Street Codes as Formula Stories: How Inmates Recount Violence

Fiona Brookman[1], Heith Copes[2],
and Andy Hochstetler[3]

Abstract

Recent developments in the study of narratives suggest that people can construct identity by referencing acculturated stories (i.e., formula stories) and often do so when explaining untoward behavior. Formula stories connect one's personal identity with generally accepted subcultural identities and the narratives associated with them. In light of this, it becomes clear that cultural codes (e.g., the code of the streets) provide structured storylines. Using data from semistructured interviews with 118 violent inmates incarcerated in the United Kingdom, this study examines how they use the code of the street when describing specific violent events. The authors find that violent inmates portray themselves as respectable by situating their past violence within the prescripts of the code; however, the inmates' narratives are not always consistent or drawn from singular formula stories. In fact, many participants offered various storylines and interpretations when describing violent events. We conclude that future theoretical development should aim to integrate perspectives focused on street codes, individual identity, and other acculturated factors and that understanding codes as narrative forms is essential.

[1]University of Glamorgan, Pontypridd, Wales, United Kingdom
[2]University of Alabama Birmingham
[3]Iowa State University, Ames

Corresponding Author:
Heith Copes, Department of Justice Sciences, University of Alabama Birmingham,
1201 University Boulevard: Suite 210, Birmingham, AL 35294
Email: jhcopes@uab.edu

Keywords

The study of self and identity provides valuable insights into the links between structural conditions, cultural influences, and individual behavior. Selves are comprised of situated identities: these identities are the character that people create for themselves and express to others and the way a person "likes to think of himself as being and acting" (McCall and Simmons 1966, 65). As such, a person's construction of self plays a part in how he or she evaluates situations, chooses lines of action, makes sense of behaviors, and presents him or herself to others. Since the aspects of self a person presents show consensus or mutuality with cultural and subcultural understandings, identities can function as social categories. Thus, by aligning one's actions with the beliefs and expectations of a larger group, it is possible to both explain actions and construct personal identities (Stokes and Hewitt 1976). That is, by referencing a larger category, people can locate their actions within subculturally approved beliefs and norms and link themselves to histories that transcend individual action.

There are numerous ways for people to construct their identities. Personal style of dress, physical appearance, choice in partners, and leisure pursuits all provide indications of who we are and how we can be expected to behave. Perhaps the most effective approach to establishing identities is through the use of language and narratives. The general consensus among those who study narrative identity, at least among those with a sociological bent, is that individuals draw on lived experiences to plot their stories, provide coherence and continuity to their lives, and to construct meaningful identities (Ezzy 1998). Indeed, the stories we tell, the facts we elaborate on or withhold, and specific words we use all contribute to how others see us.

In a recent review of the theoretical literature on narrative identity, Loseke (2007) describes how "formula stories" (which exist at a cultural level) are essential for the construction and representation of subcultural identities. Formula stories refer to "narratives of typical actors engaging in typical behaviors within typical plots leading to expectable moral evaluations" (Loseke 2007, 664). These widely circulated stories help people create and perpetuate symbolic codes; that is, formula stories reveal what people value, what they know, and how they should behave. By relying on formula stories, actors can link their personal experiences and behaviors with a meaningful group (one that listeners understand and perhaps relate to) for the purposes of effective communication. By using formula stories when describing deviance or crime, actors also can explain untoward behavior in a way that bridges gaps between

their behaviors and the social audiences' presumed moral expectations. At their core, such stories are a means of negotiating and presenting identities and self-conceptions, much like accounts as described by Scott and Lyman (1968) or recent reformulations of neutralization theory (Maruna and Copes 2005; Topalli 2005). Because they are based on shared understandings, formula stories also potentially allow actors to avoid elaborating on their actions because relating one's acts to larger narratives often will suffice.

Useful narratives must be somewhat believable and contextually appropriate. Not only must the plot be sensible to listeners but so too must the role speakers assign to themselves. One's social position dictates which stories are sufficiently authentic and believable to tell and for this reason the type, frequency, and content of them will vary by the social location and characteristics of narrators. For those who spend much of their time in urban social environments, pulling forth themes from street codes is as convenient and acceptable a way to make sense of violence as is appealing to the breadwinner role for middle-class offenders (Willott, Griffin, and Torrance 2001) or sad tales for women convicted of fraud (Klenowski, Copes, and Mullins 2011). All rely on acceptance by the audience of general truths. By providing storylines that reflect codes that are relevant to the social audience, actors can depict their experiences generally and portray themselves specifically as upholders of an accepted code or pattern of beliefs and related behaviors.

Here we build on these insights from narrative identity to discuss how inmates use references to street codes as plot devices in stories that explain or account for past violence. As such, these stories connect one's personal identity with generally accepted subcultural identities. Our analysis departs from other examinations of the code of the street; instead of examining how codes simply encourage or facilitate action, we examine how using the code of the streets in narratives reflects people's ongoing construction of identity by situating their actions within a subcultural context of respect. Those imprisoned for violent crimes strive to construct and maintain identities as respectable people who merely upheld or enforced an accepted pattern of beliefs and often avoid or skirt plots that might cast them as irrational actors, as persons whose behaviors are symptomatic of unfortunate background and circumstance, or as individually nefarious and generally disreputable persons.

Code of the Street as Storyline

Much recent ethnographic work on subcultures where violence is common draws on Anderson's (1999) concept of the code of the street. As described in Anderson's (1999, 33) now classic study of violence in Philadelphia, street

codes are "a set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior, particularly violence. The rules prescribe both proper comportment and the proper way to respond if challenged. They regulate the use of violence and so supply a rationale allowing those inclined to aggression to precipitate violent encounters in an approved way." The major requirements of street codes are that people challenge disrespect and that some affronts require substantial and decisive violence.

Anderson (1999) contends that the code of the street evolved from street culture and that it rests on assumptions about respect and deference and to whom one should grant it. Drawing on an ethnographic study of predominantly African American neighborhoods in Philadelphia, Anderson argues that conditions in the inner city led to material and social divisions, reflected in the designation of persons and families as either decent or disreputable. Codes that endorse violence by the disrespected are most likely implemented by street-oriented and disreputable persons who grant more significance to the codes and endorse them consistently. In many impoverished areas, however, potential predators are close by. It is important, therefore, for most residents to give the impression of being capable and willing to confront disrespect or threats in kind. Many residents campaign for and command status based on this impression. This, in combination with the sensitivity and potentially severe consequence to interpersonal disrespect maintains a precarious order, but contributes to potentially volatile interactions and increased instances of violence.

Empirical Support for the Code

Research supports Anderson's claim that adhering to the code contributes to violence in certain situations. This research shows that the ethic he identifies occurs in various locations within the United States and abroad. Rich and Grey (2005) asked young, black, male hospital patients in Boston who had recently been shot, stabbed, or physically assaulted to provide narratives of the events that led to their injury. A quarter of the patients said that they had been assaulted by someone exacting revenge for a past act of disrespect. The respondents also explained that being labeled as a "sucker," "chump," or "punk" would send out the message that they tolerated victimization, which they claimed compelled them to retaliate. Their accounts supported Anderson's notions of the need to retaliate following disrespect and the perceived consequences for failing to do so. In addition, Brunson and Stewart (2006) and Jones (2004) showed that young women in urban neighborhoods adhered closely to the street code. Young women in both studies claimed to use violence to maintain respectable identities and reputations.

Ethnographic research also shows that participants in street-life outside the United States endorse beliefs and values that are consistent with the code of the street. Sandberg (2008, 2009a, 2009b) interviewed drug dealers in Norway and found that they were sensitive and responsive to disrespect, established status hierarchies based on violent performances, and included stories of fights as an important part of their mythology. Also, Brookman et al. (2011) investigated the acceptance of the code of the street among those imprisoned for violent crime in the United Kingdom. They showed that study participants placed a high value on respect and on violently defending their honor in ways very similar to those interviewed by Anderson (1999).

Other ethnographic research not designed specifically to assess the code of the street is also supportive of Anderson's claims. For example, recent research on retaliation (Jacobs and Wright 2006), snitching (Rosenfeld, Jacobs, and Wright 2003), street masculinity (Mullins 2006), street violence (Wright, Brookman, and Bennett 2006), and rap battles (Lee 2009) highlight the value placed on physically standing up for one's self in impoverished areas and among street-life participants. One can be confident that belief in the code, or something very much like it, is not unique to citizens in inner-city areas of Philadelphia and may be common among disaffected populations in the United States and abroad.

Researchers have also evaluated Anderson's work quantitatively. Building on the assumption that street codes are, in part, a set of attitudes that establish what should be done in a narrowly circumscribed set of situations deemed disrespectful, researchers have designed surveys to measure these attitudes and their relation to self-reported violence. Researchers hypothesize that the degree to which a person endorses or lives by the code increases the likelihood of offending because attitudes reflecting the code condone sensitivity to disrespect as well as escalation to violence in confrontations. Findings reveal that those who most strongly endorse the use of violence as a deterrent (i.e., accept the code) are likely to commit more crime (Brezina et al. 2004; Stewart, Schreck, and Simmons 2006; Stewart and Simons 2006, 2010). In addition, it appears that those who adopt an attitude of hopelessness are more likely to identify with the code of the streets and engage in more violence (Drummond, Bolland, and Harris 2011).

Criticisms of the Code

Although there is much support and acceptance of Anderson's work, it is not without criticism (e.g., Wacquant 2002). This criticism contends that Anderson is content to leave much of the discussion linking codes and individual thinking and action abstract, to paint African American ghetto life in broad strokes, and to avoid precisely specifying the place of codes in culture or to provide

an explicit theoretical framework (Sandberg and Pedersen 2009). According to Wacquant (2002, 1491), "The code is variously described as a set of 'informal rules,' an 'etiquette,' a 'value orientation,' an 'oppositional culture' and the objective regularities of conduct they prescribe, but also as a 'script,' a set of roles and their patterned expectations, a personal identity, a 'milieu,' and even as the 'fabric of everyday life.'" Questions about whether the code is primarily a part of a larger logic of the street that predominates, a way that those familiar with their landscape navigate it, an acculturated presentation of self, a way of talking about and ordering street and ghetto life, or simply a set of rules about when violence is acceptable reflect this lack of specificity.

In addition to ambiguity, inattention to precise theoretical presentation leads to the potential for overly deterministic interpretations of the code. In many passages Anderson's use of the code "negates the inventive capacities of agents and the open-endedness of situations," so that the code "moves people about and dictates behavior irrespective of material and other factors" (Wacquant 2002, 1493). Anderson (1999, 33) acknowledges, however, that the code supplies a *rationale* for violent behavior and that people can code switch. For example, he asserts that decent people code switch often and that their implementation of codes is contingent on surroundings. He is direct, therefore, in pointing to the practical uses of the code as a selectively supported protective mechanism among the "decent" and the "street." Despite this allowance for flexibility, he devotes scant attention to codes as symbolic resources that actors reference and use strategically to make sense of their lives and construct meaningful identities (Jimerson and Oware 2006).

While the bulk of research on street codes focuses on subculturally relevant expectations that compel behavioral responses from those who subscribe to them, some authors view codes in a less deterministic fashion and focus on how actors select and use them. With greater attention to narrative forms, these scholars have sought to analyze codes as after-the-fact rationalizations of behavior. Jimerson and Oware (2006, 26) point out that street codes may be both prescripts and accounts for behavior. They view codes as selectively implemented sense-making mechanisms or as "vocabularies of motive . . . used to understand, persuade, and rationalize actions and to render accounts." In the language of ethnomethodologists, actors are "telling the code" when they call forth its themes in accounts of behaviors. Wieder (1974) suggests that inmates often tell the convict code when justifying actions (even contradictory ones). By alluding to a code when discussing their behaviors, people justify their actions (in terms of subcultural normative expectations, attitudes, and conceptions), thereby constructing meaningful identities.

While we agree that codes affect the way people interpret and respond to situations, we focus here on how participants use the code as a formula story when discussing their participation in discrete violent events. Specifically, we examine how the participants use the code of the streets as a plot device in their stories about their violent acts to aid in constructing their identities as respectable persons following behavioral prescripts. We do not examine codes simply as unidirectional determinants of action. Instead, we analyze them as acculturated linguistic devices that violent actors use to present a consistent image of self when asked to explain behavior.

Method

We base our findings on the accounts of inmates who were incarcerated in UK prisons for various forms of street violence, including street robbery, carjacking, assault, wounding, and firearm offenses. We selected interviewees by a process of purposive sampling. Ethical approval to undertake the research was sought and granted at three levels: (1) the University of Glamorgan Ethical Approval Board; (2) the Applied Psychology Group, HM Prison Service, London; and (3) each of the six individual prisons where the research was conducted. Having gained access to six prisons across England and Wales, we focused on identifying men and women who had one or more convictions for violent street offenses who would be willing to speak with us. Prison staff (officers and psychologists) approached inmates who had records of these crimes and invited them to take part in the study. We provided potential participants with information about the aims of the project and the ethical protections afforded to them to inform their decision. The ultimate purpose of this effort was to secure a diverse sample (for gender and age) and to generate an array of responses that would reveal a variety of aspects of street violence. The sample comprised eighty-eight men and thirty women. The average age of the men was twenty-eight years with a range of nineteen to fifty-five. Three-quarters of the men interviewed were white and the remaining 25 percent were black, Asian, or mixed race. The average age of the women interviewees was twenty-four years with a range of eighteen to thirty-one. Almost three-quarters of the women interviewed were white and the remainder self-identified as multiracial. Most of the participants admitted to extensive criminal histories, early participation in crime and violence, chronic histories of alcohol or drug abuse, and limited employment.

The method of data collection was semistructured interviews, which allows respondents to answer questions in detail with minimal direction from the interviewer and leads to a more natural description of events. The interviews covered

four main topic areas. The first addressed the inmates' personal and criminal justice history. The second included questions on the interviewees' most recent street robbery (regardless of whether it resulted in arrest or prosecution). The third topic centered on details of any other forms of street violence that the inmate committed (such as retaliatory violence, combating disrespect, or status-related violence). In parts 2 and 3, we encouraged participants to recount in detail particular violent offenses: how they emerged and unfolded and how they interpreted them at the time. The fourth section included questions about the participants' lifestyles immediately before imprisonment.

We conducted the interviews in private rooms with only the researcher and interviewee present. Researchers asked participants at the beginning of interviews to provide a pseudonym in order to protect their identity and we use these self-assigned aliases throughout this paper when discussing quotes. We recorded all interviews with each participant's permission. This was particularly important as we encouraged interviewees to "re-live" the offense, their thoughts and perceptions, and take us through the action step-by-step. We had all interviews transcribed verbatim; however, on occasion we edited the text to aid readability.

Scholars tend to follow one of two generally accepted approaches when analyzing stories. The first, and most common, approach is to treat narratives as record. In this approach, analysts treat the spoken words of participants as fact-based accounts of what happened during an event. The assumption is that the "narratives document what actually happened or is happening in someone's social world" (Presser 2009, 182). When analyzing narratives as record, researchers place a strong emphasis on the validity of statements, especially if their participants are discussing their illegal behaviors. In the other approach, what Presser (2009) refers to as narrative as interpretation, the emphasis is not on establishing an underlying "truth" about the causal factors and events of wrongdoings; instead the emphasis is on how actors interpret their actions and stories. In this approach, analysts view narratives as social constructs. It is this latter perspective that we take when analyzing the stories about violence given by our participants.

We view narratives as a means for identifying with subcultural expectations that arise from interactional threats (Presser 2010). Our interest was not in the simple recounting of substantive or decontextualized events that these stories depict (i.e., counts or lists of what happened) but in elaborating on the meanings that particular storylines have for the participants. Thus, probing to discover whether inmates were lying or being deceptive or to validate the truthfulness of accounts was of little importance. Instead, we focused on the patterns and themes they raised when describing their crimes (Sandberg 2010). This overriding view of narratives guided our inductive analysis of the interviews.

When analyzing data, we first extracted all narratives of violent events (more than 150 events). To ensure inter-rater reliability in coding, all authors independently read the excerpts to identify relevant sections of data and common themes. Once we reached agreement on the dominant themes, we analyzed the narratives to identify text that was consistent with the broad concept of the code of the street. We then analyzed all statements consistent with the concept of the code and coded them into discrete groups. Finally, we analyzed these groups and their subgroups to identify the core empirical elements of the code of the street as expressed among our sample of inmates.

Constructing Respectable Identity by Referencing the Code

Ethnographic research on those who use illegal violence shows that they often reference a code that proscribes and reinforces violent reactions to disrespect (Anderson 1999; Brunson and Stewart 2006). In storylines that use the code, the storytellers rely on common plot devices (e.g., seeking respect and using violence to defend it) and types of characters. The moral of most of these stories is that protagonists are acting understandably when they commit violence to combat disrespect or to establish a reputation as being able and willing to use violence. People worthy of respect are those who are culturally prepared for hostile and threatening interactions, who are quick to interpret challenging interactions as disrespectful, and who endorse violent responses or escalation in the face of disrespect. By framing their stories of robbery and violence as a means of indicating that they are upholders and/or enforcers of the street code, narrators cast themselves as such, often while implying that their victims are the antagonists. In what follows, we present and categorize thematically participants' descriptions of violent crimes, while interpreting these statements within the theoretical framework of narrative identity.

From Disrespect to Crime

Adherents of the code commonly assume that reputational attacks should be countered with a variety of retaliatory actions, including certain kinds of acquisitive crime, but certainly with violence (Anderson 1999; Jacobs 2004; Jacobs and Wright 2006). When discussing their robberies, it was not uncommon for participants to relay stories that involved their victims instigating violence by being disrespectful. Their descriptions of the events indicated that violent responses provided lessons for those who insult the street-oriented by

punishing them and by symbolically establishing victory in combat. This sentiment was expressed by Jay:

> I was waiting to use the phone box. I kept tapping the window and saying "hurry up mate I want to use the phone," and he called me a fucking arse hole. So I walked off and thought nothing of it. About 10 minutes later he came out of the phone box and called me an arse hole again, so I crossed over the road and we started exchanging words and before I knew it we were both fighting. I kicked his legs from underneath him and his wallet came out on the floor and I picked his wallet up and said "that will teach you, you stupid twat" and just walked off.

Tallulah, a woman carjacker, recalled a similar story:

> One night we were in Sheffield and this lass—we was at a nightclub—got right cheeky with me. . . . I thought right you bitch I am going to get you back and I took her car. My partner at the time beat up her fellow and I beat her up. Kicked shit out of them and then just drove it around Sheffield.

By describing their robberies as "payback" or "teaching moments" for disrespectful victims inmates, like Jay and Tallulah, situated their actions as being consistent with the dictates of the code. One function of doing so was to distance violent acts from the desperate, greedy, or senseless actions with meager rewards that might otherwise characterize them. As such, their stories portrayed violent crimes as both expected and reasonable reactions to disrespect.

Since nearly all of the participants were involved in the illegal economy, it was not uncommon for them to claim that debtors instigated their actions. When framing their stories, many participants claimed that extracting payment was not the primary goal in these confrontations. They instead framed failure to pay a debt or pay for goods as insulting and disrespectful, which necessitated violence (see also Katz 1988, 1999). This implies that even actions that might seem to be pragmatic acquisitive crimes or the result of rage often can be easily cast as enactment of prescripts of a street code. Billy recalled that she attacked the victim after she discovered the victim consuming alcohol while indebted, an unmistakable affront:

> She was shit faced . . . and was just all over the place, and I just lost me temper 'cause it felt like she just took the piss out of me. Well, I was that

angry at what she'd done because I actually gave her something [drugs] that I needed. I needed that myself and I gave her that to help her out because of a promise that I would be paid by dinner time. I shared my share with her and I was going without so I actually got so angry about that.

Similarly, Sarah explained that recovering lost monies receded in importance because the affront of default was akin to the worst forms of disrespect and demanded action (see also Brookman et al. 2011 and Engel 1984).

I knew I weren't gonna get money out of her and at the end of the day, she took piss and tried to make me look a cunt. She thought she could get away with it and when people take piss, it pisses me off. It does. I don't like that. If people are alright with me, I'm alright with them. But if they rip me off or take piss then I'll start.

Here Billy and Sarah claimed that by indulging in alcohol or drugs instead of paying their debts, the victims were deliberately "taking the piss out them." By claiming disrespect, they could situate their violent responses within the code of the street. In these and similar stories, the inmates portrayed themselves not only as upholders of the code, but also as enforcers of it. When framed in this manner, participants claimed that it was their duty to teach others lessons about appropriate behavior. Describing robbery events as payback or as etiquette lessons allowed them to situate and make moral sense of violence.

Some participants noted that motives for such actions also derived from a desire to generate sought-after reputations for violence. Mr. S explained that his robbery was an afterthought that made sense as a way of settling a score and sent out a message:

I saw this kid who I didn't get along with—I'd been drinking—was coming down the other side so I just run over knocked him out, stamped on his head a couple of time, and took everything he had and that . . . I thought fuck it, I've knocked him out now; I've stamped on his head, I may as well take what he's got, innit. He can go back and tell his boys, you know what I mean. We don't get along anyway so he deserved it.

In this description of violence, Mr. S emphasized that money was not the motive. Rather, the victim "deserved" the beating and could be relied on to let others know what happened and who did it. Because maintaining a fearful reputation is an important foundation of street codes, such actions are easily understood.

Crime to Disrespect

When describing robberies that have no retaliatory motive most claim that physically harming their victims is neither a goal nor a desired outcome (Wright and Decker 1997). Pragmatically, robbery requires a level of intimidation and violence. Therefore, those who commit robbery do not avoid violence completely. Beyond recognition that robbery requires some violence, robbery participants often placed blame on the victims for "forcing" their hand by resisting or failing to take threats seriously. They interpreted victim actions as putting their physical safety and/or dignity at risk. Thus, they extended the use of the code to violent incidents that reportedly began with almost purely instrumental purposes. By placing part of the blame on the victim, the actor can locate his or her actions within expectations of the code (i.e., the offended must mete out punishment to the disrespectful). While violence is a means of establishing respect, unrestrained or purely self-gratifying violence is seldom viewed as respectable. Instead, it is seen as being out of control, untrustworthy, and/or malicious, which are rarely valued attributes even among the violent (Hochstetler, Copes, and Williams 2010; Presser 2008).

Anderson (1999) asserts that robbers expect street and decent people to know the ways of the streets, which include how to act when robbed. Participants described maintaining order and superiority in the crime and letting victims know who was in charge as necessary, reasonable, and justifiable (Wright and Decker 1997). In these accounts, resistance necessitated violence. Many participants assumed that those in the game should know the rules of robbery—"give it up if you've been got"—and victims' failure to comply excused the harm they received. The narrators intertwined recognition of the practical necessities of controlling a robbery scene through forcefulness with notions of proper deference from victims and self-images as persons whose threats are credible.

Resistance is thought to question "the worth, the status, even the respectability of the assailant in a way that easily suggests contempt or even arrogance" (Anderson 1999, 128). Titch claimed that he interpreted victim resistance as an insult and struck his victim in response, indicating that if victims did not view threats as sufficiently foreboding, a price would be paid. In sum, he claimed that the victim deserved the attack and should not be considered a "true" victim (Sykes and Matza 1957), as he explained in the following remarks:

> I was saying to him, "Who do you think I am, some sort of fucking prick?"
> . . . He was all dazed, he was going, "I don't realize it." I said, "Well, you fucking realize now don't ya?" I says, "You're lucky I don't fucking kill ya!"

Another robber, Tee, suggested that tolerance of impudent victims poses the same threats to image as would balking in the face of a street fight.

Recalling that one of his victims was not cowed by a displayed weapon, Tee concluded that there was only one course of action to take.

> The geezer was like, "What you gonna do with that?" and he got cheeky. . . . I had to do it, yeah. I wasn't going to at first but because he was trying to mock me out in front of all those people, like I weren't going to do it, but I just showed him and I did.

When victims resisted more aggressively, the participants' descriptions shared remarkable similarities with their reasons for engaging in street fights. They drew on themes of self-protection and demonstrating honor, camaraderie, bravery, and toughness to justify their actions (see also Horowitz 1987). As Janney stated:

> He wouldn't let go of my pal, you know what I mean. He would not let him go . . . so I have had to hit him again. And Mark hits him—bang. And I have hit him—bang. He wouldn't let him go. So shit, in the end he started letting go so fucking, we just run off to the car, got in the car, and drove off.

Later in the interview, the same woman asserted that using violence to protect her partner increased her self-worth as a respectable friend.

> You know, when I got out of that, I don't know what it is, but I felt good about that one. Yes, because I gave him a good 'un, do you know what I mean? I got my mate out of a sticky situation.

In this description, she was able to claim that she behaved honorably because she successfully supported a friend under threat, which is a strong expectation among upholders of the code (Anderson 1999).

In one narrative, John recounted an aggravated robbery that emanated from an impolite response on the part of the would-be victim. The scene was structured like many strong-arm robberies on the streets, but John maintained that the crime would not have occurred had the victim responded properly to a request to try on and examine a ring he was wearing. Perhaps unfortunately, but probably with good reason, the victim insulted John by denying this request.

> I noticed he has rings on his fingers, about seven rings. I was asking about them. He had a Man United ring on his finger, and I support Man U, so I was asking him about the ring and all that. He told me where he bought it, and he was talking to us for ages and then we just hit him . . . I was talking to him and my mate just hit him. I was in front of him and

asking him if I could try the ring on and my friend was by the side and he just swung and hit him. I had rings of my own and he wouldn't let me try it on. . . . I wasn't going to rob him, I just wanted to try it on. . . . I meant it then. I just wanted to try the ring on because I liked it. I made friends with him really, but then he wouldn't let me try the ring on so my friend punched him. He fell to the ground, got back up, and hit my mate. . . . I dragged him off my mate and chucked him on the floor, and then we robbed him.

By relaying stories of how victims disrespected their authority, did not know their place, or put co-offenders in danger, the participants were able to plot their stories with notions of honor that appear prominently in the code of the streets. Participants suggested that the code of the street governs how potential victims should react in crimes and consequently the way they should behave when confronted with "disrespectful" victims (Anderson 1999). Thus, they often framed victim resistance as disrespectful, making it analogous to any other kind of insult, and warranting a violent response.

Exemplifying the Violent Type

The previous discussion raises the issue of whether some people simply portray themselves as inherently violent regardless of the prescripts and implicit admonitions in the street code (see Athens 1997). Anderson (1999, 72) recognized that by the time his street-oriented subjects were teenagers, many had internalized the code of the street and that the representation that one is "capable of violence, or possibly mayhem when the situation requires it" was part of their self-image. Similarly, Athens (1997) notes that some persons accept a wide variety of narratives and reasons that could lead to violence and this flexibility enhances their own capacity for it. Many of those interviewed here incorporated a personal susceptibility to engaging in violent acts. They intertwined susceptibility to violence and street codes in accounts of crime. In fact, several pointed out that they were more likely to react violently to affronts than others, claiming inherent tendencies toward violence. Despite this, street codes still figured prominently in the accounts of those who acknowledged violent propensity. In fact, we interpreted some accounts of such propensities as attempts to claim full and ideal support for the code. These inmates contended that there was something about their individual nature that made the code especially salient and accessible, or that a generally violent nature meant that violations of the code were one type of incident that sparked a violent response. When asked if he was a violent person Mike replied affirmatively, adding that his violence results from situations where "there is a call":

I can be. I'm a very volatile person, quick to lose my temper, quick to lash out, particularly in my younger days. I can't deal with things in other ways. If there is a call for violence I don't hold back, if you know what I mean.

Situations where there was a call for violence squared nicely with dictates of the code. Other participants acknowledged a personal cognitive weakness that they thought provided them with a propensity for violence in various situations. John described a violent event where he "went absolutely fucking ballistic."

Basically it was the straw that broke the camel's back and then up got two little muppets [fools] like that, along with their mates and that. They had no intention of getting out of the car because they are just wind-up people by the look of it. I leapt out of the van and walked towards them and I knew in my head what I was going to do. . . . I get headaches after I lose my temper, across the top of my eyes, and I get stressed out and I just went crazy on him. . . . I knew something was going to kick off, I could feel it brewing. If they said one more thing to me it would have gone anyway, but because I was stressed out I lost the plot. . . . They ask for it, they knew what I am like. You can ask the law, they will say he is a nice enough chap until he fucking goes off the head.

In these circumstances, the extent to which actions are precipitated by a behavioral code or as a result of personal proclivities and violent identities is blurred. John suggests that his reaction to the insult was a physiological response that he likened to a switch that was flipped, while also claiming that the victims deserved it. In the accounts, the actor embodies the street code and the ability to commit the violence that might be called for in the face of provocation. For example, narrators often recognized that robbery pragmatically requires violence and intimidation, but they accompanied this recognition with statements pointing to sensitivity to disrespect from victims and awareness of one's willingness to escalate in the face of it. If the code of the streets advocates retaliation to affronts, these persons are confident that they can abide.

When violent propensity becomes part of the self-concept, the implicit potential for explosive responses in street codes pertaining to defense of honor and respectability may become supplementary explanations. Explanations rely heavily on street codes in those instances where the code seems suitable to the situation, but other violence is portrayed as inherent to the individual. This lends support to the proposition that street codes are foundational elements of violent self-images. They appear prominently in accounts even for those who accept a litany of reasons for being violent and who are comfortable with

claiming a generally violent disposition. Portraying oneself as generally violent easily meshes with a claim that one is a quintessential representative for a code that endorses violence as a consequence of disrespect.

Inconsistent Storylines

Recent research on identity narratives suggests that people's life stories do not remain consistent throughout their lives (McAdams 2006; McAdams et al. 2006). It is easy to accept that as one matures, enters new periods in their life, or changes cultural contexts, the stories they tell to construct identity also change. This drives home the point that despite noble attempts to garner a consistent truth through interviews, accounts reflect more than factual renderings of events; they also reveal rhetorics of identity construction. In a discussion about the value of narratives for criminological research, Sandberg (2010) provides an example of an individual who used three storylines to explain a single act of violence against a friend. This narrator switched from justifying his actions within a code of honor, to blaming it on excessive drug use, to showing remorse for the action. Sandberg relays this example not to illustrate that interviewed street criminals are deceptive or that their narratives are of little value. Instead, he suggests that people have a repertoire of narratives, all of which tell us something about how we see ourselves as people (see also Sandberg 2011). Our interviews also suggest that change in stories and multiple narratives take place within the same interview, even when describing a singular event. Some passages of interviews used thus far may imply that the narratives were consistent, linear, and drew from singular formula stories; however, this was not always the case. Indeed, it was not uncommon for the participants to offer various storylines (e.g., code of the street and violence as self) when describing an event.

In some of the descriptions of their violence the narrators vacillate on the degree to which their actions properly fit their conceptions of the code. In these stories, participants began their narratives by pointing to the indiscretions or disrespect of their victims. On further questioning and probing, they altered slightly the role of the antagonist. For example, in several cases narrators described violent assaults and robberies that occurred on the slightest indication of insult. Despite what we perceived as minimal slights and unworthy of any retaliation, much less violent attacks, the inmates plotted their stories with aspects of the code. Tee recalled a robbery and assault on an older gentleman riding a bike. In his words:

> We were walking down the road and this geezer just come past on his bike and he goes to go through the middle of us and the geezer, we tried

to clothes-line him off the bike. . . . Honestly like, when he come off his bike [he] carried on a little bit. He [the victim] started mouthing off, I told him to shut up and like my mate's kinda saying like we're not taking your cheek.

While this account initially focused on the validity of violence based on the actions of the victim, Tee later admitted remorsefully that the older gentleman "really wasn't being that cheeky." Another robber, Max, purportedly was so insulted by the flirtatious glances of a presumed homosexual that he decided to commit a carjacking. However, the respondent was aware that he had parked in an area frequented by homosexual cruisers.

Yeah, 'cause when he, when he was smiling at me I looked like, like, pointed at him and go "What you looking at?" and, he's just put a big smile on his face. And then I've gone over to the car, I've opened the door and said, "What you smiling at me for?" and he goes, "What?" I said, "Just get out the car." And he's gone out and said, "What's going on?" And before he could say anything else I was in his car driving off.

Our interpretation of the shifts in these narratives is that Tee and Max recognized or expected that the interviewer was not entirely accepting of their storylines. Thus, they softened their reliance on the code as dictating their responses. Whereas Tee acknowledged remorse for finding insult where the victim likely intended none, Max later admitted that although no specific plan had been laid, he already had determined that a carjacking might be in the cards that evening. We do not wish to imply that their early reliance on the code by either participant was fully dishonest and meant to deceive us. Instead, it is likely that Tee and Max, like most participants, had multiple reasons and explanations for their particular violent acts. It is possible that they were not entirely convinced that any of the accounts were particularly good explanations. Alternatively they may believe that all of their reasons were valid and reasonable.

Our interviewees' narratives included several examples where the described actions could be interpreted as if the narrator were seeking an appropriate insult or injustice to trigger confrontations and the violence or robbery that might accompany it under a street code that demands escalation in conflict. This is not unlike when a young gang member aggressively asks another "where you from?" (Garot 2007). Although the question may seem benign to outsiders, the tone and body language of the asker belie any claim that the question was not antagonistic among those in the know. While it was often difficult to tell if the protagonist was looking for a fight for the joy of it, to show off dangerousness,

or simply to make money, the readiness for violence inherent in these contrived interactions was apparent (see John's previous account about trying on his victim's rings). Mary Kate described how she pulled up to a potential victim and robbed her. While there was some reference to a perceived insult, the story-line suggests that the assault and subsequent robbery were largely unrelated to an objective personal affront, although her partners' orchestration of a supposed affront reveals how crime partners can use codes in situ:

> We pulled up to this lass in Harrogate and asked her for time, she said "I ain't got time." Then he said, "She's lying, Mary. She's making a laugh out of you." He says, "She's got, she's got her watch on there and she's got a mobile phone in that car, she's got time, she's having a laugh at you." So, winding me up then. So I jumped out [of the] car, started bat-tering and beating her head off the car door and everything. He shouted, "Grab her handbag." So I grabbed her handbag and thrown it into car— not thinking—and jumped in car and drove off and that. And then once I done it once, then I got excitement of it, so I went down road and there were another girl and did exactly the same with another girl.

Even the narrator acknowledged that this crime did not occur because the victim was truly disrespectful, as was evidenced by the fact that the group repeated the offence with another woman victim just a few minutes later. Nevertheless, by pointing out that her friends contended that the victim was "making a laugh out of [her]," Mary Kate framed the event within the bound-aries of the code (i.e., punishing disrespect).

These accounts suggest that a few participants haphazardly incorporated narrative themes into constructed lines with only the vaguest attention to cred-ibility or consistency when matched against their recounting of events (Douglas 1972; Gubrium and Holstein 2008). Many of their elaborations occurred during probing, which to varying degrees challenged the initially provided and more deterministic account of street code enactment. However, we do not believe that this should be taken as evidence that the researchers caught the participants in lies. Rather it is evidence that speakers are aware of the complexities in explaining violent events and how their violent predisposition figures in a particular event. These participants related a sensitivity to disrespect and many admitted to a half-formed intention to provoke a violent interaction or contest with victims when interviewers requested any elaboration. We are inclined to see shifts as elaborative rather than deceptive, and to think that participants are relying on generalities for violent acts in particular cases where the details do not fit as neatly as they usually do (Sandberg 2010). Formula stories were

useful because as abstractions they allowed the listener to fill in details. Individuals' narratives often rely on explaining exceptions, use multiple narratives, and display composite characters exhibiting greater complexity than is possible within the clean lines of action derived from a single formula.

Uses of street codes probably can be imaginative and creative when constructing criminal scenes and accounts of them. In these situations, codes do not seem to be a template that scripts a finite set of responses in narrowly defined situations, so much as a supportive mechanism that is acknowledged and referenced in an offhand, improvisational way to help explain the conduct of violence. If narrators exhaust the credibility or the ability to explain behavior with a formula story, they can shift to another account that colors but that does not completely dismantle what is being said. Street codes seemingly are fluid in application and overlap with depictions that contain greater agency, wide flexibility in reasons for violence, and acknowledgment of violent propensity. Violent criminals reference acculturated accounts of violence in an improvised but practiced shorthand that draws on multiple forms as needed.

The inclusion of alternative explanations should not diminish the importance of referencing the code in stories as a means to constructing identity. It merely suggests that actors are not one-dimensional. They can, and often do, draw on a multitude of stories when constructing self (Loseke 2007). While we think stories about the code are important, we do not wish to imply that it is the most important storyline in identity construction. Instead, it is one among many, albeit one that can apply to a variety of crimes.

Conclusion

According to some scholars, the code of the streets offers a script or guide for how to handle interpersonal affronts. By being culturally prepared for hostile and threatening interactions, those who embrace the code are thought to be quick to interpret challenging interactions as disrespectful and likely to endorse violent responses or escalation in the face of disrespect. We can, therefore, easily see how acculturation leads to specific action, perhaps expressed by verbal escalation or the striking of blows in emergent conflicts. Readers can interpret our findings as offering clear support for the contention that a code exists among certain populations, even those outside of the United States. That is, when discussing their crimes participants made references to the code when they articulated motives behind vengeful robberies and use of force to counter victim resistance. In these situations, participants claimed that their actions made sense by the prescripts of the code; namely, that disrespect deserved immediate violence.

Codes are generally important for understanding how violent actors think of themselves, and this may be the reason that items that can be seen as indicators of street code endorsement are predictive of many sorts of crime, and not only violence resulting from escalating arguments (Stewart and Simons 2010; Walters 2006). We find considerable evidence that street codes and conceptions of disrespect are foundational in forming violent inmates' narratives of their crimes, and also appear in passages about who they are. In many instances people can cast acts of violence as enactments of street codes and they can invoke these codes even when they have no clear connection to the storyline. In places, the speaker seems to use them as indicators of a generally violent character and often combines such uses with ready admissions of violent propensity. Clearly, this supports those who emphasize codes as narrative devices or representations of constructions of self-image.

In addition to this straightforward contribution, we think our findings provide additional theoretical insights into how criminologists can understand the code of the street. While the code was a central theme in participants' descriptions of their actions, we do not think it should be examined *only* as an external and soft determinant of their behavior or as a set of attitudes indicating how to respond in a narrow range of situations. Instead, we argue that students of street life can view the code as a narrative device—a formula story—that aids in plotting accounts and represents a claim of being "street." In short, people can call forth elements of the code to excuse or justify their actions. Seen in this light, codes become yet another linguistic device for maintaining a positive self-concept, much like techniques of neutralization or accounts (Scott and Lyman 1968; Sykes and Matza 1957). At times, narrators may use illogically formulated references of the code to aid them in crafting rather shallow or misleading excuses for behaviors that have little to do with prideful or retaliatory motives.

By using formula stories when discussing violence, inmates can align their actions with social expectations (Stokes and Hewitt 1976), which allows them to maintain desired identities. When participants are questioned about their wrongdoings, the way they explain their actions becomes a central way of maintaining a particular sense of self. In this case, using themes of the code in their stories allows participants to construct respectable street identities (i.e., as upholders or enforcers of the code). In relating their stories, narrators elevate their behaviors into evidence that in their social worlds they were acting as "real" men and women should, and their violence becomes an easily understandable and expected reaction to unfolding events.

To varying degrees, offenders seem to be aware that the stories they are presenting are not entirely convincing. Only a few seemed to wholeheartedly endorse their behavior in retrospect and present their behaviors as matter-of-fact

responses to situations that tightly constrained their options. The implications of these few accounts are somewhat disturbing. In them, the speakers seem unaware that others may not see the need for brutality in the situations they describe, suggesting that their narratives are misaligned with those of a larger society and that disjuncture creates little need for self-appraisal or questioning about why one behaved violently.

It may be fortunate that most accounts are replete with signs that the offenders are aware that the acculturated responses and behaviors they are presenting will be interpreted differently out of the context of the events and milieu where they occurred. Some give slight hint that they recognize that the worlds they are describing are somewhat foreign to the audience or that they were not so intractably embedded in street culture as to make the consideration of the possibility of other avenues of handling conflict a possibility. Indeed, many seem to highlight the contradiction of how they were thinking then, in angry moments and chaotic lifestyles, with how they think now. They use words that indicate that they are aware that the old explanations are, and should be, somewhat less than convincing even as they speak.

One suggestion here is that using formula stories about the code of the street is an outward manifestation of a person's self-identity or self-concept. Theorists across numerous disciplines agree that identity takes the form of a personal narrative used to guide and organize behavior (e.g., Giddens 1991; McAdams 1985). Narrative identity can be understood as an active information-processing structure, a cognitive schema, or a construct system that is both shaped by and later mediates social interaction. Essentially, people construct stories to account for what they did and why they did it. Narratives impose an order on our actions and explain our behavior with a sequence of events that connect up to explanatory goals, motivations, and feelings. They also act to shape and guide future behavior, as persons act in ways that agree with the stories or myths they have created about themselves (McAdams 1985). According to Bruner (2004, 694), "Eventually, the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very 'events' of a life. In the end, we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about our lives'" (italics in original).

In the language of sociologists, our participants were "telling the code" when they called forth its themes when discussing their violent indiscretions. By referencing the code in explaining situational violence, actors not only draw on existing themes but they create and sustain them. This is not unlike the process by which people "do gender" (Messerschmidt 1997; West and Zimmerman 1987). While people can "do the code" in numerous ways, the

code has recognizable forms and indicators that are culturally understood. This allows those who are asked to account for behavior to frame their actions in terms of normative expectations, attitudes, and conceptions. This does not mean that elements of these accounts had no bearing on action as it occurred. To the contrary, our analysis shares much in common with Wieder's (1974) study of the convict code, where he observed that if the code shapes action it is not due to implementation of a strict, mechanical script for action but rather as a symbolic resource used to perform specific tasks (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Accounts that incorporate the street code reinforce it and proscribe future behavior. Our participants' implementations reveal the pragmatic uses of cultural codes in accounts. While the street code may be just another example of the storied nature of human conduct, it clearly is culturally powerful and *should* be supported in action and accounts of behavior.

Violent inmates' endorsement of street codes in their stories signifies their self-image and potential to react violently. When interpreted this way, use of the code is a way of marking one's location in a culture so that the listener achieves a quick, if not full, understanding of the account. By playing on themes of the code, speakers may avert excessive detail and explanation that points directly to personal or moral shortcomings. Participants assume that explanations that draw on the code are stock knowledge among those they typically interact with and even among outsiders (like researchers). They need to go no further than mentioning disrespectful victims when describing their violence and listeners can fill in the details of why the interaction ended (and possibly began) with violence. In this sense, mentioning the code is not unlike the elicitation of family responsibilities to vaguely explain everything from relocating to new jobs, to problems at work, or even embezzlement among the middle class (Connell 2005). When someone asserts that hard times lead them to commit property crime so that a casual listener might assume that they were stealing for food, they too rely on a formula story constructed to capture in a few words how persons like them make familiar choices. Thus, the narrator gets many points across, but avoids depth of narrative, self-reflection, and acknowledgment of flaws in person and choice. Use of the code, like other similar devices, asserts and reminds that this is just the way things are.

That narratives of violent crime often are not theoretically pure or discrete, of course, comes as no surprise to those familiar with accounts of violence and the difficulties of classifying them (Sandberg 2010). In fact, some accounts of crime are not linear or logical. The only intrigue of pointing to this is in revealing how participants adhere to images from a code as part of a "line" or front that they provide to researchers. To a degree, the interviewed sanitize what they did by referring to vague cultural principles about interpersonal conflict and

disrespect even where the attempt to present their accounts in this way receives almost no additional investment or consistent embellishment.

As an avenue of future research, we suggest that interviewers pursue in greater depth the accounts that offenders give of violent crime and the degree to which they are aware of the forms that occur in their stories. Clearly, there would be value in more combative and challenging interviewing strategies to see if offenders easily yield or shift to new forms of explanation when challenged. Another possibility is to reinterview offenders, presenting them with the accounts of crime that they have provided in hand and to encourage them to evaluate critically what they have said. We can imagine entire interviews centered on descriptions of a single event. The offender could be questioned about the veracity of the claims and asked if they are proud or ashamed of the way they presented the story. Researchers could highlight the excuses that members of the general population might find less than convincing and ask participants about how their associates at the time would have viewed their explanations. They could be asked if the unfolding sequences they describe are common justifications or explanations of crime, and whether the identifiable similarities make for acceptable explanations when others posit them. In retrospect, and given what has already been said of it, was their behavior justifiable? Perhaps, similar exercises could be done with other offenders' accounts. Comparison groups, composed of nonoffenders, also could be interviewed about what offenders are saying. There are many suggestions here, but they all amount to careful consideration of the meanings and forms of accounts of crime.

Anderson's concept of street codes has influenced theoretical criminology significantly. At the least, Anderson extended the tradition of earlier subcultural scholars like Miller (1958) and Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967) with new insights, although it is contested whether he went far enough in explaining the presence of the code in an explicit theoretical framework. The current analysis elaborates, even if modestly, on Anderson's foundation to provide further insights into how participants in street life interpret their codes subjectively. Our findings support the view that a code of the street exists and plays a prominent part in the narratives of those imprisoned for violent crimes in the United Kingdom. As such, our findings lend support to the claim that codes both constrain behavioral repertoires and are used after the fact to make sense of action and construct identities (Jimerson and Oware 2006). We hope that the current findings and interpretation of them encourage others to explore how people make sense of violent behavior and use the code when discussing such acts to construct respectable identities. By placing street codes within the theoretical framework of narrative identity, future scholars may be better equipped to fill in some of the

theoretical gaps left by Anderson and elaborate on how and why individuals develop, maintain, and use codes in their lives.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

References

Anderson, Elijah. 1999. *Code of the street: Decency, violence and the moral life of the inner city*. New York: Norton.

Athens, Lonnie H. 1997. *Violent criminal acts and actors revisited*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Brezina, Timothy, Robert Agnew, Francis T. Cullen, and John P. Wright. 2004. The code of the street: A quantitative assessment of Elijah Anderson's subculture of violence thesis and its contribution to youth violence research. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 2: 303-28.

Brookman, Fiona, Trevor Bennett, Andy Hochstetler, and Heith Copes. 2011. The role of the "code of the street" in the generation of street violence in the UK. *European Journal of Criminology* 8: 17-31.

Bruner, Jerome. 2004. Life as narrative. *Social Research* 71: 691-710.

Brunson, Rod, and Eric A. Stewart. 2006. Young African American women, the street code, and violence: An exploratory analysis. *Journal of Crime and Justice* 29:1-19.

Connell, R. 2005. *Masculinities*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Douglas, Jack. 1972. Observing deviance. In *Research on deviance*, edited by Jack Douglas, 1-34. New York: Random House.

Drummond, Holli, John M. Bolland, and Waverly A. Harris. 2011. Becoming violent: Evaluating the mediating effect of hopelessness on the code of the street thesis. *Deviant Behavior* 32: 191-223.

Garot, Robert. 2007. Where you from! *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 36: 50-84.

Engel, David. 1984. The oven bird's song: Insiders, outsiders, and personal injuries in an American Community. *Law and Society Review* 18: 551-82.

Ezzy, Douglas. 1998. Theorizing narrative identity: Symbolic interactionism and hermeneutics. *Sociological Quarterly* 39: 239-52.

Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Gubrium, Jaber, and James Holstein. 2008. Narrative practice and the coherence of personal stories. *Sociological Quarterly* 39: 163-87.

Hochstetler, Andy, Heith Copes, and Patrick Williams. 2010. That's not who I am: How offenders commit violent acts and reject authentically violent selves. *Justice Quarterly* 27: 492-516.

Horowitz, Ruth. 1987. Community tolerance of gang violence. *Social Problems* 34: 437-450.

Jacobs, Bruce. 2004. A typology of street criminal retaliation. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 41: 295-323.

Jacobs, Bruce, and Richard Wright. 2006. *Street justice: Retaliation in the criminal underworld*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Jimerson, Jason B., and Matthew K. Oware. 2006. Telling the code: An ethnomethodological ethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35: 24-50.

Jones, Nikki. 2004. It's not where you live, it's how you live: How young women negotiate conflict and violence in the inner city. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 595: 49-62.

Katz, Jack. 1988. *Seductions of crime: Moral and sensual attractions of doing evil*. New York: Basic Books.

Katz, Jack. 1999. *How emotions work*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Klenowski, Paul, Heith Copes, and Christopher Mullins. 2011. Gender, identity and accounts: How white collar offenders do gender when they make sense of their crimes. *Justice Quarterly* 28: 46-69.

Lee, Jooyoung. 2009. Battlin' on the corner: Techniques for sustaining play. *Social Problems* 56: 578-98.

Loseke, Donileen. 2007. The study of identity as cultural, institutional, organizational, and personal narratives: Theoretical and empirical integrations. *Sociological Quarterly* 48: 661-88.

Maruna, Shadd, and Heith Copes. 2005. What have we learned from five decades of neutralization research? *Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of Research* 32: 221-320.

McAdams, Dan P. 1985. *Power, intimacy and the life story: Personological inquiries into identity*. New York: Guilford.

McAdams, Dan P. 2006. *The redemptive self: Stories Americans live by*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McAdams, Dan, Jack J. Bauer, April R. Sakaeda, Nana Akua Anyidoho, Mary Anne Machado, Katie Magrino-Failla, Katie W. White, and Jennifer L. Pals. 2006. Continuity and change in the life story: A longitudinal study of autobiographical memories in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Personality* 74: 1371-1400.

McCall, George J., and J. L. Simmons. 1966. *Identities and interactions*. New York: Free Press.

Messerschmidt, James. 1997. *Crime as structured action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Miller, Walter B. 1958. Lower culture as a generating milieu of crime and delinquency. *Journal of Social Issues* 14: 5-19.

Mullins, Christopher. 2006. *Holding your square*. Cullompton, Devon: Willan Press.

Potter, Jonathan, and Margaret Wetherell. 1987. *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London: Sage.

Presser, Lois. 2008. *Been a heavy life: Stories of violent men*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Presser, Lois. 2009. The narratives of offenders. *Theoretical Criminology* 13: 177-200.

Presser, Lois. 2010. Collecting and analyzing the stories of offenders. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education* 21: 431-46.

Rich, John A., and Courtney M. Grey. 2005. Pathways to recurrent trauma among young black men: Traumatic stress, substance use, and the code of the street. *American Journal of Public Health* 95: 816-24.

Rosenfeld, Richard, Bruce Jacobs, and Richard Wright. 2003. Snitching and the code of the streets. *British Journal of Criminology* 43: 291-309.

Sandberg, Sveinung. 2008. Street capital: Ethnicity and violence on the streets of Oslo. *Theoretical Criminology* 12: 153-71.

Sandberg, Sveinung. 2009a. A narrative search for respect. *Deviant Behavior* 30: 487-510.

Sandberg, Sveinung. 2009b. Gangster, victim, or both? Street drug dealers' interdiscursive construction of sameness and difference in self-presentations. *British Journal of Sociology* 60: 523-40.

Sandberg, Sveinung. 2010. What can "lies" tell us about life? Notes towards a framework of narrative criminology. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education* 21: 447-65.

Sandberg, Sveinung. 2011. The sweet taste of sin: A Muslim drug dealer in a Nordic welfare state. *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention* 11: 103-18.

Sandberg, Sveinung, and Willy Pedersen. 2009. *Street capital: Black cannabis dealers in a white welfare state*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Scott, Marvin B., and Stanford M. Lyman. 1968. Accounts. *American Sociological Review* 33: 46-62.

Stewart, Eric, Chris J. Schreck, and Ronald L. Simons. 2006. I ain't gonna let no one disrespect me: Does the code of the street reduce or increase violent victimization among African American adolescents. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 43: 427-58.

Stewart, Eric, and Ronald Simons. 2006. Structure and culture in African-American adolescent violence: A partial test of the code of the street thesis. *Justice Quarterly* 23: 1-33.

Stewart, Eric, and Ronald Simons. 2010. Race, code of the street, and violent delinquency: A multilevel investigation of neighborhood street culture and individual norms of violence. *Criminology* 48: 569-605.

Stokes, Randall, and John P. Hewitt. 1976. Aligning actions. *American Sociological Review* 41: 838-49.

Sykes, Gresham, and David Matza. 1957. Techniques of neutralization: A theory of delinquency. *American Sociological Review* 22: 664-70.

Topalli, Volkan. 2005. When being good is bad: An expansion of neutralization theory. *Criminology* 43: 797-836.

Wacquant, Loic. 2002. Scrutinizing the street: Poverty, morality, and the pitfalls of urban ethnography. *American Journal of Sociology* 107: 1468-1532.

Walters, Glenn D. 2006. Appraising, researching and conceptualizing criminal thinking: A personal view. *Criminal Behavior and Mental Health* 16: 87-99.

West, Candace, and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. Doing gender. *Gender & Society* 1: 125-51.

Wieder, D. Lawrence. 1974. *Language and social reality: The case of telling the convict code*. The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton.

Willott, Sara, Christine Griffin, and Mark Torrance. 2001. Snakes and ladders: Upper-middle class male offenders talk about economic crime. *Criminology* 39: 441-67.

Wolfgang, Marvin E., and Franco Ferracuti. 1967. *The subculture of violence*. London: Tavistock.

Wright, Richard, Fiona Brookman, and Trevor Bennett. 2006. The foreground dynamics of street robbery in Britain. *British Journal of Criminology* 46: 1-15.

Wright, Richard T., and Scott Decker. 1997. *Armed robbers in action: Stickups and street culture*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.

Bios

Dr. Fiona Brookman is Reader in Criminology and Deputy Director of the Centre for Criminology, University of Glamorgan, in South Wales, which she helped to establish in 2001. Dr Brookman received her PhD from Cardiff University in 2000. Her research and publications generally revolve around homicide and other forms of violence (such as street robbery) and she is author of *Understanding Homicide* (Sage 2005), editor of the *Handbook on Crime* (Willan 2010) and author of numerous articles and book chapters. She has been the recipient of over £100,000 worth of research funding from prestigious bodies including the Home Office and the ESRC. Her research on homicide forms part of the British Murder Investigation Manual and she is currently undertaking research into homicide and major crime investigation.

Heith Copes is an Associate Professor in the Department of Justice Sciences at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. His primary research explores the criminal decision-making process using qualitative methods. His recent publications appear in *British Journal of Criminology, Justice Quarterly, Criminology and Public Policy, and Social Problems*.

Andy Hochstetler is Associate Professor of Sociology at Iowa State University. Using wide-ranging methodologies, he writes on self-conception and the choice to offend. His work usually emphasizes identity and decision-making. He also maintains general theoretical interest in criminal decision-making, choice and in examining psychological variables and offending in longitudinal data.