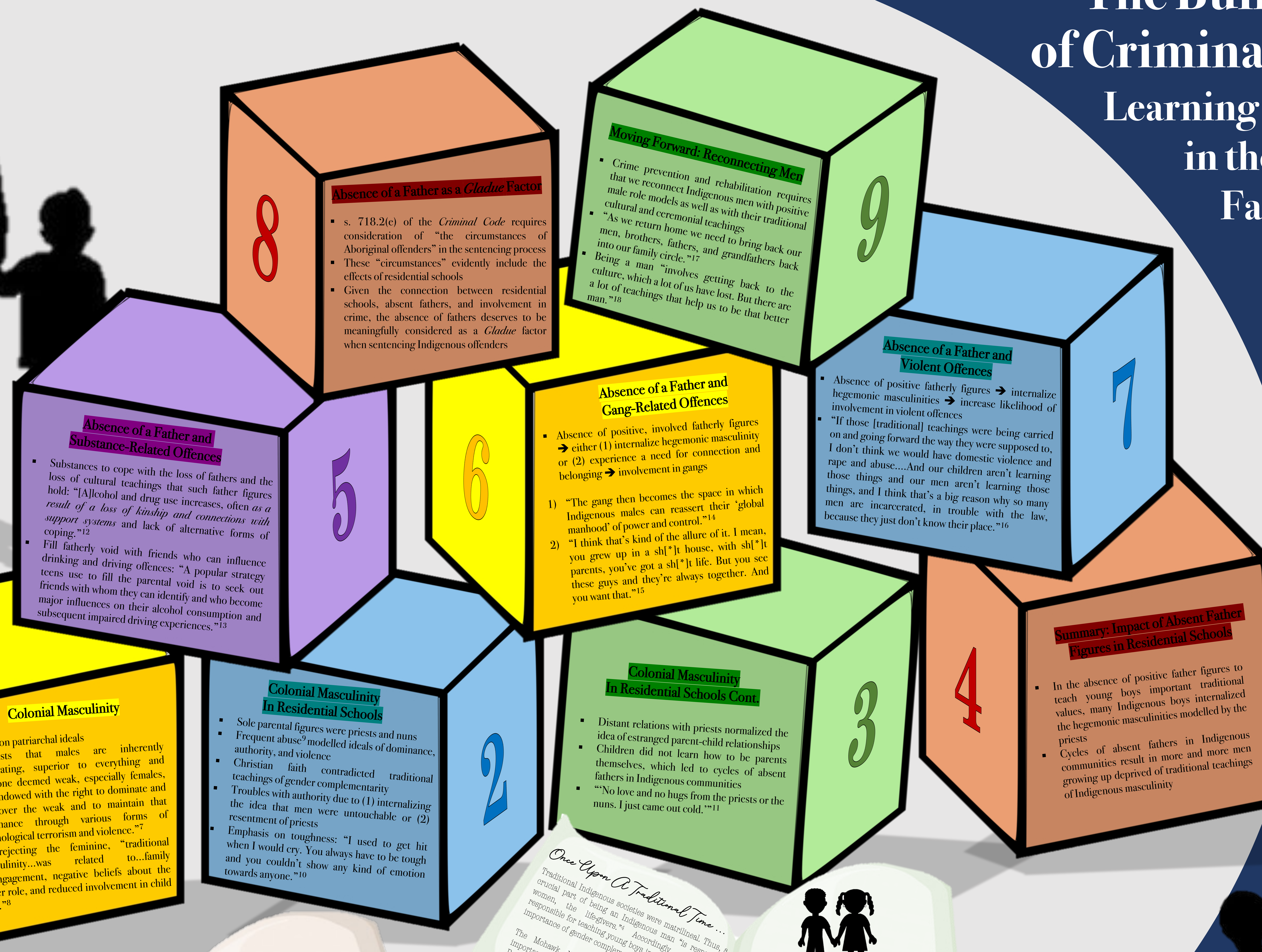


The Building Blocks of Criminal Involvement: Learning About Masculinity in the Absence of a Father Figure



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It is well known that children learn through observing the role models in their lives. This research thus explores how the separation of Indigenous boys from their traditional father figures, a result of the residential school system, has impacted Indigenous men's understandings of masculinity and therefore their involvement in the criminal justice system.



Once Upon A Traditional Time...

Indigenous men were highly involved in child rearing. As role models of masculinity, Indigenous men showed young boys that men were to be protectors and providers: "[D]aily activities included finding and fetching water, collecting firewood, finding and hunting game, maintaining crops, teaching, and protecting their wives and extended family."¹

Men were also involved in puberty ceremonies to teach young boys about their responsibilities. In the Diné culture, "the boy is isolated in the tashell (sweat lodge) with other male relatives and friends to learn songs, prayers, and to get instruction on his role and responsibilities as a young man, father, and eventually grand-father."²



Indigenous men also used the buffalo hunt as an opportunity to teach the youth the importance of collaboration with other men: "You're not only teaching the kids how to hunt; you're teaching them about their culture too." Teaching land-based men's skills was thus seen as an opportunity to build Indigenous youth identities in healthy ways that foster responsibility and relationships.³



Another defining feature of traditional Indigenous masculinities was the emphasis on gentleness. In raising children, "[t]raditional discipline is based on the principles of gentleness," and men often used stories as a means of teaching and disciplining youth.⁶