Abstract

The goal of this research is to explore the relationship between coercion and crime amongst street youths in Mexico. This research relies on Mark Colvin’s (2000) Differential Coercion Theory (DCT). Through semi-structured interviews with street youths in Mexico City, this research explores: (1) the various personal and structural factors that lead youths to the street; (2) the strategies of income generation used by the youths; (3) the youths experiences of victimization, substance use, criminal involvement and institutionalization; and finally, (4) the personal and structural reasons that contribute to youths’ inability to leave the street.

Results indicate that in most cases youths experience some form of physical, sexual, verbal, and/or psychological abuse that prompts them to leave home. In other cases, youths simply witnessed the abuse of a significant other or become subject to neglect. Some youths are thrown out of the home due to familial conflict. Results also indicate that on the street, youths are encouraged to display violent behaviours to avoid victimization. Further, youths face a number of needs and are compelled to engage in legitimate or illegitimate sustenance practices. On the street, youths are subject to theft, as well as physical and sexual victimization from peers and police officers. The results also suggest that youths are dependent on various substances as a way to cope with difficult situations. Results also indicate that as a result of crime or drug use, youths are likely to experience institutionalization where physical, verbal, and psychological victimization is experienced. Finally, youths attribute the freedom provided by the street and substance dependency as reasons to stay on the streets. Overall, the results suggest that Mexican street youths experience coercion in various settings. However, to explain the relationship between coercion and crime more research is needed on other explanatory factors.
Acknowledgements

To say that this thesis is my work and my work alone would be a lie. I have always considered myself a product of the people that have taken the time to assist and guide me on this journey. This is not only the work of the last two years, it is the work of a short lifetime with hard and enjoyable lessons learned along the way.

First and foremost I have to thank God, because without him nothing is possible. I have to also thank my mother and father. This thesis is also the product of your hard work and believing in me even when I did not show the most promise. To Fernanda: my partner in crime and best friend, thank you so much for your support. I hope I have set a proper example for you as an older brother.

I am heavily indebted to my advisor Dr. Stephen Baron. I came to Canada to work under the guidance of Dr. Baron, because I knew I would be challenged and properly mentored. Thank you for believing in me and pushing me well beyond my limits to showcase my potential. Every conversation we had in your office has made a difference in my life. Thank you so much for taking the time and interest in my research and guiding me through this journey that is graduate school. I wish I could have done a lot more.

I am also grateful to Dr. Fiona Kay. Thank you for being my second committee member and for all your help with my writing. Thank you also for your valuable insights on this thesis. To Dr. William Morrow: thank you for the opportunity to be your teaching assistant in the fall and thank you for being the third member of my committee.

To Professor Lenard Wynn-Summers: had I not met you, I would not have followed the path of Sociology. Thank you for being a mentor, an inspiration and most importantly, a friend. To Dr. Raymond Michalowski: thank you for your advice and mentorship at Northern Arizona University and shaping me to become an academic. To Dr. James Bowie and Dr. Stephanie Williams: thank you so much for taking interest in my work and mentoring me along the way.
This thesis would not have been possible without the assistance of Fundacion Casa Alianza Mexico. Many thanks to Sofia Augumedo, Alejandro Nunez, and Fatima Amezcua for giving me the opportunity to be a member of FCAM for those three summer months. Thank you so much to the street outreach team, David, Sandra, Anna, Jaffet, and Eduardo. I learned so much from all of you.

Thank you to the youths who shared their stories with me. Without you, this project would not have come to fruition. I hope that I did you justice in sharing your stories.

To grandma Raquel: thank you for housing me and feeding me during my fieldwork. You made this project that much easier. Grandpa Luis: thank you for all your help and the connections you provided.

I am also indebted to Dr. Elvia Taracena. Thank you for everything you did for me to facilitate my fieldwork. I look forward to working with you as a colleague down the road. To Doris Nyland: thank you so much for helping me out from the beginning. Without your help, I would not be here. To the George and Stanton families: thank you for everything you did and continue to do for my family.

To the Sociology department staff, Michelle, Anne, and Wendy: thank you so much for being great and taking care of your grad students above and beyond. Your help and smiling faces made this experience great.

Last but not least, Myriam, Kevin, and Jessica: thank you for being such great friends and housemates. I have learned so much from you. I consider you my Canadian family.
Dedication

To my mother and my father:

Todo el trabajo, las lágrimas, y el cambio valieron la pena. Esta tesis lo comprueba. Gracias por creer en mí y apoyarme en todo

¡Los amo con todo mi corazón!
Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................... iii
Dedication ................................................................................................................................................ v
Chapter 1 Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1
Chapter 2 Literature Review ................................................................................................................ 6
  Street Youth ........................................................................................................................................... 6
    Gender, Age, and Familial Background ............................................................................................... 8
      Gender ............................................................................................................................................. 8
      Age .................................................................................................................................................. 9
      Familial Background ......................................................................................................................... 9
  Street Pathways ................................................................................................................................... 10
    Poverty ............................................................................................................................................. 11
    Migration .......................................................................................................................................... 12
    Familial Conflict ................................................................................................................................. 13
  Street Culture ...................................................................................................................................... 15
  The Street Economy ............................................................................................................................. 16
    Legitimate Income-Generation ........................................................................................................... 17
    Illegitimate Income-Generation .......................................................................................................... 18
  Criminality, Drug Use, Victimization, and Institutionalization ............................................................ 20
    Criminality ....................................................................................................................................... 20
    Drug Use .......................................................................................................................................... 23
    Victimization .................................................................................................................................... 25
    Institutionalization ............................................................................................................................. 27
Staying on the Streets ............................................................................................................................ 29
  Conclusions ...................................................................................................................................... 29
Chapter 3 Differential Coercion Theory (DCT) .................................................................................. 32
  The Intellectual Heritage of Differential Coercion Theory ................................................................. 32
    Patterson and Coercion ..................................................................................................................... 33
    Social Learning Theory ..................................................................................................................... 33
    Structural Marxism Theory .............................................................................................................. 35
General Strain Theory ................................................................. 42
Social Support Theory ............................................................... 48
Brutalization Theory ................................................................. 50
Control Balance Theory ........................................................... 54

A Differential Coercion Theory of Crime and Delinquency ......... 57
Coercion .................................................................................. 57
Social-Psychological Deficits ................................................... 58
Coercive Relationships ............................................................. 61
Contexts of Coercion ............................................................... 65

Summary of DCT ..................................................................... 71
Empirical Status of DCT ............................................................. 72
DCT and Street Youth ............................................................... 74

Chapter 4 Methods .................................................................. 76
Location ................................................................................... 77
Gatekeeper and Gaining Access .................................................. 77
Sample Characteristics and Sampling Methods ....................... 78
Data Collection ........................................................................ 81
Analysis .................................................................................. 82

Chapter 5 Analysis .................................................................. 83
Sample Characteristics ............................................................. 83
Pathways to the Street .............................................................. 83
Familial Poverty and Physical Abuse ........................................ 84
Parental Substance Use and Physical Abuse ......................... 86
Youth Elicited Physical Abuse ............................................... 87
Witnessing Physical Abuse and Substance Use ..................... 88
Sexual Abuse .......................................................................... 91
Family Composition, Abuse and Conflict ............................... 92
Being Thrown out .................................................................... 94
Leaving institutions ............................................................... 95
Conclusion .............................................................................. 96
Chapter 1

Introduction

The presence of those living on city streets, “the homeless,” has been the subject of academic study in a number of disciplines. Most of this research has focused on the homeless in North America (see Aptekar 1989; Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Luchinni 1996). In contrast, a limited amount of work exists on the homeless in developing countries (For a review see Raffaelli 1997; Rizzini 1996). In Latin America, the presence of homeless youths has become a common sight in everyday life (Hollingsworth 2008). While largely limited to South American regions, the scant research on Latin American street youths has focused on the causes of homelessness, the personal characteristics of homeless street youths, and their substance use patterns and experiences of victimization (see Raffaelli 1997; Rizzini 1996).

A number of areas remain unexplored. First, there is a lack of empirical research on aspects of the street culture of Latin American homeless youths including illegitimate income generation and criminal involvement (although see Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008). Further, empirical research on homeless street youths in these locations and centres of institutionalization is also scant. Moreover, research has also failed to address youths’ reasons to remain on the street (although see Murrieta 2010; Zamorano 2011). Finally, the literature lacks a theoretical lens from which to understand and contextualize the findings.
Research suggests that street culture will offer youths alternatives to satisfy their immediate necessities in a short time (Ribeiro 2008). According to Taracena and Macedo (2007), the streets also provide youths with open access to substance use, violence, and early sexual promiscuity. The streets are also a locale where exploitation, victimization, and opportunities for crime are present (see also Campos et al., 1994; Hollingsworth 2008; Huang et al., 2004; Lusk 1989, 1992; Raffaeli 1997; Trussell 1992). In some cases, the streets may also provide youths with a number of positive opportunities for labour, keeping them out of trouble (Campos et al., 1994; Ferguson et al., 1993; Hollingsworth 2008; Ugueto and Feo 2004).

Research indicates that the networks and peers youths associate with will affect how they experience street life (Ferguson et al., 1993; Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007; Ugueto and Feo 2004). For example, youths who develop good working relationships with business owners may be able to secure an informal, but legitimate income source. These relationships can minimize their chances for engaging in criminal activity or spending most of their time just hanging out on the street. Nonetheless, these youths may still engage in substance use, be open to victimization, and may be open to exploitation by their employers (Ferguson 2004; Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena 1998).

Research indicates that youths who lack a network geared toward legitimate income generation are more likely to be engaged in illegitimate income generating activities such as begging and theft (Campos et al., 1994; Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Huang et al., 2004; Llorens 2005; Lusk 1992; Raffaeli et al., 1993; Ribeiro 2008; Taracena 2008). Further, these youths are also at a higher risk to engage in other types of
criminal activity such as drug dealing, prostitution, violent crime, and organized crime. These youths are more likely to have a substance abuse problem through their exposure to street culture (Gomez et al., 2008; Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007). Youths’ criminal involvement and substance abuse problems increase their chances for victimization and institutionalization (Campos et al., 1994; Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1992; Peralta 1992).

The reasons for homelessness—migration, poverty, abuse, and/or curiosity—can be explored by a number of disciplines. In contrast, aspects of street culture such as crime, substance use, victimization, institutionalization, and street permanence are better addressed through a criminological approach.

A common theme in the literature on homeless street youths in Latin America is coercion—“a force that compels one to act because of the fear, anxiety and/or perceived loss of social support it creates” (Colvin 2000:1). Coercion is faced first by the family when confronted with economic instability. Coercion is then experienced by youths when they are forced to leave the home and school to alleviate situations that are beyond their control, such as abuse. On the street, youths are faced with hardships and challenges to satisfy their most basic needs, including food, clothing, and shelter (Baron 2009, 2010; Hagan and McCarthy 1992; Taracena 2008). Moreover, having left school, obtaining employment is often not a realistic goal for these youths. They continue to experience economic instability (Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Luchinni 1996; Robinson and Baron 2009). Further, the street is often a terrain where youths are exposed to victimization and exploitation (Baron 2003, 2009; Hagan and McCarthy 1992;
Hollingsworth 2008; Llorens 2005; Taracena 2008). All of the aforementioned experiences can be considered coercive. These experiences of coercion throughout the life course are argued to lead to a number of deviant coping mechanisms—the principal being chronic predatory offending (Colvin 2000).

Through semi-structured interviews with 32 homeless street youths in Mexico City, this research examines the following questions:

1. What are the personal and structural factors that lead Mexican street youths to the street?
2. On the street, how do youths generate an income?
3. What is the role of criminal involvement amongst Mexican street youths?
4. What are the personal and structural factors that contribute to these youths’ inability to leave the street?
5. What are the consequences of a homeless lifestyle?

This research makes a contribution to the current literature on street youths in Latin America in a number of ways. First, it explores neglected components of street culture, including: illegitimate income generation, criminality, and institutionalization. Second, the current research explores the reasons why youths fail to leave the streets. Third, the various experiences of street youths are examined to better explain their involvement, in or desistance from, criminal activity. Finally, the findings are contextualized through Mark Colvin’s (2000) Differential Coercion Theory (DCT), offering a more complete explanation of Mexican street youths’ experiences.

In order to place this research within the overall literature, Chapter Two offers a review of the current empirical research on street youths in Latin America. The review is centred on street youths’ personal characteristics, pathways to the street, income generating activities, criminal activity and victimization, experiences of
institutionalization, and reasons for street permanence. The review finds that little empirical research is available on the characteristics of street culture, specifically, illegitimate income generation, criminality, and incarceration. Further, the question of street permanence has seldom been addressed.

In Chapter Three, Differential Coercion Theory (DCT) is outlined. Mark Colvin (2000) posits that an individual’s propensity for chronic criminality is developed through their exposure to an erratic coercive control structure in various settings throughout the life course. The erratic delivery of coercive control creates a number of social-psychological deficits, including: anger, low self-control, coercive behaviour modeling, control balance deficits, negative social bonds, low self-efficacy, and an external locus of control. This chapter also reviews the empirical status of DCT, as well as its applicability to this research study.

Chapter Four provides a discussion of the access, sampling, data collection, and analysis procedures used in this research. Data were collected from qualitative semi-structured interviews with 32 homeless street youths in Mexico City from June to September 2012. Ethical considerations are also discussed in Chapter Four.

Chapter Five presents an analysis of the data gathered for this research. The analysis summarizes four broad themes: pathways to the street; street life; crime and coercion; and staying on the street. Institutionalization is a sub-theme that is explored in the sections on street life and crime. Finally, Chapter Six summarizes the findings and offers a discussion of the research strengths and limitations and provides some guidelines for policy and future research.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature on street youths in Latin America. First, a distinction is made between homeless street youths and youths who are housed but rely on the street for economic survival. Second, three key characteristics of street youths, gender, age, and familial situation, are discussed. Third, the reasons that prompt youths to go to the street are outlined. Fourth, the elements of street culture are examined—the street economy, criminality, victimization, drug abuse, and institutionalization. Finally, the reasons attributed to youths’ inability to leave the street are examined.

Street Youth

Latin American researchers have placed street youths into two categories: *youths on the street* and *youths of the street* (Raffaelli 1999). The former are youths who are housed but rely on the street for work in order to supplement their family’s income (Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007). They attend school sporadically and continue to have a strong bond with their family. They can often be seen labouring alongside a parent (Hollingsworth 2008; Raffaelli 1999). The presence of labouring youths is attributed to poverty, or in few cases, child exploitation (see Llorens 2005). The street networks available to these youths are mainly for legitimate labour. Labouring youths are kept away from criminality and substance abuse due to the presence of social support in their life (e.g., a familial bond, school attendance, steady work) (Hollingsworth
2008; Tracena 1998; Ugueto and Feo 2004). As working youths comprise a large part of the Latin American street youth population, they have attracted the most research (Di Carlo et al., 2000; Ferguson 2006; Hollingsworth 2008; Luchinni 1996; Lusk 1992; Pinzon et al., 2008; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007; see also Raffaelli 1999 for a review).

In contrast, youths of the street or homeless street youths encompass a smaller proportion of the street youth population. They have very weak to non-existent familial bonds and do not attend school. For homeless street youths, the streets constitute a full-time living and working space. Their presence on the street is primarily the result of physical abuse (Llorens 2005; Hollingsworth 2008; Raffaelli 1999; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007). According to North American studies (Baron 2003, 2009; Baron and Forde 2007; Hagan and McCarthy 1992) and a few Latin American studies (Campos et al., 1994; Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1992), homeless street youths are more likely to engage in criminal activity due to the large amount of time spent on the streets. Criminal activity is the result of a lack of social support, the hardships faced in satisfying basic needs, and the nature of the street culture (see Baron 2010; Hagan and McCarthy 1992, 1997; Hollingsworth 2008; Luchinni 1998). The factors associated with street culture, including violence, high rates of mobility, and a lack of trust for outsiders, have prevented research in the Latin American context (Campos et al., 1994; Gomez et al., 2008; Hollingsworth 2008; Hecht 1998; Lusk 1992; Peralta 1992; Portugal 1999; Ribeiro 2008; Taracena 2008; Tavera 2007).
Gender, Age, and Familial Background

Most Latin American research studies have explored the relationship between personal characteristics and street life (Aptekar 1998; Hecht 1998; Lusk 1989, 1992; Peralta 1992; Trussell 1999; see Raffaelli 1999 for a review). The scope of these studies has been limited to gender, age, and familial background. These characteristics are particularly important in terms of youths’ decision to leave the household and their experiences once embedded in street culture (Abdelgalil et al., 2004; Luchinni 1996; Lusk 1992).

Gender

The streets have been labeled a male-dominated environment (Raffaelli 1999). Research suggests that most homeless street youths in Latin America are male (Aptekar 1998; Hecht 1998; Lusk 1989, 1992; Peralta 1992; Trussell 1999). Raffaelli (1999) contends that the overrepresentation of males in research studies is due to girls being more likely to stay at home taking care of younger siblings or acting as domestic assistance for the family (Aptekar 1994; Barker and Knaul 1991; Campos et al., 1994). The fact that girls are subject to “women’s work” can be attributed to the gendered culture of Latin America. For instance, Stromquist (2009) notes that among poorer families living in rural areas, girls are more likely than boys to fulfill domestic labour roles. Other research suggests that families try to keep girls at home at all costs since they become an integral part of the family survival strategy, especially when a parent is missing in the household (Aptekar 1989; Rizzini and Lusk 1995). Past research suggests
that due to parental perceptions regarding females’ weaker strengths and inability to fend for themselves, parents feel that females should remain in the home (Abdelgalil et al., 2004).

Age

Among street youths in Latin America, age varies from country to country (Rizzini 1996). The general findings in the literature suggest that younger street youths are more likely to experience the street with their family. On the other hand, older street youths are more likely to be alone. According to Hollingsworth (2008), youths between 3 and 5 years old can be found begging under the watch of one or both parents on the streets (see also Raffaelli 1999; Rizzini 1996). Unable to fend for themselves, younger street youths are exposed to the street in a controlled manner. Once they become older and are able to fend for themselves, these youths are able to engage in different lines of work (e.g., picking up trash, washing windshields, helping merchants). These youths will then receive more exposure to the street without the presence of a parent (Hollingsworth 2008). This change leads to developing a closer bond with the street and the networks found there.

Familial Background

Research suggests that homeless street youths come from atypical familial structures (Gomez et al., 2008; le Roux and Smith 1998; Lucchinni 1996, 1998). Atypical familial structures can be mono-parental or re-composed (Gomez et al., 2008). Mono-
parental familial structures are those where only one parent is present. In Latin America this is generally the mother (Aptekar 1989; Souto and Faramillo 2005). Recomposed families are those where individuals with children from previous marriages marry and bring their children together (Gomez et al., 2008). Further, research suggests that recomposed families are large in nature, some with as many as fourteen children (Hollingsworth 2008; Zamorano 2011).

Mono-parental and recomposed families are often characterized by conditions of extreme poverty and the inability to satisfy basic needs (Pare 2003; Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena 1998, 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007). The poverty and reproductive experiences might be attributable to the very low levels of education or literacy among household heads (Abdelgalil et al., 2004; Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Scanlon et al., 1998). In atypical familial structures, children often have responsibilities that children from a “normal” family would not. For example, children are often tasked with caring for siblings or generating income to support the family (e.g., washing clothes or selling trinkets) (Aptekar 1989; Hollingsworth 2008; Luchinni 1996; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007). As a result, these children develop a “work to survive” ethic that conceptualizes achievement as fulfilling basic needs and nothing more.

**Street Pathways**

Latin American research recognizes three broad situations that push youths toward street life. First is the poverty experienced by families in various Latin American countries. Second is the process of internal migration from rural to urban settings
prompted by poverty. And third is episodes of familial abuse and conflict. These broad situations are influenced by a number of other social factors.

**Poverty**

Latin American countries have been subject to a number of political processes facilitating widespread poverty among their populations. For example, Brazil has experienced political corruption, where money has been taken from governmental institutions and re-directed to support a stronger military (Ferguson 2002). As a result, Brazilians have seen a loss in their wages or lost their jobs altogether. At the same time, social support and welfare programs have been eradicated. Corruption has ultimately led to a significant proportion of Brazil’s poorest citizens being unable to fulfill their basic needs or receive any form of assistance from the government. This contributes to the presence of youths living and labouring on the street (Ferguson 2002).

In Mexico, a quest for economic development has resulted in widespread poverty. Economic development has been sought through the privatization of state-owned industries, setting the stage for a global economy (Ferguson 2002; Hollingsworth 2008). Although Mexico’s quest for economic development has been successful, the economic benefits have been unevenly distributed within the wealthiest 10% (Ferguson 2002; Hollingsworth 2008). As a result, Mexico has taken funds away from social support and welfare policies that are crucial for impoverished families (Ferguson 2002).

As Taracena (2008) argues, the presence of street youths and widespread poverty is not a direct correlation. It is the lack of social support on the part of the state that...
mediates the relationship. Poverty forces families to introduce their children to the streets (Aptekar 1994; Ferguson 2002; Hollingsworth 2008; Sandoval 1999). Families in Latin America respond to poverty in one of two ways. One, parents send their children to the street in an effort to supplement their income (Luchinni 1996; Lusk 1989; Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007). Two, parents insert their children into the street economy and abandon them after they become self-sufficient or unable to supplement the family’s income (Hollingsworth 2008).

The most common response to poverty faced by families is to send their children to work on the street as an additional or sole source of income. Street youths in most Latin American studies cite extreme poverty faced by their family as the reason for their presence on the street (Ferguson 2002; Knaul 1991; le Roux and Smith 1998; Luchinni 1996; Lusk 1989, 1992; Rizzini and Lusk 1995; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007). Generally, these youths are involved in irregular commerce (e.g., selling trinkets, performing on street lights or public transportation, cleaning windshields) (Ferguson 2002; Knaul 1991; le Roux and Smith 1998; Luchinni 1996; Rizzini and Lusk 1995; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007).

**Migration**

A common process for poverty stricken families in Latin America is internal migration (Aptekar 1989; Casteras 2009; Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007; Wright et al., 1993). According to Taracena (2008), the presence of street youths in Latin America can be seen as a result of internal migration prompted by
poverty and/or poverty caused by internal migration (Llorens 2005; Wright et al., 1993). Thus, the causal relationship between poverty and migration is reciprocal. Impoverished families often leave rural areas to find better opportunities in the city. This has been well documented in Mexican studies (Ferguson 2002; Hollingsworth 2008; Ordoñez 2005; Peralta 1992; Pinzón et al., 2008; Taracena 1998). Wright and colleagues (1993) find a similar situation in Honduras, where street youths cite poverty as the main reason for migration.

The link between migration and homelessness is not causal. While youths may be pushed to the street to work, they are not necessarily homeless. Youths may become homeless as a result of familial conflict prompted by an unsuccessful migrant experience (Taracena 2008). Petit (2009) notes that migration often means a new crisis, since migrants often find themselves in worse conditions than those they left behind. They often face hostility and deeper poverty (see also Hollingsworth 2008).

**Familial Conflict**

The most cited factor by homeless street youths when explaining their leaving the household is a form of familial conflict (Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Huang et al., 2004; Llorens 2005; Ordoñez 2005; Pare 2003; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007; Tavera 2007; Trussell 1999; Valverde 1993). Familial conflict is a multidimensional experience and a response to poverty, frustration, and/or parental substance use (Hollingsworth 2008; Scanlon et al., 1998; Souto and Faramillo 2005; Taracena and Macedo 2007). Conflict often results in direct forms of physical, verbal, psychological,
and/or sexual abuse. Abuse may also be indirect as youths may witness the abuse of a family member or significant others (Hollingsworth 2008; Llorens 2005; Souto and Faramillo 2005; Tavera 2007).

Taracena (2008) contends that before taking to the streets, street youths are often the victims of violence in the home (Jones et al., 2007; Lusk et al., 1989). In a Brazilian study, Abdelgalil and colleagues (2004) report that the parents of homeless street youths agree that physical abuse is what prompted their children to leave home. Physical abuse in the family is most often perpetrated by one or both parents or by a substitute parental figure (Hecht 1998). Further, a number of studies suggest that youths from families characterized by neglect, hostility, abuse, and a lack of affection tend to run away from home and settle in the streets as a reprieve (Ferguson 2002; Jones et al., 2007; Llorens 2005; Ortiz 1999; Panter-Brick 2002, 2004; Peralta 1992; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007; Trussell 1999).

Moreover, episodes of abuse tend to be gendered. While males are more likely to be physically abused by a male guardian (Hecht 1998), females are more likely to experience sexual, or attempted sexual, abuse by a male figure (Aptekar 1989, 1994; Gomez et al., 2008; Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; le Roux and Smith 1998; Tavera 2007). This is not to say that females are not battered (Tavera 2007) or that males do not experience sexual abuse. According to Gomez and colleagues (2008), incidences of sexual abuse tend to be higher for girls in re-composed families. Mothers are often aware of the abuse that takes place, but are reluctant to step in and stop the abuse. Reluctance occurs because the perpetrator is likely to be the mother’s partner. If her partner were to

**Street Culture**

According to Taracena and Macedo (2007), on the streets, youths will find open access to drugs, violence, and early sexual promiscuity. Other studies also characterize the streets as a locale where exploitation, victimization, and opportunities for crime are present (see also Campos et al., 1994; Hollingsworth 2008; Huang et al., 2004; Lusk 1989, 1992; Raffaelli et al., 1993; Trussell 1992). Further, street culture enables youths to satisfy their immediate necessities (e.g., food and clothing) in a short time (Ribeiro 2008). On the other hand, research suggests that youths may also find a number of positive and fruitful opportunities on the street, such as legitimate employment which keeps them from having to break the law (Ferguson et al., 1993; Ugueto and Feo 2004; Taracena and Macedo 2007).

Street youths’ exposure to street characteristics is a result of the networks in which they become embedded. For example, youths who create relationships with local merchants may labour informally, but legally (Campos et al., 1994; Ferguson et al., 1993; Hollingsworth 2008; Ugueto and Feo 2004). On the other hand, those who form relationships with deviant groups may be exposed to illegitimate means of income-generation, drug use, victimization, abuse, exploitation, and some form of
institutionalization (see Hollingsworth 2008; Llorens 2005; Lusk 1989, 1992; Raffaelli 1999; Taracena and Macedo 2007).

The Street Economy

The poverty faced by citizens of Latin American countries has prompted them to rely on informal ways of income generation (Ferguson 2002, 2004). These income-generating activities include selling items, performing tricks during traffic stops, and windshield cleaning (Ferguson 2002, 2004; Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena 1998). A number of studies recognize that street youths are engaged in various economic activities such as selling goods and providing services (e.g., selling candy or shoe shining) (Campos et al., 1994; Hollingsworth 2008; Huang et al., 2004; Lusk 1998; Peralta 1992; Portugal 1999; Tavera 2007; Taracena 1998, 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007; Trussell 1999). The reliance on an informal economy is a result of street youths’ limited education and lack of legitimate job opportunities (Gomez et al., 2008; Hollingsworth 2008; Raffaelli 1999; Rizzini and Lusk 1995). Further, the street economy can be broken down into two categories: legitimate and illegitimate income-generating activities.

Pacherres (2004) suggests that the practices of the street economy are not unique to Latin America, as they also occur in the developed world. However, it should be noted that the activities in the Latin America informal economy are more visible. In Latin America, street youths can be observed selling goods (e.g., candy, flowers, and fruit), performing in the streets or in buses (as singers, instrument players, and freeway clowns),
taking care of parked cars and/or washing windshields (Ferguson 2002; Hecht 1998; Jones et al., 2007; Pacherres 2004; Peralta 1992; Taracena 2008; Trussell 1999).

**Legitimate Income-Generation**

In most studies street youths who still hold a positive familial bond or have created a positive relationship with merchants around an area are more likely to engage in legal income-generating activities (e.g., providing goods and services) (see Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1992; Lusk et al., 1989; Taracena 2008; Tavera 2007; Trussell 1999).

Campos and colleagues (1994) found that 52% of their 453 street youth sample in Brazil were engaged in some sort of street income-generating activity such as selling trinkets, watching cars, or collecting garbage. For Huang and colleagues (2004), 34% of the 124 street youths in their sample reported selling goods, singing on buses, or shining shoes. For Lusk (1992), 60% of the 103 street youths in his Rio de Janeiro sample reported legal activities of income generation. Meanwhile, in Hollingsworth’s (2008) ethnography on the street youths of Mexico and Peru, he found that most street youths sell trinkets to tourists to generate income. The income-generating activities where goods and services are provided, although informal, are deemed legal. Ugueto and Feo (2004) suggest that youths believe the social relations that they form with other individuals around an area, especially with business owners, will lead to fruitful opportunities for work in the future.
A study conducted in Honduras by Ferguson and colleagues (1993) found that business owners believed that youths who were engaged in legal labour activities are needed by their family in order to supplement family income or to be the sole income earners. The business owners interviewed believed that these youths should have more legitimate work opportunities available to them.

Illegitimate Income Generation

Street youths without a familial bond or no legitimate labour network are more likely to rely on illegal income generating activities (Campos et al., 1994; Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Huang et al., 2004; Llorens 2005; Lusk 1992; Raffaelli et al., 1993; Ribeiro 2008; Taracena 2008). Begging and theft are the most common illegitimate work activities for Latin American street youths (see Campos et al., 1994; Hollingsworth 2008; Huang et al., 2004; Lusk 1992; Lusk et al., 1989; Peralta 1992; Portugal 1999; Raffaelli et al., 1993; Ribeiro 2008; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007; Tavera 2007; Trussell 1999). While acknowledging illegitimate activities, studies reporting on these behaviours have been vague and lack rich description (see Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007; Trussell 1999).

A common practice for Latin American street youths is begging (Hecht 1998; Panter-Brick 2002, 2004; Taracena and Macedo 2007). Begging is influenced by the context of the environment. For example, street youths may ask people passing by for money on major streets. On other occasions, street youths may frequent markets and ask people for food while they eat (Hollingsworth 2008; Portugal 1999). Begging is also
influenced by age. Research suggests that begging is often undertaken by younger street youths (Abdelgalil et al., 2004; Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Panter-Brick 2002, 2004). Younger youths elicit pity from the public thereby earning a “decent” amount of money from begging (Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Panter-Brick 2002, 2004). If begging does not yield a satisfactory amount of income then street youths move on to other illegitimate activities.

Theft is another income generating activity among street youths (Hollingsworth 2008; Trussell 1999). In Huang and colleagues’ (2004) study of the homeless street youths of La Paz, 26% of the 124 youths in their sample reported their main source of income to be stealing. In a study by Campos and colleagues (1994) in Brazil, 76% of the 453 street youths in their sample reported stealing as their principal income-generating activity. Other studies in Mexico share similar findings. In Lusk and colleagues’ (1989) study, 16% of the 248 street youths interviewed relied on petty theft and shoplifting as a survival means. Peralta (1992) found that out of the 248 homeless street youths in his sample, 66% reported being engaged in illegal activities, mainly theft as a means for sustenance. Finally, Hollingsworth’s (2008) findings in Mexico and Peru suggest that the street youths there relied on petty theft for survival at one point or another.

A third activity of income generation for street youths is “survival sex.” Survival sex involves trading sex to satisfy basic needs. These needs include food, clothing shelter, and/or physical protection (see Walls and Bell 2011). Further, survival sex is also used to finance other needs (e.g., drugs or luxurious items) (Pinto et al., 1994 see also Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008). A number of Latin American studies have cited the
prevalence of survival sex amongst street youths. Campos and colleagues (1994) found that 8.5% of their 453 street youth sample traded sex for money. An earlier study in Brazil found that out of 62 street youths sampled, 48.5% relied on survival sex (see Inciardi and Suratt 1998). Pinto and colleagues (1994) find that 92% of their 394 street youth sample relied on survival sex to satisfy various needs. Raffaelli and colleagues (1993) suggest that sexual encounters for street youths depend on their needs at the time. Sex with fellow street youths is used when protection on the street is needed. On the other hand, sex with adults takes place when youths need to satisfy basic needs or wants for luxury items (see also Hollingsworth 2008). A number of research studies have implied that survival sex is a behaviour dominated by females (see Aptekar 1994 for a review). However, other research suggests that survival sex is a behaviour employed by males and females alike (Campos et al., 1994; Hecht 1998; Lusk 1989; Pinto et al., 1994; Raffaelli et al., 1993; Scanlon et al., 1998; Taracena and Macedo 2007).

**Criminality, Drug Use, Victimization, and Institutionalization**

**Criminality**

Although petty theft is cited in the literature as an income generating activity for street youths, criminal activity more generally amongst street youths in Latin America is a neglected topic of study. The lack of empirical study is due to a number of issues, including distrust on the part of youths, preventing them from disclosing criminal involvement to researchers. Weppner (1977) suggests that members of deviant
subcultures report lower instances of crime than they are actually engaged in. Hecht (1998) notes that once his tape recorder was turned off, the street youths of Brazil began to boast about their criminal activity. A claim that remains constant in a number of studies is that street youths are engaged in various forms of criminal activity (Inciardi and Suratt 1998; Lusk 1992; Trussell 1999; Rizzini and Lusk 1995).

Research suggests that the longer youths are exposed to street culture, the greater the chances are they will become involved in criminal activity (Campos et al., 1994; Huang et al., 2004; Taracena and Macedo 2007; Peralta 1992). This comes as a result of learning from more experienced street youths (Campos et al., 1994). Specifically, Latin American street youths resort to criminal activity to defend themselves from victimization by others, to seek acceptance into the street peer-group, and/or to satisfy basic and luxurious needs. I explore these 3 reasons below.

First, a number of studies have cited instances of criminality amongst street youths for protection. In Trussell’s (1999) ethnography of the streets of Juarez, Mexico, he finds that street youths form small gangs as a response to the victimization risk posed by their immediate environment. As a border town, Juarez, Mexico is a hub for criminal gangs involved in drug trade to the United States. According to Hecht (1998), street youths in Brazil justify their gang membership as a way to defend themselves from various instances of victimization, such as assaults by other gangs.

Second, street youths engage in criminal activity to be accepted into the street peer group. According to the findings of Hecht (1998), older street youths coerce younger ones to engage in criminal activity for them. Since older youths often have a police
record or have experienced incarceration, younger youths are perceived as less dangerous to authorities. If younger street youths follow orders, they are offered protection and mentorship from older ones. If younger youths fail to obey, they will be victimized and even killed (Ordonez 2006). Campos and colleagues (1994) find that stealing is often an initiation ritual for street youths. By stealing, youths show their loyalty to the group and a willingness to follow the street norms and lifestyle.

Third, experienced street youths rely on different forms of predatory crime to satisfy various needs. Lusk (1992) identifies street youths being involved in burglary. Gomez and colleagues (2008) find that street youths engage in violent robberies of vulnerable people (e.g., women and students) and fellow street youths. Further, street youths also engage in episodes of assault against the public and other street youths as a way to channel anger (Hollingsworth 2008). Finally, sexual assault is often perpetrated against other street youths as a method to punish those non-conforming to group norms (Campos et al., 1994).

Finally, a number of studies mention the possible and actual involvement of street youths in drug dealing as a means of income generation. However, this topic remains yet to be fully explored (see Campos et al., 1994; Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1992; Inciardi and Suratt 1998; Raffaelli 1999).
Drug Use

Latin America’s illegal and legal drug market has made drugs cheap and easy to obtain. Illegal drugs are those generally prohibited by law (marijuana, cocaine, crack, or methamphetamines). Legal substances are not prohibited by law and include prescription drugs and household products (paint thinner or shoe glue) (Campos et al., 1994; Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Trussell 1999). A number studies suggest that most of the income generated by street youths is spent on drugs (Campos et al., 1994; Hollingsworth 2008; Portugal 1999). Easy access to drugs, combined with adverse situations and the peer influences found in street culture have led to heavy drug use and drug dealing amongst street youths (Campos et al., 1994; Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1989, 1992; Portugal 1999; Rizzini and Lusk 1995; Trussell 1999). Most studies cite inhalants (cement, glue, or paint thinner) as the main drug of choice for street youths because of their cheap price and easy access (Campos et al., 1994; Gomez et al., 2008; Hollingsworth 2008; le Roux and Smith 1998; Ordoñez 2006; Peralta 1992; Portugal 1999; Raffaelli 1999; Raffaelli et al., 1993; Scanlon et al., 1998; Trussell 1992). Marijuana, cocaine, and crack are also used (Hollingsworth 2008; Inciardi and Suratt 1998; Lusk 1989, 1992; Lusk et al., 1989). Alcohol use amongst street youths is also mentioned in the literature, but its use is not as frequent as that of inhalants (Hollingsworth 2008; Luchinni 1996, 1998).

Research suggests that drug use serves two purposes for street youths. First, drug use suppresses feelings that arise from difficult situations (e.g., hunger, loneliness, or
experiences of victimization). Second, drugs are used as a socializing agent that facilitates acceptance and interaction within the group (Hollingsworth 2008).

According to Tavera (2007), inhalant use among female street youths is a result of a lack of affection in the household. Hollingsworth (2008) finds that male and female street youths also use drugs to cope with the situations that led them to the street or any recent episode of victimization. Drug use also represses feelings of hunger, physical pain or sickness (Hollingsworth 2008; Zamorano 2011).

Portugal (1999) contends that drug use is a way for street youths to gain acceptance into the street peer group. Street youths are required to use drugs and share drugs with the group. Hollingsworth (2008) finds that street youths in Mexico use drugs as a way of socializing amongst each other. Street youths engage in “huffing parties,” where everyone shares a can of paint thinner to get high. Huffing parties sometimes culminate in sexual intercourse amongst peer group members (more often forced than consensual) or simply conversations that last into the night. Likewise, the street youths of Peru cite drug use as a social endeavour leading to sexual intercourse (Hollingsworth 2008).

Wright and colleagues (1993) suggest that because inhalants decrease fear of reprimand and increase bravado for street youths, they are consumed before undertaking risky endeavours. Street youths often consume drugs before practicing survival sex with adults to ease the experience (Raffaelli et al., 1993). Likewise, drugs are consumed before theft (Campos et al., 1994). On the one hand, drug use amongst street youths makes the perils of street life somewhat manageable (Raffaelli et al., 1993). However,
drug use may culminate in episodes of institutionalization or victimization by others (Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1992; Ribeiro 2008; Trussell 1999).

**Victimization**

Victimization is a characteristic of street culture that is almost unavoidable for street youths. Victimization occurs in two ways. First, victimization occurs through interaction with agents of social control (e.g., police officers) and the general public (e.g., bystanders or clients in prostitution exchanges). Second, victimization occurs through interactions amongst street youths themselves (e.g., intergroup discipline or theft).

Due to the risky lifestyle of street culture (e.g., drug use, criminality, sex work), street youths cite a number of negative encounters with police. According to Ribeiro (2008), the street youths of Sao Paulo, Brazil cite three forms of police violence. First, police are reported to persecute street youths in an effort to remove them from the public space. This is done by picking up youths who are sleeping or working in public areas and taking them to government-run facilities. Second, police are reported to humiliate street youths with verbal or physical aggression. Physical and verbal aggression includes public or private beatings. Third, police are reported to sexually abuse street youths. Sexual abuse occurs in private encounters before or after beatings (Ribeiro 2008). In Juarez, Mexico, Trussell (1999) found that police officers extort money from youths in exchange to let them keep their musical instruments or squeegees to continue working. In Mexico City, Portugal (1999) reported that street youths are randomly picked up by police, beaten, incarcerated, and stuck in justice system proceedings for no reason.
Hollingsworth (2008) found that the abandoned buildings where the street youths of Cuernavaca, Mexico live are often subject of random police raids. Street youths are beaten, taken away by police, and placed in juvenile detention centres or government-run institutions where they are often subject to further abuse. Brazilian studies also report the existence of military police run “death squads” tasked with exterminating street youths (Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1992; Ribeiro 2008; Rizzini and Lusk 1995; Scanlon et al., 1998). According to Scanlon and colleagues (1998), aggression from agents of social control is the result of street youths being considered a threat or a nuisance to the social order.

Trussell (1999) suggests that the general public often acts with hostility and/or aggression toward street youths as they go about their everyday routines. Street youths are often subject to verbal or physical aggression by drivers and bystanders. Trussell (1999) attributes such hostility to street youths being a nuisance for drivers and bystanders by selling goods or begging in busy intersections and bridges. Portugal (1999) finds that street youths often face discrimination by store owners that refuse them service or remove them from storefronts.

The risky practices of the street economy may yield episodes of victimization where conflict arises. Luchini (1996) suggests that females who engage in survival sex are often the targets of violent sexual abuse by their customers. Hollingsworth (2008) finds that, due to their subordinate status, girls engaging in survival sex may not be paid for their services or are beaten by others and forced to split their earnings. The same is argued for males during survival sex exchanges. While they can exert a certain amount of
control as to whom they sell their services to, their customers will often victimize them in violent manners.

A limited amount of research suggests that victimization among street youths is a prevalent occurrence. Portugal (1999) finds that older street youths force younger ones to give up their money, clothing, and drugs. Younger street youths who fail to cooperate are often assaulted. Hecht (1998) finds that street youths are seldom attached to their belongings, since these items can be stolen at any time. Hollingsworth (2008) finds that females are exposed to sexual victimization from the street peer group and outsiders. Failure to cooperate often translates into violent episodes of sexual assault (see Campos et al., 1994; Hollingsworth 2008). Finally, street youths whose behaviour deviates from street group norms, such as a youth who befriends a police officer, or is unable to get away from police after a crime, will likely be physically and/or sexually assaulted by other members of the group (Campos et al., 1994; Ribeiro 2008).

**Institutionalization**

Research suggests that street youths actively move from the street, back home, to institutions, then back to the street (Luchinni 1996; Ribeiro 2008). There are two types of institutions street youths are likely to frequent: (1) institutions geared toward rehabilitation (e.g. shelters or clinics); and (2) institutions of incarceration (e.g. juvenile detention centres or prison).

Rehabilitative institutions are in place to assist youths with their drug addiction and offer a path off the street. Street youths will make use of these institutions when life
on the streets gets too rough (e.g., they develop a major illness, have death threats or are wanted by police) (Hecht 1998; Luchinni 1996; Ribeiro 2008). According to Carrioza and Poertner (1992), street youths leave rehabilitation institutions because they are taught and assigned various chores and responsibilities in exchange for the assistance received. This is contrary to street culture where satisfaction is expected to be immediate without any responsibility.

Institutions of incarceration are also a frequent stop in street youths’ life trajectories, especially for those engaged in criminal activity (Carrioza and Poertner 1992; Lusk 1989; Rizzini and Lusk 1995). These institutions are heavily criticized because of improper management. According to Rizzini and Lusk (1995), institutions of incarceration are unhealthy, unsafe, violent and abusive. Detention centres often operate outside of governmental regulations and youths are frequently victimized by personnel and other inmates, and/or kept under inhumane conditions (Hollingsworth 2008). Perhaps the biggest criticism levied against these institutions is that instead of teaching youths skills to function in conventional society, youths develop more nuanced skills and propensities for criminal behaviour because of the associations created inside. Further, as a result of the maltreatment in institutions, youths are more prone to respond with violence in a number of adverse situations (Carrioza and Poertner 1992; Lusk 1989; Hollingsworth 2008; Rizzini and Lusk 1995).
Staying on the Streets

Research suggests that youths remain on the street as a result of the freedom provided by street culture. According to Hollingsworth (2008), even though street youths rely on services provided by a number of governmental and non-governmental institutions for clothing, food and/or shelter, they return to the street because of the large amount of money they can make working in the street economy. Aside from the economic gain fostered by the street, the control street youths can exert over others weaker than themselves is a key feature that draws them back to the street (Murrieta 2010). Further, the streets do not require youths to abide by rules and responsibilities to satisfy immediate needs; they satisfy them on their own terms (Carrioza and Poertner 1992; Lusk 1989; Rizzini and Lusk 1995). Finally, street youths’ dependence on various drugs draws them back to the street. According to a sample of Venezuelan street youths interviewed by Zamorano (2011), leaving the streets means leaving drug addiction and the perks that come with it, specifically the immediate reprieve from adverse situations and the comradery of street peers (Hollingsworth 2008; Portugal 1999).

Conclusions

A survey of the available literature on street youths in Latin America yields a number of findings. First, poverty, migration, and familial abuse and conflict are the main factors that lead to youths’ exposure to the street. Second, once on the street, youths’ access to legitimate or illegitimate networks dictates their experience in street culture. Those exposed to legitimate networks have a street experience that may yield them
fruitful results (e.g., legitimate jobs in the informal economic sector). On the other hand, those with illegitimate street networks will be socialized into drug use, victimization, violence, crime are likely to experience some form of institutionalization. Finally, street youths’ inability to leave the street can be attributed to the perceived freedom and opportunities offered by street culture.

Despite the rich findings on the characteristics of street youths, their pathways to the street and legitimate income-generation in Latin America, three areas remain largely unexplored. These areas encompass street youths’ experiences within street culture. Studies lack a rich description on Latin American street youths’ illegitimate income generation activities and their criminal involvement. Second, research detailing street youths’ institutionalization experiences is needed to better understand how these experiences affect other life aspects. Finally, despite the negative experiences that street youths may be subject to within street culture, youths continue to live and return to the street. Research needs to address Latin American street youths’ inability to leave the streets. The lack of empirical research on street culture, institutionalization and permanence could be attributed to a lack of trust toward outsiders by street youths. The dearth of empirical research specific to criminal activity could be due to the fact that criminology as a discipline is in its infancy in Latin America (Hernandez and Gomez 2011).

Based on this review, the goal of the current research is to explore the various experiences of Latin American street youths in a number of settings. This research is concerned with the reasons that prompt Latin American youths to go the street; street
youths’ methods of illegitimate income generation, as well as their drug use, and victimization; their experiences in institutional facilities; and the factors that contribute to youths’ inability to leave the street. Finally, this research will explore how these experiences affect street youths’ involvement in or desistance from crime. The findings will be contextualized within a criminological framework of Differential Coercion. This theory is discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 3

Differential Coercion Theory


This chapter expands on the components of DCT. First, the heritage of the theory is discussed. Second, the four ideal types of coercive control relationships are outlined. Third, the social-psychological deficits and their influence on crime are presented. Fourth, the personal and impersonal sources of coercion are explored. Finally, the empirical status of DCT is reviewed and the usefulness of the theory for this research is outlined.

The Intellectual Heritage of Differential Coercion Theory

As an integrated framework, DCT has a rich intellectual heritage drawing from various theoretical traditions where the theme of coercion is present. To better understand DCT, the theoretical insights informing the theory will be outlined.
Patterson and Coercion

According to Colvin (2000), the contributions made by Patterson (1982) on coercive family dynamics are the starting point for DCT. Patterson’s early work suggests that coercive family dynamics are responsible for the criminal behaviour exhibited by children (Patterson 1995). For Patterson (1995), families who engage in coercive and erratic disciplinary tactics (name calling, hitting, whining, and threats) are more likely to produce children who engage in predatory offending. Further, these children also tend to begin their criminal career at a younger age (Patterson 1995). On the other hand, families that are relaxed and permissive in their disciplinary tactics, produce children whose criminal behaviours emerge from the peer subculture. These children are late starters in delinquency and engage in non-predatory offending (Patterson 1995; see also Colvin 2000 for a review). Patterson’s work finds that children from coercive households tend to replicate coercion when they are faced with conflict. One theory that contextualizes Patterson’s work is social learning theory, as developed by Akers’ (1976).

Social Learning Theory

Ronald Akers posits that the involvement or desistance from criminal behaviour is learned and embedded through the combined and balanced effect of differential association, differential reinforcement, imitation, and definitions (Akers 1976, 1998; Akers and Sellers 2009; Rader and Haynes 2011).

The core concepts of the social learning theory are driven by differential
**Differential association** is defined as the major social context in which behaviour is learned through association and interaction with a group (Akers and Sellers 2009). Primary groups such as the family and friends are said to be the most important teachers of behaviour. However, secondary and reference groups including neighbours, churches, school teachers or mass media may also have an effect on behaviour (Akers and Sellers 2009).

*Differential reinforcement* is the process whereby an individual evaluates a behaviour based on perceived rewards or punishment. Positive reinforcement will lead to the commission of the act based on a perceived reward. In contrast, negative reinforcement will do the same, except, the act is committed in order to escape or avoid an aversive or unpleasant situation (Akers and Sellers 2009). Reinforcement, like association, is driven by three principles: *amount, frequency, and probability*. Akers and Sellers contend that “[t]he greater the amount of reinforcement for a person’s behaviour, the more frequently it will be reinforced, and the greater likelihood that it will be repeated” (2009:92).

*Imitation* occurs when one engages in behaviour after observing a role model. For behaviour to be imitated, the role model must receive an immediate reward or pleasurable outcome from the behaviour (Akers 1973, 1998). If the behaviour yields a negative outcome (e.g., punishment), imitation will be less likely (Akers 1973, 1998). Akers and Sellers note that imitation is more important in the initial stages of engaging in the behaviour rather than in continuing or desisting from it (2009:92). While imitation primes an individual to engage in a new behaviour, reinforcement will dictate its continuity or
desistance.

Finally, the reinforcement of various behaviours is argued to develop definitions. Definitions are the attitudes or meanings that one attaches to different behaviours in different situations (e.g., good or bad, right or wrong) (Akers 1973). For example, a youth who remains quiet during adult conversations is likely to be rewarded. In contrast, a youth who interrupts adult conversations may be reprimanded. Based on the reinforcement provided in the various settings (e.g., rewards for proper behaviour or punishment for improper behaviour), an individual will weigh his or her options whether to engage in the behaviour or not.

For DCT, coercive relationships of control within the main unit of socialization provide a model of behaviour for those who experience it. The model of behaviour set by coercion becomes accepted as a positive definition. Coercion is then imitated and reproduced in settings or situations where an individual seeks to control someone else (Colvin 2000:12-13).

**Structural Marxism Theory**

Mark Colvin and John Pauly’s (1983) structural Marxism theory integrates learning, strain, labeling, control, and radical perspectives to explain juvenile offending. Structural Marxism focuses on the different control relations that exist in work, family, and peer group structures and their relationship to juvenile delinquency. According to Colvin and Pauly (1983), workers can be categorized into three fractions. All workers, regardless of fraction are subject to a control structure that they replicate when
socializing values children (Messner and Krohn 1990).

*Parental Work Structures and Household Dynamics*

Workers in fraction I labour in low skill jobs that are considered “dead end” in nature (e.g., service jobs, sales, agriculture etc.). Their chances for advancement and rewards for achievement are almost nonexistent. Since these workers are argued to comprise a surplus population that is easily replaceable, this facilitates the amount control that can be exerted over them. These workers are subject to *simple control* (Colvin and Pauly 1983:532). In simple control structures, workers have no input in the decision making that goes on in the organization, taking away opportunities for autonomy, initiative, and creativity. Further, any act of non-compliance (e.g., unionizing or insubordination) is punished harshly, often resulting in termination (Colvin and Pauly 1983). For Colvin and Pauly (1983), simple control structures are coercive, because they stress compliance with authority through the actual or perceived removal of the means to satisfy basic needs. A coercive control structure creates an *alienated bond* between the worker and the organization which sees workers comply with authority out of fear and anxiety instead of loyalty (Colvin and Pauly 1983:532). The control structure present in the workplace is replicated in child-rearing.

Fraction I parents run a household where the goal of discipline is compliance to external authority. Punishment is not based on the intent of the child’s actions, but driven by consequence. Punishment is also “inconsistent, sporadic, and coercive” (Simpson and Elis 1994:456). This leaves the child unable to predict which behaviour provokes
punishment. It becomes evident to the child that one must comply with authority out of fear or calculation of external consequences, rather than comply because of commitment and respect (Colvin and Pauly 1983:534-535). This creates an alienated bond between the child and the parents.

Fraction II workers labour in industry jobs (e.g., automotive, steel, rubber etc.). Workers in fraction II enjoy benefits, flexible wages, and the protection of industry-wide unions to fight against coercive treatment (Colvin and Pauly 1983). These workers also enjoy better job security because of the benefits provided by unions. The better job security leads to little competition for these jobs. Fraction II jobs are characterized by a technical control structure. Technical control offers these workers a certain amount of autonomy, where compliance is sought through the manipulation of possible rewards (e.g., bonuses, higher pay based on seniority) (Colvin and Pauly 1983; Simpson and Elis 1994). This creates a calculative bond between the worker and the organization. Calculative bonds foster compliance to authority based on the perceived rewards one may obtain.

The household dynamics for fraction II workers are utilitarian in nature (Messner and Krohn 1990). In this type of household, children are sought to comply through the manipulation of rewards, instilling a calculative bond to authority (Colvin and Pauly 1983; Messner and Krohn 1990). Children in this household are able to predict the consequences of their behaviours. They learn to understand that compliance will result in rewards, whereas non-compliance will result in parents taking away rewards (Colvin and Pauly 1983).
Finally, fraction III workers are those in positions that require “independent initiative or self-pacing” [(Edwards (1979) as cited in Colvin and Pauly (1983:533)]. Fraction III jobs include a combination of blue- and white-collar occupations such as foremen, personal secretaries, electricians, carpenters, corporation accountants, and lawyers. Since these jobs require a certain amount of schooling or experience, there is only a small amount of the general population vying for them (Colvin and Pauly 1983). Fraction III jobs are under bureaucratic control. Bureaucratic control elicits worker compliance through the manipulation of statuses and symbols. Workers under this type of control have the opportunity to define their own identity, creating a close or moral bond with their job. These workers are not necessarily interested in higher pay, but instead, focus on achieving higher status (Colvin and Pauly 1983:534). Consequently, a number of fraction II workers may collect higher earnings than fraction III workers do (Simpson and Elis 1994).

The household of fraction III parents is one where positive bonds with authority are generated and enforced (Colvin and Pauly 1983). These parents instill in their children the belief that initiative and creativity are valued assets to possess. Further, discipline is not violent or erratic. Instead, it consists of guidance rather than punishment (Colvin 2000). This leads children to believe that they can control the outcomes caused by their behaviour (Colvin and Pauly 1983).

School Control Structures

Colvin and Pauly (1983) argue that school is a place where the labour production
interests of capitalism are reproduced. Schools will generally prepare children for membership in one of the fractions discussed earlier. Schools reinforce the bond with authority children have developed in the family. According to Colvin and Pauly (1983), the results of I.Q. testing, behavioural cues by the child, and a school’s financial resources will place children in a control situation at school similar to the one at home (Colvin and Pauly 1983; Colvin 2000). Children with alienated bonds will be subject to coercive control, calculative bonded children will be exposed to utilitarian control, and morally bonded children will be exposed to normative control.

First, according to Colvin and Pauly (1983), I.Q. testing is designed to reinforce a child’s bonds with authority. Children with alienated and calculative bonds will score lower on these tests because there is no punishment for lack of compliance. These children will be placed in school environments where education is more controlled and coercive (Colvin and Pauly 1983). Their educational experience will be geared to simple compliance with authority figures or failure for non-compliance. Children with calculative bonds will similarly score low because there is no explicit reward for right answers. Like negatively bonded children, they will be placed in a more controlled educational environment. The distinction between the two will be made on their behavioural cues. In contrast, morally bonded children will score higher in I.Q. tests because they have an internal motivation to achieve. Thus, their educational experience will be geared toward fostering creativity and initiative with various recognitions for achievement (e.g., honour roll) (Colvin and Pauly 1983).

Second, depending on the child’s bond to authority figures, he or she will elicit
control from school authorities based on behaviour (Colvin and Pauly 1983). Children with an alienated bond will give behavioural cues that will label them as disruptive, prompting coercive control to be exerted over them (Colvin and Pauly 1983). On the other hand, calculative bonded children may give cues that will lead to the manipulation of rewards for their compliance and proper behaviour (Colvin and Pauly 1983). Meanwhile positively bonded children will elicit autonomy and creativity.

Finally, the differential amount of funding between low income, working class and middle class schools will have an effect on the control environment (Colvin and Pauly 1983). The lack of funding in low income schools clearly limits the availability of rewards for children who comply, resulting in coercive control. Working class schools may have some rewards for those that comply, however, a large number of these children will be placed in coercive control tracks. Finally, middle class schools have greater funding, and thus more rewards for positive behaviour are available, fostering compliance through achievement (Colvin and Pauly 1983).

*Delinquency and Peer Associations*

While the structure of control faced in family relations and school settings sets the stage for involvement in delinquency, peer associations mediate the relationship (Colvin and Pauly 1983:539). According to Colvin and Pauly (1983:536), juveniles with similar bonds to authority will tend to associate with each other. Through interaction, these peer groups reinforce the bonds a child has developed in the household.

According to Colvin and Pauly (1983:539), children from fraction III families will
be more likely to form peer associations where positive bonds with authority continue to be fostered. This leads them to desist from delinquency. Children from faction II, where bonds to authority are calculative, will be more likely to form peer relationships driven by rewards or material gain. They will form a *criminal delinquent subculture* (Colvin and Pauly 1983:540). The criminal delinquent subculture is characterized by status. Those able to achieve more material goods will be held in high regard by members (Colvin and Pauly 1983). Since legitimate opportunities for material gain are often unreachable, illegitimate opportunities are favoured. This leads members of this subculture to engage in *patterned instrumental delinquency* such as theft or any activity that will provide high material gain (Colvin and Pauly 1983:541).

Children from fraction I families are more likely to associate with negatively bonded peers, where the coercion experienced in previous settings is replicated. They become members of a *conflict delinquent subculture* (Colvin and Pauly 1983:541). This subculture stems out of a lack of legitimate and illegitimate sources of material gain. The lack of legitimate and illegitimate sources leads control relationships in the group to be coercive. In an effort to gain control over each other, displays of violence amongst group members are employed to gain status. Those with higher status will be able to exert more control (Colvin and Pauly 1983). Further, members become involved in competition with other criminal groups for illegitimate sources of material gain. Thus, these groups are both, internally coerced (in an effort to gain control) and externally coerced (through competition among groups). In an effort to create illegitimate sources for material gain, conflict delinquent subculture groups engage in *patterned violent delinquency*,

41
characterized by violent criminal acts or any act where an increase in control is perceived (Colvin and Pauly 1983:541).

According to Colvin (2000: 13), DCT is a follow-up to Colvin and Pauly’s (1983) thesis. The core proposition of the theory is that “(c)oercion produces alienated social bonds, which, if reinforced by continual coercive relations, produce chronic involvement in serious delinquent behavior” (Colvin 2000:16). Further, the Colvin and Pauly (1983) thesis introduces weak social bonding as one of various social-psychological deficits caused by coercion leading to delinquency (Colvin 2000). The next set of theories will shed light on other social-psychological deficits fostered through coercive experiences.

**General Strain Theory**

Robert Agnew’s (1992) General Strain Theory (GST) posits that criminality\(^1\) is a result of coping with negative emotions, especially anger produced by negative experiences. According to Agnew (1992:60), “anger creates a desire for retaliation/revenge, energizes the individual for action, and lowers inhibitions; in part because individuals will believe that others will feel their aggression is justified.” This anger is generally the result of negative relationships with others, which according to Agnew (1992), occurs when an individual perceives he or she is not being treated like they would like to be treated. Ideally, negative relationships: (1) prevent one from achieving positively valued goals; (2) remove or attempt to remove positively valued

---

\(^1\) Not all strains lead to criminality. For a strain to result in crime, it must be: (1) unjust, (2) high in magnitude, (3) associated with low social control, and (4) create some pressure or incentive for criminal coping (Agnew 1992, 2001).
stimuli that one possesses; or (3) present or threaten to present one with noxious or negative valued stimuli (Agnew 1992:50). These three ideal results are categorized as the major types of strain, each creating a predisposition for delinquency.

_Prevention from achieving positively valued goals_

There are three ways an individual may be prevented from achieving positively valued goals. First, there is _a disjunction between aspirations and expectations or actual achievements_ (Agnew 1992:51). Individuals often aspire to achieve unreachable goals. When the achievement falls below aspirations, this may create anger. For example, someone aspiring to be the head of a major corporation may wind up working as an employee for a fast food chain restaurant. The discrepancy between the goal and the actual achievement may force them to rely on illegitimate channels to cope with their anger (Agnew 1992).

The second type of strain stemming from the prevention to achieve positive valued goals is _the disjunction between expectations and actual achievements_ (Agnew 1992:52). Here, an individual has a more realistic expectation of what he or she should be able to achieve. However, the actual achievement may not meet the desired expectation (Agnew 1992, 2001). For example, someone right out of high school may expect a stable job. Circumstances may arise where they find themselves being homeless and unemployed. Failing to meet one’s expectations may lead to feelings of anger, rage, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness. These feelings may ultimately lead to crime and deviance as a way to reduce the gap between expectations and achievements (Agnew 1992).
The third type of strain in this category is strain as the disjunction between just/fair outcomes and actual outcomes (Agnew 1992:53). In this type of strain, individuals engage in interactions with others, be it institutions or individuals, with an expectation that outcome and input ratios will be equal for all involved. This means that consequences for all involved (be it positive or negative), and contributions (be it positive or negative) individuals make should be the same (Agnew 1992:54). If the outcome and input conditions are perceived to be unfair, individuals may experience distress that will be channeled through deviance. The deviant response will look to: (1) increase their outcomes; (2) lower their inputs; (3) lower the outcomes of others; and/or (4) increase the inputs of others.

The actual or anticipated removal of positively valued stimuli

The second major type of strain theorized by Agnew (1992:57) is the actual or anticipated removal of positively valued stimuli. Positively valued stimuli can be defined as any setting or person that is highly needed or appreciated by an individual. Consistent with Agnew’s (1992) review of the stress literature, the loss of a loved one, moving to a new school district or a suspension from school, among many other situations, can be conceptualized as the removal of positively valued stimuli. Since those individuals or settings held in high regard may help an individual to follow a “straight path,” their sudden removal may create a justification for criminal or deviant behaviour (Agnew 1992:57-58). The deviant responses will lead an individual to: (1) try to prevent the loss of negative valued stimuli; (2) retrieve the lost stimuli or obtain substitute stimuli; (3)
seek revenge against those responsible for the loss; and/or (4) manage the negative affect by taking illicit drugs (Agnew 1992:57-58).

The presentation of negatively valued stimuli

The third major type of strain is the presentation of negatively valued stimuli (Agnew 1992:58). In Agnew’s (1992) review of the aggression literature, negative stimuli may be presented in the form of criminal victimization, physical punishment, or negative relations with parents or peers. In an effort to rid themselves from such stimuli, individuals may: (1) escape from or avoid negative stimuli; (2) terminate or alleviate the negative stimuli; (3) seek revenge against sources of negative stimuli or related targets; and/or (4) manage the resultant negative affect by taking illicit drugs (Agnew 1992:58).

For Colvin’s DCT, anger is a major feature of interpersonal coercive relationships. Anger pushes individuals toward predatory criminal offending, a core proposition of DCT (Agnew 1992:60; Colvin 2000:20). Furthermore, the economic goal blockage discussed in classic strain theory (Agnew 1992) is also important, since economic woes constitute a source of interpersonal coercion, leading to criminal involvement (Colvin 2000:20).

Social Control Theory and The General Theory of Crime

Travis Hirschi’s (1969) social control theory posits that individuals refrain from deviant activities because they hold a bond to society. These bonds are characterized by attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Further, these bonds are instilled in
children through socialization. Thus, improper socialization will lead to disengagement and deviance (Hirschi 1969).

*Attachment* refers to the relationship one has with family members, friends or other law-abiding individuals. If one has a high level of attachment to non-deviant individuals, deviance is less likely to occur due to fear of disappointment. Consequently, those who lack attachment are more likely to engage in deviant behaviours due to a lack of restraint (Hirschi 1969). *Commitment* is the investment that one has made toward a particular goal or current position in society. It is postulated by Hirschi (1969:18) that before engaging in deviance, one will weigh the costs of deviance against the investment he or she has made. Possessing ambitions and aspirations will create conformity. Consequently, someone lacking ambitions, aspirations or an investment will be more likely to engage in deviant behaviour. *Involvement* refers to the time an individual spends engaged in legitimate activities (Hirschi 1969). Individuals who spent a large part of their time in conventional activities are too busy to deviate from the norm. On the other hand, those who are not engaged in conventional activities and have plenty leisure time may become engaged in deviant behaviour (Hirschi 1969). Finally, *belief* is simply the moral inhibition that rule-breaking is wrong. Those with high moral standards are less likely to turn to deviance. On the other hand, those with lower inhibitions will be more likely to engage in deviant behaviours (Hirschi 1969).

Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi’s (1990) General Theory of Crime suggests that an individual’s involvement in crime and other deviant behaviours is the result of *low self-control*. *Self-control* can be defined as the restraint that allows individuals to resist
impulses to engage in activities that yield an instant gratification. Individuals who lack self-control are “impulsive, insensitive, physical (as opposed to mental), short-sighted and non verbal” (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990:90). As a result, they have a propensity to engage in criminal or “analogous” behaviours (Gottfredson and Hirschi 2002:210). Further, low self-control has a negative effect on skills needed to function in social institutions and to create social bonds (Baron 2003), impeding educational and long-term achievements (Gottfredson and Hirschi 2002). According to Gottfredson and Hirschi (2002:213), low self-control is a characteristic that is not learned in socialization. Instead, low self-control is the result of improper socialization by parents. Self-control develops in the child-rearing years. Finally, low self-control is a characteristic that sticks with an individual throughout the life course, unless major changes in the lifestyle are made (Gottfredson and Hirschi 2002).

Ideally, to produce self-control, the caretaker must: (1) monitor the child’s behaviour; (2) recognize deviant behaviour; and (3) correct such behaviour. When caretakers employ this parental mechanism, children will be sensitive to the needs and desires of others, independent, sensitive, and will accept restraints (Gottfredson and Hirschi 2002:213). Gottfredson and Hirschi (2002) recognize that the parenting system they propose may not always be possible. This is the case where: (1) the caretaker may not care for the child; (2) the caretaker may care, but may lack the time or energy to deal with the child; (3) the caretaker may care, monitor, but may not see anything wrong with the child’s behaviours; or (4) the caretaker may not have the means or inclination to punish the child (Gottfredson and Hirschi 2002:215).
Colvin (2000) connects DCT with this perspective by suggesting that children with low self-control tend to come from families where discipline is coercive (e.g., threatening, scolding, etc). Since monitoring a child at all times is impossible, children will be disciplined on an erratic schedule, not always at the moment when misbehaviour occurs. According to Colvin (2000), coercive parental situations serve to foster low self-control. This occurs because the schedule in discipline is volatile and children will risk taking a shot at misbehaving. Punishment comes to be seen as a product of luck. Further, Colvin (2000) argues that low-self control is sustained through interaction, since individuals with low-self control are often at the mercy of others. In interactions, these individuals are often at the receiving end of coercive control, placing them on a path to chronic criminality.

**Social Support Theory**

Francis Cullen’s (1994) social support theory argues that the presence of social support in someone’s life should decrease motivations for offending. This decrease in motivation is achieved by lessening an individual’s exposure to criminogenic strains. Decreasing motivations for offending should consequently decrease crime rates and instances of victimization. Similarly, when social support is provided at the ecological level, instances of crime should decrease and collective efficacy should increase (Cullen 1994). Social support can be defined as the perceived or actual transmission of affective and/or material resources to an individual or a group (Cullen 1994; Cullen et al., 1999).

There are two types of social support, *instrumental* and *expressive*. Instrumental
social support refers to the provision of financial or material assistance and information (Cullen 1994:530). The receipt of instrumental social support will generally help an individual achieve a certain goal, such as obtaining a loan or getting a job (See Cullen 1994; Cullen et al., 1999). *Expressive* social support, on the other hand, refers to the provision of emotional assistance such as meeting someone’s needs for love, affection, and companionship by allowing someone to vent their frustrations (Cullen 1994:530).

Social support can be provided at the micro and macro levels. At the *micro-level*, support is provided by confiding individuals including partners or friends. In contrast, *macro-level* support is provided by the social groups that an individual is a part of, such as neighbourhoods or churches (Cullen 1994; Cullen et al., 1999). Finally, support can be delivered through formal agencies (e.g., governmental or religious) or informal channels (e.g., neighbours or friends) (Cullen 1994).

While Cullen’s thesis argues that crime and victimization across nations and communities should decrease with the presence of social support (Cullen 1994: 537), the sources of support must be noted. Social support may be obtained from a number of sources: (1) law-abiding sources; (2) individuals attempting to gain compliance, and/or (3) sources that support criminal behaviour (Colvin et al., 2002:25). Thus, crime will be less likely to occur when the social support for desistance is greater than that for criminality (Cullen 1992:544). Finally, for social control to be effective, a support component must be present. According to Cullen (1994:545-546), in his review of the control, correctional, and family socialization literatures, a supportive social system will create a stronger regard for norms and rules (see also Braithwaite 1989).
Colvin (2000) suggests that if positive and consistent social support can prompt someone to desist from crime, then coercion will do the exact opposite. Individuals in situations where there is a lack of social support will be more likely to engage in crime (see Colvin 2000). This is the result of a greater history of coercion in an individual’s background. Colvin (2000:36) conceptualizes coercion, as “the threat or perceived threat of losing social support.” For those employed, for example, losing their job and the income it produces is coercive. For juveniles, being thrown out of their house for misbehaviour is coercive (see Colvin 2000; Colvin et al., 2002). Those who lack positive social supports tend to utilize coercion in place of supportive behaviours when dealing with others. Individuals who treat others with coercion instead of supportive behaviours are treated with coercion. This leads to criminality. In contrast those giving social support, receive social support, and this leads to desistance from crime (see Cullen 1994; Colvin 2000). For DCT, the inconsistent delivery of social support places individuals in situations where coercion is experienced and where a propensity for chronic predatory offending is fostered.

**Brutalization Theory**

Lonnie Athens’s (1992) *brutalization* theory is another important component of DCT. *Brutalization* can be defined as, “an odious, chaotic and traumatic experience.” Brutalization is likely to be experienced in environments characterized by strife, friction, and mutual distrust (Athens 1992:35). These environments foster the coarse and cruel treatment of individuals by authority figures (Athens 1992). Athens (1992) posits that the
process of brutalization is characterized by: (1) violent subjugation; (2) personal horrification; and (3) violent coaching. In Athens’s framework, this process is responsible for the creation of violent predatory offenders. Violent offenders are created because of the erratic nature of the brutalization process (Colvin 2000) since individuals may experience any of the processes at different times (Athens 1992).

Violent subjugation occurs when a bona fide or would-be identity figure, relies on violence to make an individual comply with commands or show respect (Athens 1992). Violent subjugation has two dimensions: coercion and retaliation. The former is employed through the use of violence and threats in an effort to make an individual comply with some form of command (Athens 1992). Through his/her own behaviour, an individual may elicit coercion. For example, an individual may fail to yield to an order with defiance. The authority figure may either threaten the individual to gain compliance or may physically attack him or her without warning. The physical attack will continue until the individual voices his or her intention to follow the command or follows the command outright (Athens 1992). Thus, the individual has some amount of control over when the attack will stop. Coercive subjugation often creates anger in the individual, whereby he or she develops a taste for revenge against the perpetrator.

Retaliation occurs when an individual is punished for a previous display of disobedience and/or a present display of disrespect toward the authority figure (Athens 1992). Since reactions on the part of the authority figure are unforeseen, attacks are sudden and without previous warning. Further, unlike coercive subjugation, retaliatory subjugation takes away from the individual control to stop the attack. Rather than
stopping when the individual voices submission by agreeing to future compliance, the attack continues until the authority figure chooses to end it (Athens 1992). This takes the individual into a stage of resignation, where he or she feels like there is nothing that can be done about the attack. Similar to coercive subjugation, the individual develops feelings of anger and revenge toward the perpetrator (Athens 1992).

*Personal horrification* refers to witnessing violent subjugation instead of physically experiencing it (Athens 1992). Rather than producing physical scars, horrification takes a negative toll on psychological well-being. At the beginning, the individual worries that an altercation is about to arise between a significant other and an authority figure. Once the altercation begins, the individual worries about the well-being of the significant other. This leads to feelings of apprehension and contemplation about whether to defend the significant other. The individual develops feelings of anger in which a desire to physically assault the perpetrator arises. However, the individual is unable to act because he or she fears the consequences of intervening (e.g., finding themselves at the receiving end of the attack). The feelings of anger return, but this time, they are directed toward his or herself, because of his or her lack of action during the attack (Athens 1992). According to Athens (1992), the feelings of anger and impotence will linger inside an individual long after the subjugation occurrences have passed. The result is an interplay between subjugation and horrification. According to Athens (1992), having witnessed the violent subjugation of another makes an individual more likely to comply with the authority figure responsible for the subjugation at the first instance of threat or physical violence. Thus, in some instances, individuals can undergo violent subjugation without being

Finally, violent coaching is the process by which values emphasizing violence in response to certain situations are instilled (Athens 1992). The role of a coach is generally undertaken by someone in an individual’s primary group who is viewed as a credible source by the subject. The core idea of violent coaching is that an individual is instilled with the belief that “taking violent action against a protagonist is a responsibility which they cannot evade…. and previous beliefs about violence must be discharged” (Athens 1992:47). Violent coaching utilizes four core techniques: (1) vainglorification; (2) ridicule; (3) coercion; and (4) besiegement.

Vainglorification is employed through the glorification of violent acts performed by the coach or someone close to them. This technique instills the belief in an individual that glory or respect can be achieved through violent action (Athens 1992). This will make it easier for someone to engage in violent behaviours, since glory or respect becomes an attainable goal. Ridicule entails the belittling or threatening to belittle an individual if they refuse to engage in violent behaviours. Generally, the coach will draw comparisons between the individual and himself or the individual and another (that the coach knows and respects), highlighting past violent achievements, and humiliating the individual for not having any (Athens 1992). Individuals are then forced to engage in such behaviours to stop the mockery from the coach. Coercion is a situation where coaches threaten the individual with physical violence to engage in violent behaviours. This pushes an individual to engage in violent behaviour to avoid physical reprimand from the coach, but leaves them open to defeat by the individual they attack (Athens 1992). Finally,
besiegement entails the combination of three previous strategies in an erratic schedule (Athens 1992). Individuals are presented with an inconsistent system of punishment and reward to engage in violent behaviour. For example, coercion and ridicule are used to coax violent behaviour and vainglorification is used to reward it (Athens 1992). Individuals do not endure the same coaching technique throughout their lives. They may change coaches and with those changes, the techniques employed may also change (Athens 1992).

Athens (1992) sets the groundwork to understand chronic violent offending as a result of erratic experiences of coercion throughout the life course. Individuals are first the victims of violent coercion, which later is replicated through their own behaviour (Colvin 2000). In DCT, Colvin builds on these insights to better understand criminal conduct beyond violent crime (2000).

**Control Balance Theory**

According to Charles Tittle (1995), deviance is the result of the control structure an individual is subject to compared to the control he or she can exercise over others or the environment. Control is defined by Tittle as the ability that an individual or social entity has to manipulate or block social actions and circumstances (1995, 2004). For Tittle (1995), there are three types of control balance relationships individuals might experience: (1) a balanced ratio; (2) a control deficit; or (3) a control surplus. According to Tittle (1995), all individuals have a latent drive to achieve more control, but that drive is more likely to manifest in those with control imbalances (deficits and surpluses).
However, the perception of a control imbalance is not always there. It is triggered by certain situations such as episodes of victimization or humiliation. Situations of this sort will motivate an individual to overcome the control situation through deviant behaviour (Tittle 1995, 2004). Finally, the control gained from the deviant act must be greater than the control that might result from getting caught (Tittle 2004).

A balanced ratio, according to Tittle, occurs when an individual has enough autonomy and enough control. This means that the individual neither over-exerts control, nor are they overly controlled by other people or forces (Tittle 1995, 2004). Individuals with a balanced control ratio are less likely to become involved in deviant behaviour because they lack a deviant motivation. They neither wish to gain more control or decrease the control being exerted on them (Tittle 2004). Control surpluses occur when individuals have more control over people or social forces than is the control exerted on them (Tittle 2004). Individuals experiencing a control surplus are more likely to want to extend their control and autonomy. Due to weak constraint by other forces, individuals with a control surplus will often engage in deviant behaviours that permit them to exploit their control. For example, individuals with a control surplus are more likely to engage in activities of exploitation, plunder, or decadence (Tittle 1994, 2004). Control deficits occur when an individual experiences more control exerted upon than they can exert on others, leading to a loss of autonomy (Tittle 1995, 2004). The desire for autonomy and the constant restraint create a propensity for deviance. Deviant responses will be aimed at escaping or redressing the control situation through predatory acts (Tittle 1994, 2004).

Tittle (1995) also outlines various contingencies that may have an effect on the
control balance process, including *perception, moral commitments*, and *organizational and situational contingencies*. For the control balance process to begin, an individual must perceive that they either have more control than is being exerted over them or less control than is being exerted over them. Even when the situation is present, an individual must first become aware of the control situation (see Tittle 1995). Individuals who have internalized values or moral commitments may “restrain” from altering the control balance because of strong moral definitions against engaging in deviant behaviour. They will generally lack the motivation to offend. Individuals who are members of criminal subcultures may accelerate the control balancing processes through motivation provided by peers (e.g., providing guidance) (Baron and Forde 2007). Finally, an individual’s criminal skills, intelligence, impulsivity, and self-confidence may also moderate the influence of an unbalanced control ratio (Tittle 1995).

For DCT, Tittle’s (1995) discussion on the levels of constraint individuals with control deficits may experience is a useful insight. For Colvin (2000), the amount of constraint an individual is under can be measured along a scale from highly consistent to erratic. An individual with a control deficit under extreme constraint will likely experience consistent coercive responses to their behaviour. In contrast, an individual with marginal constraint may experience erratic coercive responses to their behaviour (Colvin 2000). Individuals experiencing the latter coercive responses, according to Colvin (2000), will be more likely to engage in predatory offending. Finally, the different amount of controls experienced and the variations in offending postulated by Tittle (1995) assist DCT, since the different amounts of coercion experienced lead to different
offending patterns (Colvin 2000).

In this section, I have presented the various perspectives informing DCT and outlined their specific contributions to the theory. These perspectives directly and indirectly see crime as a result of coercive experiences throughout the life course (Colvin 2000). In the following section, I expand on the specific components of DCT.

A Differential Coercion Theory of Crime and Delinquency

This section expands on the specific components of DCT. First, coercion as conceptualized by Colvin (2000) is defined. Second, the social-psychological deficits that stem from control relations are discussed. Third, the four ideal types of control relations are introduced. Fourth, the interpersonal and impersonal contexts of coercion are defined. Finally, a summary of DCT is provided.

Coercion

Colvin (2000) defines coercion as a force that compels one to act because of the fear or anxiety that it creates. Specifically, coercion carries the perceived threat of physical reprimand or a potential loss of social support (see Colvin 2000; Colvin et al., 2002). Coercion is punitive in nature and through physical and emotional pain motivates compliance (Colvin 2000). Coercion is experienced in various contexts. Colvin (2000:51-69) calls these interpersonal and impersonal contexts of coercion. Interpersonal contexts of coercion are the control relationships that one encounters in various settings, including the family, school and governmental agencies. Impersonal contexts of coercion include
the economy or any other structural situation beyond one’s control. Finally, Colvin (2000) argues that individuals are not passive receivers of coercion. Through their responses to coercive control, they elicit more coercive control leading to a continuous “vicious cycle” of coercion (Colvin 2000:86; see also Athens 1992).

**Social-Psychological Deficits**

Even though the connection between coercion and crime has been recognized (Baron 2009), Colvin (2000) argues that being subject to coercion leads to the development of social-psychological deficits that will affect an individual’s propensity toward criminality (see also Baron 2009). Drawing on the theoretical insights discussed earlier, different relations of control will lead to the following social-psychological deficits: anger, low self-control, coercive behaviour modeling, control balance deficits, negative social bonds, low self-efficacy, an external locus of control, and a coercive ideation (Baron 2009; Colvin 2000; Unnever et al., 2004).

As argued by Agnew’s (1992) GST, the perceived loss of valued stimuli or constant exposure to negative or noxious stimuli is theorized to create anger. Anger is generally directed toward those who provide or take away the stimuli (Agnew 1992). For Colvin (2000), exposure to erratic coercive relationships will create anger. The anger will be directed outward toward authority figures, structural forces and/or anyone the individual feels to be treating him or her unfairly. This may lead to predatory criminal responses as a coping mechanism. Anger may also be self-directed in relationships of control where coercion is consistent, since outward displays of anger may be reprimanded. This is more
likely to result in episodes of mental illness, such as depression (Colvin 2000).

According to Colvin (2000), repeated exposure to coercive control will create a weak social bond to authority figures. This will diminish an individual’s commitment to pursue conventional activities. Weak social bonds to authority will foster defiance to authority figures, placing an individual on a path toward non-conventional behaviours. Further, an individual’s confidence to create positive outcomes or prevail against outside forces is diminished, lowering their self-efficacy, and creating a feeling of powerlessness (Colvin 2000).

Coercion also takes away an individual’s ability to act for his or herself, creating an external locus of control. Individuals gear their actions toward compliance with other individuals or outside forces as a way to avoid punishment (Colvin 2000). Colvin (2000) relates the external locus of control to Matza’s (1964) concept of “fatalism.” Fatalism is created through being pushed around and humiliated for compliance, leaving one with a sense of worthlessness. Fatalism will trigger delinquency in an effort to create the opposite (e.g., to feel self-worth or regain control over situations). As coercive controls take away autonomy, they create fatalism that is combated through engagement in predatory offending (Colvin 2000).

When coercion is erratic, individuals seldom know when their behaviour will be met with punishment. Thus, consequences elicited by behaviour are perceived not to be a response to the behaviour, but simply an arbitrary action on the part of the authority figure (luck and chance) (Colvin 2000). This is what Gottfredson and Hirschi (2002) refer to as improper parental socialization and the cause of low self-control. Individuals in
situations of erratic coercion will be involved in behaviours that provide instant gratification, most of them deviant in nature. Grouped with the previous deficits discussed, low self-control leads to predatory criminal offending (Colvin 2000).

Being exposed to coercion repeatedly (as a receiver or as a witness) creates a model for acceptable behaviour (Akers 1976). Individuals display coercive behaviour modeling in situations where they need to exert control over others. The previous coercive episodes that individuals have been exposed to serve as learning experiences from which to follow (Colvin 2000).

Colvin (2000) argues that coercive episodes are provocative in nature since they expose a control deficit to the individual and the controller (control imbalances). The humiliating and abusive situations are more likely to motivate criminal involvement to balance the control deficit.

The combination of coercive relationships and social-psychological deficits according to Colvin (2000), contribute to the development of a coercive ideation. Coercive ideation is a view of the world as “an all-encompassing experience of coercion that can only be overcome through coercion” (Colvin 2000:50). Drawing on Tittle’s work (1995), Colvin posits that individuals in erratic coercive relationships see coercion as the only means to overcome the coercive environment and similar relationships of control (Colvin 2000). The development of a coercive ideation leads to involvement in chronic predatory offending.
**Coercive Relationships**

Colvin (2000) theorizes four possible relationships. These are: (1) *type I, consistent, non-coercive*; (2) *type II, erratic, non-coercive*; (3) *type III, consistent, coercive*; and (4) *type IV, erratic, coercive*. Each relationship varies on the schedule of coercion it delivers, the various social-psychological deficits it creates, and the criminal involvement it fosters.

**Type I: Consistent, Non-coercive**

Type I relationships provide strong social support with a combination of normative and remunerative control (Colvin 2000). Type I relationships will produce low anger, high self-control, internal locus of control, high self-efficacy, a strong moral social bond with authority, and no instances where a control balance deficit may be perceived (Colvin 2000). Individuals in this control relationship also follow social norms, rendering excessive monitoring unnecessary. Individuals also understand that their behaviour can lead to rewards or consequences, fostering self-control and an internal locus of control. Self-efficacy is fostered through voluntary pro-social behaviours that can create positive outcomes. Respect for authority is fostered through the subtle and firm intervening of authority figures, creating a moral commitment to pro-social behaviour (Colvin 2000).

While these individuals are more likely to be kept away from deviant or delinquent behaviours, they may at one point or another explore those options. However, deviance becomes a one-time endeavour, because moral inhibitions will make them reassert themselves to the “right path” (Colvin 2000). Although according to Colvin (2000:44), if
the deviant behaviour is ignored, or the behaviour lands the individual in a different control relationship, it may very well change their normal behaviour and social-psychological formation.

Type II: Erratic, Non-coercive

Type II relationships are characterized by detached interest on the part of the controller and create a permissive and relaxed environment where intervention on rule breaking is weak and sporadic (Colvin 2000). Likewise, social support is sporadic and mainly instrumental, due to the disengaged nature of the controller. While there is no provocation to perceive a control deficit, the environment allows for the development of a control surplus. The controller may ignore the subordinate’s behaviour or may be manipulated into succumbing to their demands (Colvin 2000). Compliance is elicited through ignoring the subordinate, mild reprimands, or bribery instead of punishment. Based on these responses to behaviour, the pursuit for pleasure is not repressed, aiding the development of low self-control. This fosters the development of an internal locus of control in which individuals are able to manipulate situations or others for their own gain and pleasure (Colvin 2000). Since the controller can be manipulated, high levels of self-efficacy are fostered. Due to the lenient structure of discipline, anger is seldom produced. However, respect for authority is also not produced. Thus, the bond with the controller becomes calculative in nature, where compliance is demonstrated for the subordinates’ own gain (Colvin 2000).

The combination of low self-control, calculative social bonds, and high self-
efficacy leads subordinates to engage in delinquent behaviours of a non-predatory nature including drug use, petty theft or sexual promiscuity (Colvin 2000). The driving force behind their involvement in delinquency is pleasure without a feeling of guilt. According to Colvin (2000), once the pleasure ceases or inflicts personal damage, the subordinate is likely to refrain from it.

**Type III: Consistent, Coercive**

A type III relationship is characterized as highly punitive in nature with an active threat of social support removal. Behaviour is rarely ignored. However, compliant behaviour is rarely met with rewards. Meanwhile, non-compliance is always met with punishment. A control deficit is perceived, but is met with resignation. Anger is felt and expressed toward the self, since the expression of anger toward others are likely to be met with punishment (Colvin 2000). According to Colvin (2000), this type of relationship instills an external locus of control since the person becomes depressed and fearful due to the punitive nature of control. An individual’s social bond in this relationship is intermediate, negative, and calculative to avoid pain.

Due to the consistent coercion and monitoring, the predisposition for criminality is diminished in type III relationships. However, mental illness issues such as chronic depression may develop. Further, engagement in pro-social behaviour or anything that involves creativity and autonomy is a problematic endeavour (Colvin 2000). Finally, Colvin (2000:47) argues that if the constant monitoring of behaviour from the controller is lifted, an explosion of violence may arise if inner-directed anger is suddenly
transformed into outer-directed anger due to the lack of internal behavioural constraints. Outbursts of anger are the result of the coercive behaviour modeling fostered in the relationship (Colvin 2000).

Type IV: Erratic, Coercive

According to Colvin (2000), erratic coercive control is characterized by inconsistent punitive reactions to non-compliance and weak to non-existent social support. Non-compliance is erratically ignored or met with swift physical punishment. At others times, physical reprimand is simply dished out without provocation and well beyond the point of submission (see Athens 1992). This type of response to behaviour fosters anger that is expressed in an outward fashion. The inconsistent monitoring of behaviour aids in the development of low self-control, allowing the individual to get away with behaviour at times, giving him or her some sense of autonomy (Colvin 2000). An external locus of control is developed where the individual feels at the mercy of circumstances with little control of the results, developing low self-efficacy to remove negative consequences for the behaviour. A control balance is recognized through the aggressiveness of physical punishment. Finally, the individual exerts coercive control on others as a short reprieve that provides a small feeling of power where he or she is now the controller (Colvin 2000).

Individuals emerging from an erratic coercive relationship do not weigh the costs associated with criminal activity. The consequences procured are regarded as a matter of luck and faith, similar to previous punishment experiences (Colvin 2000). The goal of
these criminal endeavours is a short-term reprieve to anger, frustration, and a lack of control. Thus, erratic coercive relationships instill a predisposition for chronic predatory or life course persistent offenses (Moffit 1997) that start at an earlier age (see also Patterson 1995).

**Contexts of Coercion**

According to Colvin (2000), coercion arises from two separate albeit overlapping contexts. First, *interpersonal contexts of coercion* refer to the immediate settings where coercion may be encountered, including the family, school or governmental agencies (Colvin 2000:52). Second, *impersonal contexts of coercion* refer to macro-level forces such as economic conditions (Colvin 2000:51). Here, Colvin (2000:51-52) argues that the control relationships that someone is subject to, may be the result of forces beyond their control. For example, high unemployment rates may force a man to remain at a job where he does not like how he is treated, or economic dependency on an abusive husband may force a woman to remain in an abusive marriage (Colvin 2000:52).

In *Crime and Coercion* (2000), Colvin offers five specific interpersonal contexts of coercion: (1) the family; (2) school; (3) work places and labour markets; (4) peer groups, gangs and drug markets; and (5) state agency controls.

*Interpersonal Contexts of Coercion*

The family structure according to Colvin (2000:60) is the training ground for behaviour where a child's social-psychological traits are developed. Erratic coercive
discipline in the home will foster coercive behaviour in a child. Further, erratic coercion will lead to the development of social-psychological deficits in the child including anger, low self-control, control imbalances, and coercive behaviour modeling (Colvin 2000).

Children who display social-psychological deficits in school are more likely to be placed under tight control structures. These control structures will be similar or more coercive than the ones at home (Colvin and Pauly 1983; Colvin 2000). Since these students lack skill to function in pro-social activities, they are often placed in remedial school tracks based on their I.Q. test scores (Colvin and Pauly 1983). Further, since schools often have limited funding, higher priority is given to students showing high promise in conventional activities, leaving those who do not at a disadvantage (Colvin 2000).

Echoing Colvin and Pauly’s (1983) structural Marxism perspective, Colvin (2000) argues that control relationships experienced at work affect the social-psychological makeup of workers. Those in fraction I jobs where they are subject to an erratic control structure are more likely to exhibit anger, low self-control, control imbalances, coercive behaviour modeling, and a coercive ideation, making them prone for chronic predatory offending (e.g., employee theft or acts of violence). Colvin (2000) suggests that individuals who have already developed certain social-psychological deficits from previous coercive experiences will have these re-enforced or will develop new ones, increasing their propensity to engage in chronic predatory offending. This is consistent with the cycle of coercion cited by Colvin (2000:86).

As argued by Colvin and Pauly (1983), adolescents are likely to form social groups
based on similar experiences. Colvin (2000) suggests that those with similar social-psychological deficits will be in greater contact and drawn to each other. In their interactions, they will generally replicate the control relationships from their personal backgrounds. These individuals may come into the peer group with a number of social-psychological deficits. Through coercive interactions in the peer-group individuals may develop new deficits or strengthen others (Colvin 2000:73).

Participation in peer-oriented delinquency may lead youths to gang involvement (see Colvin 2000 for a review). According to Colvin (2000), gangs are social groups where a great deal of erratic coercion is present. Gangs are characterized by violent behaviours toward each other, other gangs, and innocent bystanders. This culture of violence stems from a coercive ideation. Colvin (2000:78) argues that gang members see the world as “a dangerous violent jungle that must be responded to through coercive violence.” Coercive ideation is created by episodes of erratic violence. According to Colvin (2000), gang members are always fearful of victimization by other gangs or police officers. Coercive ideation heightens other social-psychological deficits when gang members perceive an attack. Within the gang dynamic, verbal and physical victimization is common to gain compliance. According to Colvin (2000), a gang member is known for his or her status in the gang. If that status becomes endangered, a control deficit may arise, eliciting violent responses.

Similar to gang involvement is the drug market. Colvin (2000) posits that the drug trade can be considered a source of coercion from a labour standpoint. Individuals involved in the street-level drug trade are similar to workers in fraction I jobs. According
to Colvin (2000), individuals in legitimate jobs are subject to loss of income for not coming in on time. In contrast, gang members are physically harmed if the person in charge feels they are being cheated out of money. Gang members are also at the bottom of the illegitimate hierarchy in which upward movement is nearly impossible (Colvin 2000:79). This is similar to the simple control structure suggested by Colvin and Pauly (1983). From a criminal standpoint, street-level dealers are always exposed to the threat of violence from rival gang members and higher rates for arrest and incarceration (Colvin 2000). According to Colvin (2000), individuals involved in the drug market are exposed to erratic coercive control that fosters social-psychological deficits.

Colvin (2000) posits that being dependent on welfare from the state and being involved in a criminal justice process are both highly coercive situations. Welfare agencies are argued to exert control over individuals because they regulate who may receive assistance and who may not. They often do so through cumbersome investigations where individuals might get to a point of non-compliance, having their assistance taken away (Colvin 2000). Further, according to Colvin (2000), the individuals more likely to benefit from welfare benefits are those from the surplus population who have left or lost a fraction I job. These individuals move from a consistent coercive control experience to a process where instances of tighter control are sporadic (e.g., when the welfare system facing cuts). The control relation between state assistance and recipients fosters social-psychological deficits, creating a propensity for criminality.

Becoming involved in the justice system is an erratic coercive situation because the decisions in various justice processes are inconsistent. According to Colvin (2000), once
someone is arrested they become involved in a process with attorneys, plea-bargaining, and decisions by judges. Individuals rarely know what the outcome of the situation will be and they are at the mercy of others.

Incarceration is also a coercive process regulated by the justice system (Colvin 2000). Once incarcerated, individuals lose their autonomy and must succumb to the control of a state institution. Since the prison policies are generally ever-changing, individuals are not knowledgeable of what they will face inside. Further, in prison, coercive relations exist amongst inmates and guards alike and monitoring is inconsistent (see Colvin 2000 for a review). Colvin (2000) argues that the prison experience aids in the development of social-psychological deficits conducive to recidivism (see Colvin 2000; Listwan et al., 2010).

**Impersonal Contexts of Coercion**

The immediate or interpersonal contexts of coercion are part of an individual’s socialization process influenced by macro-structural forces. According to Colvin (2000) *economic situations* and *cultural beliefs* are two forces that shape an individual’s context placing them in coercive situations.

Colvin cites various economic situations to be coercive. For Colvin (2000), when economic conditions are poor, a coercive society is more likely to emerge. First, high unemployment creates instability for the workforce. Due to the lack of quality jobs available, control situations at work lean toward coercion. Social supports are often not present and unions are unable to organize to fight for better working conditions (Colvin
People who are employed are forced to remain in jobs where they might be treated poorly because they need a source of income. On the other hand, the unemployed are faced with restrictive welfare prohibitions that may lead them to compete for jobs where they are treated poorly. The desperation created by economic necessities translates into situations conducive to chronic criminality (Colvin 2000). Colvin’s argument is not that unemployment leads to crime, instead, he argues that unemployment places individuals in coercive situations. Coercive situations develop or nurture social-psychological deficits conducive to criminality (Colvin 2000:92).

From an ecological perspective, Colvin (2000:100) suggests that social disorganization fosters a street subculture. Specifically, deviant values are fostered and transmitted in communities where coercion is a normative experience. Thus, culture is a force that can also place an individual in coercive situations. Specifically, coercion is deeply embedded in the culture of violence fostered by various groups and promoted by a culture of “hyper-individualism, competitiveness, and materialism, rooted in the mass consumerism of advanced capitalism” (Colvin 2000:100).

Colvin (2000) argues that customs and traditions may place individuals in various coercive situations. Through cumulative experiences individuals pass down to their children ways to behave and perhaps raise their own children. If they were previously treated with erratic control they are bound to have a coercive ideation and may treat their children the same way. Similarly, the children will replicate those behaviours in socialization settings (e.g., school) where they will be placed under coercive control (see Colvin and Pauly 1983). Also, in cultures where coercive control is the mode of child
rearing, parents continue to foster coercion and the child may never know a different experience (see Colvin 2000 for a review).

For Colvin (2000) society is also driven by various ideologies of competition fostered by materialism. This “American” ideal of achievement through consumption leads to weak social support for families and hinders access to higher education. Further, the labour demands fostered by consumerism force parents to work long hours, leaving their children unattended. Children are then faced with relaxed monitoring and erratic instances of discipline argued to be coercive (Colvin 2000). Moreover, through advertising, individuals develop the need for immediate gratification instead of waiting out rewards. With little supervision and even less social support, individuals are faced with achieving this ideal through any means necessary (Colvin 2000). Finally, the competition produced for the few opportunities available creates a sense of alienation in those lacking proper social support systems. As opposed to creating strong social bonds, individuals develop an ideation where everyone is in direct competition and they must fight to achieve their goals.

In this section, I have discussed the specific components of DCT. First, coercion was defined. Second, the social-psychological deficits developed in coercive control relations were discussed. Third, the various coercive control relations were introduced. And finally, the impersonal and interpersonal contexts of coercion were examined.

**Summary of DCT**

Differential Coercion Theory posits that chronic criminals are made, not born
An individual’s propensity for chronic criminality is developed through their exposure to erratic coercive control situations in various settings throughout the life course. The erratic delivery of coercive control will create a number of social-psychological deficits, anger, low self-control, coercive behaviour modeling, control balance deficits, negative social bonds, low self-efficacy, external locus of control, and a coercive ideation. The interaction between coercion and the social-psychological deficits render an individual prone to chronic predatory offending. Finally, unless drastic changes occur in an individual’s social-psychological makeup and control structures, they will continue to seek coercion and be placed under coercive control situations (Colvin 2000).

**Empirical Status of DCT**

Since the publication of *Crime and Coercion* (2000), the core propositions of DCT have been directly tested in two studies, the first by Unnever and his colleagues (2004) and the second by Baron (2009). In the first test of the theory, Unnever and his colleagues (2004) tested the core propositions of DCT on a sample of middle school students. In their study, parental coercion (e.g., physical and verbal abuse, threats or physical punishment) and the impersonal causes of coercion (e.g., school and neighbourhoods) were positive predictors of crime, with peer coercion having no effect. Further, three of the four social-psychological deficits included in the research [coercive ideation, parental social bonds, and school social bonds] were found to mediate the relationship between coercion and delinquency (Unnever et al., 2004). Coercive ideation was found to foster involvement in delinquency, while bonds to parents and school were found to diminish
involvement in delinquency. Anger, however, had no relation to crime.

In a second direct test of DCT, Baron (2009) tested the core propositions of the theory on a sample of homeless street youths in Toronto, Canada and their propensity toward violent offending. Baron (2009) examined five different types of coercion: physical abuse while at home, violent victimization on the street, homelessness, the reception of state-sponsored financial assistance, and being incarcerated. Further, Baron also examined five social-psychological deficits: anger, low self-control, coercive behaviour modeling, control balance deficits, and coercive ideation (2009:245). Baron’s (2009) findings suggest that there is an association between various coercive experiences and involvement in violent crime. Further, coercion was associated with anger, low self-control, coercive behaviour modeling, and coercive ideation. Finally, all five social-psychological deficits were associated with criminal involvement (Baron 2009:259). Baron’s study found support for the core propositions of DCT.

Other studies have also analyzed the relationship between coercion and crime. Clear and colleagues’ study (2003) of coercive mobility and crime found that excessive incarceration or “coercive mobility” disrupts neighbourhood ecology by compromising communal relations amongst neighbours, leading to a rise in crime rates. Further, in their analysis of psychological well-being amongst newly released inmates, Listwan and her colleagues (2010) found that coercion has a negative toll on psychological well-being, by increasing post-traumatic stress symptoms and cognitive stress symptoms. On the other hand, social support increases psychological well-being by decreasing the previously mentioned symptoms (see also Blevins et al., 2010). Similarly, coercive interventions
while in prison are also predictors of recidivism, while socially supportive interventions
do the opposite (Lipsey and Cullen 2007). Finally, Colvin (2007) explored the different
changes in management by the Penitentiary of New Mexico, finding that in instances of
consistent coercion, violence and disorder were low, but inmates were demoralized.
During high levels of consistent social support, violence and disorder remained low, but
inmates were optimistic, and engaged in pro-social activities. Finally, the inconsistent
delivery of social support gave rise to a subculture that aimed to obtain social support
from illegitimate means. This led to erratic episodes of coercive discipline and
interventions (Colvin 2007:385).

While still relatively new, the few studies using the coercion paradigm shed light on
its promise to predict and contextualize criminal involvement (see Unnever et al., 2004;
Baron 2009).

**DCT and Street Youth**

The current research is informed by DCT for a number of important reasons. First,
the relationship between street culture and coercion is best explained by Colvin himself:

*The “conspicuous display of independence,” which is the hallmark of street
culture is overwhelmingly seductive to individuals who come out of
backgrounds filled with interpersonal and personal coercion. These
background experiences on a frequent but erratic basis remind them just how
much “under the thumb” of other people or external forces they actually are
(Colvin 2000:135, emphasis added).*

Second, various North American (Baron 2003; Hagan and McCarthy 1997) and
Latin American studies (Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1996; Taracena 2008)
suggest that homeless street youths leave home and school in order to avoid coercive situations. Third, while living on the street, youths often lack appropriate social supports (Baron 2009; Hagan and McCarthy 1992). Further, according to Baron (2010:906), street youths experience coercive hardships to satisfy basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, employment). Third, street youths are open to a myriad of victimization experiences as part of the street culture (Baron 2003, 2009; Hagan and McCarthy 1992; Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena 2008). Finally, North American studies suggest that once street youths are embedded in street culture, they are heavily involved in criminal activity (Baron 2003, 2009, 2011; Baron and Forde 2007; Hagan and McCarthy 1992). The criminal involvement of homeless street youths in Latin America has been touched upon, but largely neglected (see Campos et al., 1994; Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1992; Peralta 1992).

It safe to argue that many of the street youths’ experiences can be labeled as coercive or stemming from personal and interpersonal coercive forces. Through a lens of DCT, this research will contextualize the experiences of Mexican street youths, starting with their decision to leave home and their various experiences navigating street life. Further, their continued permanence on the street will be discussed. Finally, this research will explore how previous experiences of coercion lead to their involvement or desistance from criminal activity.
Chapter 4

Methods

This chapter outlines the various aspects of the research process to gather data on Mexican street youths. This discussion encompasses the location of the study, the sampling techniques used, the data collection techniques employed, as well as the techniques of data analysis.

The goals of this research are to better understand the reasons that lead Mexican youths to the street and their survival behaviours. This research also seeks to understand the factors that contribute to Mexican street youths’ permanence on the street. The goals of this research can be best achieved through a qualitative research approach for a number of reasons.

First, the goal of qualitative research is to understand the meaning participants give to various life processes. Second, qualitative methods allow for a rich and complex understanding of a problem, whereby the problem can be better addressed by talking to participants in their natural setting (Creswell 2013). Finally, qualitative studies can provide insight into experiences and thought processes that may not be obtained with survey methods (Colvin 2000). These insights compliment quantitative research by explaining the linkages or mechanisms found in causal theoretical models (Colvin 2000; Creswell 2013).

In sum, this research will explore how Mexican street youths make sense of their life experiences and how such experiences can be conducive to criminal involvement.
Location

Many studies on homeless street youths in Latin America have been limited to South American countries (see Raffaeli 1999 for a review). Currently, Mexico City alone is estimated to have a population of 3.5 million street youths, with that number rising (Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena 2008). While research on homeless street youths has been conducted in Mexico, criminal involvement has yet to receive serious research attention (Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1992; Peralta 1992). Instead, research to date has focused on personal and structural characteristics of street youths (e.g., gender, age, familial situation, and immigration status) (see Hollingsworth 2008; Luchinni 1996; Ordonez 2005; Raffaelli 1999; Taracena 2008; Tavera 2007).

Due to the lack of empirical exploration on homeless street youths in Mexico, Mexico City was chosen as the location of this research. Data collection took place during a three-month period, from July to September, 2012.

Gatekeeper and Gaining Access

In order to gain access to participants for this study, the researcher sought the assistance of la Fundacion Casa Alianza Mexico (FCAM). During the three-month fieldwork period, the researcher became part of a street outreach team, working as a “street educator” and a “pre-community volunteer” at FCAM. Street educators are tasked

---

2 As of 2010, Mexico City’s is estimated to be 8.85 million people.
3 FCAM is an international private organization that assists homeless, abandoned, and marginal youths in Mexico (www.casa-alianzamexico.org/).
with going to different parts of Mexico City where street youths are likely to be found. Street educators provide emergency services, organize pedagogical activities, and provide guidance on social services available to youths on the street. Through frequent visits, the goal of street educators is to establish a relationship with street youths in order to offer them alternatives to life on the street. Once a relationship has been established with the youths, street educators invite the youths to the FCAM day centre.

The FCAM day centre is operated by “pre-community” educators and volunteers. The ultimate goal of the day centre is to help street youths leave the street and to move on to the FCAM residential stage. In order to achieve this goal, pre-community educators and volunteers are tasked with teaching youths lessons in responsibility and educating them on the dangers of street life and their legal rights. To participate in the day centre, clients must arrive promptly first thing in the morning without being under the influence of any substance. Clients then have the opportunity to shower, pick out clean clothes, and have breakfast. After breakfast, clients are assigned chores to do around the day centre, such as sweeping, mopping, organizing closets, and washing dirty clothes. These chores are geared toward teaching youths responsibility. In the second half of the day, clients receive workshops on sexual health, drug use, crime and the law and other issues they might face on the street.

**Sample Characteristics and Sampling Methods**

This research is concerned with “homeless street youths” — youths who live and work on the street full-time, do not attend school, and do not return home at the end of
the day (Raffaelli et al., 1993). The Latin American literature does not provide clear sampling guidelines for the selection of research participants. The present research study defines a “homeless street youth,” as a youth between the ages of 12-24, currently living on the street, who is not presently enrolled in school, and has lived on the street for at least one out of the last twelve months. Mexico does not have a minimum age to report runaways to law enforcement agencies and youths in Latin America have been reported to be found on city streets as young as 5 years old. Nonetheless, most Latin American studies use an age range of 12-14 years old as the minimum standard for sampling (see Aptekar 1994; Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena 20008).

Due to the unique characteristics of street youths, this research relied on purposive sampling (Bryman 2001). In purposive sampling, only respondents who fit the characteristics of the research questions are selected to participate (Bryman 2001:406). Potential research participants were approached during the course of the researcher’s duties as a street educator and pre-community volunteer. Initial screening occurred during casual conversations about potential respondents’ age and time on the street. When potential participants were found to fit the study characteristics, they were verbally informed of the research. If the youth was willing to participate, the researcher then read and explained the letter of information thoroughly to the youth (Appendix A).

Participants were informed of the purpose of the project, the types of questions and topics they would be asked about, and the possible risks that participating in the project carried. Participants were informed by the researcher of his conflict of interest, as he was also a street educator. They were assured that any and all information provided
would be seen only by the researcher and not reported to anyone, including those at the organization. To protect participants’ anonymity, participants were informed they would be assigned a nickname to hide their identity. Participants were also reminded that they had the right to refuse to answer any question they did not wish to answer and they could end the interview at any point. Participants were also informed that the researcher would use a tape-recorder to capture the interview. Further, participants were provided with information of university representatives to contact if they had questions or complaints about the study. Finally, respondents were provided with a list of places for assistance.

After explaining the letter of information, the researcher thoroughly explained the consent form to the participants. The consent form outlined the interview process, the possible consequences of participation, and the use of the tape-recorder. Respondents were asked for their signature or their “mark” to grant informed consent (Appendix B).

If respondents were unwilling to be recorded, interviews were conducted with pencil and paper. In a few instances, snowball sampling was used. Snowball sampling is used when respondents lead the researcher to other respondents who may fit the study characteristics (Bryman 2001). In three cases, respondents led the researcher to new participants. The same procedures of screening, information, and consent were followed once again. The interviews took place immediately after making contact with the potential participants.
Data Collection

Data for this research were collected through semi-structured interviews ranging between 60 to 90 minutes in length. The interview schedule (see Appendix C) is divided into four main sections: personal characteristics, family history, street life, and street permanence. The participants were first asked about their personal characteristics including age, place of origin, and educational history. Respondents were then asked about their family’s characteristics including size of the family and current family situation. Once personal characteristics were established and rapport was created between the researcher and respondent, the interviewer then inquired about participant’s street life including pathways to the street, group affiliation, daily routines, criminal behaviours, instances of victimization, and institutionalization. Finally, respondents were asked about their shelter usage and the reasons for their street permanence.

Interviews took place on street corners, parks and in the FCAM drop-in centre. Street interviews were conducted in private, but populated areas. The researcher and participant were situated far enough away from people so that the conversation could not be heard, but close enough to hear someone call for help. This assured respondent privacy and researcher safety. Drop-in centre interviews were conducted in the street outreach office to assure respondent privacy, but the door was left unlocked to assure researcher safety.

Weiss (1994) suggests that interviewing as a method gives insight into how a process leads to an event and the results of such an event. Thus, the choice of semi-structured interviews for this research is not arbitrary. According to Leech (2002), semi-
structured interviews are organized around themes, but are approached as a conversation rather than a formal interview. The researcher must take into account that the particular theme can take a different direction based on respondents’ experiences. Moreover, interviews offer the researcher the opportunity to ask for clarification, or “probe,” when certain things are not clear and to clarify interview questions to respondents (Weiss 1994). Interview questions were worded in a straightforward way so that it was easy for respondents to understand, keeping in mind that a large number of the youths did not complete studies above primary school. Clarification was provided whenever the youths needed assistance during the interview.

**Analysis**

Data were transcribed and analyzed throughout the fieldwork stage. Interviews were transcribed from audio to electronic format in Spanish and then translated to English by the researcher. By way of analysis, the data were first read and categorized into the themes set out in the research questions including: street youths’ pathways to the street, ways to obtain sustenance, criminal involvement, street permanence, and consequences of a homeless life-style. Once the data were grouped into the research question themes, interview transcripts were then analyzed through content analysis methods. Content analysis allows the researcher to create categories by looking for likenesses and dislikelinesses between respondents’ answers (Creswell 2013). This allows for themes to emerge beyond those set out in the original research questions. These themes are discussed and contextualized in the next chapter.
Chapter 5

Analysis

This chapter presents an analysis of the data gathered for this research. There are five broad themes that will be discussed: (1) pathways to the street; (2) street life; (3) criminal activity; (4) institutionalization; and (5) staying on the street. Through the analysis of these themes, several sub-themes are also delineated. The findings are contextualized through a lens of Differential Coercion Theory (DCT).

Sample Characteristics

The total sample for this research includes 32 participants. Consistent with previous research on street youths in Latin America (Aptekar 1994; Barker and Knaul 1991; Campos et al., 1994; Raffaelli 1999), the sample is predominately male. Twenty-three respondents were male and the remaining 9 respondents were female. The age of the sample ranges from 14 to 24 years old. The average respondent was 16 years old. The average education level completed was the 5th grade. Time on the street varied within the sample from one month to 10 years. The average time on the street was 5.5 years. Finally, 28 respondents were migrants to Mexico City.

Pathways to the Street

Past research suggests that the main factor leading youths to the street is some form of abuse (Taracena 2008). Likewise, this research finds that respondents left home
or an institution because of some form of physical, verbal, and/or sexual abuse. The experiences of physical and verbal abuse in the home were attributed to familial poverty, parental substance use, and youths’ incorrigible behaviour. In contrast, experiences of sexual abuse appear to be unprovoked. While abuse is cited as the main reason for going to the street, a number of respondents did not suffer abuse directly. Instead, they witnessed the abuse of a family member, observed parental substance use, or experienced neglect by a parental figure. These types of histories prompted them to leave. Other respondents did not have a choice to remain at home; they were thrown out after being abused or as a result of family conflict. Finally, not all respondents left a home environment. A number of them left an institution due to physical abuse and/or peer influences. Each of these factors will be explored in greater detail in the next section.

_Familial Poverty and Physical Abuse_

Family poverty and physical abuse were the main factors forcing many youths to leave home for the streets. The participants did not cite poverty directly as their reason for leaving home. Instead, their explanations suggested that a lack of financial stability led to experiences of physical abuse in the household:

They [parents] would send me to go out and sell gum and if I did not bring money back, they would beat me. The day I left, I did not make any money and I was afraid. At around midnight, I tried going to Plaza Garibaldi to sell gum, but I did not get anything and I started crying because of the fear of getting hit at home. So, I did not comeback…At the beginning, my brother and I made money and helped my dad pay the energy bill, later he started to ask for more money for other things or he would hit us. After that, I decided not to comeback. (Male, 19)
I left because my mom used to hit me all the time. When sometimes the clients at her business did not pay her, she would take her anger out on me. That is the reason why I started to get out of the house. (Male, 17)

Research suggests that Latin American families who face financial hardships are more likely to use their children as an added or sole source of financial support (Luchinni 1996; Lusk 1992; Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007). At times, the frustration created by financial hardship is likely to translate into episodes of abuse of children (Hollingsworth 2008; Scanlon et al., 1998; Souto and Faramillo 2005; Taracena and Macedo 2007).

Two coercive situations can be identified here. First, according to Colvin (2000), the lack of financial stability created by poverty is an impersonal coercive situation because it creates uncertainty as to how to satisfy basic needs. In order to counter this coercive situation, parents are forced to pull their children out of school and send them out to work as an extra, or sole, form of financial support (Luchinni 1996; Lusk 1992; Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007). The coercion faced by parents becomes conducive to an interpersonal coercive situation for children (see Colvin 2000).

In the first example above, when the respondent was unable to contribute to the household income, the situation translated into episodes of physical abuse. After the respondent went out to work and he did not earn enough money for the day, he describes fearing returning home because of the threat of physical reprimand. This constitutes a consistent, coercive control structure. The respondent was subject to consistent episodes
of physical abuse when he failed to make enough money for the day. He became able to predict when the episodes of physical abuse were likely to happen.

In the second example, parental frustration due to economic instability led to unpredictable episodes of abuse. This constitutes an inconsistent coercive situation. Since the respondent had no control over their parent’s mood, the youth views behaviours and outcomes as a matter of chance (Colvin 2000).

**Parental Substance Use and Physical Abuse**

Alongside poverty and physical abuse, other respondents cited physical abuse through their parental figure’s substance use as the reason for leaving home:

My mom was an alcoholic…so was my stepfather. They would both hit us when they were drunk. A neighbour reported her to the police when she burnt my hand when I was four years old. They turned us over to the police agency and then an institution. (Male, 18)

My dad was an alcoholic and when I did not bring money home from selling gum, he would beat me…not when he was sober, only when he was drunk. (Male, 19)

A number of Latin American studies support the notion that episodes of abuse for street youths are a result of substance use by a parental figure (Hollingsworth 2008; Scanlon et al., 1998; Souto and Faramillo 2005; Taracena and Macedo 2007). These episodes of physical abuse create a coercive situation.

In the first example, one could argue that episodes of abuse could be predicted when one of the respondent’s parents began to drink, leading to fear and anxiety to set in anticipation of the possible abuse. Thus, the respondent was subject to consistent coercive
situations.

In the second example, the failure to bring enough money home at the end of the day, coupled with parental substance use, led to physical abuse. The fear and anxiety that arises when the respondent fails to make enough money creates a coercive situation. This example could be interpreted as either a consistent coercive control experience or as an inconsistent coercive control experience. The example can be interpreted as consistent coercion because the respondent knows that if he fails to make enough money at the end of the day, physical abuse is certain. However, the respondent also noted that the abuse only took place when his father was drunk and he provided no information about his father’s drinking patterns. Thus, if the respondent is unable to predict when his father is drunk, the situation could be seen as inconsistent coercion. While failing to contribute income at the end of the day resulted in physical reprimand, the reprimand was triggered by the father’s substance use.

**Youth Elicited Physical Abuse**

A third category to emerge entailed situations where respondents reported that their experiences of physical abuse were a result of their own problematic behaviour:

I started hanging out on the street because I did not get along with my mom. She would hit me over my behaviour. I lied, had a bad attitude, and did not really do what she wanted me to do…I used to work with a lady selling quesadillas. I learned to trust her and would tell her everything that happened at home. She told my mom what I had said and my mom beat me and threatened me not to do it again. When my mom left to go speak to the lady, I ran away. I was really afraid of my mom when she got angry, because she would beat me pretty bad. (Female, 21)
I left the house because I had issues with my dad. He would hit me and punish me all the time because of bad behaviour. I would lie, get bad grades, and get in fights all the time. He used to yell at me, slap me and send me to my room. I did not like that anymore, so I started to leave the house when I was twelve. (Male, 16)

Colvin’s (2000) differential coercion theory draws largely on Colvin and Pauly’s (1987) structural Marxism perspective. According to Colvin and Pauly (1987), parents who engage in coercive disciplinary tactics for compliance (e.g., physical, verbal, and psychological abuse) are more likely to exacerbate their child’s behavioural problems (see also Patterson 1982; 1995).

In both examples presented here, respondents report that their bad behaviour elicited physical and/or verbal abuse from their parent. Despite the disciplinary abuse, the respondents did not change their behaviour. According to Colvin (2000), children cannot be monitored at all times. Thus, coercive instances of physical abuse to correct behaviour are often erratic. This translates into an erratic coercive relationship, where behaviour may be ignored or severely reprimanded by the authority figure. Therefore, youths may continue to engage in bad behaviour because of the erratic nature of the punishment.

**Witnessing Physical Abuse and Substance Use**

Street youths are not always abused directly at home. Sometimes they witness the physical abuse of another family member or their parents’ (or guardians’) substance use. One respondent was not abused directly, but witnessed someone in the home being
physically abused. This resulted in a conflict that caused him to leave. Two other respondents were subject to negligible treatment as a result of parental substance use:

The day I left, I got in a fight with my stepdad because he hit my mom. I got mad and I pulled a gun on him. I shot in the air and he called the cops on me and filed a report. He used to beat my mom all the time and I got sick of it. My mom went to go live with my grandma and I left the house. (Male, 16)

I was taken out of school to support my siblings. I was working on the streets and the metro so they could continue to go to school. My mom did not help us with anything, she was an alcoholic and my dad left us to go to the United States. After he took my brothers; I went to the street. (Female, 18)

Everyone in my family used drugs at one point or another, my mom, brother, and stepfather. Life was about taking care of my siblings, going to school and comeback to see my mom get high. I think after all that I started to leave home looking for different opportunities. I wanted to be appreciated by my mother and my family. (Female, 23)

Research suggests that Latin American street youths are not always abused directly. However, after witnessing the physical abuse of someone in the home, they leave or are thrown out for interfering (Hollingsworth 2008; Scanlon et al., 1998; Souto and Faramillo 2005; Taracena and Macedo 2007).

In the first example presented, having witnessed the physical abuse of his mother, the youth intervened by pulling out a weapon and threatening his father. This led to his having to leave the house after a police report was filed by his father. This is a coercive situation because, according to Athens (1992), witnessing the physical abuse of another causes feelings of anger and apprehension, especially when deciding to intervene. Furthermore, the youth describes his mother as being beaten “all the time.” One could
argue that this constitutes a consistent coercive situation because the respondent is likely to know when the abuse of his mother will take place (see Colvin 2000).

The next two examples are not direct examples of coercion, but conducive to coercive situations. In order to better contextualize these examples, one must look beyond DCT to its theoretical elaboration, Differential Coercion Social Support Theory (DCSST) (Colvin et al., 2002). According to Colvin and colleagues (2002), when an individual is in a situation where social support is under threat of removal or not present to begin with, youths are said to experience an erratic delivery of social support. Individuals in erratic situations of social support are left to fend for themselves and are forced to find material or expressive social support elsewhere (Colvin et al., 2002:25).

The youth in the second example had to go to the street and work to be the sole form of support for her siblings because her mother was an alcoholic and provided no support. Furthermore, when her father took her siblings, she opted to go live on the street. In contrast, the youth in the third example left the household in order to find motherly appreciation. With most of her family using drugs, she was forced to work and take care of her siblings.

According to Colvin and colleagues (2002:25), individuals in search of social support may be pushed to embark on deviant activities that may lead them to elicit coercion. Whether one engages in deviance or not will be influenced by the source of social support they found. If the source of social support found fosters deviant exploration, the individual will be more likely to engage in deviant behaviour (Colvin et al., 2002:25). While both respondents did not experience coercion directly at the time,
going to the street in order to find material or expressive social support could set them on a path for coercive experiences.

**Sexual Abuse**

While episodes of physical abuse seem to be the prevalent reason pushing youths to the street, episodes of sexual abuse were also present in the sample. Two respondents admitted to being sexually assaulted by siblings and other family members. The first respondent was kicked out of the home after reporting the sexual abuse to her mother. The second respondent chose to leave after the abuse happened:

I did not leave my house, they kicked me out…I was ten years old and when I tried to tell her [the mother] that there were things happening with my stepbrother. She did not believe me...Also my brother-in-law since I was five years old. (Female, 15)

I lived with my dad and my brothers, and then there was physical and psychological abuse. Since I was young, I always told my father I wanted to know about my mom. That would make him upset. My brothers would also put me down and humiliated me for no apparent reason. I guess it is because I was different than they are… I have always been the type to follow orders and do what I am told. My brothers are more aggressive and violent.... At the age of thirteen, I experienced sexual abuse from one of my brothers. After that, I did not feel comfortable living at home, so I left. (Male, 21)

Research suggests that Latin American street youths, especially females, are likely to have experienced sexual victimization by a male figure in the home (Aptekar 1989, 1994; Gomez et al., 2008; Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; le Roux and Smith 1998; Tavera 2007). In both cases, respondents experienced sexual abuse by one or more
family members. For the female respondent, the abuse was constant. When she tried to report it to her mother, her mother did not believe her and kicked her out.

The first respondent (above) experienced repeated abuse from both her stepbrother and brother-in-law. This created a coercive situation in the home because of the fear and anxiety that stems from incidences of sexual abuse (see Browne and Finkelhor 1986). The second respondent lived in a familial situation where verbal abuse was a constant problem. He was then sexually abused by his brother, which creates a coercive situation, because the abuse seems to be unprovoked and random. The uncomfortability created by the situation prompted the respondent to leave home.

For the first youth, her experiences of sexual abuse seem to be continual since the age of five. Thus, her experiences can be argued to constitute a consistent coercive situation. In contrast, the second youth was subject to an erratic coercive situation because despite the verbal abuse, the sexual abuse was sudden and unpredictable.

**Family Composition, Abuse and Conflict**

When analyzing episodes of abuse and conflict, one interesting theme that emerged from the data was the presence of a stepfather:

My mom and her partner used to hit me all the time because my brothers would get in trouble. That meant I was not taking care of them right. (Male, 16)

When I started seeing my boyfriend, he was already living on the street. He also did not like that my stepfather was beating me. When he saw that my stepfather gave me that black eye, he told me to go away with him and I did. (Female, 16)
Research suggests that Latin American street youths tend to come from atypical family structures where at least one parent is missing and a step-parent is brought in to fill in that void (Aptekar 1989; Souto and Faramillo 2005). Further, when previously married individuals form a family, children of previous marriages are often brought together. This creates a blended family. Blended families are sometimes characterized by conflict and hostility between members (Gomez et al., 2008).

The presence of a stepfather is often the result of existing coercive situations. Research suggests that many times single mothers need a partner to help them out financially. A stepfather is brought in to alleviate the financial instability facing a family (Aptekar 1989; Souto and Faramillo 2005).

Judging from respondents’ answers, the presence of a stepfather created a coercive situation for these youths. The first youth endured episodes of abuse from his mother and her partner when he failed to properly take care of his siblings. Likewise, the second youth left home because of physical abuse by her stepfather.

The presence of a stepfather subjects the youth in the first quote (above) to a consistent coercive situation where episodes of abuse are triggered when his brothers get into trouble. For the second youth it is difficult to point a schedule of coercion because of the lack of depth in her answer.
**Being Thrown out**

Some respondents did not have the opportunity to remain at home. They were thrown out as a result of familial conflict or abuse.

I lived a few months with my dad until I got kicked out because of my sister. She kept telling him that I was not pulling my weight around and I was just lazy and sitting around. My dad told me that someone so worthless is not welcome anywhere, and he kicked me out. (Male, 19)

My parents were separating. They were fighting over who should keep me, and they just threw me out on the street. (Male, 14)

I did not leave my house; they kicked me out. That lady, I do not call her mom anymore. I call her lady. She used to yell at me and hit me…no reason at all. I was ten years old and when I tried to tell her that there were things happening with my stepbrother. She did not believe me. (Female, 14)

In some cases, youths are not afforded the chance to remain in the home; they are thrown out for a variety of reasons, often disagreements in the family unit (Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena 2008). Being thrown out is conducive to a coercive situation because it places youths in a difficult situation where they are forced to fend for themselves.

The first youth (in the quote directly above) was thrown out of the home after accusations made by his sister to their father. He was given no chance to correct his flaws. The second youth was thrown out by his parents in order for them to make their separation easier. This left him on the street to fend for himself. Finally, the third youth experienced sexual abuse, a highly coercive situation. When she tried to report the abuse to her mother, her mother’s response was to throw the girl out of the house.

For the first two youths, being thrown out constituted an *erratic* coercive situation because they were unable to predict that they would be thrown out. Both youths went
from no coercion to a situation where coercion was impending. For the third youth, she went from a consistent coercive situation of sexual abuse to an erratic situation of coercion. After reporting the consistent episodes of sexual abuse she was experiencing to her mother, she was thrown out on the street. This forced her to face a new coercive situation of life on the street.

**Leaving institutions**

A number of respondents did not leave a home environment. Rather, reasons beyond their control led them to live in an institution and it is from these sites that they fled. Respondents reported maltreatment inside the institution and the influence of peers as their primary reason for leaving:

My stepdad wanted my mom, but he did not want me. He wanted me far away from her. My stepdad gave her a choice: to kick me out or send me to an institution. We went to visit a few, but some turned me down because I was too old; others turned me down because I had bad behaviour. Finally, one institution said yes and that is where they left me. The very next day I ran away. They would hit me…. When your family takes you in they are very nice; once your family leaves they treat you badly. (Male, 16)

Before I started living on the street, I knew girls that would hang out around the Alameda Park downtown. I became very close with one of them when we were in an institution together. When she ran away, I left with her. I had known her since before I left home. When I worked with that lady and she would send me to buy food or bread, I would sometimes give it to the girls on the street…when she left the institution, she told me she was going to the Alameda Park and that is where I went to find her. (Female, 21)

In the case of the first respondent, one could argue his mother was coerced into getting rid of him by her partner to satisfy his wishes. For this youth, not being wanted by
his mother and stepfather represents a loss of social support. Further, the youth was left at an institution. On the first day he was mistreated, prompting him to run away. He reports that staff hit him. In contrast, the youth in the second example ran away from an institution to follow a friend with whom she shared a strong bond. Similar to the discussion on witnessing physical abuse and substance use, the examples presented here revolve around a loss of social support.

For the first youth, the loss of social support due to being abandoned placed him in a coercive situation where physical abuse occurred on the very first day at the institution. The physical abuse prompted him to run away to avoid further coercion. Since he only stayed at the institution for one day, it is difficult to label his experience as consistent or inconsistent coercive.

The second youth left an institution to go after a friend with whom she shared a strong bond. One could argue that her friend’s running away placed her in a situation of erratic social support (Colvin et al., 2002).

Conclusion

Homeless street youths are a heterogeneous population. Their pathways to the street are diverse. Nonetheless, throughout this discussion, coercion was experienced in most cases. In the cases, where coercion was not directly experienced, such as witnessing substance use and leaving institutions, youths were still placed in situations where they experienced coercion.
When discussing pathways to the street, sample respondents cited experiences of consistent or erratic coercion. Each relationship was conducive to the development of social-psychological deficits that may influence youths’ propensity toward criminal activity.

According to Colvin (2000:46), consistent coercive situations are highly punitive in nature with an active threat of social support removal. Behaviour is rarely ignored. While compliant behaviour is rarely met with rewards, non-compliance is always met with punishment. Due to the highly consistent nature of the coercion experienced, Colvin (2000:43) theorizes a number of social-psychological deficits: self-directed anger, low self-efficacy, weak social bonds, coercive behaviour modeling, control imbalances and external locus of control.

Youths are likely to develop high levels of self-directed anger unable to be channeled outward because they fear reprimand. The same fear of reprimand instills high levels of self-control to avoid pain. Further, an external locus of control is developed where youths may feel submissive, powerless, and unable to control their circumstances. This leads to the development of a control deficit that is met with resignation. Moreover, compliance with authority is geared toward avoiding punishment, creating a weak and calculative bond. The coercive experience serves youths as a model of accepted behaviour and they use coercion in their experiences with others. This makes undertaking pro-social activities such as academic endeavours difficult because of the development of low self-efficacy (Colvin 2000:46).

Youths who are subject to consistent coercive situations, although less likely to
engage in criminal behaviour, are more likely to experience mental illness such as chronic depression (Colvin 2000:46-47). Colvin (2000) also posits that if the intense monitoring of behaviour is lifted, inner-directed anger may be channeled outward and lead to violent outbursts.

On the other hand, erratic coercive situations are also punitive, but highly inconsistent. According to Colvin (2000:47), in some instances non-compliant behaviour may be ignored or swiftly punished. At times, episodes of physical reprimand may also be unprovoked. Often the episodes of reprimand may go well beyond the point of verbal or physical submission. Due to the inconsistent schedule of coercion delivered, youths recognize a control deficit through the punitive nature of the coercive experience. This leads youths to develop anger that is directed outward toward others. The inconsistent monitoring of behaviour aids in the development of low self-control and allows youths to get away with behaviour on occasion. This gives them a sense of autonomy. An external locus of control takes place where youths may feel at the mercy of circumstances, with little control over the results. This leads to low self-efficacy to avoid negative consequences of behaviour. Finally, the coercion experienced will serve as a model for behaviour, where youths employ coercion on others in order to feel in control for a short period of time.

According to Colvin (2000), youths who are subject to erratic control situations will be more likely to engage in episodes of violent chronic predatory offending. The goal of these criminal endeavours is a short-term reprieve from anger, frustration, and a lack of control.
Colvin (2000) suggests that people do not always remain in the same coercive situation forever. Rather, they often move from one coercive situation to another. It appears that this is the case for Latin American street youths. Leaving home is a reprieve to a coercive situation. Once youths arrive on the street, they are open to experiencing other coercive situations that will affect the social-psychological deficits developed before.

Street Life

“La Calle es la escuela de la vida, en la calle aprendes a sobrevivir….” (Male, 16)

Most research points to the streets as a locale were youths are introduced to the informal economy, instances of victimization, and substance abuse (Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1989, 1992; Raffaeli et al., 1993; Trussell 1999). In this section, I explore respondents’ experiences on the street. Respondents discuss how they joined a group and learned to navigate the street. Following the discussion on peers, respondents’ experiences in the legitimate and illegitimate street economies are examined. Respondents also shared the different victimization threats they face on the street. Finally, the respondents’ experiences of substance abuse on the street and how they lead to institutionalization are explored.

---

4 “The streets are the school of life, this is where you learn to survive….”
Street peer groups

The first step after leaving home or an institution is to learn how to navigate the street in order to satisfy basic needs. This will often require youths to form connections with youths who already know the streets to make their experience less difficult. Male respondents reported that they did not have a hard time to join a group in order to learn how to navigate the street:

When I first got to the street I met a kid younger than I was. He took me to places where I could stay. Then I just sat there with his group and they started taking me places with them to go and learn how to work or where to get food. (Male, 21)

When I first left the institution, I did not know anything about the streets. After walking, I found some kids and asked them if I could hang out with them, they said yes. From there I learned how to work and make a living. When I switched zones, I realized that the best way to join a group is to follow the guy in charge. That way, no one will fuck with you. (Male, 16)

After I left I met some kids on the street. I told them my story and they let me stay with them. (Male, 19)

Arriving on the street without prior knowledge, youths are faced with an impersonal coercive situation to find a way to satisfy basic needs (e.g., food, clothes, shelter). In both examples, the youths were able to join a group that taught them how to make a living at the beginning without difficulty. One could argue that they found a source of illegitimate social support on the street that allowed them to address the coercive situation created by having left home.
Two other male respondents emphasized that once they joined a group, they were forced to show they could defend themselves to elicit respect from the group:

When you get to the street for the first time you are like a house puppy who ran away. You know absolutely nothing. Then you meet other kids, they take you in. But at some point you have to earn respect. For some this does not come easy. You might need to prove yourself by showing you are strong and can pull your weight. You will get your ass kicked and each ass-kicking is going to teach you something. You will earn respect as you go along…Once you have earned respect, then the group will help you when you need them, since they know you can do the same. (Male, 24)

If you show up and you do not know how to defend yourself or stand up for yourself, you are pretty much going to be a servant. You are going to have to do everything they tell you or else they will kick your ass. You need to be able to stand up for yourself, even if you get your ass kicked the first few times…as time goes on you will learn, you know what they say, the street is the best school. (Male, 16)

Research suggests that the violent nature of the street often forces youths to display violent behaviours to solve conflicts, defend themselves or assert dominance over others (Baron and Hartnagel 1998; Baron et al., 2007; Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1992). In both examples provided, the peer group places youths in an interpersonal coercive situation.

Both respondents emphasized the need to use physical violence in order to earn the respect of the group. If youths fail to do so, according to the first respondent, the group may leave them to fend for themselves in physical altercations with others. According to the second youth, those who fail to use physical violence are placed in situations where they can be taken advantage of by others in the group and they risk physical victimization.
Being in a situation where displays of violence are necessary to gain respect or support from the peer group places youths in an erratic coercive situation. The lack of effective displays of violence may translate into a loss of illegitimate support by peers and episodes of violent victimization and humiliation.

Being forced to display violence in order to gain respect or elicit protection seems to be an exclusively male phenomenon. This finding could be explained in a number of ways. First, it could be the result of males being disproportionately subject to violent abuse at home (Hecht 1998; Llorens 2005), making violence an acceptable behaviour that is reproduced when attempting to “measure up” or forcing others to “measure up” on the street. Second, the Latin American streets have been characterized as a male-dominated environment (Raffaelli 1999). Thus, instances of violence may be favoured as a way for male youths to re-assert their masculinity and reputation on the street.

For females, street reputation and status may be obtained through different means. The scant research suggests that female street youths take pride in not engaging in survival sex as an occupation and rather make enough money to satisfy their needs in the legitimate market (Hollingsworth 2008). Thus, being able to make a living through legitimate means, despite living on the street, may be one of the ways female youths in Latin America earn respect and a positive reputation. This may be attributed to the gendered culture of Latin America that looks down upon women displaying male-oriented behaviours (see Abdelgalil et al., 2004).

When females were asked about their experiences learning to navigate the street, their answers were unfortunately generic and lacked depth. The answers were along the
lines of “I simply got there and that was it.” When asked about their experiences with peers and street culture, the answers once again were generic such as “Yeah, it is more different for girls than for boys.” When the researcher probed further, some respondents began to share instances of victimization that will be discussed in a later section of the thesis.

**Conclusion**

Being members of a peer group that requires the use of physical violence for respect subjects youths to erratic coercion. As argued earlier, erratic coercive situations are highly punitive, with a threat that social support will be withdrawn (Colvin 2000:47). In these situations non-compliant behaviour is swiftly punished and the physical punishment may go beyond the point of submission. Erratic coercive experiences will aid in the development of outward directed anger, low self-control, coercive behaviour modeling, negative social bonds, low self-efficacy, and an external locus of control. These factors render youths more prone to chronic predatory offending (Colvin 2000).

**Income Generation**

As pointed out in a number of studies, street youths may engage in illegitimate or legitimate income generation practices for sustenance (Campos et al., 1994; Hollingsworth 2008; Huang et al., 2004; Lusk 1992; Ortiz 1999; Peralta 1992; Portugal 1999; Tavera 2007; Taracena 1998, 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007; Trussell 1999). Illegitimate income generation includes begging and self-harm as entertainment. On the
other hand, legitimate sources of income include semi-formal street commerce, formal street commerce, and providing informal services. Income generation activities are explored next.

**Illegitimate Income Generation**

Twenty respondents in the sample, all males, reported being engaged in illegitimate income generating activities. These activities included self-harm as entertainment and cleaning windshields at intersections.

A male-dominated activity of illegitimate income generation is “faquirear.” The activity is best explained by one of the respondents:

Well, to do this, you need some glass bottles, and then you have to crush them up in a shirt or a rag. You wrap them up in the shirt and sneak them into the subway. You get into the very last wagon, once the doors close, and lay down the shirt showing the glass, you tell the riders your “palabreada” as you lay back first on top of the glass. Once you are done, you go from passenger to passenger and collect whatever money they give you. When the doors open, you move on to the next wagon and move on. (Male, 17)

Another respondent explained to me that *faquirear* has evolved and has become more aggressive than before to make more money:

---

5 Although not crimes, these activities are labeled as illegitimate because youths can be sanctioned for them by receiving a ticket or losing the tools they use to work.

6 This is the equivalent of the Indian word “Fakir”- someone who lies in a bed of nails as a form of spiritual practice or entertainment.

7 The “palabreada” is a speech where youths explain to metro riders their situation by emphasizing that instead of stealing from them, they rather lay on glass to make an honest living. The speech concludes by reminding passengers not to mistreat their children, so that they do not end up living and working on the street.
Before it was just laying on the glass, now, if you make yourself bleed, people give you more money. So, now, you can do it by rubbing your face on the glass or doing a flip onto it. It will get you more money. (Male, 18)

A second activity popular amongst male youths is cleaning windshields at intersections:

I also clean windshields at the intersections. What you do here is just get there before someone else does and start cleaning. If you get there and someone else is there, you have to ask for permission, because if you do not, they will kick your ass for taking their money. (Male, 14)

Right now, I also go pick a street corner and start cleaning. I can make some good money there. (Male, 16)

On the street, respondents face poverty and the requirement to satisfy basic needs. In order to do so, they have to rely on the illegitimate income market because of their age, homeless situation, and lack formal education (Campos et al., 1994; Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Huang et al., 2004; Llorens 2005; Lusk 1992; Raffaeli et al., 1993; Ribeiro 2008; Taracena 2008). The circumstances of having a number of needs to satisfy and facing barriers can be characterized as an impersonal coercive situation.

In order to contextualize the choice of illegitimate income generation, one must look to the DCSST [Differential Coercion Social Support Theory]. Having basic needs to satisfy in combination with a lack of legitimate options constitutes an inconsistent coercive and erratic support situation. According to Colvin and colleagues (2002:28), individuals facing consistent coercion and erratic social support will see illegitimate activities as their only way to avoid coercion and to obtain social support. Nonetheless, their engagement in illegitimate or deviant activities will continue to place them in situations where coercion will be experienced.
Only male respondents reported being engaged in illegitimate income generation. Females reported being engaged in legitimate income-generating activities. When asked why they did not engage in illegitimate income activities such as *faquirear* or cleaning windshields, the answers once again were generic along the lines of “I just do not.” One of the reasons behind the short answers could be the gender dynamic between the researcher and participant. Being a male researcher, for some female participants may have created a situation where they were uncomfortable disclosing such information.

This finding may provide evidence to suggest that the Latin American streets are gendered in the opportunities available for income generation. Research suggests that activities in the illegitimate market provide instant income, drawing individuals away from legitimate sources of income generation (Carrioza and Poertner 1992; Ribeiro 2008). Thus, in a male-dominated environment, females may be blocked from activities that provide more immediate rewards. This pushes them to rely on legitimate income generation.

*Legitimate Income Generation*

There are also youths who do not to engage in illegitimate income generation. These youths have been afforded opportunities to labour in accordance with the law despite having no formal education or being very young. Seven respondents reported that they engage in legitimate activities of income generation:

Right now, I sell candy and trinkets. (Female, 18)
I am selling candy. (Female, 14)

Right now I do two things, “charolear”\(^8\) and I help merchants set up and pick up their booths at the market. (Male, 15)

First I started selling movies at a market. After that I helped a merchant sell candy. And then I worked at an economic kitchen.\(^9\) (Male, 21)

I like to read and write poetry. Right now I go on the blue line in the metro and recite my poems to the public. (Male, 16)

While legitimate income generation may not seem coercive, research suggests that homeless street youths are sometimes underpaid and overworked even in the legitimate street economy (Ferguson 2002; 2004). To satisfy their basic needs, youths run the risk of being placed in consistent coercive situations (see Colvin 2000). This could ultimately lead to crime. Furthermore, the prevalence of the street economy becomes a catalyst for youths to remain on the street, because they have a way to make a living and survive (Taracena 1998). This could heighten the chances of youths being placed in coercive situations that could be conducive to crime.

When it comes to legitimate income generation, the gendered culture of Latin America seems to become evident. The most common activity among female respondents was to sell candy. In contrast, males seem to have the luxury of moving from one activity to another. For example, the third youth explored several activities and the fourth youth is engaged in creative activities.

---

\(^8\) This is mild begging (e.g., asking people nicely if they can spare a coin or share some of their food).

\(^9\) An economic kitchen is a restaurant where home-cooked meals are sold.
Conclusion

On the street youths are confronted with impersonal coercion whereby they strive to satisfy basic needs while facing a number of barriers, such as a lack of formal education and being too young to work in the formal labour market. Some street youths are forced to explore illegitimate or deviant occupations to overcome the barriers and satisfy their needs. According to Colvin and colleagues (2002), engagement in deviant activities to overcome coercion is likely to place youths in other situations where coercion will continue to be experienced.

On the other hand, some youths are afforded the opportunity to labour informally, yet through non-deviant means. These youths manage to avoid engaging in deviant activities to alleviate coercion. However, they could find themselves on a path where consistent coercion in the form of exploitation could later be experienced.

Victimization

Research suggests that living on the streets makes youths more susceptible to instances of victimization by different individuals—fellow peers, police officers and the general public (Hollingsworth 2008; Luchinni 1996; Portugal 1992; Ribeiro 2008; Trussell 1999).

Most respondents reported that their main concern while living on the street was being victims of theft by fellow peer group members.
They steal your things when you are sleeping. I try not to wear nice clothes or anything, but they will still take them from you. Funny thing is you might see them wearing it later on, but what can you do about it? (Male, 21)

We steal things from each other when we are sleeping: the clothes, the money, the drugs. This is how it is. (Male, 21)

You know, theft happens between us. If you have something they like, they will take it when you are sleeping. Next thing you know, you wake up and your stuff is gone. (Female, 15)

Of course I have suffered thefts on the street. When you are high you put your stuff in your pockets, money and what have you. You wake up a few hours later and it is gone. How are you going to get it back? You know it was one of them [group members], but what can you do? (Female, 21)

Research suggests that street youths are often detached from their belongings, because they could be gone at any moment (Hollingsworth 2008). Respondents emphasize that they are often victims of theft when they are in vulnerable situations such as sleeping or under the influence. Further, respondents showed resignation after being the victims of theft.

Another concern is physical victimization. Victimization experiences were different for males and females. For females, instances of physical victimization revolved around romantic partners:

You know, if you know how to earn your money on the street and live ok, jealousy arises with other girls. Shit talking starts randomly and that is how fights start…also, girls will always fight over guys. I started seeing this guy. Turns out he had a girlfriend and a kid. Next thing I know, she was on top of me beating me up. (Female, 21)

Fights, fights, fights, that is what my day is like. Fighting with girls over the guys I date because they want to date him. They usually win because they gang up on me. (Female, 14)
Yeah, I got beaten up over a guy once. They [girls] kicked my ass. (Female, 18)

All three respondents mentioned experiencing victimization over a romantic partner. For the first respondent, her partner had a girlfriend and a child, and the girlfriend assaulted her. The second respondent was often in physical altercations with other females because they wanted to date her partner. Finally, the third respondent was also physically assaulted by other women wanting her partner.

For homeless street youths, romantic relationships may constitute a source of expressive and/or material social support. Facing threat of victimization over these relationships is a coercive situation where the risk of being harmed is present, along with losing the social support provided by that relationship.

In contrast, physical victimization for males was the result of conflict with peers over drugs or disagreements:

Yeah, all the time. Guys who are bigger than me always come and try to take my drugs away. If you do not want to give it to them, they will beat you up. (Male, 19)

Fights happen over everything. Guys will not agree with each other and they will duke it out. It happens every day. (Male, 18)

Oh yes, if you look at people the wrong way, they will start yelling at you and if they are angry enough they will beat you up. Most of the time it is because you do not want to share your drugs. At other times it just happens. (Male, 21)

Past research suggests that physical victimization amongst street youths is often a result of power struggles that see older street youths take advantage of younger youths
Consistent with previous research, the first respondent reports instances of victimization from youths bigger than himself. In contrast, the other two respondents report violent victimization arises from simple things such as a misunderstanding or because they refused to share drugs.

Females also mentioned being the targets of sexual abuse by youths in their immediate peer group and other males:

Yeah, when I first arrived at the bridge, they abused me. They all held me down and had their way; I did not give them permission. It was forceful. I was so scared, what was I going to do about it? They tried to do it again last time. (Female, 15)

Yeah, I have suffered sexual abuse. In one occasion, a guy that just popped out of an alley put a screwdriver to my throat and he raped me. I did not want to die, so I let things happen. (Female, 21)

One Saturday, I was sleeping with my boyfriend. This guy came and told us he was a cop. He said my mom was looking for me, and that they had pressed charges on him [boyfriend] for kidnapping me. He said that if I “gave myself to him,” he would not say anything… I thought about it and I do not want to go back with my mom. Why would I go back? So she can beat me some more? I also do not want to lose him [boyfriend]. So I went with him…. He took me to a hotel, walking. I did what he asked me to do…we had sex on the bed, then I took a shower and he dropped me back off outside of the market…I was just so scared that he was going to take him, so I did it. (Female, 14)

Research suggests that on the street, females are at a high risk of sexual victimization (Campos et al., 1994; Hollingsworth 2008). Episodes of sexual abuse are coercive because victims are often afraid of what will happen if they resist. The youth in the first example was afraid to do something about her peers sexually abusing her. The second youth had to let the abuse happen because she feared for her life since the
perpetrator had a weapon. The third youth was afraid to be taken back to her mother and having her boyfriend arrested.

Although underreported, males also experience episodes of sexual abuse (Campos et al., 1994). Two male respondents reported being victims of sexual abuse by other men when they were new to the street:

To be honest with you (tears up), I was a victim of sexual abuse. I was around seven, a man took a friend and I with him...did things to us and gave us money...this is something that is part of my life and I have put behind me. (Male, 19)

One time a guy tried to abuse me when I was eight years old. I bit his dick, grabbed a rock and hit him in the head. (Male, 24)

The final concern of victimization cited by respondents was abuse by police officers. These abuses can be verbal or physical.

When I was hanging out in the streets of Acapulco, the cops there are dicks. They detained me, slapped me and took my watch. (Male, 19)

They come and mess with us all the time. They come to the bridge and yell at us for no reason. If we talk back, they kick our ass. (Male, 18)

Sometimes we are just sleeping and they come to kick us out of the area because we cannot sleep there. They start yelling and threaten to hit us or arrest us if we come back. (Female, 16)

From the respondents’ answers, it can be seen that their encounters with police are pervasively negative. Respondents reported that police officers intend to make respondents’ lives more difficult by physically abusing them or threatening to incarcerate them.
Conclusion

The episodes of victimization that street youths experience can be seen as erratic and coercive. Episodes of victimization from peers in the form of theft, as well as physical, sexual, and verbal victimization seem to be the result of circumstances beyond the youths’ control. In the case of theft, such incidents occur when youths are in a vulnerable situation. Similarly, episodes of physical and sexual abuse are random and unprovoked by youths. These episodes vary across gender lines. Females are physically victimized over romantic partners, while males experience victimization over drugs and misunderstandings. Finally, encounters with police officers also place the youths under erratic coercion. Youths are left at the mercy of beatings, verbal assault, or threats of incarceration.

Street youths’ experiences of coercive erratic victimization are likely to foster the development of anger that is directed outward, low self-control, coercive behaviour modeling, negative social bonds, low self-efficacy, an external locus of control. These place youths at greater risk of chronic predatory offending (Colvin 2000). These youths are theorized to engage in chronic predatory offending in order to alleviate the anger, lack of control, and possible loss of social support caused by erratic coercion.

Substance (Ab)use

Research suggests that homeless street youths suffer from issues of heavy substance abuse (Campos et al., 1994; Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1989,
1992; Portugal 1999; Rizzini and Lusk 1995; Trussell 1999). In this next section respondents discuss how they were first introduced to using substances; the purpose behind substance use; experiences of institutionalization resulting from substance use; and the reasons some youths desist from using substances.

Thirty respondents reported being dependent on one or more substances. For some, drug use began when they were children living at home. They used substances such as tobacco, alcohol, glue, marijuana or methamphetamines.

Before coming to Mexico, I was smoking cigarettes, drinking beer, and stuff. (Male, 19)

When I was 12 and still living at home, I used to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes every now and then. (Male, 19)

While still living at home, around eight years old, I tried marijuana and “resistol 5000.” I was able to try them because my brothers and stepdad would use it and leave it lying around. (Female, 21)

I used to hang out with my uncle a lot and he was in that business [drugs]. He took me with him once to see one his buddies and they started smoking rocks and injecting amphetamines. They were so high, that when I asked to try, he said ok and he let me. I have been hooked on that ever since. (Male, 16)

Some respondents were introduced to substance use while living in an institution:

Living in this one institution, the other kids started to tell me what “monas” were. They would tell me that the feeling was awesome and all. We went out for an hour and then I did not comeback. (Male, 19)

---

10 Vinyl acetate.

11 A “mona” is created when a piece of toilet paper, a rag, a sweater sleeve, or gauze pad is soaked with paint thinner. The “mona” is then placed over the nose and inhaled or placed under the tongue.
When I was still in the institution, people would sneak the "activo" in. I was invited to try it and I liked it. We would hide and get high. (Male, 18)

When I was staying there, people would walk in and out and they never checked for anything. They would sneak the stuff in and we would get high without getting caught. (Female, 18)

Other respondents reported to being introduced to substance use once they arrived on the streets by their newfound peers:

As far as telling you who first gave it to me, I do not remember. All I can tell you is that they put the bottle [activo] in front of me and I have been on it ever since. (Male, 21)

When I first came to live on the street, I saw them [peers] try it. I was really curious, they gave me a hit and the smell just drew me to it. (Female, 21)

I knew nothing about living on the street. Those guys would smoke weed and do activo. I asked them what it was and they told me it was something different, for someone who has never had it. They told me to go ahead and take a hit, and I did. At first it fell weird and shitty, but afterwards my body wanted it more and more. (Male, 16)

Being introduced to substance abuse may not be a coercive situation. Instead, being introduced to substance use provided respondents with a behaviour that later on can help them cope with coercive situations. However, substance use may also lead respondents to situations where coercion will be experienced.

Thirty respondents in the sample reported that the main purpose of using these substances was to forget past or current problems:

With activo, I forget everything, absolutely everything. Any problem I have goes away during the time that I am high. (Male, 16)

---

12 "Activo" is a solvent that serves as an inhalant drug. "Activo" may be paint thinner or PBC pipe cleaner.
It feels awesome, you forget everything. It takes you to your own little world where nothing else matters. The thing that sucks is that once the high is gone, I feel like shit and I have to do it again. (Male, 19)

As soon as I put it to my nose, my problems just fade away and I like it. (Female, 19)

Substance abuse is a coping mechanism to coercive situation. Substance abuse may also lead youths to environments of coercion. Agnew’s (1992) GST helps to contextualize this. As pointed by Agnew (1992:57-58), substance use serves as a way to cope with the removal of positively valued stimuli or the presentation of negatively valued stimuli. Based on the previous discussions on pathways to the street and victimization, homeless street youths may have been presented with noxious stimuli at home and/or the street or they may have lost positively valued stimuli at home and/or the street. Thus, research suggests that substance abuse for street youths is a way to cope with the reasons why they left home or the episodes of victimization they experience on the street (Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1992; Taracena 2008).

**Desistance from Substance (Ab)use**

Not all street youths engage in substance abuse. Two respondents reported not being engaged substance abuse for two distinct reasons:

Drugs? No, never…I do not want to look like the other kids, all skinny like that. (Male, 16)

No, I have never used drugs. I can tell you that at the beginning, people used to tell me I did not know what the street was like, because I did not use drugs. I much rather not be smeared in that shit. Yes, you might forget everything
when you are high, but you feel and look and shit. When the high goes away, guess what? You are still in the same shit. So there is really no point. It is just a personal choice. (Male, 19)

To explain desistance from substance abuse, one could argue that these youths may have a strong ideation toward pro-social behaviour by failing to see substance use as a positive behaviour.

Substance Use and Institutionalization

Research suggests that most street youths will be institutionalized at one point or another (Hollingsworth 2008; Hecht 1998; Rizzini and Lusk 1995). In this study, respondents spoke about a different type of institutionalization not covered in the literature, drug addiction clinics or “anexos.” Respondents find their way to anexos in order to help them with their drug addiction.

The goal of an anexo is best explained by one of the respondents:

Anexos are sort of like shelters, but they are supposed to help you with your drug addiction. You are assigned a sponsor and you have two meetings a day, where they teach you the alcoholics’ anonymous literature, you know, the twelve steps. You also have tribune on one of those days, where you go up to the podium and tell them about your life. They feed you three times a day and you are not allowed to leave. The time ranges anywhere from three months until you complete the twelve steps and feel like you are ready to go. (Male, 19)

Respondents that have been to an anexo report that their experiences did not help their rehabilitation. Instead, they experienced a myriad of victimization that prompted them to return to the street:
Why did I leave? Well, that place was supposed to help me with my drug addiction. Instead of doing that, I was getting beat up by the older guys in the dormitory. You are trying to sleep and they hit you, they take your shower supplies, they eat your food and shit. Why did I not tell my sponsor? Because what was he going to do? He was not there full time; they were just going to kick my ass some more. That is why I am back here. I did not feel I was getting the help I needed. I thought about suicide more often while I was in there. (Male, 19)

I left there because of the way they were treating me. Since I came here from an institution, I only have to stay for three months. The adults here stay for years sometimes. They used to slap me and asked me if I thought I was better than them, because I was only supposed to stay for three months. (Male, 16)

In an anexo therapy is fucking tough. Everything is allowed, they swear at you, they belittle you and make you feel like shit. When you do something wrong, they make you pay for it. In one of them, they would make you stand against the wall for 3 or 4 hours. Sometimes they would keep you up all night for 3 days in a row. This is somehow supposed to help you with your addiction. If you try to leave, they chase after you. If they catch you, they can electro-shock you or beat the shit out of you. That is why I left. (Male, 19)

Respondents expected that they would receive support to help them get rid of their substance addiction. However, their answers suggest that they were placed in coercive situations where various types of physical, psychological and verbal victimization are present. The inconsistent coercion experienced at the hands of other residents at the clinic and the staff prompted youths to run away and return to the street.

The respondents in the first and second examples were subject to an erratic coercive situation where instances of physical abuse seem to be random and unprovoked. In contrast, respondent three was placed in consistent control situation where all instances of noncompliance were punished, including running away.
Experiences of institutionalization over drug use were only shared by male respondents. Female respondents reported being institutionalized, but they did not elaborate on their institutionalization experiences. They only named the places where they were institutionalized.

**Conclusion**

Most respondents reported being dependent on one or more substances. Being dependent on a substance does not constitute a coercive situation. Instead, substance use becomes a behaviour to help cope with coercion. In contrast, street youths who do not engage in substance use may have a stronger ideation toward pro-social behaviour, despite having experienced coercion in their past.

While substance abuse is not coercive, it can lead to experiences of institutionalization for youths. Experiences of institutionalization can provide different coercive experiences. Through their institutionalization experiences, respondents experienced erratic and consistent coercion.

As argued earlier, erratic coercion subjects youths to the development of outward directed anger, low self-control, coercive behaviour modeling, negative social bonds, low self-efficacy, and an external locus of control (Colvin 2000). These experiences may translate in episodes of chronic predatory offending.

On the other hand, the youths exposed to consistent coercion are more likely to develop high levels of self-directed anger, high levels of self-control, an external locus of control, and coercive behaviour modeling (Colvin 2000:46). Youths who are subject to
consistent coercive experiences are more likely to experience mental illness such as chronic depression (Colvin 2000:46-47). The feelings of depression may trigger substance use as a coping mechanism.

**Crime and Coercion**

Research suggests that at one point or another some street youths will engage in criminal activity. The type of criminal activity will be influenced by the amount of time youths have lived on the street and their peer group (Inciardi and Suratt 1998; Lusk 1992; Rizzini and Lusk 1995; Trussell 1999). From the point of view of this research, crime is the result of various experiences of coercion that participants have been subject in different settings during their youth. This section will explore participants’ experiences with crime.

The discussion on crime is structured as follows: first, participants discuss when they were first introduced to crime. Second, participants are categorized based on their criminal activity. Finally, respondents who do not to engage in criminal activity explain why this is the case.

*Exposed to Crime at Home*

While research argues that the street is the place where youths are introduced to crime (Hollingsworth 2008; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007), the literature has overlooked that some street youths may come from families where crime is a common occurrence. In this research, only female respondents reported how they were
first introduced to crime. When males were asked, they simply replied with “you know” or “it just happens.”

Before leaving home, my mother did not pay any attention to us. My brothers would take me along with them when they would go out and steal…they would rob stores, public transportation, steal bikes and shit. That is how I learned to do it and I do it now. (Female, 22)

Growing up, my dad used to sell drugs and my brothers were thieves. I remember sitting there with him when he was cutting and mixing cocaine; he even taught me how to do it. When I was older, I used to go out and steal with my brothers. Then once I started using drugs, I left the house…Yeah, I kept doing robberies on the street. (Female, 17)

Being introduced to criminal activity does not constitute a coercive situation. However, engaging in criminal behaviour may lead to coercive situations later on or provide a coping mechanism in response to coercion (Colvin 2000). Drawing on social learning and brutalization theories, Colvin (2000) suggests that experiencing or witnessing episodes of coercion will create a model for behaviour that will be imitated in interaction with others. One could argue that in both examples, respondents witnessed episodes of predatory offending that were coercive in nature (e.g., street robberies and robberies on public transport), which have now become part of their behavioural repertoire.

**Categorizing Offenders**

In this section, respondents report on their criminal experiences. Respondents can be placed into three categories when it comes to criminal offending. Opportunity offenders are youths who sporadically commit crimes on the spot without planning. Non-
predatory offenders are youths who engage in crime for pleasurable outcomes. Finally, chronic predatory offenders are those youths for whom crime has become a lifestyle. Respondents exhibit a number of social-psychological deficits that are consistent with offending patterns.

**Opportunity and Non-predatory Offenders**

Research suggests that episodes of petty theft are common for Latin American street youths (Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1992). Ten male respondents reported only committing theft sporadically:

Sometimes when walking around the market, I swap the candy from the stands and take off...I like candy (laughs). (Male, 16)

On the subway I steal jackets and clothes when people are not looking. It is simple, they put their jacket or whatever against the seat, they fall asleep or are busy talking on the phone. When I get the chance, I pull it away slowly and walk away. After that I just wear it like it is mine. (Male, 14)

Look, I do not steal because I like to go out and take stuff. When I see someone who is not being careful with their stuff, that is when I get the itch to take it...See, like just now, this phone right here, it was peeking out from the guy’s pocket in the metro. A quick two-finger grab and it was mine. By the time we both got off and he noticed his phone was missing; I was already walking away. He was looking everywhere to see where it was. His fault for being an idiot. (Male, 16)

Alongside theft, previous research recognizes that street youths often trade sex for money as a way to satisfy basic needs and luxurious wants (Hecht 1998; Pinto et al., 1994; Walls and Bell 2011). Further, while survival sex has been recognized as a female dominated activity (see Aptekar 1994 for a review), other research suggests that males...
are also engaged in it, but are reluctant to admit it (Campos et al., 1994; Hecht 1998; Lusk 1989; Pinto et al., 1994; Raffaelli et al., 1993; Scanlon et al., 1998; Taracena and Macedo 2007). In this study, only three youths, all male, reported being engaged in prostitution:

To be honest with you, I did prostitute myself for some time. I got to the park and saw how the other guys did it. If they [potential customers] like you, you will make really good money. In my case everyone made me offers to sleep with them. (Male, 21)

I got to the park not knowing that it was a prostitution area. One of the kids in the area told me that it would be good money. One old man approached me and asked me how much? I stayed quiet and another kid said “three hundred.” I went with the man and I was nervous. After that first time, I kept doing it and it is how I make a living now. (Male, 19)

I have been doing this for four years now. At the beginning the guys hanging around the plaza told me how it worked and I said ok. I was making a fortune! I had an apartment, a scooter, everything I wanted. It was all my money. (Male, 16)

Youths who engage in sporadic episodes of theft or rely on prostitution for income generation are likely to come from an erratic non-coercive background. According to Colvin (2000), non-erratic coercive experiences may lead to minor street crimes or the exploration of deviant pleasures. These experiences are lax and permissive, where noncompliance is erratically or weakly punished. Further, the social support available is only erratic and instrumental. Erratic non-coercive situations foster high levels of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control because the youths are able to predict the outcomes of their behaviour and manage these outcomes to maximize their pleasure. As a result, low-self control will develop and a control surplus may be
perceived. Youths will continue engaging in episodes of petty crime and pleasurable
deviance until the activity has negative consequences.

One thing to note is that research suggests that youths who engage in risky
behaviours such as prostitution are likely to be subject to episodes of victimization by
their clients and others on the street (Hollingsworth 2008; Luchinni 1994). Colvin (2000)
argues that if youths from an erratic non-coercive background fail to quit exploring
deviant behaviours when these behaviours yield pain instead of pleasure, they are likely
to fall under erratic coercive control. This places them at a higher risk of engaging in
predatory crime.

Chronic Predatory Offenders

Four respondents reported to be chronic offenders engaging in a variety of crimes:

I have done them just about all. Armed robbery to pedestrians with a knife
here in Mexico City. You know, in pairs, you come up behind someone, put
the knife to their neck while the other one asks for their stuff and sometimes
searches them. After that, you run. Where I come from [Acapulco], we used
to have a small gun, so we used that for a weapon. In Acapulco, we also used
to snatch gold chains, earrings and run. There is also robbery on public
transport. We just got on as normal passengers, one sits close to the front, two
sit in the back. The one that has the gun stands up and we go down the line
taking stuff. If people oppose you, you shoot up in the air first. That usually
settles them down. (Male, 19)

The one I do the most is armed robbery of taxi cab drivers. We get in the cab,
pull out a gun, take all of his money and stick him in the trunk before leaving.
Sometimes I also snatch purses. (Male, 24)

I do not want to gloat about my accomplishments, but I do have experience. I
steal cell phones on public transportation—just pull them away when people
are not looking. I also used to rob pedestrians with a fork. One guy, I took his
bracelet, two cell phones, his wallet with $5,000 pesos and his motorcycle. (Male, 16)

I have experience man, what do you want to know? There is robbery to pedestrians; you can do that with a knife or with a gun. I also have a friend who lets me borrow his Smith and Weston revolver every now and then. You can even buy the toy guns they sell at the market and paint them all black to make them look real…. You stand right in front of them holding the gun, another guys is behind them patting them down. We have a third guy looking out for police officers. If the cops come by, you simply hug the guy like if you are friends and ask him to play along. I love robbing people like that, those are the best…Breaking and entering, those are easy, and you have to watch people. Over a week, I am going to learn what time you, your family, your kids leave the house and when you all come back. I look at the way you lock your door, if you lock your windows, everything. I go in through the window, do my thing and I leave. (Male, 16)

Research suggests that youths who have been exposed to the street for a large amount of time are more likely to be engaged in predatory offending such as burglaries or violent robberies of vulnerable people (Gomez et al., 2008; Lusk 1992).

According to Colvin (2000), chronic predatory offending is the result of erratic coercive experiences. Erratic coercive experiences hold no social support, inconsistent punishment for non-compliance or unprovoked physical attacks. If enough erratic coercion has been endured, this type of relationship serves as a model for an individual to follow later on in life. Thus, some of these control experiences might be attributed to offending patterns exhibited by street youths.

Other Responses

It has to be noted that only one female respondent detailed a chronic predatory offending pattern similar to males. This finding could mean that far fewer females are
engaged in chronic offending. However, a sample larger than 9 females may be needed to test this claim. A larger sample may provide a better glimpse into the offending patterns of female youths. Further, despite concerns raised over organized crime in the literature, only one respondent reported involvement in organized crime (see Jones et al., 2007). Thus, one could argue that perhaps street youths are not heavily involved in organized crime as has been portrayed in the media (See El Heraldo 2013; El Orbe 2012; El Universal 2011; Quadratin 2012).

**Desistance from Crime**

While some street youths are engaged in sporadic instances of opportunity and chronic predatory offending, there are youths who are not engaged in criminal activity. Ten respondents reported to not being engaged in criminal activity. Below are quotes from 3 of these youths.

You know, there is no point in doing illegal stuff. If you screw up one time and they catch you, they are going to lock you up, why do it? I prefer my freedom. (Male, 19)

I do not want to get in trouble. I think I am better off selling my candy than stealing. (Female, 18)

It keeps me out of trouble and getting my money taken by the cops. I make an honest living and I do not have to steal or hurt myself. (Male, 21)

One could theorize that the respondents who desist from crime may have been subject to consistent coercive experiences. As discussed earlier, consistent coercive experiences are likely to foster high self-control, high levels of self-directed anger, low
self-efficacy, an external locus of control, which lead to low probability of criminal behaviour. However, consistent coercive experiences are also likely to foster mental health issues and a difficult time engaging in autonomous endeavours and pro-social behaviours.

Youths’ refraining from crime may also be theorized as the result of being subject to a consistent non-coercive relationship. This type of relationship is characterized by consistent, expressive, and material social supports. Punishment is a product of behaviour and proportional to the act. A background without coercion is likely to produce low anger, high self-control, internal locus of control, high self-efficacy, a strong moral social bond with authority, and no instances where a control balance deficit may be perceived (Colvin 2000). These youths are less likely to engage in crime. My review of the backgrounds of these youths background, however, suggests such experiences are not present. Alternatively, while these youths are living on the street, they may have a source of consistent support that is steering them toward pro-social behaviour.

**Conclusion**

Crime is a response to the different social-psychological deficits that develop after being exposed to coercion in different settings. Respondents who engage in minor non-predatory offenses can be argued to have a background of erratic non-coercive experiences. In contrast, those who engage in predatory episodes of crime have a background of erratic coercive experiences. Further, for those who engage in crime as a way to survive, while they experience impersonal coercion, it is the erratic delivery of
social support that drives them to commit crime. Engaging in crime for survival may place them in coercive situations that encourage them to engage in other forms of crime. Finally, a number of respondents cited not being engaged in crime at all. One could argue this is the result of being exposed to consistent coercive experiences.

**Institutionalization**

Research suggests that at one point or another, homeless street youths will experience some form of institutionalization (Rizzini and Lusk 1995). In this study five male respondents reported being institutionalized for a crime:

I have served time in prison for “daños a la salud.” I would sell crack rock, heroin, and weed. The Federal police caught me and another guy and they took us in. They kept us in there for a week and our boss got us out. (Male, 19)

I did fuck up once and they caught me. I did not know that the guy’s mom was high up in politics. After I stole his shit, they got the municipal and Federal police on me. They caught me and I was in prison for three months. (Male, 16)

I stole a chain and the cops caught me. I returned their things, because I did not want to serve time, but I ended up serving 3 months at a juvenile detention centre. I can tell you that it is better than the street, but there are lots of issues with the other kids. (Male, 16)

Street youths often engage in crime as a response to the coercive circumstances of being homeless (e.g., poverty or the need to get high). After engaging in criminal activity, they may be caught by police and involved in the criminal justice system.

According to Colvin (2000), being involved in a criminal justice process is a coercive

---

13 This is the Mexican equivalent of selling drugs.
situation because individuals are seldom knowledgeable about the justice system proceedings and their fate is left in the hands of judges and prosecutors. Moreover, each experience of institutionalization may be different, making it difficult to have an idea of what the next institutionalization experience entails.

When asked about what it was like to be incarcerated, only three male respondents were willing to openly talk about their experiences:

When you first get there, you are in a cell with other kids. As soon as they close the door, they tell you to “inflate your cheek.” You take a breath and inflate your cheek with air. After that, everyone who is in the cell punches your cheek to deflate it, it becomes like a welcome. If you are wearing nice shoes or anything they like, you have to take it off and give it up. If they ask you for your food, you also have to give that up or you get your ass kicked. (Male 14)

There is fighting all the time, they fight over boxers, toothpaste, socks-anything basic outside is worth a lot inside. All they get to wear is a pair of sweats and thin t-shirts. As soon as you get in there and they see you wearing something nice, they [other kids serving time] take your clothes off and you give them up...You have to do chores, but not like you are thinking. There are no brooms or mops. There, you clean the floor with your t-shirt, you clean the toilet with your hands too, and you grab shit with your hands. When you are the new guy and you are doing your chores, let’s say you just finished cleaning the floor; the others will dump dirty water or come piss on it so you have to start over. You hope and pray that someone new comes in soon or you are the bitch that entire time. They are going to kick your ass and make your life a living hell. No one does anything about it, not even the guards...inside, we play wall-ball. The most experienced guys will tell you to go and play, you cannot say no, there is no choice. You have to bet your dinner, supper, or your clothes, if you do not want to, they kick your ass. I lost my dinner and supper for a month playing that shit. (Male, 16)

The kids in there are fucked up when you get there. If they have crappy shoes and they like yours, they exchange them. They start fighting over food and stuff. If you are the new guy, they hit you randomly and shit. (Male, 17)
Colvin (2000) argues that incarceration is an erratic coercive experience that is the most conducive to strengthening social-psychological deficits. Furthermore, Colvin (2000:84) implies that coercive dynamics between prisoners will be heavily influenced by the institution. In an institution where social support is present and coercive control from staff to inmates is at a minimum, there will be less coercion between inmates. In contrast, an institution that is run in a coercive manner will see more coercive exchanges between prisoners as well as prisoners and the staff (see Colvin 2000 for a review). According to Listwan and colleagues (2010:1114), being incarcerated is a coercive experience. Incarceration will foster a perceived threat of victimization from staff and other inmates, taking a negative toll on psychological well-being.

From the three examples provided, all three youths report being the “new guy.” As the “new guy” they were subject to violent victimization as well as theft. These instances of victimization continue until, according to the second youth, someone new arrives. Incarcerated youths are placed in a consistent coercive situation at the hands of other inmates.

Being highly punitive in nature, consistent coercion is likely to foster high self-control, high levels of self-directed anger, low self-efficacy, an external locus of control, which lead to a low probability of criminal behaviour. However, consistent coercive experiences are also likely to foster mental health issues and a difficult time engaging in autonomous endeavours and pro-social behaviours (Colvin 2000). Moreover, Colvin (2000:46-47) suggests that when the consistent control is lifted or the individual moves to an erratic coercion situation, they will be likely to have violent outbursts of anger, leading
to violent assaults and possibly murder, due to the coercive behaviour modeling fostered in the consistent coercion experience.

**Wrongful Institutionalization**

Two respondents reported that they were wrongfully institutionalized. They were taken in as “pagadores:”\(^{14}\)

I was in a juvenile detention centre for a pedestrian robbery and they fucked me over for four weeks. I did not do shit. That is why I am telling you they fucked me over. I was their “pagador.” After the four weeks, they had to cut me lose because did not have enough evidence to convict. (Male, 16)

I was in twice, but both of them as their “pagador.” I was hanging out at the plaza drugged out of my mind and I lay down. The cops came and the guy stayed outside, so he pointed at me saying I stole his sneakers. They kept me in for a week, but the guy never showed to the hearing… The second time, they said I gave a girl drugs and they took me in for selling drugs. I did not do anything and went in as a pagador again, but they had to let me go again. (Male, 17)

It is safe to argue that street youths are prime targets for coercive treatment by police officers. Reflecting on Latin American street youths’ experiences with police officers, homelessness can produce a situation where being at the wrong place at the wrong time may brand a youth as a suspect. One could argue that being homeless, coupled with actions by police officers, places youths in coercive situations.

Being wrongfully arrested or accused is a coercive situation. Colvin (2000) argues that being involved in a justice process places the individuals at the mercy of

\(^{14}\) A “pagador” is someone who is arrested and charged with a crime they did not commit when the police need a suspect.
decisions made by justice representatives. Further, wrongful institutionalization takes someone’s freedom away and places them in an environment where the risk of victimization is increased. Moreover, when there is not enough evidence to proceed to court, respondents are simply released and left to cope with whatever experiences they might have while in jail. Thus, wrongful institutionalization places youths in erratic coercive situations.

**Conclusion**

Crime is a result of various coercive situations. Street youths who engage in crime are prone to being caught and institutionalized. Institutionalization places youths in a coercive situation, depending on the institution. A number of the youths in this research were placed under consistent coercive control by other inmates in the institution through various instances of physical victimization over being “the new guys.” On the other hand, youths who experienced wrongful institutionalization were subject to erratic coercive situations where they were left at the mercy of justice officials.

**Staying on the Streets**

One final theme to discuss is the youths’ decision to remain on the street. Research suggests that the streets expose youths to victimization, criminal activity, substance abuse, and institutionalization (Campos et al., 1994; Hollingsworth 2008; Huang et al., 2004; Lusk 1989, 1992; Raffaeli et al., 1993; Trussell 1999) Nonetheless, youths continue to return to the street. Two main themes arise in this section. The first is
that respondents reported feeling freedom while on the street, and second, youths reported dependence on substances as the prime reasons for their continuing to live on the street.

**Freedom**

When asked why they continue to live on the street, youths spoke to the freedom and the lack of rules that the street offers:

> The freedom, man. I do not like to be locked up. I do not like rules. Living on the street, there is no set time to be home, there is no one telling you what to do. We are free and can do whatever we want. (Male, 19)

> Here, you can do whatever you want when you want. You can wake up and whatever time you want, go where you want. There are no rules, there is just freedom. (Female, 22)

> This area for me is giant magnet. It’s a fucking giant magnet that pulls me. It is a place that I cannot leave, and I love it. I can do whatever I want, everyone knows me here. This is home to me. I am free. (Male, 16)

From the DCT perspective, freedom can be explained in two ways. The coercive background of the youths dictates how they see the streets. Those youths who come from an erratic non-coercive background are enticed by the pleasure that the street may offer. They can control the outcomes of their behaviours by minimizing negative outcomes and maximizing positive ones. If the street allows them to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, they will continue to stay there. This may be true for the youths in the first two examples above who emphasize the lack of rules the street offers.

On the other hand, youths from erratic coercive backgrounds are drawn to the street
for a different reason. This is best explained by Colvin himself:

The “conspicuous display of independence,” which is the hallmark of street culture is overwhelmingly seductive to individuals who come out of backgrounds filled with interpersonal and personal coercion. These background experiences on a frequent but erratic basis remind them just how much “under the thumb” of other people or external forces they actually are (Colvin 2000:135).

According to Colvin (2000), the display of independence offered by the streets is a false one. The freedom and independence offered by the street can only be achieved through criminal involvement and the pursuit of action. Further, the freedom is often under constant threat of removal by personal and impersonal coercive situations on the street. In order to escape coercion, youths must subject themselves to other coercive situations that continue to foster a false sense of independence. This explanation can be used for the youth in the third example (prior page, age 16) who sees the street as a place that he cannot leave and considers home.

Substance (Ab)use

As respondents move away from other coercive situations, they fall ‘under the thumb’ of street culture, where, even if they want to, they can no longer leave. Substance abuse once again resurfaces as a theme for discussion. Thirty out of 32 respondents reported that substance abuse leads them to continue to live on the street or return to the street.

I want to leave the street, I have tried to leave but it is the anxiety to get high that brings you right back. People have tried to help me but it was no use. (Male, 21)
Because of the drugs. That is the reason I am still here. I tell myself ‘hey, you are stronger than it just leave it.’ But you will find me high once again. That is why I am still on the street. My body needs the drugs. (Female, 19)

It is because I like the streets and I like the drugs. This activo has a hold of me. I have thought maybe I can stop but if I do not get my high, I get all sorts of pissed off. That is the thing keeping me on the street. (Male, 19)

Respondents make it clear that it is their dependency on drugs that keeps them living on or coming back to the streets. However, as long as youths continue to return to the streets, they will continue to be exposed to the coercive nature of street life—poverty, victimization, and institutionalization. These coercive experiences may continue to elicit substance abuse. Thus, it is not drugs themselves that are coercive, but the mosaic of coercion that homeless street youths are exposed to that elicits their substance use.

When addressing why they continue to live on the street, street youths cite the freedom and permissiveness that the streets offer. Nevertheless, they also credit their substance abuse problems, which are often the result of previous coercive experience. Returning to the street places youths once gain in a path for further coercive experiences.

**Conclusion**

To address youths’ inability to leave the street, youths cite the permissiveness and freedom fostered by the street, and their substance addiction. Through a DCT approach, the perceived freedom and permissiveness is a result of the coercive situation to which the youths have been subjected. On the other hand, to explain substance abuse and inability to leave the street, one must take into that substance abuse problems are a result
of previous coercive experiences. Returning to the street places youths in the paths of further coercive experiences that may prompt continued substance use.
Chapter 6

Discussion

Through 32 semi-structured interviews with Mexican homeless street youths, this research set out to better understand the following questions:

1. What are the personal and structural factors that lead Mexican street youths to the street?
2. On the street, how do youths generate an income?
3. What is the role of criminal involvement amongst Mexican street youths?
4. What are the personal and structural factors that contribute to youths’ inability to leave street?
5. What are the consequences of a homeless lifestyle?

The findings are contextualized using Mark Colvin’s Differential Coercion Theory (DCT) (2000). Coercion can be defined as a force that compels an individual to act against their will by creating fear and/or anxiety. Coercion is experienced in interpersonal and impersonal contexts. Interpersonal contexts of coercion include the family, school, peer groups, and governmental agencies. The coercion individuals experience at the interpersonal level is often influenced by impersonal forces including economic situations or any situation beyond one’s control (Baron 2009; Colvin 2000). Colvin (2000) posits that experiences of erratic coercion will lead to the development of anger, low self-control, coercive behaviour modeling, control balance deficits, negative social bonds, low self-efficacy, an external locus of control, and coercive ideation. The interaction between coercive experiences and these social-psychological deficits will increase propensity for chronic predatory offending.
Pathways to the Street

Consistent with past research, the youths in this study cited some form of abuse as the primary reason why they left home (Ferguson 2002; Jones et al., 2007; Llorens 2005; Panter-Brick 2002, 2004; Peralta 1992; Taracena 2008; Taracena and Macedo 2007; Trussell 1999). The youths in the sample endured physical, psychological, and verbal abuse that can be seen to stem from familial poverty, parental frustration, parental substance use, and the youths’ own incorrigible behaviour. Episodes of sexual abuse were also experienced by some youths in the sample.

In this research, the main reason why youths left home was physical abuse due to familial poverty. Economic instability places the family unit in an impersonal coercive situation. In order to counter coercion, parents are forced to introduce their children to the street economy as a source of income. Sometimes, however, youths who fail to make enough money are faced with coercion in the form of physical abuse. The coercion experienced here can be interpreted as consistent, since youths know that if they fail to bring sufficient money home at the end of the day, abuse is likely to take place.

In contrast, other youths are subject to erratic coercive abuse. In these cases, parental frustration caused by financial stability translates into random episodes of physical abuse for the youths. This leads youths to see abuse not as a product of their behaviour, but as a result of chance.

In other cases, youths were subject to physical abuse as a result of their parents’ substance use. In these cases, youths were subject to a consistent coercive experience.
They knew that if their parent (or guardian) was getting drunk, physical abuse was likely to ensue. These situations prompted the youths to leave home.

Other youths cited that their experiences of physical and verbal abuse were a result of their own problematic behaviour including lying, incorrigibility, and getting in trouble at school. Since, according to Colvin (2000), children cannot be monitored at all times, non-compliance is punished on an erratic schedule. The erratic delivery of physical reprimand subjected these youths to erratic coercion, prompting them to leave home.

A small number of respondents in the sample experienced sexual abuse before leaving home. For these youths, the experiences of abuse were random and unprovoked. For one of the youths the abuse was continual from two family members. When she reported it, she was kicked out of the home. For another youth, sexual abuse happened just once and that prompted him to leave home.

Some respondents were not afforded the opportunity to remain at home. Instead, they were thrown out due to family conflict, to ease a burden on the family, or in response to reporting sexual abuse. Being thrown out of the home places youths in an erratic situation of coercion, since the abandonment happens suddenly and leaves youths to fend for themselves on the street.

Other respondents witnessed the physical abuse of a significant other or experienced neglectful treatment as a result of substance use. The youths who witnessed physical abuse were subject to consistent coercion that prompted them to leave home. In contrast, the youths who experienced neglect as a result of substance use did not
experience direct coercion, but rather a loss of financial or expressive social support. Their departure to the street often led them to further experiences of coercion.

Other respondents did not leave a home environment. Due to circumstances beyond their control, they came to live in an institution. There, they experienced physical abuse or met other youth who influenced them to leave the institution.

**Street Life**

Consistent with past research, while living on the street, youths experience coercion in two ways: (1) trying to gain respect from their peer group, and (2) to satisfy basic needs (Campos et al., 1994; Hollingsworth 2008; Huang et al., 2004; Lusk 1992; Raffaelli 1993; Trussell 1999). The former situation sees youths being forced to engage in violent behaviours in order to avoid victimization and secure guardianship from their peer group. Meanwhile, the latter situation forces some youths to engage in illegitimate income generation, while others are exploited in the legitimate market.

The youths in this research did not have a hard time joining a peer group that taught them to navigate the street. However, youths reported being forced to display violent behaviours during intergroup dynamics. Further, in order to be respected by the group and to secure guardianship during altercations with other groups, youths indicated being forced to display violent behaviours. A failure to display violent behaviours resulted in episodes of victimization by fellow group members. These experiences placed youths in an erratic coercive situation where noncompliant behaviour led to episodes of victimization and humiliation by peers.
Female respondents did not share much about learning to navigate the streets, other than recognizing that it is different for girls than for boys and discussing their experiences of victimization.

While living on the street, youths are faced with having to satisfy basic needs, a coercive situation. In order to survive, they engage in illegitimate or legitimate income generating activities. Their behaviour is a response to financial instability. This is a coercive situation. Colvin and colleagues (2002) suggest that being engaged in deviant activities to gain social support may lead to further coercion in the future.

In contrast, youths who engage in the legitimate market by selling trinkets, working with merchants and entertaining people on public transportation are not subject to direct coercion. However, by working in marginal employment, research suggests that they may still face exploitation and be underpaid (Ferguson 2004; Taracena 1998). Thus, they may also experience coercion at some point.

This research also finds that only males are engaged in illegitimate income generation, whereas females labour primarily in the legitimate market. The streets may be a male-dominated environment (Raffaelli 1999), leaving females blocked from income generating activities that provide more immediate rewards. This forces females to rely on the legitimate income market for sustenance.

Most youths in the sample reported being dependent on one or more substances. Some youths learned to use substances at home, while others were introduced to them on the street. According to respondents, substance use helped them forget problems. Thus, one could argue that substance use is a behaviour that is learned to cope with coercive
situations. However, substance use can also lead to coercion because it can lead to victimization or institutionalization.

**Crime and Coercion**

Consistent with past research, the youths in this sample reported being engaged in a number of crimes (Inciardi and Suratt 1998; Lusk 1992; Rizzini and Lusk 1995; Trussell 1999). Youths are engaged in crime that is sporadic and non-predatory, crime that is violent and predatory, and crime for survival. From the point of view of this research, the choice to engage or desist from crime is a response to the coercion youths have experienced throughout the life course and the social-psychological deficits they have developed.

*Opportunity Crime, Non-predatory Crime, Predatory Crime, and Desistance*

The majority of those who reported engaging in crime reported being involved in sporadic non-predatory episodes of theft and prostitution. From the DCT perspective, these youths have had erratic non-coercive experiences. In these experiences, non-compliance is hardly punished. The very little social support that is available is instrumental. Through the erratic punishment of non-compliance, individuals feel in control of situational outcomes and always looking to maximize pleasure. As a result, these individuals are likely to explore deviant pleasures and petty crimes until these acts no longer yield pleasure. My review of the youths’ behaviours suggests more coercive
experiences. This suggests that experiences where coercion is present can also lead to deviant exploration.

In contrast, a minority of respondents reported being predatory offenders engaged in a variety of crimes including violent robberies, break-ins, and snatchings. From the DCT perspective, these youths have experienced mainly erratic coercion. With no social support, inconsistent punishment for non-compliance, or unprovoked physical attacks, erratic coercion makes youths feel as though punishment is not linked to their behaviour. This fosters low-self control and the awareness of a control deficit. Thus, these youths engage in chronic offending to cope with the coercion they have endured. They feel in control for a short period of time. They use coercion as a way to get others to comply with their demands.

Finally, there are those youths who refrain from criminal activity. These respondents cited being afraid to get in trouble with the law if they committed a crime and felt better off pursuing conventional means. From the DCT perspective, these respondents are theorized to have a background of consistent coercion. With heavy monitoring of behaviour and harsh punishment for non-compliance, consistent coercion forces individuals to follow conventional means due to fear of reprimand. Thus, these youths desist from crime, but they may develop mental health issues later in life. Alternatively, despite backgrounds of coercion, some youths may show resiliency by not engaging in crime.

A second way of interpreting youths’ desistance from crime is to see youths’ background as one of consistent non-coercion. These relationships provide strong
material and expressive social support and punishment is not excessive, but congruent to youths’ behaviour. As a result, youths develop low anger, high self-control, internal locus of control, high self-efficacy, a strong moral social bond with authority, and no instances where a control balance deficit may be perceived. Youths with this background are less likely to engage in criminal activity. Although these youths may have experienced coercion that prompted them to leave home, they may have found steady support that has fostered an inclination toward pro-social behaviour. The data, however, suggests that these experiences are not present in this sample.

**Staying on the Streets**

Like crime, continuing to live on the street or returning to the street is also a response to the coercion experienced in other settings. To explain their continued life on the street, sample respondents pointed to the freedom provided by the street and their substance dependency.

From the DCT perspective, the freedom that youths attribute to the street can be explained in two different ways. For youths from an erratic non-coercive background, the streets are a place where they can engage in deviant activities and pleasures. If their exploration lands them in a situation where they experience pain, then they are likely to desist from those activities. It is unclear if any youths in this sample have these types of backgrounds. However, Colvin (2000:35) posits that if these youths fall under an erratic schedule of coercion, their exploits will lead them to predatory offending.
In contrast, those youths with a background of erratic coercion see the street as a place where they can exert control over others through criminal activity. While they feel a sense of autonomy, they continue to be under the control of coercive forces.

Respondents also cited their dependency on substances as the reason why they continue to return to, or remain on, the street. As argued earlier, substance use is not coercive, but serves as a way to cope with the coercion experienced. Thus, it is not drugs that keep youths on the street or bring them back, but the coercive experiences they are subject to that elicit substance use as a coping mechanism.

**Consequences of Homelessness**

Research suggests that being homeless places Latin American street youths in situations where they are likely to experience various forms of victimization (Hollingsworth 2008; Llorens 2005; Lusk 1989, 1992; Raffaelli 1999; Taracena and Macedo 2007). Further, through their drug use and criminal involvement, research suggests that street youths are likely to experience institutionalization (Carrioza and Poertner 1992; Lusk 1989; Rizzini and Lusk 1995). This research categorizes episodes of victimization and institutionalization as consequences of the homeless lifestyle. Both of these situations subject youths to coercive experiences.

Youths in this research cited victimization by peers as their main threat on the street. These episodes of victimization included theft, and physical and sexual victimization. Episodes of theft are common amongst males and females at times when youths are in a vulnerable state such as being high on drugs or asleep. On the other hand,
physical victimization was different for males and females. For males, physical victimization occurred over drugs, reputation conflicts, or bigger youths taking advantage of smaller ones. In contrast, physical victimization for females was a result of conflicts over romantic partners, be it cheating or their partner being sought after by other females. Further, females reported experiencing sexual abuse by male peers.

A second concern for sample respondents was victimization by the police. Police subjected respondents to physical and verbal episodes of victimization during their encounters on the street. Youths were unable to do much about their negative encounters with police officers, since they were under a threat of possible arrest.

Unable to predict when they might suffer theft, physical, and sexual abuse from fellow peers, youths were subject to erratic coercion. Police officers further subject youths to erratic coercion, since these encounters are unpredictable and the youths lack power in the interactions.

Institutionalization

Youths in this research experienced institutionalization because of their substance use and criminal behaviour. Some of the youths experienced institutionalization in drug addiction clinics or anexos. Respondents expected to be assisted with their addiction. Instead, they instead experienced being physically and verbally victimized by clients and staff at the clinic. Through the erratic physical abuse by staff and other clients, youths were subject to erratic coercion.
From the DCT perspective, individuals who have endured erratic coercion will elicit more coercion through their behaviour. In the case of youths engaged in predatory offending, they are at risk to become institutionalized in juvenile detention centres. According to Colvin (2000), incarceration is one of the most coercive processes a person can endure. The youths in the sample who shared their stories of incarceration cited various instances of victimization from other inmates. Their victimization experiences revolved around being “the new guys” in the facility and being subject to physical abuse and theft by more experienced inmates. From a theoretical standpoint, being subject to coercion in a facility is likely to exacerbate social-psychological deficits, prompting youths to return to predatory offending or violent behaviours once released.

A few respondents in the sample mentioned being wrongfully charged and detained by police officers. This led to their institutionalization. Being at the wrong place at the wrong time placed these youths in a coercive situation. After being forced to experience institutionalization, these youths may develop social-psychological deficits conducive to crime or substance use.

When discussing institutionalization, this research finds that females have been institutionalized but provided very little on their experiences. They simply named the institutions they had been in.

**Research Strengths and Limitations**

This research contributes to existing scholarship by exploring some issues overlooked in past research. First, this research presents empirical accounts of Mexican
street youths involved in predatory and non-predatory criminal activity. While the claim that street youths engage in crime is present in the literature, no study to date has reported empirical results on such behaviours. Second, this research is also the first to provide empirical findings on youths’ experiences in drug addiction clinics and juvenile detention centres. Third, this research adds to the scant literature on youths’ inability to leave the street. Finally, this research introduces theoretical account, applying differential coercion theory to better contextualize street youth’s experiences.

Like any research endeavour, this study is not perfect. Due to the nature of the data, several limitations have to be taken into account when interpreting the findings. First, although this research finds that a number of youths in the sample are chronic predatory offenders, the argument for a link between erratic coercion and predatory offending is only suggestive. According to DCT, Colvin’s (2000) core claim is that individuals who are subject to erratic coercion will be more likely to develop anger, low self-control, coercive behaviour modeling, control balance deficits, negative social bonds, low self-efficacy, external locus of control, and coercive ideation. Continued experiences of erratic coercion will strengthen these social-psychological deficits, translating into chronic predatory offending. This research lacks key information on the social-psychological deficits that mediate the link between coercion and predatory offending. The causal process of the theory, therefore, cannot be fully explored. This research also lacks information on the social-psychological deficits that mediate the relationship between erratic non-coercive relationships and non-predatory offending. The lack of information on mediating factors presents an issue when making broader claims on the
relationship between consistent coercion and desistance from crime, and consistent non-coercion and desistance from crime.

Furthermore, Colvin does not offer sufficient theoretical guidance to guide the placement of youths into coercive categories. For example, the scenario where a youth fails to bring enough money home at the end of the day and is abused only when his father is drunk is open to multiple interpretations. This may be interpreted as consistent coercion because the youth learns that not making enough money is likely to result in abuse if the father is drunk. However, his father is not always drunk. This means there is a possibility that the coercion is erratic. From a theoretical standpoint, this creates a difficulty when attempting to predict who may be more inclined toward chronic offending and who may not.

Finally, I worked with an institution in order to gain access to participants. This presented a number of challenges that influenced the research. Being a volunteer and having certain duties throughout the day at times imposed a limit on the research I could conduct in forms of street interviews. As a team, street outreach workers endeavour to visit a numerous places to make contact with as many potential clients as possible and then return to the facility to do paperwork. These work obligations often led my interviews to be rushed. This made participants aware of the conflict of interest presented by being a volunteer and a researcher. This awareness sometimes made youths uneasy about sharing certain information. In some cases, respondents would place their hand over the recorder, showing their apprehension that the researcher might tell someone at the organization about their criminal activities. Despite the researcher assuring all
information would be kept private, respondents were still hesitant to disclose certain types of information. Finally, the time constraints I faced meant there was often little chance to create a rapport with possible respondents. This also likely explains some of the short interviews. Some of these challenges have also been noted in previous research with Latin American street youths (see Aptekar 1994; Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Lusk 1989).

**Future Research**

Despite the limitations, the findings of this research suggest that the DCT perspective can be useful in contextualizing some of the experiences of Latin American street youths. By providing empirical evidence on criminal involvement and experiences of institutionalization, this research provides a foundation for new research to build upon.

As Baron (2009) suggests, the DCT perspective sees the street as a place that attracts those who have experienced coercion. Further, this research and previous research suggests that Mexican street youths experience many of the coercive experiences outlined by Colvin (2000). Thus, the link between coercion and crime for street youths warrants exploration through the DCT perspective (Baron 2009:240). Previous research has endeavoured to explore personal characteristics, pathways to the street, and substance use among Latin American street youths. Further research should move forward to explore the criminal involvement of Latin American street youths and their experiences of institutionalization. The findings need to be linked with previous research for a better understanding of the experiences of street youths. Further, research
should interpret the findings through the DCT perspective in order to give a more complete account of youths’ experiences. Future research should rely on quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry. With the former, the claims of the theory can be tested using respondents from different parts of the world. Through the latter method, rich accounts can be obtained to identify other theoretical processes not yet tapped through quantitative research. Further, qualitative research is able to provide ethnographic observations that can only be obtained by experiencing a degree of street culture. Finally, future research should endeavour to study the gender differences that exist amongst street youths. Aside from female-only studies, most research has been composed of exclusively male samples. Comparative samples would shed new insight on the experiences of youths across gender lines and how different experiences may contribute to crime.

**Policy Suggestions**

According to Colvin and his colleagues (2002), coercion leads to crime and social support prevents crime. The coercion paradigm should be taken into account when creating policies in Latin America to keep youths from settling on the street and to perhaps alleviate crime.

The findings of this research show that in most cases, Mexican street youths experience coercion that prompts them to leave home. In some cases the coercion they experience is a result of coercion experienced by their family as a result of macro-structural forces such as poverty. Research suggests that due to corruption in Mexico and other Latin American countries, social support services for impoverished families have
suffered greatly (Ferguson 2002). The heads of household in these families are often uneducated and they may not value education or recognize the importance of education (Abdelgalil et al., 2004; Hecht 1998; Hollingsworth 2008; Scanlon 1998). Forcing their children out of school to become a source of family income may be regarded as a simple decision. However, by encouraging their children to work on the street, parents introduce an environment where youths can associate with others and the setting can become a reprieve to difficult situations at home (see Luchinni 1998; Taracena 2008). Thus, policies should be geared toward financially helping impoverished families in order to keep them from taking their children out of school. Further, these programs should emphasize the importance of keeping children in school. While this may not alleviate all youths leaving home because of poverty, it could lessen family struggles to a large degree.

This research also finds that the main reason youths leave home for the street is some form of violent abuse. Previous research indicates that Latin American parents see punitive intervention as the main approach to control a child’s behaviour (Lopez et al. 2000; Orpinas 1999). As argued by Colvin (2000), parents are not able to monitor children around the clock, making episodes of physical reprimand erratic, aiding in the development of social-psychological deficits conducive to crime. Latin American countries should attempt to steer parents away from physical reprimand when dealing with their children. This may be difficult, since violent reprimand is part of the culture of Latin America (Lopez et al. 2000; Orpinas 1999). The findings of this research, however,
suggest a need for a new way to discipline children. These strategies may also lead to fewer incidences of youths leaving home.

The third policy suggestion is to provide consistent support to help people leave the street. Policy-makers must note that for youths, leaving the street means leaving substance use and in some cases peers that have replaced the family as the main socialization unit (Gomez et al. 2008; Zamorano 2011). Thus, policy should be geared toward funding organizations like FCAM, where street outreach teams venture to different areas and offer an alternative to the youths. However, just like FCAM, there are other governmental and non-governmental organizations that send outreach teams to the street. The problem here is that there is little communication between these organizations. This leads youths to venture from one organization to another with no record of their specific needs. Policy should bring these organizations together in order to be consistent in the ways they help street youths.

In order to deal with street youths’ dependency on substances, some form of voluntary institutionalization may be necessary. However, institutionalization should be geared toward providing instrumental and material support to youths. Therapy should be focused on assisting youths to become non-dependent on substances. This might include engaging them in sports or other pro-social activities. By fostering pro-social behaviours, youths may be less likely to return to substance use once their treatment is done. Moreover, treatment should also emphasize assisting youths to find jobs or to complete school to avoid returning to the street.
According to LaRose and Maddan (2009), a lack of training, poor salaries and corruption have contributed to a lack of professionalism by Mexican police officers. This research finds that one concern of victimization for street youths is physical and verbal abuse by police officers. This is consistent with the findings of Trussell (1999). Policymakers should allocate funds for police training to deal with youths and youth offenders. This training should be geared toward supportive practices. Perhaps police forces should coordinate with other organizations to assist street youths in need.

Finally, policy should be geared toward creating an environment of social support in detention centres. This research finds that youths who have been incarcerated suffered coercive victimization at the hands of fellow inmates. According to Colvin (2000), the coercive dynamics amongst prisoners in institutions are reflective of the way the prison is operated. Thus, centres of detention should foster pro-social behaviours amongst the youths. Youths should be taught to function in conventional settings such as school to help their chances at a better life. For youths who require intervention for psychological and other problems proper arrangements should be made.

**Conclusion**

The presence of street youths has become a common sight in the streets of Latin America. Street youths are a heterogeneous population with diverse pathways to the street. Nonetheless, most of them experience a degree of coercion that prompts them to leave home. The lifestyle that is fostered by street culture also subjects youths to coercion by forces beyond their control such as poverty and personal relationships with peers.
Youths deal with these forces often by engaging in crime or analogous behaviours such as drug use. These behaviours will often place them in other coercive situations beyond their control. If changes are not made at different levels to help families that are likely to produce street youths, youths will continue to go to the street and the problem will persist. Further, changes need to be made to assist those that are currently on the street and experiencing coercion:

Mira, tu los puedes quitar, te los puedes llevar a todos. Pero sabes que? Hay mas que ya vienen. A mas ninos les estan pegando y maltratando y ya vienen para aca. El problema sigue. (Male, 24)  

This research has provided some new empirical insights on the problem of street youths in Latin American and offered some avenues for future research and policy suggestions.

---

15 “You can remove them, you can take them away, but you know what? There are more on their way. There are kids who are getting beaten and mistreated and they are on their way. The problem keeps going.”
References


Appendix A

Letter of Information

“Mexican Street Youth, Differential Coercion, and Crime”

Christian Rojas Gaspar is conducting this research under the supervision of Dr. Stephen W. Baron, in the Department of Sociology at Queen’s University in Kingston Ontario, Canada in order to reach the degree of Master of Arts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand (1) the reasons why youth live on the street; (2) the activities they rely on to survive; (3) their criminal activities; (4) the consequences of living on the street; and (5) the reasons why they continue to live on the street.

You will be asked a series of questions in a 60 to 90 minute interview. You will be asked questions about your life, these questions will be about: (1) your personal history: the place where you were born, things about your family, school, and why you live on the street; (2) your experiences on the street: what you do to make money, any crimes you have committed, the people that you hang-out with and other people that you deal with, and; (3) any consequences of being on the streets: if anyone has ever done something bad to you, why you are still living on the streets, anything that you feel is good or bad about it and if you have ever been to a shelter. If you agree, I will tape record the interview for better accuracy.

Conflict of interest

Although I am a volunteer for Casa Alianza, if you decide to participate in the interview, I assume the role of an investigator. This means that anything you tell me stays between us, and is for the purposes of my school project only. No one associated with Casa Alianza will have access to it.

Any information regarding criminal activity or child abuse that you report to me will be kept confidential, and I will not be report it to law enforcement or any other agency.
Participation

Some questions may make you have to remember a sad or bad story about your past. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you can stop the interview at any point. Also, the information that has been recorded already, and written down already can be destroyed if you want to.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Your answers to my questions will be kept confidential. In order to ensure this confidentiality, I will use a nickname for your answers at all times.

The tape recorder I will use to record your answers alters how you sound, so no one can identify you. Your answers in the tape recorder and paper format will be typed into my computer, and then translated from Spanish to English. Once translated, your answers will be encrypted and password protected, so only I have access to them. The information in voice format will be deleted from the recorder, and the paper information will be shredded. The information from the computer will be saved into two memory sticks that will be kept in a fire proof safe under lock and key. The memory sticks will also be encrypted, and password protected to ensure your confidentiality.

I will only share your answers with my Canadian supervisor. I will keep your information for five years and then, I will destroy it.

The results of this study will be presented in academic media. For example, written form and spoken presentations. However, all identifying information linking participants to responses will be eliminated.
Concerns

Any questions, concerns or complaints about this study may be directed to:

Christian Rojas Gaspar, M.A. Candidate
Paseo de la Reforma 111, Colonia Guerrero
Delegación Cuauhtémoc.
Tel: (613) 214-7283
christian.rojas@queensu.ca

Dr. Elvia Taracena Ruiz
Profesora de Psicología
Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico
etaracena@yahoo.com
Tel: 5623-1170

Places available to offer assistance free of charge

Casa Alianza Mexico
Paseo de la Reforma 111, Colonia Guerrero
Delegación Cuauhtémoc.
(01) 800 110 1010

El Caracol, A.C. Centro de capacitación y educación recreativa
Heliodoro Valle No.337
Col. Lorenzo Boturini
15820, México, D.F.
Tel.: 764-2121

This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen's policies.
Appendix B

Consent Form

“Mexican Street Youth, Differential Coercion, and Crime”

Nickname: ________________________________________

1. The letter of information has been read and explained to me in Spanish and all questions and concerns have been answered to my satisfaction. I have also been provided with a list of places to attend for assistance free of charge.

2. I understand that I will be a participant in the project entitled “The Street Youths of Mexico.” My participation entails a 60 to 90 minute interview on my personal history, street experiences and, the consequences of being on the street. I understand that if I agree, this interview will be tape-recorded.

3. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time. I understand that if I withdraw, I may ask to have my data included in the report or destroyed. I understand that every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the data now and in the future. Only the researcher and his Canadian supervisor will have access to my responses.

4. I understand that the results of this study will be disseminated in various academic media. For example, written and spoken presentations. I understand that such presentations will be of general findings and will never breach individual confidentiality.

5. I am aware that if I have any questions, concerns, or complaints, I may contact:

Christian Rojas Gaspar, M.A. Candidate
Paseo de la Reforma 111, Colonia Guerrero
Delegación Cuauhtémoc.
Tel: (613) 214-7283
christian.rojas@queensu.ca

Dr. Elvia Taracena Ruiz
Profesora de Psicología
Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico
etaracena@yahoo.com
Tel: 5623-1170
I have been read the above statements and freely consent to participate in this research:

Participant’s mark

_______________________

I agree for a tape recorder to be present during the interview

Yes ____

No ____
Appendix C

Interview Questions

I would like to first get some background information about you; your family and then we can talk about your life on the street. Let me remind you once again, that you do not have to answer all the questions I ask. If there are any questions that make you feel uncomfortable you do not have to answer them, just let me know and we can move on.

Background

1. How old are you?

2. Are you originally from Mexico City or did you come from somewhere else?
   a. Originally, where did you come from?
      i. Did you come by yourself or with your family?
      ii. Is there a reason why you (or your family) came to Mexico City?

3. While you were growing up, who raised you?

4. What was or (is) life like with your family?

5. Do you have any brothers of sisters?
   a. If so, how many?
   b. Do they live on the streets?
      i. If so, do you all live together or do they live somewhere else?

6. Can you tell me about your school history?
   a. At any point in your life did you go to school? If so, how far along did you go?
   b. Are there any reasons that kept you from continuing going to school?

Now, I am going to ask you some questions about your life on the streets.
Street Life

7. How did you come to live on the streets?

8. *I am not familiar with street life,* could you tell me what a day in your life is like?
   a. What do you do when you first wake up?
   b. What happens throughout the day?
   c. When do you go to sleep?

9. Do you hangout with a group or by yourself?

10. While living on the streets, how do you make money for food, clothes and anything you need?

11. Did someone teach you how to do these things? (Who? And How?).

12. During the time you have been living on the streets, have you been involved in illegal activities? (e.g., selling drugs, stealing, assault).
   a. If so, is there a reason why?

13. Have any of these illegal activities you have mentioned to me, gotten you arrested or put in jail?

14. How long were you in jail for?
   a. Did anything happen to you in jail?

15. Have you ever been arrested or put in jail without doing anything?

16. During your time on the streets, have you used drugs?
   a. If so, what kind?
   b. How do you get them?
   c. Do you feel like drugs do something for you? If so, what?

17. Was there someone that introduced you to drugs and how to get them when you first got to the streets?
   a. Can you tell me who?
b. Does everyone in the group you hang out with use drugs as well?

18. During the time you have lived on the streets. Has anyone ever tried to or done this to you:

   a. Hit you randomly?
   b. Stolen your stuff?
   c. Sexually abuse you?

   i. Could you tell me about it?

19. If, so, who has done this? (Street peers outside of your group; street peers in your group; police officers; random people).

Permanence

*I want to take a few minutes to talk about some of the people you have come in contact with during your time on the streets.*

20. Could you tell me what your relationship or encounters are like with these people (are these people that you can trust? When you come in contact with them, how do they treat you, are they good to you, are they mean? Do they make you do things that you may not want to do?):

   a. Your street peer group
   b. Street peers in other groups
   c. Police officers

21. Is there a reason why you are currently still living on the street?

22. Are there things you like about living on the streets?

23. Are there things you do not like about living on the streets?

24. Is there something else you would like to tell me?
Appendix D

General Research Ethics Board Approval

May 28, 2012

Mr. Christian Rojas Gaspar
Master’s Student
Department of Sociology
Queen's University
Kingston, ON K7L 3N6

GREB Ref #: GSOC-095-12
Title: 'GSOC-095-12 Differential Coercion and Homelessness: A Criminological Approach to Homeless Street Youth in Mexico'

Dear Mr. Rojas Gaspar:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a Full Board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GSOC-095-12 Differential Coercion and Homelessness: A Criminological Approach to Homeless Street Youth in Mexico" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Adverse Event 173
Report). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To make an amendment, access the application at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Amendment to Approved Study Form. These changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services (irvingg@queensu.ca) for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, PhD Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

cc: Dr. Stephen Baron, Faculty Supervisor
    Dr. Rob Beamish, Chair, Unit REB
    Anne Henderson, Dept. Admin.