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Responding to Female Gang Affiliation:

An Analysis of Gender Construction

Melanie R. Nimmo

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
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RESPONDING TO FEMALE GANG AFFILIATION:

AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER CONSTRUCTION

BY

MELANIE R. NIMMO

A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University

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Abstract

This research is based on twenty-four interviews with representatives of different agencies in Manitoba (including criminal justice, inner-city schools, social services and community groups) whose job it is to intervene in the lives of gang women. In depth interviews explored the differences and similarities among various agency members in terms of their experiences with, understandings of, and responses to gang women. These second hand accounts of female gang affiliation contribute to the important task of making the female gang member more visible by giving us a better understanding of the material conditions surrounding female gang affiliation. This research also explores how agency representatives make sense of 'gang women' and 'female violence.' In making sense of this issue, do they locate female gang affiliation in a structural context, constructing the women as 'survivors,' as studies which have contextualized female gang affiliation would advise? Or, do they reflect popular stereotypes found in the media and traditional criminology which construct 'gang women' as 'mad and/or bad'? By critically assessing how these agencies deal with gang women and by unpacking the various discourses surrounding gender and violence, this research identifies policy implications which can inform strategies for responding to gang women. In particular, this research suggests knowledge and resource sharing amongst the various agencies who come into contact with gang women. We must also address the fact that, currently, all of the gang strategies and programs in Manitoba are created with the male gang member in mind. Further, we must provide alternatives and choices for gang women by listening to them and what they describe as their needs.

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this research to all gang women, in the hopes that it will serve as a catalyst for community involvement and dedicated efforts to meet the needs of these women. I hope it encourages options and alternatives to their troubled, harsh and violent worlds.

Introduction

Jeff Giles was a 'good guy,' a model citizen. Four days after Christmas, 1997 he had his face blown off with a shotgun. He was only twenty-two. He had been trying to get the license plate number of a van driven by robbers who held up the store that Jeff worked at in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Four gang members were later charged. One of them was a woman.

On November 14, 1997 Reena Virk was savagely beaten to death. She was kicked and beaten so badly her neck and back were broken. One week later her body was found in a suburban park in the peaceful community of Saanich, British Columbia. Eight teenagers were later charged. Seven of them were girls.

These are not the only cases. Consider the following:

> - On July 2, 1997, a woman died after being shot in the head at her home in Boucherville, Que., following her 50th birthday party. Her daughter, 17, was charged with first degree murder.
> - On March 10, 1997, a 70-year-old grandmother died after being stabbed repeatedly in the head and neck with a kitchen knife at her home in Buckingham, Que. The woman's 13-year-old granddaughter was charged with second-degree murder.
> -   In February, 1996, a 14-year-old Winnipeg girl allegedly assaulted a 16-year-old girl. Police say she was attempting to coerce the older teen into prostitution.
> - In December, 1995, Alexis Bonilla, a 17-year-old pimp who belonged to the Latino Assassins gang, was ambushed, beaten and drowned in a creek in Burnaby, B.C. Three girls were charged -- two were 14, the third 16. Two pleaded guilty to second-degree murder. The third teen was acquitted.
> - On Oct. 26, 1995, Sylvain Leduc, 17, and three other teenagers were abducted by members of Ottawa's Ace Crew gang and confined in a Nepean, Ont., apartment. Leduc was tortured to death; the others survived. One woman, then 17, was charged with first-degree murder. Three adults also face the same charge. Three teenage gang members, meanwhile, have already been convicted of lesser charges, including kidnapping and assault. (Chisholm, 1997:15)

Reading media reports about events such as these has generated considerable public unease. There is a sense that female violence and girls' involvement in gangs are not only on the increase, they are now

worse than ever. Indeed, female violence and gang affiliation have attained the status of a pressing social issue, one which demands explanation and response. This is especially the case in the city of Winnipeg, where public concern around street gangs has reached an all time high in recent years.

There are many different ways to understand the issue of female violence and gang affiliation, and many subsequent constructions of 'gang women.' For instance, media reports suggest that gang women represent a new brand of female offender; vicious, violent and more ruthless than the boys. Many of these reports imply that the women's movement is to blame (Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995:409; Schissel, 1997:44-45). Criminological research has traditionally mentioned females only in terms of their role in fulfilling the needs of male gang members, at once silencing and sexualizing them (Cohen, 1955; Short, 1968; Thrasher, 1927). According to these accounts, gang women are constructed as peripheral sex objects or maladjusted tomboys. In contrast, feminist research which contextualizes female gang affiliation locates gang involvement in terms of the role which structural inequalities (such as class and race) play in the decision to affiliate with gangs (Campbell, 1984; Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995; Quicker, 1984). These studies construct gang women as individuals whose choices and opportunities are constrained and contoured by structural inequalities in their lives.

One other site for the generation of particular understandings of female violence and gang affiliation is the various agencies (including criminal justice, inner-city schools, social services and community groups) whose mandate it is to intervene into the lives of gang women.

Given the difficulties encountered in accessing girls and women who are involved in violence and gang activities, such agencies offer an important source of information for learning about gang women. Agency representatives can provide 'second hand' accounts of the nature and extent of female violence and gang affiliation. As 'front line' workers, they are also the ones charged with the task of responding to this 'pressing social issue.' As such, they are key players in the formation and implementation of strategies for addressing the issue.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the understandings of female violence and gang affiliation held by agency representatives who are engaged in the work of responding to this 'pressing social issue.' In depth qualitative interviews are used to explore representatives' experiences with, understandings of, and responses to gang women. These respondents can provide us with a better understanding of the <u>material conditions</u> associated with female gang affiliation, those conditions which illuminate the lives of gang women and the nature and extent of their gang affiliation. A second objective of this research is to examine the different <u>discursive conditions</u> associated with female gang affiliation, the language used to describe gang women by different respondents in different agencies which reflects their assumptions of and subsequent <u>constructions</u> of 'gang women.' Ristock and Pennell (1996:114) define discourse as "a set of assumptions, socially shared and often unconscious, reflected in language, that positions people who speak within them and frames knowledge." By critically looking at <u>how</u> the respondents talk about gang women - the language they use and the ideologies they adhere to - we can uncover how they understand or make sense of 'gang women.' Their

assumptions about 'gang women' and where they locate the 'problem' of female gang affiliation reveal how they construct 'female gang members.' Nicola Gavey (1989) suggests that there are many different discourses which offer different meanings and different ways of understanding the world. They also offer individuals, in this case gang women, different subject positions. "These positions, or 'possibilities,' for constituting subjectivity (identities, behaviours, understandings of the world) vary in terms of the power they offer individuals" (Gavey, 1989:464). This research questions: How do respondents who work with gang women construct them? How much power or agency do they accord to gang women? How do those who work with gang women understand them? Given that 'violence' and 'gang affiliation' have typically been defined as 'male behaviours,' to what extent are the accounts offered 'gendered'? If so, what limitations or restrictions does this impose on efforts to respond effectively to the issue of female violence and gang affiliation?

Chapter One

Research Context: Constructing Female Gang Members

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a context for the research project by exploring the various constructions of 'gang women' which have appeared in media accounts, traditional criminological research and more recent feminist work. Media accounts provide one of the most important sources of information from which public knowledge of gang women is constructed. For this reason, attention to the ways in which the media construct female violence and gang affiliation is warranted. Criminology, given its mandate to study and explain the causes of criminal behaviour, offers another potential source of information. Nevertheless, as we will soon see, much of the focus of criminologists has traditionally been on male offenders. Women have been largely invisible and, when they do come into view, are studied in relation to their subservience to men. In recent years, however, feminist researchers have developed a more women-centred approach. In particular, there exists a growing body of qualitative research which contextualizes female gang affiliation, drawing attention to the structural realities influencing women's 'choices' to affiliate with a gang.

I. The Media: Popular Representations of Female Gang Members

The media are instrumental in shaping public perceptions and fear of youth gangs. The dramatic increase in media coverage about gangs amplifies stereotypical images of gang members and intensifies public fear of street gangs. In fact, media coverage plays an enormous part in the

cultivation of moral panics. Moore (1993:29) suggests:

> A good name for the intersection of stereotype and crime wave is
> 'moral panic.' Moral panics build on existing cleavages in the
> society - cleavages of race and class. In the case of gangs, they
> build on fear and ignorance of what is happening in the inner city.

The potency of media depictions lies in their power to simplify,
generalize and sensationalize gang activity. Fasiolo and Leckie (1993)
conducted a content analysis of Canadian media coverage of gangs from July
1, 1992 to October 31, 1992. They found that the mass media magnified the
gang problem. Violent offences were highlighted and all types of gangs
were linked to multiple crimes. They concluded that:

> The media's characterization [of gangs] centres on portrayals that
> depict gangs as being **a modern phenomenon, widespread,** and **a threat
> to society.** The media's focus, meanwhile, tends towards
> accentuating **polarization**, particularly along ethnic lines. Through
> magnification and simplification, these messages are conveyed to the
> media consumer. (Fasiolo and Leckie, 1993:22)

Media reports are often "highly exaggerated and based more on anecdotal,
rather than scientific, evidence" (Shelden et al., 1997:3). Not only do
exaggerated accounts increase the public's fear of crime, they are
political - they build on existing stereotypes and tensions within
society. "The fear of crime in general (including gang crime) has been
linked to political phenomena that are related to ethnic heterogeneity and
social change rather than to crime itself" (Shelden et al., 1997:4). At
different times in history, ethnic groups have been targeted and presented
as a threatening and destructive force in society. "Ethnicity, race and
subcultural differences have been found to play major roles in the
promotion of the public's fear of crime" (Shelden et al., 1997:4). Media
accounts and the consequent public conception of gangs capitalize on the
fact that these 'out of control' youth gangs are composed of minority

youth living in decaying urban areas. In the United States:

> Our preoccupation with youth gangs almost exclusively targets African-American and Hispanic gangs; both are reflections of ethnic minority groups that the dominant class has perceived to be the most threatening to social solidarity. (Shelden et al., 1997:5)

The 1980s saw a re-discovery of media interest in gangs.[1] There was a dramatic escalation of media coverage of youth gang activities, especially in American inner cities (Shelden et al., 1997:3). For instance, The Reed Nexis Database accessed the files of major newspapers and magazines, tabulating the number of gang-related articles. In 1983, thirty-six articles were gang-related. In 1988 and 1992, the number of gang-related articles increased to 249 and 686, respectively. In 1994, the number of gang-related articles sky-rocketed to 1,313 (Shelden et al., 1997:3). Moore (1993:29) states that the moral panic regarding gangs arose in the 1980s, in part, due to the increasing anxiety about minorities. "The real problems of minority youth and a possible underclass are effectively symbolized to the general public by the moral panic about youth gangs" (Moore, 1993:29). The increased media coverage and subsequent public fear of ethnic gangs in California in the 1980s resulted in a deluge of changes in public policy and legislation to 'get tough' on gangs (Jackson and Rudman, 1993). Whether or not the 'threat' was that immediate is open to speculation. As stated by Fasiolo and

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[1] Youth have been forming gangs since the beginning of time. For instance, reports indicate that even in the 14th and 15th centuries, citizens in London were concerned and felt 'terrorized' by organized gangs (Shelden et al., 1997:2). Girls have been involved in gangs for decades (Chesney-Lind, 1997:57). The media capitalizes on gang activity when it is socially and politically advantageous to their public appeal.

Leckie (1993:23):

> The concern with the widespread presence of gangs generates a "moral
> panic" that, paradoxically, may do more to spur the growth of gangs
> than actually combat what may not even be a serious problem to begin
> with.

Shelden and his colleagues (1997:14) problematize the very definition of

'gangs,' suggesting that it may be racially biased. 'Gang' becomes a code

word for race. They make the following point:

> If three or four white youths spend a considerable amount of time
> together, occasionally commit crimes together, and are often seen
> wearing the kinds of clothes typical of adolescents in general and
> some gangs in particular, are they considered a gang? We suspect
> that the average white citizen (and many police officers) would
> respond to this group differently than if they saw a group of three
> or four African-American teenagers hanging out together (for
> example, at a shopping mall). Perhaps this is one reason why most
> official estimates of gangs and gang members tell us that less than
> 10 percent are white and the majority are African-American or some
> other minority group. (Shelden et al., 1997:14)

To expand on this point, what makes a group a 'gang'? Marginalization,

poverty, deteriorated inner city conditions, and limited options foster

gangs (Shelden et al., 1997). Beyond this, what role do structural

inequalities play in the identification of gangs? In other words, do

racism and classism play a part in the labelling and stigmatization of a

group as a 'gang'?

In Winnipeg, the target group is Aboriginals. Only Native gangs are

consistently depicted as a threat to society. As Schissel (1997:59-60)

notes:

> Like all moral panics, however, the targets of the community's
> collective hostility were marginalized, inner city, ethnically
> identifiable youth. Ultimately, "gang" becomes a racist code word
> in the media to refer to Aboriginal and immigrant kids.

This moral panic is exacerbated when women enter the equation.

Media representations of gang women blow their activities out of

proportion, creating a moral panic about these 'new' female offenders. Indeed, the media are only interested in female gang activity if it is a particulary serious or 'evil' act (Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995:409). If it does not capture an audience, there is virtual silence surrounding female gang members. Often, media depictions exaggerate women's involvement in criminal activities, warning about their increased aggression and their immorality. Consider the following headlines:

Girl gang members more violent than boys, experts agree

(Globe and Mail Metro Edition, December 14, 1994:A14)

Female teens turning to crime at twice the rate of young males

(Toronto Star, August 12, 1995:C4)

Critical condition: women on the edge of violence

(Montreal Gazette, March 19, 1994:I4)

The '90's woman: independent, competitive and violent

(Western Report, v. 7(20), June 15, 1992:15)

Girl-Gang Violence Alarms Experts

(Globe and Mail, Sept. 12, 1995:A9)

Fasiolo and Leckie (1993:23) comment on the power of headlines and their ability to sensationalize events: "They tend to be presented to the public in such a way that incites fear and anxiety. Headlines are the most conspicuous means by which the media uses language to convey messages." The fact that many people just 'skim' the headlines, without critically reading the article, makes them all that more powerful in

shaping public opinion about women in gangs, and feeding public fear about such behaviour. Only that information which is 'shocking' is sensationalized, usually in the context of exemplifying the 'new' brand of young women, implying that our society has lost control of them and indirectly pointing a finger at the women's movement.

The 'shady side' of the women's movement has been implicated for the perceived increase in female criminal activity and aggression. Schissel, in his book Blaming Children: Youth Crime, Moral Panics and the Politics of Hate (1997), draws attention to several articles which condemn the women's movement and blame 'equality' for women's increased involvement in crime and their increased violence. One cover story article cited in his book is titled "Killer Girls," and includes a sketch of a girl holding up a gun. The introduction to the article reads:

> Girls, it used to be said, were made of sugar and spice. Not anymore. The latest crop of teenage girls can be as violent, malicious and downright evil as the boys. In fact, they're leading the explosion in youth crime. It's an unexpected byproduct of the feminist push for equality .... Modern women may have no one to blame but themselves, however. Girls after all, are only following their foremothers' lead in seizing the torch of the 1970's feminist cults of androgyny and victimhood and torquing it up to new extremes. And as they abandon traditional feminine domains for once-masculine arenas like commerce and politics, they are increasingly emulating less savory male models -- such as murderers and maimers. (Alberta Report, July 31, 1995:1 & 24; as cited in Schissel, 1997:44-45)

The belief that women's emancipation would lead to an increase in their criminality is far from novel. Since the 1800s criminologists warned against the emancipation of women and the resulting crime wave of female offenders that it would bring (Chesney-Lind, 1986:79). In the 19th century it was presumed that women could never be equal and, consequently, any attempts at liberation would merely frustrate them and cause them to

become delinquent (Heidensohn, 1985:154).

The first explicit articulation of the 'liberation hypothesis' is credited to Freda Adler, who published <u>Sisters in Crime</u> in 1975. Adler argued that the 1960s feminist movement allowed women to achieve formal equality and legal rights with respect to men, cautioning that this equality would lead to an increase in female criminality (Adler, 1975:24). While Adler was not the first to assert that women's emancipation would lead to an increase in female criminality, the media and the public embraced her conclusions, and tabloids cried out how women's liberation was to blame for the increase in female crime (Gavigan, 1993:221-222; Leonard, 1982:9).

The 'liberation hypothesis' remains popular and continues to permeate criminological thought, despite the fact that research fails to support it (Chesney-Lind, 1986:83; Gavigan, 1993:221). In reality, contextualization of female gang affiliation, from their standpoint, contradicts the liberation hypothesis. Joe and Chesney-Lind (1995:414) assert that no accounts confirm the media depiction of gang women as hyper-violent, amoral women. The 'liberation hypothesis' assumes that women have achieved equality with men, that they have 'made it,' that women's equality in relation to men is a <u>fait accompli</u> (Naffine, 1987:89). This is simply not the case. Female offenders, in general, are under-educated, unemployed or employed at temporary part-time, low-skilled jobs, and living in poverty (Chesney-Lind, 1986:81; Gavigan, 1993:224; Heidensohn, 1985:190; Johnson and Rodgers, 1993:98). Rather than women's emancipation explaining the increase in female offending, feminists point to the 'feminization of poverty' (Comack, 1996:168; Naffine, 1987:98).

Chesney-Lind (1997:57) discusses the media's current interest in female offending, and the subsequent revisiting of the liberation hypothesis. As opposed to the white middle class offender of the 1970s, female offenders of the '90s are constructed as violent Aboriginals (in Canada), and African-American or Hispanic teenagers (in the United States).

> .... [G]irls and women have always engaged in more violent behaviour
> than the stereotype of women supports; girls have also been in gangs
> for decades. The periodic media rediscovery of these facts, then,
> must be serving other political purposes .... In short, this most
> recent women's "crime wave" appears to be a cultural attempt to
> reframe the problems of racism and sexism in society. As young
> women are demonized by the media, their genuine problems can be
> marginalized and ignored. (Chesney-Lind, 1997:57)

The indictment of the women's movement as inciting female deviance fails analytic scrutiny and reflects how researchers and society in general view women's deviance differently from men's deviance. Female involvement in gangs is not a reflection of their increased equality nor their desire to be more like men. This depiction of women is informed by sexist stereotypes, a tradition of androcentric research, the conservative fear of women's liberation, and a general 'moral panic' about female offending.

This is not to deny that the majority of gang members are from ethnically marginalized groups, nor that female gang members may be increasingly violent. The problem at hand is the way that they are constructed and the lack of structural analysis in the media portrayals of gang members - female or male. For example, ethnic groups are disproportionately marginalized, economically disadvantaged, and living in deteriorating inner-city communities (LaPrairie, 1993). Media constructions, however, often omit this information and merely mention that the gang members are Aboriginal, for example. This leads the general

public to make their own conclusions as to why the majority of gang members are from an ethnic minority. In this manner, media representations build on existing racist (and sexist) attitudes held by many members of society.

Grounded in sexist, racist and classist assumptions, the media constructs gang women as hyper-violent and aggressive products of the women's liberation movement.

> Girls' participation in gangs, which has been the subject of intense media interest, certainly needs to be placed within the context of the lives of girls, particularly young women of color on the economic and political margins. Girl gang life is certainly not an expression of "liberation," but instead reflects the attempts of young women to cope with a bleak and harsh present as well as a dismal future. (Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995:428)

Stated differently, the media decontextualizes crime and attacks those who are already disempowered and marginalized (Schissel, 1997:51). In order to better understand female violence and girls' involvement in gangs, we must go beyond the stereotypes presented in the media depictions. A second potential source of information about 'gang women' is that of criminological accounts of women's involvement in gangs. However, like media depictions, the academic tradition is rife with stereotypes.

II. Construction of Gang Women: The Academic Tradition

As with criminological research in general, the overwhelming majority of gang research continues to render women invisible. Discussions of female offenders are typically premised on stereotypical notions of femininity and sexist role expectations. Female offenders, already vulnerable to stereotypical depictions, are further marginalized when their actions are gang-affiliated.

> Few phenomena studied by social scientists are as easily stereotyped as gang violence ... Usually research is a cure for popular stereotypes, but gang research is different. Much of it does not seem to cure any of the mistaken notions. Often the typical methods and theories applied to the study of gangs simply buttress the stereotypes. (Moore, 1993:27)

Female gang members, if considered, have been viewed by male researchers, using a male-centred perspective, in terms of their roles in relation to male gang members. When approached from this perspective, female gang involvement is sexualized and over-simplified. As Campbell (1990:166) notes:

> In early writings girls were defined solely in terms of their interpersonal and structural relations to male gang members. They were also described through three layers of potential distortion: their roles were described by male gang members to male researchers and interpreted by male academics.

Most of the research on women in gangs has focused on their secondary status to men or as sex objects for men (Campbell, 1990:166; Molidor, 1996:252). "Girl members typically are portrayed as maladjusted tomboys or sexual chattel who, in either case, are no more than mere appendages to boy members of the gang" (Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995:412). Their deviance is usually attributed to psychological problems or their inappropriate sex-role behaviour, specifically their presumed 'promiscuity' (Campbell, 1987:451).

In his classic study of gangs, Thrasher (1927) devoted three quarters of a page to suggest that there were so few all-girl gangs that they were basically non-existent. He commented on girls who affiliate with male gangs: "Such a girl is probably a tomboy in the neighborhood. She dares to follow anywhere and she is ill at ease with those of her own sex who have become characteristically feminine" (Thrasher, 1963:158). Eventually, however, these women assume their 'characteristically

feminine' roles. The reader gets the sense that if a woman affiliates with a gang, it is a temporary aberration and she will eventually come to her senses and assume her 'natural' feminine role. "They took the roles of boys until they began to wear their hair up and put on long skirts" (Thrasher, 1963:161). The maladjusted tomboy comes to her senses.

Cohen (1955) takes great interest in the supposed promiscuity of girls who affiliate with gangs.[2] According to Cohen, women use their sexuality to 'win' dates because their primary concern in life is to marry.[3] Cohen (1955:144-147) goes to great lengths to describe the delicate balance that women must maintain between sexual attractiveness and sexual accessibility. Consequently, women's deviance is primarily sexual in nature. It is fundamentally different from male deviance. While male delinquency is 'versatile,' female delinquency is 'specialized': "It consists overwhelmingly of sexual delinquency or of involvement in situations that are likely to 'spill over' into overt sexuality" (Cohen, 1955:144). Cohen is not interested in any other role or activities engaged in by the women. Women's affiliation with gangs is seen solely in terms of the sexual role they fulfil for male gang members.

Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) classic work, Delinquency and Opportunity - A Theory of Delinquent Gangs, virtually ignored women. Their only

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[2] While prostitution is often a part of gang life, it is not a reflection of gang women's 'loose' attitudes. Rather, prostitution is one of the only ways in which women in these circumstances can obtain money. It is a logical means of survival (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1992:37-42).

[3] To Cohen's credit, he does recognize that these are not innate 'feminine desires' but, rather, socially proscribed roles. In the 1950s, a woman's master status was in fact dependent on her marital status. My point is that Cohen, a product of his cultural time, mentions women only in relation to their sexuality and concern with the opposite sex.

mention of women is in reference to problems associated with female-centred households. In 1960 the New York City Youth Board published Reaching the Fighting Gang. This three hundred page document explored gang formation, structure, and activities in depth. One paragraph mentioned women and commented only on their auxiliary status to male gangs (New York City Youth Board, 1960:32).

Short (1968) suggested that women joined gangs because they were less attractive and more socially inadequate than those who did not join gangs. Short and Strodtbeck (1965:242) described the gang girls as follows: "The girls are not, by and large, attractive by conventional standards either with respect to physical appearance or behaviour." No mention is made of the 'attractiveness' of the male gang members. Short and Strodtbeck (1965:242) go on to discuss how some programs attempted to teach the girls how to dress, walk and wear make-up. They comment that the results were often 'grotesque' yet 'comical.' Throughout the entire book, the girls are only discussed in terms of their sexuality, with a particular interest in their supposed promiscuity and any subsequent 'illegitimate' births.

In sum, the majority of traditional criminological research only mentions women in terms of how they fulfil the male gang members' needs - physically, sexually and/or emotionally. This construction of female gang members is incomplete and distorted; the women are sexualized and silenced.

III. Feminist Research: Contextualizing Female Gang Affiliation

In the last two decades feminist criminologists have pointed to the invisibility of women within criminological literature and criticized the tradition of androcentric research which, when addressing female offenders, decontextualized and sexualized their activities (Gelsthorpe, 1989; Heidensohn, 1985; Naffine; 1987; Smart, 1976). With respect to gang women specifically, recent research in the United States constructs a very different picture of gang women than that traditionally reported in androcentric research and in the media. It illuminates the women's lives both inside and outside of the gang from their own perspectives. Rather than characterizing female gang members as hyper-violent, angry, liberated and promiscuous, these qualitative studies draw attention to structural conditions which influence these women's lives.

For instance, Anne Campbell (1984) spent two years as a participant observer with three female gangs in New York City. From 1979 to 1981 she utilized qualitative research methods of participant observation and in depth interviews to explore the lives of these gang women. Notably, she states that "these young women are stigmatized by ethnicity and poverty as well as gender" (Campbell, 1987:463). They are usually unemployed, not attending school, have no money, and have little access to recreational resources (Campbell, 1990:176). Gang women typically come from dysfunctional, often abusive, families. They witness parental domestic violence, divorce and remarriage. Their home lives are characterized by family breakdown, violent childhoods, abusive and alcoholic parents (Campbell, 1990; 1993). Their neighbourhoods are typically violent, plagued with high crime rates, poverty, and alcohol/drug abuse (Campbell,

1987:459; 1993:135). The predominant reason women gave for joining the gang is for protection, especially from rival gangs (Campbell, 1987:459).

In addition, Campbell's research suggests that gang girls hold very conservative notions of femininity. Female offenders, generally, do not adhere to feminist values. Rather, they hold more traditional and conservative sex-role views than non-criminal women (Alder, 1992:267; Chesney-Lind, 1986:85; Chunn and Gavigan, 1991:289; Gavigan, 1993:224; Naffine, 1987:101). Liberated women are actually **less** delinquent. Campbell (1990:180) observed during her interviews: "When both sexes are present, the girls tend to remain quiet, allowing the boys to do most of the talking." The men view women as mere sexual property, in need of dominance and control.

> Once an exclusive romantic relationship had been established, the male would feel free to exert control over her public behaviour and demeanour .... During the summer, the boys would not allow their girlfriends to wear shorts or low cut T-shirts on the street. (Campbell, 1987:461)

This hardly sounds like 'liberated' women.

As previously outlined, traditional research equates female delinquency with sexual promiscuity. Campbell's findings suggest otherwise. While some segments in society have made headway in challenging the sexual double-standard, this is not the case for most of the working class population (Campbell, 1982:145). Serial monogamy is the enforced norm, as the women control and monitor each other's sexual behaviour (cf. Lees, 1997). "Gang girls exert strong normative control over one another's sexuality, as do working-class girls generally" (Campbell, 1990:179). They believe a woman should be completely loyal to her 'man.' Infidelity is always the 'other woman's fault' because men cannot 'help it,' nor are they expected to (Campbell, 1987:462).

Chesney-Lind and Shelden (1992) interviewed ten young women in the juvenile justice system. In direct contrast to the liberation hypothesis, all of them expressed very stereotypical views of masculinity and femininity. One woman who aspired to be a 'housewife' commented: "I think women belong in the kitchen. In my opinion, I don't think women are supposed to work [for wages] ..." (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1992:173). Rather than liberated aspirations, these young women espoused conservative and traditional gender role precepts. Female gangs have a low status in the gang world. Women who are involved in co-ed gangs, or exclusively female gangs affiliated with male gangs, are considered utterly subordinate (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1992:46).

Joe and Chesney-Lind (1995) conducted in depth interviews with self-identified gang members in Hawaii. Thirteen of these gang members were girls. Significantly, the authors suggest that exploration of the social context of gang affiliation points to the intangible benefits that gang membership provides for these youth:

> One of the major conclusions one draws from listening to these young women and men is that the gang is a haven for coping with the many problems they encounter in their everyday life in marginalized communities .... On the broadest level, both the girls and boys are growing up in communities racked by poverty, racism, and rapid population growth .... Clearly, for both males and females, the gang provides a needed social outlet and a tonic for the boredom of low-income life. (Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995:426-427)

According to Joe and Chesney-Lind, under conditions of poverty, violent neighbourhoods, and dysfunctional and often abusive home lives, the gang takes on the role of a 'surrogate family.' The gang provides support, solace, and protection. "Many of the impulses that propel youth into gangs are prosocial and understandable - the need for safety, security, and a sense of purpose and belonging" (Joe and Chesney-Lind 1995:428). In addition, the gang offers 'something to do' in communities racked with

poverty and few recreational resources. Poverty translates into limited opportunities, few career options, and no marketable skills (Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995:413). Being poor means being bored; gangs provide a social outlet (Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995:419). Alienation from the mainstream is part of the boredom. The gang lifestyle and activities offer some excitement, something to do and talk about to counter their boredom.

Two other recent studies also point to the intangible benefits derived from gang affiliation. Mary Harris (1994) conducted interviews with twenty-one present and former female gang members in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles. She found that the gang provides support and a 'sense of belonging' for these women. The gang serves as a socialization vehicle which offers companionship, develops norms, and enforces sanctions. Again, the gang, for these young women, becomes a surrogate family.

Molidor (1996) conducted in depth interviews with fifteen female gang members in a residential treatment facility in Texas. When asked why they joined the gang, two themes emerged: (1) the sense of family that the gang provides and (2) the feeling of power, in terms of respect and protection. Congruent with the studies discussed previously, Molidor found that these women came from economically marginalized and dysfunctional families. "In addition, the majority of the young women's neighbourhoods were rife with poverty, alcohol and drug use and distribution, and gang violence" (Molidor, 1996:253). These women primarily come from impoverished inner-city communities, with economic restraints permeating the institutions they encounter. Their schools are

overburdened and understaffed, allowing for 'at risk' kids to fall through the cracks (Molidor, 1996:255). Gang women are under-educated, often at least two years behind their peers (Molidor, 1996:252).

These studies suggest that gang women are economic and social victims of the social system because of their race, class and gender (Campbell, 1990:173). They are also often victims of violence and crime in their homes and communities. Victimization and abuse are predominant themes of the women's lives, be it from family members, acquaintances or strangers. There is little institutional and structural support, creating a dismal present and a despondent future. The gang offers protection, acceptance and safety from the routine violence at home, at school and on the street (Campbell, 1993:136; Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1992:49; Harris, 1994:293; Molidor, 1996:254).

By locating the women in their structural context, female gangs emerge as a collectivity of peers that is not always criminogenic in nature. Like their male counterparts, females join gangs primarily for the familial support and the protection they provide (Campbell, 1990:175; Harris, 1994:293; Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995:413; Molidor, 1996:254). As stated by Chesney-Lind and Shelden (1992:49), the gang provides "the skills to survive in their harsh communities while also allowing them to escape, at least for a while, from the future bearing down upon them." Following this, affiliation with the gang exemplifies a coping strategy, not liberation. Far from being liberated, these women face a bleak future. Over 80% of these women will raise children alone and the majority will live on welfare (Campbell, 1990:182).

IV. Discussion: Constructions of Female Gang Members

As the preceding discussion illustrates, there are many different ways to construct, or make sense of, 'gang women' and 'female violence.' The various constructions depend on the preconceptions involved, the motivations for reporting, and the nature of the experiences with 'gang women.' Driven by the profit motive, the media have a vested interest in sensationalizing events and captivating an audience. Further to this, the media have traditionally been guilty of generating public anxiety and moral panics. With few exceptions, the mainstream media have also played on conservative ideologies, often sexist, racist and classist in nature. As such, female gang members are typically constructed as the evil, violent, male-like products of the women's movement.

Traditional criminological research constructs a slightly different picture of the 'gang woman.' She is typically invisible, always peripheral, and viewed primarily as an object fulfilling male gang members' needs. This is consistent with the androcentric nature of most criminological research.

Feminist criminologists have begun to challenge androcentric theories and methodologies. Research which takes women as the starting point constructs a very different picture than those depicted in the media and traditional criminology. These studies locate female gang members in terms of the structural realities which have an impact on their lives. As a result, a more complete picture of gang women emerges. Far from being 'liberated' and 'promiscuous,' these studies construct gang women as poor, under-educated, under-employed, often of a minority race, and living in deteriorating inner-city conditions. Furthermore, these studies suggest

that these women hold quite conservative notions of 'femininity' and know 'a woman's place.'

Many Canadians have increasing become concerned about 'gang problems' in their inner cities. Winnipeg, Manitoba has made national headlines with respect to its 'gang problems.' Despite media attention and public anxiety, there remains little academic research on street gangs in Canada. The overwhelming majority of gang research emanates from the United States, with only a handful of Canadian Reports (see, for example: Correctional Service Canada, 1995 & 1996; Fasiolo & Leckie, 1993; Gordon, 1994; Mathews, 1992 & 1998). Not only do we need to know more about female gang members, we need to know more about female gang members in Canada. What conditions do they live in? What are their demographics? Why do they join the gangs and what gang activities do they engage in? How is gender negotiated within the gang? The preceding discussion, particularly the research emerging out of feminist criminology, delineates some of the material conditions surrounding female gang affiliation in the United States. What are the material conditions surrounding female gang affiliation in Manitoba, Canada? The preceding discussion also raises another question. There are different constructions of female violence and gang women emanating from media, traditional criminology and feminist sources. The question remains: <u>How do those individuals who have direct contact with gang members construct gang women</u>? Do these constructions vary from media and academic accounts? Do they vary between the agencies themselves? Do respondents' constructions of gang women influence their intervention strategies?

Feminists have pointed to the gendered nature of the legal system

and the criminal justice system in particular. Part of the power that the criminal justice system embodies is the power to define. Rafter (1990:384) suggests that gender-related variables affect both how offenders are constructed and the treatment they receive by criminal justice personnel. Similarly, Worrall (1990) argues that criminal justice agents operate with gendered notions of 'typical' offences and 'typical' offenders. In a study of females who sexually abuse children, Nelson (1994:75) notes that police responses are greatly affected by gender constructions and the gender appropriateness of the act:

> Inasmuch as police may utilize gender schemas to assess the seriousness of an allegation and the appropriateness of case resolution they may, in the realm of sexual offenses committed by females, effectively redefine the operative legality of the criminal law.

How, then, do criminal justice agencies define the 'problem' of female gang affiliation? Are their responses to, and constructions of, female violence and gang women gendered? If so, do those constructions differ from other agencies whose mandates bring them into contact with gang women? To what extent do the constructions of these various agencies coincide with or diverge from the media, traditional criminological and feminist criminological accounts? What implications do various constructions hold for the treatment of and response to gang women?

On the basis of the above discussion, a number of lines of inquiry become evident. First, drawing from the feminist literature, it would appear that, in order to fully understand the situation of female violence and gang affiliation, attention must be directed toward the context in which gang women find themselves; that is, their material and structural conditions. Second, given that gendered notions of crime and violence

exist in our society, what are the discursive conditions surrounding female gang affiliation? How do those representatives who work with gang women understand or construct them? Third, the constructions held by agency representatives directly translate into how they <u>respond</u> to female gang members. In other words, we must examine the implications of the constructions of 'gang women' which inform the strategies for response. Subsequent chapters will illuminate the material and discursive conditions surrounding female gang affiliation, and explore what those conditions mean in terms of responding to female gang members. Before doing so, however, the methodology which informs this study must be clarified. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Methodology

I. Research Goals and Design

This research is based on interviews with representatives of various agencies who, in the course of their work, come into contact with gang women. It explores the experiences that they have with gang women and how they understand or make sense of those experiences. Representatives of different agencies and organizations were asked a standard set of questions delineated in the interview guide (See: Appendix A).

The objective of the research is three-fold. First, through second-hand accounts, this research will illuminate the extent and nature of female gang affiliation. Who are these women/girls? Why are they involved in gangs? How involved are they in gang-related activities? How violent are they? What material conditions have an impact on their lives and influence their 'choice' to join a gang?

A second objective of this research is to unpack the various discourses informing the ways in which these agency representatives deal with gang women. How do they make sense of 'gang women' and 'female violence'? The various agencies come into contact with gang women for different reasons, may have different experiences with gang women, and may have different assumptions and agendas that influence how respondents make sense of 'female gang affiliation.' Further, given that crime, gang affiliation and violence have typically been defined as 'male' behaviours, how do they understand females who engage in these activities? To what extent are their constructions of 'gang women' premised on stereotypical

and sexist assumptions?

Finally, exploring the discourses around gang women allows for a consideration of the implications of those constructions in terms of responding to gang women. What does it mean if those who work with gang women construct them as 'mad' women or ultra-evil? How do those constructions translate into their responses to these young women? What does the construction of gang women as 'other' suggest for response strategies? What are the response recommendations of respondents who, like feminist criminologists, locate gang women in terms of structural inequalities which have an impact on their lives? Importantly, this research questions how the perspectives on gang women inform the ways in which agency representatives respond to this compelling social issue.

II. Research Site and Sample

Winnipeg, Manitoba has developed a reputation as the 'gang capital' of Canada. The gang-related killing of Beeper Spence in 1995, the Headingly Correctional Institution Riot in 1996, and the fatal shooting of Jeff Giles in 1997 brought the 'gang issue' into the public forum and gave Winnipeg national attention. The Winnipeg community has responded to this issue by implementing several initiatives. The Winnipeg Police Service developed a specialized 'Gang Unit' in 1995. Since 1997, the Gang Prevention Coordinator oversees monthly meetings of the Inter-Agency Gang Coalition, which consists of various community agencies in the city who discuss their knowledge of and responses to the 'gang issue.' Beginning in 1997, the correctional institutions in the province responded by creating the position of 'Gang Coordinator' within each institution. The

intense concern over the rise in gang activity in Winnipeg makes the need for this research all the more pressing. Further, the fact that women have been involved in many of the gang-related crimes, beatings and murders further accentuates the need to know more about 'gang women.'

There are a range of organizations, agencies and individuals whose work brings them into contact with gang women. Twenty-four in depth interviews with agency representatives form the basis of this research.[4] In selecting the sample, I sought to get a broad range of respondents who come into contact with gang women for different reasons. In particular, I considered the primary job mandates of the different agencies and the reasons they were coming into contact with gang women. I created three occupational groups based on these criteria: (1) Criminal Justice agencies; (2) Social Services; (3) Community Based agencies. I then purposively sampled the respondents in the following manner:

1. Criminal Justice - This group is comprised of eleven individuals who deal with female gang members in conflict with the law (Winnipeg Police Service Street Gang Unit; Probation Services and Adult Corrections with the Manitoba Department of Justice; Manitoba Youth Centre; Portage Correctional Institution; Winnipeg Remand Centre). The primary mandate of these agencies is to detect, control and monitor individuals in conflict with the law;

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[4] In total, I conducted twenty-six in depth interviews. Two interviews were omitted from analysis because the participants felt they did not have any experience with gang members. In one case, the respondent who worked in a group home suggested that she did not come into contact with any gang women. In the other case, one interview with two respondents from an 'outreach' agency had such limited contact with clients generally, they felt they couldn't make any conclusive statements about those that may or may not be gang affiliated. For the purposes of this research project, then, the sample size is twenty-four.

2. Social Services - Six individuals work in government and social service agencies (individuals who work in inner-city 'at-risk' schools; Child and Family Services; MacDonald Youth Services; Street Gang Prevention) make up this group. The primary mandate of these agencies is to manage and provide social services and guidance to high risk youth;

3. Community Based - This group consists of five individuals work in community and aboriginal organizations in contact with gang members (Rossbrook House; Native Alliance; Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre; Inner City Youth Alive; Weetamah Salvation Army). The primary mandate of these agencies is to empower and provide alternatives to marginalized and high-risk individuals, often youth.

The gender distribution was equally disbursed between women and men across the sample, with twelve female and twelve male respondents in total. The majority of individuals fell within the age bracket of thirty to thirty-nine years of age. In total, seven of the twenty-four respondents described their ethnic origin as Aboriginal. One of these respondents was from the Criminal Justice group, two were from the Social Services group, and four were from the Community Based group. Two respondents 'chose not to' specify their ethnic identity. One was from the Criminal Justice group and the other was from the Community Based group. The average education level was Grade 12 with some additional training courses. When asked about aspects of their 'personal history' which may have prepared them for dealing with gangs, many of the respondents cited various occupational training courses. Six of the

respondents, three from the Social Services group and three from the Community Based group, described personal histories which gave them 'first hand' knowledge of the 'street world.' The majority of respondents agreed that, in terms of their occupational duties, the reality of the 'gang problem' in Manitoba only emerged three to five years ago.

The fundamental difference between the respondents is that the agencies they work for come into contact with gang women for different reasons and, presumably, have different basic assumptions and agendas with respect to dealing with gangs. Accordingly, one would expect that they will have different conceptions of, and strategies for, dealing with gang women. These different assumptions may be formed because of: (1) different ideological starting points; (2) different organizational mandates; (3) different strategies for dealing with gangs; (4) the individuals within the different agencies differ in their personal orientation, training and assumptions about gangs and gang women; and (5) different exposure to and experiences with gang women, so that respondents get to know female gang members in a different way. For instance, we may expect that correctional officers adhere to a more control-oriented, punitive approach which, in turn, influences how they respond to and understand gang women. Native organizations, on the other hand, may respond to gang members in a more empathetic manner with the goal of empowerment.

The different agencies come into contact with gang women for different reasons and, consequently, may attract gang women with different characteristics and life histories. As such, the broad sample ensured that the research covered a diverse range of the possible material

conditions associated with female gang affiliation, those conditions which illuminate the lives of gang women and the nature and extent of their gang affiliation. The sample also allowed for the opportunity to examine the different discursive conditions associated with female gang affiliation, the language used to describe gang women by different respondents in different agencies which reflects their assumptions of and subsequent constructions of 'gang women.'

III. <u>Research Questions</u>

The interview schedule (See: Appendix A) was broken down into four main sections: (1) the nature of the respondents' work; (2) their exposure to and experiences with gang women; (3) their understandings of gang women; and (4) their responses to gangs and gang women.

1) Nature of Respondents' Work

In this section of the interview, I wanted to find out why and under what circumstances the various respondents come into contact with gang women. For example, what is their job mandate? How do they identify gang members? What is their definition of 'gang' and how is 'gang affiliation' determined? What is the organization's basic strategy for dealing with gangs and gang women? This gave me a general sense of the various agencies' approaches toward, and exposure to, gang members generally and female gang members specifically.

2) Respondents' Exposure to, and Experiences with, Gang Women

In this section of the interview, I wanted to know about the nature of the respondents' experiences with female gang members. What do they know about gang women because of their direct experiences? How many gang women do they deal with? What is the ratio of female to male gang members? What material conditions do respondents describe as surrounding female gang affiliation? What are the demographics of the gang women they come into contact with? What activities, legal as well as illegal, have the respondents heard of gang women engaging in? What do the respondents say about the 'gang hierarchy' and the roles and status of women within the gang? In addition, respondents were asked their opinions on whether or not 'gang women' appear to be reflective of a 'new' female criminal. This section of the interview yields some basic information, albeit second-hand, regarding the demographics and activities of the female gang members the respondents come into contact with.

3) Respondents' Understandings / Constructions of Gang Women

In this section, I directly asked respondents about their 'theories' of female gang affiliation and female violence. I left these questions very opened-ended in order to give space for their understandings of gang women to emerge. What do their 'theories' suggest about their underlying assumptions about 'gang women'? In turn, what do those theories and assumptions reflect about the respondents' construction of 'female gang members' and their location of the 'problem'? While the entire interview reflects the discursive conditions surrounding female gang affiliation, in this section I purposely set out to expose the respondents' constructions

of female gang affiliation.

4) Respondents' Strategies and Responses to Gangs and Gang Women

In this portion of the interview, respondents were asked about their strategies for responding to female gang members. What intervention and prevention strategies do they suggest for gang members generally? I also asked the respondents if and why we should respond to female gang members differently. What do respondents say about the possibility of leaving the gang? Further, the answers to these questions allow for a discourse analysis of the respondents' recommendations. What are the implications of their constructions of 'gang women'? How do their constructions of 'gang women' influence their overall outlook with respect to dealing with the 'gang problem' generally and 'gang women' specifically? Do they suggest optimistic or pessimistic outcomes? Do they have hope for these women?

IV. Data Collection

Representatives of the different agencies and organizations were initially contacted by mail to inform them of the nature of the study and my desire to interview them (See: Appendix B). The letter indicated that I would telephone them within a week to request their participation in the project and to set up an interview time. I subsequently met with the respondents at an agreed upon date and time. Twenty-four of the interviews took place at the respondents' work establishments and two interviews took place in personal residences. Interviews ranged in duration from 45 minutes to just over two hours. All of the respondents

consented to having the interviews audio-taped, and many felt comfortable enough with me to turn off the tape recorder and share information 'off the record.'

I began each interview by thanking them for their time, and introducing myself and the research project. I outlined the measures that I would take to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, assuring them that I would be the only person to hear their taped interviews. I then explained the research requirements of informed consent and requested their signature on the consent form (See: Appendix C). The consent forms do not request a full printed name, only a signature. The consent form identifies myself and the research project, delineates the measures taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, and provides the phone numbers of myself, my advisor, and the Sociology Department. Two copies of the consent form were signed by the respondent as well as myself. One copy was for them and the other for me. I assured the respondents that the signed consent forms would be kept in a separate locked file, untraceable to individual interviews, and that I would destroy all of the consent forms upon completion of the research project.

Following the interviews, I made general notes in my journal, reflecting on each interview in general. How did the interview 'feel'? What were my thoughts on the content? How were the interpersonal dynamics between the respondent and myself? The journal enabled me to keep a record of the many 'insights' that occurred during the data gathering process that I may have forgotten if not written down immediately. No matter how much I disagreed with a respondent's opinion, I always appreciated and respected their commitment to the issue. For example, I

was perplexed by the way one woman constructed gang women as pseudo-men and evil by-products of the women's movement. Yet, while in her office, she took phone-calls and I saw her interacting with and responding to clientele. She was a sincere, considerate, empathetic, good person. She did her job well and gave 100% of herself. Journal writing not only helped me to make sense of some of my own feelings with respect to the respondents and the data gathering process, it kept me focused on the objectives of the research.

V. Data Analysis

I began my data analysis with the constant comparative method. Kirby and McKenna (1989:128-129) explain:

> The schema illustrates an analysis which is based on dynamic relationships between data, between categories and the changing links between categories. Part of the dynamic is created by the researcher's efforts to simultaneously live with the data and make sense of the data. During this time, the researcher constantly reflects on both the data and the process of analyzing it. In this way, analysis emerges from the information at hand. The other part of the dynamic is created by the researcher's constant moving, back and forth, between data and concepts, and between individual ideas and research explanations in order to fully describe and explain what is being researched. This keeps the researcher constantly vigilant for new understandings at all analytical points.

I first made multiple photocopies of each transcribed interview, securing the original interview transcripts in a separate file. I then proceeded to read and re-read the interviews, taking note of various themes emerging from the data. I had already made some preliminary notes of emerging themes while transcribing the interviews.

In trying to manage the data, I was constantly confronted with the issue of trying to discern 'objective' facts about gang women, from what were 'subjective' interpretations about gang women. So often, I felt

frustrated and uncertain about how to manage and present the data. I even noticed that, as I was doing my initial analysis and trying to make some sense of the material conditions, and as I grouped the data, drew connections, and started organizing the data by themes, I almost lost sight of the discursive underpinnings in my desperate attempts to present the 'facts.' Then, when I went back to the transcripts, it seemed that everything was permeated with subjectivity and interpretation, and there were, in fact, no 'facts.' Could I say anything with confidence? I was constantly confronted with trying to decide what I should present in the 'material analysis' and what belonged in a 'discourse analysis.' For example, how should I manage the 'motivations' for gang involvement? On the one hand, there are particular material conditions which all of the respondents, and a history of academic research, suggest (for example, a strong motivating factor is the 'sense of family' that the gang provides). On the other hand, other 'motivations' that were suggested clearly needed to be analyzed 'discursively' (for example, females join gangs for emotional reasons while males join gangs for socioeconomic reasons). Another issue that comes to light is my own theoretical positioning and reflexivity. My own personal experiences, intellectual training, and interpretation also influenced the management of the data. Ristock (1998) suggests that all three of these issues must be addressed within the research.

Not only should we identify material and discursive conditions, but we must identify ourselves, our researcher position. In discussing her research on lesbian abuse, Ristock (1998:333; emphasis mine) suggests:

> It is not a disregard for the lived experience of lesbians and gays, but a commitment to it, that pushes boundaries around categories and

turns them inside out, showing that 'findings' are never neat and tidy facts that we can present unproblematically. I find in the **material** tale a way of recognizing the participants' valuable contribution to the production of knowledge about lesbian abuse, in the **discursive** tale a way of pushing the limits of understandings available to us, and in the **reflexive** tale a much-needed check on the subjectivity behind the academic research.

Ristock's article was particularly influential in helping me to resolve my data management dilemma. It helped me to understand my difficulty in trying to separate the 'material' from the 'discursive' conditions, and reaffirmed that my difficulties were 'normal' and necessary. There are grey areas between material and discursive conditions. We must push the boundaries and challenge assumptions that research is 'neat and tidy.' Rather, knowledge is political. We must recognize the structural, ideological, and personal influences involved in the process of 'knowledge production.'

I present the data in three sections: (1) analysis of the material conditions surrounding female gang affiliation; (2) analysis of the discursive conditions surrounding female gang affiliation; and (3) analysis of how the respondents' response strategies are guided by their understandings of female gang members. In other words, what are the implications of the various constructions of 'gang women' in terms of how these front-line workers respond to them?

In terms of managing the 'material conditions' aspect of the research, I used the interview guide as a template to organize the presentation of the data. The interview guide (See: Appendix A) consists of particular sections that I used to broadly situate the various themes; for example, "What are the demographics of the gang women they come into contact with?" and "What activities do they know of the gang women

participating in?" Once I made note of apparent themes, I then went back to the interview transcripts, cutting and grouping various 'snippets' and quotations into the themes. I also ensured that each quotation was coded so that I could trace it back to the original interview. I then cross-referenced the themes and developed main categories, identifying common properties amongst the various themes. I also noted discrepancies in the data and seemingly incongruent themes. In this manner, I was able to gather some basic information regarding the lives of female gang members and their participation in the gang.

In order to analyze the 'discursive conditions,' I began with clean, unmarked transcripts. I began drawing 'hurricane charts' of themes that were emerging. As described by Kirby and McKenna (1989:146-147):

> One strategy for understanding links between categories uses an approach called hurricane thinking. The research question is written in the centre of a page. This is the 'eye of the hurricane.' Category names on little cards are moved about the page until those which have the strongest ties remain closest to the centre and those with less obvious or weaker ties sit at a distance. Then lines (linkages) are drawn between each category and the centre, with darker lines denoting stronger links. After repeating this process several times, a researcher who knows the data well will be able to see patterns of relations which, at least temporarily, will describe the data.

I noticed that there were different theories about 'female violence,' both its incidence and its 'causes.' Also, there were different theories on what motivated women to join gangs. After systematically working and re-working the hurricane charts, I began to notice that particular constructions of 'gang women' were emerging. Specifically, I noticed that the respondents used particular language to describe 'gang women.' The manner in which they spoke of female gang members often reflected deeper assumptions and constructions of 'gang women.' After doing more hurricane

thinking, and thematically organizing the emerging characteristics of gang women, I differentiated two different constructions of 'gang women.' In fact, these constructions have a history in terms of how female offenders have been understood; that is, they are congruent with the constructions discussed in the previous chapter.

All research entails an element of researcher bias and interpretation which necessitates critical reflexivity on the part of the researcher. In order to address the validity or authenticity of my analysis, I made sure that all of the respondents' voices were heard. I also re-read the transcripts many times and ensured that the respondents' comments were not taken out of context. As previously mentioned, I kept a separate journal which served as a record of my thoughts and assumptions throughout the research process - a running log of my 'conceptual baggage' (Kirby and McKenna, 1989:32). Ristock (1998:310) has called attention to the need for the researcher to locate or situate herself in the research process. This requires both a personal and a theoretical reflexivity. I will now outline my own personal history as well as the particular theoretical position which I bring to the subject matter.

My own personal history greatly influences not only my interest in gang women but, also, the way I understand them. While I do not share the inequalities and experiences of being Aboriginal in a racist society, I do share other demographics consistent with that of a 'typical' female gang member. I grew up on the 'wrong side of the tracks,' raised by a single mother in subsidized housing. I began running away at the age of fourteen. By the age of sixteen, I had quit school, was renting a shack of my own, and lived next door to bikers .... I have knowledge of 'the

street.' While my experiences have primarily been with biker gangs, a close relative of mine worked the 'low track' for one of the street gangs in Winnipeg. Given my own history, I approach the issue of female gang affiliation quite differently than someone who grew up in a middle class family and went straight into university. I know the 'codes of behaviour,' the street subculture, to a large extent. I have intimate knowledge of how women are treated within biker gangs. I know what it is like to grow up very poor. However, my empathetic ability ends there. I engaged in many 'street activities,' but I was never initiated into a gang. I never prostituted. As I mentioned before, I have not suffered racial discrimination, nor the systematic history of abuse and family disintegration that many Aboriginal women face.

As a socialist feminist,[5] my academic training alerts me to the structural inequalities, in particular, those influenced by patriarchal domination in a capitalist society, which influence and constrain women's lives. Patriarchy, the social and structural condition of male domination, comes in different forms and varies historically and culturally. In our patriarchal capitalist society, women are the underclass (Radosh, 1990:126). Put simply, in a capitalist society paid labour (read: men's labour) is valued while unpaid labour (read: women's labour) is devalued. The state, institutions, and dominant ideologies

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[5] Feminists, generally, attempt to explain, understand and de-construct women's oppression in society. There are many different threads of thought within feminist discourse (for example, liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism). They have been explicated elsewhere, however, and delineation is not necessary for the purpose of this thesis (see Tong, 1989; DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 1996).

serve to reinforce and perpetuate patriarchy.[6] Women who choose not to

be dependent on men, more often than not, face poverty.

> As a result, women are both economically and psychologically
> dependent upon men. Moreover, women's inequality is perpetuated not
> only inside the family but also outside, in the workplace, where
> many work at so-called pink-ghetto jobs, often part-time, for much
> less pay than men in comparable positions. (Chunn and Gavigan,
> 1991:291-292)

The 'feminization of poverty' could well explain women's participation in

property crime. "Clearly, shoplifting, welfare fraud, and prostitution

are rational acts from the perspective of economically marginal women who

want to feed their children and keep their families together" (Chunn and

Gavigan, 1991:292). Women who work outside the home most often work a

'double day' (Heidensohn, 1985:189). Furthermore, the jobs that are

available to most women are largely ghettoized - 'pink collar work' with,

more often than not, a male supervisor. Again, women are lower on the

hierarchy, with men controlling their behaviour at home and at work.

Consequently, women, to varying degrees, experience structural

inequalities because of their gender. Women of colour and/or low economic

status experience further marginalization and alienation. Historically,

however, socialist feminist thought has failed to adequately address the

structural conditions of racism and the social history of colonialism.

Comack (1996:30-31) recognizes the current 'shortcomings' of socialist

feminist theory, yet argues that the approach remains a useful starting

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[6] Many feminists contend that the state serves to control women and
maintain patriarchy (Chesney-Lind, 1986:78; Gavigan, 1993:216), often
reinforcing their inferior position in society through social policies
maintaining the economic dependency of women (Heidensohn, 1985:190). This
issue has been discussed extensively elsewhere. See: Currie and Maclean,
1992; Klein, 1981; and Snider, 1994.

point for analysis of the <u>structural</u> conditions which influence women's

law violations:

> Nevertheless, socialist feminism is not without its shortcomings. Although it has located class and gender in the spheres of production and reproduction, it has not clarified how other forms of inequality and difference are to be situated within the socialist feminist problematic. In particular, the existence and perpetuation of racial hierarchies and racialized understandings that priorize Caucasians over people of colour - including indigenous and so-called 'third world' populations who have suffered under colonialism and imperialism - has not been adequately incorporated within socialist feminist theoretical frameworks ... I would argue that we cannot lose sight of the role that structures like capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism and imperialism play in conditioning and limiting the choices that individuals make as they go about their daily lives. In other words, while we need to acknowledge that individuals possess power and make choices, social power is unevenly distributed along a number of different axes - most notably, of class, gender, and race.

While recognizing its limitations, socialist feminism remains a valuable

analytical tool for understanding the 'social placement' of female gang

members.

While I did my best to let themes 'emerge from the data,' I

acknowledge that my 'conceptual baggage' and academic perspective 'ground'

my research and influence how I construct gang women. In the feminist

tradition, I locate female gang affiliation in terms of structural

inequalities which have an impact on women's lives. I construct female

gang members as survivors, reacting to their situations as best they can.

I want to clarify at this point that I do not construct these women as

innocent and/or helpless victims. I recognize that these women find

themselves in particularly disheartening conditions conducive to violence

and gang affiliation. This does not strip them of agency and culpability.

My perspective and my motivations for conducting the research are

political. I do not claim to be 'value free.' Nor do I claim to approach

the issue 'objectively.' This is impossible. Consequently, my analysis of the discursive conditions was influenced by my conceptual baggage. Similarly, I approached the implications of the various constructions of gang women from a particular personal and theoretical position. In recognition of my 'bias,' I present my analysis of the research data. In particular, I will discuss how the constructions of 'gang women' translate into particular responses to female gang members.

The following chapter will illuminate the material conditions which have an impact on female gang affiliation. According to the respondents in this study, this is what they describe as the nature and extent of female gang affiliation in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Chapter Three

Material Conditions of Female Gang Affiliation

The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on the characteristics and activities of female gang members in Winnipeg, Manitoba. At the outset, it is important to note that the information presented here derives from second hand accounts of the nature and extent of female gang affiliation, and that the various respondents construct 'gang women' differently. Consequently, the line between objective 'fact' and subjective 'interpretation' often becomes blurred. While analyzing the data I was constantly confronted with trying dismantle what was 'real' – what was the 'Truth' – from what was merely subjective interpretation, and based more on personal opinion or hunches than what was the 'reality' in the gang. What could I say with confidence? How could I separate discursive conditions (the subjective understandings and constructions of female gang members) from what the respondents said about the characteristics of female gang members and the material conditions which have an impact on their lives? The relationship between <u>subjectively understanding</u> female gang affiliation and <u>objectively recounting</u> it is a dialectical one. Stated differently, the way that the respondents understand or 'construct' gang women (discursive conditions) may also have some bearing on how they describe the nature and extent of female gang affiliation (material conditions). Nevertheless, it is the latter which will be the focus of this chapter. The discussion begins with a demographic profile of the type of 'gang woman' with whom respondents come into contact. From there, I will delineate what respondents suggest about

the basic motivations for gang involvement, the gang hierarchy and structure, and the possibility and circumstances of exiting the gang. In the subsequent chapter, I will address the discursive conditions surrounding female gang affiliation; the subjective understandings which influence how the respondents construct gang women.

I. How Many Gang Women Are Out There?

It is difficult to define and measure the actual number of gang members generally. Definitions of what constitutes a gang member vary. A Correctional Officer relayed the following definition of 'gang':

> A group of individuals who collaborate together for anti-social reasons. Generally, [they] have a leader or leaders, wear colours, certain types of clothes, tattoos, brands or other identifying marks on their bodies. [They] may use certain types of hairstyles and communicate though the use of signals and graffiti on walls, streets, school work and school property. (CJ8:26)[7]

The Criminal Intelligence Service of Canada (CISC) and the Winnipeg Police Service incorporate the commission of an illegal act in their definition of a 'gang':

> A group of persons consorting together, on a formal or informal basis, to engage in unlawful activity. (RiverEast School Division / Continuing Education, 1996)

The majority of the agencies involved in this study did not have an explicit definition of a 'gang,' but utilized various objective and subjective criteria to determine gang membership or affiliation. The standards utilized by the Winnipeg Police Service were the most

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[7] The notation used to identify each respondent first presents their occupational group, then their interview number, followed by the page number of their individual interview transcript. For example, the notation of 'CJ8:26' signifies that this respondent was the eighth interview categorized in the Criminal Justice occupational group. This particular quote fell on the twenty-six page of that interview transcript.

'objective':

> We have a six point [set of] criteria that we devised that was
> established by the Criminal Intelligence Service of Canada that are
> based in Ottawa and the criteria [are] an attempt to objectively
> identify people as either associates or verified members. That
> being said, the criteria still often has to be interpreted
> subjectively ... (CJ1:4)

The National Police Gang Criteria are as follows:

> An individual is identified as a gang member if three of the
> following six point criteria are met:
>
> 1. involved in a gang motivated crime (i.e. for the support of,
> protection of, or enhancement of the gang);
> 2. identified as a gang member by a reliable source of information
> (i.e., police, schools, probation services, known gang members,
> preventative security file);
> 3. observed association with gang members;
> 4. acknowledged gang membership;
> 5. court rules the subject is a gang member; and/or
> 6. common and/or symbolic gang identification or paraphernalia
> (RiverEast School Division / Continuing Education, 1996).

Different criteria designate an individual as a gang 'associate' or

a gang 'member':

> For a gang member to be considered an associate he or she may only
> have to meet one of the six criteria. For a gang member to be
> considered a verified member, they have to have [criterion number]
> four which, in the criteria, is involvement in a gang motivated
> crime, as well as any two other of the remaining five criteria.
> (CJ1:4)

Other agencies use more 'subjective' standards to identify gang

members, such as informal experiential knowledge and 'hunches' - they 'can

just tell.' Typically, respondents said that they considered

characteristics and defining features that are known to be gang

affiliated, as well as personal hunches and second hand information. One

respondent suggests:

> There's certain things you look for in a person. There's certain
> things, certain tattoos, certain colours that they wear, that will
> identify them as gang members. Certain ways that they'll even hang
> up a telephone that will identify them as a gang member. Plus, they

> flash signals ... [S]ome of the signs they may flash, without you knowing that they're flashing a sign. You can tell by haircuts. You can tell by different, various things. (CJ7:2)

Each gang has its own distinguishing attire or 'colours':

> You just got to look for the rag, whatever rag they're flying; red, blue, black, gold. They all have their different colours. The Adidas track suits that are two sizes too big. Usually you'll see the Sisterhood wearing that, black with white stripes. I.P. wear that as well, both male and female. (CJ7:21)

The problems with defining 'gang' and identifying gang members have been recognized and debated since the study of gangs began. Indeed, rarely is there a consensus or the exact same standards applied to the classification of gangs. Methodologically speaking, this compounds difficulties in studying the phenomenon of gangs. This situation is exacerbated when we try to estimate the number of female gang members. This is because 'gang affiliation' is considered to be a male behaviour. Women have rarely been labelled as gang 'members,' even when their gang affiliation is relatively obvious. One respondent explains the policy at her agency:

> I think it goes back to people talking about females and males differently. A male that's acting up is gang affiliated, gang involved ... Very rarely would someone refer a youth to me, and, let's say her name was Tara. 'Tara is heavily involved with I.P.' or 'Tara is an I.P. member.' You don't hear that. You hear 'Tara's boyfriend is I.P.' It's connections, it's affiliations with the girls. You rarely hear someone say, 'So and so is a gang member' when it comes to females, at least with the youth. 'They're going out with a gang member.' Or, it seems to be explained that they're hooked up through family connections or something like that, but you don't hear them say that they are this or they are that. So, we would often document that as, 'So and so's affiliated with Deuce,' but not necessarily document them as a gang member ... And not to say there's not female gang members, because there is. But I don't think I've ever had a teenage girl described to me as an actual gang member. And maybe they are a gang member, but it's never been brought to my attention that way. (SS14:7)

With this said, estimates in Manitoba are that from 10% to 50% of

all gang members are female. Some Community Based agencies service clientele who are almost exclusively gang associated. For example, if all the clients are from a poor area of the inner city or North End in Winnipeg, chances are that the majority of them will have gang ties in some way. If half of that clientele is female, the respondent then suggests that half of the gang population that they come into contact with is female. Consequently, not only does the identification of female gang members depend on the agency's particular strategy for identifying gang members and individual subjectivities, but also the clientele that the particular agency comes into contact with. One respondent working in a Community Based organization found that there were just as many female gang members as male. In fact, out of the youth she worked with, proportionately more women were involved in gangs.

> And in that ratio [of females that she works with], in a year, out of a hundred, I would say 80% are involved [in gangs], to some degree ... So, in terms of a ratio, I think there's a little bit lesser boys, like 70% are involved. So, it's less than the females .... (CB20:8)

Another Community Based respondent suggests that the overwhelming majority of females she works with are gang affiliated:

> So, I think throughout the week ... at least 75% or 80% are gang affiliated. Yeah, it's the minority of girls who aren't gang affiliated with gangs. (CB22:5)

However, according to respondents working for the Winnipeg Police Service and Probation Services, only 14% to 25% of all gang members are female. Those respondents who work in Manitoba's Correctional Institutions (Portage Correctional Institution, Remand Centre, and Manitoba Youth Centre) estimate that only 10% of all gang members are female, with the number of females who are gang members varying, at any given time, from

20% to 50% of the female inmate population.

II. Characteristics of Gang Women in Manitoba

The characteristics of the 'typical' female gang member, as described by those who work with them, offer a picture of a woman whose life is constrained and contoured by structural inequalities of race, class and gender. In this sense, female gang members are not that different from female offenders generally (Carlen, 1988; Chunn and Gavigan, 1991). An exploration of the characteristics of female gang members points to what is lacking in their lives, which often translates into their motivations for joining a gang in order to have those needs met.

1) Female Gang Members and Poverty

The female gang member is typically young, single, unemployed and undereducated. The age of female gang members ranges from as young as eleven years old to the late thirties. One respondent discusses the age range of female gang members who have come into contact with the law and have subsequently been incarcerated:

> Younger than most female offenders. Probably comparable age to the male gang members. At least the ones we've run into. You're dealing with two separate populations. If you're dealing with the youth population, we're probably picking up gang members around 14, 15 years old. They are **firmly** committed by 16, 17, 18 years old. In the adult system, it's between the sort of 18 to 22 years old. Whereas, other inmates that we have in the system, some of them may be in that age range, but they tend to be a little bit older than that. (CJ3:18)

Another respondent suggests that the overwhelming majority of juvenile

offenders in the Manitoba Youth Centre are gang affiliated:

> Most of the juveniles coming out of the [Manitoba Youth] Centre are gang affiliated, unfortunately ... They have a major problem there. We call it the 'crib,' or the birthing ground, of gang members at the Manitoba Youth Centre. (CJ12:5)

Gang women most often live in extreme conditions of poverty. Low socioeconomic status typically involves living in deteriorating inner city neighbourhoods characterized by poverty and high crime rates. The respondents in this study suggest that female gang members live in the inner core of Winnipeg; the North End and Central areas.

2) Female Gang Members and School

Inner city conditions usually entail schools that are understaffed and overburdened, allowing for 'at risk' kids to fall through the cracks.

> A lot of them don't finish school. A lot. I would say 80% ... A lot of them are failing a lot of their subjects. Or, a lot of them have dropped out. And they're only, like, 16 [years old]. A lot of them find it real hard to concentrate in school. And a lot of them don't really get a lot of help from their parents after school because the parents aren't home ... (CB22:21)

> What are the schools doing to respond to this? Kicking them out. I know so many kids who are shopping for schools. Although, by law, they're supposed to be in school. And, by law, a school can't reject a kid. But they do, you know? So we've got all these kids, we've got special school programs popping up all over the city, trying to respond to kids not being in school. Kids aren't busy. Kids aren't active. (SS14:22)

In fact, the gang actively discourages any involvement or aspirations with respect to schooling.

> They're the at risk kids in school. The ones that don't show up. Attendance is poor. A lot of them get kicked out of school. Some might commit crimes, like assaults, in schools. Intellectually they can handle it, it's just the social circumstances. The gang life plays a part in it, too. (CJ6:11)

> They do very poorly in school. I think the whole profile of a gang member is socially disadvantaged, from poor areas of town, very little hope or very slim hope of continuing their education or completing their education. Very little hope of gaining employment at some point in their lives or, if they do, of having significant ongoing employment. The same is for females as for males. So, they are generally undereducated or not educated at all. And they are unskilled. And, they are socially and monetarily disadvantaged. (CJ1:16)

Gang girls are typically two to three years behind their cohort in school. Their average education level is junior high (grade 7 or 8). According to the majority of respondents in this study, it would be very rare to come across a gang member who had achieved a grade 10 education level. The majority of gang girls end up being kicked out of school, usually for gang related incidents and chronic truancy. Echoing this theme, when I asked one respondent about the typical education level, she replied:

> Probably grade eight. That would be the average. They probably dropped out when they're 15, 16, whatever. Most of them would have failed a lot up until that age, and then just dropped out totally. (CJ4:16)

3) Family Backgrounds of Female Gang Members

All of the respondents in the study suggested that female gang members endured horrible home lives.

> They've been abused. They come from poor socioeconomic situations, an abnormal home life, neglected, sexually, physically abused, unwanted, felt that nobody cared for them ... (CJ8:5)

> Things at home are not stable. And it's not all because, uh, I know a lot of the moms and dads. They're not bad people. It's just, they were young themselves when they had their kids. They're totally, uh, there's no job. They weren't able to stay together. So, they're living apart, you know? Just a lot of chaos. And little girls taking care of their sisters at 11 years old. As soon as they get old enough to break loose from having that kinda stuff imposed on them, they break loose. A lot of girls, they're like 9 or 10, and they're taking care of 2 or 3 brothers and sisters. (CB21:13)

The gang women are typically exposed to parents and extended family with severe alcohol and drug problems. Many of the girls have suffered physical and sexual abuse by family members. In fact, the majority of them have a history of abuse - emotional, physical, and sexual. As children, these girls are neglected. They grow up with a lack of supervision, attention and love. Not surprisingly, there are no positive role models in their lives.

> A lot of times there is alcohol and drug abusive families, physical abuse, sexual abuse. I don't want to generalize that, but that's often the case. I have a lot of young women now, their moms are still addicted to coke, you know. There's so much coke on the streets right now, that their mom's are struggling with trying to get off the stuff. So, they're unable to help their daughters, you know, be there for them. (CB20:19)

Another respondent describes a similar scenario:

> The backgrounds of them would be just like any other potential gang member. They have problems at home. They come from a single parent family. They have problems with academic skills in school. They smoke. They drink. Their parents drink. Their parents may have alcohol and drug problems. They haven't been brought up in a home where they've been taught really strong values, and strong, you know, beliefs, in the home. So, all those things really play a real role in one's ability to stay away from that kind of lifestyle. (CB23:9)

Further, in Winnipeg, gangs have reached third generation status. This, in turn, means that young women are exposed to gang affiliation from very early on in their lives and, for many, gang life is 'normal.' Generational gang involvement usually means that the children of gang members are 'blessed' into the gang - and the next generation of 'gang babies' is born.

4) Female Gang Members and Racial Marginalization

The overwhelming majority of identified female gang members (as well

as male) in Winnipeg are Aboriginal. One respondent, while describing the

demographics of female gang members, points to the fact that many of them

are Aboriginal:

> Most of them come from single parent families, mother only. Most of
> them come from lower class background. Most of them come from the
> inner city areas of Winnipeg. A large number of them are
> Aboriginal. (CJ3:28)

> A lot of them are Aboriginal. Yeah, the ones that I work with,
> almost all of them that I work with are Aboriginal. (CJ6:7)

Estimates range from 60% to 98% of all female gang members being

Aboriginal, depending on the agency and what area of the city is involved.

For example, a Community Based agency which specifically services an

Aboriginal population reports that over 90% of gang members are

Aboriginal. Another agency whose mandate is to service youth who have

been ordered by the court to do community service orders (CSO's) reports

that, while the majority of gang members are Aboriginal, a substantial

number of White youth are increasingly involved in gangs.

The Winnipeg Police Service reports a higher percentage of female

gang members being Aboriginal, compared to the percentage of Aboriginal

male gang members.

> The composition of street gangs in Winnipeg, generally, is about
> 75% Aboriginal. Perhaps it is higher right now. With females, it's
> at least that, and I would say probably quite a bit higher. It'd
> probably be closer to 85% Aboriginal. (CJ1:14)

Overall, female gang members, like their male counterparts,

represent the impoverished, marginalized and alienated segment of society.

Gang women are individuals without power in our society. As the next

section of this chapter outlines, the gang provides them with the sense of

acceptance and power that is missing from their lives. As described by one respondent, they have little hope in achieving or accomplishing much more. Another respondent replied to my question, "What do you know of the background of these women?":

> Speaking for the majority, they'd be Aboriginal women. Probably from broken homes and lower social class. Probably very little family structure, or if there is, no family support ... Probably low self-esteem. No hope for a future. No hope and opportunity for the future. It's very sad when you meet with little kids who are seven or eight years old and you say to them, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' and they say, 'I never thought about it.' It's very sad. (SS18:9)

III. Motivations for Gang Involvement

1) A 'Sense of Family'

The gang provides these women with the things they lack in their lives - a sense of power, purpose and acceptance. The 'sense of family' provided within the gang is one of the major motivations to gang involvement.

> People join gangs for safety, acceptance. It's pretty much expected of them, too. We're hearing about a lot of kids who are second, third generation already, and those are the kids with very, very hard core ties. You know, their brothers are involved. Um, protection. Their needs aren't getting met at home. Financially, they're being reimbursed by being in a gang. It starts out real fine and dandy. The kids doesn't have any money. All of a sudden, somebody is buying them all these clothes and giving them all these things. And then, all of a sudden, the individual has to pay the gang back by doing this or that or the other thing. So they get a lot of things that they're not getting from society. They're getting needs met that we're not meeting, parents aren't meeting, schools aren't meeting. So, yeah, that's why they join gangs. (SS14:15)

> The kids that are coming from dysfunctional families, what they're doing is seeking out another family. Although gangs are dysfunctional families as well, but, at least they feel that they may have a little more control. At least the care is there. (CJ10:10)

They join the gangs for all the things that they don't have, things that they are lacking. The majority of the kids that get into gangs have little or no family life. No support at home. Or anywhere, I guess. They needed to be needed and wanted. Their support and comfort seemed to come from the kids on the street. (CJ12:16)

Other respondents agree. The gang fills certain needs. In particular, the gang makes the women (and men) feel a sense of belonging, purpose, like they have a 'family' backing them in a harsh world. Consider the following comments:

.... [T]hey start very young, in their early teens, and they want to be cool. And that's part of it. But they have no one saying, no one giving them standards. I think that's where it mostly comes from. They haven't got anybody giving them proper guidelines ... [T]hey haven't got the love and the nurturing that they need at home. So, they're looking for it somewhere else. Their gangs are their 'family', their 'bros' ... They don't feel like they belong anywhere. So it gives them that sense of belonging, that family. And you'll hear that from the girls, 'This is my family.' (CJ13:6)

I think there's that whole idea of needing to be connected up, and feeling like you have a lot of support, protection, and a replacement for family. I really do believe that the ones that are in there, really have really unstructured, really out of control, childhoods from the beginning, from the get go, and really are searching to find somebody that can protect them, or that can make them have a sense of family or belonging. That's one aspect of it. (CJ4:23)

You look at some of these houses where they [gangs] have their parties. Every kind of dope you can imagine. Booze just flowing through ... [A]nd it's like, 'We'll be your family. We can provide you with a roof. Look at the good time we're having. No one's being judgmental here. You know, we can protect you if you're getting hassled going to school. Or whatever, waiting at the bus-stop. You can call your buddies over and we'll take care of that for you.' So it's that same way, you know, 'We can give you, we can give you, and support you, and we'll take care of you, and your parents won't.' Or these kids have gone through eight trillion foster homes and they wouldn't trust an adult within 30 miles of them. All of sudden they've got these peers that are going 'Oh, come on, we like you. We like you the way you are. And you can do some stuff for us. And look what we'll give you back. And one big happy family.' You hear that a lot, like they've [gangs] replaced families. (CJ11:18)

2) Recruitment of the Vulnerable

The gang recruits those who are vulnerable, offering them acceptance, security, fun, money, power and instant gratification.

> Broken homes, father [and] mother out drinking, don't care, um, kids out on the street at an early age, 8, 9, 10 years old. They're influenced by the people that they think care about them, the gang members, the people around them, the kids on the street, who try to help them, keep them out of trouble, keep them from getting beat up. So, basically, it turns out to be an I.O.U. type of deal. 'For saving your life, you owe me this much.' It's a never ending circle, is what it is. (CJ7:6)

Young, marginalized and alienated youth are particularly vulnerable and susceptible to gangs.

> With youths, they don't have to be criminals before they're taken into the gangs. The gangs will turn them into criminals. They just have to be impressionable. They just have to be manipulatable and, uh, vulnerable, and that's [the gang] their life line. They have so much access to it in the schools. They have so much access to it in the street, the local hang out, the [Manitoba] Youth Centre, the shopping malls, 7-11 ... we have kids that are 5 and 6 telling us what gang they want to join when they grow up. It's not a good thing. And by 8 to 11, uh, they're already that way ... by 12, 13 they're sworn gang members. (CJ1:43)

This respondent describes a particularly effective recruitment strategy:

> It's very common for us to be out on patrol and surveillance, in particular, this has happened many times, and to see a large limousine driving down, let's say Selkirk Avenue in the North End, and watch the limousine, and in the back are 3 or 4 gang members, often times teenagers. Youth gang members who legitimately rented the limousine. And, in the back with them are 3 or 4 prostitutes, no doubt liquor, no doubt drugs. So they have a big party in the back of the limousine that they've paid for. What we've seen happen is that they'll pull up beside a 13, 14 year old guy or girl walking down the street and what they're saying to that person is, is, 'If you join the gang, you can have this tomorrow. Ride in the back of this limousine. Party with us. Lots of money, anything you want. Have a great time. Join the gang and you can have this tomorrow.' Now, we, on the other hand, symbolically are saying, 'No, no, don't do that, go to school. Work real, real hard for five dollars an hour. Someday when you graduate you can be working at a place that will pay you minimum wage.' Now, if there's no significant moral programming that's taken place at that home that's going to let them know that this is bad, this is not bad. What choice would you make? Instant gratification, total acceptance, and total independence, or

working like crazy for nothing? That's sort of, to simplify things, what we're up against a lot of the time. And that is not an isolated thing. Limousines, especially in the summer time, are the vehicle of choice for gang members. When they're not stealing cars, they like to rent limo's and drive around in them. We've had them casing places for B & E's and robberies in limousines, you know. (CJ1:33)

Another respondent, working in Corrections, describes the same recruitment strategy and its powerful motivating influence:

I don't know if you're aware of this, but the Deuce have the tendency to ride around the city of Winnipeg right now in stretch limos. Young guys going around in stretch limos, girls in the back seat, open liquor, so on and so forth. It's like an army recruiting poster. And they drive through these neighbourhoods and they say, 'Heh, this is my life. How's your life?' You know? And if you add on top of that, parents that are, you know, second generation, third generation inner city core type of thing or just off reserve coming into Winnipeg, no supports, no nothing, living in tenuous neighbourhoods, and so on and so forth. And you've got poor people sometimes making some basic decisions as to how I'm going to survive this week, how's my kid going to survive, how can I get him [sic] to school and back, and so on and so forth. The gang becomes a viable alternative. So, you have those kinds of dynamics operating within the inner core. (CJ3:29)

Runaways are particularly vulnerable. One respondent who works for Child and Family Services comments:

And what happens to our kids when the go on the run is **not good**. It's horrendous what happens to our kids when they go on the run. There are people out there who prey on them, **big time**. (SS15:13)

Other times, they join the gang for shear protection:

A lot of those people aren't there by choice, they're there for necessity. They do it to be safe too. To be safe from the gangs, they have to join them. (SS19:4)

It's also protection. It's protection as well. Because there's certain areas of the city that are specifically certain gangs. And, a lot of people just join gangs, not because they're particularly delinquently oriented, except that when you're walking down the street, you want to have association with the people that are out there. You don't want your clothes being stolen. You want some protection. Especially if there's other gangs coming around, too. You want them to know that you got back up, too. So, it's protection. (CJ10:10)

I know there's this little girl, and here's a classic story. This little girl came into town [Winnipeg]. Her family came into town from way up North, from a reserve. They had to come to town because a sibling required medical intervention on a monthly basis. So they had to move the city because it's the only way that they can keep this child alive. So they move in, whole big family comes down, and they're living down in the West side somewhere, not too far from Health Sciences [Centre] because they're there all the time. And this little one is, like as naive, and as totally unsophisticated as anybody could be. So she's out there, and it's like she's got a big "V" on her face, you know, like victim. 'Come, here I am. Take advantage of me.' So, the I.P. [Indian Posse] girls in the neighbourhood are just giving her a heck of a time, just all over this kid. They eventually kidnap her, these other girls from I.P., keep her in an apartment for the weekend. They're basically saying, and they're threatening her with all kinds of stuff, and they want her to go work for them. You know, turn her out [to hook on the streets]. She's scared to death. Like, she doesn't, she's got no experience with anything like this ... [The] next thing we know, she joined Deuce so the I.P. would leave her alone. They have to do this. Like, for this kid to safely walk from the moms house to the bus stop, which was probably ten houses, and wait there to catch a bus, was like a mine field in Bosnia for her ... So protection and safety is a huge motivating factor, I think, for any of these kids. (CJ11:34)

3) Expected Gang Affiliation

In many cases, gang affiliation is expected, even mandated. One respondent recounted a story of a girl who fought the peer pressure to join a gang as long as she could.

The latest one that I had contact with, she's 12 years old. She's a gang member now. She fought it. She kept coming to me for about a month. She fought it, trying to stay away from [the gang]. She didn't want to have anything to do with it. Because of her friends, her family, the sort of lifestyle, where she lived, it was just all around her. And her friends kept saying, 'Oh come on, come on. Join, you got to be part of us.' She would hang around with them, but she was never a member. It was I.P. She was in my teen sunday school class ... and she kept trying to come, and I kept talking to her, 'Well, how's it going?' And she said, 'I'm starting to do more bad things.' And then she came one Sunday, and she pulled out her rag, and said, 'I'm a member. I was initiated in over the weekend.'

> She was 'jumped in,'[8] beat up, and she had to do something. I'm afraid she's going to have to do a lot more. (CB24:5)

In fact, in their world, gang involvement is such an expected route to follow that anyone who doesn't join a gang is suspected of being a 'rat.' A 'rat' is the negative label of an 'informant,' usually for the police or other such authorities. The implication is that a 'rat' can never be trusted. One respondent, who interviewed a female gang member for this project, suggests that there are only two alternatives in the gang member's mind: join the gang or be a rat.

> (What about someone with these high risk characteristics but chose not to be in a gang?)

> From the gang members' point of view, it's either a rat or an informant. (CJ8:23)

Given the inner city conditions, and the predominance of gangs, some parents not only turn a blind eye to their child's gang involvement, but encourage it.

> We have some information that now suggests that the Deuce ... are now becoming popular enough inside the inner core that you actually have parents suggesting to kids that if they're going to join the gang, they should join the Deuce. And when you start to get that kind of a dynamic, when you have parents telling kids to join gangs, because they think that's better protection, and, 'Besides, the Deuce share their wealth a lot better than the I.P. do. The Deuce are more sophisticated. The Deuce have ties with the Manitoba Warriors ...' (CJ3:29)

> .... [T]hey live above where the Manitoba Warriors live, and they're constantly partying. So they [Manitoba Warriors] bring, like, they're very good. The girls say, 'Because they bring us money, as a way of apology. Because nobody could sleep,' sort of thing. But nobody wants to report them because they don't want those consequences. So, that's what I mean. It's just so enculturated. (CB21:9)

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[8] Getting 'jumped in' is another term for getting 'beat in' to the gang. This is an initiation ritual involving a specified number of gang members who beat up the 'initiate' for a specified amount of time.

In other cases, the entire family is gang affiliated and the individual has no choice but to join.

> I know of situations where it's the moms who were controlling the weapons for the gangs. They stored the weapons for the gangs and received 'benefits' for doing so. (CJ6:14)

> In this area, [the gang is] so family related. Like, there's just large groups of one family, and large groups of another family, like cousins, or step-sisters, or whatever, and they're all in the gang somehow. It's like one big family. It's kinda like this network thing. Their brothers and then their sisters are [in the gang], and so we have some younger girls that are, like, 10 years old, that are in this family network of gang stuff. And, they're in it. (CB22:4)

4) Los Angeles Wannabbee's: The Media and Gang Glamorization

Many respondents commented on the effects of the media with respect to desensitization to violence. Another effect that the media have propagated has been exposure to and glamorization of the Los Angeles street gangs. 'Colours' was the first and most influential street gang movie to date. The powerlessness of marginalized and alienated Black youth in America is countered by the excitement, the sense of family, the money and the drugs, and the undeniable 'power in numbers' which gang membership provides. It is not a far leap to postulate that Canadian Aboriginal youth can relate, in many ways, to the history of socioeconomic marginalization and alienation experienced by the Black youth in the United States. One respondent commented:

> Yeah, a lot of the influence that kids in Winnipeg react to is the influence from the States, as far as what street gangs are doing down there in Los Angeles ... [T]he term '187,' which you see in their graffiti, that stands for the California Penal Code section for homicide and it's used as a death threat between gang members or between rival gangs. Certainly none of the gang members here in Winnipeg would know what the section for the Criminal Code of Canada is for homicide. They don't know that but they do know the California Penal Code section for homicide. So, I think all those things tell you that there is definitely an influence from south of

the border. They get it through movies. They get it through books. Many of the gang members we arrest high on coke driving a stolen car are playing, uh, gangster rap in stolen cars in a tape recorder they brought with them. So there's a strong influence from south of the border. (CJ1:7)

The same respondent continues:

I do know that here in Winnipeg certainly the influence from the States had a bearing on it - the gang slang, the way they're talking, the way they're walking, the way they're dressing. It's all very American, East L.A. gang stuff ... They're all playing the role. Their pattern of speech will change. They change their talking, from as I'm talking now, suddenly when there's more gang members present they revert to what we would consider 'Black talk,' like in East L.A. Kind of like a speech, like that street type of speech that you see on t.v. and talk shows. It has no basis in Winnipeg's reality. It's not a cultural reality here in Winnipeg. It's an influence from the States. They're using the same terminology. They're putting the same inflections and accents into their voices that they would see the Black rap musicians or gang members in the t.v. shows and movies.

(Women as well?)

Women as well. They use the slang and talk the talk the same. The gangs all try and flash hand signals and things, but ... they don't know what it means, so they'll stand there and go through the motions, but it's meaningless. They just know that's what you're supposed to do. They see it on t.v. In the gangs down in the States there's a whole language by hand signs. Winnipeg gangs are trying to learn that, but they're way behind in that. (CJ1:36)

The youth gangs that they're starting [in Manitoba] are based on the American experience. Everything that they do. The music. The clothing. The names. The signing. You know, some of the symbols they tattoo. It's all American. It's not like they've invented something new. They've borrowed it. (CJ11:4)

Youth often have a glorified notion of what 'gang life' is all about. Our society glamorizes the whole notion of a 'rebel' subculture. At the same time, the media presents both a glorified and sanitized depiction of what it would be like to be an 'outlaw gangster.'

I think that a lot of the kids want to self-identify, 'cause right now they see [the gang] as something neat to belong to. They don't realize the dangers. (SS18:1)

> Do you think, for moment, these kids would be acting like this, in these kinds of gangs if they hadn't been influenced by t.v. and the media? I don't really think so. (SS19:13)

The glamorized notion of 'the gang' promises excitement and parties. It embodies rebellion and counters the boredom experienced by those who are alienated from the mainstream.

> Yeah, and the power that comes with it, that you're all dressed up like them, and you're thought of as a 'gangster.' ... And one girl said, like, she says, 'Jane'[9] it's the parties too. At home, you know, there's nothing. My mom's a drunk, and she's always trying to slice her up arms, you know. So I go away and I can access whatever drugs I want, and drinking and whatever.' And she's says, 'There's always a party. There's always a big party. There's always drugs. There's always booze. There's always food. There's always everything. And they're always having fun.' And so when you think of it that way, how do you replace that for some kid who has nothing at home ... So who wouldn't go to where the draw is? It's a big huge party where there's drugs. If you're using drugs, it's free, it's easy, and there's people who've lived a similar lifestyle, so that whole peer support. And she's got nothing to do with her time. Nothing. (CJ4:15)

5) Power: The Ultimate Rush

Not only does the security of 'the gang' provide a sense of family and belonging, but the 'backup of the gang' offers the woman an immediate sense of protection and power. Suddenly, she has the clout of the gang behind her. Others fear her. Considering the abuse histories of the majority of these women, coupled with the fact that they are structurally powerless and alienated in society, the gang provides immediate and tangible demonstrations of power.

> And, unfortunately, you have the gang element in there, and you have the attitude there, you have the whole mentality of the gang, and it's like, 'Don't fuck with us, because you know, we're bad. We're in a gang. And if you mess with us, me and my boys or my girls are going to come down on you, and we'll take care of you. Like we

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[9] Like all other names used in this text, 'Jane' is a pseudonym.

demand respect, because we belong to Indian Posse.' So, once this girl, who's never experienced that joins this gang, automatically her self-esteem goes up. Because she feels she's a part of something. Because she's getting respect right away. Because everybody fears her. Because she's part of this group now. And, nobody will challenge this group because they're in fear, because they're scared they're going to get beat up. So they stay away from the group. So, the group can go right through the school, and everybody will move out of the way, you know. (CB23:10)

These are people who frequently don't have a lot of acceptance in any other part of their life ... Once you're past the initiation ceremonies, you get this sort of - it's not unconditional acceptance - but it is probably more acceptance than they've ever had before. Probably more protection than they've ever had before. Probably more power than they've ever had before. The ability to make other people scared of you is a **huge** attraction to some of these people. (CJ3:20)

We, as a society, have become increasingly desensitized to violence.

There's so much [violence] that is acceptable in society, you know, with videos and movies, 'gangsta' rap songs. I mean, it's played over and over again, 'kill the mother fucker' and all this stuff ... I don't know about you, but when I was growing up and listening to music, I would listen to the words, and a lot of the words would mean something to me. So whether you like it or not, music and videos and all that stuff is very influential on the kids .... (CB23:13)

For those who have little or no power in their lives, violence is

the most immediately effective way of getting it.

Then another aspect, I think, is that whole idea of really wanting to feel, you know, some sort of power. That whole idea of fame. That whole idea of people looking up to you. Having a reputation of being, 'Oh look it, that guy's a Deuce. That guy's an I.P. Or, that woman is connected with the gang. Or, she's got a gang guy who's really cool, and he's giving her stuff.' That's part of it. So that whole idea of fame or power or recognition that comes with it. (CJ4:23)

Most significantly, the gang provides these individuals with

immediate power. The easiest and quickest way to grab power is through

violence. We, as a society, have become desensitized to violence. It is

everywhere. The use of violence is seen as rational, a legitimate

response in some situations and, therefore, condoned in some situations.

When asked about their theories on why we're seeing an increase, one respondent said:

> Well, my personal opinions are because of the publicity it gets from the United States. These kids see these gangs, in particular the Crips and Bloods. I mean these are Chicano gangs in L.A. that have been around since the '30's and the '20's. And these kids are influenced by that. They see that. They want to have the power. They know that they can't have it if they stay in school and do it the 'right' way. They figure it's just as easy to go out and get even more by doing it the way in the States, by doing it like a gang. (CJ7:16)

In the end, the gang provides so much for these women that they do not see the negatives. When it is all they have, it becomes all important.

> I think in spite of the violence and the negatives, and the illegal activities, our kids tend to feel a sense of importance, a sense that someone really wants them. And whether it's for all these awful reasons, it's still that sense of worth that this group, that **they see** as all powerful, has an allegiance to them that, that, the saddest part is that that allegiance goes nowhere. When it comes down to the nitty gritty, they're not included at all as an individual ... (SS15:9)

Another respondent suggests that there is a darker underside to gang life, one where the temptations promised do not necessarily materialize.

> .... [I]t's the lure of the drugs, the lure of the money, you know, instant gratification for the money and that, and nobody's going to compete with that. We can't compete with that. The sad thing is though that there's only a select few out of maybe 500 gang members, only a couple are going to really reap the benefits of being a gang member. The rest of them are either going to end up dead, incarcerated, addicted to drugs or, you know, killed, whatever. (CB23:15)

IV. The Gang Hierarchy: Gang Structure and Organization

All the respondents agreed that the street gangs have a definite hierarchy. Similar to bureaucratic organizations or more organized crime collectives, there is a chain of command in gangs, with a few powerful at

the top, followed by various levels 'workers' underneath.

> I mean, there's the gang leaders. And they, in turn, have 'Strikers' for them who do all the dirty work, whether it's B & E's, different criminal activity, selling drugs, recruiting young women to work the streets, things like that. (CB20:12)

One of the attractions, one of the myths, motivating individuals to join gangs is the lure of money. In reality, the individual members of the gang receive very little of the proceeds of crime. They are required to give it to the gang, for the good of the gang.

> The reality that we've seen, and the reality from talking to high-ranking gang members, is that it just goes into the hierarchy's pocket and they spend it as their own. So they're conning their own gang, in reality. The money will funnel up through the channels, up to the president. The president of the gang might portray that he's collecting this money for the gang, that he's going to buy guns, he's going to buy this, he's going to put it into an account so that they have a defence fund or that kind of thing. The reality is that that hasn't happened, that hierarchy member has spent the money and the gang doesn't benefit from it much. (CJ1:26)

1) The Continuum of Individual Gang Involvement

There is a continuum of individual involvement within the gang. Many of the respondents suggest that the real 'hard core' members only comprise about 10% of total gang population.

> There's a difference between gang members who are 'O.G.'s,' which is the originally gangster, which are the hard core leaders, inner core, inner core members of the gang, and the outer group [who's not O.G.] ... The inner core membership of a street gang is probably anywhere between 15% to 25% of its actual membership. We're only beginning to realize some of that ourselves. The other 75% to 85% are marginal members of the gang. They may be situational gang members. They may be people who participate in gang criminal activity, participate in gang partying, but don't necessarily participate, uh, are not heavy dues paying members, and are not normally associating with the gang all the time. And there are all sorts of layers, sort of if you look at a tree, sort of tree rings. There's lots of people that are on the outside periphery, who may be carrying symbols of the gang, tattoos and so on and so forth, but their involvement with the inner activities of the gang itself are very marginal. (CJ3:6)

The position that an individual occupies within the gang culture depends on their ascribed status and achieved status. The ascribed status of being female immediately puts an individual at the lower end of the gang hierarchy. The most recurrent theme in all of the interviews was that 'men rule.' Male domination, or the variable of 'gender,' dictates the hierarchical arrangement, first and foremost, taking precedent over any other variable.

> Female gang members have **nowhere near** the status that a male gang member has. You are talking about a world of true chauvinism. (CJ3:23)

> But, you're not going to have the [Manitoba] Warriors recruiting females to be in their gangs, in the sense that the gang is. You're not going to be a hard core member of that gang. Never going to. Like, you're never going to be a hard core member of a biker gang. I mean it's a male dominated hierarchy, and they [girls] are going to be a commodity. (CJ11:4)

> You'll hear guys calling girls 'bitch' and 'whore,' and all that kinda stuff. They're just saying it almost like it's an acceptable word. And I have to think that that translates into the way that they would treat them at the gang level. So, but I'm sure that they're lower on the hierarchy in that way. They're the one's who are prostituting. They're the ones who get thrown around. (CB21:11)

2) Evolution of Gangs: Organization and Visibility

As individual gangs evolve, they become more organized. Their hierarchical structure becomes more rigid. They begin to sanction particular crimes and not others. And, they seek out other lower status gangs to do the dirtier, 'runner' work.

> Well, they have, again they've taken on the premises of the biker gangs, where you have your President. And then you have your War Chief underneath your President, or the bikers call them Sergeant in Arms. And then you've got your Foot Soldiers, your financial people, people that will take care of all your money and all your dealings. It boils down to the Foot Soldier who does all the dirty work. So, yeah, there is a hierarchy. They are government-type structured. That goes without saying. Even though these street

gangs aren't as well organized, I guess that's to our benefit, as
they could be. They have some form of organization, and they're not
just running loose, all of them. They all have to answer to
somebody. (CJ7:12)

I asked one respondent if the street gangs had any ties with the biker

gangs:

No, but they respect the biker gangs. Like, when they [Hells Angels
biker gang] came in this summer, they just moved in the North end.
So, it's I.P. [Indian Posse] territory, but they don't back-talk
them. Just because, I think, of the stories that go around about
the Hells Angels and stuff. And, that they're just really, really
hard core. So there's a sense like ... 'That's a **real** hard core
gang. You would never mess with them.' (CB22:17)

In the world of organized crime, street gangs are at the bottom of the

pecking order.

The Warriors right now are quite concerned with quality not quantity
in their gang. So, two years ago you would have seen the Warriors
recruiting just as aggressively as the Indian Posse to get numbers.
Now you find the Warriors kicking people out, because they're more
interested in higher quality members who can keep their mouths shut,
who will follow the directions from the leadership explicitly. And,
you know, you sort of have this settling out of the criminal
lifestyle. At the top of the food chain in crime in this city are
the biker gangs, essentially ... You would not find a Los Bravos
selling you drugs in a washroom. You would not find a Los Bravos
stewing nickel deals. You would not find a Los Bravos doing an
armed robbery. You would not find them doing a B & E. That's lower
food chain activity. The secret of organized crime, if you're going
to be successful, is to get yourself into the wholesale end. Big
volumes. Your fingers don't touch the stuff. Somebody stupider
than you, somebody weaker than you touches the stuff and tries to
move it. That's where the street gangs come in ... So, a couple of
years ago, the Warriors wouldn't have been, the Warriors were into
armed robberies, the Warriors were into these kinds of things. The
Warrior's are now [pause], we're down to about 22 in custody, from
probably twice or three times that number a couple of years ago.
Does that mean the Warriors have gone straight? No. It means the
Warriors have gotten smart. And the Warriors are distancing
themselves from direct street level criminal activity. And they are
becoming the agents of change, as opposed to the change agents. The
street gangs fill a nice void for the higher level gangs. The
street gangs provide all sorts of stupid people who are in for a
thrill, who are prepared to take these kinds of risks, and for whom
incarceration is regarded as sort of a 'coming of age,' you know,
'paying your dues,' so on and so forth. 'I can be trusted, I've
done time' and those kinds of things. And the street gangs form a

very necessary link in that chain. If the bikers don't have something like that, or if the Warriors don't have something like that, the Bravo's don't have something like that, they have to dirty their hands, and the chances are, they have to do some recruiting of people that they may not be able to trust. Whereas these stupid street gang members will be stupid enough to take the fall and not rat. (CJ3:8)

Winnipeg provides the unique sample in that there are different gangs, each at different stages of 'evolution' and different levels of organization. This allows us to see what happens, what changes occur, as gangs evolve and become more organized. For example, respondents have noticed that, as individual gangs evolve they also attempt to become less visible.

And the first time we tried [researching the Winnipeg gangs], it was an interesting experiment ... as soon as the researchers came into the institution, the Indian Posse were quite eager to speak to them, and candidly. The Manitoba Warriors completely shut them out. And that was sort of a measurement of the evolution of the Manitoba Warriors, from, if you had undertaken a study like that in about 1995 with the Manitoba Warriors, my suggestion would have been, you would have gotten about the same amount of information that you would have gotten from the Indian Posse. In the space of about a year, the Warriors had evolved and mutated into something quite different than they were. My suggestion now is probably, every year that we try to this kind of research, inside the institutions, it will be more and more difficult to get sociological data, unless it's pitched in a certain way. P:(02:13)

Another respondent, who works in an inner-city school, suggests that the 'hard core' gang members are not as visible as the Wannabbee's:

There's the Wannabbee's and the associates, and then the gang members themselves. The gang members are very, like, they blend in. The gang members, they really, I don't know, they just don't stand out as much as the Wannabbee's, because the Wannabbee's will just do anything. And then if they're a title or gang member already, **they're not really able to stand out like a sore thumb anymore.** (SS17:2; emphasis mine)

Also, as gang members get older, they become less overt about displaying

their gang membership:

> Well, when you're in the Manitoba Youth Centre, it's not that hard to count gang members, because young kids are stupid enough to tell you. Often they will tell you. And they're proud of it. 'I'm an I.P. I'm a Deuce. I'm this, I'm that' And young kids will frequently tell you that. As they get older they are not nearly so liable to tell you that because they understand, usually there's some consequence, and they're not very good consequences. The tougher the line we take with the gangs, the harder it is, obviously, to find gang members that we didn't know were gang members before. And as the gangs get more sophisticated, some of this very, very sort of amateurish, naive, business of overtly displaying your symbols becomes counterproductive to you. So, you tend to become more covert about your symbols. You tend to become more covert about your behaviours, and so and so forth, and you try to hide your identity, which poses a challenge to us. (CJ3:10)

3) Variation in the Degree of Female Subservience

The degree of female subservience varies with each gang. In some cases, the women aren't even allowed to attend the meetings, as with biker gangs. In other cases, the women may be allowed to form their own hierarchy, their own 'gang,' but that female gang is still utterly subservient to the male gang.

> Some of the gangs, Manitoba Warriors as an example, females can be associates of the Manitoba Warriors. They can certainly act on behalf or in concert or in association with the gang, but it's a very sexist organization. They are not allowed to be members. They can never be members. That's just the way they are organized.
>
> (As with bike gangs?)
>
> Right. But the Indian Posse, on the other hand, or Deuce females can be full members. (CJ1:13)

The less well-organized gangs do not appear to have as rigid a hierarchy. Women affiliated with those gangs appear to have more power and status than those in the more organized gangs. Stated differently, women have the lowest status in biker gangs and appear to have the most

status in the least organized street gang in Winnipeg, the Indian Posse.

> And I don't know if it's because it's less organized in terms of the way biker gangs are organized. They're [bikers] very, very organized in terms of the crime, but I.P. isn't for sure. They're not as organized a group. Deuce is more organized, so they may not treat their women well. They may not give them any of the power. But I.P. certainly had that branch of women that were ... Deuce might treat their women really badly, and see their women as property or something to use. And maybe I.P. isn't that sophisticated or organized, and let the women have power. (CJ4:10)

Another respondent suggests:

> But if you're in the Los Bravos, for example, you will never see a female at a club meeting. **Never** allowed at a club meeting. No matter how, how much power the old lady has, never get into a club meeting. I don't think the Deuce or the I.P. are anywhere near that ... For example, the gangs seem to be quite confident that the females can be just as dangerous as the males. We've never uncovered any sort of desire from the gangs to say 'O.K. When we get into a fight with another gang the males will be in the first row, and the females in the second row, and stuff.' There's none of that. Like, there's, like I say, when it comes to risk, I don't see any sign of it ... When it comes to the business of the gang, I think the gang becomes very chauvinistic ... That's the best, the best that a female can hope for ... is to try to lock on to one the higher status members of the biker gang, and to be accepted as an 'old lady.' At that stage of the game they sort of exercise power, you know, like sort of the former queens would with the king, that type of thing. They have power from the thrown. They can exercise it through their old man. And some of them become fairly powerful within the biker gangs. But they never have an official status. (CJ3:36)

4) Women and Power: A Separate Hierarchy?

While women, in general, occupy the lowest status in the sexist gang structure, it appears that there is a separate hierarchy amongst the women as well. In that hierarchy, some women have more power and status than others. The status that gang members (female or male) are accorded depends on both their ascribed and their achieved status within the gang. Gender happens to be a particularly significant ascribed status, immediately allotting you a higher status if you are 'male.' However, the

ascribed status of having a family member who is high up in the gang can

raise status significantly as well.   One respondent recounts the power

held by a woman whose family was very high up in the gang, consequently

increasing her ascribed status.

> 'Cindy' was never anybody's bitch or prostitute or whatever. She
> was very much, uh, her brother's one of the founding guys, so why
> would she have a lower status? They wouldn't even allow her to be
> used or beaten by those other gang guys. So, she had some power.
> (CJ4:19)

According to the respondents, these women who are higher up within

the female hierarchy truly feel powerful.   Regardless of the male

dominance within the gang world, the women **feel** that they have agency and

power.

> 'Janet' didn't see herself as being one of the sluts, or whores,
> that they had running and doing prostitution and those kinds of
> things. She saw herself as a legitimate member of that group, with
> this equal power, and she thought she held equal power to the males
> in the group. Her perception is that she was equal in terms of her
> power at that time. (CJ4:9)

Often, these powerful women within the separate female hierarchy

appear to hold very traditional and conservative notions of femininity and

masculinity.   In the eyes of the female gang members, as well as the

males, the role of 'prostitute' falls at the very bottom of the hierarchy,

the lowest rung within the gang.   The same respondent described a powerful

woman in the gang who held a very negative attitude toward other 'lower'

women in the gang:

> And [she] didn't even want to be associated with that level of
> status. She saw them as bitches and whores, and sluts and stuff,
> and labelled them, and saw them as being worthless, but saw herself
> as powerful. So, these women were not respected, even by the women
> that have some power ... 'Cause they [gang women with power] see
> themselves as being very much parallel to the men and, as I say,
> they have no respect and no use for these women. They see them as
> just being a way of getting money. That was her attitude. (CJ4:19)

Female gang members recruit other prostitutes for the male gang members. While women still do not receive profits from the sex trade, those who put new girls on 'the track' increase their status within the gang hierarchy.

> She kidnapped a girl on the streets – they kidnapped her – kept her in a closet naked, tied up, and beaten for three, four days. And her perpetuating that violence on another kid, another female and [pause] because she wasn't agreeing to work the streets for her. So it's like a little hierarchy. (CB20:13)

5) Female Hierarchies and 'All-Women' Gangs: Power in a Male World?

Respondents disagreed about the existence of all-female gangs within the city. Most of the respondents suggested that there are, currently, no 'all-women' street gangs operating in Manitoba.

> (What about Ace?)

> Well, the Ace is the female equivalent of the Deuce. There are not very many of them."

> (How many?)

> [pause] Officially?

> (Do they no longer refer to themselves as Ace?)

> No. A lot of the female Deuce refer to themselves as Deuce. Officially we had no Ace last month, at all. The female I.P. refer to themselves as I.P. The female Deuce tend to refer to themselves as Deuce.   There's only a couple of girls that were calling themselves Ace for any period of time. Then, every so often they create a name. A name will come out of the blue, and we'll say who the hell are these guys and so on and so forth. And then we go chasing them, and we find out that it's a sect, an I.P. sect, that's formed or something like that. (CJ3:30)

Another respondent agrees that few, if any, 'all-female' gangs exist in Manitoba:

> It is, uh [sigh], the female, and this is another phenomenon I can't quite explain, the females have, in Winnipeg, have from time to time attempted to establish their own stand-alone gangs. The

Sisterhood is one example. Ace is another. What we see is that female gangs as a separate entity don't last. They don't seem to be able to maintain their own separate stand-alone gangs. Sisterhood typically gets reabsorbed back into the Posse. Ace is the female component of the Deuce gang. But for all intents and purposes, most of the time they forget that and just refer to themselves as Deuces. So, again, it comes up every number of months, all of a sudden the females get together and decide to form a stand alone gang, still in association with the male gang, but they want their own identity. But, it just doesn't last. I don't know why that is. But, they don't seem to hold an organization as a stand-alone gang. So, currently, yeah, there are still a lot of girls calling themselves as Aces, but there's probably, the majority now just refer to themselves as Deuce. The Sisterhood is not in existence at all. (CJ1:14)

Another respondent explains:

It hasn't happened here yet. There's no evidence of it ... The gangs are notoriously turf conscious. And any other gang trying to set itself up in I.P. territory or in Deuce territory, and calling itself something else and throwing their tags up on the wall or whatever, is taking **huge** risks. That's probably the answer to the question. You'd have to have a gang that was big enough and strong enough and tough enough to be able to back one of these existing gangs off. And that's not an easy thing to do. (CJ3:31)

Other respondents disagree, and suggest that 'all-female' gangs do exist within the city. In particular, the respondents who work in the provincial correctional institutions report that they do notice 'all-female' gang activity. While police reports and community agencies suggest that there are currently no 'all-female' gangs active in the city, a correctional officer thinks differently:

They have their own little thing going on. With the Indian Posse, one of the more popular gangs in the city here, their female version of their gang is called the Sisterhood, and it's run strictly by women, and everything that's done or dealt with, is dealt with through these women. So the male counterparts have absolutely no say in it, they just give the ultimate approval or denial of whatever plans the Sisterhood may have.

(So you're seeing the Sisterhood as still being active?)

Oh yeah. Oh, they're still active. They're quite active, actually. (CJ7:9)

So what is happening here? Are some respondents 'wrong'? Are they using different criteria to distinguish an 'all-female' gang? Or, are they both right? One plausible suggestion is that female gang members only align themselves, independent of the males, when they are in a 'total institution' setting. Then, when they get back onto the street, back onto 'turf' that is already claimed, so to speak, they have no choice but to fall under the umbrella and security of the male gang. On the street, patriarchal and capitalist tendencies prevail - only those with resources can thrive on the street. Females gangs have limited access to these and, so, have no staying power. In an all-women environment (jail), at least one aspect of this equation (patriarchy) is missing. Control over resources (status/power) may still exist in jail, hence, the ability to enforce solidarity. Another correctional officer comments;

> The guys seem to be more the ones giving the orders and the girls doing what they're told ... And, then, I think there's probably a hierarchy among the girls as well. You know, just watching the dynamics on the unit that we have, and listening to what some say. Like, there was one women that we had that was very strong, and all the other girls did what she said, kinda thing. But I think in the **community** she would be falling under somebody like a **male** organizer. (CJ9:7)

This is obviously another aspect of female gang dynamics that needs further exploration.

V.   Gang Activities of Female Gang Members in Manitoba

1)   Mandating Violence

The gang mandates particular behaviours and activities. There is a 'code of ethics' within the subculture. The fundamental thread, interwoven through everything the gang does, is the predominance of violence. Violence increases status. Violence is a way of life.

Violence translates into power.

> You have to also remember that it's a treacherous world for gangs.
> When, I said you get close to unconditional acceptance, it isn't
> unconditional. Your loyalty's constantly being tested. Your
> willingness to do things for the gang is constantly being tested.
> Your willingness to take pain and suffering is constantly being
> tested. And there's a certain masochism that flows with being a
> gang member. (CJ3:21)

Another respondent suggests that, over time, violence becomes

desensitized and minimized. It becomes a 'normal' means of gaining power

and some gang members grow to enjoy it.

> The longer they've been involved in a gang environment, the use of
> violence swings from, at the beginning, they use violence because
> they are told to or have to, to eventually, they justify it. They
> enjoy it. So, what we're dealing with is those that enjoy it. So
> they've crossed that line of justification. They're insensitive.
> (CJ8:2)

Another respondent agrees:

> (What about fun? How much of their activities are gang related?
> What do they do just for kicks?)

> Hmmm. That's interesting. You know, after a while, if it's
> habitual, then it becomes easier for them to think, 'Oh that one's
> pissing me off, so I'm going to beat her up.' So it becomes like an
> ongoing thing, where they're, that's how they deal with their anger,
> or their power. So I'm not really sure, you know, if after a while,
> if it is just for fun. (CB20:23)

Female gang members have been exposed to violence their entire

lives. As mentioned earlier, the majority of them have been physically

and sexually abused.

> And this [violence] is how they obviously, how they use, want to
> maintain power and control, and [they] become insensitive to the
> damage that they do to other people ... The way we think is just
> not, is just not the reality to them. That's why it's so hard,
> because we come from, uh, they are an alternate lifestyle motivated
> by violence, controlled by violence, and they become immune to the
> damage that it does. (CJ8:5)

Police and correctional officers in this study report that female

gang members tend to be charged with more violent offences than other

female offenders generally. This is not surprising, given that female gang members have extensive exposure to violence and that the gang 'code of ethics' celebrates violence. As one respondent explains:

> So, violence is a very, very large part of everything to do with gang life and because of that, I think, to get back to your original question, if I compare a female who's not a gang member, identical age, identical area where she grew up, identical socioeconomic background, the gang member will generally be much more violent, much more prone to resort to violence in some fashion to resolve whatever conflict she finds herself in. (CJ1:20)

Violence becomes a 'normal' way to respond to situations.

> More of a controlling, threatening, under-handed, a lot more violence. One of the girls - she just walked past somebody on the stairs, and because she didn't get out of her way, she punched her in the face and, 'What? I didn't really hit her, I just punched her in the face because she wouldn't get out of my way.' And this girl's an I.P. member. Well, 'You can't do that because you should say excuse me,' and [she says] 'Well why? She should've just got out of my way. Like, I really didn't do anything wrong.' So, not even, uh, the violence is minimized. (CJ9:15)

> They will use violence as a first alternative, as opposed to a last alternative. (CJ3:6)

2) Gang Initiation

As previously noted, violence is a mainstay of gang life. Not surprisingly, 'initiation' into the gang is violent as well.

> So, for all gang members, female or male, their initiation into the gang was obviously a very violent thing. That's to prove that you're solid, that you're tough, that you can take it, that you'll stand up for the gang. From that point forward, violence is an everyday part of the gang. So rivalries between different gangs are resolved by violence. Much of their criminal activities are conducted by violence; armed robberies, home invasions, drive-by shootings. Violence is the answer to virtually every question that comes up. (CJ1:19)

The most common method of initiation is to get 'beat in.' This involves getting beat by a specified number of gang members for a specified period of time. For example, 'four for five' means that four

people beat you for five minutes. You cannot cry out. You cannot scream. You cannot fall down. You <u>must</u> endure your beating in order to prove to the gang that you are 'solid.' One respondent describes that 'the beats' demonstrate:

> .... [h]ow badly you want in [the gang]. To see how tough you are. To see, also, if you can keep your mouth shut. That if, 5 or 6 other girls beat you, so you get knocked down, you get kicked you get punched. And then, right after that, they'll have basically a process where they clean you up. They hug you. They accept you as a peer, as an equal. (CJ2:12)

When describing initiation by 'getting the beats,' another respondent commented:

> Sometimes they get so precise that if you're knocked unconscious they'll stop the clock and resume once you regain consciousness. (CJ1:18)

> Another way to get initiated is through a staged fight. This is when the potential initiate must fight somebody who has a reputation of being extremely tough.

> A girl would have to go fight another girl who's considered very tough. The girl being initiated would have to go and start the fight. And one girl last summer was pregnant and, instead of being beaten in, they thought it would be safer for her if she went and started a fight with someone else. I don't know how that would be any safer. But, that's what they decided would be better instead of having, like, eight people beating on her. (SS14:14)

There are easier ways to get into some gangs. For instance, some gangs might only require that the initiate commit a crime for the gang or recruit another female to prostitute for the gang. By far the easiest way to get into a gang is to be 'blessed' in. Essentially, this is when an individual is born into the gang through their gang parents. Winnipeg has reached third generation gang status.

The initiation rituals vary with each gang.

> The easiest way to get into the I.P. is to be known to be related to someone - or to be significantly involved with somebody who's a prominent I.P. member ... It might involve a beat up. They call it getting 'the beats.' It might involve getting the beats. It might not. It might, uh, if there's enough status with the I.P., you're simply in. That's how unstructured that gang tends to be. (CJ3:24)

Research in the United States has suggested that women get 'sexed in' to the gangs, meaning that they have to have sex with a specified number of male gang members. None of the respondents in this study found that to be the case in Manitoba. The only situations where women are forced to have sex with multiple male gang members is in the case of biker gangs.

> Well, as for most gang initiations, you have to be beaten in, in order to be a member. You have to survive a rather brutal beating from five or six other gang members of the faction. And they will beat you severely. And you have to, you don't scream, you don't call for help, you take your beating, and that makes you a member.
>
> (Is that [beat-ins] more common than getting sexed in, or having to pull a train?)
>
> Well again, getting sexed in, or pulling a train, you're going to find that that's more common with your biker affiliated type gangs ... (CJ7:8)

It appears that getting 'sexed in' is incorrectly associated with initiation. While, in order to hang with and party with a biker gang, many women have to 'pull a train' (have sex with each of the bikers one after another), it is not really initiation because women can never be members. Perhaps this explains some of the confusion surrounding the question of women getting 'sexed in' to gangs.

Recruitment and initiation rituals also occur within the provincial

correctional institutions:

> And as soon as they [gang members] hit our [correctional]
> institutions, they would begin to recruit very heavily, recruit very
> actively. And we're not talking recruitment that was necessarily
> voluntary ... But they would recruit actively and part of the
> reason was that they have an animosity to each other. Very jealous
> of 'turf' with each other, and quite capable of instantaneous
> violence, and serious violence. So they began to recruit non-
> aligned inmates in a big way. And we would have locations being
> taken over by the gangs. (CJ3:03)

Another respondent discusses gang recruitment in jail:

> A very powerful, well connected, communication system. They
> [incarcerated female gang members] know faster than I do who's
> coming in, why they're coming in, whether or not they can be
> trusted. There are communications from Portage [Correctional
> Institution] to the [Winnipeg] Remand Centre, on who to rough up and
> who to test. They'll stage gladiator fights, the women. Men will
> do it too, but we're specifically looking at the women. And the
> gladiator fight is to prove you're solid, to show that you can
> fight, to do as you're told, to be an initiate in. (CJ8:11)

'Swarm attacks' are a common method of recruitment in prison.

> A normal prison fight is usually terribly mismatched. O.K.?
> Usually one **awfully** bigger guy and one **awfully** smaller guy, or a
> couple of bigger guys and a couple of smaller guys. The gangs
> brought a new dimension of intimidation to this, and this was 'swarm
> attacks,' where they would come into a location, there would be five
> or six gang members, they would chose one at a time, the people that
> they want to really intimidate or recruit into the gang, and swarm
> attack them. And with the inmate code generally being that 'If it
> doesn't affect me, I don't get into this kind of stuff,' they were
> able to take over a location relatively quickly. They would swarm
> 3 or 4 people in a row. And, finally, you end up with now maybe 10
> gang members who are all committed to each other fanatically, faced
> up against a whole bunch of non-aligned people who really just
> didn't want to get into this, they just wanted to do 'quiet' time
> [while incarcerated]. And if you multiply that by location after
> location, this gets to be quite a critical mass within the
> institution. (CJ3:04)

3) Illegal Activities and Gang Life

Not only does the gang mandate violence, it also mandates
involvement in criminal activity. You have to 'make your bones,'

contribute to the 'pot.' This involves illegal activities.

> Well, I mean, you've got to prove things to your others, to your
> partners, to your gang friends. You've got to prove things even if
> you're just affiliated. You'll do anything from, they'll be asked
> to do anything from a simple robbery, to murder, to rape, whatever
> it takes. Whatever is approved or looked upon as being decent by
> the gang. You have to make your bones somehow, in order to hang
> with the gang, or to be in the gang. So, you've got to be into the
> criminal activity aspect of it. (CJ7:7)

In fact, 'doing time' in jail represents a 'badge of honour' in the gang

world.

> You know, they'll do their stints in [Manitoba Youth Centre], and
> that's another prestigious thing, if you do time. They learn more
> things in there, too. (CB20:13)

The majority of respondents in this study stated that women

participate in illegal gang activities to the same extent as the men do,

including: robbery, assaults, murder, thefts (especially automobile),

break and enters, drug trafficking, prostitution, and general acts of

violence, including threats and intimidation.

> They do all the things that the guys do. Shop-lifting, assaults,
> robbery's, B & E's. It's all pretty much normal activity in the
> gang. (CJ6:19)

> They're [female gang members] involved in moving drugs, like I said,
> I've given you pictures before in terms of they've certainly been
> involved in armed robberies, they've been involved in break and
> enters. They seem to be, uh, treated by, at least the two street
> gangs, as being quite capable, as being involved in the front line
> of crime, that kind of thing, including heavy shot stuff, you know,
> playing with weapons and getting into fights and those kinds of
> things. They're certainly not chauvinistic to that extent, in terms
> of exposing women to risk. No. I don't think there's any problem
> with that. In terms of exposing women to, uh, up to and including
> gang violence with each other. No problem with that. So, in all
> the risky things, the women are given equal footing. (CJ3:36)

> Robbery is the offence of choice. Robbery is all that strong arm
> stuff for jackets and hats, and sneakers, and shaking down kids for
> money and whatever. I mean, and that's been like that for two
> years. (CJ11:14)

> A lot of the muggings that we have downtown happen to be girls. A pack of four or five or eight females attacking one or two other females. A lot of times it will be just a crime of opportunity. It will be a group that are involved with a street gang. It will just have two young ladies, two girls, that they've decided they want their jacket. They want their purse. They want their money, whatever they have. They may want a gold chain. Just a crime of opportunity, in that those two groups happen to cross paths, and the one group obviously wants something the other group had, and use violence and the threat of violence to obtain it. A lot of times, the threat is used first, 'Give us your jacket, give us your purse or whatever' and a lot of times they will say no, or just try to ignore them. And then the next thing they know they are 'swarmed.' (CJ2:15)

Another respondent agrees that women are involved in the whole spectrum of gang activities.

> We have females who are involved in the whole gamut of criminal activity that gangs like, ranging from minor thefts, stolen autos. We have females in robberies. We have females selling, trafficking drugs. We have females running prostitutes, other female prostitutes. We have certainly had females present at, and in some peripheral way, taking part in drive-by shootings, and in several of the gang-related murders that we've had. (CJ1:21)

Respondents agree that female gang members utilize weapons just as much as the male gang members do.

> Same types of weapons. Guns, knives, clubs. You'll find women carry more along the lines of knives or straight razors or guns, rather than the physical aspect of it, with clubs or chains. (CJ7:8)

One respondent suggested that women, because of their lower status in the gang hierarchy, were often used as 'bait':

> I remember being trained on how to rob somebody. I never did it. But they were teaching me what to do, and what I was to do, as the female. They were using me as bait. And I know that the gangs will always use the females as bait, either to get another female who's going to 'get it,' or another male who's going to 'get it.' The females are being used as bait by the males. And, they always have and they always will. (SS17:40)

Another respondent similarly suggests that the gang takes advantage of the fact that crime and gang affiliation are defined as 'male.' The male gang

members know that the females are less likely to be searched by authorities, such as the police. Therefore, the females are used to do the 'runner work,' or carry the 'goods,' or drive the car:

> Our information is that [gang women] will be the ones used to either, hide a weapon, make them carry a weapon to and from a specific location, or even transport drugs. Because, unfortunately, most police officers, I think, view a male as more of a likely person to commit illegal activity, criminal activity. And also, on search in general, they're told that the most immediate threat is a male, as opposed to a female ... [W]ithout exception, most police officers will pay more attention to the males because they expect them to be carrying out the criminal activity, to have the weapon, to have the drugs or whatever else. (CJ2:3)

As touched on briefly in the previous section, a 'prostitute' is considered to be the lowest role in the gang, albeit a lucrative business (for the men). A woman's participation in the sex trade depends on her status within the gang. The female members have differing levels of recognition and status within the gang; a continuum of subservience, a hierarchy amongst themselves. While differential roles and statuses are distributed and accorded amongst the women themselves, females still remain subservient to males who control and profit from the sex trade.

According to the respondents in this study, not all female gang members prostitute. In fact, some question whether or not the majority of prostitutes are even gang members. Rather than being actual members, the only role that the gang plays in their lives is as a pimp.

> (And what about sex? How many of them are hooking, or working?)

> I would say, that, probably around 20% [are hooking]. Well, [pause] well, that's kinda high too. Um, I would have to say maybe a little bit lower. A lot of those girls aren't girlfriends of gang members. A lot of them are just 'down' with that group, and have become kind of [pause], they're just the working girls, you know? And, they're pretty much addicted to the cocaine, which of course is controlled by either the I.P. or the Warriors. (CB23:17)

Predominantly, the 'higher up' female members, who have some power within

the gang, do not have to prostitute. For example, one respondent describes how one girl achieved a significant status through her fighting abilities and, consequently, was able to avoid working the street.

> And, I have another young girl who has kind of risen [in the gang]. She never seemed to be a leader. She's very timid, very shy. She's 14 [years old] now ... but I think her leadership quality comes in that she's the one that does all the fighting. I've heard reports where she's taken on six other girls, and beat the crap out of them. And her friends just stood back, because she's protecting her friends. She has gained such respect that, as far as I know, she hasn't had to do anything like prostitution. (11:9)

Some suggest that it is more effective, from the male gang members' point of view, if females attempt to recruit other women to work the street.

> If they don't prostitute themselves, they will recruit young girls to come work with them, whether by intimidation, by fear, or just sheer money. The old adage about making a lot of money fast. They'll usually, most male gang members, will usually send females out to recruit for them, because they find that they'll get more willingness out of young girls who may not have thought about prostitution as a possibility. If they get other girls telling them how great it is .... (CJ7:9)

> What I've noticed is that the male gangs are using girls to force other girls [into prostitution]. I've seen situations, and come across information, where guys would get girls to go out and threaten other girls to go on the track, or force them into going on the track, and stuff like that. (CJ10:8)

One respondent noted:

> .... [T]he females will run, will generally be running younger 12, 13, 14 year old female Aboriginals as their prostitutes and victimizing them, as well as getting them hooked on drugs. (CJ1:25)

While some 'choose' to prostitute, for others the experience is far from voluntary. They initially find the gangs fun and exciting, however, things change quickly.

> They will take a lot of new members, like, young girls. And they're girlfriends first. And then they'll push them out if they want the money. The guys will just toss them to the wind, kind of thing. And [the girls] will have to do it, or suffer the consequences. And that can be death. You know, the gangs stand around there, and they got their guns. If they try to leave that street corner without

going with a 'john,' there'll be severe punishment, up to the point of death. And they know that. Or their family gets attacked. So, it looks inviting at first, but when you get in there, it's not so inviting. (CB24:9)

I think these kids [young women] are more at risk with the older guys, ending up at a party. Some of these young kids end up at a party, with a lot of dope and a lot of booze, and things get really wild. And they end up getting passed around [sexually, from male to male]. And when they wake up the next day, it's like, 'Oh my God.' I think you get a lot of victim stuff still happening with some of the girls. They're not happy at home, and they get hooked in ... I've heard that happening with Warriors stuff. That they, with the young girls that they get, and they get them **young**, like 14, and these are adult males ... they're also getting into, I think some of the gangs, I don't know which one it is, is also getting into the kiddie porn, so they've got to be out there recruiting it somehow. (CJ11:19)

I know that some of the girls 'pull tricks' to get stuff for the guys. Like a couple of my girls, kind of, through pressure or whatever, had to work the track and get money for 'crack' for the guys. That happened a lot over Christmas, actually. (CB22:9)

Another respondent comments;

Female gang members have been known to recruit younger females to be prostitutes.

(The woman recruited to be a prostitute, would that prostitute have any gang ties? Would she know of the gang?)

Oh she'd probably know damn well who it was. And that's used to keep the prostitute in line.

(Would that make her some type of a gang associate or is she just tricking for the gang?)

Not necessarily. Just tricking, and only at some stage at which she decides that she wants to move up in status or whatever it is. And she maybe makes some indication that she thinks she should be in the gang. And then they would have some kind of initiation ritual for her.

(Do the gang women just recruit prostitutes or do they trick themselves?)

They can trick themselves. They can recruit other women to do it. It seems to be a status and power thing to do that, for them to go ahead and recruit. (CJ3:32)

It appears that female gang members who recruit other women to

prostitute for the gang increase their status by doing so:

> .... [S]ome of my real hard core girls in the central area [of Winnipeg], they're the ones that are the initiators now, because they've stepped up a level and they have to recruit girls. So if they can recruit 10 girls to work the streets, then they're promoted to another level, or another name, you know. (CB20:11)

The women who do prostitute for the gang see very little of the profits. As mentioned before, men receive the benefits of the sex trade, and the women are given enough to just barely survive or, typically, the ones addicted to drugs are simply given their next 'fix.'

(Who gets the money, the gang?)

> Yeah, they get a large portion of it. Or, if that young woman is lucky she'll get 10% of it. Most of them don't get no money, they just get, uh, in return they'll get drugs or alcohol, or new clothes, things like that. It's never really, you know, economic gain for them because they'll usually start getting addicted to drugs. And they'll need more. And they have to keep on doing that, you know? (CB20:11)

6) Other Gang Activities: 'Hanging and Banging with the Bros'

Gang members tend to spend the majority of the their time with the gang. The gang is their 'family' and they spend all of their time 'hanging' with the gang or being 'down' with the gang.

> So much of their time is just spent, in some form or another, in gang-related activity, very little of what we would consider 'normal' activity. It's a full time life for them. It's not really, it's not really a 'gang' to them. It is a gang, but it's not really, in their mind, a gang. It's their family. And they want to spend all their time with their family, whatever their family wants to do or whatever they perceive that their family is all about, that's what they spend their time doing. Again, you talk to gang members and that's a common thread throughout every gang. It doesn't matter what gang it is. It doesn't matter what age they are. The constant factor is that, 'The gang is my family. That's my bro, and I will die, I will kill for my bro and he or she would die for me.' That is their family. So it's giving them some sense of belonging to a family that they're not getting anywhere else. And, because of that, it's a very intense thing. (CJ1:22)

As reflected in their low levels of educational attainment, school is strongly discouraged and, because all of their time is spent with the gang, they are inevitably expelled from school to become further entrenched in that lifestyle.

> With the street gangs, it's basically 'No school. This is the way we make money', which is usually illegal. And you don't have much freedom to do anything else. 'If you're not with us, your against us.' And if somebody's trying to go to school, and they're in a gang, 'they're against us,' you know? If any gang member was trying to go to school, and be what they wanted to be, but still be I.P. [Indian Posse] or [Manitoba] Warrior, they'd suspect that person's going to rat. They're going to learn enough to rat, or do something. You know, 'cause if you're not with them, you're against them.' And being with them means, doing the things that they do, which is quit school and sell drugs. (SS17:6)

Other activities that the gang engages in are drinking, doing drugs, and fighting. Typically, they have house parties with endless supplies of drugs and alcohol.

> .... [T]hey're primarily engaged in partying, and in committing crimes so that they can get into the partying. Drugs and alcohol. A good, uh, if you want to understand [what] a perfectly, typical Indian Posse crime is, they run out of funds at some point in the week. They decide that they either have to do a B & E or an armed robbery somewhere. They figure out that they need to steal a car in order to be able to make a get-away from the place. So they go steal a car. They go and commit the B & E or the armed robbery. They go and party. And it just repeats itself until they get caught. That's a typical Indian Posse crime. (CJ3:32)

Another common activity that gang members engage in is termed 'gang banging':

> Just everybody hang[ing] out together and somebody walks past and they like their jacket. They like their shoes, jump 'em, beat them up. Rob them of their clothing, brutalize them. Why? Because they like to just terrify people, for their sense of power and belief in the gang. (CJ1:21)

While not specific to 'gang members,' sexual activity and multiple partners is common within the gang. It is important to emphasize, however, that the high rates of sexual activity are not specific to gang

members. Whether they are gang affiliated or not, many youth engage in unprotected sex. Unfortunately, females are not always in a position to demand that protection is used. Their partners demand it, tricks demand it, or they are sexually assaulted. STDs and pregnancies are the result.

> A lot of the kids out there who are sexually involved, either being assaulted or through prostitution, whether it's gang involved or not, are **not** having protected sex. Um, people who are involved with them are **demanding** that they not wear protection. So, I think it's a big issue. (SS15:16)

While estimates of the number of female gang members who are getting pregnant varies, the consensus is that the number is rising. However, this is consistent with other women of similar demographics. In fact, "Manitoba has one of the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy in Canada with approximately seven teenagers becoming pregnant each day" (Manitoba Government News Release, 1998:1).

> I would say at least probably 50% [are mom's], would be safe to say. And, out of that 50%, or it could even be higher, but I would say that almost 100% of those moms, their kids are from gang member fathers. (CB23:16)

> We have a 12 year old male gang member that we arrested this year. His claim to fame is that he's going to be a dad twice, two separate young girls. He's 12. (CJ2:7)

Another respondent discusses a young gang mom:

> One young girl, she just turned 20 [years old]. This is her fifth child. And she has two living with her, the others are in foster care. (CB24:11)

Another respondent voices her concerns about teen pregnancy within gangs, and the implications of inter-generational gang involvement.

> We have an awful lot of females in the program who are pregnant, and often carrying a gang member's baby ... When the kid is born, he'll [sic] probably end up with a rag on his head, or a little Warrior's jacket on. I don't know if you've ever seen that, but it's rather scary, seeing little babies wearing Warrior jackets. And what are we talking already, that's a fourth or a third generation Warrior. And even if that kid tries to get out, it's everywhere - schools,

peers, family, street - everywhere. They would have to leave their whole life and start anew somewhere else to even attempt to get out of that. (SS14:8)

VI.   Exiting the Gang?

It appears that there are two schools of thought on the possibility

of leaving the gang. While some respondents suggest that it is not that

difficult, others explain that it is impossible. The gang is everywhere.

'When you're in, you're in.' It is especially difficult for youth because

they can not leave the neighbourhood. Now, not only have they lost the

protection of their gang, but they have to fear their gang.

> But our experience has been that it is much easier for an adult to
> leave the gang than it is for a youth. And primarily that's because
> of ties to the physical location. Adults are much more mobile.
> They are certainly more mobile because they have access to vehicles
> and that sort of thing. They can change the group of people they
> hang out with. They can change the areas that they hang out in very
> easily. And, therefore, when they decide to leave the gang, they
> just cut off all ties. They stop hanging out at this place, or that
> bar, or with this group. They go elsewhere. Often times, they'll
> also physically move to another part of the city, or perhaps even
> outside of the city, and very successfully distance themselves from
> associating with the gang. Youths, unfortunately, are tied to a
> single parent, if they have one. They're tied to some form of
> family, however dysfunctional. They're tied to some physical
> location. For them to say 'I want to move from the North End to St.
> James,' or whatever. It might be, it is not something they can do.
> It's whatever their family wants. Their family could totally ignore
> whatever's happening in their lives. Most often most families of
> gang members don't accept that their kid's a gang member. They
> could have graffiti on their own walls and they don't accept it. So
> the family may not be willing to move, may not be willing to do what
> it would take for that child to successfully remove himself [sic]
> from the gang. (CJ1:44)

Other respondents agree that, while possible, most individuals find it

very difficult to get out of a gang:

> You may quit the gang, but you're still in the same neighbourhood.
> And now that you're in that neighbourhood, not only are you not
> protected by your gang, but you've got to fear your gang now. So,
> it's pretty hard to get out. Even though they say, 'Oh, I can

retire at any time.' Well, you can, but it's always going to be
there for you. It's always going to be in your face. And it can be
a very painful experience to quit. (CJ7:19)

They're keeping the gang ties because they have a lot of friends in
there. And that's basically their environment. Like, you can't
just all of a sudden say, 'O.K., I'm not going to hang around with
them anymore. I have to get some new friends.' It's very hard for
some of the gang affiliated youth to make friends with the so-
called 'straight' youth that are going to school. It's very hard.
There's a big culture clash. (SS17:24)

The same respondent describes how generational gang involvement can make

it even more difficult:

....[E]specially living in, I guess, family that's gang affiliated
too. There's a lot of people who have family who are [gang]
affiliated or family who are [gang] members. So, I mean, when it's
all around you, if you always have that influence, you really don't,
you just don't know how to get out of it. You don't know any
better. It's not easy for a youth to just say, 'O.K., I'm not going
to have anything to do with the gang life. I don't care if my
sister or brother is, and you live in the same house. I'm going to
start hanging around with these people and doing good.' It's not
that easy, especially when your family is involved in that. Your
family, unconsciously, is going to bring you down, and say, 'Oh,
you're miss know it all, now', or something. Little comments like
that will keep that girl down, from changing her life. (SS17:25)

One respondent tells the story of a woman who tried, unsuccessfully, to

leave the gang life.

.... [H]er family's affiliated with the Manitoba Warriors, and
everywhere she turned it was there. And she had gone to Thompson,
to get away. The social worker had made the decision to send her to
Thompson. And they [Warriors] sent a limo to Thompson to bring her
back. I mean, she was worth a lot of money to them. And she ended
up coming back, and back on the streets. So the power that these
guys have, even compared to all Corrections, Child and Family
Services, Social Work, all the supportive things to compete against
that, what they're going to give her 24-7 [24 hours a day, seven
days a week] versus what we can do during office hours or working
hours, or 'if it's in our mandate,' things like that. Gangs offer
kids a lot. Whether we determine that as meaningful stuff or not,
the kids do. So they're in, they're in it, you know? (SS14:10)

In many cases, the only way to get out of the gang is to relocate,

to completely remove yourself from the geographic area, from most of the

people in your life, and from a lifestyle that may be all you have known.

> None of the women have ever told me that they wanted to leave the gang. Not one that I've talked to ... One girl I mentioned it to, who seems to be fairly up in the I.P., she said, 'Well, how could I do that? My whole family is involved.' It's, like, inter-generational for her. So it's harder. So then what do you do? You kinda leave your family or your friends and just make a new life in another province, or what? Which is kinda daunting. Like, you're 19 years old, how can you do that? You know? She's been in jail for most of her teen years, through MYC and foster homes and everything. Like, you don't even have a sense of yourself yet, to even begin to think how you'd move to another province far away and begin a life. That'd be hard ... But, no. Not one has released that, that they've ever wanted to leave the gang. Some have said they want to make changes in their life, but the change never seemed to be that they wanted to leave the gang, just wanted to make some changes that things were a little bit better for them. More of the men have told me they wanted to leave the gang than any of the women. (CJ9:19)

Alternatively, some respondents have found that it is not as difficult as people seem to think. In their experience, individuals <u>have</u> successfully left the gang.

> It's easier now [for kids to leave the gangs] than it was three years ago, I would say. Three years ago, they would be threatened. Their life would be threatened, or their families. And so you would notice more drive-by shootings and things like that. Whereas, now, they have to either pay a due, money-wise, or service-wise. (CB20:29)

Another respondent agrees that it is not as difficult to leave a gang as most people think.

> I got the impression that, often times, it's not as difficult as perhaps articles or the media make it out to be. That, often times, if you are a member in good standing, and if you can find 2 other or so members who support you, and you can bring up that proposal to the leaders and the management in the gang, that it isn't in fact that difficult, in that sense. If you don't have any outstanding debts, or any bad relationships with people within the gang, for whatever reason. (SS15:18)

There appears to be conflicting opinions about the possibility of leaving

the gang. One respondent offers the following explanation:

> It's as difficult as the person thinks it is. If a person thinks
> it's going to be too difficult to leave, they'll never leave. If
> they slowly fade away into the background, slowly disassociate, they
> can leave the gang without much of a problem. (SS19:6)

Reflecting the predominance of Aboriginals in gangs, some gangs respect those who leave the gang to 'walk the Red Road.' Some gangs allow Aboriginal members to leave in order to explore their Aboriginal roots, their traditional culture.

> And another thing, particularly interesting, they call it the
> respect that the Aboriginal gangs have for Aboriginal culture. And,
> that if you want to leave the gang to get involved more in
> Aboriginal culture - you want to be a traditional drummer, you want
> to be a traditional dancer - that is highly encouraged ... That's
> walking the 'Red Road.' That, if you are interested in doing that,
> and you really are committed to doing that, that they will respect
> that. And they will allow you out. But it has to be demonstrated
> as concrete or then you would be in trouble again. But they
> certainly respect that. So that's good to hear. (SS15:18)

> There's a possibility that, for some of the gangs, they respect the
> Indian way of life, the cultural way of life .... it's important to
> maintain that at all costs ... They will be allowed to exit, so to
> speak. They will still be affiliated, but not in the violent life.
> (SS19:6)

Sometimes a crisis situation serves as a catalyst, encouraging individuals to leave the gang. For instance, the recent death of a gang member shook up some of the other gang members, to the point that they were considering leaving the violent life of the gang.

> .... [I]n November he was stabbed to death, throat cut and
> everything. We wanted him to stay, but he went to a party and
> things broke out. And this is by his own, his own gang members, you
> know, at a party, a fight broke out within the gang. And the
> 'family' kinda turned on each other, their so-called family. He
> went to break up a fight, and one of them turned on him and slashed
> his throat and everything. So, I spent the day in the hospital. He
> was dying. They couldn't save him. So you have the privilege of
> sitting there as you watch one of the young people you worked with
> for 7 years bleed to death. And trying to deal with the other
> members, other family members to gang members, to this young lady,
> how she kept saying, 'Joe will never know his dad. Joe will never

> know his dad.' And Joe was only 2 years old ... And some of them actually said, 'Maybe I better start thinking about where I'm going.' Now, in saying that, I see small changes. I see some of the ones that were at that party here more often. If they're here, they're not out there [on the street]. (CB24:12)

As they get older, some gang members may leave the gang simply because they get sick of the lifestyle, sick of watching their back, and sick of being in and out of jail.

Sometimes pregnancy prompts a woman to leave the gang. It varies, though, and many others choose to retain their membership status.

> I don't know if motherhood made them want to pull out, or attempt at least to try and pull out of being associated with gangs. I think what made Cindy really think was when she had a child that was killed by an I.P. gang member. And she was living with him - it wasn't the father of this child - she had two little boys. And I don't know if you read about it in the paper. She was allegedly sleeping and this guy was up with the kid. And this kid was acting up and so he punched it to death. And so at that point she decided that if she ever wanted to have the little one, they took the youngest one away from her, and she had to really straighten her act and not have any gang activity. So for some, it takes a death sometimes. And for others, it's just the whole idea of motherhood, and wanting to pull away for protecting their child. And for some, they stay right in it. I have one woman who just loves to be associated with gangsters, and she's right in the thick of things. So I don't know. (CJ4:14)

Keep in mind that gangs are very sexist, these are not equal relationships. Almost always, the woman is left to raise the child all alone. Consequently, intended or not, pregnancy usually decreases the woman's level of gang activity. As described by one respondent:

> .... [U]nfortunately, there's a lot of cases of teenage pregnancy. And when that happens you don't see their lifestyle continue in the same manner. Once they've had a couple kids and what-not, you tend to see them slow down or to go into a different area where you have some of them getting involved in crime such as drugs or working with other drug people, getting other people working for them. So you don't actually see the continuing of a lot of the lifestyle. Whereas the boys can get the girl pregnant and they can maintain their current lifestyles. (CJ5:13)

Some gang women actively choose to retain their gang membership.

> These girls are probably having babies from the gang members, so
> they're always going to have a connection. But I also think, for
> another thing, is having the child may help them. [It] may help
> them not to be involved in it. Like, this one pregnant girl was
> doing B & E's. Now she has her baby with her all the time. She's
> not going to be doing B & E's anymore. But she's still hooked up
> with a gang member. (SS17:23)

Some female gang members want to bring the baby 'into the family.' Not

only is it 'expected' but the mother believes it to be safer for the baby.

Her thinking is that her baby, who is coming into a harsh world, will at

least have the protection of the gang. The same respondent comments that

if a gang woman has a baby with her, others are less likely to want to

fight her:

> The girls seem to feel a sense of security, like they're tougher,
> like nobody's going to beat them up if they're pushing a stroller.
> And, so they get pregnant, or they've got their baby with them all
> the time. I've seen girls who have lots of enemies and have that
> baby with them at all times, you know? So, and you know what? It
> made me realize that, I think, I felt the same way when I was
> younger. I had enemies, and I wouldn't step out of my place without
> the baby in the stroller. 'Cause who's going to fight me if I've
> got my baby in the stroller, right? If I've got my baby strapped to
> my chest, you know? (SS17:22)

VII. Discussion

The purpose of this chapter has been to give a 'snapshot' of the

material conditions surrounding female gang affiliation. Consistent with

feminist research on female gang members (and traditional criminological

research on male gang members), respondents in this study suggest that

female gang members come from poor socioeconomic backgrounds, survive

'dysfunctional' childhoods, have suffered extensive abuse, live in the

deteriorating inner city areas, and are predominantly Aboriginal. The

gang satisfies the needs that the women have. The gang provides a sense

of family and acceptance, supplies members with money, drugs, and instant gratification, and gives these marginalized, alienated and powerless women a sense of power within the gang. They know their options are limited. The comfort, the excitement, and the 'clout' of the gang may be the best they can hope for. Unfortunately, while females participate in the same gang activities as the males, they do not receive the same recognition nor the same status. Again, consistent with previous research, the gang world is a microcosm of male domination and misogyny.

The majority of respondents are quick to point out structural inequalities of class and race. What about gender? The poverty-crime link has an extensive history. Public awareness about the 'plight' of Aboriginal peoples has been heightened, to some degree. However, neither of these characteristics (economic and racial marginalization) rupture our traditional construction of a 'criminal.' Crime, violence and gang affiliation have been synonymous with 'male behaviours.' This begs the question: How do the respondents in this study understand _female_ deviance, _female_ gang affiliation, and _female_ violence? Where do they locate the 'problem' of female gang affiliation? Further, how do their understandings of 'female gang affiliation' influence how they talk about and construct 'gang women'?

The construction of female offenders, generally, has a disheartening history of stripping female deviance from its context, and psychologizing or pathologizing the woman. In fact, we have very few constructions of deviant women available to us. Dominant ideologies and stereotypes limit

the language we have to 'normalize'[10] and 'contextualize' female deviance. Gang women are not only 'deviant,' they are 'gang affiliated' and 'violent' - further challenging the 'maleness' of crime. The next chapter will analyze the discursive conditions surrounding female gang affiliation. How do those who work with female gang members speak about gang women and their activities? What language do they use, and what does that say about how they construct 'gang women'?

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[10] I use 'normalize' as an antonym to the traditional 'pathologizing' explanations and constructions of female deviance.

Chapter Four

Discursive Conditions of Women's Violence and Female Gang Affiliation

Material conditions draw our attention to some aspects of female gang affiliation, giving us a 'snapshot' of the structural conditions and needs of gang women. Ristock (1998:327) explains: "The discursive tale troubles the material tale in viewing experiences as social constructions and not as explicitly transparent fact." Consequently, just as important, we must examine the discursive conditions which permeate the 'descriptive' accounts offered by respondents. A key assumption of discourse analysis is that knowledge and language are not neutral. As stated by Gavey (1989:464): "It is through discourse that material power is exercised and that power relations are established and perpetuated." Discourse analysis reveals power relations, for example, dominant ideologies influenced by the fact that we live in a patriarchal, capitalist society with a history of colonialism.

Given that crime, gang involvement, and violence have been typically constructed as 'male' activities, we have very few constructions or understandings of female gang members available to us. In other words, there are very limited discourses available to speak about girls and gangs. As outlined in Chapter One, the media, traditional criminology, and feminist criminology discourses suggest particular constructions of gang women. These discourses reflect different understandings of female violence and gang women. What discourses do the respondents in this study use? What language do they use to explain 'female violence' and 'gang women'? Further, as suggested in Chapter Two, do respondents construct

gang women differently because of their occupational position? Given that they come into contact with gang women for different reasons and have different job mandates, do they locate 'female gang affiliation' and 'gang women' differently?

As discussed in Chapter Two, by paying close attention to the language respondents used to describe female gang members when they explained them and their activities, as well as where they located the 'problem' of female gang affiliation, patterns of responses became discernable. In particular, two different constructions of the 'gang woman' became evident: (1) she is 'mad and/or bad'; and (2) she is a 'survivor.'

I. Female Gang Members as 'Mad and/or Bad'

In their making sense of female violence and gang affiliation, some of the respondents construct the gang women as 'mad.' In other words, gang women are irrational, over-emotional, and child-like. I use the term 'mad' to mean that gang women are depicted as lacking cognitive skills and logical reasoning. The gang women are also constructed as being 'bad.' The women are constructed as 'evil,' having no conscience and lacking morality. Their violence is far worse than male violence, approaching barbarianism. These constructions of female gang members as 'mad and/or bad' typically are discussed in relation to the (implied) more 'rational' male gang member. Following a long tradition, the reference point is men - gang women are 'other' - and women's inferiority is measured with a male yardstick. There is an innate, essential 'nature' of 'women.'

1) Understanding Female Violence

Some constructions of female gang members paint a picture of an atavistic creature, capable of 'unnatural' and horrendous acts of brutality. The violence of female gang members is described as much worse than that of male gang members. The main point of reference is men. Gang women are extremely evil, power hungry, and male-like, yet, also much worse than men. These constructions of gang women as 'bad' accentuate the 'evilness' and extreme viciousness of female violence. Violent female gang members are far worse than male gang members. Fights between female gang members are more savage ('bad') and irrational ('mad'). There is something so brutal and vicious about female fighting, it breaks all the rules. It is even worse than the behaviour of animals in the animal kingdom, the lowest level of atavism possible.

> Some of these female gang members will lay lickings on other
> females, that is absolutely astonishing, the brutality that's
> involved. It shocks male staff members that we have, and I'm
> talking veteran staff members, who have seen vicious fights between
> males. And I'm not saying that males necessarily have any necessary
> code of ethics with one another in terms of a beating. And it's
> hard to describe this to you, but there's a point at which a fight
> in an institution will stop. When the other individual's down and
> it's pretty clearly indicated, this is sort of that animal kingdom
> thing, you know, when there is the wolf-pack, and one guy sort of
> exposes his neck and that, and the other animals kinda' stop. The
> females won't stop. They will keep on going, that type of thing.
> (CJ3:27)

These women reflect evilness. They have no conscience.

> It's almost a self-centredness ... It was almost sort of like, 'If
> it pleases me, I see it, like it, I take it' kind of attitude. No
> conscience ... [H]er types of crimes, and her viciousness, and her
> power kinds of struggles, she didn't seem to have any kind of moral
> reasoning at all ... She thrived on the power. She thrived on that
> whole idea of being one of them ... (CJ4:6)

Apparently, gang women can be 'mad' and 'bad' at the same time.

> You talk to any gang guy though, and you ask them, 'What do they
> think about gang girls?' And they'll say that, 'They're fucking
> crazy. They're more violent than the guys. Fuck, you give them a
> gun, you gotta watch out.' And guys are more afraid of them in
> terms of the women's violence. I think they see them as being, if
> they're powerful in the gang, they're more violent and more
> unpredictable, and more impulsive, and more scary, and more planning
> and cunning. (CJ4:10)

Rather than recognizing that women may feel anger and desire

'power,' the following respondent only allows for 'reactionary' female

violence, in response to being a 'victim.' Female aggression resulting

from anger exemplifies their 'lack of conscience.'

> It's sort of premeditated, cold, calculating, um, no conscience a
> lot of times attached to it. A lot of the violence we're seeing,
> it's just very, no sense to it, **just because somebody's really
> really pissed off, not the idea that they're feeling threatened or
> fearful.** It's just sort of like, 'You deserve it. You bitch. You
> should get it,' kind of attitude. (CJ4:24; emphasis mine)

When describing female fights, many of the respondents exclaimed

their 'shock' at the unpredictability of it. The emotional and irrational

'nature' of women translates into their 'irrational' violence. Women,

because they are so 'emotional,' hold grudges that do not make sense.

Their irrationality gives their violence an unpredictable edge.

> (In terms of the nature of female violence, how is it different from
> the male violence?)

> Far more personal. Like, it's really personal. They get really
> involved in it. I think I told you, they hold grudges for a lot
> longer. They're prepared to act on those grudges, they're prepared
> to fight at the drop of a hat. Males have the tendency when they
> become violent, or they're going to become violent, to give a bunch
> of symbolic gestures. You watch those wildlife shows, and if you're
> familiar with the gestures and those kinds of things, and
> understanding that the gangs already have a fair amount of symbolism
> attached to them. There will be a build up, often, if there's a
> direct confrontation, between male gang members ... Females, in our
> experience, can go to violence almost [slaps hand] like that ...
> they don't have a lot of these kinds of ritualistic, ritualized
> behaviours. And it's not uncommon for us to have females engaging

in a fight, almost before a staff member's eyes. They don't care if our staff are present. That's what I mean in terms of the violence and the viciousness behind some of the violence. You will not get a male gang member very often to take another gang member on when one of our staff are present to witness the thing, because it's usually considered to be pretty counter-productive. Females will not hesitate. Female gang members will not hesitate. Even if our staff members are watching them. (CJ3:40)

Female violence is unpredictable, irrational, and 'counter-productive.' In reference to the animal kingdom, another respondent describes how women give no signs of their impending attack:

.... [T]hey'll use a gun, they'll use a knife, they'll use a weapon, beer bottles, and they don't necessarily announce that they're going to strike either. Whereas men, you can pretty, you know there's that sort of, there's a stand down, a dance, you can almost tell or whatever. And for some of these women, it's almost sort of like, you don't know, they leap from a chair and that. Or they'll smoosh up to somebody and manipulate and be 'lovey-dovey,' and then bite. You see? There's no warning sometimes with the women's violence. And that's what we're seeing, is that whole idea of women are masters of psychological violence, I say, and they use their manipulation, and they use their heads a lot in order to sort of premeditate what they're going to do, but not necessarily announce that they're going to bite. It's like the poodle that all of a sudden bites. You think it's a poodle, but, then you get bit. (CJ4:25)

Interestingly, another respondent suggests quite the opposite of 'unpredictable' female fighting 'at the drop of a hat.' Rather, he suggests that there are 'cues,' and the violence is, in fact, predictable.

I could just see the way they were walking, and the expression, and the attitude, a very 'stare-down' kinda thing. They would stare each other down. You know, a stiff rigid back, shoulders back, trying to, uh, you see on National Geographic, the prairie chickens, puffing up and showing their strength or whatever. That's what it's like. (CB24:6)

While both of these respondents refer to nature shows and the precipitating clues animals use in fights, they suggest opposite patterns of the 'nature' of female violence tactics.

The same respondent then describes the 'sudden' and vicious nature

of female violence:

> And then, all of a sudden, for some reason, one of the girls got isolated from her group. And the next thing you know, they swarmed her. And they just started to do a number on her. The violence was incredible. I had less violence from the guys. The guys, one, two punches, and I say, 'That's it.' And they'll stop. The girls, I had to pull them away and everything. And they were smashing this girl's face into a brick wall, and blood going everywhere, kinda thing ... When the females come in, that I know are involved in gangs, or associated somehow with them, I almost send a signal to my staff, 'Be an alert now.' We watch it very closely, much more than when the guys come in. (CB24:7)

2) Understanding Female Gang Affiliation

These respondents explain that women, because of their 'psychology' (and implied psycho-pathology), join gangs for different reasons than men do. While men join for tangible and socioeconomic reasons, women join the gang because they are 'needy' and more 'emotional.' Women have little interest in the money or power that the gang provides, they only join the gang for 'the sense of family.' In the process, respondents who construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad' locate the 'problem' of female gang affiliation in her mind. One respondent suggests:

> My personal picture of them right now, for whatever it's worth, is these are **inadequate personalities, desperate** to be accepted, desperate to belong to something .... (CJ3:27; emphasis mine)

This respondent suggests that the 'inadequacy' of the 'female mind' explains why they withstand their second-class treatment within the gang:

> My gut hunch, and that's all it is, for what it's worth, I think there are different reasons. I think there are some different reasons that females would join gangs, as opposed to males ... I am suspecting that if somebody were to look at female gang members, I am, I would be, I would be reasonably prepared to wager some heavy money that there are some dynamics going on in the **female mind** that are not going on in the males. And I'm gauging that on the fact that, notwithstanding the second class treatment that they get, they have far more of an intense loyalty to the gang than the male members, who are presumably getting better treatment, but who

display nowhere near the loyalty to the gang that the females do. (CJ3:38; emphasis mine)

Rather than explaining male dominance in terms of the fact that it surrounds gang women and is all that they 'know,' this respondent explains that it is because of women's 'needy' personalities. According to him, they tolerate male dominance and make the illogical decision to join that gang because they are 'needy.'

> What I was trying to get at is with the fact that females have such low status within the gang, even if they get into the I.P. by this easy road, through association and relationship, why they have that kind of loyalty to the gang, when they are treated basically like shit within the gang. There was a couple of crimes I'm aware of where their role would be to drive the car, the getaway car. Their job would be to hide the weapons. Their job would be to decoy a victim. Their job may be to assist in a beating. Take part in a beating, and so on and so forth. So, the gang will tend to involve them in pretty, uh, the pointed edge of the spear in terms of the commission of the crime. They [gang women] will have almost no say in terms of the distribution of the goods from that, in terms of having any sort of meaningful say in what crimes are going down. ... It's important to understand that this is **primarily** an **extremely** sexist organization. These guys do not believe that women are on the same level with them, at all. O.K.? And if, now, as I say, this is sort of an odd thing to see the loyalty that the females show to the gang. When they have absolutely no opportunity to ever be treated as sort of an equal. And where the gang frequently puts them in a position where they're going to be the fall guy. Or where they're going to be used for very high risk sorts of things, such as trying to bring drugs into the institution, such as carrying a concealed weapon that may have been used in the commission of an offence, such as using their house as a gang hide-out, such as putting them in a position to go after informants. Putting them in high risk situations where they're going to try to decoy a victim who may be able to see the thing being set up. And guess who he's going to try to take out first? These are not, these are not, this is not the Barbie and Ken relationship we're talking about. You know what I mean? This isn't the little woman sitting at home type of thing where the big guy goes off and commits his crime and brings the goodies back and so on and so forth, and says 'let's go party now,' or something like that. They are involved in all of what I, the term I use is the pointy edge of the spear. They're involved in all the, they're equal enough to participate in the crimes. Sometimes they're so equal that they're actually set up as being the fall guy if things go down and that. And then they go searching for the weapon, the three guys that are involved in the offence 'I got nothing.' She's carrying everything. And the way the law's

constructed, if you're carrying it, you have a real good chance of
drawing much more time than the guys are, who are doing the offence.
Not only is she happy with that role.   She relishes that role.
Which tells me, you're talking with some pretty needy personalities.
(CJ3:25)

Many respondents essentialize women's 'nature.' Because women are

more emotional 'by nature' than men, they also 'buy into the gang more.'

Motivated by their 'hearts' and not their minds, they are far more devoted

and loyal to the gang than the males.

> I think for the females, it just comes down to the difference
> between male psychology and female psychology ... They're more
> involved with families, stronger than guys, and that explains why
> when they join a gang. They buy into it more than the guys do. So,
> I think that's the greatest factor. (CJ1:32)

Seemingly contradictory, while females are far more loyal to the

gang than the males, they also switch their allegiance more easily than do

the males. This is congruent with the stereotypical notion that women are

'fickle.' While their devotion to the gang is intense, women also 'change

their minds' and switch their allegiances at random.

> Getting to the female gang members, some of the information we have
> is that female gang members are by far more devoted to the gang than
> a male gang member will be. On average, they tend to be far more
> devoted to the gang. They tend to be far more vicious in their
> confrontations with other gang members ... The fighting tends to be
> more vicious. The grudge is held forever. It seems to be held for
> a long time. The loyalty to the gang is absolutely sort of
> manifested in almost everything that they do. Defiantly loyal to
> the gang ... But it isn't that hard for an I.P. [Indian Posse] to
> roll over into being a Deuce. But once they become a Deuce, they
> must hate I.P. And yet, if they're with four more colleagues in
> custody, if there aren't other gang members around to necessarily
> make a big deal out of it, there are far more associations, it
> doesn't seem to bother them, they will tend to get along. Males
> don't do that very often. Once they switch, once a male switches
> from I.P. to Deuce, that becomes a blood thing to them. Never, to
> never give an I.P. a chance. The females, occasionally, when they
> switch over, do not necessarily carry that [allegiance] unless some
> other gang member's present, another gang member's present, then
> it's just total warfare. (CJ3:22)

The insinuation here is that there is a flippant and untrustworthy aspect

to females' intensely emotional loyalty to the gang.

Another respondent suggests that the only reason women join gangs is to attract the attention of male gang members:

> The females don't, they don't set out to accomplish the same
> things once they get into the gang ... Most of these girls are
> trying to attract the attention of a male gang member by
> joining. (SS16:25)

Sometimes, the female gang members are constructed as mere appendages to the gang. One respondent suggests that women's role is so peripheral, they are basically affiliated just because of their association with a male gang member. In fact, he even hesitated to call them gang members:

> There's not really that many ... Maybe just a couple of really hard-
> nosed girls with bad attitudes ... I know that there's a lot of
> girls who are down with Deuce and down with I.P., and I guess
> technically you could call them [the girls] Deuce and call them I.P.
> also. (CB23:7)

One respondent does not merely imply that women's role is peripheral and insignificant, he likens them to children;

> What you'd probably see with them [female gang members] is they're
> just tagging along. You have cases where, you know, the homicides
> and what-not where people have been killed by gang members, usually
> in a lot of cases the females are just observing those cases, or
> they're watching their significant other engage in their work.
> 'Take your kid to work day,' I guess. (CJ5:14)

Female gang affiliation is understood as peripheral. They are motivated to join the gang because they are 'needy' and occupy a marginal, 'child-like' position within the gang.

Other respondents suggest that women do have some influence within the gang.

> So there's a strong influence from south of the border. The females
> as I say, for some reason, buy into that influence more than the men
> do. And they, they're very dedicated to the gang. They're very
> much a mainstay as far as keeping the gang going. When they buy

into it they buy into it big, and they keep it going. They keep the
guys interested, because they're such a big part of it. (CJ1:8)

In fact, consistent with stereotypes of women's nature, these women are
constructed as devious, adept at psychological manipulation. Respondents
construct gang women as manipulative, conniving, trouble-makers:

And we have girls who come in and egg some of the guys on. They'll
say, 'Buddy or whatever is putting us down. If you're a man, come
on. Get your bros, let's go, let's get him, come on.' And the guy
wants nothing to do with it. He says 'It's stupid' and comments you
know, 'Just let them shoot their mouth off,' and then we'll watch
them come up and hit the guy in the face, and say, 'You're not a
man.' And now, the guy has to save face, he's got to get up, and I
got to walk out, 'cause he's going to smack her back, and once he
hits her, he's committed himself to having to go defend her honour
kinda thing. And sometimes it's just a set up, where they're trying
to get this guy out some place, and they'll just do number on him,
beat him up or something. (CB24:7)

Another respondent paints a similar picture:

What we haven't had much of yet, at least not provable, is a female
pulling the trigger in a drive-by shooting. They are in the car,
encouraging the male gang member to do so. One particular murder,
the female was in the vehicle, a couple of females were in the
vehicle, where the person actually killed a rival gang member, very
much encouraging him to do so before the act and very much showing
him affection and pride once he killed this guy in front of them,
like, 'Right on, you did it for the gang, you're a stand up guy.'
Very, very supportive and encouraging and taking full participation
in the prestige and glory after the murder. But they weren't the
ones that pulled the trigger. (CJ1:21)

It seems the only time women have 'brains' or rational thought is for the
purposes of evil. Their 'badness' is psychologized:

She's very bright. She could go through university and get a
degree, no questions asked. But she's very devious in a lot of
ways, and very manipulative, very self-centred, very narcissistic,
and her goal in life revolves around money. Now that he's [her
partner who is high up in the gang] in jail, she's constantly trying
to find ways of calling him up, and seeing if he can call somebody
up to do a job for her in order to get some cash, because she's
strapped. Or she'll go to people, other Warrior's, and say 'I need
this and that and the other thing' to try to set up ways of getting
herself some cash. So, in terms of who's the mind behind this guy,
it certainly isn't him, it's her. So I don't know if some of the
women are playing those kinda roles where, uh, see, he took the

> fall. He's in Stoney. You see. And I know that she pushes him to
> do a hell of a lot more than, you know. And she's the brains behind
> a lot of things. (CJ4:11)

Even the motivating factors for women to leave the gang are
constructed as irrational. While some of the respondents locate the
'problem' of gangs in the failure of mothers to rear their children
properly, others suggested that this 'maternal instinct' and desire to
care for their child is not logical. Pregnancy and leaving the gang to
raise your child in a safer atmosphere are not considered 'logical'
decisions.

> Male gang members are not affected by that. Their kids, by and
> large they could care less. They could have a hundred and fifty
> kids by a hundred and fifty different girls, they don't care.
> There's no tie there. But the mother-child tie is still there. So,
> it's that kind of thing that will affect the females choice as to
> leaving the gang. **Whereas a male is more persuaded by a logical
> argument approach.** (CJ1:49; emphasis mine)

The obvious implication here is that a female is persuaded by illogical
approaches, such as appealing to her duty as a mother.

This essentialized notion of 'women' is understood in relation to
'normal' male gang behaviour. The woman is constructed as 'other,' and
understood in terms of her unique 'nature.' This essentialized view of
gang women builds on existing stereotypes of women's nature and expected
sex-role behaviour. In the process, the gang woman is psychologized - she
is irrational (mad) and doubly deviant (bad).

3) Mad and/or Bad Women and the Evils of Empowerment

Even when social factors are acknowledged, they are seen in the
context of a 'loosening of (traditional) controls' over women - the
'downside' or negative impact of the women's liberation movement. Some

respondents suggest that the messages of 'female empowerment' have created

our societal problems. The problem is not structural inequalities, but

rather, a whole generation that is 'gender confused.'

(Any theories on why we're seeing an increase in female violence?)

I think that for the young ones coming up, I call them unisex kids. And if you really look at them, there's just sort of this whole confusion of gender, and a real mix of, uh, they **don't dress feminine**. They're bulking up, they talk, swearing, and their language is **just as masculine**. I think that they don't have a role model that shows them how to gain power without doing it the traditional **male way**. They know now, I think there's enough messages out in society, that women don't have to be a doormat. So, I think the young ones coming up have lived with probably better messages than I ever did growing up, in terms of **'women deserve power'** ... 'Sugar and spice and everything nice, that's what little girls are made of' was that some of the messages that you were given, and women can't identify with that [now]. O.K., then you tell me what you think the man is, and what the woman is, who's got the most power? And, the women are saying, 'Well the women are the ones with the power.' Oh. What is a man to you? 'A man is somebody with a long pony-tail, who should look good, probably won't be a good dad, probably doesn't earn any money, but all he's good for is one thing, and that's sex.' So, this is what we used to hear men say all the time, about women.

(Where do you think they're getting that message, because it seems to counter women's equality, women's liberation in economic terms, at least, hasn't hit poverty stricken families?)

Mhmmm.

(So how are they getting that ... [interruption])

I think that, I don't know how they're getting that, in terms of what maybe media [are] presenting to them. You know, there's always that message out there that you don't have to be second class anymore. In terms of economic, they don't necessarily see themselves as hard done by ... [T]here's this type of woman that's emerging now, and it's really showing its face in the unisex girls that are coming up, that don't see themselves as powerless. They're more aggressive. They're more trying to be in power or grabbing power in the traditional ways that the boys have been doing all along. (CJ4:26; emphasis mine)

Another respondent suggests that gang women mistakenly see gang

affiliation as the opportunity to 'take over':

> And now this is their opportunity to rise up and take over kind of thing. But in a sense, they're still part of the [patriarchal] system, in that they will be dominated by the male gangs. (CB24:6)

One respondent agrees that society has less control over women which, in turn, explains the increase in female aggression. The gender role prescriptions that held women in check no longer exist. Consequently, they have the freedom to 'be like boys.'

> It wasn't viewed by society to be acceptable for females to be involved in fights past a certain age. So, there were other avenues for them to get their aggressions out. Now, I don't really see that as being the case. We don't have those societal norms that are kinda keeping people in check. It's kinda like anything, anything goes now. They don't really have anything that they can go and say 'I can't do that because little girls don't do that' ... And now you see a lot of the same values that boys used to get. Females are now getting. So when a boy was aggressive and beating other people up, he could find a certain group that could find that acceptable. Now it's the same thing for females. Where it used to be teasing and getting other boys to go and do their dirty work for them. Now you'll have females that are actually able to do that themselves. (CJ5:19)

The devious gang women can now 'do their dirty work' themselves.

Another respondent complains that there are no gender controls holding women in check anymore. Female gang affiliation and female aggression can be traced to women's 'liberation.'

> Although it does seem that it's getting more acceptable ... [Women generally] seem to be a little bit more aggressive. The females that I've come into contact with ... There really doesn't seem to be that much of a difference in the sex roles anymore. You don't really see that. It's, I guess, uh, one of the, uh, the benefits of liberation. It's gone into the criminal world. (CJ5:8)

Rather than tracing it to an increase in violence in society generally, for example, he points to women's liberation and the fact that there is no difference between the sexes anymore. 'Liberation' gives women the freedom to act like men and, consequently, be as criminal as men.

These 'pseudo-men' do not act feminine. These 'bad' women are not following their prescribed gender-roles.

> .... [G]irls always played a passive, timid role, and always stood behind the man. And now, in the '90's, especially with the girls being involved in gangs, too, now. And, then the girls taking on a whole new role, as being aggressive, being violent. And, personally for me, I may be living in the dark ages, but for me, that's a real turn off. I don't particularly care for seeing girls walking around with a bad ass attitude ... But for the girls being violent and aggressive? It's just not feminine. It's just not, it's not appealing. It's not appealing to me. It's actually a real, real turn off. I don't like seeing girls like that. (CB23:11)

This male respondent, whose job is to help gang members, laments that the females are not 'appealing' to him.

Not only do female gang members act like pseudo-men, one respondent even suggests that female gang members physiologically resemble men:

> So I'm even looking in terms of physiologically, what or how are these women changing? And they are changing to be almost generic looking, compared to, you know, sort of, in terms of, but this is not everybody, the gang girls specifically. They're almost, like I say, unisex girls. They look like the guys, they act like the guys, they talk like the guys, they're beefed up like the guys, and tougher than the guys.
>
> (Beefed up in terms of muscle?)
>
> Oh yeah. These women are **big**. Mmhmmm. (CJ4:29-30)

Perhaps this increased 'maleness' even explains lesbianism? This respondent suggests the possibility:

> And then [there are] the ones who view themselves as having some sort of power equal to men. But they're also looking the role, and acting the role, and maybe that's why Donna's even 'sexuality confused' [homosexual]. I don't know. Or is that just to gain power and control, with the way men used to? I don't know. (CJ4:29)

Not only have the messages of female empowerment created a generation of 'pseudo-men,' but the women's liberation movement has also taken women away from their role of raising children. Women's participation in the labour force has broken down the family unit. When

discussing the 'lack of parenting' problem, rather than framing it in such

a way that holds both the father and the mother responsible, this

respondent only points the finger at the criminogenic mother. The mother

is at fault for not being there for her child who, subsequently, remains

in the gang.

> So, what they're going to do is wind up escaping. And it's going to
> be another reason why that gang member is going to continue in
> there. 'Cause they're going to look at, you know, **that significant
> female that was supposed to be helping them** and they can't even help
> themselves. So what else do they have to look forward to? (CJ5:17;
> emphasis mine)

This respondent assumes that the family of origin for gang members is

'working parents,' forgetting his previous comments that gang members come

from parents who are typically unemployed and on social assistance.

> And the problems seem to be, um, a lack of supervision, or a lack of
> influence from a parent, that either through them having to work or
> them **choosing to work** [pause]. What you see is a kid has to raise,
> raise himself [sic]. (CJ5:11; emphasis mine)

Another respondent, similarly, forgets that just previously she

suggested that the parents of gang women **did not** work.

> (Any theories on why [female violence has increased]?)
>
> ... Two working parents, that's the whole thing, where there's
> somebody not there to talk to, maybe. I don't know. Like, no one
> to work problems through with or no one [pause] I mean I don't know
> [pause] But, I just think it's, we've just changed so much over the
> years, I'm a prime example of that, the two parent family. It's
> very hard to care for your children ... I don't know, that's just
> an opinion. (CJ13:7)

Adler's influence is evident again - female gang members are benefactors

of the women's movement.

> So I guess in the world of equality, they've achieved that when it
> comes to violence. It's right up there. (CJ1:39)

4) Discussion: Constructing Women as 'Mad and/or Bad'

Constructions of female gang members as 'mad and/or bad' are based on typical role expectations. Consistent with societal stereotypes of 'women's nature,' the women are described as fickle and emotional; for example, they can not make up their minds, they are easily swayed by their hearts, and they switch their allegiances on a whim. Women lack restraint and rational thought. They join the gang for 'emotional' reasons, as opposed to social and structural ones. Accordingly, the underlying reasons for a female's gang motivation lie in her mind, rather than social structural conditions. Gang women are depicted as child-like - their gang activities are peripheral and inconsequential - and/or as evil and manipulating - their gang activities more brutal (and less rational) than men's.

These constructions of women reflect commonly held sex-role stereotypes. We live in a society in which women have particular roles which they should 'naturally' fill. The containment of aggression is a female role-specific behaviour. Women must contain their aggression and feelings of powerlessness. Female violence challenges traditional role prescriptions which assume 'female passivity.' Any female 'outbursts' have traditionally been pathologized, locating the problem in their biology[11] or psychology[12] (Campbell, 1993:142). Women's aggression is

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[11] In the 1800's, hysterectomies were the heralded 'treatment' for women's hysteria [read: their frustration and anger] (See: Thomas Laqueur, 1990:176). Rather than legitimizing women's anger, the 'problematic' organ was removed. Keep in mind that early hysterectomies were extremely dangerous, often fatal.
The hysterectomy 'cure' is further illogical when we consider that delinquency is associated with 'maleness.' Wouldn't a hysterectomy make women more 'male'?

an enigma, attributed to their 'irrationality' and/or 'evilness.'

> Her actions are forced into a masculine model of aggression, judged to be male, and the woman is seen as having violated not just the criminal law but the 'natural law' of proper female behaviour. (Campbell, 1993:144)

One the other hand, it is 'natural' for men to act out. "This repeats an historic theme of the treatment of women by the criminal law - women who are criminals are viewed as crazy or helpless or both" (Schneider 1989:85). In the process of constructing gang women as 'mad and/or bad,' the 'problem' of female gang affiliation is individualized and an essential 'woman' is implied. Rather than locating the problem in terms of structural inequalities experienced by gang women, they problem is located in her 'nature.' When societal conditions are acknowledged, the women's movement is implicated - again, the problem can be traced to women. The women's movement has resulted in a lack of societal control, particularly though gender norms, over women. Consequently, women's 'freedom' translates into freedom to engage in typical 'male' behaviours of gang affiliation and violence. These constructions of gang women suggest that women are in need of psychological therapy, with a particular emphasis on re-learning their appropriate 'feminine' roles. The only societal change required, ideally, would be the reaffirmation of patriarchal control, putting women 'back in the kitchen' and, consequently, out of crime.

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[12] Male aggression translates into women's insanity (Campbell, 1993:154). For an in depth exploration of women's deviance being defined as 'mad,' typically resulting in their committal to an asylum (Ussher, 1991).

II.   <u>Female Gang Members as 'Survivors'</u>

Some respondents locate female gang affiliation in terms of the structural inequalities which have an impact on their lives, influenced by the women's race, class and gender. These respondents locate both women's violence and their gang affiliation in broader social, legal and economic factors. Rather than constructing female gang members as 'other' and suggesting that their gang affiliation and use of violence are inherently 'different' from male gang members', these respondents suggest that female and male gang members actively survive the structural inequalities which have an impact on their lives. Recognition is given to how those social factors and material conditions connect with their gang affiliation and their violence. They suggest that essentialist and stereotypical understandings of women make female violence more noticeable and shocking than male violence. They trace female gang affiliation and violence to the fact that violence in society, generally, has increased and that the gang acts as a socializer encouraging the use of violence. They also link female gang affiliation and violence to the abuse histories endured by many of the women. By locating the issue in broader structural terms, respondents do not construct female gang affiliation and violence as 'unnatural' and psycho-pathological. Rather, they describe gang women who endure particularly harsh and 'irrational' <u>circumstances</u>. In the process, they construct the women as 'survivors' who exercise agency and make <u>rational</u> 'choices' given the options they see around them.

1)   Understanding Female Violence

Women have always had the potential to be violent, yet 'violence' and 'crime' have been synonymous with 'maleness' and masculinity. In fact, some respondents point out that one of the biggest differences

between female and male gang members is the fact that society views female deviance differently from male deviance. Rather than locating 'female violence' in terms of her 'increased maleness' or 'increased equality,' some respondents locate it in terms of 'increased prosecution.' One respondent points out:

> We have way more females involved, and the question often is, 'Are girls becoming more violent? Are they becoming more criminal?' I don't know if that indeed is true. Or now, with the new response to crime, and equal opportunity, that females are just being processed in a way that they weren't processed before. A group of girls gets into some trouble, 'O.K. Dry your tears and go on home'. A group of boys gets into trouble, and it's like 'Charge them, charge them, charge them.' So I think people are being more open to charging females too, and that might account for females being seen as highly criminal now. So I don't quite have my head around that one either yet ... But, we are seeing females more heavily fined, sanctioned, sentenced. (SS14:5)

The fact that female violence violates stereotypical and essentialist notions of 'women's nature,' as well as the law, makes it doubly deviant and all the more shocking. Some respondents recognize that women, like men, have always had the capacity to be violent.

> I mean the potential has always been there. When you work in a [correctional] facility, and you get to see both males and females at their best and at their worst, you realize that there really isn't a whole lot of difference. Just because a man's a man, or a woman's a woman. The violence level is always there in both sexes, in both genders. (CJ7:15)

Further, some respondents point to the fact that we **notice** female deviance more. One respondent suggests that there has not been a dramatic increase in female violence. The potential has <u>always</u> been there.

> Yes, girls have always been capable of acting out ... The girls in care have **always** had issues with violence, like any of our kids in care. (SS15:14)

Another respondent offered the following insight:

> I think there's a big misconception out in the world, and it has to
> do with the whole idea of the patriarchal society, and stuff like
> that, that women are so sweet and things like that. And I believe
> that women have the propensity to be violent, and even more violent
> than men. But I believe that's because we've been taught not to
> express our anger, so it builds up inside of us. And you know, when
> [women] let it go, it's like an horrendous release. So I think in
> a group, women would be more likely to be able to let their anger
> go, on a basis, because there's support there, and the people accept
> it. So, therefore, the women are learning it's O.K. to be angry,
> it's O.K. to violent. And then plus with the egging on and peer
> pressure, and if people are saying that it's a good thing to do,
> then it will happen more and more ... And with the group, of course,
> people draw strength from groups, and do things they normally
> wouldn't do ... There's a lot of angry people out there but I think
> because the women haven't been **allowed** to display it before, that
> we're going to notice the violence in women more. To me it's
> normal, but we're [society] going to notice it more because we
> [women] aren't **supposed** to be that way. (SS18:5)

The following respondent rejects biological arguments that men are

'naturally' more violent than women.

> I would say that we're starting to realize that females aren't
> necessarily, not the weaker sex, but individuals that are less
> likely or less prone to violence ... The rage is there. You can't
> just say that it's a male thing, that it's all the male hormones.
> (CJ2:14)

Women, like men, can feel frustration and anger about their powerlessness

in society.

In addition to the fact that we notice female violence more (and

perhaps more than male violence), some respondents also point to that fact

that society, in general, has become more violent and encourages

desensitization. Consequently, there are more men and women who use

violence.

> (There's been a lot of talk about female violence in the media.
> Would you say that it's increasing?)

> Yes. I would say definitely it's increasing. But I think also
> people are noticing more ... But, yeah, I think all of society is
> becoming more violent. Not just the women. As a society becomes

more violent, of course women are going to become more violent too
... I am a firm believer in t.v. and movie violence, I really
believe that adds to it. Just, in the way that the longer you're
exposed to it, you just start accepting it as normal and natural,
and there you go. So it just becomes a way of life. (SS18:15)

If you're looking at society in general, I think that the girls, for
example, if you just watch kids, um, that you see there's a lot more
violence in society for a number of reasons. You can go to t.v.
You can to media. And you can go to all kinds of influences. It's
not a unique phenomenon that the female young offenders that we see
are more volent than the general population. You might be able to
make that statement, but a I think the general population is more
violent anyway. (CJ11:23)

Further, life in the gang is very violent. The gang mandates

violence. The following respondent recognizes the impact that the violent

'gang life' has on the women.

I'm just noticing more the restricted life that they have to live,
in terms of 'Oh we can't go there, because so and so might be there.
And if so and so sees us. And if they find out where we live, da
da, da da, da da, and they wrecked this house, or they did this' ...
The threat of violence, but also, like we had one family, part of it
ended up getting very involved in gangs and stuff. Well, then that
house was completely demolished one night. Regardless, if there was
a mom living there or not. Just demolish the place, and then
they're out on the street sort of thing. And that's just a regular
weekend happening sort of thing. And that's definitely gang
related. (CB21:10)

Violence is a way of life in the gang, for women and men.

I don't think there's a lot of differences. The females tend to be
as violent as the males can ... They're active participants.
They're not just individuals on the periphery ... [T]hey sort of
accept that as part of the lifestyle. Like, violence becomes an
accepted norm, as part of the lifestyle. So, something that, say,
the average citizen would really be taken aback by, to them it's
just, 'She deserved it, she had it coming to her' or 'He or she
looked at me the wrong way.' (CJ2:14)

This respondent suggested that, when compared to other females of similar

demographics, a distinguishing feature is that the gang women are more

violent.

> I think your female gang members ... I think they're going to be more violent than your average female offender. And that just goes with the whole street gang subculture. Violence is an accepted norm. It's an influence. (CJ2:27).

Another respondent suggests that, perhaps, the potential was always

there and the violence mandated within the gang 'sets it free.'

> (Do you think we're seeing a new type of female offender? I'm wondering about the nature of female violence, has it changed? And is it different from male violence?)

> Well, I think it's the same. When you look at the feminist movement, the way it's progressed, the more our movement progresses, the more everybody starts realizing that there's very similar things between men and women. And again, it's just that we're becoming aware that women are capable of this ... But I think also as the gang activity increases so will the offences of women increase. Because, if the women are at the bottom of the ladder of the gang structure, the gang structure is set up in such a way that the bottom people always get the blame. Like the leaders set themselves up to be quite clear and free and their hands aren't dirty, and more and more. And it depends too on things like, in prostitution, are they going to start arresting more women? What are they going to do with that? Are our jails going to be filled with young prostitutes? You know? (SS18:16)

The gang hierarchy is set up such that women are often the 'fall guys.'

This further increases the visibility of female violence.

Further, the gang socializes its members to abide by a code of

ethics which requires 'toughness.' Rather than constructing gang women as

'cold,' 'evil,' and without conscience, some respondents recognize that

gang women have to act 'tough' and 'unemotional' to survive their world.

> It's [gang life] very, very violent, you know. Those young women **get trained to have no fear**, even of authority ... (CB20:13; emphasis mine)

One respondent, rather than constructing the women as 'evil' because

they appear 'cold' and without conscience, notes that they cannot show

emotion within the gang or else they would be viewed as weak - tantamount

to suicide in the gang world.

> Like, basically, all of them can fight. And they've been trained how to fight. Or, they've had to fight since they've been 8 or 9. And so they have no problem, um, whenever one girl puts the other down, it's immediately, they go outside and want to fight it out. They have, that's how they prove their worth to their other girlfriends. Like I had to break up, on one of my shifts, I had to break up a few girl fights, just because, you know, it kinda shows their toughness to the other people around them and stuff. And they kinda get respect from the other girls, and also the guys who are looking, too. It's just part of the thing that you do. They don't shy away from that. It's accepted. (CB22:8)

In addition, these respondents recognize that the abuse histories of these women influence their acts of violence. Rather than explaining female violence by the fact that women are becoming 'pseudo-men,' they suggest that gang women have been exposed to violence and abuse their entire lives.

> They're not afraid to fight. Unfortunately, some of them have witnessed this in the home, you know, drunken parties, witnessing that as kids, too. And so, it just, that whole cycle continues. But when there's knives and guns involved, that's, that's serious. And there's been more of an increase in that, whether it's stabbing, or people having access to guns. I mean, any one of them can tell me where to purchase a gun, or get a gun. So, [pause] they know lots. I don't think, I think only 2% would ever resort to that, but they have the knowledge of where to get things. (CB20:27)

Since a very young age, these women have had to learn to fight in order to survive. They learn that, if you are 'tough,' allies will respect you and enemies will leave you alone.

> So, none of them have a problem with being tough or show their aggression. It's, you kinda do that to demand respect, and so that other kids don't push you around or try to manipulate you or steal stuff from you or whatever. It's just kinda the way, it's how you stake your territory. And a lot of them know how to fight, and they're only, like, 11 or 10, you know? (CB22:19)

One respondent suggests that many of the acts of violence committed by gang women mirror acts previously committed on them. The gang women perpetuate the abuse they have endured.

> Some of my girls are called Bitch #21 or whatever their nicknames or code names are. They're associated. People know who they are by that name. And they in turn have to recruit other young women. And, that's where the violence is, is torture. It's unreal. So, in that sense, ... Like I was mentioning about one of my girls who tortured this other young woman with hangers, whips, you know, beating her up ...

(Hangers?)

Hangers.

(Vaginally?)

> Yep. Yep. So, that one, she's incarcerated still. And it's not that I give up on them, but there is a certain amount, there's a limit that, you know, if she's going to continue to do this. Some are just bent on, on going all the way. And you're going to find them in Portage [Correctional Institute] also. Some of them are in there. I'm sure if I would go and visit, I would know a few of them. And it's sad. I mean, it's sad that they've had to be exposed to that kind of violence themselves, and in turn perpetuate it on other young women. So, it's, it's been on the increase in the last three years. (CB20:25)

So, here, this one respondent relates a particularly violent act of gang women torturing another woman. Yet, rather than constructing these women as 'evil,' she feels 'sad.' She draws attention to the fact that these young women were 'exposed to that kind of violence themselves.' At the same time as the respondent recognizes the victimization of the gang women, she does not construct the women as 'victims without agency.' Gang women exercise agency, taking on the role of the perpetrator and claiming the power that goes with it.

The following respondent locates female violence in terms of the abuse they have endured, and continue to endure. The gang women use violence to gain some power in their lives.

> You know, the fact that they're acting out to gain some power. I mean, for themselves to feel, um, because they're abused by the guys in the gangs. They get out of their home where there's abuse and then they hang around with these gang guys where they get abused, too. (CJ10:17)

They also recognize the sense of 'hopelessness' felt by female gang members, acknowledging the effects of the abuse many gang women have endured. In consideration of the constant exposure to, and intimate experience with, violence, some respondents suggest that gang women have nothing left to lose.

> Those who are affiliated with the gangs, their crimes seem to be either more violent or more repetitive, as opposed to a first time offender female who just gets into a scuffle at school for fighting or, whatever, assault. The ones with the affiliation with the gangs are often more violent and, uh, scarier. They're the ones that have that lack of fear. They have that sense of hopelessness. It doesn't matter what happens, they might as well go all the way with this. (CB20:19)

A learned behaviour, the use violence appears to offer the most immediate means of gaining power.

> I think that if you happen to be a child of colour, or a child, or basically child of colour, dealing with all, becoming a young woman, and all those issues. And how you're held back in society, generally. And then you're kind of one of the disenfranchised groups within that. Your chances of feeling that you have any power in your life or any kind of control about what's going on around you would be slim to none, I figure. You know, so if they're able to go beat up on someone, I mean I'm not condoning this, but I'm just saying, you can kind go 'Wait, hmm.' You know, this is the one way that they feel that they [the women's abusers] have some control and some power. It's the **wrong** kind of control and power. But you can kind of see, where maybe they've made that leap. That, 'I don't like it when it happens to me, but, I know if I go out and do it, I know that I feel that I'm more powerful than that person, than this person below me.' Right. And so, I might feel a little bit better about myself, but for all the wrong reasons and all the wrong ways, than instead of feeling better about themselves because they've done well at something, personally accomplished something. But they don't know that. (CJ11:24)

2) Understanding Female Gang Affiliation

Importantly, some respondents recognize that gang women also feel the pains of classism and racism, just as do men. Rather than locating female gang affiliation in terms of their 'nature,' such as their

'different' minds or hearts, some respondents recognize that structural and social conditions, such as poverty and abuse histories, affect women as well as men. Female gang affiliation and violence are understood as logical responses made by women trying to survive their conditions of structural inequality.

> I know anybody from whatever socioeconomic class could become involved in gangs. But, I think for kids that maybe don't have the opportunities, that some of the middle class or upper middle class kids have, are more susceptible. 'Cause they're the ones that are hanging out on the street with no place to go, nothing to do. And, you know, maybe people care about them but don't have the financial ability to take them to dance lessons or to soccer games, or to get them involved in those community things. (CJ9:16)

> All the classical reasons that everybody says, they're all true, like poverty, abuse, neglect. (CB21:14)

When asked what motivates kids, generally, to join gangs, the following respondent framed her response in terms of structural inequalities which constrained gang members lives, both females and males:

> Oh, there's so many things. Like, especially in this area [core area of the city]. And speaking about Aboriginal people, society has done so much trying to assimilate them. And, you know, starting right back to the residential schools. So, probably right back to the reserve system, with them forcing them to change their life, and trying to make them into farmers. And then the residential system stripping them of their culture and their language, and things like that. And ripping them apart from their family units, so they don't even know parenting skills ... [A]nd then because of this social assistance system, the way it's set up. It's set up for failure. It's so hard to break out of that system. Therefore, what choice do you have? And then it becomes a fact of 'O.K., I can either work really hard and go to university and get a degree. And, I don't have the money to do that, so I'll struggle and be poor. Or, do I go join this gang and have some ready cash in my pocket?' Like, immediate, immediate gratification. And then, also, what's happening is, I think, this is getting a little political, but with the new social assistance policy, you're going to see the increase in street gang membership again because the new social assistance policy forces people, like single parents or parents, when their kids are of school age, they have to go out and get training and go to a job, and things like that. Wonderful, but, when you're looking at small rural communities where there is no economic development, there's no jobs available, what happens is they have to come to the

city of Winnipeg. So, again, they're taken away from their homes, their families, their whole support system. Put into the city of Winnipeg, where they know nothing. There's no support for the kids. Things like that. The mom's off at school trying to get a training program. And then she'll probably end up in a minimum wage job. So then she becomes, not a social assistance statistic, but a working poor statistic, which everybody ignores. And then, this woman's kids are out there [on the streets of Winnipeg]. And she's slaving away from 9-5 in a waitressing job, or 5-12 slinging hash. And who's going to watch her kids? 'Cause her family's gone. Right? Everything just keeps adding to it and adding to it. (SS18:13)

Note that this respondent mentions lack of parenting skills, dysfunctional families, welfare, immediate gratification and single mothers, among other things. However, unlike other respondents, she immediately locates those aspects in terms of the structural inequalities of race, class and gender which create and perpetuate them.

Some respondents frankly point to the structural inequalities uniquely faced by Aboriginal people, tracing gang involvement to the marginalization and alienation of Aboriginal people historically.

I don't know the exact demographics but let's say 90% of the people living in poverty-stricken areas, such as the core area, are Aboriginal. It only makes sense that Aboriginal people are going to hang around with Aboriginal people. And therefore the gangs are going to form that way. (SS18:7)

I see gangs as fitting so much, speaking Aboriginally. Gangs offer so much that is missing in their home. It's replacing, as I said before, the lack of family structure and the lack of belonging and all that stuff that's missing from the home because of 200 years of history. Kids are able to gain that within a gang. And it's too bad that that's the place it has to go. And it's not the parents' fault, or the family's fault, that this thing has happened. It's been a conditioning over years. And it's just history, but kids are obviously getting desperate, to do that. So, where do you go to get it? You go to the first and the easiest place to get it, to get a sense of belonging. Everybody needs a sense of belonging and if they can get it from there [the gang], of course they're going to go. (SS18:19)

Because a lot of our clients are Aboriginal, how much does residential schools impact on that? Are we seeing, and going to continue to see, the awful impact of residential schools on the Aboriginal population? They lost the ability to parent when all

those kids were taken out. You can't give that back to them. So you can't expect the generation that's parenting now, they're in their 40s, to be able to parent, because they weren't at home to be parented. And that's how you learn right? It's modelled behaviour. Learn how to parent by watching your parents do that. So if you're taken out of that, and you only get to go home for two months a year, those parents forget how, those kids that are now adults with kids, and they've actually got grandkids now, so how many generations now have we got people that don't know how to parent? (CJ11:25)

Another respondent saw the structural inequalities imposed by racism as influencing not only the propensity to gang involvement, but also the visibility and detection of gang members. She comments:

> I guess history's shown [pause] the socioeconomic, lack of self-esteem, residential schools. Just society's racism and prejudism [sic] towards Aboriginal people. I would think the majority of **noticed** street gang members are Aboriginal. See, 'cause I also know that there's a lot of street gangs in the Asian community but we never hear about them ... And a friend of mine told me, about 20 years ago, Aboriginal youth gangs started in defence of Asian gangs ... Within our city, Aboriginal gangs formed to stop the Asian gangs from taking over their territory [in terms of 'turf' issues over drugs, prostitution, etc.] ... That was how it all started and came to light, and become organized or formal. It was protection. (SS18:6)

In Winnipeg, 'street gangs' are synonymous with 'Native gangs.' The invisibility of Asian gangs exemplifies this. Rarely are they mentioned in the media. Police and Corrections statistics suggest that their numbers are insignificant. On that note, another respondent gives a chilling assessment of Asian gangs:

> .... [T]here's Asian gangs here, too. And they're the ones that are very organized. And some of my girls have a had a hell of a time getting out of those places, and out of the grips of those men. So it's, you know, we are always aware of what's happening, try to be aware, so that they, if they end up over there [Vancouver], then they get shipped to Hong Kong to prostitute over there or become slaves. So it's a whole sex trade, I mean the whole thing is crazy, you know ... I would be very cautious and concerned if someone discloses to me that they've been involved with some Asian gangs. They won't tell me right away, but we've had to take out a few girls from places that are Asian run gangs, and they'll keep them there for weeks on end to prostitute for them. And they seem to like

> young Aboriginal girls, and so, [sigh] I don't know, those are the
> ones that I'm concerned about. They're more high risk to be shipped
> to Vancouver, and deported wherever. (CB20:25)

In Winnipeg, Asian gangs, however, remain invisible to the criminal

justice system, as well as the 'public eye.'

Multiple structural inequalities (based on race/ethnicity, class and

gender) interact and interconnect, creating conditions of marginalization,

alienation and socioeconomic disadvantage.

> They, unfortunately, are not in the mainstream. They've sort of
> been excluded. They don't have a lot of options to them. And
> because of that, the street gangs are a viable alternative to a lot
> of them. They, obviously, have the street gang replacing the
> family, in a lot of ways. They're accepted as a peer with very few
> questions asked. And even if there are some negative sanctions or
> negative aspects to it, they'll weigh those out. Overall they think
> it's a positive choice. (CJ2:4)

In addition, gang women often come from particular social conditions

in which they have survived severe abuse. One respondent cites sexual

abuse, in particular, as having a huge impact on gang women's behaviour.

> Some of them grow up being abused sexually, I believe most girls who
> are getting involved in the criminal aspect of gang affiliation.
> Some of them won't. Some of them will go hang out at booze cans,
> toke up, drink, party with them, they might fight, you know, beat
> somebody up. If this guy says, 'Beat up my x-girlfriend.' 'O.K.',
> she'll go beat her up. But they're not doing the weapons, the B &
> E's, and the robberies. Right? They're not doing that. The ones
> that are not doing that are probably repeating the cycle, but
> thinking of a better life. The ones that are doing the crime that
> the guys are doing, they've probably been molested, sexually abused
> ... I do believe though that the majority of females probably think
> that there's got to be something other than this [gang life], but
> it's just harder for them to leave if they've been sexually abused,
> and suffered emotionally, spiritually, all that kind of abuse when
> they're younger. They're the ones that are getting involved in the
> criminal aspect of it. (SS17:35)

The future seems to hold so little for these women and there is a

sense of hopelessness.

> So, in terms of their ability to finish school and get a job and
> support themselves, that reality is becoming less and less ... [I]f

you look at that, what kind blocks are there for some Aboriginal kid who's living down on Stella Walk? You know, you sit there and go 'O.K., if you finish school and get your grade 12 education, you're going to get a job.' And they're gonna go, 'Doing what? I can read the paper. I can listen to the news. And what are these other kids [non-Aboriginal, middle-class] getting? Nothing.' There's even more barriers for those [gang affiliated] kids. (CJ11:12)

Another respondent comments:

And I try and talk to the females about how they feel about something, or what they want to do. What [are] their hopes and dreams? What kind of workshop do you want? What do you think can better yourself? Like, in a workshop I said to the females, 'If a hundred dollars is the maximum, what do you think you're worth?' And they say 'Five dollars' or 'fifty dollars.' And I say, 'What do you think you need to bring yourself up to a hundred bucks? Because everybody can be a hundred bucks.' And they have no answer for that. 'I don't know.' They just don't know what they need. (SS17:26)

This respondent suggests that girls, particularly, grow up feeling powerless:

The struggle for identity, and for independence, for standing on your own two feet, for feeling in control of your own life, or at least the things around you, instead everybody else making your decisions for you. It starts when the girls become teenagers, that they're struggling with that. It starts when they're small, from when they're getting abused by little boys. You see that in elementary schools. The little boys are abusing the little girls, physically-wise, or verbally. It starts when they're small. And so by the time they're teenagers, you know? And also not to mention the media and the Barbie dolls ... (SS17:27)

They endure life in the gang because they feel they have no other options.

I think the females are used as couriers, and taking drugs into the institutions is another one, carrying the weapons and that ... [A male] street gang member tells his girlfriend, 'You're going to bring this in,' I don't think you have much of a choice. Like they're living with them. They do as they're told ... [T]hese people [gang women] don't have a lot of resources. They don't have a lot of hope. (CJ2:19)

Despite the abuse women endure in the gang, the gang also offers them protection and a sense of power in their lives.

I don't think girls are any different than the guys, wanting protection, you know, from other girls. I mean, they still have the

same kinda street beefs and they want to exert some power of their own. But the abuse is there [in gangs] as well. A lot of times, if you don't do what they want you get beat up. You want to get in, you get beat up. You know, there's a fair amount of coercion going on all the time. (CJ10:11)

So she basically joined the gang to have back-up. And it's all about proving yourself physically. I find that a lot of girls too, that their self-esteem is so low, that they have to feel like they, uh, every girl wants to feel strong and tough, but it's in the wrong way. Every girl wants to feel power, because they basically feel like they have none. So the easiest way to grab power is to put on a tough act and join a gang. You know? Like, I used to really crave power, because I used to get beaten up all the time. You know? And I used to fantasize about what I could do to the people that were hurting me. And the best thing was to hang out with bigger girls. (SS17:4)

The desire for power stems not only from abuse but, also, anger. Alienated youth are angry.

A lot of youth across the board have lost their identity. They don't feel, like, a sense of self the way somebody would, say, if they grew up being told all the time 'You can do whatever you want, you have the potential to be what ever you want to be.' Like, if a child was hearing that, they would always have a sense of self. But some youth don't. And particularly Native youth. They lost their identity. This generation is built up anger from many, many things, and many, many years. And, this is a real anger generation, so they've lost a sense of self. So they're trying to take from outside [themselves], something to give them an identity, which is colours, I.P., or a name, I.P., you know. They're trying to take from outside to try and give them a sense of identity, like 'This is who I am'. But really it's not. They don't understand that their sense of self is in them, they're trying to take from outside, to give them a purpose or an identity. (SS17:7)

Rather than suggesting that these 'angry' gang women are evil (because they are violating traditional gender norms which do not allow for female anger), these respondents recognize the source of their anger and, in so doing, validate it.

3) Discussion: Constructing Women as 'Survivors'

Some respondents construct the women as 'survivors' who, in consideration of their social and structural conditions, make the logical 'choice' to join a gang. Abuse histories, increased legal prosecution, societal sex-role stereotypes, marginalization and societal violence all play a part in motivating women to join gangs and to engage in violent behaviour. These respondents suggest that gang women survive particularly impoverished conditions because of structural inequalities resulting from their race, class and gender. They are also endure violence and crime in their homes and communities. There is little institutional and structural support, creating a dismal present and a bleak future. The gang offers protection, acceptance and safety from the routine violence at home, at school and on the street. This is consistent with feminist research which contextualizes female gang affiliation (as discussed in Chapter One), locating their gang affiliation and activities in terms of structural inequalities which have an impact on their lives.

The respondents recognize that women have the same potential to be violent as men. The respondents explain that displays of aggression and violence are not innately 'male.' The life histories and conditions of these women have taught them that violence 'works.' In order to survive, these women must be tough. As explained by Klein (1995:111):

> Thus aggression, which is socialized in normal settings as expressive behaviour - crying, screaming, stamping of feet, and so on - becomes instrumental aggression in the gang, violence against rivals and victims and against fellow gang members when challenged. It follows logically that increased male gang violence over the years will be matched by proportional increases · in female gang violence.

Gang women can respond to their violent surroundings and victimization in

one of two ways. They could exhibit expressive aggression,[13] demonstrative of fear and weakness, which leads to further victimization or they can act tough, demonstrating instrumental aggression which translates into a 'reputation' and enhances survival on the street.

> Fear and loneliness - in their families, their communities, and their schools - are the forces that drive young women toward an instrumental view of their aggression .... The key to this [survival] is the development of a reputation for violence, which will ward off opponents. (Campbell, 1993:133)

The circumstances of a bleak future and rough neighbourhood necessitate flexibility in these women's gender roles. Rather than a voluntary women's movement, this is a 'forced emancipation' (Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995:414). Gang women need to reconcile survival skills with the required traditional gender-role expectations of lower- and working- class communities (Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 1992:83). Acts of instrumental aggression do not embody these women's desires to be more 'manly,' rather, they are survival mechanisms.

By locating these women in their structural context, female gang members emerge as <u>survivors</u> of their conditions. Comack (1996) describes 'surviving' as a coping strategy. Her research with female offenders high-lights the connections between their abuse histories and their law violations:

> I have argued that abuse is one of the ways in which women's lives are gendered. Gender-based violence is a structural issue, it reflects and reinforces women's inequality in society. To this

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[13] Campbell (1982:137) differentiates between instrumental aggression (to gain particular ends) and expressive aggression (characterized by anger and hostility). Women who act out their aggression (instrumental aggression) become 'doubly deviant': they not only violate the law, but violate nature. However, **circumstances and life experiences** dictate the expression of instrumental or expressive aggression, not biology (Campbell, 1993:126).

extent, abuse is one manifestation of the existing power imbalances. While abusive relationships take different forms and occur in different contexts, they ultimately boil down to issues of power and control. The ability of a woman to manage the problems, dilemmas and conflicts that abuse generates will be very much conditioned and contoured by other factors in her life situations, including her age, her race and her class positioning in society. In drawing out the linkages between abuse history and law violation, therefore, we cannot lose sight of the other factors related to a woman's social location. At the same time, we need to maintain a sensitivity to human agency, that is, to the choices and decisions each woman has made in her struggle to deal with the abuse. (Comack, 1996:82)

Gang women actively 'survive' their conditions. Rather than constructing gang women as irrational or evil, these respondents recognize that female gang members are active agents, albeit victimized,[14] who react rationally to their circumstances. Comack (1996:101) describes 'surviving' as a coping strategy utilized by women who endure particular circumstances of 'endangerment':

> For women who have been abused, surviving is very much a process. Their struggle to contend with the effects of abuse experiences will be especially compounded when the abuse in their lives is ongoing [as with female gang members]. This is the case for women who end up on the streets. These women have been relegated to the margins of society. For them, surviving is an almost daily concern, as their social circumstances place them in a situation of constant endangerment. I use the term 'surviving' here, therefore, to capture **how the connections between abuse and law violation become intertwined in a woman's struggle to live through and with her endangerment.**

By locating female violence and gang affiliation in terms of social and structural conditions, these respondents construct gang women as rational survivors to irrational conditions. Rather than psychologizing, individualizing and, ultimately, depoliticizing female gang affiliation, these respondents locate female gang affiliation in terms of structural

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[14] While women may be victimized, they still have agency. In focusing solely on the victimization of women, as some feminists have done in the past, women are denied agency and the complex realities of their lives are obscured (Schneider, 1989:95).

conditions of inequality. This construction of gang women suggests larger societal changes, as opposed to merely 'treating' the problematic behaviour of individual 'unruly' women. Consequently, responses to female gang affiliation must challenge the societal conditions of inequality which have influenced gang women's choices to affiliate with a gang and engage in violent behaviour.

III. Discussion

Examination of the discursive conditions surrounding female gang affiliation points to two different constructions of 'gang women' held by those who work with them. In the tradition of androcentric criminological research, and sexist and sensationalized media constructions of gang women, many of the respondents construct the gang women they dealt with as 'mad and/or bad.' Female gang affiliation is explained by the women's psychology, her irrationality, her intense emotions, and her child-like status. Like traditional criminological constructions of female gang members (as discussed in Chapter One), gang women are understood as 'other' - in relation to their subservience to men and the inadequacies of 'female nature.' Respondents also construct gang women as 'bad' women who were super-evil, and deviating from their prescribed gender roles. Consistent with media accounts, they suggest that gang women represented a 'new' female offender, one more ruthless than the males. In addition, female empowerment is often implicated for the ills of society generally, such as the breakdown of the family, as well as the increase in female violence and female gang affiliation. These constructions have a long history and, apparently, remain popular. Furthermore, it is not

surprising that some respondents' constructions should correspond with popular media depictions of gang women. The media relies on many of these experts to legitimize their dramatic depictions of gang women.

However, some of the respondents' comments reflect the emerging feminist construction of female gang members. This view locates female gang involvement in terms of the structural inequalities which have an impact on their lives. The women are constructed as 'survivors.' These respondents refer to the structural conditions and constraints experienced by gang women, in particular, drawing attention to structural inequalities of class, race and gender.

As discussed in Chapter Two, given the different occupational mandates and exposure to gang women, it seemed plausible to suggest that the respondents may construct gang women differently because of their job experiences. In total, twenty-two interviews are represented in the discourse analysis.[15] Of the eleven respondents in the Criminal Justice group, seven of them construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad,' while six of them construct gang women as 'survivors.'[16] Of the six respondents in the Social Services group, only one of them constructs gang women as 'mad and/or bad,' while five construct gang women as 'survivors.' Of the five respondents in the Community Based group, two of them construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad,' while three of them construct gang women as

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[15] Two of the interviews were more cryptic, and therefore less discursive, than the others. Both of these interviews were in the Criminal Justice group.

[16] Two Criminal Justice interviews included statements which reflected both constructions. These contradictions will be discussed in the next section.

'survivors.'

In consideration of the small sample size, it is impossible to generalize from these findings. Slightly more of the Criminal Justice system respondents construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad,' as compared to those who construct gang women as 'survivors.' The majority of Social Services respondents construct gang women as 'survivors.' Slightly more of the Community Based respondents construct gang women as 'survivors,' as compared to those who construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad.' In terms of gender, seven of the twelve (58%) male respondents in the study construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad.' Only two (20%) of the ten female respondents construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad. Both of these respondents are in the Criminal Justice group. Again, with a sample size this small it is difficult to generalize. Perhaps, the fact that the only female respondents to construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad' are Criminal Justice representatives can be explained by the larger number of respondents sampled from that occupational group. Perhaps, more voices within the Criminal Justice group allowed for a more complete picture of the discursive conditions to emerge. While it seems significant that the minority of female respondents, and the majority of male respondents, construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad,' it remains difficult to say with any confidence that a respondent's gender predicts their construction of gang women. Similarly, while the majority (80%) of Social Services respondents construct gang women as 'survivors,' the statement loses its potency when we consider that there are only six respondents in that group.

Nevertheless, this research suggests that the majority of Social

Services representatives construct gang women as 'survivors.' Could there be something different in their training? Is it because they come into contact with gang women for different reasons than those in the Criminal Justice group? These representatives are charged with the task of, generally, providing 'social services' to individuals (primarily youth) who may be potential or possible gang members. But, how does that differ from respondents in the Community Based group? They come into contact with similar 'high-risk' individuals. The educational attainment of respondents in both groups is similar. One would expect that more of the Community Based agency representatives, who have the mandate of empowerment, would construct gang women as 'survivors,' than those respondents working in Social Services, whose job mandates prevention, guidance and control. Do Social Services incorporate more gender-awareness in their organization than do the Community Based agencies?

Overall, the occupational position of respondents does not appear to predict the respondents' construction of gang women. Perhaps this can be partially explained by the fact that we live in a society in which the dominant ideologies reflect the interests of the privileged - those privileged by their class, race and gender. Those dominant ideologies are further perpetuated and, often, embellished by the media to fit into simplistic and sensationalized stereotypes. This is compounded by the fact that female offenders have typically been invisible. Historically, they have received little attention and only a limited amount of (androcentric) knowledge existed about them. Consequently, we have little knowledge and limited discourses with which to understand and speak about gang women. This makes it all the easier to resort to simplistic,

polarized, rigid and stereotypical constructions of gang women.

Another consideration is the fact that the particular agencies are made up of <u>individuals</u>, who have their own experiences, interpretations and opinions. While the basic approach of an agency may be punitive, for example, individuals working within that agency may construct the gang women as 'survivors.' Other individuals in the same agency may locate female gang affiliation differently, and construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad.' Knowledge will break down the barriers and give us a fuller understanding of female gang affiliation, and the structural inequalities which have an impact on their lives. It is individuals who enforce organizational mandates. This encourages the possibility of change from within, from the grassroots up. This issue will be explored further in the next chapter.

Interestingly, the only variable that seems to influence a structural account of female gang involvement is a person's own racial status: the only respondents to emphasize the effects of the cultural genocide experienced by Aboriginal people are Aboriginal themselves. Consider the two different understandings of racial inequality:

> I guess, for us, as Aboriginal people as a whole, you know ...
> seeing the generational abuse. Systemic abuse that we suffered
> either with the state, like the churches, residential schools. All
> of that has a direct, direct impact on what's happening now to these
> kids who are teenagers. And how they've been influenced by
> grandparents, and in turn their parents. And, like I say, it's a
> cultural genocide that has happened. It's really, really awful to
> see. I mean, I've experienced it with my grandparents, and how I
> was raised and things like that. But I see it more now with these
> kids, and what their family, what they talk to me about. And the
> parents struggling, too. So it's a whole inter-generational abuse
> they've suffered. With that, all that comes with any kind of
> genocide, uh, poverty, suicides, deaths, alcoholism, sexual abuse,
> all of that. All those things really has impacted Aboriginal
> families, to care for their own children in a good way. So, that's
> what I see. The whole process of assimilation, to try and make us

fit into a mould that was foreign. (CB20:17)

This Aboriginal respondent identifies a history of colonialism and cultural genocide as having a huge affect on Aboriginal street gang affiliation. The following non-Aboriginal respondent understood it differently:

> One of the things about street gangs is that from time to time they'll try and claim, remember that 75% are Aboriginal, that street gang existence is tied in some way to racial discrimination and the minority status. And they're trying to 'right the wrongs' of the way they've been treated for the last couple hundred years. What set lie to that to me, and/or I'm not understanding the psychological components of it, is that then that same group, the Aboriginal population that belongs to street gangs, will then turn around and victimize **primarily** Aboriginals. Insofar as street gangs are a major concern to citizens of Winnipeg, and affect their lives in peripheral ways at least, the reality of the situation is that 99% of violent behaviour on the part of street gangs is directed at **other** Aboriginals ... The inter-gang rivalries, the murders, the drive-by shootings, the vicious beatings that should have been murders - but just through the grace of God they survived - are typically Aboriginal gang member on Aboriginal rival gang member. Certainly there's varying exceptions to that, the Chalmer's Community Club, the young couple sitting in the parking lot killed by gang members, unrelated. This latest supermarket robbery where Mr. Giles was unfortunately killed. There's clearly tragic exceptions to that. But, generally, the violence is gang member upon gang member, Aboriginal upon Aboriginal. So, to me, it's quite confusing, their claim, that part of the reason for their [the gangs] existence is this 'righting the wrongs' of the abuse of Aboriginal people. Well, currently they are the worst enemies of their own people that I could ever possibly imagine. (CJ1:24)

This is not to say that non-Aboriginal respondents did not recognize or sympathize with the cultural genocide experienced by Aboriginal people. What was apparent, though, was that the respondents who drew the most attention to it, and discussed it in the most detail, were Aboriginal.

Contradictions give light to areas of the discursive conditions that deserve further analysis. We lack a way to speak about 'gang women.' But, there has been a plethora of research on the structural conditions surrounding 'gang men.' Perhaps this explains why some respondents, on

the one hand, spoke of structural conditions and, on the other hand, constructed 'gang women' as 'other,' subsequently relying on traditional stereotypes of female gang members specifically and women's 'nature' generally. Two interviews, in particular, reflected contradictory constructions of gang women. They were both from the Criminal Justice group. (Again, the fact that more contradictions were found in the Criminal Justice group could, perhaps, be explained by the larger number of respondents sampled from that group.)

Generally, interviews with seemingly 'contradictory discourses' constructed gang women as 'mad and/or bad.' For example, respondents would outline structural influences when asked about 'gang motivations' then, when asked specifically about female gang members, they painted a completely different picture - one of a 'mad' woman, free of any structural inequalities. The following respondent locates the evolution of gangs, and gang motivations generally, in structural terms. He discusses poor socioeconomic conditions, the lack of opportunity, and so on. However, when discussing female gang members specifically, he suggests that it is far worse when women are involved, the implication being that it is not 'natural.' In addition, suddenly the gang member is not located in structural terms. On the contrary, the female gang member 'has the world at her feet.'

> Traditionally, women are viewed as care-givers. To see a care-giver, and being a young girl, a potential care-giver, a young girl, who has the world at her feet, resorting to this and not caring. Having absolutely no remorse. It's frightening ... So we're dealing with the worst of the worst. (CJ8:10)

Another respondent predominantly constructs gang women as 'survivors,' and later suggests that they need some 'good feminist thinking.' However, her

final comments about female gang affiliation were as follows:

> I don't necessarily like working with women, you know? Like in a correctional setting, because I find them more difficult than men to work with. They have more needs, sometimes, it seems they, [pause] women are more relationship oriented and if things don't go well, then they like to **talk** about it and express their feelings and, you know, those kinda things. And I think it's just [pause] stronger in female inmates, it seems. So it seems, like some of the guys say, 'Oh they whine more. They complain more.' (CJ9:21)

An optimistic way to make sense of some of these contradictions is the fact that feminists may have succeeded in challenging some of the stereotypical and essentialized notions of 'female offenders.' Knowledge is emerging which contextualizes female gang affiliation. Is it possible that these contradictions are giving light to a paradigm shift?

The next chapter will further explore these contradictory constructions and their implications. What do the various constructions of gang women mean? Do they have an influence on how respondents deal with gang women? What does it mean when someone who works with gang women constructs them as 'mad and/or bad'? What are the implications when respondents psychologize gang women and individualize female gang affiliation? How does that affect their response to these women? Does that construction coincide (or not) with their job mandate? How differently do they approach gang women compared with someone who constructs gang women as 'survivors' in need of options? What are the implications when respondents locate female violence and gang affiliation in terms of the structural inequalities influencing and constraining their lives? Do they look to the material conditions (as described in Chapter Three) for an understanding of the needs of gang women? The respondents in this study are front-line workers dealing directly with, and responding to, female gang members on a daily basis. For this reason, the

implications of their 'constructions' deserve further attention, and will be addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

Analysis: Implications for Responding to Gang Women

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the implications which the various constructions of gang women hold for responding to the issues of female violence and gang affiliation. Specifically, attention will be focused on the ways in which these constructions influence and/or impede our ability to effectively respond to this issue. First, I will delineate how the various agencies within each group (Criminal Justice, Social Services, Community Based) currently respond to gangs, generally, and gang women, specifically. I will then draw out the implications of the different constructions of 'gang women' (which also reflect where respondents locate the source of 'the problem') in terms of how the individual respondents respond to gang women. In the concluding section, I will develop my own analysis of the strategies which, in my view, have the best potential to meet the needs of gang women.

I. Current Organizational Responses

In this section, I will lay out the current responses to gang women in terms of the different agency mandates and occupational roles of the respondents I interviewed. As outlined in Chapter Two, the respondents were categorized into three groups based on their occupational position: (1) Criminal Justice; (2) Social Services; and (3) Community Based.

1) Criminal Justice

The Criminal Justice group consisted of thirteen respondents[17] who came into contact with gang women because they are in conflict with the law. This group consists of police officers, probation officers, and correctional officers.

The Winnipeg Police Service has responded to the gang issue by creating a separate Street Gang Unit:

> The Street Gang Unit is a fifteen member unit which was created June 5th of 1995 specifically to address the criminal behaviour of the evolving phenomenon, or fairly evolved phenomenon at that time, which was the Winnipeg-based street gangs. The approach that we decided to take was zero tolerance approach to criminal behaviour. And, by that, we mean that we will arrest, target and prosecute gang members for any offence ranging from minor highway traffic offences up to the gamut, up to and including murder, which is what we have done. In other words, to send the message that we will not be tolerating any aberrant gang behaviour what-so-ever ... We will not abide by and promote behaviour on their part and all steps will be taken to suppress, which is the terminology we use now in the '90s, to suppress their gang activity. We'll take those steps by appropriate tactical operations with very overt high profile visibility operations to let them know that their activities are not going unnoticed, unmonitored and unchecked. (CJ1:2)

The correctional' institutions have also adopted a 'get tough' on gangs approach:

> Approximately 1994 and 1995, we began to see significant sorts of numbers of street gang members entering our prisons. And these were quite a different kettle of fish than the sort of groups that you would get before ... And so there was a hiatus period where the [Correctional] Division was really trying to find out exactly what was the extent of gang membership, what were the gangs really up to, what was happening on the streets of Winnipeg, because most people really didn't understand what was going on. And what was an effective strategy to deal with them? Are we to take a very tough stance? Are we to sort of take a balanced approach? Should we sort of close our eyes and it will go away, it's just sort of a short term phenomenon? That type of thing. And while we were sorting our

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[17] As discussed in the previous Chapter, two of these interviews were quite cryptic, and less discursive, than the others. Consequently, only eleven Criminal Justice interviews were analyzed discursively.

strategy out, and I think we were coming to a realization that we were going to take a pretty tough stance with the gangs, the Headingly riot erupts.[18] (CJ3:5)

The same respondent describes the current correctional response:

We are now more interested in the substrata within the gangs. We are far more interested in individual leaders, and who those individual leaders will be. We're more interested in the organizational structure of the gangs right now. We're interested in, not only whether they're evolving, but how they're evolving, and what causes them to evolve. And we will use that information, primarily to try to disrupt them. We're not in the business of observing them dispassionately. We know exactly where they come from in terms of what their sort of stated aims and objectives are on the street. We know what their stated aims and objectives are within the institution and that. So this - you shouldn't consider our interest in the gangs a benign one. That's not to say that we don't have a particular viewpoint that we would like to help as many gang members out of the gangs as possible, that we wish people would never get into gangs, and we would do anything possible to partner with other agencies to keep kids out of gangs, and adults out of gangs. But organization to organization, that type of thing, there's no question that this is an animosity relationship. And we intend to disrupt and disturb these gangs as much as possible, just the same as one of their stated aims is to disrupt us as much as possible, and to run an underground economy inside our [Correctional] institutions. (CJ3:14)

The Correctional Division has also created a new 'Gang Coordinator' position within each of the institutions:

[W]e have a Gang Coordinator in each of one of our Institutions. And that person is either full time or part time involved in interviewing gang members, identifying gang members, and providing intelligence information to the Superintendents ... We meet as a committee approximately every six weeks .... (CJ3:16)

Probation Services monitors the female gang members after incarceration. Probation officers prepare pre-sentence reports and meet regularly with their clients, making sure they are obeying their conditions of release, attending any court-ordered programs and,

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[18] On April 25th, 1996 the 'gang problem' within the correctional institutions came to a head when inmates in Headingly Correctional Institution instigated a riot. Street gangs, particularly the Manitoba Warriors and the Indian Posse, played a significant role in the riot.

generally, integrating into conventional society. There are no programs geared to respond to 'gang members,' specifically. Probation Services tries to ensure that it is a 'neutral' agent so that gang members do not encounter rival gang members when they meet with their probation officer.

> Probation Services is a neutral territory. We discourage them [gang members] from wearing their 'colours' here. Another strategy is to not set up appointments on rival turf. (CJ4:3)

In general, the Criminal Justice response to gangs is one of suppression, monitoring and control.

2) Social Services

The group of Social Services consists of six respondents who provide different social services to potential and possible gang members. They come into contact with high risk youth, who may or may not be gang members. This group consists of respondents who work in Child and Family Services, MacDonald Youth Services (Community Service Support Program for Youth), Street Gang Prevention, and inner-city 'at-risk' schools.

Two interviews were with respondents who worked with Child and Family Services. They are charged with the task of monitoring youth in group homes or on Independent Living, providing them with legitimate opportunities and options.

> Recently, we've been more involved with the community, and multi-systems planning for kids, across departments and within community organizations. (SS15:2)

In 1997 the municipal, provincial, and federal governments created a special agency, Street Gang Prevention, geared specifically to understanding, responding to, and preventing street gangs. In particular,

it "coordinates services for community agencies to work together" (SS19:1). This has resulted in the Inter-Agency Gang Coalition, which consists of different agency representatives who meet monthly to discuss how best to respond to gangs.

> We've identified the reasons why we think people join gangs, and then we try and develop prevention programs at which the kids will get involved in, to help reduce some of the reasons why they join. Like inactivity, and lack of family structure and, you know, no role models, things like that. So, we have to try and develop programs to replace those things that are missing in their lives. (SS18:3)

One of the programs within an inner-city school in Winnipeg provides training and life skills to high risk youth. The following respondent describes some aspects of the program:

> And going along the lines of [the school] goals, which is, 'Every student that leaves here will be employable, or go on to other training or other education.' So, they're not saying that every student is going to graduate. 'Cause they know that's not a reality. They're just saying they will be more employable, and go on to employment, education or other training. So that's the kind of stuff that I'm working on, and I provide training assistance for them on things that they identify as a need, or that the school identifies. Like, for instance, they'll tell me that, 'We want to learn how to act in an interview.' And the school will tell me, 'You know this person and this person, I'm getting fed up with the way that they talk to those teachers.' So I'll say, 'O.K., let's do something on anger management skills.' So it's kinda like, life-skills and pre-employment training, and then they work on community projects or community job placements throughout the school year. They get a pay-cheque every two weeks. They pick up their mail, and they got a pay-cheque. They **work** for it. (SS17:13)

Primarily the role of Social Services respondents is to monitor, manage, and provide options to high risk youth.

3) Community Based

Five of the respondents worked in Community Based agencies. These respondents worked in Rossbrook House, Native Alliance, Ma Mawi Wi Chi

Itata Centre,[19] Inner City Alive, and Weetamah Salvation Army. All of the respondents in this group stress that the central aim of their agency is to provide a safe place, a neutral territory.

> We want to make it a safe place. We encourage the kids to feel ownership of it. It's their neutral, safe place. So, they protect. For example, we rarely have any graffiti on our building. They [the kids who go there] won't allow it. (CB24:11)

> It's fun, you know? We make it a safe place for them to come. We just play games and hang out. (CB22:2)

> We give them rides home. Like, we drive them home at the end of the night. And that, actually in the last five years, has been a good gang prevention activity. Because a lot of kids are afraid to get from point A to point B. It's not so much that they're so lazy that they can't walk two blocks. But it's a **bad** two blocks for them. (CB21:8)

Most of these agencies offer recreational activities on week-nights and weekends.

> We have a sports program in the evenings and weekends. We have boxing, tae kwon doe, racketball, floor hockey, whatever they want to do. All of the sports are free. (CB23:6)

Some of the agencies also provide alternative educational opportunities:

> We find young kids between the ages of 6 and 12 that feel stupid in school and don't have their homework done. They get laughed at or they feel inferior. They will join a gang, [so] that if you laugh at them, the gang comes after you. So that was their only way out. We saw through the Homework Club as a means that education is the way out too. And if we can help them, prepare them for the next day of going to class, they feel confident in the homework or feel confident that they can do their math, their reading, whatever, they won't join the gangs. And we've seen an increase in their grades from where they're barely passing, like a 20% increase is probably the average increase in their grades. (CB24:3)

Another respondent describes how the agency tries to help its clients

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[19] The three occupational categories are not discrete. For example, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre could also be classified as a Social Service group. However, I have chosen to place this agency in the Community Based group because its primary mandate is the empowerment of Aboriginal people. This issue is addressed in more detail in the final chapter.

'heal':

> The spiritual part, we look at helping them to heal. A lot of these young people have major issues of anger that stems from other things. So they want to do those things. So, we bring them to sweat lodges and those kind of ceremonies. It seems to speed up the healing process, and they enjoy it. So, it's getting back to some of their cultural traditions. And a lot of them don't have any idea what that is, so we slowly introduce them to that, and explain everything, what everything means and how everything's connected to them, and their family, and the rest of Creation. (CB20:3)

The primary goal of these Community Based agencies is to empower the individuals who access their services. They provide various educational and training opportunities, in addition to various recreational activities.

While the three different groups each have particular organizational mandates which influence how they respond to gangs, they are also composed of individuals. The various ways in which gang women are conceptualized or constructed by those professionals who work with them directly translates into how they respond to gang women. In this sense, what makes the various constructions of gang women all the more significant is that they have very real implications in terms of how respondents choose to deal with them. The following section will consider the ways in which the responses to female violence and gang affiliation are guided by the way the respondents construct 'gang women.'

II. Responding to 'Mad and/or Bad' Women

The construction of women as 'mad and/or bad' assumes that women have an ultimately different 'nature' than men. Further, this construction locates the issue of female violence and gang affiliation in the individual woman, typically her psychological or mental state, rather

than her social-structural circumstances. One respondent explains that

women join gangs for emotional reasons, a sense of family, while men join

for rational reasons, tangible benefits procured through gang affiliation.

> But I just don't think that materialistic, material situations are
> as high on their [female gang members] priority list. I think its
> more emotional, a sense of belonging, a sense of family, 'I'm in
> love with' kind of family. And to be honest, and this sounds hokey,
> but if you spend your time watching daytime talk shows, and they
> have gang members on t.v., you'll actually see that are reflected
> directly here. And gang members on the stage - female gang members
> on the stage - and the female is almost un-persuadable about being
> in the gang. And often times they'll have ex-gang members in the
> audience or on the panel, talking to gang members, and often times
> you'll see the gang members starting to sway, or at least
> considering whether it's good or bad to belong to a gang. **Females
> won't listen.** It's down here, it's in their hearts. **They're not
> listening with their ears. The male gang member starts to hear a
> little bit.** It doesn't mean he's going to leave the gang ...
> (CJ1:48; emphasis mine)

It seems that a woman's irrationality, the fact that she hears with her

heart and not her ears, deafens her to the voice of reason. Women just

'won't listen.' The 'fact' that women are more emotional (read: less

rational) than men necessitates a different approach for dealing with

women. This same respondent suggests we respond to women differently,

because they do not think 'with their mind':

> .... [T]he **psychology, human psychology**, a different approach is
> necessary for **males versus females**. The type of approach I would
> use for females versus males, things that will persuade or convince
> or affect a male, are much different, I would say, would not have
> the same affect for a female. You need to appeal to different
> emotions, different needs, and different ways that girls react in
> situations ... I think it boils down to, as it does in other
> aspects, where women tend to think more with their hearts and their
> emotions, **men tend to think more with their mind**. I think that ...
> maybe explains why females buy into the gang life so much more ...."
> (CJ1:46; emphasis mine)

He suggests that women 'buy into' gang life more than males because

of their (irrational) psychology, without recognizing that these women

face more structural inequalities than men and have fewer options and

opportunities. This reflects a long tradition of viewing male deviance in terms of socioeconomic conditions, and locating the 'source' of female deviance in her mind.

Another respondent suggests that gang women, unlike gang men, need psychological treatment.

> (Do you think programs and agencies should respond to male and female gang members differently?)
>
> Yes. Um, you're going to have to look for, at the female, and come up with different ideas ... What you have is a lot of self-esteem areas, where they are going to have to build up their self-esteem by either, you know, partying with the boys there and being a party girl, or being an aggressive gang member, or doing other types of crimes. So, you're going to have to deal with that differently.

He continues, explaining that male gang members, on the other hand, need to be provided with options:

> You're going to have to work with male gang members in a different manner. You're not going to be able to, you know, push the same buttons with them. You're going to have to make certain options open to them. Um, it's just one of the things you're going to have to look at doing. (CJ5:22)

Similarly, another respondent suggests that women need psychological therapy, in particular, they need help with their 'relationship forming skills':

> I think that you have to go back to the reasons that females join these gangs ... [W]e have to deal with relationship forming skills, relationship development skills with teenage girls and with elementary school girls, starting at, like, grade 6, and what we have to do is teach them about male functioning, in a much more detailed way than we did in the past, in terms of, how to identify a healthy functioning male in your age group, and how to identify some that are not functioning so well. (SS16:24)

Even though he recognizes that the males may not be 'functioning so well,' it is the females that need the therapy. The responsibility lies with the gang women working on their psychological deficits so that they learn to 'choose' better men.

These constructions of gang women also resonate with the traditional criminological accounts of female gang affiliation, as outlined in Chapter One. Women are peripheral members of the gang. They join the gang to 'win dates' (Cohen, 1955). Their primary reason for gang affiliation is the emotional benefits. While gang affiliation is 'natural' for men, it is not for women.

> If you want to affect change in female gang membership, it's going to have to come from an emotional feelings stance, if that makes sense ... I think that, although women enjoy the benefits of [the gang], I don't think that it's a **natural** aspect of gang life, as for the males .... (CJ1:47)

As discussed in Chapter Four, those respondents who construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad' often lay the blame on the shoulders of the women's movement and the corresponding loss of social control over women, lack of 'gender norms,' and breakdown of the family. One respondent theorizes that women's advancement in society has broken down the family unit, has dissolved societal checks that used to control women, and consequently explains the increase in female violence. He comments:

> I'd like to see more emphasis on responsibility, and less on rights. The idea that you have the right to go and do all these wonderful things to your body and to yourself is all great and dandy in a perfect world, but in a real world you see that they're not going to be using these rights to do wonderful things. They're going to be using these rights to do bad things, to themselves and to others. (CJ5:20)

The societal issue of female gang affiliation effectively becomes individualized; the responsibility lies in the individual gang woman, and not society.

Another respondent cites social freedoms, not inequalities, as the problem:

> So whether you like it or not, music and videos and all that stuff is very influential on the kids, and we have no regulations, because

> there's the freedom of speech. And freedom to do whatever you want
> in this world. Especially here in [North] American society, and
> it's gone rampant, it's out of control. (CB23:13)

Granted, negative media influences that perpetuate violence

desensitization need to be addressed. However, he implicates 'freedom to

do whatever you want' in the formation of gangs. The implied response is

the restriction of individual freedoms and an increase in social

'control.'

I asked another respondent if there should be different responses

and programs to address female gang members needs. She replied:

> From our perspective, we treat females the same as males, in terms
> of holding them accountable. And I think that's important. When it
> comes to their activity, everybody's dealt with the same. And they
> shouldn't be any less because they're female. (CJ4:35)

She recommends that females are 'punished' the same as men. This implies

that she believes women do not receive harsh enough treatment; that part

of the problem is that women have been getting more lenient sentences than

men. In other words, if women want equality, they should have 'equality'

in the eyes of the law as well.

Another respondent suggests that gangs are a 'natural' by product of

an increasing population. The emergence of gangs has nothing to do with

poverty, ethnicity, nor the failure of the community to reach out to youth

in need:

> Gang membership is not about poverty ... It's simply because of the
> population. See, the gang thing is, it's not a **failure** of the
> community to reach out to the children. It's not ... [T]his is not
> an ethnic, I don't think that this is an ethnic issue either. This
> is an issue of, why the kids leave home and go into the gangs, I
> mean, that's the bigger picture of this. This is an issue of family
> structure. This is an issue of family structural breakdown ... We
> simply have more households and, so we have more dysfunctional
> households too. Just the number of the population that we deal with
> is expanding. I mean, yeah, you're going to see more female gang
> members now, simply because there are more females. (SS16:29)

If the emergence of gangs is 'natural,' then there is no need to demand structural change. Gangs, after all, according to the previous respondent, are not a response to structural and material conditions.

Ultimately, the majority of respondents who construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad' reflect a pessimistic attitude regarding the possibility of 'changing' these individual gang women. Not only do they 'not listen,' they are incorrigible.

> If we can't turn around the girls, the people that we have here now, then we are going to have to concentrate on the next group coming up ... The group that's coming in might be just destroyed. If they don't want out, they won't come out. If they want to continue in this lifestyle, they've gone so far over, they won't change. So they'll burn out before they'll change. And that's sad. They'll either burn out or they'll kill themselves ... Hard core female gang members that we have here are **incorrigible, will not change**, will only modify their behaviour if it suits their immediate needs. As soon as you walk away or go away, they resort right back. (CJ8:24; emphasis mine)

> What are you going to do, relocate them? Right. The girl doesn't have any money or job skills. What is she going to do when you relocate her under your program? She's going to end up on your Main Street area back again, on welfare. What's she going to do? So she's probably going to filter back to the friends that she knows. (CJ13:9)

Other respondents believe that studying women is of little concern; their role is peripheral, and they are not much of a problem. As explained by one respondent:

> (O.K. In closing, what would you comment about female gang members in general?)

> [pause] Um, I think that what you're going to probably find with the female gang members, it's not as [pause] set in concrete a problem as say the gang members [male?] ... So, the aggressive level is also less. So, they don't have the aggressive tendencies that the males have. And they have other things that wind up occupying their time. Having kids, having several children, is going to, you know, have some factors, some influence in your life. You're not going to be the young party girl anymore. (CJ5:23)

Another respondent agrees:

> I don't know. I'm not too worried about the female component. I'm
> not worried about the gang situation at all. (SS16:32)

Apparently, gangs are not a 'pressing social issue.' No social change is

necessary. No response strategies are needed.

For some, however, the situation would appear to be hopeless:

> I don't have an answer for that. We identify it here the best we
> can, but you can't stop it. I don't know the answer to that. I
> think it's going to become quite the little civil war between the
> gang members and [pause] that's how I truly feel. I think there's
> going to be bloodshed. I think things are going to get really
> crazy. I believe that. It's going to get ugly, all out war.
> (CJ13:8)

> Gangs aren't going to go away here. They're here. They're here
> now. They're going to stay. (CB23:14).

III. Responding to Women as 'Survivors'

Respondents who recognized the structural inequalities which have an

impact on these women's lives suggest very different responses to gang

women. The construction of gang women as 'survivors,' who make rational

choices to their 'irrational' circumstances, translates into response

strategies that suggest options and alternatives for the women. In

recognition of the material conditions resulting from structural

inequalities, as discussed in Chapter Three, these respondents suggest

opportunities and alternatives which would address gang women's needs.

> I think there needs to be other alternatives. It just seems like
> it's all like a cycle right now. And somehow you have to stop the
> cycle. (CB22:20)

> Give them positive alternatives. Let them know that there's choices
> in life and they're responsible for those choices, that you have to
> present them with lots of choices. Right now I don't think that
> they have enough choices. They see themselves as in a tunnel, of
> social assistance programming, whatever it is they're in, and they
> don't see how to break out. So, broaden their experience base, give

them lots of opportunity and create a hope for them and for their future. Build up their self-esteem and self confidence so that they know they can tackle the challenges of life. And keep them in school. Very important. (SS18:18)

One respondent locates the educational problems experienced by gang women in terms of their structural position. Specifically, she points to conditions resulting from socioeconomic inequalities:

I think another thing is a lack of opportunity. I think they feel that, in a situation where there's poverty, there isn't that sense of hope, and there isn't the opportunity to get out of that system. Then, things that get affected are things like involvement in school programs ... [These kids] have tremendous difficulty in school. And our education system, really, I mean, we're all failing these kids. Even our system is, in terms of being flexible enough in our programming and developing resources that make sense for them, and academics, education is one of them ... So they get into difficulties and inevitably are booted out. And when you're not in school, you have a lot of time on your hands. I think that that's an issue ... Some of our kids [in Child and Family Services care] are 15 years old and have not been in school for 2 to 3 years. (SS15:6)

Another respondent comments:

You have to build up their self-esteem, and education's a good part of that, too. Because if they don't have an education, then they can't really go anywhere anyway. So, they're pretty well stuck in that area and it's going to be self-perpetuating ... 'Cause if you can't provide some kind of hope in the community, if you can't provide opportunity and safety, then people are going to be in gangs, and they're always going to be in gangs. I mean, so it's a whole big economic thing, a social kind of thing too. So, there has to be programs to teach skills and literacy ... (CJ10:14)

Many of these respondents empathized with the 'hopelessness' that gang women must feel:

It's such a big issue, and such a global kind of thing. If you can erase poverty, or start working on the poverty problem, and if you can do that, then you can provide some hope. Kids join gangs because they're hopeless. It's a sense of hopelessness. And they don't really care what's going to happen to them, because they can't see anything for themselves in the future. You know? So, there's just a sense of utter hopelessness. (CJ10:16)

Those who construct gang women as survivors also talk about the need

to respect the women's reality. They indicate that <u>realistic</u> alternatives

and choices are needed for these women.

> Then you've got to do an awful lot of stuff about the support piece.
> I mean, if you can't house them properly, they can't get medical
> help, or they can't finish their education, then you haven't got
> anything. There's no way that you're going to get these kids out of
> it, with all the false and dash of having money, and be able to sell
> them this, unless you've got something to replace the gang piece
> with. So, if there's no home, there's no parent there all the time,
> there's no food in the cupboard, there's nothing good about where
> they're supposed to be. And the gang piece is that there's always
> food around. Everyone always looks good because they've got the
> money to go out and buy the clothes that are cool, 'cause that's
> important when you're a teenager, in a gang or not. Or there's
> always a roof over you're head and it's always warm, and there's
> always people there that say they're concerned about me. It may not
> necessarily be true, but at least there's somebody there. And
> you're going to say that they shouldn't be there, and they have to
> go back to their family? They go, 'Why? There's no one there for
> me.' So, whatever you're going to try and replace this [the gang]
> with, it better make sense to them. 'Cause they're not going to buy
> into it. They're not going to say, 'Oh yeah, I'm going to give this
> up, and I'm going to work at something for $4 an hour. What's the
> point? And how long am I going to work at $4 an hour, and am I
> going to be able to survive on that?' No. (CJ11:38)

Another respondent stresses the importance of listening to the gang women,

listening to what <u>they</u> say their needs are.

> ... [S]ome of the programs **assume** what the kids need, and they don't
> incorporate or collaborate with the youth in terms of their needs.
> So, when they go to finding out, 'Why isn't this program working?
> Why don't you come?' 'Well nobody asked me what I needed. Nobody
> talked with me about what would help me.' So that's another
> critical piece, that we go off as adult helpers half-cocked, in
> terms of what **we** think, and what **we** believe, and it doesn't always
> match what the [women's] needs are. (SS15:21)

As discussed in Chapter Four, the respondents who emphasize racial

inequalities and the historical (mis)treatment of Aboriginal people are

typically Aboriginal themselves. In this case, a non-Aboriginal police

officer, uniquely points to the difficulties experienced by Aboriginals

who move to the city from reserves:

> If you take a person from, say a Northern reserve, that is, say, a fly-in, so basically an isolated community ... [Y]ou bring that person from a Northern reserve, into Winnipeg. I would suggest that that person who has never seen an elevator, has never seen traffic lights, has never ridden an escalator, never been in a large store, isn't any better suited to life in Winnipeg, which isn't a huge urban centre, but to them would be, as a person maybe coming from a Bosnia. They're really an immigrant. Although they're still in their country, they have ... they've moved away from a setting that they're very comfortable with, that they're very knowledgable with, and they're put into this strange society, and this very strange city, a very different way of doing things here. And again, without the proper support, I think they're almost setting themselves up to stumble ... (CJ2:9)

He suggests the establishment of community support systems specifically to

help Aboriginals adjust to urban life:

> I think you really need somebody to be a mentor for them. You need someone, another Aboriginal person would be the best, a person that is 'successful' in the urban setting, a successful mentor that can teach them about Winnipeg, teach them about urban life. Whether it be just the simple fact of taking the kids to school, registering them properly. All the little things, like taking them shopping, whether it be Supervalue or Safeway or whatever, just to sort of be their resource person for a while. And I know other organizations, or other groups, do it. I know of people that have immigrated to Canada from, lets say, whether it be Russia, or a country like that, and a lot of times they put themselves into that community, and all of a sudden the church is a major player, the youth organization is a major player. So they have a lot of people that they share something in common with, that can climatize them. You could have a lot of agencies, I would suggest, a lot of agencies already out there, that probably could provide that service (CJ2:11).

Another respondent suggests that many Aboriginals would respond well if

they were given the opportunity to learn more about their culture:

> .... [A] lot of them have not had an opportunity to understand and be exposed to their culture, and to feel that sense of pride in being Aboriginal. But I get the impression that the majority of them, if given the opportunity, would really respond positively to that. (SS15:19)

She further suggests that dismantling the 'gang myths' would be an

effective preventative strategy:

> .... [P]revention, of course, is the best medicine for this situation, that if you target very young kids, and you start from there up to address the issue and to teach them about the myths of gang involvement. Because, boy, they just have those myths about you gaining financially, and you don't. Because, ultimately, it's the two or three people that control the pot of money. That they're really there for you, the sisterhood and the brotherhood, and when it comes down to the bottom line, no they're not. You're just, you know, their ass is first, before yours. That it's all powerful. Not true. You don't really own anything, you're not really powerful, you're hounded by the police, you end up in jail, and in jail you're beaten, you're offended against. So, dispelling all those myths for kids who might be thinking that, 'Wow. This is awesome. This is **cool**.' That's the best thing to do, to start from there and dispel those myths. (SS15:19)

If young women are offered legitimate opportunities and choices, and they learn about the harsh 'reality' of life in the gang, they will no longer perceive the 'gang' to be the best option they have.

Some respondents also recognize that, while possible, it takes a lot of 'hard work' on the part of the women to leave the gang and to change their lifestyles.

> Right now I have a young woman who was heavily involved in one of the gangs in the North End, and had been on the streets, and been through several physical assaults, and sexual assaults. And, now, just dealing with testifying against all those gang members, and having to be labelled by different systems, whether it's school or the judicial and child welfare system. And she had a child in '96 and had the baby apprehended. Now we're slowly getting back on track to her having the child back, you know, being a 'good mom.' So she, that's one case that's from thirteen years old to now, now eighteen, where different life changes. I've been with her through that whole process. So it's interesting to see. But it takes a lot of hard work on their part, you know, to stand their ground, and to just build their self-esteem and have different options and choices available to them. (CB20:14)

In response to my question, 'How difficult is it to leave the gang?,' another respondent candidly offers:

> Ohh. It could be impossible for certain people. It could be almost a joke for us to even suggest that a kid leave a gang. And I think that we get really cocky in our professions and we get so far away

from street level, and say, 'What are you doing involved in this? Get out. Get out.' Like, you know? 'Come on, you're a better person than that. How come you can't do it? I don't understand how you can keep being involved.' When this kid's uncle, brother, father, they're all in Stoney, and everyone in the community that they live in, including their mother, is involved, everyone that they know. And that we would have the audacity to say, 'Get out, walk away. Don't get involved' ... So, I think we have to be careful, you know. Don't say 'Get out' if you can't tell kids how to get out. If you can't say, like, walk a minute in their shoes, and go, if they're saying, 'The way I live my life right now, just the way I live my life right now is wrong, that means I'd have to leave my house, leave my job, leave my community, leave my partner, leave my dog, uh, potentially move to another city' and just try to put that in your life, and imagine doing something like that. And then go, 'How can I tell this fifteen year old that that's what they need to do?' So there's kids that are in, from our perspective, very, very bad situations. But maybe for that kid, it's the best situation. Them staying in the gang might be the safest solution. It's not what we want as a society. It's not how we want to respond, but in some cases it's not the smartest thing to tell a kid to get out. You know, you're putting them at risk, potentially, by telling them to do that. Or you're pushing them further into despair and hopelessness because they know they can't. (SS14:19)

Typically, the respondents who recognize that gang women are survivors suggest a sincere, honest, and non-judgmental approach towards these women.

.... [A]nd they [gang kids] know the kind of work I do. It's non-threatening and non-judgmental. So, that's how I am with them. Otherwise it doesn't work. It just doesn't work, otherwise. They'll just high tail it out of your office, think you're a phoney, you know. You have to be sincere, honest with them. I'm brutally honest with them ... (CB20:16)

Further, in recognition of the limited options and subsequent aspirations of gang women, these respondents suggest <u>realistic role models</u>.

Nothing bugs me more. Like, it's fine to have a doctor and a lawyer and a teacher and all these ones as role models. But, to me a positive role model is the man who sweeps the streets, raises his family well, goes to work and does the best job he can sweeping the streets. Like, that's a positive role model. It doesn't have to be the one who's making the $100,000 a year or the university educated lawyer or anything like that. It has to be, like role modelling has to change away from just the money thing. It has to be everyday

people, who go and lead a good life, ... things like that. Those
are the role models of our society and we have to start putting
those out as such, so that people feel it's O.K. to do something,
like, whatever it is, as long as you do the best you can do in it.
(SS18:18)

Another respondent suggests the importance of a role model that the gang

women can relate to, somebody who has 'walked the walk':

They need people that have been in the situation, that can come in
and talk to them, and you know, say that, 'I've done this. I came
from where you came, and I've managed to do this.' And as well,
they need people that work here [Correctional Institution] that they
can relate to as well. So, that's, they got to have somebody that
they can relate to that's positive. And hopefully that will be part
of breaking the cycle too ... (CJ10:15)

Some respondents recognize the additional barriers experienced by

female gang members in a patriarchal gang and a patriarchal society.

(Do you think there should be different programming for the males
and females [for gang intervention and/or prevention]?)

I think some of it could be the same. [pause] But I could see where
separate things could be good, if we're looking at male gang members
that have sort of a more chauvinistic traditional kind of view on
women and male roles in society, that identifying some of them, and,
'No it's not you that should have the last word, or it's not the man
that should rule the rooster', you know? Whether it's within a
gang, or whether it's within a home. You know, respect for each
other. And the girls, I think, would benefit from some good
feminist thinking. Yeah, I do. Just, both need self-esteem to be
raised. But I think the women need it more so because you're not
only, maybe you're coming from a place that is very chauvinistic or
traditional, but society is that way as well. So, I think women get
sort of the shittier end of the stick no matter which end they come
from. Whereas it's not as strong, I don't think, for the men. The
women need to, or the girls need to know that there are strong
women. And, you know, there are good role models to follow. They
just need some good feminist thinking. (CJ9:17)

Rather than decrying the women's movement, as those who construct gang

women as 'bad' do, this respondent suggests that the women need some 'good

feminist thinking.' Further, she also suggests that we need to work with

the male gang members, challenging their chauvinistic attitudes. In

short, these respondents recognize that the women are responding to

particular life choices; life choices contoured by structural inequalities of their race, class and gender. They are not 'bad.' They are not 'mad.' Ignorance has perpetuated the rigid and sexist constructions of female gang members. In order to challenge that, we need to make women visible.

(Do you have anything that you would like to add about female gang members generally?)

Well, I personally would like to see more focus on the female gang members in our programs. Because, of course, since there is more males, we focus more on the males. But I think, with the females being the future parents, or maybe they already are parents, we're looking at a generational issue, since the children are with the are mom's, and things like that. And the children are going to grow in learned behaviour, which really scares me. It bothers me. If moms are gang members, then the kids are going to fall right into that pattern, too. Especially if they're single parents, without a male in the household and things like that. So I think it's a bigger issue for females. And it's the generation of tomorrow that we have to worry about with the females. (SS18:23)

I think we need to know more about females ... And I think we need to know better how to respond to our females. Because maybe we're responding to our females as we do our males, and that's not necessarily the right way. Maybe we need to be doing it differently. And, I don't [know] if it's because they are becoming more criminal or because we're starting to look at them differently - or process them as males now and, then, is our treatment the same? I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I know I'm concerned about the teenage pregnancy rate, though. About 70% of the girls in our program are pregnant or have been pregnant, or something. And that's very alarming. One young lady, a real nice girl, a real neat girl, although does have affiliation because her partner is a gang member, just had a baby in December and she's pregnant again. And she's crushed because she was hoping to finish school. She's 16, 17. Her partner is 28. That's a whole other issue. I think we need to look at the girls a little bit differently, but haven't been set up to do so yet, especially in regards to the gangs. (SS14:23)

The message is that we have to explore and contextualize the lives of these women. We have to counter the ignorance that perpetuates the obstructing views of gang women as 'mad and/or bad.' In the process, we will come to a better understanding of the structural constraints and material conditions influencing female gang affiliation. In turn, this

will inform novel strategies which uniquely address _female_ gang members' needs.

> I don't think all the treatment programs for males, automatically, are appropriate for females. I think that's definitely an understatement. I would say that you definitely have to have people that have knowledge of females, knowledge of female street gangs and their activities .... (CJ2:29)

> And they need special attention, women themselves. They need special attention. They really do. Where they are, who they are, and why they're involved. They need to see themselves in a different way. They need a taste of life where, or experience, at least something that's positive, rather than the negative stuff they've tasted all their life. (SS19:9)

Locating female violence and gang affiliation in terms of the structural inequalities which have an impact on these women's lives necessitates a _social_ response. These respondents speak of the need for the whole community to get involved to meet the needs of these women.

> .... [I]t's a big picture, and it has to do with society. Like, everyone has to be in it. It can't be just Justice. There has to be a partnership between education, health, the police ... [E]verybody has to have a piece in it. Because not **one** part of it is going to change it all. And that's been proven time and time again. It's been, through the American experience, they've brought as many people on board as they can. And, that certainly is going to hold true for the Canadian experience. You **have to** have everybody on board and be willing to say, 'This is a priority and we want to do something about this.' (CJ11:39)

> We have to give them opportunities. That's the bottom line. The key here is getting the community back involved ... The gangs will be as strong as the community will allow them to be. That's the bottom line. If the community's strong, the gangs won't be strong. If the community's weak, the gangs will be strong. (SS19:8)

Some of the respondents echo the overwhelming feeling of 'hopelessness' that they suggest the gang women feel. Given the magnitude of the problem, and the social change required, some of these respondents are pessimistic about eradicating the 'gang problem.'

> I think it's going to grow. I don't see it lessening, myself. Where, unfortunately, because of Winnipeg's socioeconomic make-up,

most of our street gang members are Aboriginal. And, in fact, we're just on the front end of a baby boom that's happening in the Aboriginal community. If, as a society, if we don't get our act together, and ignore what we could do before that, it's just, we have to get the Aboriginal community into the mainstream of Winnipeg society, so that they have options, they have jobs ... But, if we don't do something about that, I would suggest that the situation will get a lot worse, 5 or 10 years down the road. I don't believe that we can get rid of street gangs. Even if we have some successes ... we were a little isolated as far as some of the major American cities. The influences didn't come here as quick. Now that it's here, I don't see us getting rid of it. We'd be very naive to think we could get rid of them. (CJ2:31)

A correctional officer, while recognizing what needs to be done, believes

that it is too late. The problem is too big.

There's only so much you can do. No matter what agency, whether you're Winnipeg Police Services, to Corrections, to John Howard Society, to whatever programs that are available out there. It's, we're at the point now where it is too late to turn around. These agencies do their best to try and deter and to curb gang violence. And there's not much more that any of these agencies could do to make it better ... Like I say, gangs are something that have started here now, and we're not going to see the end of it. It will never end. (CJ07:18)

I questioned another respondent, 'What do you think about how other

agencies are responding to gangs?' She sighed and replied:

Well, to tell you the truth, I think it's the flavour of the month right now. And everybody thinks that there's money available. And they see it as a problem so they're jumping on the band wagon without, uh, I think a lot of people want to get involved even though they aren't aware of all the issues and things like that. I don't like it when people jump in without looking at it first, or thinking that they're the experts. Through coordination of agencies, which is part of our job, hopefully we can learn to work together. But if history repeats itself, it's just going to be, 'let's get the money while we can.' Like, I really believe that. And I know that's really callous, but the money is tight. Every organization is struggling for funding. And if there's a hot topic, and it even falls loosely into their mandate, they're going to try and go for that buck, because it's their sense of survival also. (SS18:21)

What is important to keep in mind is that these respondents feel

'hopeless' about the possibility of societal, structural change. They

recognize that the roots of the gang problem lie much deeper than in the individual gang women's minds.

Other respondents are more optimistic about working together and affecting social change. In particular, they were excited about the potential of the Inter-Agency Gang Coalition:

> We've got hope. We've got this list of people here [Inter-Agency Gang Coalition], 74 people here. We meet once a month and talk about these exact things. What are we doing? How do we do this? We've done our Path.[20] We know where we want to be, where our utopia is. Not that you ever get there, but now we've got this group of people that, we want to make things happen. And part of that is getting systems to stop being so secretive and start working together, and start doing these things. (SS14:21)

> And we've formed Inter-agency group to talk about what we're going to do about gangs. We're still spinning our wheels a bit. But what you have to do is get institutions working with other institutions, and different areas working together. (CJ10:15)

One respondent suggests that we need a paradigm shift in terms of how society views juvenile offenders, generally. That is on the Path agenda as well:

> The young people are being looked upon as negative, and as out of control and unreachable. That's the message out there that they're getting. Even in the [Manitoba] Youth Centre, I've talked to people, and I've been there before, and the people are being considered and looked at as 'jail guards.' Before, when I used to go there, they [juveniles in custody] looked at people that worked there as 'counsellors,' people who worked with them to help them. The whole thing's changed. There's been, like, a paradigm shift. We need a whole new paradigm shift once again, and it's going to have to start in the community. Probably right here, we've done our Pathing. (SS19:9)

Overall, these respondents feel optimistic about the potential of gang women. Not surprisingly, they suggest that, if given opportunities, alternatives and responsibility, these female 'survivors' _can_ turn their

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[20] 'Path' is actually an acronym for 'Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope.' The Inter-Agency Gang Coalition meets monthly to discuss their Path, the best long-term and short-term strategies to respond to gangs.

lives around.

> Because all of them are brilliant kids. I mean, you have to be smart to organize, to manipulate, you know? So they're very gifted kids. All of them have been. You know, they've taught me many things, good things, too. They're very resourceful. They know all the systems. They know how to manipulate the system. And, so, if we can turn it to the positive side. I mean, I see those kids now, I know they're going to be leaders in the future because they're getting involved in youth counsels or different things ... So that's encouraging, too, to use their ingenuity and creativity for a more positive way of being for themselves. So, there's hope. (CB20:30)

IV. Discussion: Implications and Strategies for Change

As discussed in this chapter, respondents in this study construct women as 'mad and/or bad' or as 'survivors.' On the one hand, those respondents who constructed women as 'mad and/or bad' located the problem of female violence and gang affiliation in the individual gang women. The focus on the 'problem' with the woman's mind, as opposed to her circumstances, is nothing new:

> Reports on female offenders almost invariably address themselves to the issue of the mental state of their subjects .... This is in sharp contrast to reports on male offenders, which instead tend to focus on the more external and material aspects of the offender's behaviour, biography, and life-style. (Allen, 1987:83)

Gang women are constructed as 'emotional,' 'irrational,' and 'needy.' They are also constructed as 'evil,' 'pseudo-men,' who are the negative by-products of the women's liberation movement. An essentialist notion of the 'gang woman' is proposed - she is a 'different' and 'other' by 'nature.' The problem of female gang affiliation is located in the woman's 'nature' or 'mind.' In the process, the material conditions which influence women's violence and gang affiliation go unaddressed, as do their needs. Female gang members can remain invisible - they are not

'real' or 'natural' gang members. There is a general sense of 'hopelessness' about the ability to 'cure' these 'incorrigible' women. Some of the respondents even suggest that there is nothing to be done. Others suggest that we enforce social control over women, generally and 'get tough' on gang women, specifically. While male gang members need 'options,' female gang members need psychological 'treatment'; that is, 'relationship-building skills.'

On the other hand, respondents who construct gang women as 'survivors' locate the problem of female gang affiliation in terms of structural inequalities which create particular material conditions of 'endangerment.' They suggest that we need to address the needs of gang women and provide them with options and realistic alternatives. They suggest education, skill development, employment opportunities, realistic role models, support for Aboriginals moving from northern reserves to urban areas, and programs which challenge traditional and chauvinistic beliefs held by female and male gang members. Importantly, they call for community involvement and societal change, rather than 'therapy' for individual women.

While many of these respondents use the same language as those who construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad,' they locate the issues differently. Rather than constructing the individual gang women as 'hopeless,' respondents who recognize that gang women are 'survivors' empathized with the 'hopelessness' that gang women must feel. Despite the many barriers facing gang women, the respondents have 'hope' for the gang women. They suggest that, if given opportunities and choices, female gang members can turn their lives around. Rather than constructing the gang

women as 'needy,' they stress that we need to learn more about the 'needs' of female gang members. Rather than keeping women invisible and negating their structural experiences, this woman-centred approach points to the need make gang women visible. These respondents state that we need to explore and contextualize the lives of gang women in order to get a fuller understanding of their needs and, in turn, use that knowledge to implement the best programs and alternatives to address those needs. I argue that it is the latter approach which holds the greatest potential for responding to female violence and gang affiliation.

Feminist criminologists point to the need to make female offenders visible, and to contextualize their acts of violence and gang affiliation (See: Campbell, 1984, 1987 & 1990; Chesney-Lind, 1989, 1997; Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995).

> Feminist criminology began as a reaction; the reaction was against an old, established male chauvinism in the academic discipline. Women were either invisible to conventional criminologists or present only as prostitutes or marginal or contingent figures. Further, when women were discussed it was in crude sexist stereotypes which were widely and thoughtlessly disseminated. (Heidensohn, 1995:161)

While feminists have made some in-roads in terms of dismantling essentialist and sexist stereotypes of female offenders, the female offender often remains invisible. Recently, there has been an increase in media reports and public unease concerning a supposed 'new female offender.' The murder of Reena Virk by seven girls in 1997 shocked the country and seemed to lend support to the fact that women and girls are, indeed, capable of extreme brutality.

> In the aftermath of the Virk murder, commentators and journalists have not only senstationalized girl violence, they've made some sweeping generalizations about all young women. Following long-standing misogynist traditions, they've made the assumption that the

behaviour of a few girls and that increased freedom for women - brought about specifically by feminism - is responsible for the supposed rise in young women's violence ... Having freed girls from the repressive ways of the past, feminism, the theory goes, has also freed their aggressive natures. (Nolan, 1998:32 & 34)

Despite the lack of research and the lack of evidence, many commentators continue to proclaim the rise of this 'new female offender' (Heidensohn, 1995:21). Unfortunately, because female offenders have largely been invisible, there is little evidence to refute these sensationalized claims. Chesney-Lind (1993:322) explains:

.... [T]hese media crime waves [are] lodged within the larger silence about girls, their problems, and their delinquency. For this reason, there is often little with which to refute sensationalistic claims about girls' crime. More importantly, the relative lack of interest in this topic makes it difficult to craft an accurate understanding of girls and their relationship to gangs.

As discussed in previous chapters, the indictment of the women's movement for the increase in female offending has a long history (See: Adler, 1975). This 'liberation thesis' can be classified as a gender theory. It presumes that, with 'equality,' women will have the freedom to act like men. Further, it presumes that crime and aggression are 'naturally' male activities and 'unnatural' female activities.

Gender theory anchors itself in a discourse that views violence and aggression as 'natural' to or a defining feature of males and 'masculinity,' a view which is biased and sexist. (Mathews, 1998:4)

In reality, the expression of anger and acts of aggression are influenced by social factors, not biology (cf. Campbell, 1993).

It is generally believed that boys are more aggressive than girls, that their aggression is more severe, and that it is a more stable trait in males. However, studies of children, adolescents, and adults reveal that there are few if any real differences between males and females ... Many people believe anger is the 'fuel' driving aggression: that males get angry more often than females. However, in studies using tests to gauge covert hostility, internalized hostility, and aggressive feelings, no difference between males and females have been found. (Mathews, 1998:5)

As a society, we have limited language with which to speak of women as criminal, gang affiliated, or violent. We have an extremely limited understanding of women as perpetrators. The only way we can understand female acts of violence is to suggest that they are far worse than men. She must be 'bad' and 'evil.' Or, we construct the woman as 'mad,' with her insanity stripping her of agency and responsibility. These discourses fail to scrutinize circumstantial evidence of 'female deviance' which makes the picture grey, and less dualistic. These essentialist constructions of gang women allow no room for circumstances and variation. Mathews (1998:8) explains the problem of 'gender essentialism,' and its influence on how we understand female aggression and violence:

> Gender essentialism presumes that there is a unitary, 'essential' experience of gender, male or female, that can be isolated and described independently of race, class, sexual orientation, or other personal experiences ... This is perhaps most apparent in how the current discourse pertaining to interpersonal violence and aggression portrays the sexes. There has been a 'masculinization' of violence in North American society despite empirical evidence that female violence and aggression is also a serious social problem. The issue of female violence and aggression has become lost in the 'feminization' of victimization, that is, the tendency to see females solely in the role of victim of violence or aggression.

Women who do not fall into the 'victim' status but, rather, perpetrate violence, are 'doubly deviant.' One respondent describes a particularly violent act committed by one of her clients:

> One woman was sort of fed up with this boyfriend always being jealous. He never threatened to hurt her or hit her or whatever, he just sort of made this face that she was looking at another guy. So, she popped a couple valium, sat on his knee, pretended to kiss him up, and then bit his lip off. So, [pause] and she saw herself as the victim in this. She didn't see him as being the victim. Um, and so you say, 'What did he do to you in terms of, what was your fear that he would hurt you?' And it was, 'No, I'm just sick and tired of him always trying to tell me what to do.' So it wasn't even the idea of feeling victimized. It was the idea of wanting power and control over her situation in some way. Why didn't she

> just leave him? Well, that wasn't an option. She just wanted to
> teach him a lesson ... We always sort of picture women in
> situations, to always just be trying to get out of victimization,
> and wanting to heal, and feeling helpless, and those kinds of things
> ... We have that perception that women are basically under
> somebody's thumb, and trying to get up all the time. But we're
> seeing a lot of women, that mmm mmm [shakes her head, no way].
> They've already crossed over. They may go back and forth in
> situations where they have been victimized, but they are very
> comfortable being the perpetrator. (CJ4:8)

Yes, this is a violent act. It is horrible. Females do commit extreme

acts of violence, and always have. However, if we leave the analysis

here, it quickly loses any consideration of context. While the man may

have been the labelled 'victim' in this incident, my goal is to question,

to rupture, the traditional conceptions of a polarized vision of the

victim/perpetrator construction. The rigid victim/offender construction

also prescribes the appropriate gender: female victim/male perpetrator.

Women have a long history of being (mis)understood in terms of dualistic

constructions   (e.g., madonna/whore; virgin/slut.)   Limited discourses

offer us no way to understand a woman who breaches the conception that she

must always be a 'victim.' Perhaps the man in this situation, in addition

to being the victim, also had some agency. Perhaps, while not physically

abusive, he was emotionally manipulative and abusive. No less a 'victim,'

but a 'player' in the dynamic, context-ridden situation. The woman

exercises agency as a perpetrator, immediately gaining power over the

situation by biting off his lip. Unpeeling the layers of context reveals

that perhaps 'players' take turns exercising agency in their own ways.

However, the traditional construction of 'woman' as being a helpless

victim only removes the possibility of constructing women as individuals

with agency who actively respond to situations in which they find

themselves.

Respondents in this study who discussed gang women as 'mad and/or bad' typically, but not uncommonly, understand gang women as 'cold' and 'manipulative.' Schur (1983:55) explains that this can be traced to essentialist notions of the 'nature' of women:

> There are, to begin with, patterned expectations regarding the emotions that women and men are supposed to display, and even to feel. It is widely recognized that our gender system incorporates assumptions as to the emotional qualities that are 'natural' to the two sexes ... If a woman does not openly demonstrate stereotypically 'feminine' qualities - warmth, nurturance, supportiveness, and so on - she is likely to be defined as 'cold,' 'calculating,' 'manipulative,' and 'masculine.' Correspondingly, her direct display of emotions that are prized or accepted in men - such as coolness, assertiveness, aggressiveness, and anger - will usually be disapproved. Thus women are susceptible to negative sanctioning for several types of emotion norm violations.

As such, female offenders violate 'natural' gender norms. One response to these women has been to 'cure' them by enforcing their 'appropriate domestication' (Allen, 1987). Another response has been to reaffirm traditional gendered role prescriptions. Nolan (1998:35) discusses the implications of locating the problem of female violence in women's increased equality:

> It's a short jump from the [liberation] thesis that girls have been made more violent by being given more freedom to concluding that the key to stopping this 'dangerous trend' is to restrict them once again. The rhetoric of panicked urgency surrounding this supposedly 'sharply rising' girl violence favours quick solutions over progressive ones - the punitive over the therapeutic.

Feminist discourses contextualize female acts of violence and gang affiliation. As such, they locate female offenders in terms of structural inequalities which influence their 'choices' of behaviour. In the process, they come to a more complete understanding of the 'needs' of these women. Rather than suggesting a more punitive agenda and increased social control, they point to addressing the needs of women by creating

opportunities and choices. Importantly, they stress the need to make gang

women visible and to develop policies which address the needs of gang

women.

> Programs directed at gangs rarely consider the special needs of
> female members, and the media continue to be fascinated by these
> women's sexual experiences and to perpetuate the myth of the 'new
> violence' of women's gangs. Ironically, the most important
> influence on gang women's future may be the dismantling of the
> nation's welfare system in the 1990s. This system has supported
> women with children who want to stay out of the drug marketing
> system and in addition has provided a significant amount of cash to
> their communities. Its disappearance will deepen poverty and make
> the fate of gang women ever more problematic. (Moore and Hagedorn,
> 1996:217)

Unfortunately, but not surprising, not one of the agencies in the

three occupational groups has implemented programming which specifically

addresses the needs of _female_ gang members.

> We even offer employment training. We have a Carpentry Skills
> program and they even get paid while they're in training.
>
> (Are there any women in it?)
>
> No, it's only for the boys.
>
> (Are their any programs for the girls?)
>
> No. Actually, no. Nothing. (CB22:24)

Another respondent discusses how much the boys enjoyed playing hockey. I

asked him, 'What do the girls do?':

> Well, hmmm, that's a good question. There really isn't that much
> programming for the girls. It's easy. The guys want their floor
> hockey, and they basically get involved in that. But the girls,
> they just sort of hang around and don't have too much to do.
>
> (Why do you think that is?)
>
> I don't know. Old stereotypes. It's easier to set up a gym, get
> some guys playing some sports, or doing some weight-lifting.
> There's a little less that the girls can do. (CB21:16)

Earlier in this chapter, I outlined the three different occupational

groups that the respondents were categorized into, and the subsequent institutional mandates. In the previous chapter, I pointed to the fact that the occupational position of the respondents did not predict their construction of gang women. Consequently, the eight respondents who constructed gang women as 'mad and/or bad' could be found in each occupational group. The twelve respondents who constructed women as 'survivors' could, similarly, be found in each group. Keeping in mind the contradictions, even within individual interviews, discussed in this chapter, perhaps there are more than two constructions of gang women. In other words, the constructions of gang women as 'mad and/or bad' or as 'survivors' are not discrete categories. While the two constructions identified in this research capture a lot, further investigation and a larger sample could refine them further. In terms of the immediate question, 'How do the respondents' individual constructions of gang women guide their responses to gang women within their specific job mandate?,' respondents in the Criminal Justice group have the mandate to control and manage the population they deal with. How do respondents who construct women as 'survivors' respond to them, given their job mandate? Do they take a strictly punitive stance or do they try to address some of the needs of the women at the same time as they monitor and control them? How are we to understand respondents who construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad,' yet work in a Community Based agency with the goal of empowerment? Do the women remain invisible? Do their needs go unaddressed? Or, are they forced into accepting the 'opportunities' provided premised on male gang members' needs?

While it could be argued that occupational mandates restrict

individual response strategies, we cannot forget that institutions are made up of individuals. Individuals can affect change from within. This is particularly significant given that respondents who construct gang women as 'survivors' are found in each occupational group. Attitudinal change precedes behavioural change. Knowledge is the key to dismantling stereotypes of female gang members. In this study, twelve of twenty-two respondents constructed gang women as 'survivors.' This has to be looked upon optimistically. They, too, will do their part to challenge and break down the stereotypical constructions of gang women as 'mad and/or bad.' Further, the implementation of the Inter-Agency Gang Coalition promises to provide a bridge between the various agencies, promoting knowledge-sharing and resource-sharing. The fact that all of the respondents state that their agencies have recently begun to share knowledge and resources with other agencies is an important step. One Criminal Justice respondent who constructs gang women as 'mad and/ or bad' recognizes that a strictly punitive approach does not work. He suggests we look to the Inter-Agency Gang Coalition for hope:

> We acknowledged from very early on in our existence that, although what I've just described to you is a very necessary part of the total approach to gang activity - in other words, we can't tolerate gang criminal behaviour, the robberies, the killings, the drive-by shootings - that is not going to be, in and of itself, a long term answer to the street gang problem ... We noticed very early on that the better we did our job, the higher the population of gang members in our Institutions became ... They didn't drop that gang identity or dissociate themselves from the gang once they were in the institutions. They recruited from within so we ended up having a growth of gang members within the Institutions. Simultaneously, there was increased recruitment on the street to replace their ranks from those that were incarcerated. So, instead of decreasing or helping the problem to reduce, in actual fact, it was probably growing, exponentially growing, because they target inside and outside. The gang members that were incarcerated were basically warehoused. They didn't drop their gang association. They didn't learn, so to speak, the big lesson about when you're bad you go to

jail. Because that's actually very much part of their lives, and
actually is part of their pride and prestige. Being sentenced to
jail actually increases their rank in the gang. So it wasn't really
reducing gang activity, it was warehousing certain members from the
street. It's still a very necessary function. We can't let them
run free. Um, but it's not an answer. It's not a long term answer.
It's just a part of the puzzle ... [W]e have created a position
which we call the Street Gang Prevention Coordinator and that's
funded by the province, the federal government, and the municipal
government. The idea of that function is for him and his assistant
to search out programs that have been effective in other urban
centres that face similar problems as us ... I think that's where
the answer to Winnipeg's problem would lie. What those programs
will be, I haven't the faintest idea. (CJl:6)

Another respondent stresses the importance of listening to the gang

members and to what they identify as their needs.

The emphasis is on the kids, what they want to do, what their needs
are, sort of thing. And, we've sort of established all the programs
based on that. It's not like we set up and said, 'O.K. Here's the
programs.' (CB21:16)

We need to make women visible, and prioritize female (as well as

male) needs. The fact that this agency already listens to what the (male)

youth describe as their needs offers hope for the possibility of listening

to gang women and what they describe as their needs.

Female gang members are being given more and more attention.

Society must address the roots of the problem and, thereby, address the

needs of the gang women. Such a response would locate gang women's needs

within the structural inequalities of poverty, racism and sexist

stereotypes about women's 'nature.' In order to 'break the cycle' we need

to provide options and alternatives to gang women. We need to provide

them with skills and education so they have real alternatives to the 'gang

life.' Gang women also need non-judgmental encouragement and respect as

'survivors' of irrational circumstances. We, as individuals composing a

society, are responsible for breaking down the barriers imposed by

classism, racism and sexism. As stated by Mathews (1992:28):

> [We must] recognize that we need to closely examine our institutions
> and professional practices and confront any and all structural and
> systemic paternalism, ethnocentrism, racism, homophobia, and sexism.

Conclusion

Recognizing Female Gang Affiliation

Female violence has generated considerable public attention recently. In particular, the issues of 'female violence' and 'females in gangs' have attracted significant attention. Unfortunately, the gang women themselves have not. In fact, as outlined in Chapter One, there is a dearth of knowledge about female gang members and female violence. Crime, violence and gang affiliation are synonymous with 'male' behaviour and 'masculinity.' Female involvement in these acts has been relegated to the margins and, as such, female gang members have remained invisible. As a society, we do not have the language to understand 'gang women' and acts of 'female violence.' Typically, our only understandings of gang women have been premised on androcentric research traditions and sensationalized media accounts.

This research is based on twenty-four in depth interviews with respondents whose work brings them into contact with female gang members. The two objectives of this research were: (1) to come to a closer understanding of the nature and extent of female gang affiliation through second hand accounts; and (2) to examine the discursive conditions surrounding female violence and gang affiliation - how the respondents the constructed 'gang women' - and the implications in terms of how their understandings of female gang affiliation instruct their responses to gang women.

According to respondents in this study, female (and male) gang members find themselves in particular material conditions. Consistent

with the feminist literature, the material conditions described by respondents paint a particularly bleak picture. Gang women live in dismal situations, contoured by the structural inequalities of their race, class and gender. Female gang members come from poor socioeconomic backgrounds, characterized by dysfunctional families and crime-ridden inner city communities. The majority of these women are Aboriginal. They have often endured severe emotional, physical and sexual abuse. Often, gang affiliation is _expected_, by their peers and, at times, their family as well. Gang women are under-educated and have few, if any, employment skills. They lacks the positive role models and encouragement to break out of the 'cycle.' The gang fulfils particular 'needs,' and becomes a viable option to help them 'survive' the conditions of their endangerment. The gang provides safety and protection in deteriorating crime-ridden inner-city communities. It provides them with a sense of family and purpose. Often, female gang members are vulnerable - they feel they have no options and no future. The gang offers excitement, money, instant gratification, and a 'purpose.' Further, the 'clout' of the gang gives these marginalized and alienated women a sense of power in their lives. Many of the respondents suggest that gang women must feel a sense of 'hopelessness' about their circumstances. The gang is the most promising 'option' they have.

Much research has been done on _male_ gang affiliation, pointing to the structural inequalities experienced by the male gang member. However, there is little information about female gang members. One respondent

comments:

> I think what motivates them, and I hear it loud and clear, and it's **probably** no different for the men, **but I really don't know**, is that they need to be needed. (CJ13:6; emphasis mine)

As reflected in the above statement, the fact that we know so little about female gang members causes us to rely on <u>assumptions</u> about what we <u>think</u> are the circumstances surrounding female gang affiliation. Given the history of constructing women as 'other,' defining female deviance as 'unnatural,' and locating the 'problem' of the female offenders in their 'minds,' this research also explored how the respondents in this study make sense of female gang members who appear to live in the same material conditions as male gang members. When charged with the task of understanding the 'uniquely female' gang situation, many respondents fell back on sexist and polarized views of deviant women as 'mad and/or bad.' The constructions of 'deviant' women as 'mad and/or bad' are premised on stereotypical and essentialist understandings of the 'nature' of women. For these reasons, these traditional discursive foundations, and their implications in terms of responding to gang women, are limiting. Respondents who construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad' locate the 'problem' of gang affiliation in the individual woman, her defective 'psychology,' thereby deflecting attention away from the structural conditions and social responsibility. They suggest psychological treatment to help these 'needy' and 'inadequate' personalities. Others suggest that these women are either so peripheral to gangs that they require no attention, or that they are so evil that they must be 'controlled' and re-taught their 'naturally feminine' behaviour.

Feminist research which takes women as the starting point constructs

these women as 'survivors' of their structural conditions of inequality. Some of the respondents in this study recognize that gang women, like gang men, are survivors of structural conditions which offer few alternatives and options to the 'gang lifestyle.' They locate the sources of female gang affiliation in terms of 'irrational' conditions imposed by society, rather than the 'irrational' nature of women. They implicate social responsibility and restructuring in order to address the needs of gang women, as identified by the gang women themselves. Further, they point to the need to understand more about gang women and to implement specific programs which offer alternatives and options for _female_ gang members. Currently, no such programs exist in this province. I have argued, in Chapter Five, that the 'survivor' construction of gang women offers the most potential for addressing the needs of gang women. This necessitates that we make gang women visible and hold the community responsible for addressing the structural conditions, the 'roots' of the problem, which make gangs a viable option for these women.

This research is an important step in coming to a better understanding of female gang affiliation and female violence. We now have more of an understanding of the lives of gang women and the material conditions in which they negotiate their agency and make 'choices' about how best to live their lives. We also have a better understanding of the discursive conditions surrounding female gang affiliation. The importance of the constructions of gang women held by the respondents lies in the fact that these are 'front-line' workers actively engaged in responding to this 'pressing social issue' on a daily basis. Their strategies for responding to gang women are guided by their constructions of gang women

as 'mad and/or bad' or as 'survivors.'

Interestingly, the occupational positions occupied by respondents do not appear to predict the constructions of gang women nor their response strategies, despite differing organizational mandates. As discussed in Chapter Five, the occupational groups of Criminal Justice, Social Services and Community Based are not discrete groups. At times, it was difficult to decide in which occupational group a particular agency representative belonged. For example, MacDonald Youth Services comes into contact with gang members who have been in conflict with the law through its Fine Option Community Service Option Program. However, I classified it as a Social Services because its mandate is different from that of the Winnipeg Police Service or the Winnipeg Remand Centre, for example. It is geared towards teaching the youths responsibility and life skills, while helping them complete their Community Service Orders. It is 'youth-centred' as opposed to 'control-oriented.' Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre could also be classified as a Social Services group. However, I placed this agency in the Community Based group because its primary mandate is the empowerment of Aboriginal people. Another example, two respondents currently work in Social Services. Yet, their understandings of gang women were based on their previous experiences in different occupational positions (which I classified as Criminal Justice).

Another explanation for the fact that the respondents' occupational position did not predict their construction of gang women could be that other variables, not addressed in this research, also influence their understandings of gang women. Respondents speak both personally and as a reflection of their particular agency mandates and institutional

acculturation. Respondents likely have their own personal experiences and biases which influence how they implement institutional mandates. Consequently, some respondents may speak more as 'key informants' than as 'agency representatives.' I asked respondents what _they_ thought about female violence and gang affiliation. This makes it difficult to distinguish how much of what the respondents' say is their personal opinion as compared to the 'belief system' perpetuated within their occupational group. Stated differently, it is unclear as to which 'hat'- their personal or occupational - the respondents wore during the interview and, at different times in the interview, while answering different questions. Consequently, we have to be very cautious about extrapolating assumptions and conclusions about the 'culture' and 'belief system' of the occupational groups within which the respondents work. This raises other questions as to the various sources from which respondents build their constructions of gang women. What personal experiences do they have which might influence how they locate the issue? How do their opinions of women and men, generally, influence their constructions of gang women? Further exploration is needed to understand the complexity of discursive conditions and to identify other variables which influence discursive constructions.

I also want to clarify that my identification of the two constructions of gang women - as 'mad and/or bad' or as 'survivors' - does not presume that these are the only two constructions of gang women that exist, or that these two categories are mutually exclusive. The understandings of gang women held by respondents were, at the same time, complex and contradictory. I do not want to give the impression that the

two constructions used to manage the data in this research are discrete and all-encompassing. The fact that respondents do not easily fall into one or the other discursive categories points to the complexity surrounding discursive constructions of gang women. As discussed in Chapter Five, evidence of both constructions - gang women as 'mad and/or bad' and gang women as 'survivors' - could be found even within the same interview. This leads me to suggest that there are many other ways in which gang women can be understood, and that this is an area which deserves further research. We need to pay more attention to these complex and contradictory discursive conditions and how they operate. In addition to the analytical level, we need to understand the implications of discursive conditions and contradictions at a practical level. For example, are the respondents aware of their own constructions of gang women, as well as any contradictions in their understandings? Do respondents who construct gang women as 'mad and/or bad,' for example, recognize that they assume a female 'nature' based on sexist stereotypes, and that they suggest individualistic responses? Do they recognize that others construct gang women as 'survivors'? Do respondents who construct gang women as 'survivors' recognize if they contradict themselves and suggest women are 'irrational' and that <u>female</u> gang affiliation is 'unnatural'? We need to start talking about the ways in which female violence and gang affiliation are understood. We need to confront essentialist and sexist constructions of gang women and encourage knowledge which contextualizes female gang affiliation and locates it in terms of structural conditions which gang women 'survive.'

The larger, societal responsibility for addressing female gang

affiliation raises many questions about the possibility of large scale structural change. What does it mean to hold the community responsible for encouraging structural change and addressing social inequalities? How 'do-able' is this? This research points for the need to implement social programs which offer opportunities and alternatives to those whose lives are influenced by structural conditions of inequality - particularly, marginalized, alienated and disenfranchised youth. The need for these social programs and opportunities is paramount. Unfortunately, the current political agenda appeals to conservative ideologies by advocating reactive and punitive approaches which call for increased enforcement programs and stricter punishments for young offenders. Miller and Cohen (1996:16) admonish us of the urgency of the situation:

> Given the present political agenda and power of the 'new right,' it seems inevitable that social programs will be drastically reduced, if not abolished, in the near future.

Given that addressing structural conditions has, historically, not been high on the political agenda for helping male gang members, why would we expect responses which advocate social programs for female gang members? In addition to a disintegrating 'social welfare net' (and the subsequent affect on poverty levels), the population of marginalized Aboriginals is increasing dramatically in Manitoba. The teen pregnancy rate is also rising dramatically. This makes the need ever more pressing to address the growing number of 'at risk' youth, female and male.

> [We must] recognize that there is a link between the economy and families, communities, minorities, and youth at risk. [We must] recognize the need to **address the risk, not the youth,** as the problem. (Mathews, 1992:27)

This research suggests the need for an open dialogue amongst respondents who are charged with responding to this pressing social issue. We must

also educate the public, the media, politicians, and all professionals (within the police service, within the schools, within social service and community agencies), about the root causes of gang affiliation and the pressing need to give 'at risk' youth opportunities. Female gang members comprise the future generation, and many of these women will bear the children of the future. Society must take responsibility for, and invest in, the futures of these women. This entails government funding which addressees the unique needs of impoverished and marginalized youth. They need flexible and non-judgemental educational and occupational training. They need positive realistic role models who give them the encouragement and confidence to access those opportunities. They need 'legitimate' recreational activities which encourage their own community involvement and responsibility. This, too, will challenge sexist, racist, and classist stereotypes which, historically, have assumed and 'encouraged' the limited potential of these 'at risk' members of society.

An important step towards challenging the essentialist and limited constructions of female gang members is knowledge sharing and resource sharing amongst the various agency's who respond to female gang members. A further ambition of this research consists of sharing the final report with all of the respondents, with the auspicious aim of helping to build the bridge between the various agencies represented in this study. It identifies the discourses and experiences surrounding female violence and gang affiliation in order to enhance knowledge and facilitate a cross-communication amongst the various individuals who work with gang members. In this sense, this research has the potential to encourage knowledge sharing and resource sharing amongst the agencies and individuals

involved. This research brings us one step closer to a better understanding of gang women, their material conditions and their needs. It also enlightens us as to the discursive conditions surrounding female gang affiliation. With knowledge, we can challenge limited discourses which presuppose that women are 'other' and have an 'inferior nature.' Knowledge sharing amongst the various respondents will encourage contextualization of female gang affiliation and, in the process, lead to response strategies geared to meeting the social and structural needs of gang women, as opposed to the psycho-pathological. Consequently, this research is strategic in that it will make a tangible contribution to the discourses concerning gang membership and the policy implications designed to respond to females involved in gangs. Knowledge encourages attitudinal change, which precedes behaviourial change. Structural change is incremental. Knowledge can encourage seemingly 'small' changes amongst individual members of the community whose concrete actions, in turn, will address the root causes of female gang affiliation and promote social action from other members of the community.

We must challenge the traditional stereotypical and limited constructions of female offenders generally, and gang women, specifically. This requires that we understand and contextualize female gang affiliation from their own standpoint. Originally, I had proposed to interview the real 'experts' on female gang affiliation, the gang women themselves, from their own standpoint. However, research of this nature can be problematic and, in fact, dangerous for both the researcher and the participants. My physical safety became a concern in terms of becoming a target by other gang members for being privy to confidential information. The safety of

the gang women was a concern because of the possibility that they themselves could become targets for talking to me, an outsider. Just speaking to me could put them in danger. Consequently, for this project, I elected to interview individuals who work with gang members. While not as ideal as speaking with the gang women themselves, they offer an important source of information for learning about gang women. In addition, this research strategy offered the possibility of examining the discursive, as well as the material, conditions surrounding female gang affiliation.

The important work of listening to the voices of gang women remains to be done. One respondent, while constructing the women as 'mad,' still suggests that we could learn from listening to what they have to say:

> There are some dynamics, though, that are going on with the women and with the girls, that I don't understand ... With some of them there is a pattern of repetitive violent behaviour, repetitive acting out behaviour, with peaks and valleys of sort of non-confrontational behaviour. There appears to be a rhythm to that, there appears to be some commonalities to that. It's happened enough times that there appears to be a trend. The question is why? What are the dynamics that precede the acting out? What are they? And we don't have enough data right now to be able to do that. We need to do some really strong focused interviewing with those young ladies. I don't know if I'd call them that, but we need to do some focused interviewing with them. We need to look at the dynamics of the social environment they're in, to see whether they were abused, whether there were precipitating events that occur. There are some things that suggest to us, they don't like to be locked up, they don't like being told what to do. But exactly what they're being told to do and those kinds of things, I think there are things in there, that do not, uh, [pounding fist on table for each word] there are aspects of dealing with female gang members that are different than dealing with [male] gang members. We don't have a picture of all of those kinds of things. It's enough though, for me to suggest to you that I think that there are differences. And it's enough for me to suggest to you that I think that the differences are significant, that they're not subtle differences, that they're significant differences. Exactly what those are, I can't give you that. (CJ3:42)

We need to explore how gang women construct <u>themselves</u>, making them

visible with their own voices:

> I brought a gang member in here, and interviewed her for this
> [interview]. Some of the stuff I couldn't get, or I didn't know.
> So I brought a gang member in here and interviewed her, and said,
> 'This is what's going down. This girl's coming to see me. Do you
> want to participate?' So she gave me most of this [information].
> 'Are female offenders treated differently within the gang than
> males?' She told me, 'Yes. They are subservient.' She told me
> that this original I.P. gang had a female element to it. And
> something happened, a murder or something happened, and three of
> them ratted out on one of the males. And that destroyed the female
> gang structure at that time. Absolutely destroyed it. And the view
> went out that you can't trust a female within the gangs, the gang
> structure. 'Can't trust 'em. They'll rat on you. Never trust
> them.' So now, someone like the girl that I interviewed, who is
> born into this, is always striving to maintain that respect, and
> reacts so violently to informants, because 'This happened before and
> you reduced my credibility to nothing. I am nothing. What have I
> got? I have nothing with my family. I have no education. I'm
> going nowhere's, very low self-esteem. All I have is the gang.
> And, now I have no credibility with the gang, because you can't
> trust them [women].' So to prove their trust, they become more
> violent. Pretty powerful. (CJ8:14)

While this quote from a female gang member leaves many more questions than

answers, it seems that she suggests women are subservient. She also seems

to buy into the fact that women are less than men and can not be trusted.

Women are always trying to achieve credibility in the male dominated

subculture of the gang. Women have to be tough, they have more to prove

in order to be trusted. This is, however, all speculation. We cannot

know until we talk to the gang women. Another respondent described one

gang woman who claimed that she 'chose' to prostitute for the gang to 'do

her part':

> And talking to that one specific girl, she said, 'Yeah, they treated
> me very well. But I always wanted to go out and prostitute myself
> because I had to contribute something.' So, she looked upon it as
> she was providing something ... (CJ2:22)

This raises important questions about how the women, themselves, perceive

their roles and behaviours within the gang. Further, it suggests that

women exercise agency. They make active choices and decisions about what they will and will not do. How do these women negotiate their agency and status in the patriarchal gang hierarchy? How do they construct themselves? How do they understand their gang affiliation and acts of violence? We also need to find out more about why female gang members leave the gang. What conditions make exiting the gang possible? How can we create social conditions which make leaving the gang a viable option? What 'needs' do they suggest which could help them make safer choices in their lives?

These women deserve to have their voices heard. We, as a society, must listen:

> So, it's going to take every area. It's going to take every bit of society to help these problems ... You know, it takes a whole village to raise a child. Everyone's got to pull together. But we haven't been very good at that, historically. So, now, this [Inter-Agency Gang Coalition] is the start. (SS14:22)

Appendix A - Interview Schedule

<u>Responding to Gang Women in Manitoba</u>

Hi! Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. My name is Melanie Nimmo. I am a Master's student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba. This research is part of my Master's thesis which is on female gang affiliation. All of the information you give me will be kept strictly confidential. Your name, and any information that may reveal your identity, will not be used in the research.

With your permission, this interview will be audio-taped. If at any time you would like to turn the tape-recorder off, the stop button is right here. If you do not want to answer a question you do not have to. Your participation is completely voluntary and you can stop the interview at any time.

A signature of informed consent is required by the Department of Sociology's Ethics Review Committee. One copy of the consent form is for you and one is for me. My copy will be separated from your interview and will be kept in a locked file with the other consent forms. I will destroy all of the consent forms and interview tapes when the project is done.

[give them the consent form to them to sign]

The interview will begin with some basic questions about what it is that you do, and why your work brings you into contact with gang members. The interview will then move on to explore your experiences with gang women, your understandings of those experiences, and what you feel are the most effective responses to gang women. Please feel free to elaborate and

add questions as you wish. My interview guide is flexible. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. **Nature of Your Work**

    a.   What is your job title and position?

            probe: What do you do?

    b.   Why / how does your job bring you into contact with gang members?

    c.   What is your organization's basic approach to gangs?

            probe: What is the underlying philosophy or goal?

        i.   How would you classify the organization's <u>approach/ strategy</u> on a continuum with "punitive" at one end and "rehabilitative" at the other?

        ii.   How would you classify the organization's <u>response</u> on a continuum with "reactive" at one end and "proactive" at the other?

        iii.   How would you classify the organization in terms of whether it is; government, private, or grassroots?

    d.   How do you identify gang members?

            probes: What is your (and your organization's) definition of "gang" and how is "gang affiliation" determined?

    e.   Do you have programs and/or counsellors in place specifically to respond to gang women?

2. **Exposure to and Experiences with Gang Women**

    a.   How many gang women do you deal with? (ratio male:female)

        i.   Do you think this number / ratio is approximates the actual ratio of male to female gang members? That is, due to your specific agency functions, do you think you come into contact with more or less gang women? [quantitative difference]

    b.   Due to the specific nature / function / mandate of your particular agency, do you think that your clients (gang members generally and gang women specifically) differ qualitatively from those gang members on the street? In other words, do you think that the gang members you deal with are "typical" gang members and representative of most gang members?

            probe: How much do you think you can generalize from the gang members you are in contact with to other gang members?

    c.   What can you tell me about the characteristics of the gang women you deal with?

        i.   How old are they?

        ii.   What is their ethnic origin? (percentage?)

        iii.   What percentage would you say are single? Married?

        iv.   Do many of them have children?

        v.   What would you say the average education level is?

            probe: Of those who are minors, are they in school or have they dropped out?

vi. What do you know about the background of these women / girls?

> probe: What was their family life like? What socioeconomic status do they come from?

> (1) Do you notice any differences (in terms of demographics and personal histories) between the women and men?

d. What activities have you heard of gang women engaging in? [hearsay, or directly from the women?]

i. What sorts of criminal activities do they engage in? (e.g., drugs, prostitution, B&E's?)

ii. What sorts of non-criminal activities do they engage in?

> probe: What do they do for fun? (e.g., hang out at malls? party at houses?)

iii. Are there any differences between women and men in terms of the activities they engage in?

e. How are the gangs organized?

> probes: Is there a hierarchy? If so, how is it organized?

i. What are the relationships between the women and men?

ii. Would you say the women are independent or subservient to men, or neither?

> probe: Why do you think this?

3. **Understandings / Constructions of Gang Women**

   a. Why do you think kids join gangs generally?

      i. What motivates females to join gangs?

         probes: Would you say that the reasons are similar or different compared to males who join gangs?

   b. Do you think female violence has changed throughout the years?

      i. Are you seeing more females committing violent acts?

      ii. Has the nature of female violence changed? How is it different from, or the same as, male violence?

      iii. Do you think we are seeing a "new" type of female offender?

         probe: If yes, how so?

      iv. Why do you think this is so? (theories?)

4. **Responses / Strategies to Gangs and Gang Women**

   a. What do you think we can do to prevent kids from joining gangs?

      probes: immediate? long term?

   b. What can be done about those who are already involved with gangs? What do you think is the best response / intervention?

   c. According to your experiences, how difficult do you think it is to leave / exit the gang?

d.   Do you think there is any way that organizations such as yours could make it easier for someone to leave a gang?

e.   Has your organization's approach to gangs changed over time?

        probe: If so, why and with what effect?

f.   Do you think programs / agencies should address different needs for male and female gang members?

        probe: why?

g.   What do you think of the other institutional responses to gangs?

        probe: What do you think about how other organizations are responding to gangs?

i.   Do you think that information and resource sharing between the various agencies would be worthwhile?

        probe: Why? Is it possible?

Concluding Remarks:

I would like to thank you very much for your time and honesty. As I said before, I promise that your name will never be used. Is there anything you would like to add to what you have told me? Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix B - Introductory Letter
March , 1998

Respondent name,
title,
and address.

ATTENTION: Respondent name

RE: Street Gang Research Project

Dear :

My name is Melanie Nimmo and I am a Master's student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Manitoba doing my thesis research on female gang affiliation. This research project involves interviews (approximately one hour in duration) with representatives of different agencies (including the police, schools, social services and community groups) who come into contact with gang members as part of their work. The research explores the differences and similarities among various agency members in terms of their experiences with, understandings of, and responses to gang women.

You have been selected to participate in this study because of your position as .... with ..... If you agree to participate in this interview, I guarantee that your responses will be kept completely confidential. Your name, and any information which may reveal your identity, **will not** appear anywhere in the project. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions and may stop the interview at anytime.

I hope you decide to participate in this study. The research will explore the experiences which various agency representatives have with gang women, and will draw attention to what they feel are the most effective responses to curtail gang involvement. As such, the final paper will produce policy implications related to current responses to gang women. Copies of the final report will be available upon request, which I hope will serve as a valuable information bridge amongst the various agencies.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 204-888-8747. I will contact you by phone within the next week to discuss your participation in this important project. I thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Melanie Nimmo
Department of Sociology
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3T 2N2

Appendix C - Consent Form

This study investigates various agency representatives' experiences with, understandings of, and responses to female gang involvement as part of Melanie Nimmo's thesis work for her Master's of Arts degree. I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, my interview will be audio-taped for later transcription. Melanie Nimmo will be the only person to hear the tapes and her advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Comack, will be the only other person to see the transcriptions of the tapes. The interview tapes and consent forms will be destroyed when the project is done.

I understand that my name, and any information that may reveal my identity, **will not** be used in the research. Any information I give will be kept **strictly confidential**, with one exception: any information related to the abuse of children must be reported to the appropriate authorities.

I understand that I do not have to answer a question if I do not want to and that I can turn the tape-recorder off any time I want to. My participation in this interview is entirely voluntary and I can stop the interview at any time.

-------------   -------------------------------
(Date)   (Respondent signature in ink)

-------------   -----------------------------
(Date)   (Researcher signature in ink)
                                 Melanie Nimmo
                                 Department of Sociology
                                 University of Manitoba

    If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me or my advisor (Elizabeth Comack) at 474-9673. I will be done the project in July 1998 and would be happy to hear from you to give you a copy. Thank you very much for letting me interview you.

This project has been approved by the Department of Sociology Ethics Review Committee and any complaint regarding its procedures may be reported to the Head of the Department of Sociology (474-9260) for referral to the Ethics Review Committee.

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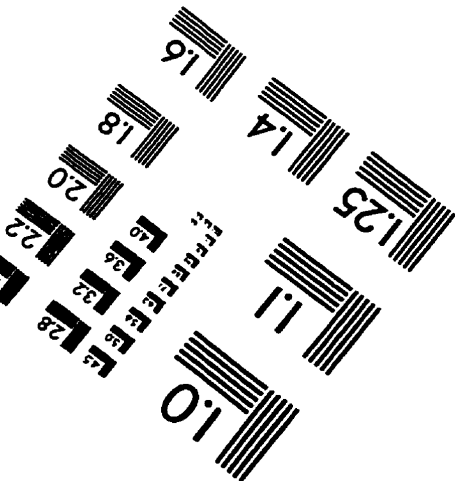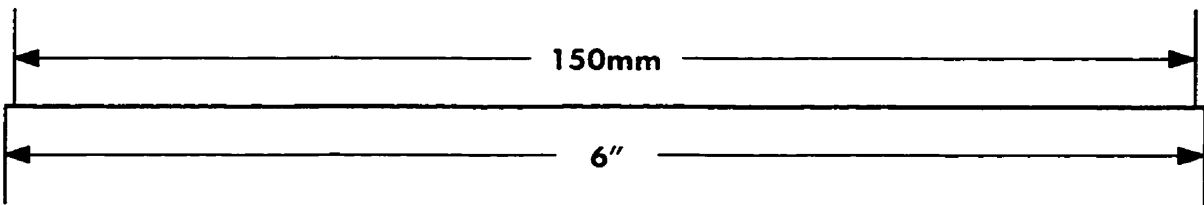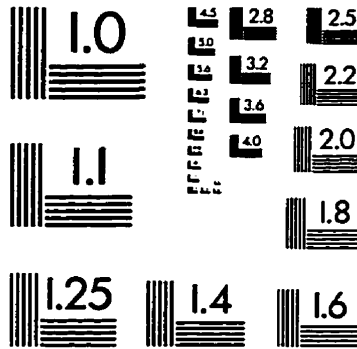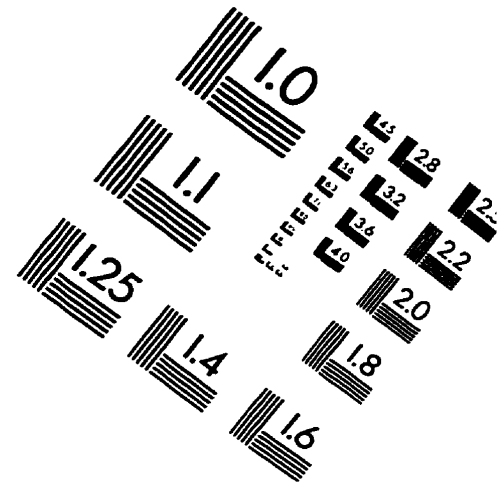   Albany, NY: State University of New York, pp. 3-25.
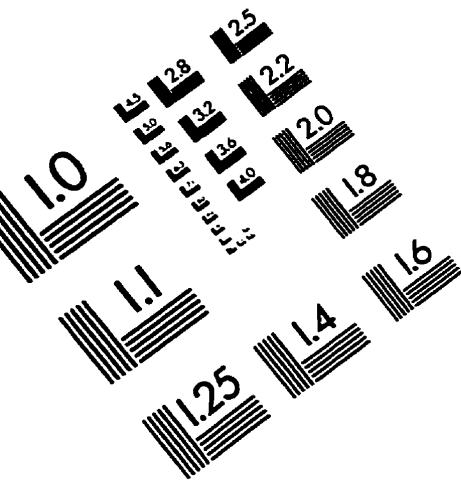
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IMAGE EVALUATION
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