

# “Malik and Them”: Rethinking the Effects of Structural Violence in the South Ward of Newark, NJ

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## Abstract

Historically, the South Ward of Newark, NJ has been marked by violence, crime, and poverty. Structural violence is used to cause indirect forms of violence and inflict non-physical forms of pain onto people of minority backgrounds. While there is much research that has been done regarding the gender inequalities that women and young girls face, we know much less about the way men are affected by hegemonic forms of masculinity. This research aims to understand how hegemonic masculinity is used as a tool of structural violence in order to debilitate the bodies of black and brown men in urban neighborhoods.

## Research Questions

- How is masculinity performed by the men in the South Ward of Newark, NJ
- Is this a result of the structural violence present in the neighborhood?
- If so, how is structural violence manifesting itself in an ethnographically visibly and invisibly violent way?

## Methodologies

- This research project was completed using the following methodologies:
  - Ethnographic Interviews – These were semi-structured, open ended interview about my informants childhood years and adult lives
  - Mapping – To gain an understanding of the space the South Ward occupies, I mapped the residencies of my informants, the location of the interviews, and the location of vital resources available to them.
- The interviews consisted of 4 male informants and 1 female informant.
- The informants ranged in ages from 23-55 years old.

## Findings & Analysis:

So what does the Structural Violence in the South Ward look like? It looks like “Malik and them” and it manifested in different ways according to gender. In my findings, I examine the effects of structural violence in the case of men and then women.

Men:

- Ideal form of masculinity directly tied to structural violence.
  - Men do not show vulnerability, identify and perform as heterosexual men, and are leaders in the family.
- Informants accept hegemonic masculinity as something that “just is”.
- The education system limits the agency of young men and women
- Men and young men in the neighborhood are socially pressured to participate in the local drug trade.
- The male informants’ perception of masculinity proves toxic to their health and limits them in seeking healthcare.

Women:

- Women do not perform the hegemonic masculinity but they are affected by it.
- Without acknowledging the effect the patriarchy has on men, women will continue to be oppressed.

Mapping:

- Socially constructed and structurally violent factors have contributed to using physical space to also help debilitate and break down black and brown bodies.

Map of the South Ward



Map Legend:

- :west ward resources
- :residencies of my informants
- :location of all interviews

## Theoretical Perspectives

- Theory of Limited Good – In his piece “Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good”, George Foster explains that within traditional societies there is a limited amount of “good” to go around (Foster 1965). Therefore, when someone or some group of people profit, there is another person or other group of people losing.
  - For the informants, participation in drug dealing and other illegal activities seems promising as it a way for primarily the men to be able to provide for their families.
- Strain Theory – Robert K. Merton theorized that crimes are committed as a result of people being pressured to achieve “socially acceptable” goals.
  - For the informants, a common socially acceptable goal is achieving the “American Dream”. As people find themselves not able to achieve the American Dream with the means that they have provided to them, they will turn towards behavior that is considered deviant my mainstream culture.
- Considering the theory of limited good and strain theory, I am focusing on the role that structural violence has played in creating a detrimental form of hegemonic masculinity that limits men of color in urban neighborhoods, specifically, the South Ward of Newark, NJ.

## Literature Review

- John Galtung describes structural violence as, “a structure at work, churning out harm, causing basic human needs deficits, as in un-intended, indirect.” (Galtung, 35)
- Structural violence reduces a collective (usually minority) group’s ability to reach their full potential and aids in the cyclical nature of poverty and oppression.
- The role of structural violence is to create barriers for people of color. Among many issues, it creates economic instability and economic inequality.
- The presence of this kind of violence in urban communities has contributed to “poverty, hunger, subordination, and social exclusion” (Yves, 195).

## Conclusion

- “Malik and them” are representative of the effects of a system that seeks to slowly debilitate the bodies of black and brown people.
  - They do not have a colloquial term for structural violence because they do not need it.
  - They understand structural violence because they live it and do not read about it in a textbook.
- “Malik and them” are the ethnographically visible effects of structural violence.
- The ethnographically invisible effects are the wounds that we cannot see them physically bearing.
  - And the ultimate question, for us, is whether we are ever able to see them.

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