptualized the prison environment, the challenges prisoners encounter, and the ways that they cope with these challenges. In order to understand how and why prisoners attempt to cope with imprisonment, it is important to understand the conditions and situations that they attempt to cope with. Throughout this chapter, special attention will be given to issues regarding masculinity and identity as they pertain to prisoners' changing status from civilian to prisoner and to the ways that they choose to resolve conflicts, overcome challenges and cope with their environment.³

This chapter begins with a description of the prison environment, the challenges prisoners encounter and the effects of these challenges on prisoners' identity and more specifically, their masculinity. The challenges prisoners face because of their status change from citizen to prisoner will be discussed, as will the official rules, the collective aspect of prison living and the informal control system. The significance of these features lies in their influence on prisoners' coping behaviours. Since this research study aims to develop an understanding of prisoners' coping strategies, specifically their engagement in hyper-masculine behaviours, special attention will be given to the issues of physical and sexual victimization.

³ The various studies presented in this chapter focus on diverse issues, such as the constricting prison conditions, the hyper-masculine aspects of prison culture, interpersonal violence and emotional responses to incarceration, among others. I am not attempting to undertake an in-depth examination of the similarities and differences between the various types of research studies. Indeed, because these studies use different terms and concepts, it is difficult to compare them. My goal is to more thoroughly understand and explore the prison environment and the complexities of prisoners' coping strategies.

The chapter proceeds with a description of the ways prisoners cope with the abovementioned challenges they encounter in prison. Research has found that prisoners attempt to cope in numerous ways, from avoidance techniques to aggressive attempts, from adoption of the prison culture to withdrawal from it.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of the research presented, focusing on its relation to masculinity research, and its ability to facilitate an understanding of hyper-masculinity in the prison environment. Both the strengths and the limitations of these studies will be discussed.

The research presented in this chapter comes from various periods in correctional research. The research of Gresham Sykes (1958) and Donald Clemmer (1966) represents the rehabilitation era in prison sociology. The work of Erving Goffman (1961) examines many similar issues in the context of the sociology of psychiatric hospitals. During the 1930s to the 1950s, the rehabilitation model dominated the way offenders were dealt with and there was an emphasis on treatment and rehabilitation (Petrunik, 2002, p. 486). During this time, sociology was used as a “tool for improving prisons” and prison social order and prison culture were central themes of research studies (Simon, 2000, p. 288). Prison administrations were in favour of such research since they believed that insight into the social organization of prisoners facilitated the governance of the prison (ibid). This research influenced a discussion and “debate as to whether the pathological features of inmate social order” were a result of institutional characteristics or a result of the culture prisoners imported into the prison (ibid).

Conversely, other research, such as that by Zamble and Porporino (1988) represents the new penology era in corrections. The new penology began as a result of criticisms that the rehabilitation approach was not effective. The new penology, so named by Feeley and

Simon (1992), is defined as the shift towards a greater concern with the management of risk. Compared to the rehabilitation model whose emphasis was on treating offenders so that they desist from offending, the new penology aims to identify, classify and manage (often through incapacitation but also through forms of surveillance), groups of offenders deemed to be at high-risk of re-offending (Feeley & Simon, 1992, p. 462).

Zamble and Porporino's (1988) study seems to fit the new penology approach. While other research studies—such as Edgar and O'Donnell (1998), Phillips (2001), Jewkes (2005) which will also be discussed—were conducted during the new penology era, they do not represent this approach. Rather, these studies, which mostly focus on violence and masculinity in prison, represent a move away from the new penology and towards an understanding of the complexity of prison life and the possible solutions to the problems that arise in this environment.

Three Classical Research Studies of the Environment of Prisoners and other Inmates

A significant portion of this next section on the prison environment is based on two classic studies in sociological research on the prison—Gresham Sykes' *The Society of Captives: A Study of Maximum Security Prison* (1958) and Donald Clemmer's *The Prison Community* (1966)—and one classic study of psychiatric hospitals, Erving Goffman's *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and other Inmates* (1961). I will briefly describe each. For all other research, the methodology and context will be described in an on-going manner.

The Society of Captives: A Study of Maximum Security Prison, which was published in 1958 is based on Gresham Sykes' three-year research of the New Jersey State Maximum

Security Men's Prison.⁴ Sykes' objective was to explore prison life and understand the social system of the prison society. He gathered the following types of data: official publications and reports, regulation reports, prisoners' individual files, tape-recorded interviews with prisoners and guards, questionnaires of two hundred prisoners, personal observation and informal interviews with prison staff and prisoners (1958, p. 147).⁵ In addition, Sykes interviewed twenty prisoners on a number of occasions during his research (ibid). Sykes (1958) identified five areas in which male prisoners experience deprivation during incarceration: (1) liberty, (2) goods and services, (3) heterosexual relationships, (4) autonomy and (5) security. These deprivations will be discussed throughout this chapter. Two years after publishing *The Society of Captives*, Sykes co-wrote a paper with Sheldon Messinger entitled *The Inmate Social System*. This paper focuses on the inmate code of conduct as a significant aspect of prison culture.

Donald Clemmer's *The Prison Community*, first published in 1940, is the result of the author's investigation of prison social life from a period of three years from 1931 to 1934. Clemmer's subjects were prisoners and prison staff in a typical prison in the United States where Clemmer worked as a sociologist (1966, p. xvi). This prison consisted of 2,300 prisoners, although it is unclear how many participated in this study. Clemmer's objective was to provide "a description of the *culture* of the prison [and to explore] the extent and degree to which the culture of the penitentiary determines the philosophy of its inhabitants"

⁴ Sykes was a sociologist and criminologist and is presently professor of sociology emeritus at the University of Virginia.

⁵ Of all these methods Sykes concludes that the most useful were his informal interviews with prisoners and staff (1958, p.147). He argues that although this may not amount to a systematic methodological approach, he found that going back and forth between prisoners' and guards' opinions was an effective way of gathering a "valid picture of prison life [since] the realities of imprisonment are...multi-faceted; there is not a single true interpretation but many, and the meaning of any situation is always a complex of several, often conflicting viewpoints" (Sykes, 1958, p.148).

(1966, p. xv). He did not aim to “understand the causation of crime [but] to know the wishes, ambitions, drives, habits and attitudes of [the prisoners] because it is these forces which bring to the prison community some of the factors which make it unique and determine its culture” (Clemmer, 1966, p.1). Clemmer conducted interviews with prisoners and collected their “social histories” and evaluated their “personalities...with respect to criminality” and supplemented these interviews with official data (1966, p. xvi).⁶

Erving Goffman’s *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and other Inmates* published in 1961 is a study of what Goffman calls “total institutions”, which he defines as “a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (p. 11). Examples of total institutions given by Goffman are prisons, psychiatric hospitals, sanatoria, monasteries, nunneries, boarding schools, and military barracks. Although Goffman included prisons in his concept of total institutions he did not directly study prisons as did Sykes and Clemmer. His observations are based on academic and popular accounts of prisons, monasteries, boarding schools and the military, and his participant observation research in St. Elizabeth’s psychiatric hospital in Washington, D.C. during a period of three years between 1954 and 1957 (Goffman, 1961, p. 7). At St. Elizabeth’s, Goffman immersed himself in the life of the patients and tried to understand their subjective perceptions (1961, p. 7).⁷ Compared to Sykes who gathered data on both staff and prisoners, Goffman limited his focus to patients and “avoid[ed] sociable

⁶ Clemmer states that these interviews were conducted independently of his role as an institutional sociologist (1966, p. xvi).

⁷As did Sykes and Clemmer, Goffman contends that direct observation of subjects is best and that “a good way to learn about ...[prisoners, for example] is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject” (1961, p.7).

contact with the staff” during his observations (ibid). Similar to Sykes and Clemmer, Goffman eschewed the gathering of statistical data on the basis that this would inhibit his “gathering of data on the tissue and fabric of patient life” (1961, pp.7-8).

The Prison Environment: The Transformation from Citizen to Prisoner

The following section of this chapter will be presented in six sub-sections: (1) the loss of rights, privileges and personal possessions; (2) restricted freedom and the official rules; (3) collective living: an additional stress of imprisonment; (4) anxiety, depression and emasculation: negative emotional states upon becoming a prisoner; (5) prison culture and the informal control systems; (6) victimization among prisoners: physical, psychological and sexual violence.

The Loss of Rights, Privileges and Personal Possessions

Upon beginning their incarceration, prisoners and other inmates experience a “loss of citizenship” (Sykes, 1958, p. 67) or “civil death” (Goffman, 1961, p. 25). Most of the rights that free citizens have, such as the right to vote, sue, or challenge divorce procedures are taken away from them (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961). Prisoners and other inmates also lose their material possessions (civilian clothes and property) which are replaced by institutional uniforms, toiletries and furnishings. Finally, while they do not lose entirely symbolic indicators of self such as birth names and nick names they are assigned an impersonal number as an indicator of identity in formal records which may be experienced as dehumanizing (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961; Clemmer, 1966). The loss of these possessions and identifying tools—such as clothes and cosmetics—means that prisoners and other inmates lack control over how they present themselves to others (Goffman, 1961). In Western culture, material possessions and symbolic identifiers are integral to a person’s self-

concept (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961) and when these are taken away, a person can feel “attacked at the deepest layers of personality” (Sykes, 1958, p. 69).

Restricted Freedom and the Official Rules

In addition to the loss of privileges, status and material possessions, new prisoners are required to abide by institutional rules. These rules are part of the formal control process which aims to solicit prisoners’ cooperation through various means. Prisoners have to adhere to schedules imposed by the administration, have little choice regarding the food they eat, the clothes they wear, the work they do, and the means of socializing (Zamble & Porporino, 1988). Additionally, prisoners require guards’ permission to engage in behaviours that they were in charge of on the outside such as “smoking, shaving...telephoning, spending money, [and] mailing letters” (Goffman, 1961, p. 43).

Goffman explains that inmates learn what the institution expects of them through the ‘privilege system’; by obeying the rules, they may receive rewards or privileges and by disobeying they may be subject to various penalties and losses of privileges (1961, p. 51).⁸ The system of rewards and punishment can impact prisoners’ independence, autonomy, and identities (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961). Being required to speak in certain ways and to show respect for prison staff can affect prisoners’ identity because they are essentially forced to behave in ways that are ill-assorted to their idea of themselves (Goffman, 1961). Having to ask permission to engage in various mundane activities and being subjected to a system that rewards or punishes based on minute details of one’s actions can make some prisoners lose their ability to regulate their behaviours in ways that make sense to them (Goffman, 1961).

⁸ This system can make prisoners fixate on obtaining these privileges. According to Goffman, the preoccupation with rewards and privileges is one of “the most important features of the inmate culture” (1961, p. 52).

Furthermore, because prisoners inhabit a supervised environment in which they depend on staff's approval for certain requests which affect their lives, they may find themselves in a "submissive or suppliant role 'unnatural' for an adult" (Goffman, 1961, p. 45). The characteristics of "determination, autonomy, and freedom of action" are central to one's own sense and that of others around us that one is an adult with agency over one's actions and environment (Goffman, 1961, p. 47). However, it is precisely these characteristics which the prison thwarts and which can make prisoners feel that they are being "radically demoted in the age-grading system" (ibid).

Collective Living: An Additional Stress of Imprisonment

Although separated from society at large, prisoners are not separated from their fellow prisoners; on the contrary, in prison, privacy is scarce and many activities are engaged in collectively.⁹ Zamble and Porporino (1988) found that although prisoners do not have much unscheduled time, they do not have many options but to socialize with others during their free time; prisoners are unlikely to remain in their cells and are more likely to opt to spend time in the common areas so that they can watch television or partake in other activities (p. 80). However, spending time in these locations can increase one's chances of coming into conflict with others. Research has found that some prisoners actually avoid these common areas in an attempt to avoid conflict and physical altercations with other prisoners (McCorkle, 1992).

The lack of privacy can cause prisoners to feel anxious and insecure (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961). Goffman argues that the experience of living with other inmates can be considered a "contaminat[ion] by forced interpersonal contact, and in consequence, a forced

⁹ Exceptions to this are solitary confinement (which is usually temporary) and confinement in a super-max prison in which one can be locked in one's cell twenty-three hours a day for an indefinite period of time (Simon, 2002).

social relationship” (1961, p. 35). Additionally, some prisoners may fear for their personal safety (Sykes, 1958). These fears are not unfounded; collective living can lead to either provocations to engage in violence, threats of violence or outright violent encounters, which, not surprisingly, can contribute to feelings of anxiety and insecurity (Sykes, 1958; McCorkle, 1992; Edgar & O’Donnell, 1998). This aspect of the prison environment will be discussed in more detail later.

Anxiety, Depression and Emasculation: Negative Emotional States upon Becoming a Prisoner

While the psychological impact of incarceration has been briefly examined in the previous sections, this next part will more closely look at this aspect of incarceration. Since they are rendered powerless and weak through conformity, new prisoners can experience threats to their self-concept and identity (Goffman, 1961; Jewkes, 2005). During intake, prisoners learn the language of the other prisoners and understand the prison power relations and the fact that they are now members of a “subordinate group” (Clemmer, 1966, p. 299). A new prisoner is often called names such as ‘fish’ or ‘swab’ by both guards and other prisoners (Goffman, 1961, p. 27). The purpose of such name calling is to let him know that “he is merely an inmate, and what is more, that he has a special low status even in this low group” (ibid).

Additionally, prisoners can experience negative emotions because of the sex-segregated nature of prisons. Aside from a few female staff members, male prisoners live in the absence of interactions with women, something that can affect their sense of masculinity and identity (Sykes, 1958; Phillips, 2001; Jewkes, 2005). They are separated from their female partners and from opportunities to engage in sexual relations with the opposite sex. Sykes argues that our identity is formed not just within ourselves but also in the “picture of

[ourselves] that [we] find reflected in the eyes of others” (1958, p. 72). Only interacting with other men does not provide male prisoners with that opportunity. In the outside world, it is the dichotomy between men and women that provides males with “much of [their] meaning” and the absence of women and of heterosexual sexual opportunities in male prisons can lead to anxiety regarding one’s masculinity (ibid).

The absence of female companionship is perhaps the biggest contributing factor to men’s insecurity in their masculinity and one of the main differences between the outside world and prison. Sykes (1958) contends that for homosexual prisoners the lack of heterosexual opportunities is evidently not a problem. Telling of the times, Sykes calls these prisoners “habitual” homosexuals and their behaviour “deviant” (1958, p. 71). Evidently, views on homosexuality have changed significantly since Sykes’ 1958 study and homosexuality is less likely to be considered a form of deviance (at least in the academic and medical literature). In prison culture, same-sex acts are seen as either deviant or acceptable depending on the roles the men play in the sexual acts. Prisoners who play active roles (such as penetrating in anal sex or receiving oral sex) are perceived as engaging in acceptable (non-homosexual) behaviours, while those who play passive roles (such as being penetrated and performing oral sex) are perceived as engaging in homosexual acts. While both types of prisoners may be engaging in same-sex behaviours, the former may actually be conferred a hyper-masculine status for engaging in such acts, while the latter can be ostracized and victimized (Sykes, 1958; Hensley, Wright, Tewksbury, & Castle, 2003). This demarcation between what are acceptable and not acceptable behaviours shows that it is not the actual behaviours that are of interest in prison culture, but the roles that men play in these behaviours. This will be explained more thoroughly in the discussion on prison argot roles.

The threats to one's masculinity are explored in more depth by Jenny Phillips in *"Cultural Construction of Manhood in Prison"* (2001) and by Yvonne Jewkes in *"Men Behind Bars: "Doing" Masculinity as an Adaptation to Imprisonment"* (2005). Both research studies assess the role masculinity plays in prison and the ways that male prisoners cope with imprisonment (Phillips, 2001; Jewkes, 2005). Phillips' study is based on observations and in-depth interviews with medium-security American prisoners over the space of one year (2001, p. 14) while Jewkes' study is based on "ethnographic data from an empirical study of four men's English prisons of various security classifications" (2005, p. 46).¹⁰

Phillips argues that masculinity is a public performance that is collectively assessed by other prisoners, and which prisoners believe can be lost, regained, stolen, protected and contaminated (Phillips, 2001). Phillips' (2001) assertion that prisoners' behaviours are governed by their quest to recover their lost or stolen masculinity will be helpful when analyzing why prisoners engage in certain behaviours. Jewkes argues that "[c]riminal perspectives learned earlier in life combine with the pains of imprisonment to give rise to an enhanced or exaggerated form of masculinity" (2005, p. 61). Since prisoners are relegated to a subordinate status, "manliness (or a version of it) becomes the primary means of adaptation and resistance" (ibid). Male prisoners can experience threats to their masculinity because, compared to the outside world, prison offers fewer means of enacting and displaying masculinity. The resources available in the outside world, such as "women, money, clothing, weapons and access to goods and services" are absent or inadequate in prison (Phillips, 2001, p. 14). Because of this, men use the resources that are available, such as "contraband items,

¹⁰ Jewkes (2005) does not offer more details such as the number of participants in the study or the length of the research.

privileges, and being respected and feared by other inmates” as tools for enacting masculinity (Phillip, 2001, p. 15).

Prisoners can also experience other negative emotional states such as anxiety and depression (Zamble & Porporino, 1988). Edward Zamble and Frank Porporino’s research study, *Coping, Behavior, and Adaptation in Prison Inmates*, (1988) explores some of these issues. This study was conducted in a Canadian federal prison over a period of one and a half years in the mid-1980s. The subjects were 133 prisoners.¹¹ The objective of Zamble and Porporino’s study was to explore how prisoners cope with incarceration so that their coping behaviours could be predicted based on a number of variables.¹² Each prisoner was interviewed three different times: first, a few weeks after the beginning of their sentences; second, four months later and third, a year later. The interviews focused on prisoners’ backgrounds, their behaviours before incarceration and their lives during their present prison sentence.¹³ Prisoners were also administered questionnaires which aimed to “measure particular emotional states and/or cognitions, e.g., depression or the attribution of control” (Zamble & Porporino, 1988, p. 33).¹⁴

¹¹ Forty-five of the prisoners were short-term (serving a sentence of less than five years), 47 were medium-term (serving a sentence of 5-10 years) and 41 were long-term prisoners (serving a 10 years to life sentence) (Zamble & Porporino, 1988).

¹² The new penology approach, which started in the 1980s and has continued to the present, is evident in this objective. While other researchers (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961; Clemmer, 1966; Phillips, 2001; Jewkes, 2005) aimed to merely explore prison life, Zamble and Porporino (1988) aimed to devise a prediction formula which could be used to better predict prisoners’ behaviour and ultimately inform policies and procedures of governing prisons.

¹³ An example of some of the questions concerning life in prison is: “Aside from sleeping, how much time in the average week do (will) you spend on [the following list of categories such as working, visits and watching television]?” (Zamble & Porporino, 1988, p. 33). Other questions focused on how prisoners cope with the problems they encounter. For example, “When you have a problem, who are you likely to turn to for help?” (Zamble & Porporino, 1988, p. 188).

¹⁴ While prediction and policy change were part of Zamble and Porporino’s objectives, and while the study looked at both prisoners’ coping outside of prison and inside prison, for my purposes I am only interested in

Using the *Beck Depression Inventory*, Zamble and Porporino (1988) found that 8% of prisoners were severely depressed (eight times more than the normal population) and 29% were mildly depressed (five times more than the normal population). Therefore, at the beginning of their sentence a high number of prisoners can be considered anxious and depressed at clinically significant levels. Zamble and Porporino conclude that there is strong evidence “that emotional disruption is clearly a problem among inmates beginning a new term” (1988, p. 85). However, these negative emotional states are not permanent, the authors argue, since later interviews with the participants showed that both depression and anxiety decreased as prisoners’ sentences progressed (Zamble & Porporino, 1988).

Zamble and Porporino (1988) conclude that although they did not measure prisoners’ emotional states prior to incarceration, and therefore cannot be certain that they are due to imprisonment, the fact that these negative emotions improved over time suggests that they were the result of the shock of imprisonment. Additionally, because these emotions are not permanent, the authors argue that it would be erroneous to conclude—as previous research has—that imprisonment is necessarily experienced as involving high levels of deprivation and stress. They suggest that these disturbances are due to a combination of prisoners’ regular maladaptive emotional states and their new environment (Zamble & Porporino, 1988).

Zamble and Porporino (1988) also argue that there is no evidence, either in previous studies, or in their own, that imprisonment has long-term negative or positive effects. On the contrary, Zamble and Porporino (1988) argue that their study shows that imprisonment acts as a ‘behavioral deep-freeze’, where prisoners’ “outside behavior patterns remain, in effect,

how prisoners cope while in prison. However, where pertinent, references to the study’s other findings will be discussed.

frozen in time [and] stored until their release” (p.152). This suggests that while imprisonment might change prisoners’ behaviours, such as when they sleep, work and socialize, their ‘true’ behaviour patterns (those they engaged in on the outside) are affected little by imprisonment.

Although Zamble and Porporino’s (1988) study does not broach the subject of masculinity, one can assume that since they argue that imprisonment does not adversely affect prisoners’ behaviours, it does not adversely affect their masculinity. However, the study’s findings that other negative emotions such as anger, boredom and loneliness remain constant from the beginning of prisoners’ sentence to a year and a half later, contradict the above conclusions (Zamble & Porporino, 1988). The authors focused more on the transitory nature of prisoners’ anxiety and depression rather than on their more constant emotional states of anger and loneliness. They assume that if the former emotional states decreased, then prisoners are faring better than at the beginning of their sentence (Zamble & Porporino, 1988).

Prison Culture and the Informal Control Systems

So far, the physical conditions of the prison, along with the institutional rules, the negative emotional states and the threats to masculinity have been discussed. This next section explores the unofficial rules of prison culture and the significant influence that they exert on prisoners’ lives and their coping strategies. While the official rules and regulations influence prisoners’ choice of behaviours, the rules of prison culture exert much more influence on prisoners’ behaviours and interactions. Because they have direct, daily, and frequent contact with other prisoners much more than with guards and other prison staff, the consequences of diverging from the prisoner code can be dire and even dangerous (Phillips, 2001; Hensley et al., 2003).

Sykes (1958) explained that prison culture is governed by the inmate code and the argot roles that stem from it. Although this research is five decades old, time in which prisoner characteristics and therefore their interactions with each other may have changed, there is evidence to suggest that these changes have not been that great.¹⁵ For my purposes, “prison culture” will be defined as the formal and informal norms and regulations, including the inmate code and the argot roles that govern prisoners’ interactions with each other and with staff. Sykes (1958) identified the inmate code and the argot roles as two aspects of the informal social control that influence prisoners’ behaviours by letting them know what prison culture views as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The goal of the inmate code and the argot roles is to promote prisoner cohesion. Cohesion is conducive to a better life because sharing, be it goals or goods, allows prisoners to alleviate the pains of imprisonment as a collective (Sykes, 1958).

However, although cohesion is promoted through these two processes, it does not characterize prison culture; the harsh conditions of the prison can make some prisoners or all prisoners at some point act in individualistic ways. Therefore, cohesion is rather an ideal that is propagated by prison culture and its expectation permits the resentment of those who act individualistically (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961). The following section discusses both the inmate code and the argot roles and the influence they have on prisoners’ behaviours and ultimately on their coping strategies.

¹⁵ For example, research by Edgar, O’Donnell and Martin (2003) in British prisons found that although being called by different names, Sykes’ argot roles still exist (p. 72). The authors state that Sykes’ “descriptions of the types of behaviour that match the labels are immediately recognizable and bear witness to the consistency over time and across cultures of coping strategies in prison” (Edgar, O’Donnell, & Martin, 2003, p. 72). Similarly, Hensley et al., (2003) found that the sexual argot roles (to be discussed below) described by Sykes are, with slight changes, evident in present-day prisons. Other research has found that the inmate code is still governing modern-day prisoners’ behaviours and interactions (Phillips, 2001; Sabo, Kupers, & London, 2001).

The Inmate Code

Sykes and Messinger (1960) state that prisoners' actions are influenced by a code of behaviours—the inmate code—which is defined as an unwritten set of rules “that prisoners as a whole adhere to or outwardly display allegiance to, [and which] serves a functional purpose in alleviating the pains of imprisonment experienced by prisoners” (p. 82). The principles of the inmate code are: (1) don't interfere with inmate interests; (2) don't lose your head; (3) don't exploit others; (4) don't weaken, and (5) don't be a sucker (Sykes & Messinger, 1960, pp. 77-78). The inmate code, then, dictates that prisoners should be loyal to other prisoners, maintain their composure even under duress, share their possessions even if these are scarce, and be tough and smart. However, these are not merely suggestions; diverging from the inmate code can lead to severe repercussions ranging from “...ostracism to physical violence” (Sykes & Messinger, 1960, p. 77).

Recent research has found evidence that the inmate code still exists in contemporary prisons (McCorkle, 1992; Phillips, 2001; Sabo et al., 2001; Jewkes, 2005). For example, McCorkle (1992) and Cooley (1993) found that prisoners rarely officially report being victimized by other prisoners, suggesting that the old adage of not interfering with prisoner interests and not being weak still hold true. Sabo et al., (2001) argue that while the inmate code has changed due to various alterations in the prison such as the prevalence of drugs and the greater age span among prisoners, the

core commandments [of the code] remain: Even if you do not feel tough enough to cope, act as if you are. Suffer in silence. Never admit you are afraid. Whatever you see “going down”...do not get involved and do not...snitch—the penalty can be death. Unless you want to be branded a punk, do not do anything that will make other prisoners think you are gay, effeminate, or sissy. Act hard and avoid any semblance of softness. Do not help authorities in any way. Do not trust anyone. Always be ready to fight, especially when your manhood is challenged, and act as if you do not mind

hurting or even killing someone (this is sometimes the only way to avoid being put in a position of having to hurt or kill (pp. 10-11)).

While the above quote suggests that the inmate code can be found in contemporary prisons, it is unclear whether it exists to the same extent in prisons of all security levels or in countries culturally different from Western ones. Therefore, this research does not argue that the inmate code is a universal set of rules which prisoners in all countries abide by. It is plausible that countries with different cultures, traditions, and conceptions of masculinity have a different kind of code, if any.

Argot Roles

Argot roles represent a “map of the inmate social system [...and a way of...] ordering and classifying experience within the walls in terms which deal specifically with the major problems of prison life”¹⁶ (Sykes, 1958, pp. 84-85). Sykes’ subjects identified and named eleven different argot roles (to be briefly described later): (1) real man; (2) rat; (3) center man; (4) gorilla; (5) merchant or peddler; (6) ball buster; (7) tough; (8) hipster; (9) wolf; (10) punk; (11) fag. One way to think of these roles is by their function in either promoting cohesion or individuality among prisoners. The role of the ‘real man’ is a cohesive one since it describes prisoners who are loyal and generous, act with dignity and are not likely to fight gratuitously or to engage in sexual activities (Sykes, 1958). Sykes (1958) found that there are a variety of roles within the category of ‘real man’ but they all have the same characterizations as described above. This first role is positively viewed by prison culture.

¹⁶ The argot roles which Sykes describes were identified and named by the prisoners he studied at the New Jersey State Prison (1958, p.86). This is significant since Sykes argues that new argot or language arises in response to the need to interpret new experiences (ibid). Since experiences in prison differ vastly from those of the outside world, language develops in response to the need to identify and classify unique behaviours and values (ibid). Like the inmate code, the argot roles are most likely not universal, but influenced by both the culture of the prison and the culture of the society in which prisoners were raised and socialized.

The next ten roles are classified by Sykes as alienative, meaning they describe prisoners who deal with the pains of imprisonment by following their “own interests [and]...needs, without regard to the needs, rights, and opinions of others” (1958, pp. 106-107). These prisoners are viewed negatively by prison culture.

Before describing the eleven argot roles, I must clarify that prisoners do not generally fit one definite argot role; on the contrary, they may play more than one role depending on the situation (Sykes, 1958). In their attempts to cope with obstacles, prisoners oscillate between cohesive and alienative roles: they sometimes look out for their best interests, while other times they do what they believe is best for the collective (Sykes, 1958). This finding suggests that prisoners are not entirely united but that their interactions are in a state of constant flux between cohesiveness and individuality (ibid).

(1) ‘Real Men’ are prisoners who are revered by other prisoners because they are perceived to ‘play it cool’ (Sykes, 1958). They cope with prison with dignity, show “composure under stress” and deal with the pains of imprisonment in a reserved manner (ibid). ‘Real men’ fit prison culture’s ideal because they follow the inmate code (Sykes & Messinger, 1960). They behave with poise, are ready to fight but do not provoke fights, keep to their own affairs, and never cooperate with guards (ibid).

(2) ‘Rats’ or ‘squealers’ are prisoners who tell prison staff incriminating information about fellow prisoners (Sykes, 1958). Prison culture perceives ‘ratting’ not merely as a personal issue between two prisoners but as a betrayal to all prisoners. Sykes (1958) found that one of the reasons there was almost no communication between guards and prisoners is because of prisoners’ belief that even something insignificant, if relayed to a guard, can cause trouble for themselves or fellow prisoners.

- (3) 'Center Men' are prisoners who openly agree with the administration's rules, regulations and beliefs (Sykes, 1958).
- (4) 'Gorillas' are prisoners who use threats and violence to achieve their objectives (Sykes, 1958). They are not necessarily stronger or more violent than other prisoners but they present themselves as temperamental and willing to engage in violence (ibid).
- (5) 'Merchants' or 'Peddlers' are prisoners who sell their possessions instead of sharing them with their fellow prisoners. Their infringement lies in the fact that they sell things that the inmate code dictates should be shared (Sykes, 1958).
- (6) 'Ball Busters' are prisoners who are overtly defiant of the administration's rules and who consistently create disorder (Sykes, 1958). 'Ball busters' disrupt the "delicate system of compromise and corruption" which exists between guards and prisoners and cause conditions in prison to be stricter than they would be otherwise (Sykes, 1958, p. 100). Like 'gorillas' and 'merchants', 'ball busters' are only looking out for their best interest even if they do so in less calculated ways than the former two (ibid).¹⁷
- (7) 'Toughs' are prisoners who are apt to argue with other prisoners because they feel offended; their "violence is directed against [other prisoners] rather than against the custodians" as in the case of the 'ball busters' (Sykes, 1958, p. 103).
- (8) 'Hipsters' are prisoners who have the "tendency to erect a false front" and to copy others' behaviours and speech in order to belong to a certain group that they are on the margins of (Sykes, 1958, p. 104). However, they are also aggressive prisoners or "bully types" who carefully choose which prisoners to victimize (ibid).

¹⁷ Although separation between prisoners and guards is encouraged by the inmate code, ball busters make this separation more obvious and create actual conflict between the two parties rather than merely adhere to a "don't talk to guards" policy.

(9), (10), (11) The next three argot roles include those prisoners who engage in same-sex sexual behaviours while in prison: ‘wolves’, ‘punks’ and ‘fags’. Significantly, although these three types of prisoners all engage in same-sex acts, they are perceived by other prisoners quite differently depending on the role that they assume in the sexual act; essentially, whether they penetrate during anal sex and receive oral sex or whether they are the ones penetrated or giving oral sex (Sykes, 1958).

Research by Hensley et al., (2003) on sexual argot roles in prison reveals that with slight changes, these roles are still pertinent in contemporary American prisons.¹⁸ The interplay of social interactions and masculinity is especially apparent in these sexual argot roles and is exemplified by the differential ways that ‘active’ and ‘passive’ prisoners are perceived by other prisoners. Phillips (2001) argues that “[a]nal sex between inmates can be viewed as a resource for enhancing manhood and for demonstrating physical prowess and control over others” (p. 16). However, this is only true for prisoners who play active roles in the sexual acts (Phillips, 2001. p. 16). Those who engage in sexual activities with members of the same sex as the penetrating partner are perceived as masculine by the other prisoners and are able to retain their social status (ibid). In addition to the notion that some types of sex acts (receiving fellatio, penetrating in anal sex) are masculine and others (performing fellatio and being penetrated) are inherently feminine, it is also significant that most prisoners perceive the wolf’s sexual activity with other male inmates as “situational, and therefore acceptable” (Hensley et al., 2003, p. 292). Sykes (1958) explains that the wolf’s behaviour is perceived merely as “a search for a casual, mechanical act of physical release...[and] is often

¹⁸ Their study, *The Evolving Nature of Prison Argot and Sexual Hierarchies*, is a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with 174 minimum, medium and maximum security prisoners in Oklahoma. Hensley et al., (2003, p. 296) found that within both the wolf and fag role, there are two subcategories; the wolf argot role is now divided into aggressive and non-aggressive wolves, while the fag role is divided into ‘fish’ and ‘closeted gays’.

viewed as simply masturbating with another person [or as]...a form of rape [in which] his victim happens to be a man rather than a woman, due to the force of circumstance” (p. 97).

Conversely, punks and fags are prisoners who play passive roles in sexual relations (Sykes, 1958). Fags self-identify as homosexual while punks self-identify as heterosexual but engage in passive same-sex activities while in prison either due to coercion or to gain material goods (Sykes, 1958). While they are both perceived by prison culture as feminine and weak, punks are viewed more negatively because they are seen as “...act[ing] from fear or for the sake of quick advantage rather than personal inclination” (Sykes, 1958, p. 97). Prison is a dangerous place for those labeled punks or fags; they are perceived as not being real men and are more likely to be victimized, both sexually and in other ways (Phillips, 2001). Additionally, other prisoners may treat them as if they were women and may expect them to fulfill roles that in the outside world are traditionally fulfilled by women (Rideau & Sinclair, 1982). This suggests that prisoners attempt to duplicate the sexual roles found in the outside world (Hensley et al., 2003).

Victimization among Prisoners: Physical, Psychological and Sexual Violence

The following section provides an overview of the characteristics of prison violence, the reasons that prisoners engage in such behaviours and the possible effects on prisoners' identity and their choice of coping strategies. Studies have shown that male prisoners are at risk of suffering bodily injuries and sexual assault while incarcerated (Toch, 1977; Cooley, 1992; McCorkle, 1992; Schneider, 1996; Edgar & O'Donnell, 1998; O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998). Furthermore, prisoners are unlikely to report their victimization to prison staff, either because they believe that staff will not, or cannot do anything to help them, or they are scared of the consequences if other prisoners find out that they talked to prison officials (McCorkle, 1992).

Violence¹⁹ can be defined in various ways, and can encompass different acts, be they physical, psychological, sexual, emotional or institutional, among others. Edgar, O'Donnell and Martin argue that “[a]s a concept, violence is slippery [and]...evades easy description and fixed definition” (2003, p. 23). Violence is defined by Stanko (1994, p. xiv) as “emotional, psychological, sexual, physical and/or material damage” (in Hatty, 2000, p. 46) while aggression is defined by Gottfredson and Hirschi (1993, p. 52) as “unprovoked, senseless, or unjustifiable violence or threat of violence” (in Hatty, 2000, p. 45). Although some may argue that aggression and violence are ‘senseless’ and ‘unjustifiable’, research on prison violence (McCorkle, 1992; Edgar & O'Donnell, 1998) shows that on the contrary, some prisoners believe their aggressive acts are justified and make sense in their given situation. In prison, violence can be defined as a “predatory practice whereby inmates of superior strength and knowledge of inmate lore prey on the weaker and less knowledgeable inmates” (Toch, 1977, p.143). Although in reality there may not be clear demarcations between physical, emotional and sexual violence, for the sake of organization and clarity, each of these will be discussed in separate sections.

Physical Victimization

Data from self-report victimization surveys conducted by Correctional Service Canada (CSC) for the Prison Victimization Project (PVP) show that the victimization rate of incarcerated males is 538.46 per 100,000 while for non-incarcerated males the rate is 90 per 100,000 (Cooley, 1992;1993). This means that male prisoners are almost six times more likely to experience various forms of victimization than males in the outside world.

¹⁹For the purposes of this research I use the terms violence and victimization interchangeably to refer to instances of physical and sexual assault, including rape, unless I specifically make reference to which I am referring.

The PVP gathered data from 117 federally-sentenced prisoners from five prisons and three security levels (Cooley, 1992; 1993).²⁰ Each prisoner completed a questionnaire which asked “whether or not he had been involved in any of six victimization incidents while housed in a federal prison during a 12-month period” (1992, p. 1).²¹ Forty-seven percent (55) of the 117 respondents had experienced 107 separate victimizations during the past year, with 23 of the 55 reporting more than one instance of victimization (Cooley, 1993, p. 483). The most common incidents involved personal victimization such as robbery, sexual assault, assault, threats and extortion, rather than victimization involving property, such as theft and vandalism (Cooley, 1993, p. 484).

Forty-six percent of all personal victimizations involved assaults, meaning that assaults accounted for 28% of all victimizations (ibid). The PVP’s definition of assault is similar to the one used by CSC, which states that assault is “a deliberate attack on an inmate or inmates” and therefore excludes fights between prisoners considered to be mutual (Cooley, 1993, p. 489). Cooley (1993) concludes that in total, “assaults and threats of assaults constituted approximately 82% of all personal victimizations and 50% of the total number of victimizations...” (p. 484). These findings suggest that assaults constitute an important type of victimization in prison. This issue is explored in more detail later.

The PVP shows that a significant number of prisoners who reported being victims of crime indicated multiple victimizations (Cooley, 1993). Forty-two percent were victimized

²⁰ The survey method was used in order to counteract official statistics. Cooley (1993) argues that the majority of “knowledge about violence in Canadian prisons comes from officially collected statistics and it is not at all clear what these statistics recommend” (p. 481). Although the survey method can have its own flaws, Cooley (1993) argues that it is the best method of measuring crime rates (p. 482).

²¹ The six victimization incidents are: (1) robbery or attempted robbery; (2) sexual assault; (3) assault or attempted assault; (4) theft; (5) vandalism; (6) extortion (Cooley, 1992, p. 11n). Victimization was said to have taken place if the respondent answered that they had been involved in one of the six incidents and if, after soliciting more details about the altercation, it was ruled by the researcher that the event could not be considered self-defense (according to the *Criminal Code*) or a mutual fight (Cooley, 1993, p. 483).

more than once and 11% were victimized four or more times during the prior twelve months (ibid). The research found that victims tended to be younger, in maximum security prisons and to be incarcerated for less time in their current institution (ibid).

The PVP's assessment of the dark figure' of prison violence revealed victimization rates of five times higher than those revealed by official data (Cooley, 1993). These results support the supposition that prisoners rarely report instances of victimization, finding that only 9% of prisoners who are victims of crime report their victimization to prison officials (ibid). Prisoners usually explained their reluctance to report by stating that these sorts of matters are between prisoners and none of the staff's business (ibid). This suggests that the inmate code rule against talking to staff (Sykes, 1958) still exists in contemporary prisons. These findings also suggest that research on prison violence is best done by direct contact with prisoners and that reports of victimization should be based on prisoners' own accounts rather than on institutional or medical files. Furthermore, the considerable difference between the victimization rates of male civilians and prisoners and the high rate of victimization among prisoners signal that some forms of violence are significant features of the prison environment.

Similar to the Prison Victimization Project, a 1998 study by O'Donnell and Edgar investigated routine victimization in prison, arguing that day-to-day instances of violence can provide a more accurate picture of the prison experience than sensational, rare or extreme forms can (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998, p. 266).²² However, compared to the PVP which used mainly physical acts to define victimization, this study uses a broader definition of victimization which also includes psychological abuse.

²² The study investigated six forms of victimization: (1) assault; (2) robbery; (3) threats of violence; (4) cell theft; (5) exclusion; and (6) verbal abuse (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998, p. 267).

The researchers administered 12-page surveys inquiring about prisoners' "personal experience of victimization in the past month" to 722 prisoners in two adult male prisons and 820 young male offenders in two young offender institutions (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998, p. 267). Structured interviews were also conducted with ninety-two prisoners.²³ The research found that 19% of the adult prisoners had been assaulted and 26% had been "threatened with violence on at least one occasion in the previous month" (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998, p. 277). While prior experience with incarceration "did not reduce the risk of being victimized [...being previously incarcerated] did increase the probability that a prisoner would victimize others" (ibid). The authors conclude that

[t]he capacity to assault, threaten and rob was in this sense acquired, and was a likely consequence of having been assaulted, threatened or robbed by others. Thus, not only do prisons allow for the transmission of specific criminal techniques, but they also de-sensitize people to the effects of their actions on others (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998, p. 277).

O'Donnell and Edgar (1998) identified four forms of physical victimization: assaults, threats of violence, robbery and cell thefts, and two forms of psychological victimization: verbal assault and exclusion.

Assaults

The main reason prisoners gave for engaging in assaults or physical attacks (O'Donnell and Edgar, 1998)²⁴ is to resolve conflicts with other prisoners. Prisoners may also engage in physical violence in order to defend themselves, to seek revenge or retaliation, to enforce debts or persuade the debtor to repay his loans, or to improve their social status (since fighting a respected prisoner can decrease the pressure on them to prove themselves to

²³ For the purposes of this research, I will focus only on the results of adult prisoners and exclude the findings on young prisoners. It is sufficient to say that victimization rates were significantly higher in the young offender institutions than in the adult prisons (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998, p. 268).

²⁴ Although assaults can include sexual as well as physical assaults, O'Donnell and Edgar (1998) focus on physical assaults since they found that "sexual assaults were rarely reported in the institutions [they] studied" (p. 271).

others). In addition, prisoners may be attacked because of the types of crimes they were convicted of (e.g. conviction for sex offenses) (ibid).

Threats of Violence

The second form of victimization identified by O'Donnell and Edgar (1998) is the threat of violence, which is often accompanied by other types of violence, such as assault or robbery (p. 271). Prisoners use threats to gain material possessions, elicit a certain favour, instigate a fight, get another prisoner to retreat from a physical fight or “put an end to an escalating round of insults” (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998, p. 271).

Robbery

Robbery²⁵ often begins when a prisoner (the victim) refuses another prisoner's (the aggressor) 'request' to lend him some goods and the aggressor takes the goods by force. In some cases, even if the victim complies, the aggressor is not satisfied with just borrowing and he demands the goods (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998). However, robbery is not a frequent form of victimization (ibid).

Cell Theft

Prisoners who steal from others' cells either do so opportunistically, (such as noticing a cell door is open) or plan their theft in advance (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998). The research found that prisoners tend to feel that there is not much they can do about cell thefts since it is difficult to ascertain who the perpetrator is. Therefore, cell theft is often seen as “part of the hazards of prison life” (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998, p. 274).

²⁵ Robbery is defined as the “act of taking possessions by force...[which] involves both a threat and an attempt to steal...[and] is often accompanied by verbal abuse and in its more serious form can also involve an assault” (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998, p. 272).

Psychological Victimization

Verbal Abuse

O'Donnell and Edgar define verbal abuse as "hurtful, insulting language" (1998, p. 274). Although it is more common among young offenders, 26% of adult prisoners in their study experienced such abuse in the previous month (ibid). Verbal abuse is often used by prisoners to establish "relationship[s] of dominance", to identify prisoners as sex offenders (regardless of the validity of such claims), to isolate prisoners from their social groups and to "break the inmate's spirit" (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998, p. 275).²⁶

Exclusion

Exclusion refers to one or more prisoners preventing another prisoner whom they perceive as having a lower status from partaking in activities or using equipment meant to be shared, such as television watching (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998). Exclusion can involve the use of threats, assaults and avoidance and can be used to demonstrate one's dominance over a weaker prisoner or to isolate this prisoner from his associates. In O'Donnell and Edgar's (1998) study, 7% of adult prisoners had experienced exclusion in the previous month (p. 276). The authors argue that verbal abuse and exclusion can be "very damaging to the victim's self-esteem" (ibid).

Sexual Victimization among Prisoners

Another significant aspect of prison violence is sexual victimization. Although some studies report relatively low rates of sexual victimization (Cooley, 1992; 1993; O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998), others suggest that the number of prisoners who are subjected to sexual

²⁶ Identifying someone as a sex offender can isolate him from others, since prisoners do not want to be associated with a sex offender. Such insinuations can be dangerous for the prisoner in question since unless he can prove that he is not a sex offender the prisoner collective tends to accept the rumor at face value (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998).

violence is much higher than official reports indicate (Human Rights Watch, 2001). The problem of underreporting mentioned earlier is even more pronounced in the case of sexual violence. While physical violence presents its own problems, sexual violence has significant negative impact on prisoners, especially because it is intimately tied with masculinity and identity. Prison sexual aggression can be defined as:

behavior that leads a man to feel that he is the target of aggressive sexual intentions. The perception of the target becomes just as important as the objective actions of the aggressor in defining the situation. Sexual aggression can be viewed as a continuum marked by different levels of force: One end of the continuum might be a target imagining aggression from an aggressor's overture; the other end, the gang rape (Lockwood, 1980, p. 9).

Research suggests that prisoners who are victims of sexual assault tend to be victims more than once. Hensley and Tewksbury (2002) found that these prisoners each reported an average of nine instances of assault, while the one prisoner who admitted to being sexually assaulted in the PVP (1992) study reported six incidents. However, it is not clear if either the Hensley and Tewksbury survey or the PVP questionnaire differentiated between cases consisting of multiple perpetrators and cases of multiple assaults of one victim by the same perpetrator. The latter case may involve men who engage in coerced sexual activity with their 'protector'.

While not all sexual activity between prisoners is non-consensual, it is difficult to assess what constitutes consent in prison. For example, in some cases, perpetrators of sexual victimization use force and weapons while in other cases they do not. In the latter case, victims are led to believe that letting themselves be raped is the only way they will survive in prison (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Victimized men may become the 'wives' of their rapists, in exchange for protection. In this way, they evade being raped by numerous men,

unless their protector allows it (Rideau & Sinclair, 1982). To the extent that they see the acts as rape, since they do not consent to the acts, they could indicate in the survey multiple sexual victimizations.²⁷

Research does not suggest a clear-cut answer to why prisoners engage in sexual violence. Prison rape can be seen as a product of the absence of opportunities to engage in sexual relations with women, as an exertion of power that has little to do with sexual desire, or a combination of the two. Some researchers argue that heterosexual deprivation is overwhelmingly the catalyst for prison sexual assaults; for some prisoners, they argue, sexual deprivation is so unbearable that they willingly substitute men for women and engage in acts of sexual aggression for the purpose of sexual gratification (Sykes, 1958; Lockwood, 1980). Other researchers argue that prison is an ultra-masculine world where violence (including sexual violence), is a means of climbing the status hierarchy (Rideau & Sinclair, 1982; Phillips, 2001). In this context, rape is seen primarily as an act of power, not sex. The view is in accordance with much of the feminist discourse on rape. In prison, rape is about power and displaying one's masculinity in a setting where ways of enacting masculinity are limited or threatened.

The effects of sexual victimization can be serious and long-lasting and can range from stigmatization, future victimization and identity problems to escalation of violent behaviour by those who are raped. In Western society, it is generally believed that it takes only one same-sex experience to change a person's sexual orientation and that this change occurs even in cases where the acts were engaged in under coercion or force (Peeples Jr. &

²⁷ Kupers (2001) contends that the term 'rape' should be applied to sexual acts that seem consensual but are based on one man's fear that unless he submits he will be beaten or killed (p. 111). However, other researchers might not see these acts as rape, which can explain why some have concluded that "victims are generally victims only once" (Lockwood, 1980, p. 96).

Scacco Jr., 1982). This belief can contribute to male rape victims' identity crises and to destructive or self-destructive behaviours (ibid). Furthermore, rape victims can suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which includes symptoms such as "flashbacks, nightmares, panic attacks, and severe constrictions of emotional range and daily activities" and which can lead to depression and suicide (Kupers, 2001, p. 194). In addition to psychological effects, forced sexual contact carries the threat of contracting sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS or hepatitis.²⁸ In this context, rape and sexual assaults take on new meanings. Not only are assaults psychologically and physically traumatic, but they can amount to a death sentence for the person victimized and infected. Furthermore, most prisoners will be released back into society and the traumatic experiences they have in prison can influence their chances of successful reintegration upon release.²⁹

Coping Strategies used by Male Prisoners

Based on the information presented so far, it can be assumed that prisoners' coping strategies will be both enabled and constrained by prison culture (informal control) and institutional rules (formal control), and by the way they experience prison. Furthermore, I have shown that masculinity is integral to prison culture, and therefore, will also influence the ways that prisoners cope with challenges. I have argued that compared to free citizens,

²⁸ Human Rights Watch (2001) reports that "AIDS is currently the second leading cause of death among prison inmates" (p. 111).

²⁹ Although it is not in the scope of this research to explore intervention strategies against prison sexual victimization, it is worth mentioning that it is common for those who do research or advocate for such intervention to do so on the grounds that those who are victimized may victimize others once released from prison (Lockwood, 1980; Paczensky, 2001). The rationale of such an idea is that the experience of being victimized in prison "trains men to raise the level of violence they have been accustomed to employing" (Lockwood, 1980, p. 100). Therefore, in addition to "psychological trauma and social maladjustment...sexual aggression can also precipitate violence on the part of targets" (Lockwood, 1980, p. 101). While this may be true, there is a need to intervene since the effects of prison rape transcend the 'victimized becomes victimizer' hypothesis. These victims are prisoners but they are still victims, worthy of compassion and support. For a discussion on the ethical obligation and responsibility of therapists to help clients who are both offenders and victims, see Ward & Moreton (2008).

prisoners have limited opportunities to cope with obstacles (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961; Edgar & O'Donnell, 1998). However, prisoners are not passive in dealing with these obstacles; on the contrary, they use various coping strategies, be they legal or illegal (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961), passive or aggressive (Zamble & Porporino, 1988; McCorkle, 1992; Edgar & O'Donnell, 1998), conscious or unconscious (Clemmer, 1966). The next section describes four different ways that prisoners may cope with imprisonment: (1) avoiding problem situations or people; (2) adopting the prison culture; (3) gaining a 'good' reputation; (4) engaging in aggressive techniques; (5) balancing the inner persona with the outer self.³⁰

Avoiding Problem Situations or People

One way that prisoners can deal with challenges is to avoid or forget them. While complete avoidance of one's problems is not a plausible solution to coping with life's problems, and the prison environment, more than the outside world, is not conducive to such behaviour (Sykes, 1958), research has found that some prisoners, or all prisoners at some point use avoidance techniques to cope with imprisonment (Goffman, 1961; McCorkle, 1992).

However, these techniques are not used exclusively and may be part of an arsenal of coping strategies (Goffman, 1961; McCorkle, 1992; Edgar & O'Donnell, 1998). Avoidance behaviours lie on a continuum, with more benign strategies such as 'removal activities' (Goffman, 1961) at one end and prolonged avoidance of other prisoners at the other end (McCorkle, 1992). Removal activities are "voluntary, unserious pursuits which are sufficiently engrossing and exciting to lift the participant out of himself, making him oblivious for the time being to his actual situation" (Goffman, 1961, p. 67). These can

³⁰ Prisoners do not use one type of coping strategy exclusively. Rather, prisoners may use all or none or a combination of these strategies at any one time or to deal with a specific situation.

include activities such as field games or watching television (Goffman, 1961).³¹ Zamble and Porporino's study (1988) found that prisoners used both escape and avoidance coping strategies. While 96% of prisoners attempted to actively deal with problems, 61% also used escape, which they define as "physical removal of self from problem situation, or termination of thoughts about it" and 50% of the prisoners used avoidance, defined as "staying away from situation in which problem occurs, or avoidance of thoughts about it" (Zamble & Porporino, 1988, p. 93).

To understand how prisoners change their behaviours to evade victimization, McCorkle (1992) administered a thirteen-page questionnaire to 300 maximum-security prisoners in the United States and included 25 of these prisoners in in-depth interviews. McCorkle sorted the prisoners' coping strategies into two categories: passive and aggressive. Behaviours such as keeping to oneself, avoiding certain areas and spending more time in one's cell were categorized as passive precaution, while engaging in violence, possessing a weapon and lifting weights were considered aggressive precautions (McCorkle, 1992).

The results show that 78% of prisoners 'kept to themselves' in an attempt to reduce their chances of being victimized, while 40% avoided certain areas in the prison such as the recreational areas and/ or spent more time in their cells (McCorkle, 1992). Almost one in five prisoners reported that these types of coping strategies prevented them from partaking in prison activities.³² McCorkle (1992) argues that avoidance behaviours are related to fear, since prisoners who had been threatened, robbed or assaulted were more likely to use them.

³¹ Prisoners may engage in removal activities because they believe that time in prison is time wasted (Goffman, 1961, p. 66). Goffman argues that this belief is founded, since prisoners cannot gain any advantage or skills that they can use upon their release (1961, p. 67). Of course, in some cases, prisoners can learn some skills or gain an education through correspondence college or university courses.

³² It is not clear if the one in five refers to one in five of all 300 prisoners who answered the questionnaire, or to one in five of the 40% who avoided certain areas or spent more time in their cells.

These prisoners tended to be older, to have been in prison longer and to be isolated from other prisoners (McCorkle, 1992).

McCorkle's (1992) assertion that prisoners who have spent more time in prison are more likely to use avoidance techniques is backed up by Zamble and Porporino's (1988) finding that as prisoners progress in their sentence they tend to socialize less with other prisoners. Zamble and Porporino (1988) argue that based on their clinical experience, by the third interview (a year and a half into their sentence), some prisoners were behaving in ways that would be characteristic of long-term prisoners. For example, some prisoners became increasingly "hardened, sealing off their capacities to reach outside of the present moment of the self" (Zamble & Porporino, 1988, p. 123). Moreover, this "pattern was often visible in [their]... faces and demeanor...and the changes from the first to the last interviews were sometimes quite marked" (ibid). Zamble and Porporino (1988) argue that for these prisoners, "[p]sychological survival was the goal, and they did manage to cope, but the cost was considerable" (p. 123).³³ It is unclear, however, if this cold and hardened exterior happens automatically for some prisoners (in the same vein that prisonization does) or if prisoners consciously disengage from others to decrease their chance of conflict. While Zamble and Porporino do not specifically state this, the latter explanation seems to have more support. Their research found that long-term prisoners avoid becoming friends with short-term prisoners because when the latter get released or transferred to another institution, the loss makes long-term prisoners feel lonely and depressed. At the same time, long-term prisoners avoid friendships with others serving long sentences because these relationships "often intensif[y] their own feelings of loneliness" (Zamble & Porporino, 1988, p. 123).

³³ Significantly, Zamble and Porporino's conclusions are shaped by their clinical judgments as well as quantitative data.

Adopting the Prison Culture

Another way that prisoners cope with their environment is by adhering to the tenets of prison culture (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961; Clemmer, 1966). Prisoners can adopt the prison culture in both conscious and unconscious ways. Donald Clemmer (1966) coined the term 'prisonization' to refer to the unconscious and automatic ways that prisoners take on "in greater or lesser degree...the folkways, mores, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary" (1966, p. 299). This process takes place outside of prisoners' control and they do not engage in it deliberately. Therefore it can be considered an unconscious coping mechanism. Prisonization begins during the admissions process when new prisoners are "confused and uncertain about the social world they have left [and]...have anxiety about the future" (Clemmer, 1966, p. 298).

In time, being prisonized can prove beneficial for prisoners. In a sense, it means that they are aware of the intricacies of prison culture and may be better able to adapt to it. Clemmer likens prisonization to 'wizing up', explaining that new prisoners are happy with any kind of jobs they are offered but as they become prisonized, they realize that some types of jobs can make their lives easier and they attempt to acquire such jobs (Clemmer, 1966). This suggests that prisoners who are aware of how the prison culture operates may be better able to cope with the negative aspects of imprisonment.

Clemmer (1966, p. 300) found that all prisoners are subjected to a variety of universal factors, such as

[a]cceptance of an inferior role, accumulation of facts concerning the organization of the prison, the development of somewhat new habits of eating, dressing, working, sleeping, the adoption of local language, the recognition that nothing is owed to the environment for the supplying of needs, and the eventual desire for a good job

which can influence their behaviours and attitudes, and ultimately, their identity and which can lead to the complete prisonization of some prisoners. However, the extent to which these factors influence prisoners depends on the length of their sentence. For long-term prisoners, even if they do not adopt any other aspect of the prison culture except the abovementioned aspects, they are still likely to become prisonized. On the other hand, short-term prisoners (those with sentences of up to two years) who are only influenced by these factors do not necessarily become prisonized (Clemmer, 1966). This suggests that prisonization is not a rational choice on prisoners' part but one to which they are unconsciously subjected.

In addition to length of sentence, the degree to which prisoners become prisonized depends on factors such as their personality, the types of relationships that they have with outside persons and with other prisoners, how accepting they are of the prison culture, and finally, chance (Clemmer, 1966). These findings suggest that imprisonment does not have a blanket effect on all prisoners but that depending on diverse factors individual prisoners may experience, and be influenced by, imprisonment quite differently.

While prisoners may go through the process of prisonization, they may also adopt the prison culture in conscious and deliberate ways. Goffman (1961) found that prisoners may cope by making 'secondary adjustments'—also known as 'knowing the ropes', 'gimmicks' or 'conniving'—which he defines as “practices that do not directly challenge staff but allow inmates to obtain forbidden satisfactions or to obtain permitted ones by forbidden means” (p. 56). These activities not only help prisoners cope with various problems but also make them feel like they have some agency over their environment, which can counteract the loss of autonomy and independence that the prison environment fosters (ibid).

Gaining a 'Good' Reputation

The inmate code and the argot roles dictate how prisoners should behave and how they should interact with each other and with staff. Indeed, prison is a social environment in which prisoners have to learn how to survive among others. In prison it is difficult to avoid others' company and one's status and reputation mediate social interactions (Zamble & Porporino, 1988; Phillips, 2001). Since the inmate code exalts cohesiveness, getting along with other prisoners can facilitate adaptation and positive coping (Sykes, 1958). The argot roles in turn, exalt the characteristics of the 'real man' while shunning all other types of roles (Sykes, 1958). Therefore, some prisoners attempt to form bonds with other prisoners and to foster a reputation as a 'real man' (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961; Phillips, 2001). These strategies are also related to the quest for status in the hierarchical system of power and dominance that characterizes prisoners' relationships (Phillips, 2001). Therefore, while prisoners may be following the tenets of prison culture, they are also attempting to improve or at least maintain their own social status or reputation. Having a high social status in prison facilitates coping; prisoners with a high status are treated better, are less likely to be provoked to fights and are more likely to get through their sentence with less harm (Phillips, 2001). Here, social status is related to manhood. The more 'manly' a prisoner is, the more likely it is that he will possess a higher standing among his fellow prisoners.

Since having a high social status is beneficial to prisoners' sense of manhood, it is not surprising that their coping strategies most often revolve around improving their status. There are three main ways that prisoners attempt to improve or maintain a 'good' reputation: (i) allying with others; (ii) being perceived as a 'real man'; (iii) consuming and possessing material goods.

Allying with Other Prisoners

Prisoners may be able to improve their social standing and in turn cope more effectively with their environment by forming close associations with other prisoners (Phillips, 2001). Phillips (2001) contends that these associations not only “constitute a valuable resource for building a reputation and for recouping manhood” but also make a prisoner less vulnerable by providing him with people who will stand by him in case of conflict with others (p. 16). However, prisoners have to choose their associates wisely, since associating with the ‘wrong’ people (such as prisoners who are believed to be convicted of sex offenses) can result in the “detraction from one’s manhood” and can result in prisoners being shunned or even violently attacked by other prisoners (Phillips, 2001, p. 15). Finding out who is a ‘right kind’ of prisoner, can be achieved by finding out what kind of crime the man in question has been convicted for (ibid). Crime status (the crime a prisoner was convicted for) plays a significant role in prisoners’ status and their acceptance as ‘good’ associates by others. Some crimes, such as break and enter and armed robbery, are considered ‘manly’ while others, such as sex crimes, especially against children, are considered ‘unmanly’ (Phillips, 2001; Jewkes, 2005).³⁴ Because directly asking other prisoners what they were convicted for is considered insulting in the prison culture, prisoners usually judge others by the way they are treated by others (Phillips, 2001). For example, if a prisoner’s associates are respected, one can safely assume that his crime status is acceptable. On the other hand, as one prisoner interviewed by Phillips asserted, “You can tell who the

³⁴ Since prisoners are aware of this, ‘rule’ of prison culture, they may attempt to either boast of their crime status (if the crime is considered ‘manly’) or hide their crime status (if it is considered ‘unmanly’) (Phillips, 2001).

rapists are because nobody will say 'hi' to them, nobody will give them the time of day" (2001, p. 20).³⁵

However, achieving a high status also entails striking a balance between one's bonds with one's associates and acting independently (Phillips, 2001). Associating too much with others can result in prisoners being perceived as needy and dependent on others and can detract from their masculinity. Balance is achieved by a prisoner who is part of a group but is also able to "evoke qualities of independence and self-containment—the capacity to perform masculinity alone" (Phillips, 2001, p. 18).

Being perceived as a 'Real Man'

Another way that prisoners can improve their status and cope more effectively with incarceration is by being seen by others as a 'real man' (Sykes, 1958; Phillips, 2001). Phillips (2001) argues that the real man "is a cultural category of manhood that incorporates the idealized qualities of the strong, impregnable male self" (p. 16). Here we see hegemonic masculinity playing out; the 'real man' is the ideal that men in general attempt to embody. Phillips (2001, p. 16) argues that being perceived as a 'real man' allows prisoners to recuperate their stolen masculinity.

Gaining a reputation as a real man necessitates various strategies. The most important of these is for the prisoner to not allow others to take advantage of him in any way (Phillips, 2001). He protects his possessions against thefts and he protects his body against rape and other forms of assault (ibid). However, the real man does not use gratuitous violence; when threatened or aggravated he first warns his provoker and only if the warning is not heeded does he respond with violence (ibid). Recall that Sykes (1958) differentiated between the

³⁵ We have to assume that the reference is made to rapists outside of prison, since those who rape other prisoners are not necessarily viewed as negatively.

violence demonstrated by the 'gorilla' and the controlled aggression demonstrated by the 'real man'.

Gaining and maintaining a reputation as a 'real man' can also cause prisoners to feel that they "need to continually produce evidence of honor and valor" while at the same time steering clear of anything that may cause them to lose their status (Phillips, 2001, p. 15). This constant effort to maintain the right reputation can be considered an attempt to perpetually enact and display one's masculinity while at the same time shunning any behaviour that can cause one to be perceived either as feminine or weak.

Possessing and Consuming Material Goods

Another way that some prisoners attempt to achieve a higher social status is to be seen possessing and/or consuming material goods (Jewkes, 2005). Although this is not a characteristic of the inmate code, Jewkes (2005) argues that material goods play a significant part of prison culture. Engaging in such behaviours can confer a prisoner a higher status because material possessions are perceived by prison culture as symbolic of status (Jewkes, 2005). Prisoners who can afford to buy or somehow get access to canteen products or are the possessors of goods obtained by various means, are more likely to be seen in a positive light by fellow prisoners (ibid).³⁶

Physical and Sexual Violence, a Façade of Toughness and Readiness to Fight

Perhaps it is not surprising that Jewkes (2005) found that many prisoners engage in body-building as a way coping with imprisonment. The image of muscular prisoners lifting weights in the prison yard is one that is often seen in movies and other forms of media. A muscular physique may play a role in one of the most often used strategies for coping with

³⁶ Although the research does not mention this, one can suppose that the value placed on material possessions can lead to cell thefts and robberies.

imprisonment: violence or the perception of being perpetually ready to engage in violence' (Sykes, 1958; Phillips, 2001; Hensley et al., 2003). Male prisoners may attempt to rebuild their 'stolen' manhood; in this context, some researchers have argued, physical aggression is the most readily available resource at their disposal (ibid). Violence or the reputation of being perpetually willing to engage in violence, be it physical, sexual or verbal, allows prisoners to enact or rebuild their masculinity, protects them from victimization and facilitates their ascendancy in the prison status hierarchy (ibid). Aggressive coping strategies are perhaps most related to the concept of hyper-masculinity since they suppose a relationship of dominance and subordination between prisoners, something that may catalyze hyper-masculine behaviours and interactions.

While physical activity such as body-building can be a way for prisoners to vent energy and anger or to attract a partner, its main function is likely a protective one (McCorkle, 1992; Jewkes, 2005). McCorkle (1992) found that prisoners lift weights in order to avoid being victimized by others, while Jewkes (2005) argues that prisoners engage in body-building as a way of combating the prison's emasculating effects and of displaying their status to other prisoners. By having a physically fit body, a prisoner can differentiate himself from others, especially those who are weaker than himself and can warn other prisoners not to 'mess' with him (Jewkes, 2005). The body then can be used to embody hegemonic masculinity while simultaneously subordinating and marginalizing those whose bodies do not measure up to this ideal.

It may be that prison culture promotes violence in both direct and indirect ways. Since those who engage in such behaviours are considered 'manly' and conferred a higher status, prisoners may attempt to deal with problems in aggressive ways. In this respect, engaging in violence may actually be adaptive. As one prisoner interviewed by Phillips

attests: “A lot of [prisoners] build reputations by getting into fights. Then people say, ‘No, you don’t want to mess with him, because if you mess with him, he’ll fight you.’ This is how they establish credibility around here” (2001, p. 21). This suggests that prisoners who are willing to fight may be less likely to be threatened or assaulted because they have shown that they are willing to engage in violence. Therefore, a façade of toughness and a willingness to fight can be beneficial in elevating prisoners’ status and helping them avoid victimization.

Part of presenting a readiness to fight is prisoners’ willingness not to ignore any forms of disrespect from other prisoners and to always “reciprocate violence or threats of violence” (Phillips, 2001, p. 20). Prisoners generally believe that if they do not do so, their reputation will suffer and their chances of being victimized by others will increase (ibid). While almost half of the prisoners in McCorkle’s (1992) study used avoidance coping strategies, more prisoners used aggressive techniques of coping (69.6%), namely, ‘getting tough’ with another prisoner in order “to avoid being victimized or exploited” (pp. 165-166). These prisoners stated that ‘getting tough’ (defined by McCorkle as being violent in some way), shows not only the aggressor but also the rest of the prisoners that the prisoner in question “is willing to use violence in defense of self” (ibid). Additionally, 25% of prisoners stated that they possessed a weapon of some sort and almost 50% reported that they lifted weights in order to thwart off the threat of violence (ibid).

Interestingly, Phillips (2001) found that even prisoners who do not want to fight (because doing so can lead to official sanctions such as punishment or the removal of privileges) still find it socially beneficial to do so; being in a fight can be perceived by the prison culture as masculine and can raise one’s status. This suggests that the formal social control (the official rules and regulations) does not exert as much influence on prisoners’ decisions as the informal social control (the prison culture) does. Phillips concludes that

“fighting...is an elaborately ritualized and often mandatory means to recoup manhood in prison...[and the] performance of the battle is essential to the reconstruction of reputation” (2001, p. 22).

Sexually Aggressive Coping Strategies

In addition to physical violence, some prisoners use sexual violence or threats of such violence to cope with their environment. Although some prisoners have to cope with the sexual aggressions of other prisoners, there are also those who cope with the deprivations of imprisonment by engaging in sexual acts, be they consensual or not (Sykes, 1958; Phillips, 2001; Hensley et al., 2003). For example, Sykes (1958) argues that some prisoners cope with the deprivation of sexual opportunities with women by having sex with other male prisoners.

Age, Fear and the Use of Aggressive Coping Strategies

Violence does not play the same function for all prisoners. Age and fear are two variables that mediate the use of aggressive coping strategies. The relationship between fighting and status is mediated by one's age (McCorkle, 1992; Phillips, 2001). An older man is less likely to fight for banal reasons and will likely only do so if the provoker touches him (Phillips, 2001). Additionally, “a young man is not going to gain the same honor by attacking an older guy” and losing a fight to an older prisoner can jeopardize the younger prisoner's reputation (Phillips, 2001, p. 21). Perhaps this is why research has found that both victims and aggressors of violence tend to be younger than those who are not involved in violence (Lockwood, 1980; Bowker, 1982; McCorkle, 1992).

Like passive strategies, aggressive ones are also related to fear; prisoners who have been threatened or physically assaulted are more likely to use this type of coping strategy (McCorkle, 1992). Additionally, those who are younger, physically smaller, who have been

in the specific prison longer and who have less incarceration experience are also more likely to use these strategies (McCorkle, 1992).

McCorkle (1992) argues that fear and age are the best predictors of both passive and aggressive precautions. Citing research of fear in the outside world (Liska, Sanchirico & Reed, 1988), he concludes that “the relationships between victimization and fear, on the one hand, and the use of personal precautions, on the other, were decidedly more pronounced in the prison than has been observed in the free world” (McCorkle, 1992, p. 169). Therefore, he argues that fear influences the behaviours and lifestyles of many prisoners (McCorkle, 1992).

McCorkle (1992) argues that although prisoners most likely use both passive and aggressive strategies interchangeably “the general orientation and response to perceived threats, be it passive or aggressive, probably remains consistent over the course of the incarceration experience” (McCorkle, 1992, p. 170). This assertion is different from Edgar and O’Donnell’s (1998) study which found that victim/aggressor roles can change abruptly. Although Edgar and O’Donnell (1998) explore the roles prisoners play in aggressive interactions, and not in the coping mechanisms they use, they point to the flexible nature of prison roles, while McCorkle (1992) suggests that it is more likely that prisoners’ coping styles are rigid.

However, the high victimization rates suggest that neither aggressive nor passive coping strategies are effective in protecting prisoners from violence (McCorkle, 1992). Using violence to alleviate prison deprivations can create relationships of dominance and submission, propagate a cycle of aggression and breed distrust and fear. When a prisoner is an aggressor, be it physically or sexually, someone else, a fellow prisoner, is being subjected to his violent acts. Indeed, just as hegemonic masculinity cannot exist without subordinated and marginalized masculinities, and dominant, violent men cannot exist without

subordinated, victimized others (either women or weaker men), there cannot be aggressors without victims and there cannot be high-status prisoners without there also being low-status prisoners. The absence of women in male prisons means that some men will be relegated to the status of women and be perceived as weak and potential victims. Therefore, it could be argued that prison helps perpetuate gender stereotypes and relationships based on power inequalities.

If, as Phillips (2001) contends, most of prisoners' behaviours are attempts to rebuild their manhood, and if as Messerschmidt (1993) argues, enacting masculinity depends on the resources available, it may be that prisoners use a different set of criteria for evaluating manhood than they do in the outside world. Indeed, Sykes (1958) argues that since the most often used criteria for judging maleness in the outside world—heterosexual intercourse—is absent in prison, male prisoners have made 'acting tough' as the criterion by which to measure manliness.

However, it is not outward aggressiveness such as that displayed by the wolf or the gorilla which embodies masculinity the best. For example, although the wolf is perceived as more masculine than the fag and the punk, he can never occupy too high a place in the prison hierarchy because of his sexual acts (Sykes, 1958).³⁷ The prisoner who embodies the masculine ideals is the real man. The characteristics of the real man are linked to ideals of masculinity in the outside world; 'playing it cool', for example "has its roots in a vision of manhood and integrity which far transcends the prison" (Sykes, 1958, p. 101). Therefore, the

³⁷ When discussing wolves, punks and fags, it seems that Sykes is equating heterosexuality with masculinity since he portrays masculinity and homosexuality as mutually exclusive characteristics (1958, p. 96). It is not clear whether he states how prisoners view homosexuality and masculinity or whether he is making a moral statement on homosexuality, arguing that homosexuals cannot be masculine. However, taking into account that he published his work two decades before homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), his potentially negative view of homosexuality is not unexpected.

hegemonic masculinity evident in the prison environment is an extension of the hegemonic masculinity in the outside world (Messerschmidt, 2001; Jewkes, 2005). While conceptualizations and manifestations of masculinity have most plausibly changed in various ways since Sykes' 1958 research, the similarities between his findings and those of Edgar and O'Donnell (1998), Phillips (2001), Hensley et al., (2003) and Jewkes (2005) indicate that there are some recurrent and persistent characteristics of masculinity.

Furthermore, masculinity is not something that one acquires and holds on to for life, but rather is elusive and dynamic. This is evident in the prison setting where masculinity can be stolen and lost but it can also be regained through various means (Sykes, 1958; Phillips, 2001; Jewkes, 2005). Male prisoners therefore, attempt to continually protect themselves and their masculine status since being labeled weak by others can place them in continual danger of being victimized.

Zamble and Porporino's (1988) findings suggest that although prisoners may have engaged in negative behaviours (such as alcohol and drug consumption and violence) prior to incarceration, as prisoners they refrain from such activities because it is "either very difficult or else very dangerous [to engage in] inside the penitentiary" (Zamble & Porporino, 1988, p. 99). Furthermore, this research argues that prison is not a deteriorative environment but one that may actually be safer and more orderly than prisoners' outside environment because it offers a structured setting with reduced opportunities for engaging in negative coping behaviours (Zamble & Porporino, 1988). However, while prison may be more physically restrictive and may provide more formal structure than prisoners' outside environment, it does not mean that prisoners' pre-incarceration lives lacked structure. It may be that their lives had a kind of structure that may be perceived negatively by academics or researchers like Zamble and Porporino. Additionally, these findings contrast research that argues that

violence is a part of prison culture and that some prisoners do use violence to cope (McCorkle, 1992; Edgar & O'Donnell, 1998; Phillips, 2001).

The strategies I discussed so far describe more or less, negative ways of coping with imprisonment since they seem to facilitate prisoners' membership in prison culture. Belonging to the prison culture (becoming prisonized) has been found by Clemmer (1966) to be a factor in unsuccessful reintegration in the community. The coping strategies described above can be thought of as roadways to prisonization. For example, associating with others can lead the new prisoner to adopt the beliefs of the prison culture; sexually or physically assaulting another prisoner means that the aggressor supports a culture predicated on violence. While Clemmer's (1966) research suggests that prisonization and therefore, the behaviours that result from this process, occur outside of the control of the prisoner, Edgar and O'Donnell's (1998) research suggests that prisoners engage in various behaviours because they perceive that they will gain some rewards from doing so. According to these authors, prisoners' behaviours are not as much a result of uncontrollable forces but of calculated actions based on perceived future rewards. However, one has to consider whether these choices are really freely engaged in or are the result of constraint or coercion. Prison offers fewer opportunities for engaging in acceptable behaviours and prisoners' actions may reflect this.

A Positive way of Coping: Balancing the Inner Self with the Outer Persona

The next section describes a different type of coping strategy based on Yvonne Jewkes' (2005) research which argues that in order for prisoners to successfully cope with imprisonment they must maintain a balance between their inner self and their outer persona. If they achieve this, prisoners are less likely to experience harm as a result of incarceration and more likely to be successful after their release (Jewkes, 2005).

A prisoner's outer persona is the image he presents to others. This image may project a tough and manly prisoner and may benefit from a strong and muscular body achieved through body-building. The outer persona may try to fit in with other prisoners and with the prison culture by putting on a façade of toughness (Jewkes, 2005). On the other hand, a person's inner self is his "private, interior (and usually non-"macho") sense of self" (Jewkes, 2005, p. 46). Prisoners may nurture their inner self by taking comfort and gaining strength from those things that are specific to their situation, such as their family, friends, work and other aspects of their outside life which indicate that they are different from other prisoners (Jewkes, 2005).

Jewkes (2005) argues that the outer persona and the inner self are not incongruent; even something as outwardly masculine as body-building can nurture a prisoner's inner self since it allows him to feel powerful and different from weaker prisoners. Similarly, possessing material goods can help a prisoner achieve a higher status because possessions are perceived by the prison culture as a symbol of status. Since the prisoner in question may feel more independent for possessing these, his inner self may also benefit (Jewkes, 2005).³⁸

Jewkes (2005) argues that successful coping is the product of the balance between the inner self and the outer persona. However, maintaining this balance may be difficult since the boundaries between prisoners' self and identity can become fragile in prison and can lead to prisoners behaving in ways that they would not normally behave (Jewkes, 2005). The masculine culture of the prison can compromise the balance between identity and self by contributing to prisoners' depression and disconnection from the day-to-day goings on of the prison (ibid).

³⁸ It is not clear whether Jewkes (2005) believes that prisoners engage in these strategies consciously or unconsciously.

Making Sense of Prisoners' Behaviours

To understand how prisoners cope with incarceration it is important to delve deeper into the reasons why they may engage in some behaviours (e.g. those involving violence or a risk of violence to oneself or others) that may not make sense to someone outside of prison. Assuming that “people choose courses of action deliberately, based on their view of the best option open to them” Edgar and O’Donnell (1998, p. 648) argue that prisoners engage in high-risk activities—such as assaulting others and trading tobacco and drugs—not because of these limited options, but “because of the meaningful rewards they provide” (p. 648).³⁹ Those who verbally insult others may do so in the belief that their social status can be enhanced by such actions. Some prisoners who are assaulted are trying to rob others while those who engage in physical fights believe that a fight can resolve whatever conflict they have with another prisoner (ibid). Edgar and O’Donnell (1998) argue that when prisoners “decide[] to argue about access to telephones, games tables, or the television channel of their choice” they increase their chances of being assaulted (p. 648). While the desire to partake in these activities is understandable, these are “disputes between one who wished to dominate the situation and another who elected to defend his rights” and in prison, defending one’s rights increases one’s chances of being assaulted (Edgar & O’Donnell, 1998, p. 648).

While Edgar and O’Donnell’s (1998) research illustrates the risks that prisoners face and the possible reasons that they may be vulnerable to such risks, it does not explain how prisoners cope with these situations. Interestingly, their study found that “despite high levels of assault...eight of ten [prisoners] had managed to avoid being assaulted during the previous month” (Edgar & O’Donnell, 1998, p. 649). What is not clear from their study is how

³⁹ Their research involved 1, 566 male prisoners who answered a questionnaire and 91 prisoners who took part in in-depth interviews.

prisoners managed to accomplish this. It could be as easy as avoiding the high-risk activities that the authors described, such as engaging in verbal abuse and trading. However, other research (McCorkle, 1992) found that while not engaging with other prisoners may work in some respects, keeping to oneself can also contribute to a prisoner's reputation as a weak man.

Conclusion: Discussion, Advantages and Limitations of the Literature

Previous research argues that prison is drastically different from the outside environment; it is a stress-inducing environment in which prisoners' safety, identity and masculinity are threatened (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961; Clemmer, 1966; Cooley, 1992; Phillips, 2001; Jewkes, 2005). Research shows that imprisonment can be both physically and psychologically dangerous; for example, prisoners have considerably higher chances of experiencing violence than free citizens (Cooley, 1992) and are limited in their abilities to deal with this violence (Edgar & O'Donnell, 1998; Phillips, 2001).

Conversely, other research argues that while imprisonment may be perceived by prisoners as constraining, the reason for this lies in the contrast between prison and their outside environment (Zamble & Porporino, 1988). These authors argue that prisoners' pre-incarceration lives are "loose and unstructured", their behaviours lacking clear and predictable consequences (Zamble & Porporino, 1988, p.77). In comparison, prison is a structured and orderly environment where consequences follow behaviours that do not proscribe to the rules. This research seems to argue that if only prisoners' outside lives were more 'normal', that is, more structured and adult-like, they would not perceive imprisonment as stressful.

Although there is some disagreement among researchers on the effects of imprisonment, it is apparent that prisoners encounter different problems than they do in their

outside lives. It is also evident that prisoners attempt to cope with these problems by employing various strategies, some of which may be conscious while others may be unconscious; some may be more effective than others; some may be conducive to life on the inside but may interfere with life after release. These strategies may be influenced by prison culture and institutional rules, in some cases limiting prisoners' abilities to cope, while in others allowing them to cope more effectively with their problems.

Since the present research focuses on how prisoners cope with the challenges they encounter, the studies discussed so far have been useful in providing ways of conceptualizing and analyzing prisoners' coping strategies. However, as helpful as these studies are, they are not able to answer all of my questions regarding prisoners' coping strategies. For example, although Sykes' (1958) research explores the harsh conditions of the prison environment it does not explain whether all prisoners experience imprisonment similarly or if there are some differences. Do all prisoners experience the deprivation of material goods and services in the same way or are these deprivations felt more acutely by those who led a relatively well-off existence prior to incarceration? If that is the case, are those prisoners more likely to devise strategies for coping with that particular deprivation? In this regard, Zamble and Porporino's (1988) criticism that Sykes' (1958) research (among others) does not consider individual differences is founded. Similarly, the coping strategies that Sykes discusses, mainly the way that prisoners oscillate between doing what is best for themselves and what is best for the collective, do not address individual factors which might lead some prisoners to be more collectively, or individually, focused. In this respect, Zamble and Porprino's (1988) study of prisoners' outside coping strategies enlightens the reader into the coping styles of prisoners before and during incarceration. Their finding that prisoners cope poorly with both their outside and their prison problems, suggests that prisoners lack effective coping skills and that

this deficit may cause them more trouble than the structural characteristics of the institution. However, coping skills might be influenced by other elements such as education, social context, family history and gender. If these skills are influenced by such elements, then coping is not as much a personal choice as Zamble and Porporino (1988) make it seem. In this case, structure might not help these prisoners to cope more effectively.

Regarding Goffman's (1961) findings, they are, in essence, similar to Sykes' (1958). The fact that he did not conduct research on prisons or prisoners, but based his writings on observations of 'total institutions' and previous research, does not allow Goffman to present the in-depth analysis of the prison system or its inhabitants that Sykes (1958) and Clemmer (1966) are able to. However, regarding coping strategies, Clemmer's (1966) treatise too is lacking in the conceptualization of just *how* prisoners cope with the obstacles they face and whether all prisoners cope in the same way. While prisonization may help them cope better, it is neither a choice nor something that they can ignore once it happens. Therefore, some questions remain. Do prisoners use the same strategies throughout the duration of their sentence? What are some of the differences in the ways prisoners cope? Do all prisoners encounter similar challenges in prison or are they likely to face different problems depending on personal characteristics?

Some of these questions are, at least partially, answered by Zamble and Porporino's (1988) study. Their research examines these changes and concludes that aside from socializing less, prisoners tend to use the same coping strategies at the beginning of their sentence as they do a year and a half later. Additionally, these coping strategies are similar to the ones they typically use prior to incarceration, which seem to suggest that prisoners lack effective coping skills irrespective of their environment. However, what is not clear from their research is how prisoners cope long-term with incarceration. Recall that their study

ended a year-and-a-half into the participants' sentence. It is plausible and expected that prisoners serving five, ten or even twenty years will undergo other changes and will cope differently with their life and sentence.

Research on prison violence and masculinity is able to answer, at least partially, some of the questions arising from the research of Sykes (1958), Goffman (1961), Clemmer (1966) and Zamble and Porporino (1988). This research argues that prison is an unsafe environment posing multiple threats to both prisoners' bodies and their masculinity (Cooley, 1992; Edgar & O'Donnell, 1998; Phillips, 2001; Jewkes, 2005). In this environment, physical, verbal and sexual violence may serve numerous functions, such as displaying and improving one's social status, demonstrating one's dominance over others and resolving conflicts (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998; Phillips, 2001).

Although all types of violence can be related to masculinity and relationships of power and control, sexual violence in prison exemplifies these issues. The dichotomy between masculinity and femininity discussed in the first chapter is profoundly evident in the research on prison sexual victimization. Prisoners who are perceived to be weaker and therefore, feminine, are more likely to be sexually assaulted and may be tempted to join a 'consensual' sexual relationship with a stronger, more powerful prisoner in an attempt to thwart off more unpredictable and potentially more dangerous violence (Rideau & Sinclair, 1982; Human Rights Watch, 2001).

However, it is not clear whether all prisoners are equally vulnerable to these threats. Although some research has found that both aggressors and victims tend to be younger (Lockwood, 1980) and involved in the prison social culture (McCorkle, 1992; Edgar & O'Donnell, 1998), some questions still remain. For example, do all prisoners experience prison as emasculating to the same degree? If they do not, what are some differences

between prisoners who are more or less vulnerable? Perhaps one explanation for the high number of violent incidents in prison compared to those outside is that engaging in violent behaviours in prison may actually be adaptive. However, the research has yet to demonstrate that engaging in violent behaviours is universally adaptive. Some prisoners choose to withdraw from other prisoners to avoid conflicts and therefore cope more effectively with their problems (Goffman, 1961; McCorkle, 1992). Others choose to become aggressive in order to avoid being victimized themselves (Sykes, 1958; McCorkle, 1992; Edgar & O'Donnell, 1998; Jewkes, 2005). In actuality, most prisoners probably use these two strategies interchangeably, reflecting the fact that prisoners' coping strategies are multi-faceted and adaptable.

However, McCorkle (1992) cautions against believing that any of these strategies are actually useful in dealing with prison violence. Indeed, the high rates of victimization found by the PVP suggest that prisoners are not successfully dealing with these issues. A question one can ask of this research is: are there different ways for prisoners to cope which do not qualify them for either the victim or the victimizer role? Can prisoners avoid the hyper-masculine culture and cope effectively with imprisonment in such ways that they do not sabotage their chances of reintegration after release? Although the questions posed here are helpful in thinking about the research, they are very broad. In the next chapter, I will reformulate these questions into one comprehensive research question.

Chapter Three: Methodological Approach

This chapter describes the research design of this study. It begins with the questions that propelled this research, including the specific question the research aims to answer. The chapter continues with a description of the data used and an explanation of why this type of data was chosen. The methodological approach used in analyzing the data is also described as are the strengths and limitations of the research design.

The Research Question(s)

I chose to explore masculinity in prison because I was interested in how men ‘do’ masculinity.⁴⁰ How does masculinity influence male prisoners’ lives? How does it manifest itself? What are some of its features? Can one measure it? Do prisoners talk about it? Another issue I was interested in was prisoners’ coping behaviours. Reading about the dire conditions and the negative consequences imprisonment can have on prisoners, I wondered how they cope with the deprivation of liberty. The research discussed in the literature review led to a reanalysis of these initial questions and a clarification of what the present research seeks to investigate, leading to further questions: how do prisoners cope with imprisonment? What role do conceptions of ‘masculinity’ play in their attempts to cope with their new environment? Do prisoners need to adopt a macho façade in order to cope with prison life or is this a stereotype? Is violence or its threat a necessary part of coping with imprisonment? How does identity change during imprisonment? Are there different types of masculinities, aside from an exaggerated form of masculinity that are conducive to coping with prison life?

⁴⁰ While the expression of masculinity is probably not the only way of coping with imprisonment, it is the one form that I have decided to focus on for my research.

So that my research would be more specifically guided, I sought to narrow these questions down to a more precise question. This research question attempts to move beyond the idea that there is only one type of masculinity in prison (hyper-masculinity) and to encompass different ways of envisioning masculinity that are not destructive to the self and others and may even be conducive to prisoners' reintegration into the community. This research question reads as follows:

Is the hyper-masculinity model the only model conducive to coping in prison? Is it found everywhere (in all security levels)? If yes, how do prisoners experience it? Do the autobiographies reflect this model? How do they explain it? Does hyper-masculinity help prisoners cope with the challenges they encounter in prison? Are there other forms of masculinity conducive to coping with these challenges?

The Research Materials

The present research uses male prisoners' autobiographies as data sources. I believe that these sources are well-suited to provide the information I am seeking, namely, the roles masculinity and violence play in male prisoners' coping strategies. The following section includes an explanation of, and justification for, choosing autobiographies as sources, and a description of each of the eight autobiographies used.

Why Autobiographies?

Before explaining why autobiographies were chosen as my sources of data, I will explain what is referred to as an autobiography in this research. What I refer to as an autobiography is actually a prison narrative and not necessarily an account of the person's whole life. Although most of the authors also recount their lives before prison—some in more detail than others—what makes these books prison autobiographies is that their main

focus is on prison life.⁴¹ However, they describe specific episodes in a person's life and not all of their lives. Kohli (1981) argues that life histories represent "structured self-images" and should not be perceived as "a collection of all events of the individual's life course" (p. 65). Indeed, the inclusion or exclusion of certain events, circumstances or interactions is a choice that was made by the author/prisoner in a deliberate manner. These choices may have been influenced by memory, space limitations and editorial input. Therefore, these autobiographies do not represent a prisoner's entire sentence but episodes which he, and perhaps his editor, decided were significant, interesting, or possibly entertaining. For example, it may be that violent encounters between the author and other prisoners or staff are focused on to the exclusion of mundane activities in order to make the autobiography more entertaining. While the violent activities are real, they may stand out more than other types of non-violent activities that prisoners may have engaged in. While this may methodologically influence my research, in choosing this type of data there is no possible way of avoiding this limitation.

Autobiographies are part of what is referred to by some researchers as 'life documents' (Plummer, 1983) or 'life histories' (Kohli, 1981). Life documents encompass various types of 'documents of life', such as life histories, diaries, letters, oral histories and photographs among others (Plummer, 1983).⁴² These sources focus on the subject himself and the ways that he interprets his experiences (Plummer, 1983). The life document can be

⁴¹ The exception to this rule is "In the Belly of the Beast", by Jack Henry Abbott which is a collection of letters Abbott wrote from prison. I decided to include this narrative since in my opinion it represents Abbott's life in prison in as much detail as do other autobiographies.

⁴² Although some autobiographical features can be found as "far back as the ancient Egyptian tomb inscriptions", autobiographies came into 'fashion' with the advent of the Enlightenment and the focus on the individual and have been a distinctive part of history ever since (Plummer, 1983, pp. 8-10).

defined as “an account of individual experience which reveals the individual’s actions as a human agent and as a participant in social life” (Blumer (1939) in Plummer, 1983, p. 13).

The use of autobiographies does not purport to be an objective method of retrieving information from subjects; rather it relies on the subjective interpretation of lived experience (Kohli, 1981; Plummer, 1983). Kohli explains that a paradox can be found in autobiographies: on the one hand, it can be argued that since autobiographies are first hand accounts of a person’s lived experience, they “have the highest authenticity possible” (1981, p. 69). Conversely, it can be argued that the autobiographer can deliberately “distort[] the truth” (Kohli, 1981, p. 69). Indeed, prisoners’ autobiographies represent the authors/prisoners’ views about their lives and are not influenced by the researcher’s predetermined ideas. Autobiographies can be considered narratives of ‘social lives’ told by the prisoners themselves. Each autobiography represents one prisoner’s story, but at the same time, each tells more than just a story; it speaks about the social practices and the social context of these men’s lives. It also informs us on the prison as a social institution and on prisoners’ experiences in this environment. Kaufman (1986) argues that it is “[t]hrough life stories [that] people account for their lives [and]...the themes people create are the means with which they interpret and evaluate their life experiences and attempt to integrate these experiences to form a self-concept” (in Bachman & Schutt, 2001, p. 281). Autobiographies represent the authors’ own voices, own knowledge and beliefs about their lives. However, I am focusing on certain specific aspects or themes of the autobiographies and not on everything that the authors attempted to convey to the reader.

I do not argue that this is an objective study that captures the absolute truth on the issue of masculinity and prisoners’ coping strategies. By using autobiographies I attempt to gain insight into the role of conceptions of masculinity in prisoners’ coping strategies.

Studying an elusive concept such as masculinity, one cannot profess to discover absolute truth. If masculinity is socially constructed (Kaufman, 1998) then our knowledge of it is also shaped by our beliefs and assumptions. Such knowledge while not objective has considerable merit. A better understanding of the role masculinity plays in prisoners' coping strategies can contribute to already existing knowledge of prisoners' coping techniques. In turn, such knowledge could be used to question or critique existing correctional policies and programs.

This 'subjective' feature of the life documents may explain their rare usage among social scientists (Plummer, 1983). Arguing in favor of life documents, Ken Plummer (1983) states that

an important approach to understanding human life has been persistently minimized, maligned and rendered marginal by social scientists: they believe that human documents are just too subjective, too descriptive, too arbitrary to help in scientific advance (p. 11).

Plummer (1983) further postulates that "scientific advance in the social world may actually be contingent upon building a methodology that can take subjectivity and the lived life as its cornerstone. In which case, documents of life must have a central role to play" (p. 11).

Because life documents are based on individual cases and not on aggregates, they can be criticized for not being conducive to generalizable results (Plummer, 1983). However, Plummer argues that because social scientists aim to generalize their results, they "impose[] order and rationality upon experiences and worlds that are more ambiguous, more problematic and more chaotic in reality...[and] seek consistency in subjects' responses when subjects' lives are often inconsistent" (1983, p. 68). In part, this is due to the methods often used in social science. For example, Plummer (1983) argues that questionnaires and measurement scales impose constraints on the ways the phenomena in question can be analyzed and interpreted. On the other hand, the life history method can uncover the

“confusions, ambiguities and contradictions that are played in everyday experiences” (Plummer, 1983, p. 68). Plummer concludes that the life document method is an invaluable but often ignored method of analysis (1983, p. 11/35).

Although autobiographies may not fit traditional scientific notions of data sources, they are nevertheless valuable and suitable for my purposes. Autobiographies present in-depth information about their subjects. However, a method involving in-depth study of its subjects, “requires a trade-off between depth and scope” (Connell, 1995, pp. 89-90). Connell states that a “life-history of masculinity...cannot sample a broad population of men while gaining any depth of understanding of particular situations” (1995, p. 90). In this respect, this thesis could not sample a large number of ex-prisoners and still gain profound insight into the role of masculinity in prisoners’ coping styles. At the same time, the quest for in-depth knowledge requires that the sample number be lower. This does not mean that using autobiographies is not ‘scientific’. It merely means that in the trade-off between depth and scope, depth was chosen. Indeed, Connell (1995) proposes that the solution lies in the study of “a few situations where the theoretical yield should be high” (p. 90). In this thesis, I decided to analyze a relatively small number of autobiographies in order to avoid spreading the research thinly, to paraphrase Connell. I argue that while autobiographies may not fit traditional ‘scientific’ notions of data sources, their advantage lies in their ability to provide a high theoretical value.

I will further explain my rationale for choosing autobiographies as data sources by contrasting them with the other sources which I considered using, namely, interviews. Autobiographies are more in-depth and can provide more details than interviews can since interviews would most likely be constrained to a few hours’ duration while autobiographies contain all the information that the author chose to express to the reader. Furthermore,

compared to interviews, autobiographies are not encumbered or skewed by the interaction or rapport between the interviewer and interviewee or by the interviewer's questions. While interviews might be better suited to elicit answers to specific questions that can be devised to suit the particular needs of the researcher, autobiographies can provide information that might otherwise be overlooked by the researcher. For example, an interviewer might omit asking about specific details of prison life which may be useful in understanding why prisoners choose to cope in certain ways. Thus, autobiographies allow the reader to grasp what prisoners believe is significant. This does not exclude the possibility that autobiographies may still omit some facets of the author's life, either done so consciously or unconsciously. However, in any type of method used the subject may choose to keep some information hidden.

Using autobiographies also has the advantage of allowing a more varied sample of stories than I would have been able to had I conducted interviews. It would have been difficult to obtain interviews with prisoners who were incarcerated twenty or thirty years ago or who served prison sentences in diverse geographical areas such as Ontario and British Columbia in Canada and Vermont, Michigan and Delaware in the United States.

Time constraints also played a role in my decision to use secondary data as my sources. At the time that I began my thesis I believed that due to the time constraints of completing a master's thesis, it would be less time consuming and less difficult to gain access to autobiographies than to attempt to conduct interviews with prisoners or former prisoners.⁴³ Conducting interviews would have required that I apply for ethics approval, something that would have caused additional time delays in my research. Because I am using

⁴³ Anecdotal evidence suggested that even at the PhD level, students have found it difficult, if not impossible to gain access to current prisoners for the purposes of conducting interviews.

data that has been made public by the authors themselves, the usual ethical considerations of research involving people, such as voluntary participation, subject well-being, identity disclosure and confidentiality (Bachman & Schutt, 2001, p. 318), are not concerns in my research. My preference for analyzing data that has not been influenced by myself (the researcher/interviewer in the case of interviews), and time constraints, I decided that autobiographies would yield the information that I was looking for.

Data-Gathering Criteria

In order to facilitate the inclusion or exclusion of certain autobiographies in my data, I decided on a set of criteria: (1) the type of prisoner, (2) the time period they were in prison, (3) the geographical area they were imprisoned in. The first criterion is that the book has to be written by a male author who has served a prison sentence but who does not identify as a political prisoner. The second criterion is that the book has to be about a prison sentence that was served after the year 1960. The third criterion is that the prison sentence had to be served in Canada or the United States.

Therefore, the authors have to be males who served a prison term in Canada or the United States after the 1960s for crimes other than political ones. The reason for choosing this geographical and 'year' boundary was to avoid confusing the information yielded by the autobiographies with cultural and social changes due to country and time. Although there are differences between Canada and the United States, and differences within the countries themselves, I could not restrict my study to Canadian sources because there would not have been enough autobiographies to allow an adequate analysis. And while I could have included only American authors I wanted my research to include Canadian sources so that I would not contribute to the Americanization of our knowledge as Canadians. I chose to cover a more than four decade time span because had I restricted my selection of autobiographies to only a

one or two decade span I would not have had enough sources.⁴⁴ I chose to exclude political prisoners because they tend to be different than the average prisoner and I aimed to have as much a representative sample of the average prison population as possible.⁴⁵

These autobiographies can answer the research question because they describe prisoners' everyday lives during incarceration. These documents show how prisoners attempt to deal with the challenges they encounter in their new environment, whether they use hyper-masculine coping strategies or not, and their reasons for using certain strategies over others. Therefore, autobiographies illustrate the ways prisoners negotiate their actions and interactions and how effective or ineffective particular coping strategies are in resolving their problems. Additionally, since autobiographies provide, in most cases, a chronology of prisoners' time in an institution, it can be ascertained whether their coping strategies change over time, and whether different models of masculinity emerge during the span of one's sentence.

The Eight Autobiographies

Finding autobiographies written by prisoners which fit my criteria required several searches, from the University of Ottawa and the Ottawa Public Library, to independent and chain bookstores. Ultimately, I used the website www.amazon.ca to order the eight autobiographies I used as my data sources, a choice which was limited by both my criteria and my ability to purchase them.

⁴⁴ While there have certainly been cultural and social changes from the 1960s to the present, I feel that these changes have been gradual and maybe not as profound as they may seem at first.

⁴⁵ The average Canadian prisoner is male, single, a parent, between 20 and 34 years of age, convicted of a property offense (in provincial institutions) and convicted of violent offenses (in federal institutions), marginally skilled and disproportionately Aboriginal or Black (Griffiths & Cunningham, 2003, pp. 225-226).

The following section contains a list of the eight autobiographies used as data sources in this research. The name of the autobiography, its author, and a brief note about each are included. All the prisoners/authors except two either self identify as White or from the book jacket photo it can be inferred that they are White. The other two prisoners are Reginald Hall who is African-American and Jack Henry Abbott who states he is half White and half Chinese.

1) Breakfast with the Devil: The Story of a Professional Jail Breaker by L. Wayne Carlson (2001)

Wayne Carlson served his first prison sentence in 1960 for stealing cars and due to numerous escapes only became a free citizen in 1998. Carlson served time in both Canada and the United States. He is presently a prison reform activist. His autobiography, published in 2001, was made possible with the help of Ontario and Canada Council grants. Carlson's story provides a unique perspective on long-term prisoners.

2) Shaking it Rough: A Prison Memoir by Andreas Schroeder (1976)

In 1973 Andreas Schroeder was sentenced in British Columbia to two years less a day for possession of hashish with the intent of trafficking. Unlike most of the other authors, Schroeder (1976) explicitly states his reasons for publishing his prison memoir, saying that he wants to "describe a little of how it feels to be "treated" for such [deviant] behavior by being imprisoned, and what such a life in prison is generally like" (p. viii). His account of prison life is less emotional than some of the other narratives and offers a unique analysis of prison's effects on short-term prisoners.

3) Fish: A Memoir of a Boy in a Man's Prison by T.J. Parsell (2006)

T.J. Parsell served a two-year prison sentence for attempted armed robbery with a toy gun, something that he thought of as a joke at the time. Parsell was seventeen years old at the

time and confused about his sexual identity. In prison, he was brutally raped by a group of prisoners and continued to be the target of threats and violence throughout most of his sentence. Parsell is currently a human rights activist, the president of Stop Prisoner Rape and a consultant to the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission in the United States. His autobiography is based on journals he kept while serving his sentence and is intended to raise awareness about sexual violence in prison. Parsell's story offers unique insight into the interplay between power relations and masculinity in prisoners' interactions with each other. Compared to the other narratives which mention sexual violence only in passing, Parsell's story offer an insightful account and analysis of sexual assault and sexual relationships between prisoners.

4) Memoir: Delaware County Prison by Reginald L. Hall (2003)

Reginald Hall served an eight-month jail sentence at the age of eighteen for credit card fraud. Hall is African-American and self-identifies as homosexual. His depiction of prison life is quite different from Parsell's. For example, Hall states that he was propositioned and harassed sexually but always managed to get out of the situation without being raped or otherwise hurt. Out of the eight autobiographies, this is the one that I trust the least. It may be that the grammatical mistakes and poor writing style influenced my perception of this author. Additionally, because his stories do not match with the other eight autobiographies in terms of the description of prison culture and the inmate codes, I found myself questioning the authenticity of his recollections, or perhaps if he attempted to portray himself in a more favourable light. Ultimately, I decided that despite these limitations, his narrative would be a positive contribution to my sample. Hall's story offers a unique perspective on prison life since his is the only autobiography that does not mention the

inmate code. More specifically, the tenet against ‘ratting’ out to the guards does not seem to exist in the county jail that Hall serves his sentence.

5) *Maximum, Minimum, Medium: A Journey Through Canadian Prisons by Julius Melnitzer (1995)*

Julius Melnitzer was a Canadian barrister who was sentenced to a nine year prison term for bank fraud. In his autobiography he attempts to understand his motivation for committing his crimes. Melnitzer is presently a writer. It is not evident if he wrote his story in order to propel his writing career or if a writing career was born from writing and publishing his prison autobiography.

6) *From the Inside: A Prison Memoir by Robert L. Berger (2003)*

Robert Berger was sentenced to a three-year prison term for income tax evasion. Compared to Melnitzer’s autobiography, Berger’s is more superficial in its rendition of his own experiences and feelings. Accounts of other prisoners’ stories make up a large section of the book, making this autobiography less useful than the others. However, both Melnitzer’s and Berger’s narratives offer the unique perspective of older, non-violent, white-collar prisoners. Their stories illustrate the impact of age and social status change on older, non-violent prisoners.

7) *The Haven: A True Story of Life in the Hole by Richard Dube (2002)*

Richard Dube spent four hundred days in solitary confinement in Millhaven Penitentiary in Canada, where he served a sentence for murder. His time in segregation was spent planning his revenge against the guards. He experienced ‘redemption’ when, after praying for a sign, he was visited by a stranger who offered to help him. Out of the eight autobiographies, his narrative provides the most extensive account of the inmate code and the connection between the code and violence. Dube’s aggressive coping style also offers a

unique perspective on the use of hyper-masculine coping strategies and on the resistance tactics used by some prisoners.

8) *In the Belly of the Beast: Letters from Prison by Jack Henry Abbott (1981)*

In the Belly of the Beast is a compilation of letters written by Jack Henry Abbott to the American author Norman Mailer during Abbott's numerous prison sentences. Abbott's story is unique because he is a state-raised prisoner who never experienced the 'redemption' that the other seven prisoners whose autobiographies I used did. Abbott spent most of his life in prison and committed suicide while incarcerated. Like Dube, his style of coping can be considered aggressive and his story illustrates how some prisoners attempt to resist their circumstances.

The Autobiographies Contextualized

In the following section, I further contextualize the autobiographies by providing information about the way they were written and the possible reasons the authors had for writing and publishing their stories. All the autobiographies were written by ex-prisoners themselves, without the help of a co-author. Some of the authors kept journals while incarcerated and may have used these when writing their autobiographies. None of the books are written in journal style however, so that those who kept journals reworked the material into a story format. Although this is not specifically mentioned in their autobiographies, some of the authors may have also used information from the letters they sent to family or friends. Although it is not evident from all the authors whether they kept journals, used letters or wrote just from memory, all the autobiographies except Jack Henry Abbott's letters were written retrospectively. It may be that writing retrospectively provides a different lens through which these experiences are perceived compared to the way they were experienced at the time. However, since most of the authors kept journals or wrote letters, it is likely that

the autobiographies are a reflection of their feelings and thoughts from the time of their sentence and do not reflect their present views.

There are various reasons these ex-prisoners had for writing and publishing their stories. Writing itself can be a form of resistance (Gaucher, 2002). Say something about resistance writing....While these authors/ prisoners do not state that they wrote specifically as a form of resistance, some of them, like Abbott and Parsell wrote as a form of activism, to raise awareness of prison conditions.

Some wrote to raise awareness about the injustices perpetrated by the criminal justice and correctional systems. Authors such as Jack Henry Abbott and T.J. Parsell indicate they wrote with this specific goal in mind. Abbott wrote letters to Norman Mailer so that Mailer would let people know about the conditions in prison. Parsell wrote to attract attention to the much-neglected subject of prison rape. Others, such as Wayne Carlson and Robert Berger may have written simply to share their stories, although this can only be guessed since they do not specifically state their reasons for writing. Julius Melnitzer seems to have written for the therapeutic value of writing and for propelling a profession as a writer, a significant change from the business man he was before prison. Both Parsell and Carlson are currently prison reform activists and writing may be part of their work as activists. To a certain extent, although some of the authors are unlikable, I believe that each of the autobiographies I have chosen to include in my analysis was written with the best intentions of the author to accurately portray his experience of prison life. That each author has his own style and his own reasons for writing his story is something that makes this group of autobiographies a varied sample of prisoners' experiences.

Method of Analysis

In analyzing data, all researchers have to choose whether to use methodology that is qualitative, quantitative or a combination of the two. I decided to use qualitative methodology to gather and analyze my research data. I chose this type of methodology because I believe that compared to quantitative methodology, it is better suited to answer the questions this study seeks to answer. Qualitative research aims to understand phenomena (Clandinini, 2007). For example, it seeks insight into why people act in certain ways by delving into their motivations and thoughts in specific circumstances (Bachman & Schutt, 2001; Henn et al., 2006). Conversely, quantitative methodology, based on positivistic principles, is better suited to predict behaviours or actions by controlling for diverse variables (Clandinini, 2007). Therefore, while quantitative methodology may be better suited to answer yes or no questions, qualitative methodology is better able to provide insight into the 'why' and 'how'. In this regard, both the assumptions and purpose of qualitative research are a better fit with my research. The approach I take does not seek causal inferences, but rather an understanding of specific phenomena, the role of masculinity and violence in prisoners' coping strategies. It is only after my analysis that I develop a theory of the role masculinity plays in male prisoners' coping strategies.

Analyzing the Data

In order to retrieve information from the autobiographies for analysis, I used a coding method adapted from Neuman's (2006) three-stage coding method. Coding, which is based on the research question but which can result in additional questions as it proceeds, is a fundamental component of qualitative data analysis (Neuman, 2006). Coding allows the researcher to move beyond the raw data, organizing it so that relevant information can be

retrieved during analysis (ibid). It is also useful in making sense of the data so that generalizations can be made and a theory can ultimately be developed (ibid).

Open Coding

Open coding is a way of summarizing data into “preliminary analytic categories or codes” (Neuman, 2006, p.461). After devising my research questions, I had to decide on the themes that I would code for in each of the autobiographies (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 209). I based my initial themes—physical and sexual violence, coping, masculinity, the inmate code, prisoners’ relationships with each other and prisoners’ relationships with guards—on my research question and the literature review. These themes “are at a low level of abstraction” (Neuman, 2006, p. 461).

Because I sought to develop an understanding of how prisoners cope, and more specifically, if they use hyper-masculine behaviours to cope, I coded for both coping and violence. To assess what role masculinity and the macho façade play in prisoners’ coping strategies, I coded for instances where masculinity issues were obvious, but also for violence and sexual assault which I am considering indicators of hyper-masculinity. Since masculinity is an abstract concept, I needed to develop concrete indicators to code it. I also coded for both physical and sexual violence, which are related to both interactions between prisoners and between prisoners and staff but also to masculinity and coping.

I started by reading each autobiography and coding in the margins of the book for the abovementioned themes. As I read each autobiography, more themes emerged which I added to the others (Neuman, 2006). For example, I coded for ‘family’ to see if prisoners’ relationships with family members impacted their coping styles. The purpose was to assess both the common themes and the unique themes in prisoners’ lives during their sentence. Generally, all the autobiographies contained the same themes, although some themes

appeared more predominantly in some narratives than in others. Aside from the themes that are directly related to my research question, I also coded for other themes which I believed might ultimately prove useful for my analysis. Below is a list (in alphabetical order) of all the themes that I coded for: conditions, coping, identity/loss of identity, family, feelings, labels (argot roles or other labels), masculinity, prisoner code, prison effects, prison industry, prisoners' relationships with each other, prisoners' relationships with staff, race, resistance, sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual relationships (consensual) and violence (physical).

After I did an initial coding of each of the eight autobiographies, I transferred the coded information to paper, creating one file for each prisoner containing all the coded information from his narrative. This stage involved going through each autobiography and transferring on paper each instance of where I coded for a certain theme. I divided the page in half so that on one side I had the code initials and the actual information, including some pertinent quotes and on the other half I did an initial, though very preliminary, analysis. I did this so that any first thoughts or ideas that surfaced from this stage of coding would be collected for later use.

Axial Coding

In the axial coding stage the “researcher organizes the codes, links them, and discovers key analytic categories...[by] focus[ing] on the initial coded themes more than on the data” (Neuman, 2006, p. 462). During this phase of the analysis, although the researcher may notice additional themes emerge, his or her “primary task is to review and examine initial codes [and]...to move toward organizing ideas or themes and identify[ing] the axis of key concepts in analysis” (ibid). The researcher can then inquire about the relations and connections between themes, the sources and significance of themes and whether some themes can be amalgamated while others may be discarded (Neuman, 2006).

Compared to open coding where I categorized the data into themes, in axial coding, I focused on each theme and the connections between them. I carefully re-read each prisoner's individual file and sought to understand the connection between the themes. At this point, I realized that I coded for more themes than I actually needed for my research. Not all the themes were necessary or useful in answering the research question and transcribing and interpreting all the initial themes would have proven time consuming while broadening the research beyond its initial scope. Therefore, I decided to focus on the themes that were directly related to the research question: violence, coping, masculinity, sexual assault, the prisoner code and identity.

In order to make sense of all the information comprised in each of the prisoners' files, I compiled one file for each of the abovementioned themes. I organized the themes by focusing on the relationships between the different themes and making links between them (Neuman, 2006). The goal was to discover key analytic categories and to unite some themes while abandoning others (ibid). In compiling these themed files, I included more quotations and details than in the initial individual prisoner files. This process included a close reading of each of the files and going from the autobiographies to the files in order to extract precise information. In doing so, I paid close attention to both context and prisoners' intentions in engaging in certain behaviours. This process revealed the connection between certain themes.

Selective Coding

Selective coding, the final stage of the coding process involves identifying the main themes of the research and looking for evidence which supports them (Neuman, 2006). At this stage, the researcher looks over the themes, the data and the codes in order to extract examples which exemplify the themes (Neuman, 2006).

During this stage, I organized the data in each file and attempted to make sense of this information. Some of the files contained less information than others, or were more specific to certain prisoners than to others. For example, the theme of sexual assault was mostly seen in T.J. Parsell's autobiography. However, the themes of violence and coping were evident in all of the autobiographies and making sense of those files required numerous careful re-readings and conceptually organizing the data so that some sense was made of it. The major themes that emerged from this stage of analysis and from the questions that guided the research were coping, violence, and masculinity. In the following section these themes will be defined and the process I undertook to make analytical sense of them will become evident.

Definitions and Description of the Major Themes Analyzed

In this section, the major themes which were analyzed are defined and contextualized. The research identified two key coping strategies that prisoners use: violent and non-violent.⁴⁶ These will be defined and explained. As well, the concept of masculinity, which guides this whole research study will be defined and contextualized for a more in-depth understanding of how the concept was used as both a source of data and a theoretical guide.

Coping Strategies

I use the term 'coping strategy' to refer to any behaviour or action that is engaged in as a reaction or as a preventive measure to another action or circumstance. The term

⁴⁶ These strategies are not an exhaustive list of all the behaviours that male prisoners engage in during incarceration. In order to refine my analysis, I chose to analyze some behaviours and exclude others. Prisoners use numerous strategies and engage in a variety of behaviours in order to deal with imprisonment. The behaviours discussed in the following two chapters are a sample of these behaviours, ones that I have chosen because of their ability to answer my research question. The prisoners/authors may cope in other ways, but they might not have mentioned these in their autobiographies or they may have engaged in certain behaviours that they did not think significant to mention.

‘strategy’ can imply a deliberate, conscious action on the part of the person engaging in it and in this context, it may seem like prisoners engage in deliberate, conscious actions that they believe will benefit them. This understanding of the term leaves out instances where these ‘strategies’ can be merely reactions to various circumstances. For example, a strategy may be avoiding prison communal areas because one has seen fights break out in these areas, while a reaction may be hitting another prisoner when one is hit or threatened. In the present research, both of these behaviours are categorized as strategies, although the former seems more deliberate while the latter can be considered a reaction, an instinctual behaviour that may not have been fully, or even partially, thought out. Therefore, this research uses the term ‘strategy’ loosely to refer to a behaviour, action or reaction. I also use this term interchangeably with behaviour or action. The limitations of this term are that it may seem that prisoners engage in certain behaviours after deliberating their options and deciding that a specific behaviour is the best course of action. In reality, it may be that they did not think about their actions, or their consequences. However, Edgar and O’Donnell (1998) argue that people engage in behaviours that make sense to them in certain ways. Therefore, it could be argued that whatever actions, reactions, behaviours or strategies prisoners engage in, they engage in because they believe they are beneficial for them.

I have defined coping strategies as actions that prisoners take with the aim of making life easier. At first I made the distinction between coping behaviours and resistance. I considered behaviours or actions that prisoners took in an attempt to make their lives easier or which solved their problems as coping behaviours. Conversely, I coded as resistance actions or behaviours that prisoners engaged in that showed they resisted their circumstances or dealt with problems in ways that may have solved their current problems but may not have made their life easier in the long run. In some instances, these behaviours resulted in their

placement in segregation. However, on closer analysis, I realized that those behaviours that I coded as resistance could be a way of positively coping with challenges. I might not see it as coping but maybe they are just as beneficial for that particular prisoner as other behaviours. By resisting, they may be keeping their identity and their dignity. Or they may just perceive to be. In either case, maintaining a sense of agency over one's environment and a sense of identity is important for psychological survival. Resisting might result in spending time in segregation but at least they feel that they did not compromise or succumb to authority.

The research identified two main themes in prisoners' coping strategies: violent strategies and non-violent strategies. Violent coping strategies are defined as physically or sexually aggressive behaviours or threats engaged in with the aim of achieving certain objectives. This can include actions such as threatening, punching, shoving or stabbing another person. I define physical violence as any physical altercation or threat of a physical fight between prisoners or between prisoners and guards or other staff, be it justifiable or not. I excluded any instances where sexual violence was used because I coded separately for such behaviours. Of course, sexual assault and physical violence can be used concomitantly. In such cases, I coded for sexual assault. Violent coping strategies, then, are those in which prisoners use threats of violence, or physical violence itself to deal with a situation they perceive as problematic.

Non-violent coping strategies are not as straight forward. Aside from an absence of aggressive behaviours, these strategies encompass many modalities of coping, from avoidance to immersion in work and school. Non-violent coping strategies are behaviours characterized by a lack of violence or threat of violence and can include behaviours such as reasoning and avoidance of certain people or situations, among others. While both violent and non-violent coping strategies can be used to deal with similar situations, in some cases,

one or the other is more often used, or is more apt to lead to the results sought by the prisoners (namely, to put an end to the problematic situation).

Masculinity

I coded for masculinity any instance that related to masculinity, manhood, femininity or gender. Any instance where power differentials were discussed or inferred or where feminine or female nouns were used towards males were also coded under the theme of masculinity. Compared to the other themes which were mentioned more often, masculinity itself was rarely explicitly mentioned. Indices of masculinity had to be gleaned from their writings.⁴⁷

Aside from coding for instances where masculinity issues were obvious or inferred, I used the masculinity theory presented in *Chapter One* to analyze the findings. In this regard, it was not what the prisoners wrote about masculinity per se, but the ways that their coping strategies were informed by masculinity that was of interest here.

The Strengths and Limitations of the Research Design

Any research design has both strengths and limitations and this research is no exception. A major strength of this research is that it is based on the experiences of people who have lived through imprisonment. Although it can be argued that life documents such as autobiographies are subjective and incapable of being generalized, it is precisely this subjectivity which makes these sources valuable. While other methods of inquiry such as surveys, questionnaires and interviews can purport to be objective and better suited for generalizations, they may overlook significant issues in meaning-making and interpretation.

⁴⁷ T.J. Parsell's narrative is the exception. He makes observations about masculinity issues. However, it is most surely that he engages in such analysis retrospectively. It is doubtful that he had the awareness or the insight to so profoundly analyze these issues at the age of seventeen (when he was incarcerated) to make such observations. It is more likely that as an activist against prison rape he developed the insight into gender relations and conceptions of masculinity.

Conversely, autobiographies are able to illustrate the meanings prisoners assign to various circumstances and the motivations behind their choices of behaviour.

Because autobiographies allow the authors to speak for themselves, the data are not influenced by my questions or assumptions. While this may be an advantage, this aspect can also be considered a disadvantage since I was not able to directly ask the ex-prisoners what role they believed masculinity played in their coping strategies.

Life documents can also be criticized for their representation of one point of view to the exclusion of others. Prisoners may represent one kind of viewpoint and may have a particular agenda when writing. Using accounts by prison staff could have counteracted this problem. However, doing so would have taken away from the depth of the research and was not feasible in the time allotted.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the advantages of using texts written by prisoners themselves is that they are first-hand accounts of prison life. However, this also means that some parts or all parts of the narratives are written retrospectively. Some experiences may be influenced by the author's memory and by his experiences up to the time of writing. The author may be writing about events which happened years earlier but the way he explains them could be influenced by his current position in life. However, as discussed earlier, all the authors kept journals, wrote to friends and family, or did both while they were incarcerated; these materials may have served as the basis for their story and may have facilitated an accurate portrayal of their prison lives.

It may be however, that the prisoners whose autobiographies I used are different than average prisoners. For example, the authors/prisoners could be more literate and more introspective than average prisoners. Corrections Services Canada states that 64% of Canadian prisoners do not have a high school diploma and 30 % of those have not finished

grade eight (Stevens, 2000). However, these numbers may appear more significant than they are. Rankin (2005) argues that prisoner literacy studies do not tend to compare prisoners' literacy rates with non-prison populations. When these rates are compared, the literacy rates for prisoners do not appear as low. Irrespective of the actual rates of literacy among prisoners, being able to write an autobiography requires a strong grasp of language and grammar, in addition to a high level of introspection and organization. In this respect, it can be safe to conclude that the authors/ prisoners whose autobiographies I use as my sources may be, at the least, slightly different (more educated) than the average prisoner. These authors/ prisoners are also men who had the possibility of writing and publishing their stories. However, in using secondary sources, I feel that this is one limitation that I could not work around. The only solution would have been to conduct interviews, but as discussed earlier, this was not the best option for me at the time that I started this research.

While eight data sources might be considered a low number, this low number is offset by the thorough analysis that I was able to accomplish. The in-depth analysis can be considered an advantage of the research design. As mentioned earlier, when exploring issues such as masculinity, depth may be more beneficial than breadth (Connell, 1995). It is better to present a comprehensive account of a phenomenon based on a few cases, than to engage in a superficial analysis of a large number of cases. Of course, the ideal would have been to use more sources of data and to have done an in-depth analysis, but due to the nature of a master's thesis, this would not have been possible.

Ultimately, all methods of inquiry are flawed in the sense that they represent someone's version of the truth. Even empirical research is based on someone's (the researcher's) choice of subject matter and of hypothesis, to the exclusion of other subjects and hypotheses that could be equally relevant (Plummer, 1983). Although the way prisoners

define their incarceration experiences may not be the truth but perceptions of truth, they can still provide trustworthy information on prison life and the ways that prisoners cope with challenges they encounter.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

Previous research has shown that prisoners have to deal with many challenges (or pains of imprisonment) while they are incarcerated. Prison is a social place, where prisoners live in close proximity with others and where they are subjected to the demands of the institution. Prisoners have to deal with boredom, lack of comfort, missing their loved ones, formal punishment, anxiety, depression, loneliness, loss of status and identity, physical and sexual threats and loss of heterosexual sexual relationships, among others (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961; Clemmer, 1966; Zamble & Porporino, 1988; Edgar & O'Donnell, 1998; Phillips, 2001; Jewkes, 2005). However, prisoners are not passive in dealing with these challenges. The present research study has found that male prisoners actively cope with these problematic situations in a variety of ways. While the coping behaviours engaged in by prisoners can seem to be of their choosing, it is difficult to assess whether these choices are made freely or are in some ways coerced. In certain situations, it may be that prisoners are limited in their choices of behaviour and may engage in certain actions rather than in others as a result of these limits and not because they perceive these actions to be the best ones.

In the following two chapters (*Chapter Four: Research Findings* and *Chapter Five: Discussion and Analysis*) I will present and contextualize these findings within the research questions and the concepts which propelled this study. Furthermore, the findings will be analyzed in *Chapter Five* in order to assess the usefulness of masculinity theory. More specifically, is masculinity theory able to explain prisoners' coping styles and why they may find it beneficial to engage in hyper-masculine strategies when dealing with the challenges of incarceration?

Chapter Four begins with a description of how prisoners describe using violence as a coping strategy. After that prisoners' non-violent coping strategies are discussed. The chapter ends with an analysis of the ways that prisoners' coping styles change over the course of their prison sentence(s).

Physically Violent Coping Strategies

In the last chapter, I defined violent coping strategies as behaviours which are physically or sexually aggressive and in which prisoners engage with the aim of achieving certain objectives. These behaviours may include acts such as threatening, punching, shoving or stabbing another person. The findings suggest that prisoners choose to engage in physical violence in order to deal with a variety of situations that they deem problematic. I have sorted these reasons in the following categories: (1) resolve conflict; (2) self-defence; (3) adherence to the prisoner code; (4) prevent future violence, and (5) resisting institutionalization. Although I have chosen to present my findings in these categories, it is obvious that in many cases, prisoners engage in violent behaviours for more than one reason. For example, a prisoner can threaten another prisoner in order to protect himself, to deal with the conflict and to prevent future violence by showing that he is someone not to be 'messed' with. While the autobiographies present numerous examples which I could have included in each category, I chose to include the examples which best typify the particular reasoning behind each type of coping strategy.

Resolve Conflict

Prisoners use physical violence in order to resolve some sort of conflict, often between themselves and other prisoners, although in some cases the conflict involves prison staff members. Robert Berger attempts to deal with another prisoner who is interfering with his job as the manager of a production line. Berger first threatens the other prisoner and then

gets in a physical altercation with him. He explains the altercation and his rationale for fighting: “Since this was prison I wasn’t going to try to “tactfully” solve this, and I was furious that this clown was interfering with a worker and holding up production” (Berger, 2003, p. 51). After asking why the prisoner is arguing with one of his workers, Berger threatens him: “You have three seconds to beat it...Are you going to keep running your mouth? Or are we going outside?” (ibid). After this, he shoves the other prisoner and a fight begins. Berger states that as a result of this altercation, the conflict is resolved and the other prisoner does not bother him again. Similarly, Julius Melnitzer physically threatens a prisoner who had been eavesdropping on Melnitzer’s phone conversations and spreading rumours about his family. As he hovers over the prisoner’s bed, Melnitzer shouts at him:

Look, you toad, stay away from me. If you’re close enough to touch, I’ll smack you. If you’re even close enough to hear what I’m saying, I’ll kill you—the same night. If you don’t come to the woods, I’ll drag you. You better not even be in the fucking building when I’m on the phone (1995, p. 236).

It is obvious that in this situation, Melnitzer is putting on a tough front. He uses both his body and certain words to get his message across and to embody a tough persona.

Although the behaviour described above may be situation-specific, Melnitzer explains that in general his behaviour is quite different from that of his pre-prison days:

My own behaviour was not unaffected by the atmosphere of savagery. After just a short time in prison, I found myself using my size as an advantage, not hesitating to threaten others whom I found offensive, nor refraining from the odd shove when tempers rose. It was a fine and very trying line between not being pushed around and not pushing back too hard. Perhaps I was just fitting in to my environment, trying to make do where reason would not, but my behaviour was a radical departure from the norms of my first forty-five years (1995, p. 124).

The above quote contains a variety of issues. First, it exemplifies how Melnitzer adopted a more aggressive behaviour in order to fit in with prison culture in general, but also, more

specifically, to achieve a purpose: to resolve problems where he cannot do so by reason and logic alone. Second, the above quote exemplifies how Melnitzer negotiated his reputation, both as someone not to be taken advantage of but also as someone who is not gratuitously aggressive. Here, Melnitzer illustrates that displaying just the right amount of aggressiveness can be adaptive.

While both Melnitzer and Berger used aggressive behaviours in certain situations, their advanced age and their white-collar status (and I expect, their lack or limited use of physical violence in the outside world) makes them less likely to use physically aggressive behaviours in dealing with their challenges. Berger even argues that for prisoners such as himself (white, educated, and convicted of non-violent crimes), it does not make sense to physically fight other prisoners (presumably non-white and not as highly educated as himself), because there are no chances of ‘winning’. He states: “If you perhaps best one of them in a fight, six more will attack you in the night, when you’re asleep, and your white “friends” will sit there petrified while you are worked over. Then having learned your lesson, you will never tempt fate again” (Berger, 2003, p. 77).

Therefore, although Berger was himself aggressive in at least one situation (the one described earlier), he does not believe, given his personal characteristics, that he should be engaging in violent behaviours. In the above quote he shows that he is aware of his limitations regarding physical strength and reputation so that it would be counterproductive for him to engage in violence.

Self-Defence

In some cases, prisoners engage in physical violence in order to protect themselves from an immediate danger. In such cases, using physical violence can be considered an act of self-defence. When another prisoner attempts to rape Jack Henry Abbott, he successfully

defends himself. Abbott explains: “The first prisoner—a middle-aged convict—who tried to fuck me, I drew my knife on. I forced him to his knees, and with my knife at his throat, made him perform fellatio on my flaccid penis in front of three of his partners” (1981, p. 93).

In other cases, the aggressive behaviour does not take place right away but some time after the prisoner is threatened or attacked. For example, after Reginald Hall is repeatedly sexually harassed by another prisoner, he makes a knife out of a razor and uses it to threaten his aggressor. He explains: “I got tired of B-Real (the aggressor)...I made a little knife out of a shaving razor. When he came by to harass me I pulled it on him” (Hall, 2003, p. 29).

Similarly, T.J. Parsell, together with another prisoner, Paul, decides to fight back against a prisoner who frequently harasses them sexually. Like Hall, they each prepare a weapon (a padlock in a sock), wait for an opportune moment, and attack the prisoner by repeatedly hitting him with their makeshift weapons.

While it may seem that none of these three prisoners first attempt to defend themselves non-violently, Parsell and Hall’s attempts to ignore their aggressors’ behaviours can be considered a type of non-violent response. Their responses are not active, but rather passive. They each ignore the situation and become frustrated by the escalating harassment but they do not actively attempt to stop their aggressors before resorting to violence. In Abbott’s case, his behaviour seems more of a reaction to the assault and it does not seem like he had the chance to contemplate the course of action he would take.

Adherence to the Prisoner Code

In some cases, prisoners engage in violent behaviours because they want, or feel constrained, to adhere to the prisoner code. Recall that the inmate code is a set of rules that the prison culture promotes; divergence from these rules can result in negative consequences for the prisoners who chose to do so (Sykes & Messinger, 1960, p. 77). Although the inmate

code does not explicitly promote violent behaviours, in the situations described below, the prisoners/ authors engaged in violent acts due to their belief that to do differently would be a violation of the code.

After beating up another prisoner, Dube argues: “I had to pummel that kid. He would have gotten me killed for ignoring the prison codes” (2002, p. 64). In another instance, Dube lists the injuries he inflicted on fellow prisoners and justifies his behaviour as such: “It was something that had to be done. These are the damn codes. If I allow myself to be stomped on, I’ll be killed myself” (Dube, 2002, p.107). In this case, it is not only Dube’s belief that the inmate code dictates that he should engage in violence, but also that in order to avoid future victimization, he must act violently in the present.

Jack Henry Abbott cites “custom” as the reason one *must* engage in violence when provoked. He states: “If you are a man, you must either kill or turn the tables on anyone who propositions you with threats of force. It is the *custom* among young prisoners. In doing so, it becomes known to all that you are a man, regardless of your youth” (Abbott, 1981, p. 94).

In another situation, a fellow prisoner calls Melnitzer a ‘goof’, which, according to other prisoners, means that Melnitzer has to fight him.⁴⁸ Melnitzer finds out about this ‘rule’ from Fred, whom he calls a “self-professed keeper of the Code” (1995, p. 117). Fred states: “No choice. A guy calls you a goof, you kill him or he kills you” (Melnitzer, 1995, p. 117). However, although Melnitzer puts on a tough front and acts unafraid of fighting the other prisoner, his work colleagues offer to deal with the situation for him and he avoids having to fight.

⁴⁸ The word ‘goof’ is encountered in all the Canadian autobiographies I read. It seems that calling a fellow prisoner a ‘goof’ is a grave insult which can lead to physical fights. Dube (2002) states that the words ‘goof’ and ‘rat’ “have caused many men to die in here....” (p. 149). There is no mention of this word or an equivalent in the American autobiographies.

The above quotes represent prisoners' perception that the prisoner code dictates that in certain situations violence is warranted. The behaviours may be the same as when prisoners attempt to resolve conflicts or defend themselves, but the justification for the violent acts are different. An additional implication of the above comments is that if prisoners refrain from acting violently they may be the ones victimized, either in the present or in the future. This issue will be discussed further in the next section.

Prevent Future Violence

While the above situations are examples of prisoners using violence to protect themselves from a specific threat, in other cases, prisoners attempt to prevent their future victimization from yet unknown aggressors. This can be considered a form of preventive self-defense. The objective is to be perceived by other prisoners (and in some cases by staff) as someone who is 'tough', with nothing to lose and in general not to be 'messed' with. This can be achieved in two ways: (1) retaliation, and (2) reputation as someone who is either 'crazy' or 'tough' or both. In some cases, the two strategies interconnect, as in the example of Richard Dube's first prison fight (described below).

Retaliation

Retaliation involves showing other prisoners that one will not let even the most seemingly insignificant conflict go unnoticed. Such an approach makes it less likely that one will be taken advantage of or victimized in the future. In one incident, Dube violently retaliates against another prisoner who had "jeopardized [his] life..." a few days earlier (2002, p. 14).⁴⁹ He explains how he waited for the man in the prison yard where a rainstorm protected his actions from guards' view. He describes the incident: "Heart palpitating, blood rushing, with one leap, I pounce like a crazed cougar and tackle him to the ground with such

⁴⁹ Dube does not provide any explanatory details on how this prisoner jeopardized his life.

force he's knocked almost unconscious" (Dube, 2002, pp. 14-15). The goal of such attacks is to show others that one should not be 'messed' with. Prisoners explain that if one lets certain incidents pass without retaliation, one can be perceived as weak and therefore as a suitable target for future violence. Jack Henry Abbott explains:

Let's say someone steals something from your cell. You catch him cold...If he took your property, there is no telling what he may try to take next. It's possible that he would even try to fuck you if you let him steal from you. In prison society you are expected to put a knife in him. You might have to walk the yard with him for a week to take him off guard, to get him alone to kill him (1981, p. 89).

Abbott's comment exemplifies the belief that once a prisoner identifies himself as someone to be taken advantage of (by not retaliating), there are no limits to the amount of 'things' that can be taken away from him. The insinuation that doing so can lead to one being raped, and the implications this has for masculinity will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

Wayne Carlson describes a similar rationale for fighting when he explains how he would have dealt with a prisoner who at first failed to return a borrowed jar of peanut butter:

I could have badly hurt or even killed [him], if he hadn't paid me back, because not to have done so would've shown me to be an easy victim at the whim of predators. A prisoner who chooses to act in a violent, brutal fashion, sees himself as preferring to die like a lion instead of living like a lamb (2001, p. 62).

Reputation as someone who is either 'crazy' or 'tough' or both

Gaining a reputation as someone who is tough or crazy or both, involves showing other prisoners that one is fearless, has nothing to lose and is not afraid to fight. Andreas Schroeder points out that there is no predictable reason to explain why prisoners are relegated to their various places in the "pecking order" of the prison social hierarchy (1976, p. 23). However, prisoners who act 'crazy' and as if they have nothing to lose are at the top of the hierarchy. He explains:

...if you clearly didn't *care*, if you could convince inmates and guards that you had absolutely nothing to lose and that your countermeasures to even the most trivial provocation would be totally unrestrained and pursued to the utmost of your abilities—then you were given respect and a wide berth, and people looked to you for leadership and advice. “He’s crazy,” they’d say admiringly, even longingly, when the name came up. “He’s just totally, completely insane (Schroeder, 1976, p. 23).

Richard Dube’s first fight in prison at the age of sixteen teaches him an important lesson: that a way to protect oneself is to fight without fear and to act ‘crazy’ (2002, pp. 101-102). While he is at first scared when three other prisoners attack him, while fighting them he experiences a change and is no longer afraid. He recounts: “I’m pumped and I’m ready. My body’s tense; my energy surges. I’ll hit and fight until I go out...They stare at me. I’m yelling louder now and I’m out of control. The fear is gone” (Dube, 2002, p. 102).

Melnitzer’s encounter with the eavesdropping prisoner also exemplifies this approach. After shouting at the prisoner to leave him alone, Melnitzer continues:

I’ll fucking kill you. I don’t give a damn what they do to me. I’ll be happy for the rest of my life. I’ll cherish the photographs of your body in bits. And I’m just not talking about my wife. If I hear one more word about the pass to my daughter’s graduation, I’ll assume it came from you (1995, p. 236).

Melnitzer is acting as if he has nothing to lose, as if killing this prisoner will be worth it, no matter what the consequences. Abbott describes a similar approach to how prisoners should present themselves, asserting:

Everyone is afraid. It is not an emotional, psychological fear. It is a practical matter. If you do not threaten someone—at the very least—someone will threaten you. When you walk across the yard or down the tier to your cell, you stand out like a sore thumb if you do not appear either callously unconcerned or cold and ready to kill. Many times you have to “prey” on someone, or you will be “preyed” on yourself. After so many years, *you are not bluffing*. No one is (1981, p. 144).

Another example of the importance of such perception can be found when Parsell, sometime into his first prison sentence has to go to County Jail. Once there, hoping to avoid the violence he experienced in his previous institution, he attempts to present himself as a more seasoned prisoner than he is. He states:

I walked into the County Jail with a “cat in my stride”—the slow rhythmic swagger that I learned from Scatter [a fellow prisoner]—it was supposed to communicate that I was street-wise or institutionalized to lessen the odds that I would become a target (Parsell, 2006, p. 166).

These comments exemplify not only that one has to be willing to engage in violence, but that he has to be perceived by *others* as capable of engaging in violence. These findings are supported by research that found that prisoners often built a reputation by fighting (Phillips, 2001) or are able to avoid future violence by acting tough (McCorkle, 1992).

Resisting Institutionalization

The above discussion has focused mainly on prisoners' attempts to cope with other prisoners. The reasons for using violent coping strategies have centered on either dealing with immediate conflict situations or preventing future conflicts. While this discussion can suggest that prisoners engage in violence in extraordinary situations, violence can also be imbedded into the institutional arrangements. In this case, prisoners may engage in violence for other reasons than resolving conflicts. They may do so as a way of maintaining their identity and autonomy and at the same time defying the institutional values of the prison; these behaviours are generally directed towards prison staff and can be considered as forms of resistance. As I mentioned in *Chapter Three*, I first coded these types of behaviours as resistance. My conception of ‘coping’ was that it resolves a problematic situation, leading to an objectively defined ‘success’ or that it somehow brings things into balance, maintaining

the status quo. However, resistance behaviours like the ones described in this section are not as clear cut. In some instances these behaviours are successful in resolving or overcoming whatever challenge the prisoner in question is facing; in other situations, however, these forms of resistance prove futile in actually resolving the situation and in many cases exacerbate the problem.

Although all eight prisoners/authors engage in some form of resistance at some point during their incarceration, Jack Henry Abbott and Richard Dube use more drastic forms of resistance and employ such behaviours as a predominant way of coping. In a way, these prisoners are resisting the 'system'. Both Abbott and Dube refrain from, or are incapable of, adjusting to prison life. They perceive their use of violence as having the effect of 'saving' themselves from becoming institutionalized. Abbott explains that although he knows his release depends on his adjustment to prison life, he cannot bring himself to do so. "I cannot adjust to daily life in prison", he states (Abbott, 1981, p. 16). At the time of writing, Abbott had been incarcerated for twenty years and was still receiving disciplinary tickets. He argues that adjusting to prison life means not being able to adjust to outside life (Abbott, 1981, p. 17).⁵⁰ Abbott engages in violent confrontations with prison staff. He believes he is justified in doing so because of violence he experienced by guards and by the correctional system in general. The following is a typical occurrence in Abbott's prison sentence: after guards beat him up one day, he makes a weapon by soaking his Bible in the toilet and wrapping it with cloth, later hitting one of the guards on the head. His reaction to his punishment exemplifies his approach to dealing with prison staff:

⁵⁰ Paradoxically, when he is released from prison, he is unable to adjust to outside life; within two weeks he stabs a man to death and is returned to prison where he later commits suicide.

When I was taken before the captain's committee, I was given another twenty-nine-day stint back-to-back with the other two sanctions. [The captain]...passed the slip of paper the order was written on across the table to me and I picked it up, wadded it carefully into a ball and bounced it off his chest. I was given another twenty-nine-day sanction. That made four of them I had to do—roughly *four months* (Abbott, 1981, pp. 36-37, emphasis in the original).

This behaviour does not make his time in prison easier, nor does it improve his chances for release. In Dube's case, he too deals with prison staff in a way that makes his life more difficult. For example, when he is escorted back to his segregation cell after a shower, Dube puts up a physical fight:

I'm still chained and shackled, but I'm not going back into that suffocating pit. I'm not that institutionalized, nor that tamed and domesticated. I'll never stop seeing this madhouse and these puppet masters for what they are. I'm not some automated, mindless robot. I refuse to go back to my hole, pig (2002, p. 19).

Both these prisoners seem to engage in violent altercations in order to maintain their identity. Abbott writes: "Before I was twenty-one years old I had killed one of the prisoners and wounded another. I never did get out of prison. But at least I was never a punk" (Abbott, 1981, p. 94).⁵¹ Similarly, Dube states: "I'll never be made a robot by any institution" (Dube, 2002, p. 233). However, the way they attempt to do this is by being defiant and constantly putting up a fight with guards and other prison administration. This may indeed help them feel that they are maintaining their independence, identity and agency, but it also leads to many weeks spent in segregation, prolonged sentences and, in Dube's case, to almost being designated a dangerous offender.

However, in some situations, this type of resistance is effective in achieving the prisoner's goals. For example, while he is in segregation, Dube makes the guards' lives

⁵¹ It is not clear whether Abbott uses the term 'punk' to refer to a man who engages in same-sex behaviours or whether he means something else.

difficult and gets transferred to Millhaven faster than he would have under normal circumstances, which is what he was hoping to achieve. He states:

After less than five days in solitary, the sheriffs arrive to transfer me to Millhaven. My strategy has succeeded. The screws have pleaded with the heads of the institution to get me transferred. I'm a bad influence on the good order of the institution, they say (Dube, 2002, p. 226).

While other prisoners also engage in resistance behaviours they do so to a lesser extent than Dube and Abbott. For example, after rumours about Melnitzer spread throughout the institution, the warden advises him to keep a low profile. However, Melnitzer reacts in a confrontational manner towards the warden. It is only later that he realizes his behaviour was not beneficial to himself. He states:

For someone devoted to image making, I had considerable difficulty comprehending the role of perception in prison. My meeting with the warden was an opportunity to learn, but my ego chose form over substance...Had I digested the advice [of the warden] I would have found it unappetizing, but nutritious (Melnitzer, 1995, pp. 250-251).

It seems that prisoners engage in violent behaviours in order to resolve some problems that they encounter during incarceration. As O'Donnell and Edgar (1998) found, prisoners use certain behaviours because doing so makes sense to them in the present situation; basically, they believe that their actions will help them in some way. Even seemingly nonsensical resistance behaviours such as the ones employed by Abbott and Dube make sense to them: they are maintaining a sense of autonomy and independence. Other prisoners may use violence as a preventive measure of avoiding future violence. As paradoxical as that may seem, previous research (McCorkle, 1992; Phillips, 2001) and the autobiographies have shown that the ability to fight or at least project the ability to fight can confer a prisoner a reputation as someone not to be 'messed with'. In this sense, violence serves a protective function. However, as the next section on non-violent coping strategies

will show, while violence may serve some functions, there are numerous other peaceful strategies that prisoners can, and do, employ in their quest to cope with incarceration.

Non-Violent Coping Strategies

The previous section focused on prisoners' use of violent coping strategies in achieving certain aims, such as resolving conflict, protecting themselves from danger, adhering to the prisoner code and resisting institutionalization. However, prisoners do not use violent coping strategies exclusively; in some cases, non-violent strategies are also employed. The following section describes seven non-violent coping strategies that prisoners employ: (1) using reason and logic; (2) assessing situations and people (learning the ropes); (3) acquiring allies; (4) actively changing one's situation and resisting through non-violent means; (5) subservience or resisting resistance; (6) avoiding certain situations, people or feelings; (7) maintaining or regaining psychological strength.

Using Reason and Logic

Some prisoners attempt to resolve an immediate conflict by using reasoning and logic. In an incident involving Carlson, reasoning was effective in resolving a conflict with another prisoner. Interestingly, when Carlson speaks to the prisoner whom he was having the conflict with he brings a weapon with him. He states: "It would help me if I needed it, but I didn't because we resolved the problem by talking about it. I saw him many times after that, and on every occasion he was sensible" (Carlson, 2001, p. 213).

After using threats and violence to deal with the prisoner who was interfering with his production line (described earlier), Berger explains rationally to his workers that a collective approach will be beneficial to them all and that they should work together. This example shows that even one situation can sometimes warrant the use of two or more different strategies. In this case, Berger effectively deals with the interfering man by using

violence and with his workers by appealing to their rationality. Had he chosen to act tough with his workers, they may have not respected him; and had he tried to reason with the interfering prisoner he would not have gained the respect of his workers, which he does as a result of his unexpectedly tough attitude.

However, although prisoners may be able to choose the ways that they interact with others, in some cases, their preferred mode of interaction does not work. For example, some prisoners may choose to speak rationally and logically when attempting to resolve a conflict, but it can sometimes be difficult to reason with people who are unreasonable. For example, Wayne Carlson describes how in one institution he was in, the prevalence of drug use among prisoners contributed to their inability to understand rational conversations (2001, p. 251). Carlson tries to resolve some conflicts with these prisoners in peaceful, logical ways, but he cannot. However, he does not state what other approach he used or found effective in dealing with these types of prisoners.

Similarly, when a prisoner spreads rumours about him, Schroeder ignores him since he believes other prisoners are not gullible enough to believe these rumours. When a new prisoner has the courage to threaten him, though, Schroeder realizes that his avoidance is being perceived by others as weakness. He explains: "It was becoming clear that I was being boxed into a corner, my inaction being interpreted as a tacit admission of defeat, which somehow amounted to an admission of guilt" (Schroeder, 1976, p. 104).

However, even then, Schroeder does not resort to violence; on the contrary, he decides that he must somehow become indispensable to other prisoners and begins helping prisoners write appeal applications. This approach is successful only for a short time. The prisoner spreading rumours about him eventually hires another prisoner to beat Schroeder up in exchange for fifteen chocolate bars. Schroeder hears of this and attempts, yet again, to use

logic and reasoning. He tells the prisoner: “You’re doing your last six days; you’re even goofier than your reputation if you sell that away for fifteen chonies. Use your goddamn head, man!” (Schroeder, 1976, p. 107). Schroeder’s approach is again ineffective. The other prisoner, a man with low mental functioning, reacts to Schroeder’s use of the word ‘goof’ and attacks him. Schroeder is saved from a severe beating when his allies intervene. The above incident shows that in some cases, trying to avoid using physical violence can prolong a conflict and can lead to the eventual use of violence. However, it also shows that having allies is an important way to avoid violence. It is not clear whether the conflict with the other prisoner ended as a result of this last altercation though, so a conclusive comment on Schroeder’s approach cannot be made.

Assessing Situations and People (Learning the Ropes)

A third non-violent way that prisoners can protect themselves is by accurately assessing situations and people. This involves being aware of one’s surroundings, non-verbal cues and potentially violent people or situations. Schroeder explains that new prisoners should attempt to keep a low profile but at the same time observe as much about the prison culture as possible. Parsell (2006) explains how he used this strategy:

I wasn’t always a quick read of people, and I was still operating from the haze of my youth, but the danger of prison was teaching me to pay close attention to subtleties. I usually captured certain gestures in people and then recorded it in my head. I would study them, become aware of their moods and expressions—mostly to see if there was danger—but then I’d slip away again (p. 161).

Dube and Carlson also state that in order to remain safe, one has to be aware of what is going on around oneself. Carlson states: “I needed to focus on survival. Things could get serious in such a short period of time; staying in tune with the atmosphere was important” (2001, p.

209). Similarly, Dube advises: “Know your surroundings and the players through observation and listening” (2002, p.155).

This strategy also involves learning the customs of the prison culture or the inmate code. For example, some prisoners state that positive emotions like happiness and joy, or indicators of such moods, like whistling, smiling or singing may be perceived negatively in the prison culture (Schroeder, 1976, p. 90; Carlson, 2001, p. 109). Being able to ascertain this ‘rule’ can facilitate one’s inclusion in the culture; at the very least, by not engaging in these ‘forbidden’ behaviours, one may avoid unwanted attention.

‘Rules’ of appropriate behaviour are abundant in prison and it may take some time for a prisoner to understand them. For example, Melnitzer finds out that his outside ways of interacting with people does not work in prison. He states:

I wanted to fit in here in jail...Prison etiquette, however, did not conform to my accustomed methods of getting acquainted. By inclination and training I was a questioner: I made friends by asking people about themselves. Here, my curiosity provoked suspicion and ostracism (Melnitzer, 1995, p. 16).

Knowing the inmate code and the rules that govern prison culture, as well as being able to ‘read’ others are invaluable resources for prisoners who wish to avoid physical altercations or to otherwise ease the ‘pains of imprisonment.’

Acquiring Allies

Acquiring allies can be considered a significant aspect of how well a prisoner copes with incarceration. Allies are other prisoners whom one treats as equals and not as subordinates and whom one can depend on for help. In outside life, we would call these men friends. Schroeder explains that even as early as the bus ride to prison one can begin ‘sizing up’ fellow prisoners on their usefulness. After that, one can start a conversation and establish a connection. This approach can be continued “until you knew enough people to generally

cover the territory you were going to run in (e.g., your tier, the exercise yard, your place of work, the gym)...” (Schroeder, 1976, p. 30).

T.J. Parsell finds out the importance of having allies from a fellow prisoner.

However, in this case, allies are referred to as a “family” whom one belongs to. He states:

Chet [another prisoner] explained that you had to have a family if you wanted to survive inside the penitentiary. He said it was very difficult to make it on your own, especially if it was your first time. When you hook up with a family, he explained, you look out for each other (Parsell, 2006, p. 71).

While most prisoners’ allies were also their friends (within the prison context), Dube’s approach to allies is quite different. He explains:

Many moons ago, we [himself and his allies] agreed to keep a loose affiliation and not hang around each other too often lest others recognize our bond. We decided to call on each other if ever the odds were to prove overwhelming. That’s the best way to operate around here (Dube, 2002, p. 174).

The importance of allies is further exemplified by the following quotes: “A loner in prison was a goner more often than not” (Schroeder, 1976, p. 30) and “There’s nothing in prison like an introduction to other people to help a man become assimilated” (Carlson, 2001, p.196).

While the most obvious and important aspect of having allies is in dealing with aggressive prisoners or threats, allies can also provide social support and material gain. The following examples will be divided in these three categories: (1) physical support; (2) social support, and (3) material gain.

Physical Support

Acquiring allies is a way that prisoners can protect themselves from immediate or future violence. Schroeder explains his reasons for acquiring allies in the work camp

institution in which he is serving his sentence: “I could at least rest assured that I had people I could call on in case of trouble, and I could work without wearing a metal plate on my back or having to maintain a constant lookout for accidentally flying axes or falling trees...” (1976, p. 106). For prisoners who are unable, on their own, to instill fear or respect in others, allies take on even more significance. Carlson (2001) explains that “a prisoner who is physically weak must have good friends capable of doing serious physical damage to those who get out of line, or be willing to use a knife or a club himself to make this point” (pp. 61-62).

Social Support

Allies can also offer social support. Although this aspect is specifically discussed only by one prisoner (Berger), it is worth mentioning; it is plausible, that like in outside life, belonging to a group or having close friends can provide one with emotional support. Berger explains that compared to outside life, prisoners spend a lot of time together: “You eat together, sleep in the same cube or building, work out together, and are most always in one another’s company” (2003, pp. 21-22). He explains that such closeness results in profound friendships:

Over time friends confide their deepest thoughts to one another. They become each other’s advisors, a trusted soul and companion. They help each other through difficult times with family and problems on the outside...friends in prisons are generally very intimate associations, they become crutches for each other (Berger, 2003, p. 22).

Berger’s explanation of friendship in prison is interesting for a few reasons. Other prisoners/authors do not describe such close friendships with fellow prisoners or instances where prisoners share their hardships with one another. This can be considered a non-macho way of interacting, one that is predicated on cooperation, help, and understanding and it

contradicts the notion that prisoners strive to embody hyper-masculine ideals in their day-to-day interactions with one another.

Material Gain

Having close associations with other prisoners can also provide one with material gains. This in turn can improve prisoners' lifestyles and can help them bear the 'pains of imprisonment' with greater ease. Berger states: "As on the outside, in prison it's also who you know that's important" (2003, p. 86). Berger is not only able to acquire writing materials and better food through his connections but also a job which he can get done in fifteen minutes a day (Berger, 2006, pp. 4-5).

Melnitzer describes similar advantages to knowing the right people. Because he is in close association with prisoners who work in the kitchen they invite him to take part in a luxurious meal every Saturday where they eat "food worthy of a fine restaurant: shrimp, oysters, lobster, prime roast beef and veal..." among others (Melnitzer, 1995, p. 144).

Choosing the Right Allies

While it is important for prisoners to have allies, they must also be careful who these allies are since having the right allies can reflect positively on them. Carlson states that knowing a certain prisoner "always served [him] well because he was well respected by so many people" (2003, p. 182). Similarly, Dube (2002) describes why his allies are the right allies: "Paul, Franky and Benny are respected and feared around here. Nobody, I mean nobody, messes with these guys. They respect everyone, keep a low profile and embrace the codes" (pp. 174-175).

Conversely, having the wrong allies can reflect negatively on a prisoner. Paul, Parsell's friend tells him to not spend time with the 'queens', saying that other prisoners

“will judge you by who you’re hanging with, who you talk to, by as much as how you carry yourself. And don’t kid yourself, Tim, they’re always watching” (2006, p. 250).

While the prisoners do not specifically discuss the importance of allies in one’s reputation as previous research does (Phillips, 2001), the above comments assert that who one’s allies are reflects on one’s character and can influence not only how others treat him but also his well-being. This can put some prisoners in a bind. For example, Parsell enjoys spending time with some of the prisoners considered ‘queens’, but he chooses not to after he understands that his physical safety is in jeopardy if he continues to do so.

Actively Changing One’s Situation/Resisting through Non-Violent Means

Compared to using violence as a resistant technique, in the following section I explain the non-violent ways that prisoners may attempt to resist or challenge their circumstances. These types of strategies can be successful and in some cases, quite ingenious, while in other cases they can lead to negative consequences.

The most common way that prisoners can change their circumstances is by filing grievances. In Parsell’s case, although he was not able to defend himself from a second rape attack, he nonetheless resists the possibility of this happening by asking for a transfer to another institution (2006, p. 193). He does this without divulging the names of his attackers and therefore avoids being labeled a ‘rat’. Not being labeled a ‘rat’ is important not just for building a reputation as a ‘man’ but also for physical survival. Parsell believes that while being identified as a gay male could cause him to be raped, being identified as a ‘rat’ could get him killed. After a later incident, he files numerous grievances in order to get transferred to another institution where he believes he will serve an easier sentence (Parsell, 2006, p. 300).

Similarly, when Melnitzer is owed money for his work in his former prison, he files a grievance in the new prison and makes that grievance as technical and difficult as he can. This way, it is actually cheaper for the institution to give him the money that they owe him rather than to hire a lawyer to sort through the intricacies of the grievance (Melnitzer, 1995, pp. 345-346). In Berger's case, he writes a letter to the warden when his phone account is not validated on time (Berger, 2003, p. 110). Filing grievances and letter writing can be considered both a form of coping and of resistance.⁵²

However, actively attempting to change one's situation can have negative consequences. For example, Parsell resists the role that he is placed in by other prisoners (as a 'boy' in need of protection from a 'man') by allying with Paul, another homosexual prisoner. The two refuse to 'get a man', something that is condemned by both prisoners and staff. Other prisoners continually harass them while guards try to separate them. Parsell sees the staff's actions as homophobic. He argues: "They [guards] "couldn't stand that we were happy together. Fags weren't entitled to happiness. Even inmates who raped the boy they kept weren't separated" (Parsell, 2006, p. 292). However, he and Paul are able, at least temporarily, to resist doing what is expected of them. In this way, they are able to learn from each other, to enjoy each other's company and to avoid having to engage in forced sexual relations with their 'protector'.

Julius Melnitzer also experiences negative consequences when he manages to successfully deal with a situation, namely, to get transferred from a medium security institution to a minimum security camp in less time than it usually takes other prisoners. His

⁵² Obviously, the use of this strategy is mediated by prisoners' ability to write and understand the law and the rules of the institution. An illiterate or semi-illiterate prisoner would not be capable of using such a strategy. Furthermore, while these examples suggest that filing grievances is an effective strategy for changing one's circumstances, recent events in correctional institutions in Canada suggest that this is not always the case. For example, federal prisoner Ashley Smith filed numerous grievances that went unanswered and some were opened only two months after she committed suicide.

transfer gains much attention from the other prisoners who are resentful of his ability to 'beat the system.' When Melnitzer cannot understand their resentment, a friendly prisoner explains it to him:

Julius, you don't understand. This place might not look like a prison, but the politics are worse than Millhaven. There's only one hundred guys here and everybody's into everybody else's business...So some guys have waited for years to get to camp. They'll hate you for beating the system (1995, pp. 188-189).

Parsell's and Melnitzer's stories exemplify that in some cases, prisoners who are able to somehow deal successfully with a negative situation may garner unwanted attention from other prisoners who may be resentful and angry with them for not following the unwritten rules of the prison culture or for navigating the system better than they were able to. Far from the solidarity that may be expected among prisoners, these stories show that prisoners may be resentful if they perceive that another prisoner has it 'too easy.' Therefore, coping effectively with certain situations can sometimes actually create problems between prisoners.

Subservience or Resisting Resistance

In some cases, prisoners found that being subservient or stopping themselves from reacting aggressively can be beneficial. For example, Carlson (2001) describes a relaxation technique which helps him deal calmly with his parole officer: "His tone of voice and his insults were an attempt to trigger me into an irrational reaction, and though butterflies of fear were beating in my belly, I always managed to retain my presence of mind. I just bit my tongue and let him rant and rave" (p. 250).

In another instance, Hall is purposely quiet at his new job, refraining from talking back to staff so that he will not get transferred to another block (2003, p. 49). In both cases, letting oneself react negatively or aggressively can result in unpleasant consequences.

Melnitzer learns from another prisoner that he should be subservient with the teachers where

he hopes to tutor and to not act as if he is more qualified than them (1995, pp. 183-188). Melnitzer uses this tactic when dealing with a representative of the work board; he acts subserviently, but at the same time pushes his own agenda to learn and teach computers. The strategy works and he is assigned to the post. Even Richard Dube, who recounts various instances of overt, violent resistance, in one situation deliberately refrains from resisting. He states: "I'm still pumped, but the tense standstill ends when I decide I had better return to my cell and not jeopardize my release, due in just a few days" (Dube, 2002, p. 31).

Subservience can also be beneficial in avoiding trouble among other prisoners. Or conversely, not having a combative approach can prove beneficial in avoiding conflict. For example, when he is moved to a dorm style institution, Berger notices that one of the other prisoners is the leader of the dorm (2003, p. 106). Berger asserts that he is "cool" with that and does not challenge the man in any way.

While overt non-violent resistance towards the institution and other prisoners can serve some purposes, refraining from any resistance can be equally, or perhaps even more effective. The above examples show that some prisoners realize that in order to effectively cope with incarceration one must also know when not to resist.

Avoiding Certain People, Situations or Feelings

The coping strategies discussed so far have represented active behaviours. However, prisoners can also cope with the obstacles they face through avoidance techniques. Avoiding certain people or places seems to be an effective strategy for avoiding conflicts. In a sense, if the conflict is averted, there is no need to resolve it by resorting to other types of behaviours. Prisoners discussed engaging in three types of avoidance: (i) avoid certain prisoners and keep a low profile; (ii) avoid certain places in the prison, and (iii) avoid negative emotions.

Avoiding Certain Prisoners and Keeping a Low Profile

Avoiding certain situations or people can lessen one's chances of encountering conflict. I have categorized 'keeping a low profile' as an avoidance technique, because by keeping a low profile one is, in essence, avoiding attention from both staff and other prisoners. Schroeder, Berger and Melnitzer found that keeping a low profile was a good strategy for avoiding unwanted challenges. Schroeder explains:

...you wanted on the one hand to maintain your individuality, on the other to keep your profile low enough to avoid attracting unnecessary attention, from both guards and inmates alike. Attention attracted hassle, and too much attention brought on challenges and involvement in power struggles that could be ruinous... (1976, p. 30).

In Melnitzer's case, he finds it difficult at first to be anonymous. The high-profile of his case and his upper-class status make his first few months in prison difficult (Melnitzer 1995, p. 129). In time, Melnitzer realizes that keeping a low profile is a good coping strategy and attempts to appear as inconspicuous as possible. Similarly, Berger explains: "I mind my own business, live my own life and stay out of the daily bullshit" (2003, p. 131). This suggests that blending in with the prison culture can be an effective way of coping with some of the challenges that prisoners face. In one situation, Hall adopts a similar strategy. He states: "I hated to get hurt or caught so I turned and finished watching the rain" (Hall, 2003, p. 32). In order to avoid conflict and lead a more peaceful life, Carlson also avoids certain types of prisoners: "I discovered too that in avoiding substances and those who use them, I avoided most of the daily stresses in my life" (2001, p. 282). However, he has this realization thirty years after his first sentence and towards the end of his string of prison sentences. The changes in prisoners' coping strategies as they advance in their sentence will be discussed in more detail later.

Avoiding Certain Places in the Prison

To evade unpleasant situations, prisoners sometimes shun specific places in prison. Schroeder states that avoiding a certain dark tunnel in the prison is one's "first line of defense" against sexual assault (1976, p. 44) while Hall does not shower for his first five days of imprisonment because he had heard stories of prisoners being raped in the shower area (2003, p. 16).

Avoiding Negative Emotions

Aside from avoiding certain people and places, prisoners also cope in some cases by avoiding or ignoring their negative emotions. After Parsell is raped, he attempts to ignore what happened in the hopes that doing so would make him feel better. He states: "I would put the bad part of what happened right out of my mind...I am going on with my life as if free from the burden of responsibility. Free from worrying about what they think—because in my mind, they never happened" (Parsell, 2006, p. 99). Later Parsell (2006) states, with hindsight, his approach to dealing with the traumatic experiences of incarceration:

I had to shut down to survive in there. So I tucked all my feelings away. I couldn't think about it, because that might lead to true feelings something [sic], and you couldn't afford feelings inside. If you do that long enough you start to get good at it after a while (p. 169).⁵³

Abbott explains that he coped with prison life by sleeping. He explains:

The closest you come to adjusting is this: you *will* yourself to sleep all day through most of the disturbances. After each meal you curl up, pull the blankets over you, put your pillow over your ears and sleep...Once for about three years I slept like that sixteen hours a day (1981, p. 77).

⁵³Parsell's avoidance of what happened to him prevented him from talking about his rapes after he was released from prison. He mentions that it took him ten years of therapy to have the courage to finally tell his therapist about being raped.

Prisoners may also avoid thinking about something that is out of their control. For example, while awaiting a transfer to another institution which he had heard was dangerous, Berger decides to stay “focused on [his] everyday living [and]...not to think about shipping out...” (2003, p. 15).

Prisoners can also avoid showing their emotions to other prisoners. This can be related to both the prison culture and masculine values since both emphasize resistance to the display of emotions and feelings. Perhaps this is the one aspect of hyper-masculinity best explained in the prison literature. Berger states that “Among the inmates I never let my emotions show. I also never complain or confess to feeling sad or lost. But inside it’s another story, I feel as though I have let my entire family down” (2003, p. 6). However, he does not say why he does not show his emotions. Is it because he experienced negative consequences for showing emotions? Did someone tell him? How did he decide not to show emotions?⁵⁴

Maintaining or Regaining Psychological Strength

Another challenge that prisoners face is the psychological strain of being incarcerated. Previous research has shown that male prisoners are stripped of their rights as citizens (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961), their ability to present themselves in the ways that they see fit (Goffman 1961), their material possessions (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961; Clemmer, 1966) and their opportunities to engage in heterosexual relationships (Sykes, 1958; Phillips, 2001; Jewkes, 2005) among other deprivations. These ‘pains of imprisonment’ can have dire psychological consequences on prisoners’ mental health. Whether these consequences are short-lived or long-term, previous research has found that male prisoners

⁵⁴ Berger’s assertion that he does not show his emotions around other prisoners can be considered in conflict with his earlier assertion that prisoners become ‘crutches’ of support for each other (2003, p. 22). However, it may be that while in general he does not show emotions around others, he has a few close friends from whom he receives social support.

experience negative emotional states as a result of imprisonment (Sykes, 1958; Zamble & Porporino, 1988; Phillips, 2001).

While the autobiographies show that mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, fear of the future and loneliness are a major concern of prisoners' lives, they are something that prisoners cope with in an active manner. Schroeder (1976) explains this type of challenge and how he copes with it:

And you sit in constant guard...watching carefully for any signs of approaching depression...and if you feel them coming... you bring your most massive defenses to bear, any twisted or absurd form of logic, stern talkings-to...to yourself, the company of another inmate who is just then riding high and can afford to clap you on the shoulder. You plunder your little store of medicine or magic, a letter that put you in a good mood last time, memories you normally only unwrap at night, a carefully saved-up smuggled-in cigar, anything; whatever will deflect or snap the mood (p. 60).

The autobiographies show that there are numerous strategies that prisoners use in order to deal with these personal challenges. While not all prisoners use these strategies, and while not all prisoners who do use these strategies did so from the beginning of their sentence—indeed some of these strategies were learned after going through episodes of depression—the prisoners/ authors did actively seek ways to cope with such mental health issues. Four of these strategies will be discussed here: (i) maintaining contact with family and friends; (ii) keeping oneself occupied; (iii) being optimistic, and (iv) making sense of one's incarceration period.

Maintaining Contact with Family and Friends

The autobiographies show that keeping in contact with loved ones provides prisoners with emotional support and contributes to their well-being. Both Melnitzer and Berger exchange regular letters and phone calls with their grown children and with their mothers. Berger writes: "Visits were very emotional. To be able to spend a few precious hours with

my wife and daughters were beyond words. It was a gift from heaven” (Berger, 2003, p. 6). Carlson maintains contact with his sister while Hall receives moral support from his friends and his mother. Hall states: “I talked on the phone everyday, to my best friends and my family. I kept hope alive” (2003, p. 120).

However, this is not the case for all the prisoners/ authors. For example, Parsell makes a conscious decision to cut off all contact with the outside world. Perhaps the traumatic experiences he went through made it difficult for him to face his loved ones. Similarly, Schroeder stopped answering letters he received. He states that it “became too emotionally exhausting to switch so constantly from hot to cold, to live completely Inside while considering Outside matters...” (Schroeder, 1976, p. 140). However, Schroeder (1976) later states that the letters he receives are a source of strength for him: “On the other hand, I was damned grateful for every letter I got in that it kept my sense of security intact—each letter a kind of signal telling me somebody out there was keeping me in mind” (p. 141).

Compared to Melnitzer, Berger, Parsell, Schroeder and Hall, Abbott and Dube do not have as many people to communicate with on the outside. Dube does not receive any visitors during his incarceration and Abbott’s only sources of outside contact are his sister and the author Norman Mailer.⁵⁵

Keeping oneself occupied

Keeping oneself occupied or preoccupied with certain activities, pastimes, or thoughts is one way that prisoners attempt to cope with the emotional rigours of incarceration. For example, Berger asserts: “Two more years sounds like a long time but it’s

⁵⁵ American author Norman Mailer was instrumental in publishing Abbott’s letters and in securing his eventual release from prison.

moving fast. I stay very busy, and that's the key" (2003, p. 24). He explains his routine (which he devised to keep him busy):

Computer class has ended and I have enrolled in Spanish language class. We met five days a week from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. I still have my AA meetings, the positive thinking class, classes in the drug program, working out, my usual reading and writing projects, and my job in the kitchen. So I'm staying busy, helping keep the time moving as quickly as possible (Berger, 2003, p. 166).

Of the many ways that prisoners can keep themselves occupied I focus on four of the most important: work, education and learning on one's own, writing, and working out, collective games and sports.

Work

Prisoners often cite work as a positive aspect of their incarceration because it helps pass the time and keeps their bodies and their minds occupied and relatively worry-free (for the moment, at least). Referring to his job on a Linotype machine in the prison print shop, Carlson says: "I think the best time I did was while on the machine. It was time consuming, but it was interesting as well" (2001, p. 212). For Berger, working is a way to speed the passing of time. He states: "The job there [at UNICOR] is one of the most beneficial aids to speeding the time along... While on the job I sort of forget about prison because of my preoccupation with my duties" (Berger, 2003, p. 60).

A prison job can also offer a respite from daily life and can sometimes be a quieter place than in the general population. Melnitzer joins a tutoring program with the hopes that "it would get [him] out of the cell more frequently" (1995, p. 294). Berger looks forward to a new job in order to avoid the noise of the cell block. He states: "I'm glad because I'm reaching the end of my rope trying to deal with the noise level in the prison" (2003, p. 49). Working can also be therapeutic. Berger states: "When I get off work I'm tired but happy

about another day being down. For me work has always been therapy, even on the outside, so working in prison has been a blessing” (2003, p. 60).

However, work can also lead to conflicts with co-workers, and can cause the prisoner added stress. For example, Berger states: “Trying to deal with both the inmates and supervisors on a daily basis is extremely frustrating. In the beginning it seemed like an excellent way to pass the time, but now it has become political” (2003, p. 88). Nonetheless, working provides prisoners with an opportunity to keep busy and helps them pass the time faster. Even when there are conflicts in the workplace, these can provide a distraction from the daily prison life. Although working can provide prisoners with money, none of the prisoners mention this as a reason for working.

The two prisoners who wrote the most about the benefits of working are Berger and Melnitzer, both of whom state that working was a big part of their pre-incarceration lives. It is perhaps these types of prisoners for whom working confers the most benefits, while those who did not have steady employment prior to incarceration do not find as many advantages to working.

Education and Learning on one's own

Prisoners may also engage in educational pursuits such as reading, writing and taking courses as a way to keep themselves occupied and thus make the time pass faster. Dube, Berger, Parsell and Abbott each cite reading as a great way to pass the time. Abbott (1981) elaborates:

I must fight, from that point on, the routine, the monotony that will bury me alive if I am not careful. I must do that, and do it without losing my mind...I read, read anything and everything. So I mutter to myself sometimes; sometimes recite poetry (pp. 54-55).

However, aside from mere preoccupation, there are other benefits to these activities. For example, Berger states that while taking a ceramic class is “a great way to kill time...It’s [also] a form of therapy” (2003, p. 24).

Education courses can also offer a safe place to be, outside of the cell block. Carlson agrees, stating: “One of the effects of taking programs in prison is that it took me out of the daily action. And the action in [the prison] was deadly” (2001, p. 228). Similarly, for Parsell education and reading represent ways of coping with the challenges he faces. He states: “The school and the library became my sanctuaries” (2006, p. 223).

Education can also be a source of self-confidence for some prisoners. Parsell experiences a boost in his self-esteem from being able to dedicate himself and graduate high school at the same time he would have, had he not been in prison. Additionally, learning about law also empowers him. He states: “I spent time in the law library studying the Department of Correction’s Policy Directives. There was something empowering about knowing the rules and regulations as well, or even better, than some of the staff” (Parsell, 2006, pp. 299-300).

The above comments illustrate that, as with work, there are other benefits to engaging in educational pursuits while serving a prison sentence. The power of education lies not only in its ability to keep prisoners occupied but also in its ability to empower them while also allowing them a needed break from daily prison life.

Writing

Since the prisoners/authors whose autobiographies are used in the present research all wrote their own story, it is not surprising that most of them mention writing as an activity that not only keeps them busy but that offers them an opportunity to express their feelings,

deal with hardships and grow as people.⁵⁶ For example, Carlson asserts: “There were times when the frustration of confinement made my life miserable, but I discovered an outlet in writing” (2001, p. 277). Later, he states: “Writing allows me to deal with strong emotions in a most productive, pro-social way” (2001, p. 294). Hall echoes similar sentiments: “I just wrote in my journal as often as I could. Writing about my thoughts helped me to stay focused, to not get lost in the pit” (2003, p. 40). For Schroeder, conducting a writing workshop provided him with balance and stability. He contends: “The Writing Workshop became a mainstay in my prison life, and I think it true to assume, also in the lives of many of its members” (Schroeder, 1976, p. 124). For Melnitzer, writing facilitated his self-fulfillment. On numerous occasions throughout his autobiography he explains the impact that writing has had on his life. Describing the effect his letter-writing has had, he adds:

...my correspondence sustained me. I had been writing steadily, religiously pumping out at least one handwritten letter a day since my sentencing... Writing was becoming my instrument of growth, of self-realization, of external discovery, and eventually, of self-love (Melnitzer, 1995, p. 192).

Later, when he begins writing for himself instead of only letters to family and friends, Melnitzer discovers the power of freely being able to express his feelings and thoughts: “No matter how hopeless I felt, writing brought me back to myself, to self-discovery, to release, to an appreciation that all was not lost...” (Melnitzer, 1995, p. 304).

Working Out, Collective Games and Sports

Prisoners also pass the time by engaging in sports or games with the other prisoners or on their own. Carlson plays the card game bridge with other prisoners, stating: “Bridge is a great way to pass the time; it requires focus and concentration on the cards, and this helps

⁵⁶ While writing can also be a form of resistance (see Gaucher, 2002), the prisoners/authors do not mention writing as a resistance technique.

men get their minds off their situations” (2001, p. 241). Berger agrees, stating: “Meanwhile, the days are extremely tedious. I play cards, board games, read, write and try to stay busy” (2003, p. 17). These games of course, have other benefits. Melnitzer states that playing bridge is both an ego boost for the winners and a way to gain others’ respect, for the prison culture respects intelligence in these types of games (1995, p. 241).

Prisoners also pass the time by working out in their cells or in the prison exercise yard. While some of the prisoners/ authors do not say that they work out specifically to pass the time, their often detailed account of their work out regime suggests that this might be one of the reasons for engaging in such activities.

Another reason why prisoners engage in sports is to have fun. Berger states: “We played baseball again this morning. I find it spiritually uplifting to play...Our equipment is old and worn. But we had *fun*. It’s hard to find fun in prison” (2003, p. 164). Further benefits of engaging in sports or working out may be in the power of exercise to alleviate frustration, boredom and pent up aggression. Melnitzer experienced this first-hand. He states:

The [basketball] games had become incrementally intense as the same teams [of prisoners] played each other repeatedly: arguments were frequent and a roughness had crept in. Still, the exercise was an alleviating constant, the bickering a release of my frustration (Melnitzer, 1995, p. 272).

Like work, education and writing, engaging in sports or games not only fills prisoners’ time, but also helps them in other ways. Interestingly, none of the prisoners/ authors state that they work out in order to be physically strong or to be able to intimidate or fight others. While Phillips (2001) and Jewkes (2005) argue that engaging in physical activity can confer one not only with a physically superior body but can also signal to others

that they should stay away, these prisoners/ authors do not specifically discuss this aspect of physical exercise.⁵⁷

Thinking Positively

Some of the prisoners/ authors also maintained a positive mindset by being optimistic. I have categorized what prisoners wrote as optimistic if they assessed their situation as not 'so bad', or believed that 'it could be worse' or that other people were worse off than themselves. For example, Schroeder thinks about how previous prisoners in the work camp he is in had much worse conditions; he states: "Even so, we're apparently living a much better life than our predecessors...[who were] often sleeping in wet bedding and wet clothes, and eating outside in the snow or rain" (1976, p. 86). Similarly, Carlson writes: "I was feeling heartsick and hopeless. Yet beneath the despair, I understood I was much better off than most of my fellow [prisoners]" (2001, p. 192). Berger too is grateful for the relative ease with which he will, compared to other prisoners, integrate into the community upon release: "For a white-collar guy like me it's a lot easier. I'll be going back to business and living in a decent area" (2003, p. 147).

These prisoners explain that a positive outlook can be beneficial, even if one is incarcerated. Schroeder writes: "In order for imprisonment to be truly dreadful...it requires the full cooperation of the prisoner himself, and I've often been truly amazed at how willingly most inmates offer that cooperation" (1976, p. 209). Similarly, Berger (2003) touts the benefits of positive thinking, stating:

⁵⁷ However, it would be erroneous to assume that because they do not mention working out to intimidate others, that they did not do so. This could be an instance where the limits of document analysis are evident; I was unable to ask the prisoners directly if they engaged in physical activity as a way to develop the type of body that can intimidate others.

You have to believe in your heart and mind that you are free, that your mind is free and your heart is free. No matter where you are, in solitary confinement, or in your cell, you have to believe this. They only locked up your physical body. They cannot lock you up spiritually. I am free to think whatever thoughts I desire to, experience my emotions, and believe in any God (p. 128).

While being optimistic can help prisoners cope with incarceration, the prison culture dictates that they must keep their positive outlook hidden. Showing positive emotions can be considered disrespectful towards other prisoners who are having a bad day. It is not clear whether this is the case in all institutions or more pronounced in some than in others. For example, Carlson (2001) observes that in the institution he is in "...freely expressing a positive feeling was rude" (p. 209).

Being required to keep their positive emotions hidden can interfere with prisoners' coping processes. If negativity is encouraged by the prison culture, than positive feelings are less likely to be fostered. In turn, more negative feelings can be felt by prisoners, which can influence their state of mind. In order to gain the benefits of having a positive outlook and of being accepted by the prison culture, prisoners who are optimistic must do so by balancing their inner self with their outer persona.

Making Sense of One's Incarceration Period

Another way that prisoners are able to maintain or regain their psychological strength is to allot meaning to their incarceration experience. Making sense of one's life, or finding a positive aspect in a negative situation can be instrumental in one's resiliency to negative circumstances. In "Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild their Lives", Shadd Maruna (2001) argues that prisoners who desist from re-offending often change or renegotiate their life stories. He refers to this as the 'rhetoric of redemption' and argues that

former prisoners redefine their identity and often find new meanings in their lives to fit in with their offense-free lifestyle.

Four of the eight prisoners/ authors (Berger, Melnitzer, Carlson and Schroeder) in the present research described their positive interpretations of their lives in prison. These interpretations focused on three aspects of a person's life: (1) being in better physical condition than previously; (2) accepting oneself, and (3) discovering an inner strength.⁵⁸

Better Physical Conditions

Except Jack Henry Abbott who stated that he used heroin while incarcerated, none of the prisoners/authors indicated that they used medication, drugs or alcohol during their prison sentence. On the contrary, for Julius Melnitzer and Robert Berger, prison was a place where they dealt with their substance abuse and where they worked on their physical well-being through exercise. Recounting the abuse of alcohol and pills such as Valium, which he engaged in prior to being incarcerated, Berger (2003) states the positive effects of his incarceration: "Now, over two years later...I'm down to 175 pounds, in excellent physical condition, and I have the blood pressure of an eighteen-year-old athlete" (p. 128). Similarly, Richard Dube states that he did not even smoke cigarettes while in prison so that he would be in optimal physical strength while incarcerated.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Although these prisoners seem sincere when describing how they made sense of their prison sentences, it is possible that these interpretations are influenced by the ideas instilled in them by both the institutional discourse and by the prison culture. They may be influenced to attach a positive reinterpretation to their experiences and to 'correct' their negative ways in preparation for release.

⁵⁹ In contrast with Berger and Melnitzer, who wanted to be in good physical condition for the intrinsic value of feeling better, Dube refrains from smoking so that he can have the strength to violently deal with others in an environment like the prison which he considers dangerous.

Accepting Oneself

For Melnitzer, prison also afforded him an opportunity for self-acceptance and reinvention of his identity. Speaking of his changing approach to interacting with both other prisoners and guards, he states:

...I began to appreciate my inflated sense of entitlement in [my outside life]....As I substituted acceptance for control, my relations with others and with the staff lightened; by accepting my place, I was accepting myself, demanding less as I felt less empty; the less inclined I was to push my way in—to force or buy my way into the game—the easier it became for others to accept me. In hindsight, I understood my arrogance, and, as I did so, I looked forward to humility’s rewards, balance and rest (Melnitzer, 1995, p. 294).

Towards the end of his sentence, Melnitzer (1995) explicitly explains his newfound sense of self: “I had learned to accept myself and the things I couldn’t control. A year wasn’t a big price to pay to find out I wasn’t angry any more; time anywhere is precious to me, so I was much better off than I had ever been. These were all prison’s gifts” (p. 375).

Discovering Inner Strength

Prisoners may also discover their inner strength in prison. During his sentence, Schroeder has a revelation regarding the importance of his incarceration. He states: “Suddenly...I can see that this [being incarcerated]...is how I’ve decided to find out what I can really handle, and what I really need to stay alive...This is where I start to find out who I really am” (Schroeder, 1976, p. 83). Berger (2003) too realizes that he has gained inner strength as a result of being incarcerated. Speaking of the fears that plagued his life before incarceration, he states: “I was afraid to lose my business, my lifestyle, home, etc. I was afraid of what prison would be like. Today I don’t fear any of those things...” (p. 67). Similarly, Melnitzer too gains clarity of mind that he did not have before incarceration. He contends: “I was outlasting loneliness and redefining catastrophe; I had made better, more

liberated decisions than I ever had in the knotted mesh I knew as normal” (Melnitzer, 1995, p. 171).

Andreas Schroeder (1976) has a similar realization by listening “with increasing interest and curiosity to the ways...[his]...cell mates understood themselves and each other” (p. 212). From this he makes a profound discovery: “I began to realize that we were not only part of the same world, but also, in the final analysis, part of the same quest” (Schroeder, 1976, p. 212). In a sense, Schroeder is developing not only an understanding of, and empathy towards, others, but also an understanding of his place in a collectivity, as a member of humanity.

Like Schroeder, Carlson experiences a change in how he perceives his fellow prisoners and his place as a man in society. He states: “I believe bringing compassion and human understanding into the prison system is one of the most worthwhile endeavors and undertakings a man can do” (Carlson, 2001, p. 281). This change however, happens gradually, after many years in and out of prison. During his younger years, Carlson focused on escaping from prison. Close to thirty years after first being incarcerated, his outlook on life changes as a result of a prison gardening work program. He states: “I began to more clearly understand what it means to be a social human being, which means that I began to see that people are very much the same under the skin” (ibid).

However, even if these prisoners are able to redefine their prison experience, they may still be aware of the hardships felt by their families. For example, Berger wonders what effect his incarceration has had on his daughters, wife and mother, stating:

Sometimes I wonder if I have extracted enough out of prison life to have actually turned it into a positive growth experience...The other factor is how much this episode has affected my family on a short and long-term basis...Can we all overcome this trauma, or will it leave scars forever? (2003, p. 181).

Moreover, the positive personal experiences, such as being in good physical shape and dealing with his substance abuse issues does not erase from his mind that he too, may experience negative consequences as a result of his prison sentence. Berger asks: “Will I have a stigma to carry for the rest of my life?” (2003, p. 181).

The coping strategies described above suggest that prisoners actively fight against negative emotional states by accessing various resources or material comforts that can either resolve the problem, or that can help them detach—even if temporarily—from the problems they encounter.⁶⁰

Changes in Coping Styles

Just as people in the outside world make changes in their styles of behaviour, coping, or interacting, so too can prisoners’ coping styles change as their prison sentences progress. Prisoners’ coping strategies are not static, but dynamic and they may modify depending on changes in prisoners’ circumstances or personality. Some prisoners, such as Carlson who served numerous sentences over a period of thirty years, probably experienced a sense of maturation in their personal life, which not surprisingly influenced the ways that they coped with the challenges they faced.

This assertion is supported by research which has found that over time, prisoners experience a change in their coping styles (Zamble & Porporino, 1988). Zamble and Porporino (1988) found that in an attempt to diminish their risk of official punishment, as prisoners advance in their sentence, they are less likely to socialize with other prisoners. The

⁶⁰ Of course, some of these changes may be due to the process of aging, and prisoners may have gone through them had they been on the outside as well. For prisoners like Carlson, who served over thirty years in prison, it is hard to discern whether the changes he encounters are part of his aging or part of his experiences in prison. However, even prisoners like Schroeder who served a short sentence experienced some changes in how he perceived his place in the world, suggesting that even short sentences can propel changes in beliefs about oneself and others.

autobiographies partially support this finding, as they show that some, but not all prisoners change their coping strategies towards the end of their sentence.

The attempt to 'stay out of trouble' can be seen in one situation in which Berger is partially at fault. Although he would be able to diffuse a simmering conflict between two of his fellow prisoners, Berger retreats from the situation. He adds:

I could have tried to straighten it out, but I learned my lesson in Allenwood (the institution where he served time in segregation for mopping up blood from a fight between two other prisoners). Never get involved. It's not worth it. I would have been implicated and as a result probably would have been thrown out of the drug program (Berger, 2003, p. 135).

Towards the end of his sentence, Berger is even more adamant about avoiding any sort of official sanctions which would increase his sentence. He states:

I am trying to stay to myself and to avoid possible problems. I'm too short to have a stupid altercation or break some minor rule and wind up having my release delayed or revoked...They (administration) can cancel these benefits if I give them a good reason to (Berger, 2003, p. 182).

While Berger only served a three year sentence, it is perhaps his maturity level (he is fifty-five years old when he begins his sentence) that allows him to learn from his mistakes and to avoid behaviours that can result in negative consequences. For other prisoners, who are perhaps younger when they start their criminal career, the changes in coping strategies take longer to materialize. For example, Carlson, (who was eighteen when he served his first sentence), begins to change his coping styles only after thirty years of intermittent prison sentences. Towards the end of his autobiography (and the end of his string of prison sentences), he asserts:

I became very active, working as an elected committee member, and a clerk in the Corcan Prison Industries business office as well. I played

tennis, worked out, maintained my marriage to Judy and commitment to Jeff and Debbie, my wife's children, and began to think of getting out and staying out (Carlson, 2001, p. 249).

This is a marked transformation from the "wheeling, dealing man" he was in the past (Carlson, 2001, p. 280). Carlson (2001) makes other changes as well: "I began to take part in worthwhile programs, including instructing my peers in first aid, and coordinating The Sams of Drum Pen, a volunteer group of prisoners who assist other prisoners who are under a great deal of emotional stress and anxiety" (pp. 280-281).

The autobiographies show that over time, some prisoners' coping styles modify to reflect their heightened awareness of what can be beneficial for them. For example, Melnitzer's coping behaviours change as a result of his deeper appreciation of how the prison system works. He states: "I still worked the system well. But there was a difference: now I worked within the system, not obsessively against it" (Melnitzer, 1995, p. 361). Melnitzer's assertion exemplifies how prisoners can resist the system in ways that benefit rather than disadvantage them. Melnitzer also changes his interactions with staff from a combative approach to one predicated on subservience and understanding. He explains:

I had learned the hard way not to volunteer information or advice. Careful not to seek indulgences until the staff made it clear that they trusted me, I thanked them profusely when they did, letting them know that I appreciated the leeway. I took "no" in silence, whether I thought it was right or wrong (Melnitzer, 1995, p. 360).⁶¹

Aside from modifying how he copes with the official restrictions of the institution, Melnitzer also alters how he deals with fellow prisoners. While at the beginning of his sentence he aims

⁶¹Although it may seem that Melnitzer chooses to behave in subservient ways, this behaviour is also a way of complying with the institutional rules and therefore, cannot be said to be entirely of his choosing. In this instance, his choice of behaviour is constrained by the ramifications of not complying with the official rules of the prison.

to please people, (something that he contends was a characteristic of his outside approach to interacting with others), towards the end of his sentence he deliberately refrains from doing so. He writes:

In the past, I would have taken an interest [in Jeff, his young cellmate who tells him he had been raped in prison], tried to open Jeff up and do what I could to help. Now, withdrawal kept pace with solitude; ten months in prison had taught me that low profile was a combination of silence, ego control, and distrust. A wholesome selfishness was eroding my contrived and controlling mask of charitability, as I continued my search for an identity based on fusion rather than seduction (Melnitzer, 1995, p. 344).

While the above example may not suggest a positive change, Melnitzer explains that his past eagerness to help others was due to his compulsive need to please others, and not to a genuine concern for their wellbeing. Therefore, his reluctance to helping this new prisoner can be considered a positive step in his self-awareness.

In contrast to the changes experienced by these prisoners, neither Jack Henry Abbott nor Richard Dube experiences such positive transformations. These two prisoners use a combative style of coping, with few if any exceptions, from the beginning to the end of their sentences.⁶²

While Zamble and Porporino's (1988) assertion that prisoners change their coping styles toward the end of their sentence found some support in the autobiographies, their other finding that long-term prisoners become hardened and cold did not find such categorical support. Out of the eight prisoners whose autobiographies are used in this research, both Jack Henry Abbott and Wayne Carlson can be considered long-term prisoners. While Abbott was a violent and emotionally hardened prisoner it is unclear if he became that way as a result of long-term incarceration. Because he was state-raised, it is difficult ascertain the impact long-

⁶² This is actually difficult to assess for Abbott since his story is not told chronologically and since he died in prison and therefore, did not really have an 'end' to his sentence.

term imprisonment had on his personality.⁶³ On the other hand, Carlson, who is also a long-term prisoner but is not state-raised, does not become withdrawn or emotionally removed as a result of his incarceration. On the contrary, he becomes empathetic and helpful towards other prisoners.

However, these findings should be interpreted with caution. The experiences of these eight prisoners may have limited generalizability to average prisoners because these men may be somehow different from average prisoners. These men may have more positive prison experiences or if they do not, they may be able to make sense of these experiences in ways that offer them a chance to redeem themselves or to experience some sort of personal fulfillment.

The findings presented in this chapter show that prisoners use both violent and non-violent strategies in their attempts to cope with incarceration. While in some situations violence can seem to be both warranted and expected by the prison culture, there are many instances in which prisoners not only employ non-violent strategies but do so successfully. The implications these findings have for masculinity theory will be discussed and analyzed in the following chapter.

⁶³ For more on this, see Strimelle and Poupart (2004).

Chapter Five: Discussion and Analysis

In this chapter I attempt to make analytical sense of the concepts presented in *Chapter One*, such as ‘masculinity’, ‘hyper-masculinity’, ‘hegemonic masculinity’, ‘violence’ and ‘homophobia’ in order to provide an understanding of the role masculinity plays in male prisoners’ coping behaviours. Furthermore, I examine the ability of critical masculinity theory to explain not only how, but also why, male prisoners behave in the ways that they do in their attempts to cope with the challenges of incarceration. Essentially, I aim to answer the research question presented in *Chapter Three: Is the hyper-masculinity model the only model conducive to coping in prison? Is the model found everywhere (in all security levels)? If yes, how do prisoners experience it? Do the autobiographies reflect this model? How do they explain it? Does hyper-masculinity actually help prisoners cope with the challenges they encounter in prison? Are there other forms of masculinity conducive to coping with these challenges?*

The analysis is divided into two parts: first, I will present the findings which support masculinity theory and which provide evidence of prisoners’ hyper-masculine coping strategies; second, I will discuss the findings which challenge hyper-masculinity and which cannot be adequately explained by masculinity theory.

Support for Masculinity Theory and Hyper-Masculine Coping Strategies

The autobiographies suggest that the main tenet of hyper-masculinity centres on the concept of reputation and the prevention of victimization. Prisoners seem to believe that if they do not retaliate or show toughness towards others, they will be victimized. Therefore they attempt to portray a façade of toughness that can intimidate or keep others at a distance. In order to portray this image, prisoners may attempt to marginalize or subordinate others

and to disengage from things that can be perceived as feminine or homosexual. Furthermore, since incarceration may provide limited resources for enacting masculinity, prisoners' ways of portraying their identity may change. Because of these limited resources, prisoners may continually attempt to prove their masculinity through hyper-masculine ways and may guard against the further annihilation of their manhood.

Diminished Resources for Enacting Masculinity

According to Messerschmidt (1993; 2001) masculinity is dependent on specific circumstances and is enacted and displayed depending on these circumstances in a continuous and interactional way. Masculinity is therefore “renegotiated in each particular context” (Messerschmidt, 2001, p. 67). According to this theory, prisoners' outside masculinity does not remain unchanged; rather, it is renegotiated and enacted depending on the circumstances and the resources available in their new environment, the prison. The autobiographies support this supposition. Prisoners, especially first time prisoners may experience the deprivations of imprisonment as personal attacks to their identity and masculinity. Their distance from those things that conferred their sense of identity and therefore their masculinity are removed or absent in their new environment. Robert Berger (2003) explains the change that prisoners go through:

When one enters prison, one is then removed from society with its manners, courtesies, and all of the human emotions and feelings associated with the normal characteristics of who we are, how we live, how we interact in society, how we raise our children, etc. When one comes to prison we enter an abnormal world...To survive one may become tough and hardened, or simply becomes a punk (p. 125).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ It is not clear whether Berger uses the term ‘punk’ to refer to a prisoner who engages in same-sex acts with other prisoners or to something else; throughout his autobiography Berger does not mention the term ‘punk’ in other situations and does not explain here what the term means.

Messerschmidt (2001, p. 67) argues that the limited access to certain resources for enacting masculinity means that in some situations, only specific forms of masculinity are available, encouraged or permitted. In some cases, these may not be legal and some men may choose to engage in violent and/or criminal activities in order to enact and display masculinity (Messerschmidt, 1993, p. 85). Prison can be considered such an environment, since it limits men's resources for both enacting and displaying their masculinity and may lead some men to rely on violent and aggressive modalities of expressing their identity. The prisoner, by virtue of his incarceration can arguably be considered as having limited or no access to power. In addition, certain attributes (such as race, sexual orientation and class) can influence his ability to enact masculinity. Therefore, practicing masculinity in prison may be different from that which is practiced on the outside.

Two characteristics, socio-economic status and sexual orientation, which can influence male prisoners' ability to enact and/or display their masculinity will be discussed below:

(i) The influence of socio-economic status on prisoners' ability to enact masculinity is most obvious in the cases of Robert Berger and Julius Melnitzer. Upon their arrival in prison, these men lose their ability to enact masculinity through their usual channels: wealth, career, power, prestige and personal possessions. Before incarceration, both Berger and Melnitzer were wealthy lawyers who enjoyed an upper-class lifestyle. However, in prison, these resources are no longer available. Furthermore, their age (Berger is in his mid-forties and Melnitzer is in his mid-fifties) and their white-collar crime status hinder their ability to blend in with the other prisoners.

Acting in physically violent ways is not how these men are used to resolving conflict. However, in prison, this changes and at some point they both engage in hyper-masculine

behaviours in order to deal with problematic situations. During his conflict with another prisoner, Berger states that because “this was prison I wasn’t going to try to “tactfully” solve this...” (2003, p. 51). It is not clear whether this opinion is based on Berger’s perception of what works in prison. What is clear, however, is that Berger is making the distinction between how he would act on the outside in such a circumstance and how he chooses to act in prison. Berger modifies his behaviour according to what he perceives to be the best way of dealing with these types of situations in his present environment; in this particular case, by being physically aggressive. As I explained in the previous chapter, Berger’s aggressive behaviour proves to be beneficial in two ways: first, the other prisoner leaves and never bothers him again, and second, his subordinates respect him for showing his willingness to fight. In this case, coping with a problematic situation in a hyper-masculine manner proves beneficial on more than one level.

Similarly, when Julius Melnitzer threatens the prisoner who had been spreading rumours about him, it is obvious that he is not used to acting this way but perceives such behaviour as warranted by the situation. Leaving the prisoner’s cell, his reaction indicates this: “I smiled to myself: I was getting good at this prisoner business” (Melnitzer, 1995, p. 237).

(ii) Sexual orientation is another characteristic which can influence one’s ability to enact masculinity. While sexual orientation figures predominantly in how one is viewed and how one views himself in the outside world, it seems that in prison it is amplified. For T.J. Parsell, his resources for enacting masculinity are severely limited, not only because of his homosexual orientation, but also because there are no viable role models for how to behave like a homosexual man in prison. Prison culture only provides two models for being a homosexual man: the ‘punk’ (a prisoner who chooses another prisoner as a ‘man’ in order to

gain his protection) or the ‘queen’ (a man who dresses and acts feminine, and who even gets referred to by a female name),⁶⁵ neither of which interest Parsell. Prison culture does not offer him the possibility of not embodying either of these two personalities; the idea that he can just be himself is not presented as a viable option.

Through no choice of his own, Parsell gets placed in the role of a ‘punk’, when after his first rape his rapists decide, with the toss of a coin, that he will ‘belong’ to a man called Slide Step.⁶⁶ In a way, Parsell can choose not to be with Slide Step. However, to reject his ‘protector’ means that he will most probably be raped and victimized in other ways by many other prisoners. Therefore, his choice to accept Slide Step as his partner is a coerced choice. Parsell understands that these are his two options: partner up with Slide Step or put himself at (almost certain) risk of being violently attacked by other prisoners. The third option, to protect himself by engaging in violence, is not presented as an option and is not evident to him at first. It is only when he befriends Paul, another young, homosexual prisoner that he realizes he can in fact protect himself physically.

In prison, Parsell is constrained into a marginalized masculinity by characteristics that are out of his control: his age, stature, inexperience and confused sexual orientation (which is somehow obvious to the prisoners who choose to take advantage of him). As a young, gay male in 1970s America, Parsell may have experienced harassment even on the outside; however, because he is incarcerated, his sexual orientation becomes more evident (in contrast to the older, macho prisoners) and the options he may have on the outside to protect himself from both scrutiny and harassment are limited in prison.

⁶⁵ Prisoners referred to as ‘queens’ often tried to embody feminine characteristics by using chalk on their eyelids (as eye shadow), growing their hair long or even dyeing their underwear in red Kool-aid.

⁶⁶ Slide Step is not one of the prisoners who rape him, although later another prisoner, Paul, tells Parsell that Slide Step orchestrated the rape.

The limited availability of their usual resources for enacting masculinity may lead prisoners to seek alternate ways of defining themselves. For example, Melnitzer chooses to volunteer for a job during a prison lockdown—even though doing so can result in other prisoners' disapproval or ostracism—because he needs to redefine himself. He states:

I volunteered [for the job] because...stripped of the trappings that had sustained me in society [I needed]...fresh emblems to define myself in this new environment. I would make prison an experience...something to distinguish me, rendering my humiliation a badge of honour by making the most of it. In this way, I could deny prison its immediacy as my life's reality, creating the illusion of meaning where there was none (Melnitzer, 1995, pp. 139-140).

The above quote exemplifies how prisoners may choose new ways of asserting their masculinity and the ways that they may choose to assign positive meanings to certain situations that can be viewed as negative or meaningless. Here Melnitzer is looking for a new way of defining himself based on the resources available in his new environment.

In Parsell's case, what is of interest is that he is young and his confusion about his sexual identity is not a result of incarceration. He would have, most likely, experienced this confusion in the outside world as well. But perhaps in prison he is forced to confront this aspect of his identity more dramatically than he would have had to in the outside world.

Parsell (2006) laments about his identity confusion, stating:

I was starting to piece things together, but figuring out my identity was more difficult than I first realized. I knew I belonged to Slide Step and that my place in the pecking order was tied to him. But how could I be myself, if I didn't know what that was? I wasn't like the punks, and I wasn't like the queens...and it left me confused about who or what I was (p. 128).

The above examples seem to support Messerschmidt's (2001) assertion that prisoners' possibilities for enacting masculinity are limited in prison. Indeed, if their access to resources which had previously provided them with a sense of identity is removed, and if their

masculinity suffers as a result, men will try to enact masculinity according to the means that are available to them in their current environment.

Continuously Proving Masculinity and Guarding against the Loss/Theft of Masculinity

According to masculinity theorists, a significant feature of masculinity is its elusive nature and, therefore, its fragility; it is this fragility which propels men to continuously prove their masculinity (Kaufman, 1998; Messerschmidt, 2001). At the same time, masculinity may be tested or questioned by others and may even be lost or stolen (Messerschmidt, 2001). This may contribute to men's insecurity regarding the stability and validity of their masculinity and they may, in turn, attempt to engage in activities and behaviours that prove that they are indeed masculine (Messerschmidt, 1993).

This supposition is supported by Jack Henry Abbott's contention that if he lets himself be robbed of material possessions without retaliating he could be sexually victimized. The connection between being robbed and raped is not evident on a superficial level. But if one thinks of prison culture as predicated on violence, and of masculinity as something that can be taken away or somehow lost, the connection becomes plausible. Phillips (2001) argues that male prisoners' behaviours are governed by their quest to recover their lost or stolen masculinity; in this context, protecting against the further loss of masculinity or fighting to regain one's masculinity makes sense. In Abbott's case, if perhaps he is experiencing a loss or a threat of loss of his masculinity, his adamant belief that he must protect his material possessions because neglecting to do so can have more personal and significant consequences seems reasonable.

Marginalized and Subordinated Masculinities

Perhaps because of the absence of women (with the exception of a few female staff members) in male prisons, the dichotomy between prisoners who are perceived to embody

hegemonic masculinity and those who are marginalized is quite stark. Connell (1995) argues that hegemonic masculinity depends on the existence of marginalized and subordinated masculinities since authority cannot be achieved unless there are those over which to exercise it or those that are pushed to the margins. In prison, there cannot be powerful prisoners if there are no weak prisoners. Since hegemonic masculinity assumes that homosexuality equates femininity, homosexual masculinities are at the bottom of the gender hierarchy while heterosexual masculinities are at the top (Connell, 1995).

The power relationship between prisoners who embody hegemonic ideals and those who are marginalized is evident in the language of prison culture. Prisoners like Parsell are called 'boys' while those who embody hegemonic masculinity are referred to as 'men' (Parsell, 2006, p. 117). Moreover, feminine pronouns are used to either insult prisoners or to make them understand that they are relegated to the role of women. For example, Parsell (2006, p. 41) is often referred to as 'she' by other prisoners while Hall (2003, p. 93) is called a 'bitch' on numerous occasions. The other autobiographies also document the use of derogatory female pronouns between prisoners (Melnitzer, 1995, p. 160/235; Berger, 2003, p. 15). Recall that Kupers (1993) argues that in general, boys are socialized to link weakness with femininity. Epithets such as 'girl', 'queer' or 'pussy', signal that the "worst thing a man can call another man is a woman" (Kupers, 1993, p. 47). The autobiographies show that male prisoners use terms that connote femininity and/or weakness to insult other prisoners, either seriously or in jest, and to affirm their own masculinity.

While being called by feminine names can be traumatizing and can confer one a weaker status, to be imputed a homosexual orientation can actually be dangerous for some prisoners. In prison, it is not the actual sexual orientation of prisoners that comes into question, but more likely, their imputed sexual orientation. While prisoners such as T.J.

Parsell self-identify as homosexual, it is of interest to note that he self-identifies as a gay man at a significantly later date than when other prisoners identify him as such. Therefore, it is not just prisoners who self-identify as homosexual who are subjected to marginalization from hegemonic masculinity but also those who are imputed the status of homosexuality. Such prisoners can be subjected to harassment, isolation and potentially life-threatening risks. As can be ascertained in Parsell's case, his life is not only placed at risk due to the multiple rapes he is subjected to and the violence that accompanies these rapes, but he is also at risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Furthermore, being raped can lead to psychological issues such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Peeples Jr. & Scacco Jr., 1982; Kupers, 2001). Therefore, to be imputed the status of homosexual can lead to various negative consequences that are not merely unpleasant.

Conversely, those prisoners who self-identify as heterosexual or who are imputed heterosexual status by others enjoy a higher social status that they may not even be aware of. These prisoners do not necessarily benefit, in obvious ways, from being heterosexual. They are the norm. Just like White persons may not be aware of benefiting from being white-skinned, heterosexual prisoners may not realize that their sexual orientation affords them certain advantages. The difference is seen when one diverges from the norm. The benefit of being imputed heterosexual status can be ascertained by looking at the experiences of prisoners who are imputed homosexual status.

The subordination of prisoners such as T.J. Parsell is dependent on the existence of those who hold a hegemonic position. While the men who rape him are constrained by (relatively) the same deprivations of incarceration, their experiences can be considered different than his. While all prisoners can experience a sense of powerless in relation to the institution, these types of prisoners exert power over weaker prisoners such as Parsell and

therefore can be considered or can consider themselves to hold more power and agency over their behaviours and circumstances. Indeed they occupy a higher position in the prison social hierarchy, while Parsell occupies a lower one.

Fracher and Kimmel (1998) argue that men are socialized to believe that “sexuality is the proving ground of adequate gender identity” and it is through sexuality and sexual activity that men enact, display and express their masculinity (p. 458). The men who rape Parsell are not viewed by others as feminine, weak or homosexual. They are ‘men.’ After he is raped, Parsell makes the following observation about one of his rapists: “He seemed energized by the incident, as if it raised his standing with the other guys. The way he set me up and *turned me out*” (Parsell, 2006, p. 98).⁶⁷

It is only when Parsell decides to use violent force to protect himself that he is viewed differently by other prisoners. For a while after he uses the padlock and sock weapon to defend himself, he does not experience the usual harassment from the other prisoners. However, because he does not successfully embody the hegemonic ideal, he is still targeted by other prisoners. As a gay man, Parsell is unable to transcend the marginalized status that others confer to him. Although his violent behaviour alleviates some of the problems he encounters, his sexual orientation presents an obstacle that he is unable to completely overcome. He states: “Under the convict code, regardless of how we may have acted, we

⁶⁷ Interestingly, Parsell was aware of the risk of sexual violence before coming to prison. Both his brother and father had been incarcerated and had told him stories about rape. As well, the first prison psychologist Parsell had to see in prison told him to be careful about prison rapes, insinuating that Parsell will get raped at some point. However, what Parsell understands from these stories is that ‘real men’ do not get raped and that if they are raped, they should not tell anyone (2006, p. 98). It seems that the stories about prison rape reinforce the prisoner code against seeking staff’s help (don’t snitch) and normalize this type of violence; these stories make prison rape seem like a normal and expected part of being in prison. They may also contribute to a prisoner’s helplessness and shame.

weren't thought of as "men" because inmates believed that gays were fundamentally lacking in what they considered *manhood*" (Parsell, 2006, p. 250).

In order for Parsell to avoid being victimized further, he had to relinquish his masculinity and engage in sexual relations, taking the female role, with another prisoner—the 'man' he partners up with for protection. In essence, to cope and survive, he had to take on a feminine role. Parsell explains this: "Men were expected to defend their manhood, and if it were lost, they would need another man to protect them. For a weaker con, the choice of having to do it with one was a better [sic] than having to do it with many" (2006, p. 57).

However, in these kinds of relationships, prisoners like Parsell do have some agency. Although his first partnership (with Slide Step) was not of his choosing, he is later able to choose which 'man' he wants as his protector. Therefore, although as a gay man in prison his power over his actions is limited, he still holds the power to choose his 'man'. However, if he does not choose a man soon enough, one is chosen for him. Therefore, Parsell has some power, but it is a false sense of power since the choice is a coerced one. He can choose which man he wants as his 'protector', but he cannot choose not to have a protector. When Parsell and Paul decide to resist this informal arrangement and not choose to partner up with a 'man' but to be friends and lovers themselves instead, they are harassed by other prisoners and eventually separated by the staff.

A Tough and Masculine Reputation (Disengaging from the Feminine)

The opposite of the marginalized or subordinated masculinity is the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position. In their attempt to circumvent being marginalized, male prisoners may avoid engaging in behaviours or acting in ways that can be perceived as feminine and can lead to their subordination.

According to Kaufman (1998) masculinity assumes the denial of emotions and behaviours which can be considered feminine. Therefore, men attempt to disengage from feelings and behaviours which can be perceived as feminine and therefore possibly weak and/ or homosexual. To be imputed a homosexual orientation in prison can be potentially life-threatening, meaning that the incentive to disengage from perceivable feminine actions can be even higher than in the outside world. In prison, acting tough, hiding one's emotions, and attempting to appear strong and in control are ways that men cope with an environment and a culture that shuns those who appear weak.

It is perhaps this aspect of masculinity that is most connected to the concept of hyper-masculinity. Possessing the 'right' reputation can confer one a sense of safety; the autobiographies show that those prisoners who are able to show that they are tough and will not let themselves be victimized are less likely to be subjected to violence. But how does one gain such a reputation? In certain cases, access to such a reputation is limited by one's characteristics. New prisoners, especially those who are young and inexperienced are more likely to gain the 'wrong' reputation. Parsell's ability to enact his masculinity is severely limited by his characteristics and by the reputation he gains (as weak, gay, feminine, easily victimized) within his first few weeks in prison. It is almost that he does not 'gain' this reputation but that he is allotted this reputation. His inexperience in physical fighting and the violent rapes to which he is subjected perhaps inhibit Parsell from engaging in behaviours which would confer him the 'right' reputation as someone who is tough and willing to retaliate or fight for almost no reason at all.

Because Parsell is already relegated to a weak and marginalized status among other prisoners, his eventual engagement in physical violence offers him only temporary benefits. While those who harassed him cease to do so for a time, his reputation as a weak prisoner

does not instantly disappear. This suggests that prisoners have to assert their reputation at the beginning of their sentence and that it is more difficult to do so later. Indeed, Richard Dube does so during his first prison sentence at the age of sixteen: he fights other prisoners, acts 'crazy' and presents himself as someone who is fearless.

The autobiographies show that prisoners' reputations follow them even when they are transferred to other institutions. Information about a prisoner's history and status sometimes travels from one prison to another through the prison grapevine even before the prisoner's transfer is complete. When Parsell is transferred to another prison, he finds out that everyone knows that he had been raped in the previous prison. He states "I sat back on my bunk without saying anything. So everyone knew. I felt humiliated and ashamed" (Parsell, 2006, p. 212). In this respect, it seems that prisoners are unable to renegotiate their masculine status in new contexts, as Messerschmidt (2001) argues. While prisoners may think they can have a fresh beginning in a new institution, their ability to 'start over' and to present themselves differently is limited and inhibited by the easy flow of information between prisoners and between institutions. Therefore, the role they are assigned by their fellow prisoners can supercede their attempts in proving their manhood.

Prisoners' limited ability to change their reputation is also influenced by their status as newcomers (or 'fish' in prison argot). During their second sentence, both Carlson and Parsell realize that they are treated better by other prisoners. This suggests that in some cases, the reputation of prisoners has less to do with the types of coping strategies they use or the ways that they specifically set out to present themselves and more with the passage of time and the arrival of new 'fish'. For example, Carlson finds that upon returning to prison after an unsuccessful escape effort, he is viewed more positively by other prisoners. He explains:

I was no longer a young, naïve fish; I was instead a veteran, a seasoned convict and in many ways a man to be respected. In my case, it was understood that any man who could go through my experiences and come out the other side without breaking, had to be respected (Carlson, 2001, pp. 61-62).

These experiences, namely, escaping and being caught, are ones that are perceived by prison culture as manly and therefore having gone through them confer Carlson a higher status. On the other hand, having been violently gang-raped, an experience which arguably is significantly more difficult and traumatic does not confer upon T.J. Parsell a higher status. This experience actually contributes to his weak status and to being perceived as someone to be victimized. Therefore, it is not the objective difficulty of a situation but the ‘manliness’ of it that contributes to a prisoner’s status and reputation.

An intriguing incident which demonstrates how prisoners disengage from the feminine is described by Jack Henry Abbott who defends himself against an attempted rape by not only threatening his attacker with a knife but also forcing him to perform oral sex on him. One has to wonder why Abbott does not just stab his attacker. Why force him to perform oral sex? It is obvious from his description that Abbott’s way of dealing with the situation has less to do with sexual aggression and more with humiliating and subjugating the other prisoner. Abbott’s reaction represents hyper-masculine ideals—he uses force and relegates the other prisoner to a passive status. The fact that he mentions that his penis was not erect suggests that he wants the reader to know that this was not about sexual satisfaction but about power, resistance and control.

The Inmate Code

The significance of the inmate code in prisoners’ choice of behaviours is evident in all except one autobiography. All prisoners except Reginald Hall cite the inmate code as at

least partially influencing their choice of actions.⁶⁸ Sykes and Messinger (1960) listed a compendium of rules that the prison culture encourages; these rules do not seem to have drastically changed in the five decades since Sykes and Messinger's seminal work. The inmate code is significant in the present research because it is congruent with norms pertaining to masculinity in intriguing ways. For example, "Do your own time" and "Don't be weak" are representative of the masculine ideals of appearing strong and keeping one's emotions private. Additionally, the adage against communicating with prison staff influences how prisoners cope with challenging situations. For example, after Parsell is gang-raped, he does not seek medical help for his injuries or ask prison staff for help. He states: "...I was sore, and there was blood when I went to the bathroom. I was afraid to ask the guards to see a doctor, because I would have to explain what had happened" (Parsell, 2006, p. 97). Parsell reasons that it is safer to remain silent: "I thought about reporting the rapes, but my brother's voice rang inside my head: *Punks are fucked, but Snitches get killed*" (Parsell, 2006, p. 97, accent in the original). Indeed, informers seem to be universally despised in prison culture. Parsell (2006) states that this "was one of the few sentiments that crossed all racial lines" among prisoners (p. 225).

The rules of prison culture are learned by new prisoners not only through their observations of how others behave but also through conversations with senior prisoners. In some cases, older prisoners tell new prisoners what is expected of them and what to avoid in order to stay out of trouble (Melnitzer, 1995, p. 64; Dube, 2002, p. 154). For example, at the beginning of his sentence, Melnitzer meets regularly with an older prisoner and asks him

⁶⁸ Hall is the only prisoner who not only does not mention the inmate code, but behaves in ways that blatantly contradict this code. For example, he informs staff of other prisoners' wrong-doings on numerous occasions and steals from other prisoners. Even more interesting is that this type of behaviour does not attract retaliation from other prisoners. A possible explanation for this is that he is serving time in 1998 in a county jail and his fellow prisoners are all young. It is possible that the inmate code does not figure as prominently in county jails and among the young as it does in provincial and federal institutions and among older prisoners.

about the prison culture. In this case, because the questions are not personal, there is no rule against asking. Melnitzer states: "I think I asked more questions in four weeks than I had during my entire career in court" (1995, p. 64). The other prisoner tells him important information, such as: "Don't stand in a [guard's] office with the door closed. Everybody will think you're ratting out" (ibid). New prisoners who are fortunate enough to have these instruction lessons can be spared learning the prison rules 'the hard way'.

While most of the prisoners make reference to the inmate code, Dube actually lists all the rules of the inmate code operating in the institutions he has served sentences in. The following is a compendium of what prisoners should *not* do: complain, ask any questions, show fear, back down from a fight or point a finger, whistle, talk in a friendly manner to guards or leave your cell to speak to the guards, go into protective custody, sit in anyone else's chair, change channels on the television, meddle in someone else's affairs, talk about rehabilitation, cheat at cards, look into other prisoners' cells, receive gifts from other prisoners, gossip, ask for things from others, fully reveal your emotions or potential for survival (Dube, 2002, pp. 154-155). This extensive list shows the numerous behaviours that prisoners have to avoid in order to evade conflicts with other prisoners.

The inmate code is also significant in that it influences prisoners' ability to follow the informal and formal rules operating within the institution. Dube argues that in order to survive in prison, one must act in violent ways, something, he argues, the administration does not understand. He states:

Maybe my damaging rap sheet and joint record can bury me. But they (prison administration, guards, the parole board) don't understand the codes we have to live by in order to ensure our survival. By virtue of having to adhere, we label ourselves dangerous offenders. What else would you idiots have me do? Get killed? Rat out? Go to protective custody? (Dube, 2002, p. 108).

Dube's comments show not only that he believes he has no other choice but to engage in violent behaviours, but that these behaviours are adaptive in the prison culture. If he desists from engaging in such behaviours, he risks his personal safety. Wayne Carlson eloquently analyses this connection:

The means and methods one employs to socially survive inside a penitentiary, which usually involve at least some form of intimidation or threat of violence, do not have the same effect on the people in the community. An average law-abiding citizen doesn't think he'll be [violently attacked]...by a man who holds an opinion contrary to his own. In prison this threat is always present and usually clearly understood, and it runs unseen beneath the surface like a hungry shark in the undercurrent every second of every hour of each and every day. And it works well, for it keeps mute those men who might otherwise dare to break free of the bonds of the con code (2001, p. 253).

Carlson's comments point to the differences between the prison culture and the outside society by drawing attention to the roles that violence or threats of violence play in these two societies. Additionally, his comments highlight the ramifications of adhering to the inmate code once prisoners are released into society. A strict adherence to the code, such as that shown by Dube and Abbott may hinder one's ability to reintegrate after release.

Gaining and Showing Respect

A significant feature of the inmate code is respect. Although not specifically stated by Sykes and Messinger (1960) in their inmate code rules, the narratives show that respect features prominently in the prison culture. Describing an altercation he has with another prisoner while working in the prison kitchen, Melnitzer states that respect is the "magic word in prison" (1995, p. 118). What he means by this is that prison culture places a significant emphasis on both gaining others' respect and showing respect.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ In his case, the other prisoner disrespects Melnitzer's work in the kitchen by throwing slices of toast on the ground. Such behaviours would normally call for Melnitzer to fight the other prisoner. However, because the prisoner disrespected Melnitzer's job, other kitchen workers perceive this as disrespectful of them as well and

The significance of the concept of respect in the present research lies in *how* prisoners gain it. Two very different prisoners, Abbott and Carlson, both state that prisoners gain others' respect by instilling fear in them. Carlson states: "A prisoner who commands respect in the penitentiary is also a man to be feared, because inside, respect is synonymous with fear itself. If a man cannot, either directly or indirectly, generate fear of bodily harm, the man will not truly be respected..." (2001, p. 62). Also linking physical violence with respect, Abbott states: "...the most respected and honored men *among us* are those who have killed other men, particularly other prisoners. It is not merely *fear*, but *respect*" (italics in the original, Abbott, 1981, pp. 149-150).

The similarities between respect and masculinity are many. They are both something that prisoners seek to possess and to maintain; they can be tested, lost or stolen and they both require a continued effort in maintaining. Prisoners have to continuously prove their worth of respect and their possession of masculinity. Parsell explains that: "...everything in prison was about respect. You either had it or you didn't, and even when you did, it was frequently tested. There was a pecking order in prison, and inmates were constantly checking to see where they fit in" (2006, p. 114). Prison culture's reverence of violence is obvious in these quotes. Hyper-masculine behaviours, then, seem to be effective in achieving a high social status among prisoners.

Hyper-Masculinity in Prisoners' Coping Strategies

The autobiographies suggest that prisoners may be able to cope with imprisonment by gaining a reputation as someone who is tough, has the ability and willingness to fight, has nothing to lose and does not overlook even minor incidents (Abbott, 1981, p. 89; Carlson,

decide to all deal with the prisoner in question. Melnitzer is saved from having to fight the other prisoner, although he does not state what his co-workers did to 'deal' with the prisoner.

2001, p. 62; Dube, 2002, p. 102; Parsell, 2006, p. 282). These strategies can be considered hyper-masculine, since they are based on a rigid interpretation of masculinity and are characterized by a lack of negotiation, compromise and empathy and an exaggerated use of confrontation, aggression and force. Recall that hyper-masculinity is defined as “a personal code of behavior based on confrontation and force rather than negotiation and respect” (Jewkes, 2005, p. 62).⁷⁰ The autobiographies further suggest that by acting in these hyper-masculine ways, prisoners can, in a variety of situations, achieve numerous objectives: resolve conflict, defend themselves physically against other prisoners and against institutionalization, prevent future victimization and fit in with the prison culture.

Toch (1998) argues that prison culture is predicated on a hyper-masculine ideology; this culture espouses the belief that there are two types of people in the world (or in the prison): the strong and the weak. Evidence for this belief can be found in prisoners’ assertion that if they do not protect themselves in certain ways their chances of victimization are increased. In a sense, this belief shows that prisoners view strength and weakness as absolutes: one is either weak or strong. Prisoners such as Abbott, Dube, Carlson and even Parsell espouse (at one time or another) the belief that one must present himself as strong, tough and willing to fight lest he be considered weak. The prisoners explain that if one is not able to physically fight or elicit fear in others, one has to align himself with those who are able to do so. Evidence of this belief is found in prisoners’ numerous statements regarding how one has to protect himself and his belongings, retaliate swiftly and act as if he is readily able and willing to engage in violence.

⁷⁰ In this definition, ‘respect’ seems to be used differently than what I earlier described as the respect prisoners attempt to gain by instilling fear in others.

Although all eight prisoners/authors at some point use hyper-masculine coping strategies, Jack Henry Abbott and Richard Dube use these types of coping strategies predominantly. According to Sykes' (1958) argot roles, they can be considered 'ball busters'. By actively and sometimes violently resisting authority, they make life for themselves and possibly for other prisoners more difficult. Toch (1998) argues that behaving in hyper-masculine ways leads to no-win situations. In Abbott and Dube's cases, this seems, at least on a superficial level, to be true. These prisoners adhere to a violent code of behaviour and in a way expect others to as well. For example, Dube becomes angry when other prisoners do not put up a fight when guards do the evening count, as he does. However, it seems that for them hyper-masculine strategies represent a way of maintaining their sense of identity and agency and of resisting becoming institutionalized or 'giving in' to the system. In this respect, although their behaviours may not seem beneficial, for them they may be.

The other six prisoners, Parsell, Hall, Melnitzer, Berger, Schroeder and Carlson use hyper-masculine coping strategies in situations where they feel that it is beneficial for them to do so. Although some of these prisoners, like Berger, Parsell and Melnitzer are not used to engaging in violent behaviours, in their new environment, they see their options as limited and act accordingly. In some cases, acting in hyper-masculine ways can prove beneficial beyond the evident result. After retaliating violently against his harasser, Parsell feels empowered by the experience and states that he "actually enjoyed it" (2006, p. 283). Furthermore, he feels that this incident taught him what he has to do in order to survive in prison (ibid).

It is possible that the empowerment Parsell feels as a result of his eventual violent retaliation is an indication of his assertion of his masculinity. Phillips (2001) argues that male prisoners' behaviours are governed by their need to regain the masculinity they lost or which

was stolen upon their arrival in prison. Since violence and aggression are characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity, by acting violently and aggressively, male prisoners are not only asserting their masculinity in the most obvious of ways, but they are also distancing themselves from appearing weak (and therefore feminine or homosexual). Arguably, by acting aggressively, prisoners are able to enact and assert their masculinity. This may in turn provide them with a sense of autonomy and independence; in a sense, the institution has been able to take so much from them, but it has not been able to take away their manhood. This is most obvious in Dube and Abbott's narratives; these two prisoners repeatedly mention the pride they feel for not 'giving in' to the administration and not becoming institutionalized.

What about Prisoners' Non-Violent Coping Strategies?

So far I have analyzed prisoners' violent or aggressive coping strategies; both masculinity theory and the concept of hyper-masculinity have proven apt in providing explanations for why male prisoners may choose to, or feel constrained into choosing, certain actions or strategies in dealing with the challenges they face while incarcerated. However, as the research findings in *Chapter Four* indicate, male prisoners also cope with challenges by employing non-violent coping strategies such as using reason and logic, assessing people and situations, allying with others, avoiding certain places, people or feelings, resisting through non-violent means, keeping themselves occupied, thinking positively and assigning sense to their incarceration period.

Considering the other ways that prisoners cope then, how does masculinity theory explain these behaviours? In a sense, it does not. Some of the non-violent coping strategies challenge masculinity theory and the concept of hyper-masculinity. Three of these strategies

will be discussed below: avoidance techniques, actively changing one's situation, and gaining respect.

Avoiding certain people and situations in order to avoid conflict suggests that male prisoners are able to transcend confrontational and aggressive ways of behaving and employ strategies which may not be traditionally masculine but can be just as effective in preventing conflict as aggressive ones. Furthermore, strategies such as actively trying to change one's situation either by filing grievances or requesting transfers suggest that prisoners have some agency over their environment. In such cases, they do not have to resort to hyper-masculine behaviours to resist their circumstances. Prisoners may be able to gain respect by eliciting fear in others. As effective as that may be, the autobiographies show that male prisoners can also achieve respect through non-violent means. For example, Andreas Schroeder secures a valuable place in the prison community (and has others' respect) by typing appeal forms for other prisoners (1976, p. 131). This suggests that prisoners can resist through non-violent and arguably non-masculine ways. There is nothing traditionally masculine about these strategies. However, by engaging in such actions, prisoners are able to challenge their situation and cope more effectively with their environment.

Not only are male prisoners able to transcend the stereotypical masculine ways of coping with the deprivations of incarceration, but some are also able to challenge their situation by assigning new meanings to situations that can be perceived as meaningless. By devising a narrative of redemption (Maruna, 2001), prisoners such as Carlson, Berger, Parsell and Melnitzer are able to create new forms of identity based on the newfound lessons they learn while incarcerated. For Carlson, this involves developing an identity around helping others, while for Melnitzer, it means desisting from helping others in a false attempt

to gain their approval. In a sense, these men find other models of masculinity—ones not based on power, control and domination but on self-acceptance, appreciation and empathy.

The Verdict: Can Masculinity Theory explain the Myriad of Male Prisoners' Coping Strategies?

In conclusion, critical masculinity theory is not a comprehensive theory that can explain all types of behaviour. While this research study is unable to argue that this theory is able to explain all violent coping strategies used by prisoners, it can argue that the constructs of critical masculinity theory are better able to explain some of prisoners' violent coping strategies better than their non-violent ones.

Male prisoners use both violent and non-violent strategies in their attempts to deal with the challenges they encounter. While some aggressive behaviour can be explained by masculinity theory, the current research shows that prisoners cope with a variety of challenges, employing diverse strategies depending on the situation. Some of these challenges are of a social nature, such as conflicts with other prisoners and guards, while others are of a personal nature, such as loneliness and depression. Masculinity theory seems better able to explain the former rather than the latter.

Although hyper-masculine strategies may not represent the best ways of coping with imprisonment, in some situations, they seem necessary. In cases where physical confrontations are imminent, reasoning and logic are not likely to result in resolutions. Hyper-masculine strategies may also be useful in constructing one's reputation. The findings suggest that once a prisoner gains a reputation as someone who is tough and ready to fight, he is less likely to be victimized or provoked. On the other hand, the absence of a hyper-masculine reputation can increase one's chances of victimization. Therefore, some problematic situations may require prisoners to behave in hyper-masculine ways.

However, hyper-masculine strategies, albeit necessary in various circumstances, are not sufficient in dealing with the myriad of challenges that prisoners encounter. The autobiographies suggest that hyper-masculinity is not the only model that is conducive to coping with incarceration; on the contrary, there are many challenges that prisoners face which are best dealt with in non-violent ways. In such situations, prisoners may cope by using negotiation, conversation, reasoning, and preventive measures, among others.

It is possible that a balance between hyper-masculine and non-hyper-masculine coping strategies is the best approach a prisoner can take. The autobiographies suggest that the exclusive use of one type of strategy over another (either hyper-masculine or non-violent) can either be counter-productive (as in the case of Jack Henry Abbott or Richard Dube who used almost exclusively hyper-masculine strategies), or can leave long-lasting scars (as in T.J. Parsell's case, in which his understandable inability to protect himself against aggressive behaviours leave him life-long scars).⁷¹ On the other hand, prisoners who use a balanced approach (such as Julius Melnitzer), choose which types of strategies to use depending on the characteristics of the situation they encounter. Therefore, it seems that while in certain situations hyper-masculinity is necessary, and can even be effective, its exclusive use may actually hinder prisoners' ability to adapt to the environment and therefore be better able to cope with the obstacles they face. On the other hand, not to use such strategies at all can exacerbate prisoners' problems and can increase their risk level to the point that their livelihood can be in jeopardy.

Although this thesis did not set out to assess Yvonne Jewkes' (2205) assertion that prisoners cope with both internal and external stressors, it has found some support for this

⁷¹ Parsell states that it took him ten years of therapy to even mention to his therapist that he was raped while in prison.

supposition. Recall that Jewkes (2005) argues that in order for prisoners to successfully cope with imprisonment, they must maintain a balance between their inner self and their outer persona. The autobiographies suggest that to cope with prison culture, prisoners portray a tough outer persona. They follow the inmate code, act in hyper-masculine ways and employ aggressive behaviours when they deem it necessary. However, coping in this way cannot assuage their inner self. To do so, they can cope in non-violent ways such as keeping themselves occupied, thinking positively and assigning meaning to their incarceration period, among others.

Jewkes' (2005) theory of inner and outer coping strategies provides an adequate modality of making sense of the variety of coping strategies that prisoners employ. This theory suggests that dealing with imprisonment means more than just coping with outward threats to one's safety. It is also a deeply psychological, intimate and private matter; prisoners have to cope emotionally, make sense of their time, and ward off depression, anxiety, worries, panic, mental boredom, and lethargy in addition to physical threats to their body.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I attempted to assess the role masculinity issues play in male prisoners' coping strategies. More specifically, I aimed to assess whether prisoners use hyper-masculine strategies to cope with the challenges of imprisonment or whether they use other models of action. In doing so, I presented a compendium of research on the characteristics of the prison environment, the experiences prisoners may have while incarcerated, and the ways they may cope with these experiences. My choice of using prisoners' autobiographies as my data may have had some disadvantages, but ultimately, I believe that they have proven useful in allowing me to gather the data I was seeking. Furthermore, the autobiographies 'speak' of the direct experiences of these prisoners, something that is an integral part of this research.

While there is disagreement among researchers on what effect imprisonment has on people, this environment does present certain obstacles, deprivations and dangers that prisoners may either not face in their outside lives or may face in a lesser degree. Male prisoners may lose their privileges, rights and material possessions, but more significantly, they may lose their autonomy and masculinity. Their living conditions are confined and restricted but at the same time collective in their shared accommodations. They are subjected not only to the institutional rules of the prison but also to the culture of the prisoner collective, each with its own rules and regulations, sometimes conflicting in their tenets. Additionally, male prisoners may be physically, psychologically and sexually victimized by other prisoners or may themselves be the perpetrators of such abuse. Although some research suggests that these aspects of imprisonment do not have far-reaching consequences (Zamble & Porporino, 1988), other research argues that on the contrary, imprisonment can negatively affect prisoners' identity and masculinity (Sykes, 1958; Phillips, 2001).

Irrespective of these conditions, research supports the supposition that male prisoners actively deal with their environment by employing a variety of coping strategies (Sykes, 1958; Edgar & O'Donnell, 1998; Phillips, 2001). However, while prisoners seem to engage in these strategies of their own free will, the constricting nature of the prison environment suggests that they may be, in certain situations, coerced into choosing a certain course of action over another (although they may not realize themselves that their choices are coerced).

This thesis found that prisoners' coping behaviours are not the result of pure choice but are influenced by the rules of both the institution and the codes of acceptable behaviour operating among the prisoners themselves. Furthermore, because male prisoners' resources for enacting and displaying masculinity are limited, they may engage in certain behaviours that are not characteristic of their identity but actually reflect the characteristics of their environment. For example, in the outside world, acting aggressively would have been 'out of character' for some of the prisoners/authors, but in prison, they 'chose' to engage in such behaviours because they believed that doing so made sense in their given situation.

These findings call into question the amount of freedom of expression and action prisoners have in their 'choices' of behaviour. It may certainly be appealing to believe that prisoners have as much control over their behaviours and coping strategies as free citizens but it would be naïve to do so as well. While I do not argue that prisoners categorically lack the ability to choose their actions, I point out that it would be erroneous to overlook the impact of institutional constraints, the codes of the prison culture, and the sense of threatened identity, on prisoners' 'choice' of actions.

This thesis found that male prisoners use both violent and non-violent strategies when they attempt to cope with the challenges they encounter during incarceration. While

individual prisoners generally displayed a specific coping style, they engaged in both violent and non-violent coping strategies depending on the characteristics of the situation.

The autobiographies show that engaging in violent acts is not as much the result of clear-cut choices but in certain circumstances it is about surviving a situation or preparing for survival in the future by portraying oneself as someone not to be ‘messed’ with. In these situations, engaging in violence can serve a protective function.

Furthermore, imprisonment severely limits prisoners’ access to resources by which they could, in the outside world, avoid engaging in violent actions. Either through characteristics such as wealth or status or through the support of one’s family, or of course, by the increased choice of who one associates with, these men may have been able to avoid feeling like they *had to* engage in violence. However, in prison, these resources are absent or limited and therefore, prisoners find themselves constrained to act in certain ways.

This thesis found that while hyper-masculine strategies are sometimes helpful in resolving problematic situations— such as when prisoners perceive themselves to be in imminent physical danger or when they feel that they have to prove their willingness to fight in order to secure ‘good’ reputations—there are many other challenges—such as the psychological deprivations felt as a result of missing family, feeling bored, anxious or scared—which prisoners cope with through non-violent strategies. Like violent ‘strategies’, non-violent ones are influenced by institutional characteristics and the codes of the prison culture. However, while prison culture seems to take precedence over the formal rules and regulations, in some situations, prisoners are able to navigate these two usually contradictory influences and choose peaceful courses of action. The many examples of non-violent coping strategies found in the autobiographies suggest that although prisoners’ choices may be

constrained, they still, in most situations at least, can choose to engage in non-aggressive interactions and coping behaviours.

In conclusion, masculinity theory is better suited to explain prisoners' violent coping strategies than to explain their non-violent ones. Of course, such a qualifying statement has to consider this study's limitations. The research was not able to assess all the coping strategies that prisoners use, but a limited number of them. Therefore, it would be more apt to conclude that masculinity theories are able to explain *some* of male prisoners' coping strategies better than they are able to explain their non-violent strategies.

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