

**[Slide 1]**

**Xiaobei Chen**

I'm Xiaobei Chen, Professor of Sociology at Carleton University. I'm also president of the Canadian Sociological Association. On behalf of the CSA, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the CSA webinar series on *Canadian Policing, Colonialism and Racism*.

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**Xiaobei Chen**

I would like to open the event with a land acknowledgement. The Canadian Sociological Association wishes to situate its presence as an uninvited guest on the traditional territories of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, across what has come to be known through a colonial project as Canada. This acknowledgement is to recognize the enduring relationships that exists between Indigenous nations and their territories that the CSA and its constituents work and live on.

As an organization, we strive to understand our role within Canada's ongoing settler-colonial project that subjects Indigenous peoples to dispossession and genocide. We recognize our participation and complacency in colonial modalities and knowledge systems and are committed to decolonial praxis that centres and affirms the contributions of Indigenous elders and scholars to the field of sociology.

**[Slide 3]**

**Xiaobei Chen**

As the debate about policing is becoming a major contentious issue for sociological departments across the country and for Canadian society, it is important that we create public space for discussions about these issues among sociologists, and with the wider community. That's why we have decided to offer this series.

Throughout today's event. We invite you to communicate with the panelists by using either the 'Chat' or 'Q & A'.

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**Xiaobei Chen**

It is our great pleasure today to have Dr. Vanessa Watts as a moderator. Dr. Watts is an Assistant Professor and the Paul R. McPherson Chair in Indigenous Studies McMaster University. Vanessa is also Chair of the Decolonization Subcommittee of the CSA. She is Mohawk and Anishinaabe Bear Clan who lives with her partner and two children on Six Nations of the Grand River.

Her research examines Indigenist epistemological and ontological interventions on place-based, material knowledge production. Vanessa is particularly interested in Indigenous feminisms, sociology of knowledge, Indigenous governance, and other-than-human relations as forms of Indigenous ways of knowing. Vanessa's SSHRC Insight Development Grant for her project "An Indigenist Sociology of Knowledge: Indigenous social lives in Indigenous studies, sociology and political science (1895 and beyond)." The project interrogates over a century of representations of Indigenous peoples in sociology and political science.

Vanessa, thank you so much for being the moderator for today's event. I'll turn it over to you to introduce our speaker today, Dr. Robert Henry.

[Slide 5]

**Vanessa Watts**

Kwékwé

Hello, everyone and thanks so much for joining us today for Dr. Henry's talk on *Survivance and Indigenous Street Lifestyles*.

I would like to thank the Canadian Sociological Association for organizing this and in particular to Sherry Fox for all of her excellent organizing efforts to bring us all together, virtually, here.

As you heard from Xiaobei, the Q & A function will be really important for any questions you might have after the talk. We are going to try to have 20 to 30 minutes or so towards the end to have a moderated discussion with Dr. Henry so I'll introduce him now.

Dr. Henry is Métis from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, and is an Assistant Professor at the University of Saskatchewan in the Department of Indigenous Studies. He's also a member of the Canadian Sociological Association's Equity Subcommittee.

Dr. Henry's research areas include Indigenous street gangs and gang theories, Indigenous masculinities, Indigenous and critical research methodologies, youth mental health and visual research methods. Working closely with community partners, Robert works to create knowledge mobilization outcomes that reflect community needs and wants. We will be hearing more about this in particular today during Dr. Henry's presentation, which builds upon general business concept of survival as an applied theory to examine how Indigenous peoples engaged in street lifestyles find creative ways to survive within violent urban street spaces. I'm really looking forward to hearing more about this and in particular Dr. Henry's challenge to Eurocentric positivistic criminological perspectives of crime with respect to Indigenous peoples and communities. So, with that, I'll pass it over to Dr. Henry to introduce himself and his presentation. Thanks, everyone.

**[Slide 6]**

**Robert Henry**

Thank you, Dr. Watts for that introduction and hello everybody. Thank you for taking time out of your day to listen. I do want to say before I begin, there will be a mini video that I'll be showing, along with some photographs that are content sensitive, with potential triggers for some individuals. I'll give the warning that it's related to suicidality, cutting addictions, and so forth - and trauma and violence. If you have issues or concerns about that, I'll give a warning before I put up the video.

**[Slide 7]**

**Robert Henry**

Today, I'm going to try and just do a quick conversation in and around some work that I have been doing for quite a few years now. It's a continuation from my Master's work that goes into my PhD and that has continued on.

Now, I'm going to give a little introduction of who I am. Because one, it helps me ground myself when I do any of these talks and two, it will help you (for those of you that may not know me,) to understand how I've come to think about these things and begin to understand the ways in which I've come to see Western theories, in Western perspectives of criminology, of being lacking within Indigenous spaces, or having the inability to fully grasp what's happening within Indigenous life worlds. I'll go on to explain the problematic definitions and theories of settler colonialism and Indigenous street gangs. Then to where I am now on re-reading a lot of the experiences and the life history work that I've done with Indigenous street gang members and those involved in street lifestyles through a survivor's lens. Finally, we'll get into a conclusion with the questions to move forward.

**[Slide 8]**

**Robert Henry**

To begin, as Dr. Watts stated, I'm from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. I've been very lucky to be able to work with a lot of community partners in around the areas of street lifestyles. I come from a very large, extended Métis family. The bottom picture there, that's my grandpa - the one in the hat and the tie, the young guy standing up there. And those are his brothers and sisters. So, I come from a very large, extended family. And the reason why this is important to say here is that when we start looking at the ways in which belonging is understood, we have to understand that where I come from, and how I was raised, is that my fourth and fifth cousins are really my first cousins and my first cousins are down the line. The way in which we related to one another was more around our age and our experiences on how we built our relationships. This will come out in some of the

discussions, in the analysis that I bring forward, in the challenges that we have when we're actually re-reading Indigenous street spaces.

I've been lucky enough to have a couple editions out there - and this is just to promote myself in some of the work and partners, academic partners. One is *Settler Study Limits* (University of Manitoba Press) that just came out with Heather Dorries, David Hugill, Tyler McCreary, and Julie Tomiak.

I've had the privilege of working on a health book with Dr. Lavallee, Dr. Van Styvendale, and Dr. Innes, *Global Indigenous Health* (UBC Press), as well as two other books; *Brighter Days Ahead* and *Indigenous Women and Street Gangs* (University of Alberta Press).

These are community knowledge mobilization pieces. One comes from my PhD (which is *Better Days Ahead*) and the other one is focused on a project post-PhD because my PhD work focused on Indigenous men engaged in street gangs. What happened was, the women who were involved in one of the programs that I was working with actually came to me and said, 'Why are you always focused on men? We put in the work too.' And so from there, we created a project for them and their stories to come out which is really kind of carrying on this notion of surviving and survivors' narratives.

The reason why I have the picture of McDonald's and the \$1 drink days? For those of you who aren't familiar with Prince Albert, we have kind of our own language and lexicon, I guess, going on up there where the double negatives are 'Well you are poor cuz' and stuff like that.

This is just to try and ground you to where I come from and how I've come to try and understand some of these issues that we're talking about.

[Slide 9]

**Robert Henry**

To begin, one of the biggest things that we have to understand, and why I've moved away from the term 'gang' within the title (but I'll talk about gang members here) is that there's multiple ways in which gangs are understood at the community level, and it's very political. What a gang is in one community may not be in another community. What happens is that the construction of the gang actually helps for surveillance tactics to go on and it helps individuals to begin to construct who is and who isn't a gang member.

What I've been doing with communities is having them begin to start working from a topology sort of perspective, that individuals just don't fall into a gang, they just don't become a gang member, that there is a progression that goes on there. When we talk about street gangs, we have to

understand that there's a difference between what's going on and not everybody involved in street lifestyles or the illegal economy are connected to the street gang. It's actually a very few number of individuals who become involved in street gangs. And so, what happens then, is when we have poor definitions of street gangs, we can begin to label groups of youth, groups of those who we consider as outside the norm, as gang members, which then increases police presence and removal from those communities.

**[Slide 10]**

**Robert Henry**

When we look at gangs, in general, a lot of the information that we have on street gangs here in Canada, is derived through American perspectives. We are starting to see more of British sociological, sort of more of a critical lens being brought in on this, but primarily how we've come to understand street gangs or street gang theories really does come from the Chicago School and a lot of it focuses on youth deviant theories.

These theories continuously focus on strain. Or if we look at strain, social disorganization and control theories, many of these theories focus on individual acts of being immoral, or not having proper skills to participate within society. A lot of it focuses on middle class understandings. They focus on the ways in which you have to act or you have to be a part of it. If everybody has the same experiences then they're easier to understand. However, when you're continuously fighting against systems and the system is created in a way to erase Indigenous experience, the theories that are put in place really do not explain Indigenous gang involvement, and ignores the complexities that are happening here.

What happens with a lot of the theories (one of the biggest things that that I've seen within my research) is this idea that continuously gets brought out within communities and other writings that Indigenous gang members or gang members are joining gangs, because they're searching for a place to belong.

Now, this makes sense at one level, that individuals are trying to find places where they belong. But all youth do this, everybody kind of looks for places to try and become engaged, find others who are more like themselves. But when we're looking at this from traditional criminal, chronological, positivistic perspectives, a lot of it on this idea of belonging says that they don't have family or their families aren't there.

When we look at Indigenous street gangs, it is their family. It is these long-standing relational pieces. When we start understanding relationality, we begin to see that Indigenous street gangs are built off of their relationships to family and space, in place. They're not really searching for a family

to belong to (which is what a lot of the research says) but they're actually just joining their family. They are finding those who are similar to themselves, and everything else.

And so, when we look at the idea of theories, and the strain theories, they're positivistic, with a heavy reliance on pathologizing individuals, making them feel inadequate for what is actually happening. When we look at this, we can ignore or remove the social or society's way of saying that we are all a part of this and we can put the blame on individuals by saying, 'Well, it's their fault.' What happens then is that we create policies and educational programs that focus on individuals to be more like us, rather than beginning to understand what is actually happening within these spaces.

**[Slide 11]**

**Robert Henry**

Why this is important and what is going on with all of this is that when we look at colonization, and we look at empirical colonial tactics, it's always been about removing. It's about removing capital from one place to another. When we look from an empirical colonial perspective, it was always about removing capital from the new regions back to the mother country. However today, what we begin to see is that within settler colonialism, the goal is not so much the removal of resources to a different place, but it's about controlling resources and reclaiming land and space in the eyes of the settler.

We are then looking less at the idea of colonization as being an event and more something that it's built within the structure. But how do you build structures? How do you maintain a control of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous bodies?

When we look at the history of colonization, the idea of the violent Indigenous body has always been something that colonization has relied on in order to exert violence and control over Indigenous livelihoods and life worlds. And so, what's happened now is that the gangster image has now become that space.

Rather than the bloodthirsty savage that was constructed, rather than having that construction, the gangster now becomes the image of urban decay, and then the ways in which Indigenous bodies now are related within this. The activity of clearing settler spaces of Indigenous bodies becomes morally defensible with Indigenous people who can in fact, be turned into debris. A transformation that is accomplished by viewing the Indigenous body as sick, dysfunctional, and self-destructive. By creating this and creating these spaces, what we begin to do is to look at the experiences of Indigenous people engaged in street lifestyles as that they are lacking. Again, going back to this understanding that they're lacking morals, or they're lacking an ability to move forward.

The gangster image now allows us to maintain a sense of fear and control over Indigenous bodies or the way in which Indigenous people move within urban spaces. We can utilize specific structures such as police, Child Welfare Services, to say that we need to create more surveillance, we need to control them. We can use heightened levels of violence in order to do this, because they're not really people. So, what we begin to see now is that the gangster image is actually a continued reconstruction of the Indigenous body as lacking, and something that can be used to control.

**[Slide 12]**

**Robert Henry**

One of the things we need to understand as well within all of this is that Indigenous street gangs, the history of Indigenous street gangs, is something more recent. I focus on the prairies where a lot of my research is and despite a long history of colonization, and settler colonialism across Canada, Indigenous street gangs are a recent phenomenon.

A lot of the research and literature around Indigenous street gangs continues to point to residential schools as being the access point of this. But it isn't until about 20 to 30 years after the closure of residential schools begins to happen that we begin to see an upsurge of Indigenous street gangs beginning to form. It wasn't until the streets of Winnipeg that it's confirmed, or that we've come to understand that this is where the Indigenous street gang was born from. It was from Richard and Daniel Wolf, who with their cousins and friends who had similar experiences, began to find a way to fight back against the violence that was happening on them and to take control of their lives.

Prior to this, when you see gangs (Indigenous street gangs) these were more focused around drinking groups, around specific neighborhoods. You would be Robert Henry or the Henrys sitting over there on Parler Avenue. The Henrys would be just hanging out but (again, this goes back to that typology) this wasn't a gang, it was more of a group of individuals who hung out together.

What happened in the streets of Winnipeg is we begin to see a reshaping in the ways in which individuals identify and move forward as a way to gain economic capital within a capitalist space. The Wolf brothers along with their cousins and their friends (when you look at their histories) felt that they needed to come together. We see this as an idea of belonging, but the reason why they came together was to get money, power and respect. They were searching for ways in which to survive and what they began to do was to find ways to survive within violent street spaces, but also survive and increase their capital within illegal street economies. This is important because this is where we begin to see Indigenous ingenuity, moving into these illegal economies to control it, while at the same time they're looking to gain others to be a part of their group.

However, we also have to understand that when we look at street gangs, just like we look at the Academy, just like we look at any other social space, a gang doesn't want every single person. This

is where we begin to see a politicization of what happens, and how we see a bunch of different gangs beginning to form within neighborhoods, and the politics that go on in there.

The Indian Posse was one of the first gangs to form on the streets of Winnipeg. This was followed by the Manitoba Warriors, followed by the Native Syndicate. And the other part is that when we begin to see this (and the ways in which policies were being done at the time) was when Indigenous street gangs were housed in primarily one institution in Manitoba. They (government) thought that by controlling the gang members that they could control the spread of the gangs.

When a riot occurred at one of the institutions the policy began to shift. What they did was they took the leaders from all the different gangs and spread them across to different institutions (saying that they didn't have enough space) thinking that they could take their power away because of the numbers.

The problem is that individuals learned psychology, they learned manipulation, they learned how to use numbers to build their gangs moving forward. It was actually the state that helped to increase Indigenous street gangs to go coast to coast which beat the other organized crime syndicates that we are more familiar with in Canada, like the Hells Angels, the Bandidos, and so forth. So, it was actually Indigenous street gangs, who were the first groups to go coast to coast and have this connection.

The other part that we have to understand is that once individuals left the prison system, they went back into their communities, and they utilized their understandings of relationality to continuously build upon their groups and move forward within their mandate.

### [Slide 13]

#### **Robert Henry**

So, what does this all mean? I have been doing research within the Indigenous street gangs since 2006, when I started my Masters, but the interest and where it all came from was back in 1999 or 2000, or 1998-2000, somewhere in there.

I was an educational assistant in Prince Albert at Queen Mary Community School. It was at the school and at this time that gang members were (or gangs were seen as) becoming an issue within the community. The school started to get worried and asked the police to come and do a talk just to try and mediate some questions that teachers had and educational assistants like myself. What was happening and where we could go from there?

For those of you who are familiar with Prince Albert, or may not be familiar with Prince Albert, it's probably one of the most geographically interesting cities out there. There's a hill and a flat, and

then it's divided by a road that goes from the North to the South. This creates the East Hill, West Hill, East Flat, and West Flat. It is geographically divided economically and racially as well. When we look at the hills, it has higher socioeconomic, primarily white families living there. On the flats, it's primarily Indigenous blue collar. As you move Westward, lower socioeconomic, higher Indigenous concentrations.

When the police officers came into the school, it was at the time when a street gangs began to reformulate themselves. This becomes the problem with defining street gangs, again, going back to the early part, that they began to use pop culture and utilizing the ways in which baseball teams and culture were coming together for clothing. And so, the police officer said, "It's these kids wearing New York Yankees backwards, tilted to the left blue Yankees hats."

I asked a question, because kids all over the city were wearing these hats. "Well, what about the kids on the East hill?" The police officer said, "No, not those kids." I asked, "What about the kids on the West hill?" They replied "Not those kids." and finally, "What about the kids on the East flat?" The officers responded, "Not those kids. But the closer we get to Midtown, kind of." And then I asked the question, "So, is it just the kids on the West flat?" And the police officer at that time said "Yes, because those are the kids that commit crime."

This got me to look at all of this, it is what kind of brought me into the idea of 'Okay, what's actually happening because those kids on the West flat are my cousins and they weren't gang members.' So, this is what got me into asking these questions and moving forward.

As my education career continued to move forward, I started to do work with Straight Up in Saskatoon. I began to do life history work with individuals, and began to ask the questions; What are your first memories? How did you come to construct your notions of identity? How did you come to survive? How did you make it over to where you are now? It was through this sort of notion that individuals began to talk and tell their stories. But the problem is, when I was doing my PhD, I didn't have a way in which to describe what I was seeing. The theories that were put in front of me, strain theories, the control, the social determines the continuation of those theories, they framed the way I was trying to look at the questions and I kept seeing gaps. I wasn't understanding what was really happening here.

I began to see that we continuously demonized and pathologized Indigenous existence. Because I'm over here within the Indigenous Studies Department and Indigenous theories, and I'm like, 'Okay, what's going on here? Why are these theories missing the whole point of colonization? What is the role that colonization plays within all this?'

During my PhD, I actually started to look more towards Bourdieu's theory and perspective in and around habitus and field and it began to help me understand that individuals aren't just pulled in or

moving around but there's a thought process that goes on in here. That it depends on one's capital and how they see their spaces. It depends on the code within the streets, pieces that allow for the differences on what is a gang, what isn't a gang when individuals move through here.

But again, even hearing this and going back and re-reading some of this, I realized I was still missing a big piece. I was missing a way in which to better understand how to read life history work through those who've been engaged in street lifestyles. What it did is it drew me to some work by Gerald Vizenor and this is where the idea of surviving started to come in. I started to ask if this actually what we're beginning to see?

The problem with the theories that I was working with (the Western criminological theories) is that they focus on a point of time, they don't allow for us to understand the way in which things move through time and through space, that it focuses on a here and now rather than understanding how do people move through these spaces. Because when we understand street lifestyles as a progression in that street gangs (most people who join street gangs are out of street gangs within six to 18 months when you join the street gangs) we have to understand - why are people joining? What's going on? How are they resurging themselves on the other side?

This is what led me to look at Gerald Vizenor's notion of survivance. Gerald looks at surviving how this sort of works because there's something missing. I was reading and understanding what they're trying to say but I didn't have the sort of language or the theoretical perspective to work through this.

When we look at survivance, it's used as a way to describe multiple ways that Indigenous peoples have been subjected to colonial encounters, but move beyond the understanding of Indigenous passive subjects. And this is really important because every single person who I've interviewed over the years, has always told me, "Do not look at me as a victim, I was never a victim in any of this, I made the choices that I did, because I needed to survive." There is this idea that we move away from the aspect that Indigenous peoples are passive to colonization or passive to their experiences, helps begin to shift and look at the ways in which individuals teach or learn or pick up specific cues in order to survive within spaces that are violent, or as understood as being violent. And again, when I'm talking about this, I don't want to pathologize this for all Indigenous experiences. This is just for those engaged in street lifestyles.

Indigenous survivance can be understood as place-based pedagogy of the oppressed. Survivance allows researchers to understand what is happening, where, what are the narratives that you're telling us and how do we begin to know what's really happening here, from the voices of those who are experiencing these spaces.

“The theories of survivance are elusive, obscure, and imprecise by definition, translation, comparison, and catchword histories, but survivance is invariably true and just in native practice and company...The character of survivance creates a sense of native presence over absence, nihility, and **victimry**. (Vizenor, 2008: 1)

I think this is the strongest thing that Vizenor brings within the idea of survivance and Vizenor uses this within a literary sense. He doesn't use it in an applied sense, or in real time, but looks at the ways in which Indigenous writers have come to understand post-apocalyptic understandings of self and identity.

I began to start thinking how we go about doing this in real time. How do we begin to use this as an applied sort of theory to understand Indigenous street lifestyle? How do we do this without seeing the victims to something and that we can actually start looking and reverting the narratives that they're telling us and create the lens back onto society itself? How do we begin to reshift this?

#### [Slide 14]

#### **Robert Henry**

When we look at this, within the process of surviving in the streets, we can see multiple things that are happening. We have to also understand that this isn't a scale that we move one to the other, that there's continuous relationships or movement going back and forth across them. And it's not as clear as just saying this is survival. I want to reread some of this going back to ways in which some people are resisting and its survival, some are resurging, and it's going to survival but they're always moving towards something. They're always trying to improve and to make life better for the next generation. That's that sort of where it is.

Now, we also have to understand that there's limitations and how that works. We can interpret it differently. But when you do go through the life history, and you go through individuals who are working through the space of being in a street gang and street lifestyles and working their way out, they continuously want to try and give back. The individuals who I've worked with at The Connection, they want to try and give back to the community, or they thought they were doing something for the community, or they're trying to do something for their children, or provide a better life for their children than what they had.

We need to understand where it's all coming from. The process is warranted survival. What are those survival pieces that individuals need to survive? Sometimes it is joining a gang, sometimes it is enacting in violence in order to protect oneself.

What is resistance and resilience? If we take the settler colonial theory, and we acknowledge that it's around us, and it abounds us, and it recreates the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities across Canada, that it's always there. And we understand that settler

colonialism, again, is about the erasure of Indigenous presence and Indigenous bodies. The gang itself, just joining a gang is a site of resistance. Because what you're doing is you're claiming space, you're reclaiming space, and you're showing that you're there. And this can be through the identification of tagging, walking together through groups. But it's also a perverted sort of way to understand the ways in which power can be done.

When individuals are joining gangs for a sense of power, where they walk into a place and people would look down on them, when they come in as a group and people move around. Individuals would say that was one of the greatest pieces of self-esteem that they had was that it was a sense of power that was given to them.

There's resurgence and then there's an active presence over absence, and an act of creativity and adaptation to environment.

**[Slide 15]**

**Video**

*Brief delay as technical issues are sorted out*

I'm going to play a video here. This is a this is the video that I said has some issues. It is a digital story that I worked with one of the young individuals and she did a spoken word poem. We put it together in here and it's my voice so I'm sorry, you're going have to listen to my voice still, but let's just listen to it and see where it goes.

We have been silenced by the ones who stole our innocence before we ever knew right from wrong.  
We have been silenced because if we open our mouths for the wrong things others have done, we pay for it.

We couldn't be ourselves growing up.

We couldn't laugh as loud as we could.

We could not run around with our friends.

We didn't have the luxuries other people had.

We were taught young at certain colors are bad.

We can't go into certain neighborhoods if we weren't wearing the right color.

Don't walk. Don't walk around without a weapon. Always watch your back.

Don't trust your friends. Don't even trust your family.

The girls are told never trust the men because they're all hungry.

Don't wear shorts while your uncles are visiting or while men come to the house.

Don't talk to the men who come sit. Come visit.

Don't be seen. Stay in the shadows.

We were made to be uncomfortable. We were supposed to be.

You're supposed to feel safe. Supposed to feel free.

The boys are told men don't cry.

Don't ever show a girl that you like her because she'll break your heart.

They were taught from a young age to hit women. No one ever flat out said hit women. But they watched their dads, uncles, brothers, etc. hate their girlfriends, wives and children.

Their parents have their older children raising the younger ones so that they can keep the party going.

They leave their children to strangers, so they can do dope.

They let their kids go hungry so they can fly high.

They let us go into corrupt foster homes. Never knowing what's happening behind the closed doors.

We were taught that white people are bad. Don't trust white men. They steal young native girls and boys. They have the greater advantage against us. To them we are nothing.

I write we instead of me because this is what I was taught. That everyone else was taught.

### [Slide 16]

#### **Robert Henry**

This is the digital story that I did with one of the women and what we begin to see is that if we actually listen to what she's saying and take Western theories, we can look at the strain, look at those social disorganization that was going on in there, look at the social control theories, all of those theories will fit in there.

But if we actually start peeling back some of the layers that's going on there, we begin to see that what (and this is a very young individual who's just starting to figure out how to move through different spaces) is the idea that Indigenous survival was foremost under there. It was teaching individuals, young kids on how to survive, how to protect themselves within those spaces, and everything else. Now, when we look at this, we can begin to understand. What are the reasons why this is happening? What are the impacts that this begins to have?

As individuals begin to move through this phase or not phase, but the ways in which they're moving through survivance, or we can reread survivance as a living theory, we also have to understand. Through her poem, she was talking about the ways in which survival comes in later on, she talks about different things - about resistance and resurgence moving forward. When I talk about resistance it needs to be understood, that individuals are resisting. And again, most are resisting poverty.

Most are looking to resist violence against themselves, most are trying to find ways in which to survive. This becomes the space for illegal street economy. Individuals are trying to move forward. With individuals engaged in street lifestyles, the gang becomes that resistance.

When we look at it through the lens of masculinities and we look at what it is to be a man through this Western notion of masculinity, we begin to understand that being a man is one who supports or has financial abilities to support their families and protects their families and everything else.

But what happens when you are excluded from economic opportunities? What happens when you are limited in where you can get the necessary capital to say that you're providing for your family? You got to go other ways to do that. This is where the gang or gang involvement comes for some people. They're resisting this idea (I will just focus on men here real quick) that the men are lazy.

Gang work isn't lazy. Gang work is very difficult, it's actually harder to do that, because you're always on and there's a lot of impacts that happens after that. When we look at this, although the gang is viewed as negative, it misses the entire point that agencies look at. For a lot of community agencies, if it wasn't for the individuals looking to get out of the gang and move through the gang, but also understand the ways in which politics, street politics work, they wouldn't be there themselves. So, we can look at this and we can start seeing the ways in which different organizations begin to utilize street culture, and street lifestyles, but are reframing it and are bringing it back, but with a positive piece to it.

The photographs that are here, the one on the bottom left, that is The Crazy Indian Brotherhood. Now when we look at this and look at the understanding of street gangs and what they are, they wear vests, they have a credo, they go through it all. We look at them, they can be gang members, but at the same time, there's really shifting things.

We have the Bear Clan Patrol, and moving through within that which is all focusing on supporting and resisting violence to individuals. They're supporting communities, they're moving through different things.

#### [Slide 17]

#### **Robert Henry**

When we look at the idea of resurgence, this is more of an area where as individuals age and they move through the space, they begin to research themselves and their identity of who they are. Who are they not just as an Indigenous person, but who are they and what are their relationships to community?

As Matt says, "I didn't want them to have my life, you know? So I, right away I was trying to make steps...They never miss a day of school, they've never done drugs, they've never been part of any gangs, nothin'. They're doin' good. My other my daughters as well, they're doin' good...I took a First Nations Child and Family Services Worker diploma program. To become a CFS worker. But, I didn't *wanna* become a CFS worker. I've become a therapist, of all things. Who woulda thought that, right?"

But I work with exploited or at-risk youth. And they absolutely *loove* me, especially the ones that are you know, kinda tryna be groomed, I talk to them right way, and I've steered so many kids away from that, it's unbelievable." (Matt, OPK)

What happens then when we start rereading individual's life histories and going through them, we begin to see ways in which they've had to endure extreme violence within certain spaces that the structures themselves have placed them in, in vulnerable positions. But they found ways not just to survive, not just to resist their erasure, but as they're supported in specific ways, they find ways to research and give back into their communities, to give back to their children and to try and build a better space within their community.

**[Slide 18]**

**Robert Henry**

Finally, when we look at this "Survivance, in the sense of native survivance, is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence...The native stories of survivance are successive and natural estates; survivance is an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry." (Vizenor, 1998: 15)

And with that, I just want people to begin to understand that when we're looking at individuals engaged in street lifestyles (those engaged in street gangs and different things) a lot of times they're engaged in the behaviors they're engaged in, because they don't see any other way to do it. It's not about being immoral. They are finding ways to survive in order to try and make it to the next day. And simply by doing that, we're challenging settler colonialism. It doesn't have to be positive all the time but it is a way in which we continuously create a presence of ourselves here.

**[Slide 19]**

**Robert Henry**

So, with that, I'm going to just follow up and just say, these are four of the partners that I've had the opportunity to work closely with over the years; Straight Up located in Saskatoon who works with primarily Indigenous male and female adults looking to exit the street gang lifestyle, EGADZ, which is a youth program, it's nationally recognized for the work that they do, then you have O.P.K. Manitoba out of Winnipeg, and GAIN the gang action interagency number.

And through that, I just like to say thank you and hopefully you got something out of it today. But with that, we'll just open it up for some questions.

**[End Slide Show]**

**Vanessa Watts**

Thanks so much for your talk. Rob. I encourage everyone to use the Q & A function, rather than the chat. You are able to upvote questions you really want to hear Dr. Henry's perspective on and we can keep track of them there. So please feel free to enter some questions.

In thinking about some of these issues that you raised, specifically around challenging stereotypes about the so-called 'violent Indian', thinking through microcosms of resurgence as being place-based and how that ties into settler colonialism was reminding me about the past system in the prairies, and preventing mobility of Indigenous peoples into kind of developing urban white centers to protect white people from encroaching Indians because of this sort of violent stereotype that continues to persist. I wonder if you had any comments on the connection there, perhaps to that kind of history of colonialism and trying to separate Indigenous peoples from white spaces?

**Robert Henry**

I think this is where the image of the gangster is so important. We can't just see the image of the gangster or something that is just created, but it's actually a continuation of the creation of the Indigenous body as being fearful, as the Indigenous body is something that we need to control, limit, and remove from white settler society.

When we look at the ways in which colonization was done, it was out there when we look at the cultures of fear and cultures of terror that were created. In order to say the Indigenous body is violent, and it's a part of nature, we can actually enact higher rates of violence against Indigenous people, because they're not actually human to us. It's hard to say 'not human' because I do think that most people say that Indigenous people are human - I hope that we are now. But it's the same sort of deal that Indigenous peoples are lacking, or they're behind the sort of educational understanding of what is morality. I think what's more important is this idea of whether they have the morality to move forward. Do they have consciousness of that violence? So, when we look at it, violence begets violence. If they're violent, then the only way they're going to learn is through violence. This is where we see such an uptake on the way in which we can enact violence on Indigenous bodies.

We can look at Sharene Razack's work when she was looking at dying in custody, and the ways in which Indigenous bodies are created as that necropolitical space. When she talks about that, what we begin to see is that the Indigenous body within street spaces is that but the gang is different than all of that. There's a very small piece of the gang within the street spaces that is a hegemonic space that everybody wants to strive and get to, but not everybody can get to, and it's that sort of level that's there.

But the image of the gangster, the continuation of it within the media, helps to reify the ways in which we control Indigenous movement within urban spaces - that we can remove individuals.

Look at schools and if you wear a bandana. We can remove a kid from school by just simply wearing a bandana. We're not going to remove a primarily white person. If we have a volleyball team that comes in and they're all wearing bandanas, we're not going to remove the white team. But I've heard stories and anecdotal evidence of Indigenous teams being removed simply by wearing bandanas because they can't wear a bandana through school.

The construction and the relationship of violence, gangs and Indigenous, helps to create a lot of this sort of space. Which is just going back to the past system, the past system was controlled, there were limited economic opportunities. If I see you as a criminal, or I see you as a gang member, then I don't have to hire you because you're going to steal from me sooner on or you're lazy. And it's this continuation that goes forward.

### **Vanessa Watts**

Thanks so much, Rob, we have a few questions up on the Q & A. Do you see any similarities in any of your research between Indigenous and Black gangs?

### **Robert Henry**

There is actually quite a bit. The differences that we're seeing between Black gangs and Indigenous gangs is the ways in which relationships through familial networks is being done. That's where I think there's a stronger connection to Latin X gangs than there are to Black gangs. But when we look at culture, and the ways in which gangs, identify and move through or create ways of being, a lot of similarities go through Black gang culture which has been understood as being the American gang culture. So those are the similarities.

But when we look at creation of familial linkages, it's more connected to a Latin X sort of understanding of cousins and moving forward. Whereas black gangs, it's more on location of where individuals are. So, if you live in a neighborhood, even if your family is on the other side, you will be a Blood not a Crip, or depending on how that is.

When we look at Indigenous street gangs, location is part of it. But a lot of it comes down to who your family is. If your family has a connection to being IP (Indian Posse), the chances of you being IP is greater even if you're living in a neighborhood that is primarily Native Syndicate, let's say, because it's those familial relationships.

The other part to that I think, for a lot of individuals (and the misconception with Indigenous street gangs as well) is the idea of family within that. Because some people will say that the gang becomes one's family. But when the gang is your family or there are family members in other gangs, there's also a protectionism that also goes through within.

Individuals have spoken about how they were in opposite gangs, and they are at war with one another. And so, when we look at gang theory, if they are actually at war, they are going to fight each other as soon as they see each other - it doesn't matter. However, what the individuals were describing (and these are two different brothers) when they had dinner and they would all go to their Kokum's place, they would actually hang up their rags. They were the family first. There are multiple levels of relationships that are going on there. Then they would go on to the streets, they shake hands and go in their own direction. There are these relationality pieces which I haven't seen come out as much within Black gang research as I'm starting to see within Indigenous gangs. But I have seen it come out in some Latin X research that's been going on with some Latin X gangs, and how that's moving forward.

### **Vanessa Watts**

Great, thanks. We saw a couple of more questions here. You talked a bit towards the end of your presentation about a person who had left and kind of changed direction. Could you comment more on what sort of factors influence a youth's decision to leave a gang or a street lifestyle?

### **Robert Henry**

Sure, there are multiple ways and I don't think we should focus on one or the other. For many, it's just getting sick and tired of being sick and tired. The gang life is very hard, because you're always on. And this is what everybody always talks about. It's always this face and creating a face and creating a sort of positionality that if you're caught slipping, you're going to get into trouble.

For a lot of individuals, it's having children or it's losing a family member. It's understanding that they're not actually getting ahead by being in the gang and there's another way to do it. It's about building a relationship with somebody else.

So, there's multiple ways in which individuals move in and out of this the gang lifestyle. But the other part that I want to go back to is why they go to a street lifestyle. It's the idea of connection to illegal underground untaxed economies that's more important. The gang helps individuals get into that economy but you can leave the gang and still be a part of that underground economy, you can still be a part of the sort of violence that's going on in there but you may not be a part of the gang.

The reality is that very few people are actually gang members. A lot of more people are connected to the underground economy which we then associate to gang members, but they're not actually there. And so, they're there because they're associated to it and then we recreate that we have this huge gang issue when we actually don't have a gang issue happening with the community.

### **Vanessa Watts**

We have another question and first just a comment, thanking you for your fantastic and important research and wondering if you could comment on the extent to which people involved in a gang view themselves as engaged in resistance and then the second part being what limits and opportunities you see in using Bourdieu you in your work.

### **Robert Henry**

When we look at (this going to the first question) to what extent people involved in gangs themselves engage in resistance, it goes to when we look at masculinity (our focus on masculinity with the men right now). When we construct masculinity, we see the notions of how Indigenous men have been constructed within these spaces - that they're lazy, they're not fathers, and they're all over the place. The gang becomes the resistance to that, that they're taking an active presence within their life, that they're not just lazy, they're not a victim. That is the sort of the resistance that we see.

At other levels that I didn't get to talk to you about today is the ways in which the gang challenges Western notions of Indigenous males living in specific street lifestyles as being a drug addict, as being a drunk, as being just unable to live their life, or that they're just passive to what's happening to them. The gang member is something that is resisting all of that

When individuals speak they're talking about, 'I didn't want to be like my dad, who was a drunk. I didn't want to be like my uncle over there, who is lazy. See, I wanted to take control of myself, I wanted to have control in my life, and the gang gave me that.'

Now, when they revert back and they look back at it, they do begin to see that it was a negative way. They do understand and that's part of learning and that is resistance as well. The resistance to change the way in which individuals are moving, 'I'm going resist being that violent gang member that society wants me to be, or society sees me to be. I'm going to be something different. I want to resurge my identity moving through here, from what everything I've learned.'

This is the way in which resistance is working through all of this and how resistance is challenging this out in these spaces.

The question has been deleted but I believe there was a question about Bourdieu.

When I was seeing Bourdieu, it was helping me begin to understand his notion of habitus and the way in which the environment shapes languages and shapes the way in which individuals interact or react to specific experiences and how that works.

We can use the field and capital as a way to say these are where people are. What survivance does is it actually puts the idea of the social piece, so challenges the Foucault sort of idea that survivance is an act of personal decision within habitus.

What we are saying is that it's not about the social primarily, it's about individuals having the ability to make decisions within their understanding of social capital and within the field that they're working in. And so, survivance actually helps us to understand that moving beyond this idea of Indigenous relationships to settler society at the same time. While Bourdieu helps us to begin to understand things (and one thing that I do think has been highly overlooked within Bourdieu's work) within gang research. I think more and more people are taking up his work within gang research with Harding and Fraser, especially the British criminological area, is the idea of illusional.

The idea of the construction of the illusion because what we see within gang members is that they recreate themselves, they recreate a mask, or they create an identity that they put forward. And that's the idea of illusion that I do think that we need more work, more analysis, within street gang theory more broadly on what is the importance of illusion and this idea of creating masks or faces, to engage in violence and violence. Because the majority of people who I've spoken to (and I'll say majority, because one individual doesn't make it 100%. It was one person that said that he loved violence but everybody else didn't like violence) said they had to create a name and an identity for themselves in order to enact violence onto others.

It was that sort of illusionary mask or face that they create to say, 'This is my street image.' When we look at the resurgence what that resurgence is and with resistance, it's destroying that face, it's destroying that identity and redefining oneself moving forward.

The gang life then becomes that (when we look at Vizenor) apocalypse, as a state of apocalypse, and people are redefining themselves outside of it, the gang becomes (once they leave) that apocalyptic state, and they are resurging and redefining themselves on the other side of it.

### **Vanessa Watts**

Thanks, Rob. I'm conscious of time but I'd like to maybe have one more question on the Q&A that has a couple of votes. It's a bit of a big question about how school boards can create spaces that

could support visibility and resistance to oppressive systems. So how can school boards do that sort of work?

I don't know if you've come across this within your own research in urban centers, like Winnipeg, with respect to, secondary schools or something like that, where there might be kind of a high percentage of street lifestyle. Do you see special programming or initiatives that have happened within let's say other cities? Thanks

### **Robert Henry**

There's no one answer to any of this because every community is different. I think that by saying, 'Here's this program now you utilize this program.' This is probably one of the worst things we can do because this is what happens with gang programming. I'm going to just go more broadly, your five-star gang programs are being implemented across the country but they're not taking into effect the socio-political histories that have created street gangs in that space. That's why at the very beginning I said a gang is different from community to community.

The biggest thing that we see within the programs that have been seen as effective with supporting individuals is the idea of building relationships. What are you building are relationships where people are at - not trying to say 'You have to be here.' but 'Where are you? How do we get you to where you want to be?' That's what the schools and everything moving forward need to do. The big thing is that schools, school boards, agencies, need to do this.

O.P.K is different than other programs. You don't have to drop your colors in order to be a part of it. What they're doing is asking you to leave the violence. 'I don't care if you're Indian Posse, I don't care if you're a Native Syndicate. I don't care who you are, I just don't want to see violence within these spaces.' There's nothing wrong with saying that.

Being an Indian Posse doesn't make you violent. It's the violence that we need to stop. We have bullying groups that are doing just as much violence within schools but we're not doing anything about it because it's the bodies that are creating that violence. We have hockey teams, sports teams that are going around and bullying kids that are creating mental trauma on individuals, but we're allowing that to happen and allowing them to go through simply because of the capital they have.

When we start looking at this, and I think we're going to see a shift in change as Indigenous street gangs become more politicized in Canada. I think we're going to see a shift moving towards what we're seeing in New Zealand with the Mongrel Mob and the Black Power in New Zealand, where it's going back into that 1960s 1970s when they were created, like the Black Power movement in the United States. We're going to see more social capital ventures being done by gang members and gangs themselves and this is what we need in our community. I'm beginning to see this in Winnipeg.

With conversations that I've had with gang members and those who are just leaving the gang, they will sit around with researchers coming in and they'll say 'Why are you continuously creating a pornification of our community?' We're seeing this more and more where inner city urban Indigenous communities are starting to take more control over researchers and over people coming in to define their life world. They are coming back and saying 'You can't come in here. We don't like that you not being a part of it.' I think we're going to start seeing this happening more.

The only way to stop a lot of this is to make sure that everybody has the economic capital necessary to survive. If we're going to continuously take kids away for not having milk in their fridge, parents are going to go and do what's necessary to make sure that they have a lifestyle so that child services aren't taking their kids away. And so, there's a lot more issues that are happening here.

I don't think that there's a one size fits all. But I do think that the way to start this is just to build healthy relationships. Who is your neighbor? Just realize that people are coming from different areas, they have different life histories and we need to respect that. But we also need to make sure that people are safe. And that's the number one thing is understanding what is safety, and people will if they respect you, they'll respect that idea of safety within there.

### **Vanessa Watts**

That's great. That's really helpful. Thank you so much, Robert. I just want to thank you formally for your talk today. I think you've provided a really crucial reframing of how we think about street lifestyle, how we think about resurgence, resistance and the role that settler colonialism plays with respect to violence, group dynamics, etc. I just want to say thank you.

Thank you to all of our attendees for taking the time to join us once more for the CSA and Xiaobei I'm not sure if you want to mention something but also important to again recognize Sherry Fox and all of her work in organizing us today.

I know that this will be posted to YouTube soon. For those who would like to share the link with their networks. If you have any follow up questions for Dr. Henry, his information is here, and was also on the poster for today's webinars. Feel free to reach out to Dr. Henry if you have any further questions about his talk today.

### **[Slide 20]**

### **Xiaobei Chen**

I really want to take just one minute to thank Dr. Henry for really demonstrating and modeling decriminalization of research from conceptualization to methods and to analysis. I think it's a really wonderful project and thank you for inspiring us to reflect on our own research as well. Your work

really has broad implications to other studies and not just in criminology, but in other fields of sociology as well. And thank you Vanessa for your beautiful work with the facilitating and moderating the event. Thanks as well to Sherry Fox and your great organizing work without which not much can happen so smoothly. And thank you everyone in the audience for being here and for your wonderful comments and questions. Enjoy the rest of your day. We'll see you at our next event.