Taking the 'Street' Mainstream: The Power of Krump Dancing to Transform Youth Violence

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how 'street' and 'decent' practices of inner-city youth intertwine to alter the social structure of their communities. Using the case of 'krump' dancing, I examine how this practice transforms aggression and violence to improve the life chances for at-risk youth. Drawing upon data from semi-structured interviews, participant observation and qualitative documentary analysis of krump dancing videos and social media in Los Angeles, CA and Melbourne, VIC, Australia, I analyse how leadership in krump dancing groups effect their communities. I find that the leadership styles of big homies, or figureheads of these groups, are influenced greatly by their upbringing, which facilitates the building of trust essential for responding to challenges of authority. However, structural barriers arise regarding dancers that are 'raw' or untamed versus those dancers who are exposed to mainstream audiences. Issues of legitimacy arise, as tensions cultivate around those whose embodied experiences are captured and highlighted. These two competing concerns of authority and legitimacy are considered in evaluating the efficacy of krump dancing to resolve conflict, foster resiliency and increase cathartic capacity for collective healing.

KEYWORDS

Krump dancing; resiliency; gangs; code of the street

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INTRODUCTION

This article examines the role of krump dancing in fostering resiliency among at-risk gang youth.[1] As a youth-centred and created intervention, the case of krump dancing expands what is known about breaking cycles of violence, which originate in the historical and social conditions of systemic racism and class-based oppressions. Drawing from the work of Hart et al., (2016), resiliency in this article is defined as "overcoming adversity, whilst also potentially subtly changing, or even dramatically transforming, (aspects of) that adversity" (Hart et al., 2016, p. 6). For the youth in this study, adversity is manifested as the social disadvantage of living in inner-city communities plagued by unemployment, crime, underfunded schools, dilapidated housing, and poor health outcomes. This is expressed in the development of a social order organized around aggression and violence (see Anderson, 1999).

Furthermore, this article considers the role of culture in explaining the resiliency capacity of krump dancing for at-risk gang youth. Examining the resiliency practices for 1500 at-risk youth from around the globe, Unger (2008) defines resiliency as a "process of the child's navigation towards, and the capacity of individuals to negotiate for, health resources on their own Terms" (Unger, 2008, p. 225). A central tenet of this definition is that resources acquired to promote well-being and reduce social disadvantage must arrive in "culturally meaningful ways" (Unger, 2008, p. 225). To be culturally meaningful, a resource must be valued at the local level (see Ogbu, 1991).

Youth violence is a major concern and threat to the physical, emotional and psychological well-being of young people. Youth violence also has significant impacts on communities, as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019) estimates Americans spend more than $21 billion dollars annually on costs related to this social issue. Homicide is the third leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 10-24 in the U.S., with approximately 14 young people dying daily (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019).

In inner city communities, youth violence is often expressed through neighbourhood street gangs (Decker, 1996; Papachristos, Hureau and Braga, 2013; Moore, 1978). Increasing destabilization of the economy has heavily impacted working-class and poor communities, stripping them of the resources and opportunities necessary to meet the needs of day to day living. Underfunded and overcrowded schools, high-priced yet dilapidated living conditions, and wages that fall well below the cost of living contribute to the allure of gang membership (Hagedorn, 1988; Wilson, 1987; Rosenfeld, Bray and Egley, 1999; Thrasher, 1927). The entrenchment of substandard living conditions and ongoing neglect by the state has created a legacy of gang membership that is inheritable by each new generation. The disruption of inner-city residents is amplified by the effects of intergenerational incarceration that negatively impacts Black communities (Bronson and Carson, 2019; NAACP, n.d.).

These conditions give rise to what Elijah Anderson (1999, p. 9) calls a "code of the street". The code is an unwritten practice that arises where there is a breakdown in law and order. Left without the protection of the state, inner city residents resort to

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[1] The phrase, 'at-risk youth' is used throughout this article to refer to young people who are at-risk of becoming involved in gangs, having recently left the gang, or those who are believed to be in gangs. What is 'at-risk' for these youth is harm through their involvement in criminal activities, such as joining a gang or becoming targets of street-based violence and crime.

'street justice' (Anderson, 1999, p. 10), or the "law of the jungle" to ensure their safety and security. At the heart of the code is violence or the threat of violence. As such, "many inner-city youths, learn from a young age that 'you have to fight for your place in the world'" (Anderson, 1994, p. 86). What, if instead of fighting, inner city youth could dance to find their place in the world? This article examines how krump dancing provides a pathway for inner city youth to navigate their terrain moving beyond the negative effects of violence.

NAVIGATING THE CODE

Anderson (1999) finds there are two family forms that live in the inner city. The first type include 'decent' families who are most closely aligned with mainstream societal values and embrace values such as education, working a steady job and honesty. In contrast, are the 'street' (Anderson, 1999) families. A vast majority of street families have households headed by women who are from poor socio-economic backgrounds. Plagued by the feminization of poverty, street families struggle to find the resources to meet their physical, psychological and emotional needs. The values that are passed on to children raised in these families are best summed up by the expression, "might makes right" (Anderson, 1999, p. 70). Physicality and toughness are highly regarded attributes. They are taught, tested and reinforced within and outside of the home. However, whether one is from a decent or street family, the code constrains all public behaviour for inner city residents. This is due to the close interaction of decent and street families in navigating the same neighbourhood conditions. As a key to survival, Anderson (1994, pp. 91-92) identifies the concept of respect as essential to well-being as described below:

> Shows of deference by others can be highly soothing, [and] contribut[e] to a sense of security, comfort, self-confidence, and self-respect. Transgressions by others which go unanswered diminish these feelings and are believed to encourage further transgressions.

Respect is earned by families through shows of force, aggression and the willingness to deploy violence, if pushed too far. Signs of being 'soft' or showing weakness in neighbourhoods controlled by the code can lead to a person becoming a target for victimization. As a result, what develops is that aggression and violence organise inner city interactions particularly among at-risk youth.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE CODE

Sometimes, at-risk youth do break from violent patterns of interaction. In many urban communities, intervention programmes are designed to encourage young people to participate in nonviolent alternatives. Afterschool programmes, churches, sports teams and mentorship organisations, such as the Boys and Girls Club of America, provide mainstream values and opportunities to at-risk youth who would otherwise be without these resources. Similar social interventions are promoted by the National Gang Center [NGC] in their Comprehensive Gang Prevention, Intervention and Suppression Model (n.d.).

Moreover, not all youth who join gangs stay in gangs. While there has been little research about the mechanisms involved in gang desistence, the degree to which one severs ties with gang members is of major importance (Pryooz and Decker, 2011; Pryooz, Decker. and Webb, 2014). Analysing how young people leave the gang, Pryooz and Decker concluded that a "cessation of gang membership involves both cognitive or identity shifts *and* restructured routine activities" (2011, p. 423). In other words, young people need to de-identify with gang membership on a

mental, emotional and physical level to break away from the patterns associated with gang activities and violence. Where young people failed to de-identify, they "were at least twice as likely to be victimized violently or to be arrested for serious offenses" (Pryooz and Decker, 2011, p. 422).

EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULES

The above-mentioned solutions are predicated upon an appreciation and integration of mainstream social values. However, these values are founded upon an historical framework that aligns with those in power. Competing claims, or ways of being advanced by the disenfranchised are often absent in the defining of what is 'good' or 'moral.' For some youth, the proposed solutions are complicit in continuing the historical disruptions of families, cultures and communities.

Isolation from one's kin and community can generate feelings of anomie, even where it seems unhealthy or toxic to the outsider (Jones 1995). The relationship of where you were raised, or your 'hood' (street slang for neighbourhood) is a deep one that spurs notions of loyalty and allegiance (see Forman 2000). As a UCLA student activist, who was born and raised in South Central, LA, Desiree Martinez (2017) reflects this reality when she writes:

> When a teacher—one of the most important role models an inner-city student has—describes a community as *unworthy*, that teacher denounces and further oppresses a student. South Central is home to my family, my friends, our struggles, our endeavors, and our successes.

Attacks on where you come from are interpreted and felt as attacks on the personality. Many young people were born into a legacy of the streets. However, behind these labels are the people that have raised, nurtured and shaped these youth with the intent of preparing them to take on challenges that have little in common with the middle-classes. Emerging as a counterclaim is the sentiment that, "Success for me isn't about making it out, it's about making it better" (Watkins, 2019; see also Martinez, 2017). Moreover, young people still moving through trauma and the post-traumatic stress associated with family, neighbourhood and societal violence may struggle to meet schedules, respond to authority figures and 'play by the rules,' all of which are required of most mainstreamed forms of social interaction. For youth strongly aligned or tied to a 'street' identification, breaking away from their community and people is not a viable solution. Rather, alternatives for these youth should incorporate practices that transform the elements of respect – violence and aggression – while retaining its protective qualities. Krump dancing offers this type of solution. In examining the case of krump dancing, we discover how rage born out of trauma and the streets is channelled into a dance, where it aids in breaking the cycle of youth violence.

METHODS

This article is part of a larger study which began in 2010. I approached this study centring on 'methodological empathy' (McGuire, 1982) or understanding a sociological phenomenon from the position of those on the inside as a way to "understand the substance, coherence, and maintenance of views that may seem implausible to outsiders" (Singleton and Straits, 2005, p. 308). In doing so, I developed a rich understanding of the expressions, creations, struggles and joys that were produced and experienced by the dancers. To conduct this study, I drew from a variety of qualitative methods including ethnography, participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

I obtained my participants using snowball sampling. The first krump dancer I met was an American travelling through Australia in 2009. I used this contact to connect with other krump dancers in Los Angeles. In 2011, I returned to Australia to follow the chain of krump dancing from Los Angeles to Australia. The primary site for this study was in the U.S., in Los Angeles, California. My comparative secondary site was in Australia, in Melbourne, Victoria. These sites were selected as the first cities to develop a krump scene. By befriending and earning the trust of gatekeepers in the krump community, I gained access to the dance groups and families in the two sites. From February 2010 through September 2011, I was intensely involved in participating in krump dancing activities on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Since that time, I have maintained contact for almost a decade with a number of key informants through social media, phone calls and occasional visits.

My coding system and themes emerged out of the data I collected from the field. Using Grounded Theory, an inductive research method pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (1967), I entered the field with minimal theoretical direction. I combed through the fieldnotes, visual data and interviews systematically to focus my themes into concepts to explain the transformational aspect of krump dancing at individual and institutional level.

KRUMP DANCING

Krump dancing is an urban street dance that started in 2000. It was created by a group of young people in South Central, Los Angeles, California as an alternative to violent street gang participation. Embedded in a community rife with gang culture, these at-risk young people modelled the organisational structure of krump after the street gang. Drawing from their intimate knowledge of the street gang, these youth organised themselves into krump 'crews' and 'fams' similar to street gang sets.[2] Krump dancers align themselves to their leaders known as their 'big' or 'big homie' and fall underneath them, as a 'lil' or 'lil homie'.[3] Krump dancers are assigned ranks, which may be battled for in the dance. They adopt colours, 'drop' signs, and claim and 'rep' different turfs or territories.[4]

Krump crews and fams are so similar to street gangs in their organisation, participants and neighbourhoods that they could easily become a gang. However, what keeps krump dancing from turning into a street gang is its ideological framework. As an evangelical praise dance with roots in the African American community, krump is a backronym which stands for: Kingdom Radically Uplifted Mighty Praise. While not all krump dancers krump for God, there is a respect that reigns supreme on the moral constraints of behaviour in the scene. This moral restraint is strengthened by the pre-existing religiosity and spirituality that resides in the local community.

By channelling their feelings and expressions into a dance, krump dancers transform their aggression and violent experiences into a non-destructive form. For those who do not find absolution, relief or salvation from God in their krump, the communion and fellowship derived from the scene serve as a proxy. In krump, the

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[2] 'Crews' is a slang term for a small group of dancers that may be comprised of dancers from different fams. 'Fams' is a slang term for family. While krump dancers may not be blood related, they form small groups that take on the characteristics of a family. A 'homie' is treated as a close friend or family member. They are often from the same neighbourhood or community. Crews and fams will be used interchangeably throughout this article.
[3] 'Lil' is a slang term for little.
[4] 'Drop' is a slang term for display; 'rep' is a slang term for represent; and 'turf" is a slang term for neighbourhood or territory.

dancer re-enacts their trauma, stressors and rage in the centre of a circle while surrounded by a supportive community. In doing so, the dancer releases or purges these feelings. The collective action of witnessing by the audience provides a social healing on an individual and group level. Moving beyond their fams, big homies use their power to tap into mainstream social institutions to renegotiate the boundaries of 'street' and 'decent'.

DANCE, ART AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Writing on the mind and body, Fanon (1963) focuses on the role of violence in the decolonization process. In the passage below, Fanon describes how the collective rituals of dance channel the "aggressiveness and impulsive violence" of the colonial subject (Fanon, 1963, p. 19). The source of this rage is derived from living in a state of systemic oppression. Through dance, the marginalised find an outlet for their rage, while toiling in their oppressive conditions as Fanon (1963, pp. 19-20) articulates:

> The dance circle is a permissive circle. It protects and empowers. At a fixed time and a fixed date men and women assemble in a given place, and under the solemn gaze of the tribe, launch themselves into a seemingly disarticulated, but in fact extremely ritualized, pantomime where the exorcism, liberation, and expression of a community are grandiosely and spontaneously played out through shaking of the head, and back and forward thrusts of the body. […] Everything is permitted, for in fact the sole purpose of the gathering is to let the supercharged libido and the stifled aggressiveness spew out volcanically. Symbolic killings, figurative cavalcades, and imagined multiple murders, everything has to come out.

While Fanon is writing about life under colonial rule, contemporary conditions rooted in the historical conditions of colonialization and slavery reproduce themselves in a racialised and class-based society. Systemic oppression manifests itself in the social structures that reproduce the inequality found among the urban underclass in the US and around the world.

As such, aggression and violence are seen as something to be seized. They are akin to an energy source to be harnessed and set in motion for the purpose of liberation. It is through violence that one can remove the colonizer within, as Fanon (1963, p. 51) sums up:

> At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them and restores their self-confidence.

For krump dancers, what resides within is the accumulation of violence and aggression that is passed down intergenerationally in the form of internalised oppression (David, 2014; Tappan, 2006) and historical trauma (Mohatt, et al. 2014; Denham, 2008; Sotero 2006). What is key here is that aggression and violence are social things. They are created out of collective conditions, and it is through collective conditions that they become dispersed. Thus, it is in the collective consciousness where a collective catharsis or healing occurs. This is driven by the collective effervescence invoked in dance (see Durkheim, 1995).

The transformation of aggression and violence that happens in krump extends beyond the individual dancer and carries through to the wider community. By witnessing the embodied story of a krump dancer, onlookers share in the "tragic pleasure" of viewing scenes of pity and fear in purging themselves of negative

feelings (Aristotle and Longinus, 1930, p. 25). Fear is invoked in the audience when they imagine themselves in the 'imitation' or story. Pity on the other hand, is an imitation that is relatable, but less likely a condition that the onlooker will find themselves in. According to Aristole (1930), a story is cathartic when the main character is a moral and good person who is plagued by some mishap. Such calamities include a kind of social injustice, "undeserved misfortune" or mistaken identity (Aristotle and Longinus, 1930, p. 23). Similarly, in krump, dancers come to the circle to share stories of grief, suffering and pain that reflect the struggles inherent in these young people's lives.

The collective cathartic aspects of dance and drama demonstrate the transformative role of art in society. The arts have both the power to change and reproduce a social order. Within art, the moral order of a community can be located through the concepts of 'aesthetic' and 'convention' (Becker, 1974). Writing about the collective nature of art, Becker (1974, p. 774) states:

> The conventional way of doing things in any art utilizes an existing cooperative network, an organized art world which rewards those who manipulate the existing conventions appropriately in light of the associated sacred aesthetic.

Here, the existing conventions are those social rules and structures that define the parameters for the creative pursuit of the arts. Conventions provide a way of creating, presenting, teaching, evaluating and consuming art.

However, it is the 'sacred aesthetic' that prevails over all actions. The collectivity's belief in that which is moral or good is expressed through aesthetic. As such, that which is pleasing to the community is so because it conforms to the normative order; it is conventional. If a work of art is disturbing, shocking or offensive, it is due to the challenge that it poses to the convention. The unconventional threatens to reshape, rearrange or reorganize the existing order. As Becker writes, "[a]n attack on sacred aesthetic beliefs as embodied in particular conventions is…an attack on an existing arrangement of ranked statuses, a stratification system" (1974, p. 774). However, it is possible for the unconventional or artistic innovations to be successful. When this occurs, a new convention is established.

Channelling the rage born of trauma and social disadvantage into krump, at-risk youth transform street-based routines of violence and aggression into positive social outcomes. By highlighting the role of big homies, I show how their histories and cultural capital aid in this process. Through community centres, public schools, dance studios and art galleries, big homies institutionalise the street-based elements of krump, thereby redefining that which is 'decent', and altering the life chances of young people in their communities.

THE CATHARSIS OF KRUMP DANCING

Krump dancing gained popularity outside of its proximate community through the documentary *Rize* (2005). From its inception, the youth who created krump dancing understood how to use bodily movement to direct emotion in narrating their saga in an embodied form. Krump is a dance for the expression of pain, rage and trauma: In an arm swing you throw someone. A punch to direct your aggression. Facial contortions conjure up the emotional feelings that live in the heart. Beyond storytelling, the purpose of these moves is to connect with one's emotions through feeling. To express that which words cannot.

In krump dancing, you must connect to the feelings within your body moving in rhythm and sync with the music. The drop of the beat guides you rhythmically keeping each pulse of your heartbeat in time with the tempo. The inhalation and exhalation of breath fuels you through the dance. Your being is propelled forward as you unearth your story, trauma and emotions. This is a journey of going deep within the self to extract that which is buried, suppressed or lost. Inside krump is the freedom to seek redress and redemption from the pain of the world.

In krump dancing, you reconnect to your injury. This rhythmic practice exists to create and recreate a deeper understanding of your story. To feel the 'liveness' of your being. In the stirring and moving of the body, you begin to channel a force within. The momentum generates an energetic entity the source of which is the wound inflicted by trauma. As this energy builds within the self, it takes on a power that the dancer channels and controls through their movements. The re-enactment or return to pain is done with the purpose of healing. Krump dancing is a circle dance, at the centre of which the purging of aggression and negativity are possible. This catharsis happens in the safety of like-minded others from the community.

In observation, the audience opens itself up to stand with the dancer by bearing witness to his or her saga. The openness or vulnerability of the dancer allows for their wound to move out of the deep reaches of the soul and psyche, through the body, and into the body of the community. For it is in the collective conscious where this healing occurs. The catharsis of the dancer transpires not by his own accord but in the witnessing and 'hyping up' by the community. Here, the dancer is restored to a balanced state. In their presence with the dancer, the community frees him or her of the wound by acknowledging the energetic entity and then diffuses its power to harm, as each absorbs it. The wound is released, and a healing occurs.

LEADING THE ROUGH AND READY

Big homies operate as father figures at times providing money, food, shelter and most importantly, moral guidance. Being a big homie means that one must be able and willing to lead the rough and ready. Rough, because the ranks of these crews and fams are immersed in a street-based sense of morality. Always at the ready, these street youth are prepared to "light this bitch up" or "kill a muthafuka," if necessary. However, this display of aggression or violence is a necessity to ensure one's safety and security where the code of the street organises the community (Anderson 1999).

The stamina required to lead these young people comes from a place of passion. A deep knowing or understanding that comes from one's own story. Being a big homie is a time intensive commitment with no guarantees that the efforts put forth will result in making a difference. Under these conditions, it is easy to understand the frustrations felt by a big homie when they learn that their lil' has fallen into trouble.

On more than one occasion, I listened to big homies tell me how they were fed up with the trouble from these 'knuckleheads.' The ongoing question they asked themselves and me is why continue to pour energy into their crews and fams, when they could be spending time on themselves or be with their blood family. Why indeed, I would often wonder. But never did I see any of them quit. In almost ten years of knowing each of the big homies in my study, none of them ever quit. I have observed them take time out or scale down their involvement. Never have they been able to leave. They have stood by their lil' homies, their community and the krump movement. This is because a big homie's loyalty to their community is entangled

with their loyalty to themselves. Their story is reflected and interwoven in those around them. Giving up on krump would be akin to giving up on themselves.

TRUST AND AUTHORITY

Trust is not easily earned in settings controlled by the code. Sayings such as, "I ain't no bitch" or "punk ass nigga" convey a sense of fear and dread at becoming someone's fool or being taken advantage of. Before the rough risk vulnerability, they will need to know that the ground they stand on is secure. For a mistake could lead to such consequences as being 'dissed' (a loss of respect) at one end of the spectrum, to becoming a target of aggression at the other, neither of which is wise in an environment ruled by the code.

In these settings, trust is established through a system of loyalty. "Who you rep'?" is always a question being asked. Inside this question is an interrogation of "What block are you from?"; "Who is your kin?"; and "Who do you know?" From these questions, determinations are made as to one's trustworthiness. Thus, trust is gleaned through a system of identification. Here, identification is attained through place and person.

For a big homie, their background provides the basis upon which they claim the 'street cred'5 necessary to connect to the rough. It provides common ground through language and experience. This identification and familiarity helps to solidify the trust of their rank and file members in building an alliance.

EARNING YOUR STRIPES

Once trust is earned, it must be maintained. One must continually demonstrate that the trust bestowed upon them is deserved and rightfully given. A failure to do so will result in the trust being withdrawn, and the person cutoff or "frozen out" of the group. Maintaining confidences, showing up, "paying dues," "having one's back" and staying within the fam' are all expectations, of which violations reap consequences. While it is possible to recover from a break in trust, the process can be lengthy and onerous with no assurances of redemption.

Respectability in a krump fam' translates to rank. The type of solider you are and how you have 'earned your stripes' are key to the hierarchical structure of a krump fam. With its religious roots, it is not uncommon to find krump dancers who identify as "a solider for God." Continuously being checked by lower ranking members or other crews, big homies must defend their position and fams'.

However, it is through resource allocation where big homies prove themselves most worthy of their titles and rise above the challenges both internal and external to the crew. The strongest big homies understand this because, as one big homie explained, "You're gonna' draw the hatin' when you're good." The most prized resource in the krump game is "blowin' up" or fame and fortune. Getting gigs; shooting videos; likes and hits on social media; making movies; being on television dance competitions; sponsored trips all around the world; and most importantly getting paid, are resources which come through the big homie and solidify his or her leadership.

THE CONUNDRUM OF KEEPIN' IT REAL

However, the conventions of art present a challenge for big homies. This manifests in the acquisition of the resources mentioned in the previous section, as they are

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5 'Cred' is a slang term for credibility.

rooted in the mainstream social order. As such, big homies must negotiate issues of authenticity and legitimacy in their leadership.

This is where a big homie's ability to code switch or negotiate with the mainstream social order is critical. However, big homies must always be careful never to stray too far from their roots. For, it is on their street cred that trust is built. This produces the conundrum of 'keepin' it real.' Stray too far from the street and you may lose your edge. You will be called out for being 'too soft' or 'not being in it for the community.' Make it a 'one-man show' and you will find yourself subjected to massive criticism and 'hatin'. Knowing how to balance these competing interests in securing fame and fortune is an ongoing struggle.

'*WILD'N'OUT*' VERSUS WILD

As a street-based art form, krump dancing draws its inspiration from the 'rawness' of its dancers. Rawness is that emotional being which lives deep inside the dancer. Raw talent is derived from the raw emotion. Once the emotion is harnessed then it can be channelled into the dance

Sometimes in krump, a dancer will unleash their raw emotions as they 'spazz out' or are 'wild'n'out.' This often happens in krump battles where a dancer seeks to annihilate their opponent or stir crowd support. However, what appears to be a loss of control is actually done with intentionally eliciting a response. It is contained within the conventions of krump dancing.

By contrast, being 'wild' is problematic for the community. In most street-based groups, there are always entities that are too *locura* (Vigil 1988) or unconventional for any organised activity. While a person may be your homie, if he's too wild, then he can bring the whole group down. Interestingly though, the wildest ones are often those with the most talent. But it is still raw, unrestrained talent or emotion, so raw that it frightens others. This creates a collective problem for the big homie.

Additionally, a crew may be regarded as "too street", or statements like, "that dude's too wild" will force a big homie to make some tough decisions when it comes to allocating resources in the crew. While a big homie may have much love for his wild homie, he may have to quarantine the wild homie to situations where there is not much social or economic capital to lose. In the most extreme situations, a big homie may choose to "cut him loose." However, in most interactions, big homies provide the stability and guidance to tame down or channel the wildness in their lil' homies.

TRANSFORMING COMMUNITY THROUGH THE ARTS

Art provides a conduit into the self. It is a gateway into the inner worlds of beauty and pain. In art, the emotional realm is manifested, as the creator is reflected in their creations. We share in that lived experience through impression, interpretation and inspiration. Art sits in a place of contestation. For krump gangs, art is positioned at the border where expressions of decent and street meet. In art, we find the reproduction of social life, as galleries contain the artistic visions of past and present. Thus, art documents existence. In artefacts, we find evidence of human experience and of human existence. Art legitimates these expressions of life.

Art is where imagination meets form. Art opens a space where dreams and creativity become unleashed. In art, people can accept the unacceptable and suspend reality to become what they might imagine. For krump dancers, art is a game changer.

With regard to dancing in general, the body becomes the palette or medium upon which the inner emotional realm is displayed. The curve of a face, grace of a twirl,

or delicate balancing on rigid pointed toes communicate in their folding and unfolding of form, an emotion that carries a story. Similarly, in krump dancing, the body tells the story. Using the foundations of the dance style and movements, a chest pop can communicate intentionality and power from the heart. Arm swings are used to shift the flow of energy or exert force in the circle. Punches literally drive a fist into the point that is being made. They are the driving force behind anger compelling control over another or oneself. In the thunderous boom of a stomp, a krump dancer emotes, "Here I stand. You will recognize me."

Krump dancing thus invokes and resonates with that deep, dark part of the self waiting to be expressed. Screaming to emerge, demanding to be recognised, krump dancing reconciles a rage within waiting to be seen, heard, felt, witnessed and shared. By tapping into the social structure through community centres, public schools, dance studios and art galleries, big homies fuse krump dance with mainstream social institutions. In doing so, they open a space for nonconformist youth in building a new social convention to channel and release rage. By examining the work of three big homies, we learn how the arts allow the line of 'decent' and conventional to expand and shift to include krump dancing.

THE BIG HOMIES

Each of the big homies discussed below, lead in different ways. At the heart of their differences, are their values and life experiences that shape their leadership styles.

FUDD

Assuming his krump name after the cartoon character, Elmer Fudd, 'Fudd' grew up in South Central, LA. His passion for krump dancing started as a way for Fudd to spend more time with his two boys, Brenden and Lynnden, who began krumping from a very young age. Fudd's love of dance stemmed from his mother and he fondly recounts how, "she would be dancin' with us." Raised in a household where parties were the norm, Fudd remembers how dancing brought together different members of his family. Knowing how to dance a particular type of dance or "show your moves" would garner applause or recognition within his family unit. For Fudd, dancing is a nostalgic source of joy and comfort. The spinning of a record or the drop of a beat is where he comes alive. For Fudd, music and dance are synonymous with family.

From his father, Fudd learned the value of time he carries with him throughout his life. As Fudd's parents were divorced, he did not have very much time with his father. When he could spend time with his dad, his father still chose to invest all of his time working and earning money to support his family. This left Fudd feeling abandoned by his dad because his dad did not take time to teach him about the 'keys' in life. These keys are the lessons of manhood a father teaches his son. Vowing never to let anything come between him and his children, Fudd redefined fatherhood in his family to value relationships above all else.

His conviction would be tested when Fudd left high school and moved to Virginia to play college football. In his move, he left behind the mother of his child and would-be wife so he could concentrate on his studies and football. It would take less than a year before Fudd would be overcome with loneliness and the pain of being away from his son, Brenden. Not wanting to repeat history and be an absent father, Fudd quit college and returned to Compton, California.

Fitting into the krump scene was easy for Fudd, as he had grown up around many of the originators of krump. "In it for the kids," Fudd leads these young people just

as he parents. For his lil' homies, there is little Fudd will not sacrifice. However, this is not to say that Fudd does not have high expectations for behaviour. Yet, those expectations are always tempered with love. No stranger to street gangs, as his parents had been in different gangs, Fudd leads compassionately.

Connected deeply to his local community, it is no surprise that Fudd embeds his work in publicly-funded neighbourhood centres not far from where he was raised. By institutionalising krump dancing in these spaces, Fudd provides continuity for young people whose lives are constantly in flux. In these centres, Fudd opens space for at-risk young people to commune and release their rage. Bystanders are also drawn in to the activities of krump as conventional activities coexist alongside them. This space operates as an anchor not only for local youth, but for young people around the world who are also attracted to similar kinds of space. (See Figures 1, 2 and 3).

Figure 1: Fudd's lil' homies from Switzerland came for a visit to a krump dancing session in 2018. The session was hosted in a community centre in Compton, California.

Figures 2 and 3 are promotional posters where Fudd has been featured in international events.

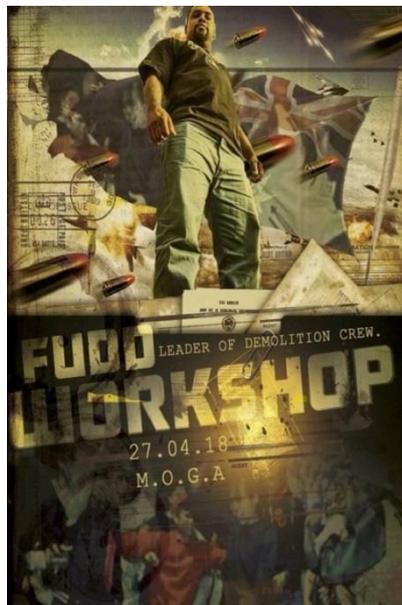**Figure 2:** 2014 in Spain where he served as a judge.

Figure 3: Australian Krump dancing workshop in 2018 led by Fudd.

All of these images highlight his strength of leading through inclusion and love.

ROBERT

I met Robert through Fudd, as they are cousins. Robert grew up in Watts, California in a neighbourhood controlled by the Bloods. His mother, a school teacher, instilled in Robert the value of education. Ranked a top player, Robert played high school football. In the afternoons and on weekends, Robert spent his time dancing in his garage where he developed his passion for krump. (See figures 4 and 5).

A defining moment in Rob's life transpired when he was recruited by the California Institute of the Arts to dance. Through formal training, Robert blended his street smarts with conventional dance. This opened doors for Robert propelling him into the spotlight. Robert's world expanded from the streets of South Central, LA, to the far reaches of the globe.

For Robert, dance was a way to get paid. However, he would also learn a hard lesson of the market when his talent was exploited for another's profit. Sensitive to this reality, Robert spends much of his time mentoring youth to know their worth, in a material sense, so they may maximize their returns from their talent. Thus, Rob's leadership style focuses on formal education and the entrepreneurial aspects of krump dancing to help at-risk youth move beyond the limits of their local environment. Working in public schools and through his dance studio, Robert merges the street with decent by helping young people package and market their street knowledge into a resource to advance their material and social conditions.

Figure 4: Robert's work in local public schools, bringing street dances to communities that would not otherwise be exposed, facilitates the moving of the line between 'decent' and 'street.'

Figure 5: Same event as Figure 4, showing youth in a dance class organized by Robert. These youth are being instructed in the art of krump dancing although they are not street-oriented youth. Rather, these children come to the classes through the

work Robert does with the public-school system to integrate street-based arts into the curriculum.

LADY BURN

Shifting to Australia and the youth of Melbourne, is Lady Burn. While not officially a big homie, she carries with her all the attributes of a big homie. Earning her stripes from the ground up, Lady Burn started krump dancing near the inception of krump dancing in Australia. As a White woman of Australian nationality, Lady Burn is a minority in both gender and race. Spending part of her childhood in Vanuatu, a nation of islands in the South Pacific between Australia and Fiji, Lady Burn became acquainted with the ways of living among indigenous people. This experience strengthened her ability to move between ethnic and racial groups.

The authority by which Lady Burn leads is due to her loyalty to the crew. Consistently showing up and supporting her crew and homies, Lady Burn is an anchor in a fluctuating network of vulnerable youth. Furthermore, Lady Burn rises to the challenge of resource acquisition when she showcases and elevates the crew beyond the small group context. She accomplishes this through her organisational and technological skills. With a background in photography, Lady Burn uses the camera to document the lived realities of these at-risk youth. Using her connections with the conventional world, Lady Burn transports their reality through the images she creates. In so doing, she brings their experiences to light. Here, the merging of street with decent occurs through art galleries, exhibitions and documentary film making (see *Burncity*, 2010). In bringing krump dancing to the mainstream, Lady Burn legitimates these at-risk youths' existence, (see figures 6 and 7).
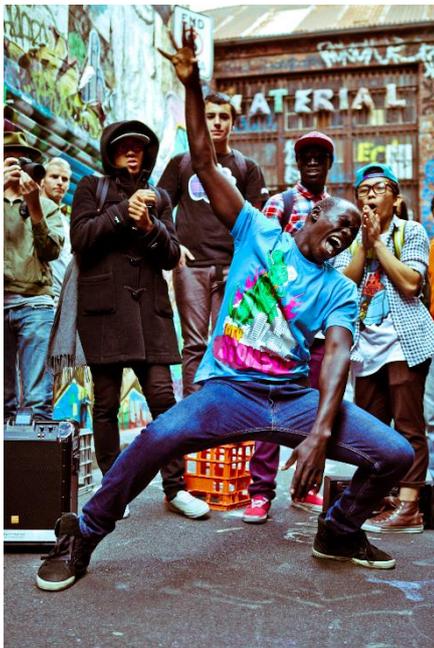

Figure 6 and Figure 7: These pictures provide an example of the photo documentation Lady Burn contributes to her crew. Currently, she creates documentary art under the label of Shuttermain. Posed in beautiful raw emotion, her images have hung in public galleries and Victoria's arts' galleries.

Through her images, Lady Burn documents existence, placing it in the purview of the curator, the state and the middle-class citizen. In doing so, her art becomes a legitimating force.

CONCLUSION

This study provides an example of how at-risk gang youth generate resiliency to overcome social disadvantage. Moreover, this study extends what is known about the resiliency of young people, especially those who are not integrated into established mainstream social institutions, such as schools, sport or other types of youth-based formal organisations. For at-risk youth who are oriented to street-based norms, krump dancing offers an example of how street-based adaptations can be transformed into nonviolent protective measures that preserve "culturally meaningful ways" of being (Ungar, 2008, p. 225).

Based upon this study, interventions for street-oriented youth should incorporate youth mentors who carry street credibility and the ability to allocate resources that are of value in the local context. As "relationships are the 'active ingredients' of the environment's influence on healthy human development," (Luthar and Brown, 2007, p.14), relationships that honour and incorporate local practices and beliefs have the best chance of integrating and transforming aggressive and violent patterns of coping.

To gain social advantage, as Hart et al. (2016) promote in their definition of resiliency, requires the mobilization of collective action. For the at-risk youth who krump dance, they gain mobility, resources and reorganise their environment through the arts. Based upon this research, resiliency efforts for street-oriented youth should include social policies that grant funding for youth art programmes with a particular emphasis on unconventional or avant-garde youth art forms. Additional recommendations include social policies that create space for street-based youth artistic performances in the form of indoor and outdoor venues accessible by public transportation or within walking distance. Accessibility can be impacted by the competing interests of free-expression with safety. To balance these interests, big homies and other local leaders can be consulted and involved in the process of creating safe artistic spaces for youth. Moreover, spaces that increase the visibility, experiences and identities of at-risk youth, validate their existence and thus incentivize participation through the creation of social and cultural capital.

This article began with the question, "Instead of fighting, what if inner city youth could dance to find their place in the world?" By examining how krump dancing provides a pathway for at-risk youth to navigate their neighbourhood conditions, we learn how these young people channel their negative emotions into an art form. Under the guidance of the big homies, these young people harness local resources to create positive outcomes. Using cultural and social capital, big homies transport the dance from a personal tool of resiliency to cope with tragedy and pain, into a collective and institutionalised practice located in the mainstream.

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