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DECONSTRUCTING MYTHS: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF "SADOMASOCHISM" VERSUS "SUBJUGATED KNOWLEDGES" OF PRACTITIONERS OF CONSENSUAL "SM"*

by

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ABSTRACT

The following paper is based on a critical criminological, methodologically mainly qualitative, social research project that I conducted during 1996 and 1997 in London's "Scene" of consensual "SM." During this time I conducted unstructured, focused interviews as well as participant observations within Scene-clubs that aimed at exploring the "lived realities" of consensual "SM" and its "subjugated knowledges." The paper contrasts the major elements of the social construction of "Sadomasochism" that medicalize and pathologize practitioners of this consensual "bodily practice" with some of the findings of my empirical research within the "Scene" that developed around consensual "SM" in London. More specifically, the paper explores images, representations, and accounts of "kinky sex" within popular culture as well as the various motivations for engaging in consensual "SM" that were mentioned by my informants and suggests that the motivations are not pathological or peculiar but rather part of contemporary society’s "subterranean values." The paper thus deconstructs the social construction of "Sadomasochism" and opposes the selective criminalization of consensual "SM" practice.

INTRODUCTION
Dominant discourses and ideologies of "sexuality" as well as of "perversion" established "conditions of domination" (Foucault, 1990) that directly or indirectly produced individual and social harm. The social construction of "sadomasochism" was part of the "deployment of sexuality" which did not operate by means only of repression but more effectively in terms of productive power relations working throughout the whole social body. The discourses and practices comprising the Western "scientia sexualis" (e.g., psychiatry, psychology, and sexology) aimed at reproducing socio-political power relationships by means of the authoritative character of the expert discourses that constituted the "new species" of "perverts," one of which was the "sadomasochist."

*Psychopathia Sexualis*, originally published in 1886 and written by Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1886/1978), a Professor of Neurology, serves even today as a basis for many definitions and meanings given to "sexuality" as well as to "perversions." Krafft-Ebing’s *a priori* understanding of the source of "perversions" was a belief in inherited "deviant" sexual traits, which he illustrated with bizarre case studies. His focus on the manifestations of "sadism" and "masochism" was then combined with the morals and "sexual ideals" of his time and could only result in a misunderstanding of "sadism" and "masochism" as substitutes for "natural sexuality."

Even though Krafft-Ebing considered, but never elaborated on, the possibility that there could be a link, or rather a continuum, that reached from "normal," heterosexual "horse-play" to "sadism," he still defined "sadism" as an experience of sexually pleasurable sensations (including orgasm) that is produced by acts of cruelty, including bodily punishment inflicted on one’s own person or witnessed. Although this definition would also cover "masochism," as he stated that a "sadist" could also gain sexual pleasure by infliction of pain on his/her own body, he created the separate theoretical construct of "masochism." The creation of this counterpart of "sadism" probably stemmed from the stereotypical belief that sadism was a pathological form of the "natural heterosexual relationship" and as women were meant to be, and therefore seen as, passive, "sadism" had to represent a pathological intensification of the "male sexual character." Since "sadism" was envisioned as active, represented by the stereotype of the "man," "masochism" had to be a predominantly "feminine" characteristic or...
a sign of impotence. Krafft-Ebing’s theories were thus completely determined by Victorian morals and stereotypes, which impact even on contemporary etiological approaches.

The "paraphilia" of "sadomasochism" (a sub-category within the classifications of "sexual pathology") constructs this "bodily practice" as a "sexual compulsion," a "deviant sexual trait" (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1978) determined by either "sexual impotence," a "weak sex drive" (e.g. Ellis, 1897/1901), or by "deprived" and/or violent family backgrounds. Even in contemporary, more "open" approaches, the association with a "sexual disorder" and/or of a substitution of "natural, normal, mature, genital sexuality" lingers on (e.g., Cowan, 1982; Keyes & Money, 1993).

In past and present, the social construction of "perversion," and that of "sadomasochism" in particular, is always based on the "relational distance" between the "sexual" behavior in question and "normal coitus," the established norm of "heterosexuality," as shown in the following example:

Non-coital sexual behavior on the part of sexually mature individuals may be called abnormal only when it is practiced not just as an introduction to or accompaniment of coitus but, despite opportunities for coitus, as the exclusive or preferred form of behavior. Then only can we speak of sexual deviations. The further such behavior is removed from normal coital behavior, the more immature it is, the more rigid its performance, the more passionate dependence there is on it, the more justifiable it is to use the term perversion (Scharfetter, 1980: 257).

DEMYSTIFYING CONSENSUAL "SADOMASOCHISM"

Negative stereotypes of sadomasochism are translated into public policy. Government action against our community is always taken in the name of fighting violence; some even claim it is necessary for the cops to arrest us to protect us from our own sexuality.
Califia holds the association of "SM" with mental illness responsible for the social reactions with which practitioners of consensual "SM" are confronted, such as "attempts to ban our literature, harass or arrest people at our public events, or outlaw even the private practice of bondage and S/M" (Califia & Sweeney, 1996: xv). These social reactions and actions of formal as well as informal agencies of social control are based on the social construction of "Sadomasochism" and the connected discursive constitution of the "Sadomasochist" with its implicit positivistic notions of pathology and determinism.

The data collected during my fieldwork within the "Scene" of consensual "SM" in London revealed that current representations of "sexuality" as well as the "sexual" ambitions and practices of members of mainstream society are not that different from many of those stated by practitioners of consensual "SM," thus indicating the existence of "subterranean values" (Matza & Sykes, 1961). It was Matza’s and Sykes’s ambition to reveal that there were and are many continuities between the worlds of "delinquents" and/or "deviants" and non-delinquents/deviants. They suggested that society contains a sub-culture of "delinquency," in contrast to many sub-cultures within a society. Although much of what follows confirms Matza's and Sykes's premise, I will suggest that the operations of the system of capitalist consumer society necessitated the development of a representational system that "normalizes" what is designated to belong to a now legitimized and exploited realm of "kinky sex," while still excluding what is socially constructed as "perversion." As "Sadomasochism" has become a site of political and legal power struggles in contemporary times (e.g., in Britain especially after the R. v. Brown case and the subsequent decision of the European Court of Human Rights in 1997), an excursion into the representations of "sexuality" and connected issues within the public sphere appear to be important. These representations can crucially influence individual perceptions and attitudes.

THE DISENCHANTED REALM OF THE "SEXUAL"

It seems that sex – its defining limits and its inter-personal objectivity shot to hell – teeters
on the brink of becoming a meaningless word; signifying everything and meaning nothing. 

(Polhemus & Randall, 1994: 4-5)

The "sexual liberation" of the sixties enabled humans to notice and throw off their inhibitions as well as making sexual freedom a civil liberty, but it also brought negative results. Whereas the original aim was the achievement of "authenticity" through sexual liberation, however that was defined (e.g., in terms of essentialism), a shift in the opposite direction occurred through the marketing of "sex." "[S]ex itself, it[s] saturated external reality, [was] becoming part of mainstream culture. Sex as image became far more significant than sex itself" (Grant, 1993: 264). The consequences of this media and cultural "sex-overkill" may be interpreted as leading to a "disenchantment" of the "sexual" realm, as expressed by Baudrillard:

Nothing is less certain today than sex, behind the liberation of its discourse. And nothing today is less certain than desire, behind the proliferation of its images. When desire is entirely on the side of demand, when it is operationalized without restrictions, it loses its imaginary and, therefore, its reality; it appears everywhere but in generalized simulation (1990: 5).

While "normalized sexuality" has been used in advertisements since the so-called "Sexual Revolution" to market even the most unrelated products, in recent years the exploitation of the "perversions" has begun as capitalist consumerist societies require "innovation" to generate the buyer’s desires and demands.

Language always lags behind visual symbols, and one need only look at today’s fashion, advertising, or pop videos to realize that perviness pervades the mass as well as the minority. Everywhere you look (and this is as true of continental Europe, Japan, and the USA as it is of Britain), that which excites is that which incorporates some undercurrent of erotic weirdness, decadence, or perversion. The erotic, like everything else, is subject to fashion change – the pendulum swinging between nature and artifice, sunlight and darkness, normality and deviance, the girl/boy next
door and the vampiric alien other (These contrasts are all perfectly realized in David Lynch’s film *Blue Velvet*) (*Polhemus and Randall, 1994: 5*). An example of this development in the realm of marketing can be seen in the 1995 promotion of the perfume "Ma Griffe," which was entitled "Leave Your Mark on a Man" and presented the reader of magazines like *New Woman* (*Nov. 1995: 46-7*) with the sight of an exposed "male" back showing green scratch-marks left by a woman’s long nails. [End page 69]

As exotic and/or bizarre objects, even "sexualities" that were formerly constructed and thus perceived and treated as "deviant" and were pathologized and/or criminalized, as has been the case with "Sadomasochism," are being used to promote consumer products. In their winter promotion of 1996 (until February 15, 1997), the company "Häagen-Dazs" advertised their ice cream product using the slogan:

**CALL DIRECT RESPONSE ON**

*Men in Leather* – Will deliver your Häagen-Dazs on mopeds.

**FULFILL YOUR CHOCOLATE FANTASIES WITH OUR**

**INDULGENT NEW FLAVOR, CHOCOLATE MIDNIGHT COOKIES.**

**JUST CALL THE HOTLINE BETWEEN 10PM AND 4AM,**

**ASK FOR HÄAGEN-DAZS AND OUR BOYS WILL ZIP ROUND** (*Häagen-Dazs, 1996a: 1*).

And in true "gender" coverage of the potential consumer groups, Häagen-Dazs had a parallel advertisement:

**DOMINANT MISTRESS WANTS HÄAGEN-DAZS NOW**

Any time of night between 10pm and 4am your demands can now be satisfied with our
new sensual flavor, Chocolate Midnight Cookies. Just call the Hotline and insist we whip round with Häagen-Dazs, OR ELSE.


These suggestive and seductive representations of signifiers of "Sadomasochism" in the competitive winter ice cream sale did not harm the sale of "Häagen-Dazs" ice cream as these advertisements continued to be used in various magazines within the United Kingdom. If the former meaning ascribed to "Sadomasochism" had still applied, this promotion would have used different signifiers; this once again shows a shift in the meaning, and the rising acceptability in the public's view, of the label "kinky" or "kinky sex." This label, however, still excludes constructed "Others" who are designated as practicing "real perversions."

A similar approach to product promotion was applied by "Tango" soft drinks with their advertisements on TV; the different flavors of these soft drinks were characterized [End page 70] as being "deviant," "against family values," and so on. Moreover, the brewery "Boddingtons" used the image of a black whip twisted round a full glass of beer with the slogan, "The Cream of Manchester," for the 1996/97 promotion of their beer in several magazines and newspapers sold within the United Kingdom. The impressions an advertisement by "Clairol" is supposed to leave the potential customer with are not hard to imagine:

YES! YES! YES! YES!

Introducing Herbal Essences

Start an affair with your hair.

A totally organic experience!

Unleash the powers of nature with these wonderful new shampoos and conditioners. Unique combinations of organic herbs and botanicals blended with mountain spring water. Its distinctive fragrances will stir your senses to unparalleled heights.
The customer appears to be openly encouraged, if the advertisement is taken literally, to follow a "deviant" career in hair "fetishism" to obtain an organic (orgasmic?) experience. About ten years ago an advertisement with this content would possibly have ruined the "Clairol" company.

The "deployment of sexuality" penetrates nearly all areas of everyday life and can thus be seen as responsible for the "widespread dissatisfaction with our own sexual experiences, which somehow never seem to live up to our culture’s extravagant myths of erotic fulfillment" (Polhemus & Randall, 1994: 7). From a critical criminological perspective, the potential effects of media proliferation can be explained with Mathiesen’s (1977) addition to Foucault’s notion of the "panopticon." The "panopticon" describes the system of surveillance operating through the "gaze," which at first is merely external (through agents of social control), but through internalization turns into the internal supervision of oneself.

In his essay "The Viewer Society," Thomas Mathiesen (1997) suggested that Foucault’s concept of the "panoptic" process needs to be supplemented with its opposite, the "synopticon," and that these processes operate in a reciprocal relationship with each other. Mathiesen sees "synopticism," as well as "panopticism," as characteristic to our Western societies, using these concepts to suggest that the situation in which masses of people focus on a selected few represents the opposite of "panopticon" and is embodied in the total system of modern mass media. The "synoptic space" performs its visual and continuous power over masses of people through an active process of filtering [End page 71] and shaping the "informations" "within the context of a broader hidden agenda of political or economic interests" (Mathiesen, 1997: 226).

The functions of control and discipline performed by "synoptic space" can be best appreciated by emphasizing "the total Gestalt produced by the messages of television," meaning an effect of broader enculturation in the population. Referring to Enzensberger (1974) and Tuchman (1974), Mathiesen (1997) states: "synopticism, through the modern mass media in general and television in particular, first of all directs and controls or disciplines
our consciousness" (Mathiesen, 1997: 230). "Synopticon" thus functions in terms of social control through inducing people to specific patterns of self-control and, I would add, also by inducing specific patterns of desire and "sexuality," which fit the requirements of consumerism. Although "lived bodies" are never completely determinable, the effects of the "synopticon" should not be underestimated as it serves a similar function to that formerly occupied by the church: the need for escapism through the offerings of a televised "world paradigm." Thus, the "synopticon" as a functional alternative to the church works smoothly in communion with "panopticon" in the prevention of critical thought: "surveillance, panopticon, makes us silent about that which breaks fundamentally with the taken-for-granted because we are afraid to break with it. Modern television, synopticon, makes us silent because we do not have anything to talk about that might initiate a break" (Mathiesen, 1997: 231).

The influence of media on individual perceptions and expectations concerning "sexuality" could thus be seen as the combined effect of "synopticon" and "panopticon." The proliferation of "sexual ambitions" and their pursuit extend further and further, so that in contemporary consumer culture interest in "sex" is a must. As Sarah Litvinoff has written:

> When we talk about sex we’re not talking about what goes on in individual bedrooms, but about the acceptable public face of sex....and the public face of sex in the Nineties is about very upfront sexual gratification; anything goes with anyone. It’s a more hard-edged version of the free love of the Sixties and Seventies. For everyone who is liberated by this kind of attitude, there are others who are made unhappy because they feel pressurized into acting in a way that they don’t want to. In today’s sexual climate, you are assumed to have a problem if you are not particularly into sex (quoted in Lacey, 1997: 1).

**TRANSGRESSING THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE SPLIT**

[A] huge gap exists between erotic expectations and
sexual realities.

(Polhemus & Randall, 1994: 7) [End page 72]

Through the commodification of "bodies" and their "sexuality," the strict division of public and private broke down. In 1995, Annie Sprinkle toured the United Kingdom with a performance called "My Body Is A Temple For A Multi-Media Whore," using her "sexualized body" for artistic performances in public settings and thus further eliminating the formerly rigid split between public and private. A large proportion of the internet focuses on "sexuality" and thus becomes potentially a new source for the further deployment of "sexuality." "Stripping in cyberspace" serves as an income for some: "Couples with a camera, a computer and access to the Internet . . . earning thousands by getting on-line and getting it all off" (Gill, 1998: 13). The private/public boundary is blurred through these displays of "authenticity" in "sexual exposure" which, in some respects, appear like a reaction against the cult of the "sexual body image:" "What a relief to find a real woman between all of those retouched ones" (Gill, 1998: 13). The private/public line is further transgressed by the interactions between some of the visitors to these websites and the women and men who strip for them, as the strippers sometimes display themselves according to suggestions made by viewers (Gill, 1998: 14). Gill further remarks that this so-called "electronic streaking" is "hip" and easy and that "tens of thousands of men and women" engage in this cyberspace activity, which provides anyone with the chance of "15 megabytes of fame" (Gill, 1998: 14). The so-called "net exhibitionists" see their activities as positive not only for the viewer but also for themselves: "Having a Web site changed their lives . . . . The Web now gives . . . the anonymity to explore the dark side" (Gill, 1998: 15).

Apart from various "normal sex" sites (i.e., the "Adult Sites"), the internet provides plenty of resources for the "sexual deviant." There are the "S&M News" (http://www.smnews.com/), the "Erotic Punishment" website (http://www.4bdsm.com/pt=pmb1730/entrance.html), the "IC: UK BDSM Directory" (http://www.informedconsent.co.uk/ubd/), and the "SM: Safe Magic for Gay Men" (http://www.safersex.org/ssex/safemagic.html). The list could go on and on as the internet is full of "sexual" freesites. This technological development holds the potential for positive change.
in terms of diminishing formerly rigid borderlines of exclusion. Ken Plummer explored the growth and change of the "intimate" within the borderless space of the modern media. Whereas in the nineteenth century "sexual stories" were mass-printed in magazines, each of which would be read by a separate audience, "the new electronic media have blurred previously distinct spheres, such as those between men and women, young and old, gay and straight, black and white, making once segregated worlds more pervasively accessible" (as quoted in Weeks and Holland, 1996: 35).

Yet not all public representations are inclusive:

Fetish imagery has never been more common in music videos, haute couture, and mass media. S/M is a talk-show staple and a reliable staple of crime shows. While it’s nice to have people admire our clothes and to hear jokes about [End page 73] handcuffs during prime time, these media references too often include damaging and dangerous stereotypes about us. When latex, leather, and metallic accessories are taken out of context, we get ripped off so the viewers at home can be titillated (Califia & Sweeney, 1996: xiv).

These effects of distortion that lead to a reinforcement of stereotypes of "Sadomasochism" can also be seen in many "SM" movies:

Cinematic SM is twisted into the non-consenting, violent realm of the unhinged that we know it is not. Fetishism is used as an excuse for a bit of titillatory semi-nudity, or to identify the villain – the man in black leather. Horror films, in particular, will happily throw in a leather catsuit or a gratuitous bondage scene to spice up a mediocre script (Olley, as quoted Woodward, 1993: 19).

Other movies that attempt to give a more authentic view of consensual "SM" practice are rare: Nick Broomfield’s "Fetishes," which showed for two weeks in London during September, 1997, as well as "Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan,
Supermasochist," a documentary by Kirby Dick, which provides an insight into consensual "SM" as a possibility for a reclaiming of "body," experienced and developed by a man who suffered from cystic fibrosis.

As movies and/or documentations that do not operate with and thus reinforce negative, reductionist stereotypes about consensual "SM" are very much in a minority and often are only shown in selected cinemas, the impact of distorting representations of consensual "SM," like for example in the movie 9 ½ Weeks, will remain strong. Sensationalism is the common reaction towards performances like the "Jim Rose Freak Show," which annually features as part of the "Edinburgh Festival" and even advertises itself as a show of "freaks." Within this show "bodily practices" that are part of "auto" and consensual "SM" are performed for their shock value.

RISING INTEREST IN CONSENSUAL "SM" WITHIN THE "GENERAL PUBLIC"

The rise of public interest in consensual "SM" within the last decade is striking. In Britain, for example, the magazine Elle featured an article called "The Dominatrix Next Door," which stated that "the S&M scene has never been bigger" (Weese, 1994: 74). Although 1994 was the same year in which the "Spanner" trial ended with the conviction of 16 men who had engaged in consensual "SM," making it publicly known that consensual "SM" bodily practices are indirectly and selectively criminalized in the United Kingdom, "there are thousands of ordinary couples" engaging in these practices (Weese, 1994: 71). "For many couples who practice S&M, the clubs provide a rare opportunity to act out their fantasies in public. Others create their own dungeons or torture chambers at home, keeping them locked to avoid upsetting the children" (Weese, 1994: 71). In this feature the journalist Sandra Weese conducted interviews with women who engaged in practices that are labeled "Sadomasochism." Her first interviewee, who has been married for 30 years, explained her motivations: "It wasn’t that we didn’t have a good sex life, but after 10 years of marriage, we needed something to spice it up" (Weese, 1994: 71). As culturally constructed ideas about "sexuality" and fulfillment are constantly reinforced through the diverse channels of the media, "routine in the bedroom" is a major motivation for people to start experimenting with alternatives to the "normal." The
heightening of pleasure, excitement, a prolonged foreplay, and the element of surprise are among the most appreciated features of this couple's (and surely many others, including some of the subjects in my sample) experiences with consensual "SM." The interviewed woman summed up:

S&M has definitely helped our marriage. But you have to maintain the unexpected element – if we did this every time we went to bed, it would become mundane, like normal sex. We still enjoy the candlelit dinners and tender lovemaking, but now there’s so much more to our sex life. After 30 years, we are still getting to know each other and it is never dull (Weese, 1994: 71).

Another female interviewee told Weese that she was approached by a man, who had a fetish, when she started to get into the "Scene." Later she met her long-term partner, while she was looking for a "submissive" partner for consensual "SM." Her search turned out to be quite easy as:

A good dominatrix is not easy for a man to find. A lot of women do it for the money but aren’t into it in their personal lives . . . . There are an awful lot of married men out there who wish their wives would be dominant in the bedroom. You only need to look inside a London telephone box to see all those cards from men wanting to be spanked (Weese, 1994: 74).

Here another common motivation becomes apparent – the wish for role-reversal. As the social construction of "masculinity" implies that men’s "nature" determines that they play the active and dominant part in "normal sexuality," consensual "SM" provides a space for a release from the pressure of social and individually internalized expectations under which a lot of men suffer. The interviewee’s remark about London phone-boxes is valid and can be confirmed by the numerous cards in the same phone-boxes from women offering to dominate men for money.

The magazine *She* (The Sex You're Having Now, 1998: 53)
published the results of its December survey called "The Sex You’re Having Now," which asked its female readership about how they felt about sex. The average age of the respondents was 32 years and half of the survey population had children. This survey showed that, for example, the use of "sex toys" "to spice up your lovemaking" was integrated into sexual encounters with their partners by 31 percent of the respondents. Apart from the use of pornographic films as stimulus (47 percent) and anal sex (60 percent), the respondents also made use of outfits: "Two thirds of respondents told us that they like to wear PVC, rubber, or other kinky underwear to turn their man on; 30 percent of you like wearing it on a night out, when just the two of you know. Although 79 percent of you don’t fancy the idea of making love to a man clad in women’s underwear, one in ten do – and love it . . . . 37 percent of you would love to try bondage provided you got to be in control . . . ." (The Sex You're Having Now, 1998: 53).

COMMODIFIED "SADOMASOCHISM"

"[P]assive" and "masochistic" sexual fantasies and practices, although seen as definitively "feminine," are at least as frequently the experiences and practices of men. By a ratio of four to one, Nancy Friday informs us, men’s fantasies are masochistic.

(Segal, 1994: 257)

Apart from countering "moral feminist" concerns about the alleged re-inscription of societal power positions through the "bodily practices" of consensual "SM," at least in the case of men taking part, these male fantasies and experiences are reflected in part by the many related services offered by prostitutes in London’s busy city center. During the months I stayed in London, I found the number of cards in phone-boxes that offered professional "SM" services amazingly high. "Normal sex" is comparatively rarely offered on these cards. As the cards (10-30 per phone-box) constantly get removed and then replaced, the business of consensual "SM" prostitution must be a worthwhile one. The contents of these cards reflect the desires of the men, who pay for the services offered. To give an impression of an ordinary phone-box in central London, which gives some indication of the "average" demand for "SM," I quote only a few of those cards I
These are "non-Scene" offers (although some professional "Dominatrixes" frequent the clubs as well) of services that are obviously in demand within the average "male" population, as "normal sex" offers are rare in these London phone-boxes.

In a feature called "Destination: ‘Other World Kingdom’ – Holidays a la de Sade" in the magazine *Marie Claire*, the reader was encouraged to "imagine working in a holiday camp where the guests wait on you hand and foot by day and spend the night in cages . . . . THE KINKY CASTLE. Where women keep men in dungeons" (*Connolly, 1998: 88*). The setting for the "Scene" thus described is the Czech Republic, where a 500 year old castle serves as a space in which "European professional males-turned-slaves
are being whipped into submission by young attractive women and, if they are lucky, by the queen herself" (Connolly, 1998: 88). This package-holiday, which sounds like a reversal of the situation described in *The Story of O*, attracts many businessmen who are willing to pay for the almost "complete illusion of submission towards women" (Connolly, 1998: 88).

ENTERING THE "FIELD" OF CONSENSUAL "SM"

As "Sadomasochism" is behavior which is ascribed (Kühl, 1981) on the basis of a comparison with the myth of "natural sexuality," the attempt to explain it in terms of physical or psychological deficiency would only be valid if this behavior were not understandable to a sufficient degree (Weber, 1949). My empirical field research on consensual "SM" clearly showed motivations that are understandable and sufficient, especially with regard to their "cultural background," in terms of reflecting "subterranean values" (Matza and Sykes, 1961) that were largely generated by the continuous demand for "innovation" to sell consumer products and, further, through the socio-cultural emphasis on "safe sex" after the emergence of AIDS. In order to contextualize the findings of my research project to the reader, I will outline the methodological tools used to conduct my research. [End page 77]

My approach could be located within the tradition of ethnographic fieldwork and is also informed by feminist-inspired approaches to social research. During the one year of social research in London, I conducted "unstructured non-directive interviews" with sixteen interviewees, who were contacted through "snowball sampling" and "relational outcroppings" (Lee, 1993: 68). The major advantage of unstructured, focussed interviewing is the fact that it allows the interviewees to express their views in terms of their own "frames of reference," thus providing the possibility for the researcher to understand the meanings attributed to their "life worlds" (e.g., the "bodily practices" of consensual "SM" as well as the meanings that individual practitioners attribute to the label of "Sadomasochism"). This is also a feminist-inspired approach to qualitative research, with its roots in Oakley’s (1981) approach. An unstructured but focussed approach, grounded in respect for the frame of reference of the "other," has, in my experience, led to profound insights and revelations about the lives of my interviewees. In communion with other feminist researchers, I consider and practice research as a "two-way" process, which has
also come to be known as "dialogic retrospection." Humm (1989) defined this feminist-inspired concept and research practice as: ". . . open and active exchange between the researcher and participant in a partnership of co-research" (Humm, 1989: 50).

The choice of the access methods of "snowballing" and "relational outcropping" appeared, and turned out, to be the most effective ones as I had to deal with a "hidden" and "deviant" population" (Lee, 1993) with all its sociological problems. As the topic of this research project is a sensitive one as it is, for example, dealing with the relatively private realm of "sexuality" and also involves "bodily practices" that are now indirectly and selectively criminalized, obtaining data was not an easy task to undertake. As Lee (1993: 6) has noted: ". . . sampling becomes more difficult the more sensitive the topic under investigation, since potential informants will have more incentive to conceal their activities."

Due to the secrecy and the resulting problem of "invisibility," access to the "field" was crucially dependent on the information and trust I gained from the two "gatekeepers" I found. May (1993: 42) defines "gatekeepers" as ". . . those who control access to the information which the researcher seeks." In this case, access to the population of interest was mostly conditioned by the possibilities of access through the "gatekeepers" (one from the "bi-and hetero"-consensual "SM-Scene" and one from the lesbian "Butch-Scene") and the development of trust between myself as researcher and these two "gatekeepers."

As it turned out to be difficult to sample a relatively hidden population, Lee's (1993: 61) suggestion to employ a combination of the strategies known as "networking" or "snowballing" and "relational outcropping" as a strategy for ". . . sampling 'special populations' [End page 78] which are rare and/or deviant in some way. . . " seemed to provide an adequate approach. In order to gain more control over the referral chains of my interviewees, I had to engage in explicit efforts to obtain information about the "gay SM" population as well as about the more easily obtainable data on "bi-and hetero" and "lesbian/butch"-consensual "SM"-"body-practices." My fieldwork data were generated through the employment of the social research method of "participant as observer." 5

The sample method I used is known as "relational outcropping." Lee (1993: 69) describes this as ". . . one method of sampling a rare
or deviant population [which involves finding] some site in which its members congregate and to study them there." My seeking out of "relational outcappings" within the "Scene" was partly limited by the code of secrecy that made some parties and clubs unobservable to the non-member. After some time within the "field" and the collection of a reasonable amount of qualitative data, I followed the advice of the majority of my interviewees and started to extend my observations to include the semi-public events of the "SM-Fetish"-market and to focus on a particular club that was recommended by them. As the club that was suggested to me allowed me a possibility to "blend in" and as the problem of access was resolved by the membership of one of my "gatekeepers," I decided to attend these club-events several times.

Whenever I went to any of the "Scene-clubs," the group or individuals that took me along were always informed of the purpose of my undertaking. At the "Scene-clubs" themselves, I observed and asked questions only when the flow of events allowed me to do so. As the people at these clubs wanted to enjoy themselves, I had to respect their wish to "play" without being a hinderer or a disturbance. Especially since some of their "modes of enjoyment" are criminalized and a number of clubs had been raided by the police, I did not want to increase the fears among the practitioners in the club about getting "busted." I did not dress in a typical "Dom" or "sub"-outfit but wore a rather "untelling" black rubber dress in order to adhere to the club's often rather strict dress codes.

It was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgression, when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will . . . it was a period when bodies "made a display of themselves (Foucault, 1990: 3).

This opening sequence of Foucault's "History of Sexuality," in which he illustrates a view of the relationship towards "sexual" practices at the beginning of the seventeenth century, came immediately to my mind when I encountered the "Scene" of consensual "SM" in London. In the so-called, "Fetish-Scene" and "SM-Scene," which do overlap, the exposure of bodies or body-parts and their manipulation are also the most striking features of visual encounters. The display of interacting bodies that indulge in erotic experiments appeared like a flight from the everyday wholesale product "sex." As genital [End page 79] sexuality loses
its socially reinforced importance and becomes a more or less rare by-product of the "bodily practices" within this "Scene," I was confronted with my own internalized and limited preconceptions about "sadomasochistic sexuality" that were based on categories of "normalization."

The following section of this article will present findings from my social research project. These observations reveal that the pathologizing explanations of traditional sexology and psychology for the engagement in consensual "SM" are wrong. This conclusion is evidenced through the direct words of my interviewees.

MOTIVATIONS FOR THE ENGAGEMENT IN CONSENSUAL "SM" "BODILY PRACTICES"

In this section of the paper, I discuss the most important aims mentioned by my interviewees for engaging in consensual "SM" "bodily practices." Altogether, five motivations were revealed through my conversations with practitioners of consensual "SM." My informants viewed these "bodily practices" as an alternative to "normal genital sexuality," as "safer sex," as an exploration of the dimensions of "lived body," as a possibility to transgress gay and lesbian stereotypes of "sexuality," and as a possibility to experience the transformative potentials of "lived body." In the following pages, each of these aims will be described in turn.

A. Consensual "SM" as an alternative to "normal genital sexuality"

For Ella the "bodily practices" of consensual "SM" were taken up as a possibility to enhance the sex life within her long-term marriage:

Ella: "Well, I’ve been married for about thirty-two years and really basically we started getting into it as part of our sexual play. We started with tying each other up and doing little things and it developed from there." (personal interview, 1997: 1).

This motivation could be understood as a choice to perform "sex work" within the framework of marriage as elaborated by Duncombe and Marsden (as cited in Weeks and Holland, 1996) which appears to be a quite widespread phenomenon. The effect
Ella gets from consensual "SM play," she describes in great detail:

Ella: ". . . relaxed and sexy. I mean I have to say obviously it heightens up our sex life, there’s no doubt about it. I mean because when you are doing something like that I mean it keeps you horny for days, basically, you know . . . you get into what you are doing, you get really sexually ‘high’ and it gets really sexually exciting. . . . Yeah, I mean it’s very much part of my life, it’s part of both of our lives because it’s important. Because sex is important to me. And I don’t ever want to stop that. I mean it’s an enjoyable activity if you like, if people say fishing is their hobby, o.k., sex is my hobby. But, yeah, you do, you feel really good. It’s great" (personal interview, 1997: 7).

For the next couple the choice of alternatives to genital "sexuality" is the main motivation for their engagement with consensual "SM" "body practices." Bess and Tom have a relatively new relationship; they also practice "vanilla" sex but enjoy novelty:

Bess: "There’s nothing better than sweet, kind, loving ['vanilla sex']. There’s nothing better than that but like everything, one diet gets boring. So the variety is really good" (personal interview, 1996: 5).

For Ryan, consensual "SM" "bodily practices" also serve as an alternative to penetrative "sexuality" which he found to be mandatory within gay culture:

Ryan: "I suppose it started, my first sort of experiences ‘S/M’-wise, was seeing that film called . . . [later it turns out to be Cruising]. Oh dear, the gay 'S/M' film? Oh, god, I can’t remember its name."

Andrea: "Maybe you can remember it later. Was it on TV or in the cinema?"

Ryan: "No, in the cinema and it got a very bad
reputation because it portrayed gays as
deviants and it was set in America. I can’t
remember what it was called, it’s really bad!
But anyway it was 1978 and it just came out
and I was sort of, about 14, 15. . . . And then
watching it and actually being very turned on
by the leather in it but also the power-games.
So I was sexually turned on. And then,
another film that I saw was the . . . 

Andrea: "Ah, 'Querelle’?”

Ryan: "Again, I got it on video and I watched
it and I was just. . . . And I suppose that sort
of. . . . And then I started experimenting with
partners and to be honest I suppose I’m more
interested in, you know, you’ve heard the term
‘vanilla sex,’ yeah? I’m more interested in that
sort of, not ‘vanilla sex’, the other sort of
sex” (personal interview, 1997: 1).

For Pat, the "bodily practices" of consensual "SM" provide the
possibility to have meaningful "sexuality" within an environment of
trust and safety:

Pat: "... you can have all of that excitement in
a place where you’re feeling trust [End page
81] and where you’re feeling safe, and where
you’re getting intense sensation and where
you’re communicating on a very intense level
with the other person. And I think, I mean
that’s what people want from sex, isn’t it?
They want to communicate in an intense way
with another person that they care about and
that cares about them and that they trust. And
that’s what they want from sex, isn’t it? I
mean apart from casual sex, but that’s what
people want from life. Meaningful sex – and
that’s what I get from S/M” (personal
interview, 1997: 8).

For Bette, consensual "SM" and "ordinary sex" are similar in
that both "... happen to utilize sort of extreme physical sensations
in order to bring pleasure . . . " (personal interview, 1996: 1) but with very distinctive features. The meaning and existential importance of communication between the partners engaged appears to Bette a point of difference:

Bette: "I think that "SM"-sex in a way is more conscious, more verbal and non-verbal communication between people throughout. I mean if somebody is being beaten, you ought to be looking at the person and trying to get it absolutely right. I mean that should be true in ordinary sex as well but I think it’s more true of "SM"-sex than any other sex. . . . Men just go for their own pleasure. I think that part of the thing is the difference between intercourse and beating somebody; with intercourse, man having intercourse with a woman, there’s a very direct sexual path, there’s a very sexually fixed pleasure. And therefore he has a motive for just getting what he wants. But if what he does is not directly genital or sexual. I mean it may give immense satisfaction, but the satisfaction it will give will be in the communication with the other person. The fact to get it right with the other person. The fact that it’s turning the other person on. Unless this man is just violent. But assuming it’s a proper "SM"-person. There isn’t a direct path . . ." (personal interview, 1996: 5).

Therefore, Bette concludes that empathy is more crucial in consensual "SM" than in "ordinary sex" as consensual "SM" depends directly on the communication between the partners; otherwise, it would not work out.

It appears as if the shortcomings of the "Sexual Revolution," with its focus on the goal of "heterosexual intercourse" that was to be achieved through the means of "foreplay," have been individually as well as socially recognized and alternatives have been found at the former fringes of "sexuality." The ideological and socially constructed "sexuality" has been found to be unsatisfying as well as limiting; in Bette’s opinion: " . . . a lot of people miss out enormously on sex. Particularly men do, particularly heterosexual
men do" (personal interview, 1996: 7). After reading the Hite Report on Male Sexuality, Bette was astonished: [End page 82]

Bette: "It’s just so tragic in a way how limited, what they appear to enjoy is. And how little use, you know, they are just so genitally orientated. It’s just so terribly, terribly sad. You just think, what they are missing out on. You haven’t explored your mind or other parts of the body. Have you not been taught about being fucked yourself or what about your nipples. I mean all you do is with your penises. It’s so sad. I mean putting your penis in isn’t much communication. And I mean sex doesn’t have to be like that. And being a man doesn’t have to be like that" (personal interview, 1996: 7).

This comment has clear parallels to Michel Foucault’s (1990) criticism of the genital fixation in the concept of "sexuality" and its effects of domination, which often led, for example, to "dominating body usages" on the side of human beings that had to prove (or maintain) their socially constructed "masculinity," thus preventing "communicative body usages."

B. Consensual "SM" "bodily practices" as "safer sex"

As several interviewees mentioned the possibility that the rising interest in consensual "SM" could be related to AIDS, I asked for Bette’s opinion and she replied: "Oh, absolutely. Because it’s so, I mean we don’t know of any case at all, where it’s been caught in that way" (personal interview, 1996: 11). Bette engages in consensual "SM" as well as "ordinary sex" and notices that the feelings afterwards can be quite different, more obligating after "ordinary sex." She added:

Bette: "... it’s also a slight danger that you might catch something or get pregnant or something like that if you do something like that. There were two other equivalent people who I’ve done the opposite, I’ve done not 'SM' but been to bed with. Sort of younger men, I mean that was fun but on the other
hand. I mean it didn’t change our relationship, I mean in some way it did change, but it was: ‘What if I get pregnant? What if I get HIV?’ I mean we did use condoms, it was okay. But these were two other gay men. But it’s not as carefree. The thing about 'SM,' as long as it’s properly regulated, you don’t injure somebody, it’s completely harmless. You cannot catch anything, you can’t get pregnant, nothing can happen. So it’s a very easy thing to do" (personal interview, 1996: 11).

Ros Coward views the emergence of AIDS as creating a crisis but also as potentially causing a "sexual revolution" since:

Women have been bearing the brunt of making sex safe for men in the past. . . . But now, suddenly, it’s a matter of life and death to men that they abandon their historical privilege of spontaneous sex and assume personal responsibility for their actions . . . sexuality could be redefined as something other than male [End page 83] discharge into any kind of receptacle. In this new context where penetration might literally spell death, there is a chance for a massive relearning about sexuality (as quoted in McEwen & O’Sullivan, 1988: 57-8).

Jane confirmed that responsibility and "safe sex" are important issues in the "Scene," more so than in mainstream society:

Jane: "... it’s a lot better, I mean, I much rather go to a party that is an 'SM'-party than a ‘normal’ party because, you know, that if somebody harasses you, that’s considered unacceptable and it’s going to be dealt with. People are much more responsible usually about sex and there’s a lot more emphasis on safe sex" (personal interview, 1997: 7).

Apart from individual self responsibility, which appears to be increased within the "Scene," Jane mentioned that there is always
the pressure of "significant others:" "Peer pressure to behave. So people who may be not necessarily sensible and respectful will be pressured into behaving like that" (personal interview, 1997: 7).

[I]t would be difficult to imagine a more powerful or urgent demonstration than the AIDS crisis of the need to conceptualize sexuality, after the manner of Foucault, as "an especially concentrated point of traversal [point de passage] for relations of power" (Halperin, 1995: 27).

The "sexual" politics of AIDS employed modes of empowering knowledge in combination with the traditional modes of authorization and legitimization – power in order to administrate the public and private "body" and its pleasures. In other words all the modalities of "bio-power" (Foucault, 1990) were applied in the fight for medical "truth" and social regulation. As Foucault has observed:

[R]epression is always a part of a much more complex strategy regarding sexuality. Things are not merely repressed. There is about sexuality a lot of defective regulations in which the negative effects of inhibition are counterbalanced by the positive effects of stimulation (as quoted in Kritzman, 1990: 9).

The "change in the economics of sexual behavior in society" that Foucault talks about in this interview was also to occur through the AIDS epidemic and its "better late than never," "safe-sex" campaigns. The educational initiative to prevent the further contamination of people with the HIV virus was very much focussed on the use of alternative methods of sexual interaction in preference to penetrative "ordinary sex" in order to avoid any direct contacts with body fluids, especially blood. Therefore, diverse [End page 84] suggestions were presented to the scared public on how to have "great sex without being at risk" and the involvement of fantasy and toys was promoted. As Swartz has made plain: "It is the plague time. It is possible to eroticize latex. It's the only responsible thing to do. Exchanging fluids is suicide" (as quoted in Califia & Sweeney, 1996: 177).
I consider one effect of preventing unsafe sex through educational sex discourse on a broad and public level to be the rising interest in consensual "SM" and "Fetishism." The intensification of both anxiety and of newly discovered pleasures was, in my opinion, the result of the societal reaction to AIDS. As Singer points out:

The ideology of safe sex encourages a reorganization of the body away from the erotic priorities with which it has already been inscribed. Specifically, safe sex advocates indulgence in numerous forms of non-genital contact and the reengagement of parts of the body marginalized by an economy of genital primacy. . . . Safe sex presumes that pleasure [better: desire – A. B.] and practice can be reorganized in response to overriding utilities and presumes, as well, the capacity of regimentary procedures to construct a body capable of taking pleasure in this new form of discipline. Unless bodies and pleasures are politically determined, they can not be redetermined, even in cases where that is what rational prudence would demand. The success of this strategy will thus depend not only on promulgating these techniques, but also on circulating a discourse that allows individuals to reconsider their bodies in a more liberatory and strategic way (as quoted in Butler & MacGrogan, 1993: 122).

C. The "bodily practices" of consensual "SM" as exploration of the dimensions of "lived body"

For Jane, consensual "SM" allows her to experience her "lived body’s" sensuality as well as emotions. Jane’s motivation is the exploration of sensuality: "I enjoy everything that is sensually exciting and new . . . exploring feelings, emotional feelings. Having fun really, I think it’s great fun" (personal interview, 1997: 1). Apart from being a strategy for drawing a borderline between reality and fantasy, consensual "SM" also serves Anthony as a space for exploration of "bodily" possibilities and choice:
Anthony: "But we have to also separate fantasy from reality, I think that’s what 'SM' does for me as an individual. And also it is, I want to explore lots and lots of things, whether it’s 'SM,' being tied up, watersports, or whether it’s scatting – it provides this space. Where I can say this is for me or this is not for me, you know what I’m saying?" (personal interview, 1997: 2).

For some practitioners consensual "SM" provides a space which is free of taboos [End page 85] and the ordinary conventions of keeping a "face" (Goffman, 1967):

Mike: "The major thing I get from it is a tremendous sense of release and freedom. Because it’s something that you can get into a very sort of primitive relationship with someone. It’s very physical and it deals with very sort of dark elements. And it’s a place, where you let it all go."

Andrea: "You don’t have to pretend anything?"

Mike: "No, you don’t have to pretend. So, no one is gonna judge you. People are not gonna say: ‘You are weird,’ when you’re in a ‘Scene’ with someone" (personal interview, 1997: 3).

Some informants regarded consensual "SM" as a possibility to transgress set limits of "political correctness" through these "bodily practices:"

Anthony: "I did work around cross-dressing and drag. It was at a time I found cross-dressing and drag interesting for me. And then the work comes through that as well. 'SM' came into my work, I made photographs and I found it interesting. I was also meeting other black men within various spaces, who were into it. I’m actually curious by nature anyway. And I thought: ‘What is this shit about?’"
basically. And also about three years ago there was a lesbian and gay exhibition in the Brixton Art Gallery and on the invite it said that non-'SM'-related work would be accepted. And I felt concerned, here you have a platform for gay men and they say what is accepted and what is not. And I think that was another reason to say: ‘Well, push those boundaries a bit further as well.’ I do believe 'SM' and black people creates problematics for lots of black people. But those people miss an argument. First of all, there is a consent, whereas slavery wasn’t with consent" (personal interview, 1997: 3).

D. The "bodily practices" of consensual "SM" as a possibility to transgress gay and lesbian stereotypes of "sexuality"

What I think is interesting now in relation to lesbian S/M is that they can get rid of certain stereotypes of femininity that have been used in the lesbian movement; a strategy that the movement has erected from the past. This strategy has been based on their oppression. But now, maybe, these tools, these weapons are obsolete. We can see that lesbian S/M tried to get rid of all those old stereotypes of femininity, of anti-male attitude and so on (Foucault; as quoted in Lotringer, 1991: 387).

Through the experiences I gained within the field of lesbian as well as gay consensual [End page 86] "SM," I suggest that Foucault’s comments are also valid for gay practitioners of these "bodily practices," as Ryan’s example shows. During an interview with Ryan, who does not approve of labels because he finds them limiting, he brought up the topic of gay stereotyping and the "liberating effect" of consensual "SM:"

Ryan: "What I found, Andrea, on the 'Scene,' when I first started, when we were young on the gay 'Scene' is that, I’ve never been into penetrative sex, being penetrated, not because of being raped or anything like that, I’ve just
never been inclined. And I find it painful, you know, when people try to, I’ve never found any pleasure in that. What I find, when I was on the 'Scene,' when I was young, older men just wanted to do that to you. And this was just pre-AIDS, yeah? Late seventies, early eighties? So in a way ‘SM’-sex has actually helped me get round it. Because I remember, when I was very young, before I went to college in '82, you know, my first sexual experiences, when I was about fourteen to eighteen that I was getting a bit depressed, thinking: ‘Oh, I’m not really gay because I don’t get fucked.’ You know, or: ‘I don’t want to fuck.’ And I suppose ‘SM’-sex, as you say, was like a trigger of wakening me, to have a sexual possibility, which I found much more interesting."

Andrea: "So it does not only overcome hetero-categories of sexuality but also gay categories of sexuality?"

Ryan: "Yeah, gay, gay, what’s the word now? Gay stereotyping, you know, that we’re all into anal sex. That’s why a lot of heterosexual men are wary of gay men, ‘cause they feel that all they want to do is just ‘bugger’ them. And that’s not, that’s not, you know, for me, it’s never been . . . I mean I have been, I have had anal sex but very few, very few occasions" (personal interview, 1997: 6).

E. Consensual "SM" as a possibility to experience the transformative potentials of "lived body"

Bette enjoys many variations of sex. An important motivation for her to engage in consensual "SM" is the relaxation she obtains from doing it, which she illustrated with an example:

Bette: "I mean I find that kind of sex [consensual 'SM'] very relaxing. I’ve got a serious eye condition, and I had some laser
treatment in the hospital. Physically, it’s not that painful but very upsetting. I was very uptight. It’s quite a nasty thing to have done. This woman, X, came around and . . . she ended up beating me. And it was mainly unbelievably relaxing."

Andrea: "It can release you from tension?" [End page 87]

Bette: "Yeah, absolutely. I just think, physically, if it’s done well, you know, it’s very similar to being caressed. I mean I was covered in bruises, it was quite a . . . I mean it wasn’t an enormously heavy but it was fairly heavy, it wasn’t a light ‘Scene.’ Also, if you get injuries in that way, they don’t hurt which I think is very interesting . . . It has certainly a big spiritual element to it" (personal interview, 1996: 6).

The spiritual dimension of these "bodily practices," mentioned explicitly here, is elaborated upon in my thesis, but as it would take up too much space within the context of this paper, I will leave this interesting issue aside for now.

Apart from experiencing sensations of release and freedom, Henry, Pat, John, and Mike enjoy testing and transgressing their own limits as well as transforming the sensations to which they expose themselves:

Mike: ". . . you can just get on and do things that feel good and that are a lot of fun and that push your limits. To see, you know, what you can actually take. And for me it’s a case of what I can take and whether I can convert that sensation into something enjoyable. So, there is a lot of, sort of, personal combat and willpower involved, I suppose" (personal interview, 1997: 3).

The motivations to engage in consensual "SM" cited above illustrate that, apart from being rooted in a contemporary cultural
goal centered on the primacy of "fulfilling sexual experiences" which is achieved by means of consensual "SM," a lot of practitioners are interested in the exploration of the dimensions and potential limits of their "lived bodies" by means of these "bodily practices." In that way they experience and potentially change their "life-world" in a manner outlined in *The Visible and the Invisible* by Merleau-Ponty (1968: 135): "The thickness of the body, far from rivaling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh."

**CONCLUSION**

Categorizations like the two that follow should be an item in the past of modernity. Under the heading "Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders," within the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994: 233-51), the reader will find a list of "paraphilias:"

**302.83 Sexual Masochism** – (A) Over a period of at least 6 months, recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors involving the act (real, or simulated) of being humiliated, beaten, bound, or otherwise made [End page 88] to suffer. (B) The fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

**302.84 Sexual Sadism** – (A) Over a period of at least 6 months, recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors involving acts (real, or simulated) in which the psychological or physical suffering (including humiliation) of the victim is sexually exciting to the person. (B) The fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 1994: 245).
As seen through the excursions presented in this article, first into the societal commodification of elements of "SM" and the rising interest in consensual "SM" and then into the "life worlds" of consensual "SM," the labeling, exclusion, and selective criminalization of consensual "SM" as "deviance" and "pathology" does not make any sense, as many elements of consensual "SM" are part of the "subterranean values" of society. What is problematic about the commodification of elements of consensual "SM," apart from the fact that it is just another tool of consumerism, is the fact that it is decontextualized:

[D]ynamic reciprocity lies at the heart of S/M and it structures all of its philosophy and actions . . . such reciprocity couldn’t exist without mutual concern and respect. And it is these three fundamental tenets of the S/M Scene – reciprocity, concern and respect – which make the stereotyped public perception of such activities so erroneous (Polhemus & Randall, 1994: 113-14).

As my conversations with participants in London's "Scene" attest, the "bodily practices" of consensual "SM" provide the "players" with the possibility to appropriate for themselves strategies and positions of power, as well as "technologies of government," which usually serve to effect states of domination and the establishment of authority, in order to produce individual states of "bodily pleasure." The experimental games of consensual "SM" further allow for the discovery of new intensities, the diverse dimensions and potentials of "lived bodies," as well as the development of contextual ethics; thus, they do have the potential to bring about a "political spirituality" on a practical level which would involve a "questioning through which people might start to depart from the historical limits of their identifications" (Rajchman, 1991: 108).

Contemporary understandings and representations of the "body" and "sexuality," especially those oriented to consumer culture, fail to make their objects meaningful. In comparison to these, the richness of meaning as well as the complexity of existential interaction and communication (both verbal and non-verbal) that characterized the [End page 89] empirical world of consensual
"SM" in London, makes the rising interest and potential engagement in these "bodily practices" more understandable. Although it is, on the one hand, beneficial that the notion of "kinky sex" now allows for more diversity in "sexual" encounters, the negative side of this development is obviously that the selectivity of this proliferation of images and discourse distorts social reality and thus neutralizes the potential for resistance that, as argued in my thesis, is inherent in consensual "SM."

Even the "risk" involved within some consensual "SM" would not justify the "pathologization" or "criminalization" of practitioners. As within many areas of social life, the experience of "risk" as excitement has become a commodity, ready to be marketed. In Western consumer cultures the experience of risk within the areas of sport practices and other leisure activities is in high demand. This tendency to promote high-risk sports as thrills seems to attract large numbers of mainstream members of society; and as these activities, although "risky," still serve the "normalizing" aims of consumption, they are legal. Risks, as well as risk products, seem therefore to function as social distinguishers in terms of cultural capital in contemporary culture. If "risk" taking functions as a form of "cultural capital" and is by now commodified in many ways, the criminalization of the "bodily practices" of consensual "SM," on the grounds of potential risks to health and safety, appears like a political judgment in pursuit of the "normalization" of "lived bodies." [End page 90]

ENDNOTES

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1. Since the R. v. Brown case (1992-93) and the subsequent decision of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg (1997), the effects of the social censure of "Sadomasochism" have been intensified as they have been reinforced through the legal agencies of social control. Practitioners of consensual "bodily practices" labeled "Sadomasochism" are now in danger of being prosecuted once their enacted "plays" ("Scenes") leave wounds that are not "trifling or transient." Three of the men who were convicted by the United Kingdom courts took their cases to the European
Court of Human Rights in the hope to get their verdicts overruled on the ground that it breached Article 8 of the European Human Rights Convention. The decision of the European Court of Human Rights (February 19, 1997) to officially criminalize the "bodily practices" of consensual "SM," even though undertaken in the private sphere and without the causation of serious injury, violates the human right to privacy and makes the right over one's body questionable. Article 8 of the European Human Rights Convention states that: "Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence." The Strasbourg court based their decision that the British ruling was justified on the exception to the Article that covers "the protection of health." If consent forms a defense to assault charges in other instances, like for example contact sports or operations for medical or aesthetic reasons, the judgment appears to be primarily moralistic and "bio-political" (Foucault, 1990).

2. As these websites move, change, or at times even stop to exist, the website addresses provided might be subject to change.

3. In 1987 a police operation called "Operation Spanner" acquired private videotapes which showed nearly fifty gay men involved in consensual "SM" "Scenes." Sixteen of these men were then arrested. In the years 1990-91 the trial against these sixteen men took place. They were facing charges under Sections 20 and 47 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. The initial trial judge ruled that consent was no defense to a charge of assault (Thompson, 1994: 3) and therefore the defendants, who at first had pleaded not guilty, had to change their pleas. On December 19, 1990 they were formally convicted. The ruling of the initial judge included the declaration: "... that it was the role of the court to draw the line between what was and was not acceptable in a civilized society, and that as sadomasochism was 'degrading and vicious' it was on the wrong side of the line" (as quoted in Thompson, 1994: 4). At the Court of Appeal the decision was later on upheld. [End page 91]

Consensual "SM" "bodily practices" should have never been subject to an assault charge as it involves consent as well as that the pain inflicted is actually perceived as pleasurable by the practitioners themselves. As with other categories of "perversion," official bodies of social control presumed non-consent and based their decisions on the presumption of violence, instead of
acknowledging consensual pleasure. It was a victimless crime because no one complained of an offense being committed and because no one's privacy or decency was invaded by the consensual, private "plays" of these men. Therefore, the "masochists" were, and had to be, constructed as the "victims," even though ". . . the majority of the defendants [like most of my interviewees – AB] were in the habit of switching roles" (Thompson, 1994: 6).

Importantly, the individual psychological and social harms that were the effects of the "Spanner" trial, and thus of the official social reaction towards consensual "SM" and not the effects of the consensual "play," were high as all of the defendants lost their jobs, several were thrown out of their flats, and all of them were "outed" as "perverts." Three of these men were convicted and jailed for assault on consenting participants during the practice of consensual "SM" and later took their cases to the European Court of Human Rights.

4. In *Quantity and Quality in Social Research* Bryman (1988) describes one of the crucial advantages of the unstructured but topic-focussed form of interviewing in comparison to structured or semi-structured interview forms. Although it has an open-ended character: ". . . rambling can be viewed as providing information because it reveals something about the interviewee's concerns. Unstructured interviewing in qualitative research, then, departs from survey interviewing not only in terms of format, but also in terms of its concern for the perspective of those being interviewed" (Bryman, 1988: 47).

5. The role of "participant as observer" implies, according to May (1993: 117), that ". . . a person adopts an overt role and makes her or his presence and intentions known to the group . . . " and that ". . . during the process of observation the attempt to form a series of relationships with the subjects such that they serve as both respondents and informants . . . " is made. [End page 92]

REFERENCES


WEBSITE RESOURCES

"Erotic Punishment" [http://www.4bdsm.com/pt=pmb1730/entrance.html]

"IC: UK BDSM Directory" [http://www.informedconsent.co.uk/ubd/]

[End page 94]
"S&M News" [http://www.smnews.com/]

"SM: Safe Magic for Gay Men" [http://www.safersex.org/ssex/safemagic.html] [End page 95]
GANGSTA MISOGYNY: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE PORTRAYALS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN RAP MUSIC, 1987-1993* 

by

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ABSTRACT

Gangsta rap music is often identified with violent and misogynist lyric portrayals. This article presents the results of a content analysis of gangsta rap music's violent and misogynist lyrics. The gangsta rap music domain is specified and the work of thirteen artists as presented in 490 songs is examined. A main finding is that 22% of gangsta rap music songs contain violent and misogynist lyrics. A deconstructive interpretation suggests that gangsta rap music is necessarily understood within a context of patriarchal hegemony.

INTRODUCTION

Theresa Martinez (1997) argues that rap music is a form of oppositional culture that offers a message of resistance, empowerment, and social critique. But this cogent and lyrical exposition intentionally avoids analysis of explicitly misogynist and sexist lyrics. The present study begins where Martinez leaves off: a content analysis of gangsta rap's lyrics and a classification of its violent and misogynist messages. First, the gangsta rap music domain is specified. Next, the prevalence and seriousness of overt episodes of violent and misogynist lyrics are documented. This involves the identification of attributes and the construction of meaning through the use of crime categories. Finally, a deconstructive interpretation is offered in which gangsta rap music's violent and misogynist lyrics are explicated in terms of the symbolic encoding of gender relationships.
THEORY

Postmodern perspectives share the view that "culture is reality" (Kotarba 1994: 148). Signifiers are signs in themselves that take on a life of their own (Manning 1995). Speech is seen as action; a text is axiomatically an ethnography (Van Maanen 1995). Postmodern criminologists attend to the meaning of what is said or written as expressed by the language one uses and show that different positions in the justice system (e.g., police, drug dealers, court officials) have their own language systems (Vold, Bernard, and Snipes 1998). The sociological study of deviant behavior anticipated the contention that language, as symbolic interaction, is behavior itself (Bryant 1982). Postmodernism draws attention to the increasing role of symbolic violence in shaping interpersonal relations (Manning and Singh 1997). But feminist theory has taken a more fully developed textual turn, emphasizing the discursive construction of social reality (Smith 1990; McClary 1991; Klimenkova 1992; Alway 1995; Mumby 1996; Kasinky 1998). Language is a constitutive force that creates a particular view of reality (Richardson 1991). Words are acts, essentially the practices they constitute rather than the expressions of the ideas they embody (MacKinnon 1993). The theory of discursive violence problematizes the distinction between words and deeds and attends to the real-world anguish of the verbally abused. This is not to say that real rape and its fictional representation are equally grave offenses (Douglas 1995). But as the physiological effects of discursive violence make evident, "linguistic violence is in fact a form of physical violence" (Gorsevski 1998: 513). More to the point: sexual and violent imagery "indeed is violence against women" (Levine 1992: 146).

The postmodern and feminist vision holds that words, music, and other discourses are performative utterances that instantiate a condition or state of affairs (Swidler 1996). One variant of this viewpoint: the Equal Opportunity Commission's guidelines defining sexual harassment under Title VII includes verbal conduct – words that can poison a workplace or classroom (Dooling 1996). A key element of the idea of "hate speech" is the understanding that people do things with words, that speech acts assault their victims (Walker 1994). Violent metaphors are not simply figures of speech (Eisikovits and Buchbinder 1997). Rappers create a commercially available everyday reality and it is in accordance with the lyrics provided by gangsta rap music that individuals structure their perceptions.1

DATA AND METHODS
When a text accompanies music it provides an explicit conceptual framework that answers questions concerning musical meaning and social significance (Miles 1995). Postmodern sociological readings of music begin with the centrality of the text – the lyrical narrative (Kotarba 1994). The nature of rap music dictates just such a concentration on language. Rap's harmonies are "simple," based on one tonality as defined by a simple bass line (Bitz 1998). Instead, the genre is predicated on lyric content (Roberts 1994; Guevara 1996), that is, the power of the word (Keyes 1996; Smitherman 1997). Words are spoken, not sung (Dixon 1989; Edwards and Sienkewicz 1991; Shusterman 1991; Cawker 1994). Ray Charles comments that rap is just "talk with music" (quoted in Silver 1997: 76). Public Enemy's Chuck D even declares that "rap is a vocal culture" and "is not music per se" (quoted in Chambers and Morgan 1992: 85). Snoop Doggy Dogg (now just Snoop Dogg) summarizes the nature of his raps in these terms: "I just be conversatin'" ("Week In Rock," MTV, 9/12/93).

Rappers avoid word play and metaphor, substituting instead the communication of straightforward meaning (Dimitriadis 1996), and they eschew lyrical subtlety (Danaher and Blackwelder 1993). Nearly all raps are first-person narratives, retellings of what the artists (allegedly) have seen or done, recounts of events that happened personally and specifically to them (Light 1992; Steaman 1992; Rose 1994b; Allen 1996; Kelley 1996; Perkins 1996; Barrett 1999; Snoop Dogg 1999). This self-referential quality is central to gangsta rap music. In gangsta rap music, the first-person point of view brings both the narrator and the listener into the heart of modern urban terror (Gilmore and Karl 1990). By telling their tales in the first-person, rappers appear to commit themselves to the worst impulses in their scenarios.

Rap is best understood as verbal art (Keyes 1984; Jeremiah 1992). The nature of rap facilitates its content analysis, the transcription and interpretation of lyrics. Postmodern ethnographies are a kind of content analysis because they describe textual imagery by comparing and contrasting the meanings of the elements of a code (Manning 1991). A genre such as gangsta rap music is a code in itself (Dunbar-Hall 1991). This interest in codes parallels the ethnomusicological concern with collections, the raw material that is a prerequisite for establishing the set of traits that combine to convey an image of a genre (Nettl 1964; Davis 1992). Ethnomusicologists divide the collection of songs into smaller, more homogeneous groups (Nettl 1964). The research enterprise moves to classificatory analysis, a systematic paradigmatization of units (Nattiez 1990). Both ethnomusicology and postmodern ethnography are accomplished by classification and categorization (Manning 1995). In this
article the collection is constituted by songs manifesting violent and misogynist lyrics. Content analysis is used to determine whether a song depicts violent and misogynist lyrics and, if so, the kind of crime and the nature of the violence portrayed. To begin, however, a specification of the gangsta rap music domain is needed.

**COLLECTION AND CLASSIFICATION**

Lyrics were gathered from 490 songs produced by thirteen artists from 1987 to 1993. Following ethnomusicological guidelines (Nettl 1995), attention is directed toward artists who provide gangsta rap music's "central repertory" and who are considered gangsta rap music's "ruling class." The criteria applied in establishing this repertorial centrality are historical priority, popularity, and reputation – a function of cultural criticism. Part of the present analysis is occupied with specifying membership in the gangsta rap music domain.

The history of gangsta rap music begins with Ice-T (McAdams 1992; Rose 1994b). His "6 'N The Morning" (1987) served as the blueprint for the gangsta rap music style (Ice-T 1994). But two groups, N.W.A (Niggaz Wit Attitude) and the Geto Boys, and the spin-off solo careers of their members, eclipsed Ice-T's success. N.W.A billed itself as "the World's Most Dangerous Group." The late Eazy-E founded the group. Until Ice Cube left the group in early 1990, he served as its chief lyricist (Nelson and Gonzales 1991). [End page 98] MC Ren acted as the group's hardcore center (Nelson 1993). Dr. Dre, N.W.A's non-rapping producer, coined the term gangsta rap music to refer to the albums he produced (Gold 1993). In 1991, their Efil4zaggin (Niggaz4life spelled backwards) became the first gangsta rap music album to reach No. 1 on the *Billboard* charts. In 1992, Dre's *The Chronic* became the most popular gangsta rap music album. Only a year later, Snoop Doggy Dogg's *DoggyStyle*, which Dre produced, surpassed *The Chronic*. Snoop's album, the first by a solo artist to reach No. 1 prior to its release, sold over 4.5 million copies and made him the best-known rapper (Pareles 1995). Unlike N.W.A, members of the Geto Boys had separate careers until joined together in a business partnership. In 1990, their *Grip It On The Other Level* sold more than 500,000 copies without major-label sponsorship or radio air play (Kot 1990). The Geto Boys spawned multiple solo successes: Bushwick Bill, Scarface, and Willie D. They also collaborate with the members of Too Much Trouble, a group with the allonym, "The Baby Geto Boys." Too $hort, another artist of eminence, added a sense of humor to the gangsta rap music pose (Nelson and Gonzales 1991). At the mid-point of the 1990s, Too $hort was the largest-selling rap artist (Perkins 1996).
Temporal limitations to the specification of the gangsta rap music domain are central. When gangsta rap music reached the height of its popularity, Luther Campbell (formerly Luke Skyywalker), founder of 2 Live Crew, Hammer (formerly M. C. Hammer) and Vanilla Ice (Jones 1994a; "Week In Rock," MTV, 4/24/94), artists who had fallen on hard times, advanced "tougher" stances and demanded categorization within gangsta rap music's stylistic boundaries. Because of the expanding nature of membership, only the foundational period of gangsta rap music, from 1987 to 1993, is assessed (see Appendix A below for a gangsta rap music discography).

Questioning the frequency and the nature of presented themes is the first concern of a media researcher (Altheide 1997). Of course, violence ranges in severity from an intimidating look and harsh words to rape and murder (Berger 1994). As members of the renowned Cultural Indicators Project point out, the way violence is defined directly determines the amount and nature of the violence that is isolated (Signorielli, Gerbner, and Morgan 1995). Here attention is limited to three serious personal offenses directed at women: assault, forcible rape, and murder, and a fourth category combining rape and murder. Analysis of lyric content shows that 22 percent (N = 107) of the 490 gangsta rap music songs had violent and misogynist lyrics. Assault was the most frequently occurring criminal offense, portrayed in 50 percent of the violent and misogynist songs. Other rankings: rape only = 11 percent; murder only = 31 percent; rape and murder = 7 percent. Table One presents a breakdown of the variety of violent and misogynist lyrics by artist. But categorization according to crime type does not reveal the manner in which violent and misogynist lyrics are presented. Because similar kinds of violent and misogynist lyrics have different meanings, the messages inherent in the lyrics need specification. A way of deconstructing these meanings is by detailing the manner in which the criminal acts are depicted. [End page 99]

**DESCRIPTION OF VIOLENT AND MISOGYNIST LYRIC CONTENT**

**Assault**

Ice-T's (1987) "6 'N The Mornin'" and Eazy-E's (1988a; 1993; and N.W.A's [1989b]) "Boyz-N-The-Hood" anticipated and affected gangsta rap music's matter-of-fact depictions of violence and misogyny. These songs gave thematic centrality to assault and signaled the coming age of
gender-based conflict as a staple of the genre. In "6 'N The Mornin'", Ice-T batters a woman, heretofore a stranger, because she called him a name. "Boyz-N-The-Hood" suggests corporal punishment for women who "talk shit." Dr. Dre (1992) presents the identical message in "Nuthin' But A 'G' Thang," the No. 1 rap song of all time (Krohn and Suazo 1995). Talking back (Ice-T 1989a; Too Short 1987b and 1993d) and showing disrespect (dissin') (N.W.A 1991b) cause men to react violently. MC Ren (1992b) hits, with a shoe, women who complain. Rejecting a proposition provokes a physical attack (Eazy-E 1992b). Too Short (1993a) hurled this tirade:

You fuck with us, bitch, something gettin' broken
Your leg, arm, jaw, nose, pick a part.

In N.W.A's (1989a) "A Bitch Iz A Bitch," money-hungry or stuck-up women are subsumed under the same solution: "Slam her ass in a ditch." Too Short slaps women who act "shitty" (1988b) or bold (1992b). Responses to mental slowness are equally harsh. Bushwick Bill (1992c) kicks a woman's ass if her "brain don't click." By choosing the wrong friends, "bitches" either "need stitches" (Willie D 1992b) or get drop-kicked (Ice-T 1993). Personal characteristics also induce violence. In "Punk Bitch," Too Short (1990b) expresses his desire to slap all bald-headed women. Ice-T (1991b) pushes a woman to the floor because "she looked like Godzilla." Because a woman had "more crabs than a sea-food platter," Eazy-E (1988e) "slapped the ho" and proudly proclaimed himself a "woman-beater." The Geto Boys (1993d) handed down comparable excesses when they threw an "unsanitary bitch" into a ditch.

Violence and criminality are linked. The Geto Boys (1990g) kick a female employee for not quickly complying with their commands during a robbery. Ice-T (1987) mentions another woman's positioning as the object of opposition to drug use. A homeboy broke his girlfriend's jaw "for smokin' cane." The desire for drugs even destroys a parent-child relationship. Snoop Doggy Dogg (1993b) meets a woman who wants to take over her daughter's source of drugs – Snoop himself. The mother hits her child "in the face" and punches her "in the eye" and "in the belly."

Pimp-prostitute associations are the locales of violent and misogynist lyrics. In documentary fashion, Too Much Trouble depict themselves as pandering pimps in seven selections from their album, *Players Choice*. The lyrics of five of these songs are formulaic – workers get "smacked" if they fail to meet their financial quotas (1993a; b; c; g; and h). [End page 100] Ice Cube (1990c) recommends similar actions. Alternatively, in "Little Hooker," Willie D (1992a) beats a young girl because she became a
Intimate relationships are also riddled with violence. When one's "lady," as opposed to one's "bitch," talks to another man, she gets physically punished (Geto Boys 1990f). Tardy breakfasts are hard to handle. Violence accompanies the command to put some "eggs in the goddamn skillet" (Too Much Trouble 1992c). Identification of rappers as putative parents generates physical responses. Ice Cube (1990b) plans to end a pregnancy by kicking a woman "in the tummy" and by looking in a closet "for the hanger." The Geto Boys (1989a and 1990b) handle a false accusation of paternity by trying to break the woman's neck. Too $hort (1993d) deals with a similar situation by surprising the woman "like a mack" and then dropping "her ass off at Kaiser [hospital]." Women are hit (Ice Cube 1993), slapped (Too $hort 1988a and 1990c), tossed (Eazy-E 1988d), thrown into a trunk (Too $hort 1992c), smacked (Too Much Trouble 1993f; Too $hort 1988e) and kicked (Too $hort 1990d), all for no apparent reason. For instance, Too Much Trouble (1993d) mention only that "a bitch is just like glass – easy to break." N.W.A (1988a and 1989c) tell of a woman who "got a black eye cause the dope man hit her."

Bushwick Bill (1992d), in his autobiographical "Ever So Clear," travels to the home of the women "closest" to him. Upon arriving, he "provoked her, punched her, kicked, and choked her." After trying to throw her baby out a window, he's shot in the eye. (Until the releases of Eminem's Slim Shady LP (1999) and The Marshall Mathers LP (2000), this was gangsta rap music's only mention of infanticide.) Marriage is also depicted with violent and misogynist lyrics. Consider "Bitches 2," where Ice-T (1991a) mentions a friend who regularly "kicks his wife's ass." Too $hort's (1992d) domestic sexual encounters begin when he whips "ass like a world champ." Violent and misogynist lyrics also take the form of overly aggressive and rough sex. Scarface (1991b) brags that "bitches walk out of the crib with a limp," while Ice Cube (1992a) nearly breaks "that thing in half" during sex with a new partner. Too Much Trouble (1993e) say that after oral sex, they "leave some stretch marks" on a woman's jaw. Ice-T (1989b) attests to the actions of Evil E who "fucked the bitch with a flashlight." Because he left the batteries in, "the bitch's titties started blinkin' like tail lights."

**Rape**

Willie D (1989b) and Too $hort (1993c) advocate raping women who do not submit to their sexual advances. Another rape narrative has Too $hort (1987d) beating his victim's "ass with a billy-club." In "She Swallowed It," N.W.A (1991d) recommend specific procedures for attacking a fourteen-year-old:
Punch the bitch in the eye/then the ho will fall to the ground
Then you open up her mouth/put your dick, move the shit around. [End page 101]

Ice-T (Body Count 1992a) proposes sex "with Tipper Gore's two twelve-year-old nieces." This is a clear case of seeking revenge against one of the founders of the Parents' Music Resources Center (PMRC).

The substance of the rape songs becomes far more execrable than the criminal category ostensibly prefigures. Eazy-E (1988c), Snoop Doggy Dogg (1993a), and Too $hort (1990b) casually mention gang rapes. MC Ren (1992a) tells of "ten niggas" who rape a child and then violate her with a broomstick. In Ice Cube's (1991) "Givin' Up The Nappy Dug Out," "fourteen niggas" line up to take turns placing themselves "two on top, one on the bottom" of an underage girl. Too $hort conceives of an array of alternatives in his consideration of the pluses and minuses of statutory rape. In "She's A Bitch" (1987c), he adapts a crude aphorism: "Fourteen, fifteen, all the way up/if she can bleed then she can fuck." He recites similar words in "Hoes" (1992a). But in "Little Girls" (1988c), after an attempted rape fails, he rallies against sex with children.

Murder

Although the police targeted Too Much Trouble (1993i), they mistakenly shot and killed a "bitch." Other songs by Too Much Trouble have women dying in defense of personal possessions (1992b) and their employers' property (1992a). During another robbery, one "old bitch got her neck broke" (1992e). MC Ren (1993a) shoots a woman who set him up to be robbed. In "To Kill A Hooker," N.W.A (1991f) drag a streetwalker into a car and kill her because she demanded money in exchange for sex. Women are also murdered for choosing the wrong companion (Eazy-E 1992a), becoming nosy (Geto Boys 1993c), and for remaining silent. Ice Cube (1992b) fed a girl to the wolves because the "little ho had no words." Three other personal traits stimulate violent and misogynist lyrics. N.W.A's (1989d) Eazy-E tied to kill a "fat girl" with an elephant gun. When that didn't work, he "grabbed a harpoon" and left the woman on the avenue "like a beached whale." MC Ren (1993b) mulls over shooting and burying a "bitch" whose "pussy really stinks" and who has "crabs on her pussy." In "Bald Headed Hoes," Willie D (1989a) proposes "a bill on Capitol Hill to kill all bald-headed women at will." Rappers plan murders to pay back women who, in their opinion, did something wrong.
Transgressions include telling a lie (Scarface 1993), failing to make bail (Eazy-E 1988b), transmitting a venereal disease (Geto Boys 1988 and 1990a; N.W.A 1990), calling the cops (N.W.A 1991e), and cheating. N.W.A's (1991c) surprise discovery of a cheating mate propel them to dump the unfaithful partner, now wearing cement shoes, into a river. Willie D (1989c) and the Geto Boys (1993a) also kill cheaters.

Two Too $hort (1988d and 1990a) songs tell of killing women but never offer a hint at what precipitated the acts. Bushwick Bill (1992a) simply brags that he is the "neighborhood bitch slayer." The Geto Boys (1989b and 1990c) recommend putting "a ho in front of a trigger." Without supplying any explanation, N.W.A (1991a) mention taking the life of a wife and daughter. N.W.A (1988b) also recollect "bitches" that they have shot and announce their plans to "smother" someone's mother. The Geto Boys kill a person's wife "for kicks" (1993b) and pump anonymous women "full of lead" (1989d and 1990e). Scarface (1991a) recounts the same senseless killings. Songs combining murder and mutilation exemplify a virulent positioning of women as objects of violence. The Geto Boys (1991) attack someone's nieces and cut the girls' heads into "88 pieces." Bushwick Bill (1992b) recalls this incident in a song where his breakfast menu is "bacon and legs." Ice-T (Body Count, 1992b) sets his mother on fire, beats her to death with a baseball bat, and cuts up her body. In a Geto Boys' (1988 and 1990a) act of murder, the weapon of choice is a machete: "I sliced her up until her guts were like spaghetti."

Rape and Murder

Too Much Trouble (1992d) kill an elderly rape victim whom they caught crawling for the telephone. First, they hit her on the head with a hammer, and the sound of a hammer hitting someone's head accompany the lyrics. Then they "beat her head with the phone until her skull caved in." An operator's recorded message echoes in the background. Too Short (1987a and 1993b) slaps a young girl to convince her to perform oral sex after which the child dies: "She choked on sperm in her windpipe." In "One Less Bitch," N.W.A (1991c) tie a woman to a bed, rape, and then shoot her. Compared to the lyrics that follow, this song seems almost benign. The Geto Boys (1989c and 1990d) produced two versions of their signature song, "Mind Of A Lunatic." Both begin by noting the identical initial actions of a peeping tom turned rapist. In one, the perpetrator cuts the victim's throat and watches her "shake like on TV." The second version heightens the macabre as the killer has "sex with the corpse." In a different song, Bushwick Bill (1992e) recites the same lyrics. Another Geto
Boys' (1993c) song depicts a similar rape/murder, only this time they slit the woman "like a pig."

RESULTS

This project is an initial move to fill an analytical void. Although lyrics are a most accessible kind of text, feminist semiologists have neglected this area (Bayton 1992). Scholars have been particularly slow to analyze and critique gangsta rap music's content (Williams 1992). On the one hand, gangsta rap music has been identified with its violent and misogynist lyrics. At the beginning of the decade, Billboard (1991) editorialized against gangsta rap music because it purveyed a "gangsta ideology," an unabashed espousal of violence and misogyny. A New York Times (Staples 1993) editorial did likewise. C. DeLores Tucker, chair of the National Political Congress of Black Women and the most famous opponent of gangsta rap music, considers the genre a profane and obscene glorification of murder and rape (Waldron 1996). Gangsta rap music, according to Tucker, is more suitably called "gangsta porno rap" (Kramer 1997). On the other hand, the notion that gangsta rap music manifests violent and misogynist lyrics is condemned as the myth of aural violence (Maxwell 1991). This research establishes the frequency and describes the details of gangsta rap music's violent and misogynist lyrics frame, where physical aggression is presented as a way of dealing with women and handling male-female interaction. An immediate consequence of this content analysis is a "both/and" resolution to the debate – "only" 22 percent of gangsta rap music songs dealt with violent and misogynist lyrics.

Another result of this study is to challenge prevailing wisdom on the existential basis for gangsta rap music's violent and misogynist lyrics. Verbal deviance has commercial configurations (Bryant 1982). Late capitalism promotes sexual and violent cultural industries (Denzin 1985). Yo Yo clarifies the issue with regard to gangsta rap music: "The harder that you are, sad to say, the more you sell" (quoted in Jones 1993: 6D). Allegedly, rappers created gangsta rap music when their focus shifted from music to money and they discovered that the best way to make money was to rap about sex and violence (Salaam 1995). Bill Stephney, rap historian and CEO of Stepsun Entertainment, underscores the issue by claiming that the marketplace and capitalism motivate what gangsta rappers do and don't do ("Gangsta Rap," MTV, 9/13/94). Here we have numerous indictments of the "greed-artists" of gangsta rap music (Shocked and Bull 1992: 6) and the gangsta rap music's "shock-for-sales rantings" (Jones 1994b: 10D). Not surprisingly, a reporter for The Wall Street Journal agrees with this
contention and supplies a quotation from rap producer David Dickerson as further evidence: "The sad truth is the harder the rapper's image, the more music they sell" (Pulley 1994: A1). But the present analysis contradicts the direct association between violent and misogynist lyrics and popularity in three ways. First, assault, the least serious of the specified criminal acts, is the modal violent and misogynist lyrics category. Next, the least popular gangsta rap music group has the highest frequency of violent and misogynist songs. Too Much Trouble, the Baby Geto Boys, are far less commercially successful than other representatives of the genre. Finally, Dr. Dre and Snoop Doggy Dogg, the two premier gangsta rap music artists, combine for only three of the 107 cases of violent and misogynist lyrics.

DISCUSSION

A deconstructive reading of gangsta rap music's lyric content immediately suggests the core element of the gangsta rap music domain. As with other European-American popular songs, interpretations of gangsta rap music must fall within the context of, and as contributing to, patriarchal hegemony (Davis 1998). Indeed, every variety of Western music, including classical symphonies and opera, is an almost exclusively male domain (McClary 1991). Rock lyrics are lopsidedly male, circumscribed by male dominance over women (Pattison 1987). Punk rock retained misogynist imagery (Levine 1992). Paralleling rock's sexism, rap is a haven of male hegemony (Guevara 1996). To begin, recall that gangsta rap music is self-referential. The self-referential reportage that frames the gangsta rap music enterprise is initial evidence for gangsta rap music's essential sexism. This kind of presentation of self is characterized as a "masculinization" of ethnographic narrative. Literary scholars note a strong male proclivity toward elaborating their life stories in order to project a poised self-image (Tedlock 1995). The self images that women's memoirs project are often an understated and fragmentary clarification of personalities detached from (male) self-glorification. Further, narratives are cultural stories that have real holds on the imaginations of men and women. When the cultural stories are told from the point of view of the male, the central character in the patriarchal system, they reaffirm the status quo (Richardson 1995). In gangsta rap music, as elsewhere, relations of power over sex are maintained through language (Foucault 1980). Part of the ongoing work of gender construction occurs within the gangsta rap music arena. Gangsta rap music is a constitutive element in a complex web of meaning formation and power relations.
The hegemonic dimension of gangsta rap music's narratives is immediate evidence of a rape culture (Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth 1993). In fact, gangsta rap music is a "celebration" of rape culture and its most powerful contemporary voice (hooks 1993). A rape culture is a complex of beliefs supporting a continuum of threatened violence against women that ranges from sexual remarks to rape itself. It is a "generic culture," part of the social construction of gender, how individuals "do gender" (Boswell and Spade 1996). When members of the National Political Congress of Black Women staged a protest outside a store selling gangsta rap music, one of the marchers carried a sign with the slogan, "Gangsta Rap Is Rape" (Herrmann 1994). Minimally, gangsta rap music's typifications of violent and misogynist lyrics are rather dramatic examples of what Dworkin (1981) terms the male use of language as violence. Deconstructing gangsta rap music's violent and misogynist lyrics, the symbolic working toward the denigration of women, enables its reevaluation.

CONCLUSION

Recently, two syndicated columnists have linked social problems directly to gangsta rap music's foundational period. For Leonard Pitts (1999) of the Miami Herald, gangsta rap music helped promote urban decline by romanticizing value-free visions, which included a celebration of women pimping in a scabrous and explicit way. For Stanley Crouch (2000) of New York's Daily News, gangsta rap music, beginning with N.W.A's 1989 arrival, caused a decline in American values and promoted the way thugs and sluts live by "any means necessary." What these writers could not have known was that gangsta rap music in the year 2000 would make prior lyrical presentations seem tame.

In 2000, gangsta rap music continued to dominate rap music. Its popularity was such that Pareles (2000) categorized artists offering an alternative to gangsta rap music as part of the "non-gangsta wing of hip-hop." The "Up in Smoke" tour, featuring Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, Snoop Dogg, and Eminem, became the most popular rap tour ever. The show even presented a reunited and reconstituted version of N.W.A with Snoop Dogg replacing the late Eazy-E. Moreover, Eminem's Slim Shady LP, which Dr. Dre produced, won the Grammy for the best rap album of 1999. In the Slim Shady LP, women are killed by guns and knives and by an innovative means, such as poisoning. Further, violent and misogynist lyrics are enhanced by an act of infanticide. Eminem's The Marshall Mathers LP became the fastest selling rap album of all time. Violent and misogynist
lyrics are [End page 105] found in eleven of the album's fourteen songs. Worse still, nine of the eleven songs depict killing women, with drowning becoming a new modus operandi. Comparing the lyric content of gangsta rap music's foundational period with that of Eminem shows the following: In terms of violent and misogynist lyrics, gangsta rap music (1987-1993) scores a 22 percent while Eminem (2000) reaches 78 percent. Concerning the percent of the violent and misogynist lyrics dealing with women's murder: gangsta rap music (1987-1993) yields 31 percent and Eminem (2000) 82 percent. As a reward for extending the presence of violent and misogynist lyric content beyond his musical progenitors, Eminem has made the cover of *Rolling Stone* (8/3/00), *The Source* (7/00) and *Spin* (8/00). Gangsta rap music continues to teach, promote, and glamorize violence and misogyny (*Bok 1999*). Introduction of discursive vehicles for unlearning, resisting, and de glamorizing violent and misogynist lyrics has become more important than ever with the increasing popularity of the gangsta rap music genre. [End page 106]

**ENDNOTES**

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1. The question, "Does rap music contribute to violent crime?" is the subject of scholarly debate (see, for example, *Martin, 1998* versus *Hamm and Ferrell 1998*). Research confirms that listening to gangsta rap music motivates sexual aggression (*Barongan and Nagayama Hall 1995; Johnson, Adams, Ashburn, and Reed 1995; Johnson, Jackson, and Gatto 1995*) and inappropriate behavior (*Harris, Bradley, and Titus 1992*). Wester, Crown, Quatman, and Heesacker (1997) found that gangsta rap music lyrics significantly increased men's adversarial sexual beliefs. Other studies, however, fail to find any causal link between rap lyric content and behavior problems (*Epstein, Pratto, and Skipper 1990; Took and Weiss 1994*). Likewise, the hypothesis that rap lyrics cause either anxiety or suicidal ideation has been experimentally rejected (*Ballard and Coates 1995*). Attempts to link rap and violence are critically categorized as part of the so-called "danger to society frame" that allegedly emphasizes that rap creates legions of misogynist listeners who are a danger to women (*Binder 1993*).
2. Historically, rap is part of an oral heritage and as such preserves the cultural past of West African slaves whose flowery language was the sign of the speaker's verbal skill and of the social code shared by the oral community (Edwards and Sienkiewicz 1991; Stephens 1991; Perkins 1996; Smitherman 1997). Attention to rap as verbal art leads to deliberations on the production of the object, explorations of the art form as socially contingent. Here rap is seen as an articulation of contemporary black culture (Pressley 1992; West 1993), black nationalism (Muwakkil 1992; Decker 1993; Henderson 1996), and the socio-economic problems encountered by inner-city youth (Baker 1993; Berry 1994; Kelley 1996; Keyes 1996; McCall 1997).

3. Philadelphia artist Schoolly-D is also considered the original gangsta rapper (Jackson 1994) and the producer of the seminal hardcore release (Nelson and Summers 1993), but Schoolly D has not been commercially successful and remains virtually unknown (Jackson 1994). Cross (1993) believes that Schoolly D and Boogie Down Productions (BDP) were at gangsta rap music's vanguard. BDP's KRS-One, however, quickly moved to espousals of political and non-violent agendas. Another candidate for inclusion is the late Tupac Shakur (2Pac/Makaveli). But Tupac stressed that he was "a thug" not a gangsta rapper ("Gangsta Rap," MTV, 9/13/94). His violent recitations were never directed at women and many of his raps dealt with the elevation of women's status (Watts 1997). During Tupac's funeral, Naughty By Nature's Treach emphasized that Tupac "weren't no gangsta" (Rhyme & Reason 1997). [End page 107]

4. Gangsta rap music underwent other changes as well. In 1995, Ice-T, gangsta rap music's progenitor, ceased using gangsta rap music to describe his music (McLaren 1995). A year later, Dr. Dre, the artist/producer who coined the term "gangsta rap," announced that the musical style was "over" (MTV 9/2/96), that it had "run its course" (quoted in Samuels and Gates 1996), that gangsta rap music "is definitely a thing of the past" (quoted in Reilly 1996: B2). A book published during December, 1996, was entitled Gangsta Rap Is Dead (Osayande 1996). In 1997, Death Row Records, the genre's key label, started to unravel, dismantling gangsta rap music's most potent artist lineup (Branch 1997). A common viewpoint was that the "reign" of gangsta rap music had ended (Klein 1998) and that gangsta rap music was "in ruins" (Smith 1997). But after a mid-decade sales dip, the genre's popularity increased dramatically (Clark-Meads and Legrand 1998). Both Ice-T (James 1999) and Dr. Dre (Pareles 1999) returned to their gangsta rap music roots and reclaimed their places at the center of the gangsta rap music enterprise. In 1998, rap became America's
top-selling format and because of this, *Time* labeled the United States the "hip-hop nation" (Farley 1999). After accessing the global popularity of the music, *The Christian Science Monitor* disagreed, finding not just a hip-hop nation but a "hip-hop world" (Terry 1999). Gangsta rap music still remains the most popular of rap's major categories (Pinn 1999).

5. Many commentators challenge the notion that gangsta rap music has violent and misogynist lyrical content. For Wahl (1999) gangsta rap music offers only a "seeming" glorification of violence and misogyny. Kitwana (1994) calls critics of gangsta rap music "uninformed" and suggests that they should listen to the music. Rose (1999a) finds that opponents of gangsta rap music operate out of genuine ignorance when they give their shallow readings of gangsta rap music's violent and misogynist lyrics. Gladney (1995) claims that critics fail to analyze the lyrics critically and intellectually. Dyson (1993) sees negative appraisals of gangsta rap music as rooted in a shallow understanding of rap which results from an unwillingness to listen to the lyrics. During one conference, rappers and their fans criticized noted psychiatrist Dr. Alvin Poussaint, claiming that he disparaged rap without having listened to it (Williams 1992). Keyes (1996) concludes that gangsta rap music's critics cannot "decode" its language. Potter (1995) and Yancy (1997) hold that criticisms of gangsta rap music's violent and misogynist lyrics unfairly remove the lyrics from their "context." According to Rosen and Marks (1999), gangsta rap music's violent and misogynist lyrics are "parodic signifying." The lyrics are humorous poetic contrivances. [End page 108]

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APPENDIX A

Discography of Gangsta Rap, 1987 to 1993


Ruthless/Priority. P4V 53815.


------. 1990. "Just Don't Bite It." *100 Miles And Runnin'*. Ruthless/Priority. E4V7224.


------. 1988e. "Playboy Short II." *Born To Mack*. Jive/RCA. 1100-1-J.

------. 1990a. "Ain't Nothin' But A Word to Me." *$hort Dog's In The
House. Jive/RCA. 1348-Z-J.


**TABLE ONE**

Gangsta Rap Artists and Violent/Misogynist (V/M) Lyrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Number of Songs</th>
<th>Number with V/M Lyrics (% Total Songs)</th>
<th>Lyrical Portrayals of Assault (% V/M)</th>
<th>Lyrical Portrayals of Rape (% V/M)</th>
<th>Lyrical Portrayals of Murder (% V/M)</th>
<th>Lyrical Portrayals of Rape and Murder (% V/M)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bushwick Bill</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5 (42%)</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Dre</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eazy-E</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8 (32%)</td>
<td>5 (20%)</td>
<td>1 (13%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geto Boys</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>17 (26%)</td>
<td>5 (29%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>9 (53%)</td>
<td>3 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Cube</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>6 (9%)</td>
<td>4 (67%)</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>1 (17%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice-T</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>8 (10%)</td>
<td>6 (75%)</td>
<td>1 (13%)</td>
<td>1 (13%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC Ren</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4 (25%)</td>
<td>1 (25%)</td>
<td>1 (25%)</td>
<td>2 (50%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.W.A.</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13 (31%)</td>
<td>5 (38%)</td>
<td>1 (8%)</td>
<td>6 (46%)</td>
<td>1 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarface</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3 (10%)</td>
<td>1 (33%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (67%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snoop Doggy Dogg</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2 (13%)</td>
<td>1 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (50%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Much Trouble</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14 (48%)</td>
<td>9 (64%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (29%)</td>
<td>1 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Short</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>21 (35%)</td>
<td>12 (57%)</td>
<td>5 (24%)</td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willie D</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5 (18%)</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>490</strong></td>
<td><strong>107</strong></td>
<td><strong>54 (50%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>12 (11%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>33 (31%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>8 (7%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Review of *Flag Burning: Moral Panic and the Criminalization of Protest* by Sheldon Ungar

University of Toronto at Scarborough

Book: *Flag Burning: Moral Panic and the Criminalization of Protest*
Author: Michael Welch
Publisher: Aldine de Gruyter
Year: 2000

Is the American flag "nothing but a piece of cotton with a little bit of paint," or is it a sacred object whose desecration justifies mob action and criminalization by the state? In addressing these opposing views, Michael Welch marshals an arsenal of concepts that do justice to C. W. Mills's faith in the sociological imagination. Consistent with Mills, the story develops along historical, social structural, and biographical lines. The historical analysis is built around, and provides a cogent illustration of, a social constructionist perspective. Stripping away nostalgic myths, we learn that Old Glory did not attract much interest or symbolic protest until the Civil War. (Flag desecration is recognized as an "epiphenomenon" that accompanies wars and other events that promote dissent by some citizens and "compulsory patriotism" by the state.)

In the post-Civil War era, the flag becomes an object of veneration as it is aligned with elements of the American civil religion and propelled by social movements that mount flag protection campaigns. (Americans ought to note that there is nothing inevitable here: Canadians do not have a civil religion, and our flag has so little significance that I cannot recall anyone bothering to burn it.) Early on, flag protection was concerned with its commercial misuse, but this was soon replaced by attempts to
control incendiary dissent. Closer to our era, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans could wear flag shirts while selling dog food on television, but Abbie Hoffman had his ripped off by the police, ironically revealing a Viet Cong flag painted on his back. (At his sentencing, Hoffman exclaimed, "I regret that I have only one shirt to give to my country!") While the veneration of the flag embodied in the civil religion is thought to promote patriotism and solidarity, Welch shows it has a nasty underside as it is sometimes linked to nativism, exclusion, and even episodes of coerced flag kissing.

Subsequent chapters examine flag desecration and flag veneration movements from the 1960s through the Reagan and Bush administrations, the Supreme Court rulings (Texas v. Johnson; U. S. v. Eichman) that invalidate flag protection statutes, to moral panic over flag art, flag burning in the Gulf War, and the Supreme Court decisions. So potent is the moral panic of 1989/90, that formal social controls are used against some demonstrators despite the Supreme Court rulings. There is also a vigorous and ongoing campaign for a constitutional amendment to protect the Stars and Stripes. These events make compelling reading, and they are rendered more meaningful by an extensive analysis and application of the concept of moral panic.

Moral panic is exemplified in several ways. First, President Bush's role as a moral entrepreneur is examined. Then Welch undertakes a content analysis of all speeches published in the Congressional Record between 1989 and 1998. Among other things, the data reveal that the moral panic of 1989/90 engendered such a broad public consensus that this symbolic issue eclipsed every other topic discussed in Congress. Politicians of all stripes dove for cover and were quite willing to abandon the free speech protection of the First Amendment to guard Old Glory. In contrast, content analyses of the media reveal that while they hyped the moral panic in 1989/90, quoted statements (mostly of politicians) about flag protection were slightly more negative than positive ones. With editorials, the media challenged the public and politicians and came out strongly in favor of free speech (86 percent of editorials opposed flag protection; only 5 percent supported it).

This brief summary leaves out an array of other interesting ideas. Thus, Welch talks about the "authoritarian aesthetic" and the ironic nature of social control, where flag desecrators only really
succeed when they are punished and embrace their penalty as a badge of honor. A brief section dealing with ontological considerations shows that it is virtually impossible to come up with a workable definition of flag desecration. For those too busy or too wary for street demonstrations, there is a web site where one can set the flag ablaze electronically. Bringing it all together, the last chapter offers a reasoned defense of dissent.

Overall, this is an interesting and informative book that is clearly written at a level accessible to most undergraduates. By reading it they will learn some history, some law, some sociological theory and methods, and perhaps some idea of how to tie these together. Welch is certainly not value free, but I cannot find any place where his opposition to flag protection statutes mars his analysis. Indeed, he not only shows how precarious free speech is but also reveals that it needs to be constantly affirmed if it is to be maintained.

My only major complaint has to do with the dated formulation of moral panic. Welch draws on Cohen and Goode and Ben Yehuda — the classics — but misses more recent work that is well-represented in the *British Journal of Sociology* and hence readily available by computer search. This work argues that folk devils are now more likely to fight back and that, along with increased access to a wider range of media, moral panics are harder to constitute than they once were. These developments fit well with Welch’s position and would allow him to refine his analysis of panics and social control by authorities.

In the same context, I think he overlooks the significance of his findings from his content analysis of the media. From Cohen onwards, most researchers have, in the [End page 128] absence of much data about public opinion, used media coverage to establish the existence of moral panic. Welch has evidence of panic by the public and politicians in a context where the media oppose them. The implications of these novel findings should be drawn out.

ENDNOTE

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Review of *Crime Prevention at a Crossroads* *

by

Brion Sever
Monmouth University

Book: *Crime Prevention at a Crossroads*
Author: Steven P. Lab (Ed.)
Publisher: Anderson
Year: 1997

INTRODUCTION AND STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

*Crime Prevention at a Crossroads* is a book edited by Steven P. Lab that brings together a diverse group of articles centering on crime prevention. The articles are organized so that the reader will be exposed to the history of crime prevention, some of its pertinent issues, and a number of ideas concerning the path the field of crime prevention needs to take in the future. Lab provides a one-page introduction to each chapter in an attempt to provide a smooth transition from chapter to chapter.

The book begins with an introductory article by Steven Lab, in which he reviews the history of crime prevention strategies, and touches on some of the issues facing crime prevention today. Lab states that although the term "crime prevention" is relatively new, many of the techniques and strategies used to prevent crime are age old. Lab notes that the trend today is back towards reliance on the general citizenry, and away from the police, courts, and corrections as the sole providers of crime prevention.

Lab stresses that there are five challenges for crime prevention in the future: theoretical competition, program implementation, political reality, poor evaluation, and displacement and diffusion. Accordingly, most crime prevention programs are based on bits and pieces of a number of theories, and encounter a sizeable gap
between theory and practice. For example, the theory behind neighborhood watch programs can never be achieved with only two percent of the residents in a community participating. Moreover, Lab argues that the policies today tend to focus on the immediate symptoms (crime and victimization) rather than the root problems (poverty, inequality and powerlessness).

Lab further contends that prevention programs have typically suffered from poor evaluation in which the outcomes and impacts of the programs have been ignored. He states that crime prevention has now come to a crossroads and that we must decide the next path to take, and this path must be based on an informed choice. He states that the chapters in this book will present a number of different paths that we should consider. [End page 130]

**REVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS**

In Chapter Two, Ronald Clarke and Ross Homel revise Clarke’s original list of 12 techniques of situational prevention to include ideas of alternative research performed on the topic. Specifically, they expand on their techniques to include the guilt, shame, and embarrassment that take place when one commits a crime. Thus, they add elements from social control and neutralization theory in their revision.

Similarly, in the third chapter, author Marcus Felson attempts to link together Hirschi’s control theory with the General Theory of Crime. He does so by proposing a communications compromise using an ordinal scale to show that when people’s own self control decreases, their likelihood of responding to the control of others will also decrease. Felson concludes that most people do not compel the toughest crime prevention measures and can be controlled through simpler, less costly techniques. Although well written and interesting, this article tends to drift away from the general themes of the book, and from the rest of the chapters.

Paul and Patricia Brantingham team to bring the reader back to the main theme of crime prevention strategies in Chapter Four. Moreover, their article also concentrates on a facet of crime that crime prevention strategies have often neglected: fear of crime. The authors stress that crime prevention strategies must focus on methods that bring down both crime and fear of crime, noting that the two are not interchangeable. For instance, the authors use
strategic lighting as an example, arguing that good lighting may decrease fear of crime, while at the same time increasing some types of crime. They suggest that drug dealer’s desire well lit places for better awareness of the location of police, while a thief needs light to see what he or she is doing. While such claims are certainly debatable, the authors do well in questioning prevention strategies that have always been accepted at face value.

Chapter Five continues the theme of challenging long held assumptions as Ralph Taylor criticizes prior research suggesting that incivilities are a key factor in predicting people’s fear of crime. He selected a stratified sample of 24 small commercial centers in St. Paul, Minnesota, and interviewed merchants and local residents about their perceptions of the incivilities in their area. In a nutshell, Taylor found that incivilities were secondary in influencing people’s fear of crime. Rather, a person’s perceived incivilities and the differences between victimization within neighborhoods were more significant factors.

Taylor suggests that we should focus less on trying to bring down actual incivilities, and more on increasing communication and trust between residents in close proximity to each other, which, in turn, will bring down the perceived incivilities. Taylor’s ideas are partly in line with those researching social disorganization theory today. Indeed, a number of previous researchers have also noted that people who perceive their areas to have high crime and incivilities tend to keep more to themselves [End page 131] and have less involvement and stake in their community (Greenberg, 1985; LaGrange, Ferraro, and Supancic, 1992; Taylor and Covington, 1993; Skogan, 1986). On the other hand, Taylor’s ideas are in direct contrast with those of social disorganization theorists, who have always assumed a strong correlation between actual and perceived incivilities.

Dennis Polumbo, Jennifer Ferguson and Judy Stein are the authors of the book’s sixth chapter, which examines the conditions necessary for successful community crime prevention. Polumbo, et al., examined two projects in Arizona to better understand some of these conditions. First, they examined Project Intervention, a life quality improvement project intended to assist residents with housing assistance, job training, and substance abuse education. In order to examine this project, the authors interviewed 72 people in the six cities in the study, including project directors, coordinators,
program clients, and police officers. The authors found that Project Intervention had some success because it focused on multifaceted crime prevention programs rather than focusing only on one issue. Moreover, in the cities where the program was most successful, residents felt a much stronger sense of community cohesion.

The second project that the authors examined was the Community Partnership of Phoenix. Rather than focusing on rendering services to the communities, this project attempted to prevent crime via the use of community empowerment. In other words, the community is allowed to identify the factors causing problems in their neighborhood. This community assessment is then followed by, or in conjunction with, forums on the subjects and steering committee meetings to discuss the assessment. In order to assess this project, the authors of this study conducted interviews with forum participants and attended the forums and steering committee meetings.

The authors found that several factors were critical in order for a community participation project to be successful. The first factor is that the community members must have a strong belief in what they are doing, and must be in agreement about the goals of the project. The second factor is that the community must be involved. For instance, a problem hindering the success of this project was that there was sparse involvement by community members, probably because of poor advertisement of the program by organizers. The authors conclude the chapter by making several conclusions and recommendations for community crime prevention.

Chapters Seven and Eight turn their attention to a specific type of crime prevention: crime prevention in schools. First, Chapter Seven focuses on the victimization and crime prevention on college campuses. In undertaking this study, the authors, Bonnie Fisher, John Sloan, Francis Cullen, and Chunmeng Lu performed a random sample of 3,472 undergraduate and graduate students in 1993. As to the occurrence and type of crimes on campus, they found that students most commonly experienced theft, with 11 percent of students reporting being a victim of larceny. Moreover, most on-campus victimizations were in the students’ living quarters and in a classroom building. Specifically, personal and violent crimes were more likely to take place in the students’ living quarters, while theft was more likely to occur in the classroom buildings.
As far as crime prevention efforts, the authors found that the students rarely were involved in any measures to prevent crime. The most common types of crime prevention methods offered to students on campus included the placement of security guards in their residence, card key access, and deadbolt locks. The study found that few schools offered crime watch programs or self-defense programs, with schools generally offering after dark on-campus escort services and emergency telephones.

While Fisher, et al.’s study focused on crime on college campuses, Steven Lab and Richard Clarke examined victimization patterns of in-school victimization of junior and senior high school students. They surveyed 11,085 students in grades seven through twelve in Lucas County, Ohio, and found that forty percent of the student body had been victims of theft at school, while, respectively, 13 and 12 percent had been assaulted and robbed. Moreover, they found fear of crime to be high in their sample, with it predictably being highest among seventh and eighth graders and lowest for 11th and 12th graders.

Lab and Clark suggest that the manner in which students react to their victimization is usually inappropriate, and that we need to encourage students to prevent crime in more productive manners. For instance, students must be encouraged not to skip school or carry weapons in avoidance of crime victimization. Also, limits must be placed on law and order approaches such as searches and metal detection devices. Such efforts are counterproductive to the objectives of school, and may negatively impact the learning experience of students. Rather, crime prevention efforts centering on alternative strategies such as student and parent involvement must be encouraged.

In Chapter Nine, Tim Hope offers yet another recommendation for better crime prevention, this one focusing on aggregate level solutions. Hope focuses on the destructive force that economic inequality, poverty, an overabundance of rental housing, and problematic demographic structures (single parent families, etc) have on a community. He argues that the problems are generally community wide, and that social change is necessary in order to achieve any resolution. He offers a few ideas on how to combat problems at the macro level, such as the welfare solution, and structural change.
The book concludes with a chapter by Paul Lavrakas concerning the ability, or lack thereof, of crime prevention efforts to compete with "get tough" strategies in the political arena. Lavrakas argues that get tough strategies make extremely good political tools for politicians when dealing with the uninformed public. But, he also contends that part of the problem is that the politicians themselves are uninformed on the subject of crime. Indeed, the reviewer of this book has often thought of surveying politicians about their knowledge of basic criminological and criminal justice theory and policy, with the idea that crucial criminal justice decisions are often made by those with little knowledge on the subject area. [End page 133]

Lavrakas argues that one manner in which we can change the current system is through the media. Specifically, the media must become more educated on criminal justice issues, and must move beyond its focus on crime and crime prevention as a tool to sell papers/programs. In other words, they must move beyond the catchy stories of crime in "cold blood" and get tough strategies used to combat crime. Lavrakas considers these stories as "lazy journalism." Moreover, this coverage causes the general public to get a skewed view of the strategies available to politicians, and allows politicians to continue to use reactive measures to their political advantage. Lavrakas concludes by suggesting that scholars must take a more active role in changing the existing system, particularly in the education of the media on crime and crime prevention.

CONCLUSION

Looking at the pros and cons of this book, it should be recognized that the individual chapters are well written, and they appear to have been examined with much scrutiny before they were placed in this book. Indeed, each chapter provides an argument or research that is based on clear theoretical underpinnings and a thorough review of the literature. Perhaps the main drawback of the book is that the chapters could have been organized or brought together a little better. Perhaps two or three chapters could have been brought together in sections according to themes such as environmental crime prevention, crime prevention in schools, prevention of fear of crime, etc. Instead, the chapters are loosely placed together, and tend to jump around from topic to topic.
Looking at the book as a whole, it certainly brings some topics to the forefront that have generally been neglected in basic crime prevention books. Thus, it is definitely a worthy read for a researcher, particularly one interested in crime prevention. The book probably would be more appropriate for a graduate than undergraduate course. This is primarily because it is edited, and assumes that the reader has some pre-existing background with crime prevention literature. On the other hand, the chapters in the book are concisely written and most of them provide a review of their topic area in the beginning of the chapter. Thus, it could also be recommended for advanced undergraduate criminology and criminal justice students.

ENDNOTE

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REFERENCES


A Review of When Law Goes Pop: 
*The Vanishing Line between Law and Popular Culture*

by

Ryan Alford
University of New Mexico

Book: *When Law Goes Pop: The Vanishing Line between Law and Popular Culture*
Author: Richard K. Sherwin
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Year: 2000

Life today resembles a fictional paradigm more and more and sometimes even outdoes the movie version. O. J. Simpson’s ride in a white Bronco might well have been an improbable episode on a television cop series; the televised Simpson and Menendez trials so convincingly melded the forms of [the popular television programs] "L.A. Law," "All My Children," and Oprah" that talk show and soap opera ratings fell off.

(Goldberg, 1997, §2, p. 1)¹

*When Law Goes Pop* is the first book-length appraisal of the impact of popular culture on the criminal justice system in the United States written by a legal theorist. The author, a former prosecutor, skillfully motivates the need for the appraisal of this influence. Sherwin refers to numerous instances of the influence of the media on the framing processes of jurors and judges alike. He encourages his readers to think not only of the immediate import of this influence, but also to consider the potential long-effects of this influence on the justice system. Sherwin is alarmed at the threat posed by "skeptical postmodernism" most particularly. He is
determined to show us the roots of this threat within the nature of popular culture and to address productively the threat they pose.

Sherwin is not the first legal scholar that has remarked about the influence of popular culture representation on the justice system. Various ethnographic studies of the courtroom, (e.g. Schrager, 1998) have mentioned it in passing. However, Balkin first raised the effect of popular culture as a source of narrative frames as a troubling concern for legal scholars concerned with the integrity of the legal process. He provided a telling analysis of the influence of television at the highest level, from the Supreme Court nomination hearings of Clarence Thomas:

Thomas’s defenders, however, invoked the plot of a contemporary movie, Fatal Attraction, to paint [Anita] Hill as a spurned lover … Hill’s accusations could then be reinterpreted as those of a calculating, unstable vixen … narrative [End page 136] framings had enormous rhetorical power and may have helped turn the tide in favor of Thomas’s eventual confirmation (1998, p. 197).

However, it is Sherwin, in this well documented account of the patterns and mechanisms of influence between the criminal justice system and popular culture, who opens our eyes to the breadth and depth of the connection between these two spheres and the potential for harm that this creates. The majority of American citizens form their opinions about the criminal justice system through the mass media, and more often than not, Sherwin contends, from fictional accounts of the trial process. His thesis is that this process takes on a negative cast within a postmodern culture, where "the symbols replace the real" to such an alarming extent that we mistake representation for reality. As Baudrillard noted about the present, "there is no corpse of the real, and with good reason, the real is not dead, it has disappeared" (1997, p. 141).\(^2\) The author advances ample proof that due to this disappearance, we make due with our familiarity with the simulacra, with sometimes humorous (but often serious) effects.

THE EFFECTS OF THE SIMULACRA OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE
It appears that people construct prototype representations of crime categories similar to the way other social categories are organized, but contrary to the way these categories are organized under the law

(Smith, 1991, p. 863)³

Remember, your average juror spends four to six hours a day with a television in their home

(Sherman, 1993)⁴

The impact of American popular culture’s representations of the criminal justice system is such that Canadian citizens routinely complain after arrest of having not been read their Miranda rights (p. 298, n. 27). Of course, the U. S. Supreme Court’s jurisdiction ends at the 49th parallel, but the hegemony of American representations of the legal process does not. Sherwin’s examples of the influence of the "frames" of the criminal justice system are taken largely from film, and he uses them to demonstrate how they can be seen as both causes and effects of changes in the American zeitgeist.

The detailed commentary on the documentary The Thin Blue Line and the differences between Thompson and Scorcese’s versions of Cape Fear demonstrate that a feedback loop links the criminal justice system and the way it is represented in popular culture. His analyses of these films and the feedback loop fulfill three functions. They trace shifts in attitudes towards the courts, they reveal how public anxieties (as reflected in these films) are seized upon by lawyers and lawmakers, and they reveal how an ever-increasing number of contradictory "ideologemes" about the possibility of justice circulate within popular culture. [End page 137]

Sherwin also advances general evidence for the fact that general patterns of media representations of crime and criminals have affected the justice system. It is not the content of the media that he faults for unwarranted changes in the structure of the legal process, however, but rather its aesthetic form. Following Baudrillard and McLuhan, Sherwin adopts a position of technological determinism,
although his account of this process is tempered by an awareness of the role of the market in shaping the technological patterns. He singles out television in particular as a force that erodes the public’s ability to think critically about crime, as its preference for the sound bite and pseudo-drama lead viewers to consider criminality in a dubious fashion.

Television, more than any other medium, is responsible for a flattening of our perceptions, making it impossible to burst out of the frame and to see crime as a result of anything other than a demonized class of uncontrollable "hyper-criminals." However, it is not simply that the threat to our safety posed by criminal violence has been dramatically over-inflated by networks hungry for the ratings they can procure when they cater to our voyeuristic impulses; it is more importantly true that television promotes an awareness of the condition of hyper-reality.

THE SEDUCTIVENESS OF HYPER-REALITY

Sherwin posits that there are two sets of effects of "the law going pop." The first is the snowballing trend towards the court system’s reliance on the techniques of representation most common in popular culture. This trend leads to a moment when the legal system becomes the parasite rather than the symbiote of media representations of the criminal justice system. In the past, lawyers merely made surreptitious or causal references to popular representations of the justice system (e.g. *Perry Mason* or *Dragnet*) to punctuate their speeches. At present, effective summations (which are often the pivotal moment of the trial) largely depend upon the incorporation or mimesis of mass media formats that have shortened our attention spans and fueled our preference for the immediate gratification of deeply repressed desires.

Rather than delivering marathon speeches, the advocates now often rely upon "summation videos, which incorporate computer-generated graphical representations, or even video clips of movies in order to present a suggestive metaphor" (p. 25). Judges’ and other authorities’ negative intuitions about the appropriateness of these mass-media style techniques within the courtroom are called into doubt by their sheer weight, and they have begun to accept what would previously have been considered blatantly prejudicial.

The legal scholar George Fletcher highlighted an excellent
example in his analysis of the trial of Bernhard Goetz. Goetz’s lawyer, Barry Slotnik, desperately wanted to convey to the jurors the fear of a white person surrounded by four Black "predators," and he smuggled it into the trial, in much the same way as it would be done in the mass media, by means of a dubious re-enactment. Ostensibly designed to discuss the paths of the bullets fired in a subway car, Slotnik’s re-creation involved four large Black volunteers, who crowded around the dummy representing Goetz. Fletcher [End page 138] perceptively labeled this re-enactment "a courtroom mini-drama." His explanation of why this was permitted is even more illuminative:

After all, when the television show 20/20 showed a re-creation of the shooting scene, they had cast four black young men in the parts of the victims. Why should Barry Slotnick, as the director of this re-creation, not enjoy the same dramatic freedom? Most observers thought that he should, and Justice Crane temporarily concurred (Fletcher, 1998, p. 207).

CORROSIVE EFFECTS OF HYPER-REALITY AND OF OUR AWARENESS OF ITS FORCE

To a great extent, the American public has been seduced by the cognitive strategies required to process high-speed visual stimuli (which Sherwin demonstrates is central to producing the "atavistic response" so crucial to advertising). The result is that many people only respond positively to this sort of information, and many no longer have the critical ability to understand why this reliance on this format is dangerous, Sherwin contends. Even more portentous is the fact that techniques drawn from the sales-driven mass media, which have become interpenetrated within the trial format, have reached a stage when they can no longer be skillfully manipulated even by the most experienced and media-literate attorney without provoking a cynicism that defeats their purpose.

These techniques produce an inflation of affective responses that is unsustainable, especially given the fact that their proliferation creates cognitive dissonance, an inability to reconcile disparate points of view. This condition leads to an indefinite suspension of
judgement, since the reference point by which to judge the simulacrum has become the shifting ground created by the incompatible simulacra itself. Even if one can perceive that what is represented of crime in popular culture is not moored to reality, this creates no escape from the effects of a sign system that has broken down the barrier between the categories of reality and fiction. This breakdown is clearly indicated by the effects in ubiquitous re-enactment and obvious re-framing of the purportedly genuine in "reality TV" formats. The inability to distinguish the "real" is indicated by the decision of a news programmer not to air a murderer caught on tape because "it looks like a re-enactment" (p. 15). 7

Sherwin argues that when the cultural fabric becomes saturated with these fundamentally manipulative techniques, both in popular culture and the trial, the depictions of the legal system leave us incapable of the affective response that they were designed to provoke. The public loses faith in their ability to produce a just response in this cultural context. The ability of juries to respond to the puzzle of re-creating meaning in the courtroom, the ability to attempt to right wrongs and to discover how meaning can be created collectively, must be resurrected in the face of dangers of the proliferation of cynical, aestheticized responses to the abyss of meaning engendered by the simulacrum of criminal justice that we confront. [End page 139]

The cynical response is toxic from the point of view of the justice system, as "skeptical postmodernism renders judgement impossible." However, the destruction of the capacity for faithful legal judgement is only the most noticeable of the cultural effects of hyper-reality that have the ability to tear cultures to pieces.

Following James Boyd White, Sherwin claims that skeptical postmodernism endangers the collective creation of meaning that the justice system engenders. White’s influence is pervasive in this text, as Sherwin’s sense of urgency indicates that he believes there is far more at stake in this transition to skeptical postmodernism than the loss of faith in a once-respected institution. White believes that the primary purpose of the justice system is to serve as a forum for the articulation and recreation of shared meanings and values. Sherwin uses an evocative metaphor to underscore this point, comparing the trial to the Dionysian rites that appease the spirits; the trial also restores order to society by means of a ritual
purification that not only punishes the guilty and compensates the injured. Crucially, however, the trial is an example of how competing values and meanings can be compared and even integrated productively in a just examination that leads to a judgement that affirms our ability to deal positively with a surfeit of perspectives and values. Because the legal system has recourse to what Robert Cover called "the field of pain and death," it is a powerful influence upon those who look to it as a site where the values of the community collectively triumph, although tested by much more than the confrontation with the lawbreaker: by the confrontation with the specter of the breakdown of all meaning.

THE RESPONSE: AFFIRMATIVE POSTMODERNISM

Sherwin believes that the trial can be an example of affirmative postmodernism, where the proliferation of values and meanings can be considered as a source of strength and vitality rather than the root of a skeptical paralysis. In the light of the erosion of meaning through the commodified circulation of images, the justice system can be a source of optimism about our ability to make sense of our collective reality even in the face of the near-infinite number of competing representations.

Sherwin's ideal for the justice system is suggestive of the crux of Drucilla Cornell’s Philosophy of the Limit, which itself displays the influence of Emanuel Levinas’ plea to consider the other as other. Sherwin (following Cornell) believes that if we turn skeptical postmodernism on its head, we see everything as potentially meaningful and important to our judgement – we rise to the challenge of making sense of reality despite its many paradoxes.

In a new twist on the importance of the value of openness to difference, Sherwin reminds us that we must not also suppress the time-tested means of assessing perspectives most prized by the justice system, even though they are no longer fashionable. Precedent arguments and the techniques for the appraisal of logical cogency must not fall by the wayside if we are to regain the confidence to assess the meaning of crime without falling back upon this sort of dogmatism and rejection of differences in perspectives. Sherwin’s rationale for the salvaging of a modicum of rationalistic approaches to judicial problems in a postmodern world is evocative of Derrida’s response to his critics: "reading otherwise … means always passing through the classical
discipline, and never having abandoned or jettisoned it" (Derrida, 1998).

Hopefully, the justice system will then, by means of the segment of the feedback loop which leads back from it to popular culture, not only counter the erosion of its own ability to judge adequately, but also counter the hegemony of skeptical (rather than affirmative) postmodernism. The public, if they were made aware of the way in which the justice system integrates competing perspectives to good effect, can be convinced that it is worthwhile to participate not only in institutions but also in processes where our ability to create collectively affirmed meanings is put to the test. Naturally, the media’s hegemony of representations of the criminal justice system will need to be destroyed if this is to be possible.

Sherwin suggests that the trials that should be televised are precisely those which do not mesh well with the media’s aestheticization of representations – the trials that are broadcast should be devoid of the sensationalistic elements that currently make trials attractive to the mass media. If this were possible, then perhaps rather than novelty singles being released to chronicle Goetz’s crime (witness Ronny and the Urban Watchdogs Subway Vigilante)8 more reflective public discourse would be stimulated by high profile trials.

PROBLEMS

Sherwin paints an appealing picture of how the feedback loop between law and popular culture might be turned against the tide of nihilism. Unfortunately, his account of the problem is not devoid of problems. The most significant is that it remains unclear, when rationality is reduced to one heuristic tool amongst many, that we would be able to judge whether or not we have balanced it judicially against other ways of perceiving and judging. Sherwin’s approach seems to call for a form of meta-judgement (about whether we have in fact been appropriately open to all forms of reasoning, and have done so appropriately.)

For this reason, it is unfortunate that Sherwin dismisses Habermas’ theory of discourse ethics in such a perfunctory manner, and that he pays attention only to Aristotle’s conception of rhetoric and poetics, but not to the dialectic. As a result, in When the Law Goes Pop there exists a deficit of normativity. Sherwin takes a
strong stand against the destruction of the power to affirm shared values but is unable to justify his position, other than by pointing to the consequences. As Habermas would note, Sherwin is reduced to a form of crypto-normativity. This form of argument will make it difficult for Sherwin to engage in dialogue with postmodern legal thinkers who will have no truck with normativity, such as Richard Delgado (1992).

On the subject of the book’s faults, there are a few other problems that are not quite as thorny that still warrant mention. The fifth chapter, previously published in the *Stanford Law Review*, breaks the flow of the book in an unfortunate manner and could have been omitted without creating any difficulties. Likewise, Sherwin’s discussion of Kieslowski’s *Red* ends the book on a slightly self-indulgent note.

However, none of these faults detracts from the strengths of this book in any serious way. *When Law Goes Pop* is a thought provoking and compelling appraisal of the link between popular culture and criminal justice. It shines a light on a process of the loss of meaning that many would rather not think about, and has the courage to propose a course of action to address it. It is a book that will hopefully have an influence far beyond the boundaries of interdisciplinary legal theory, and will undoubtedly influence the works of those who analyze the intersection of law and popular culture most of all.

ENDNOTES

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5. Following V. Caldwell’s comments in *Critical Race Theory* (1994), I capitalize the proper noun "Black."
6. One of Slotnick’s sound-bite style catchphrases during the trial.

7. The response of this inability to draw meaning from representations is to make use of the consumption of images to fulfil the desires that these same images spark in our psyches. Our consumption of the media images, even when we assume a posture of ironic detachment, is one in which we derive pleasure from pure consumption. We no longer attempt to engage in a process of collective meaning making that is the heart of a common identity and set of values so important for a culture; we merely take pleasure from "the debauchery of signs … the vertiginous subversion of all effects of meaning" (Baudrillard, 1990, p 74).

The avatar of this sensibility created by our dependence on the simulacra, for Sherwin, is Quentin Tarantino, who has aestheticized violence with abandon, "who inhabits Gorgias’ world, a world where knowledge is deemed to be impossible … it is the same skeptical postmodern aesthetic that prompts audience to laugh in the face of horror and perversion." Hyper-real popular culture not only displaces the law, but replaces it in this scenario, as there is no longer any need for the courts as a site where meaning is re-imposed on what is otherwise not understandable (i.e., criminal violence). [End page 142]

8. The lyrics of that single include:

   He’s the subway vigilante
   The brave subway vigilante (…)
   He had enough and came out fightin’
   Drove the rats back into hidin’
   Let’s cheer the subway vigilante
   He’s one special kind of man. (Cited in Fletcher, 1995, p. 201).

REFERENCES


Sherman, R. (1993). "And now, the power of tape: videos are being used to argue the case and not just demonstrate the ‘facts’," National Law Journal, 8 February 1993, 1. [End page 143]


The heyday of the Jewish gangster is long over, but the imagined ethnic mobster has never ceased to fascinate mass American audiences. The past decade or two in particular have seen a fresh burst of popular interest in this shady, colorful figure, largely playing out upon the screen and producing a spate of movies about Jewish gangs – *Billy Bathgate* (1991), *Bugsy* (1991), *Eight Men Out* (1988), *Miller's Crossing* (1990), *Lansky* (1999), *Once upon a Time in America* (1984), and *Little Odessa* (1994), among others.

Although audiences' appetites for fictional gangsters have not abated, a glance at historical and journalistic writing spanning the twentieth century about actual Jewish gangsters reveals that the attitude of the Jewish community toward its mobsters has evolved considerably. The first written reactions in the Jewish American press to the activities of Jewish criminals shows pained bewilderment: How could such a thing be reconciled with a moral code that supposedly made violent crime impossible? In addition, many Jews feared that the delinquencies of a few "bad" Jews would
bring shame upon the entire group, and it was a common reaction to ignore or hide the question of Jewish crime. For instance, Detroit Jewish journalist Philip Slomovits acknowledges that the Jewish community was well aware of Jewish gangsters, but didn't want anything about them printed in the newspaper: "'We panicked,' he admits. 'We worried about what the Gentiles would say and submitted to our fears'" (Rockaway, 58). This fear of making all Jews look bad was not limited to journalistic accounts; more than one academic historian, engaged in researching the first documented accounts of Jewish gangsters in the United States, has reported being asked why he or she must air dirty laundry "in front of" the entire country.

But as the twentieth century moved toward its end, a more distant, and also more appreciative, stance toward Jewish gangsters began to take hold. Rich Cohen's 1999 book Tough Jews is exemplary of the new wave of interest on the part of Jews in Jewish gangsters: Bored with his safe and domestic childhood in well-off suburban Chicago, the author seeks in the Jewish gangsters a kind of cultural Viagra. For Cohen, the flinty criminals of his grandfather's generation provide a dramatic antidote both to the pallidness of suburban life and to the behavioral mandates of feminism; rediscovered as ethnic heroes, they stand as a powerful white, middle-class "me too" retort to the general acceptance of "multiculturalism" in the American educational system.

Robert A. Rockaway's But He Was Good to His Mother, which claims early on that it will take an anecdotal approach to the story of Jewish gangsters in order to discover "lesser-known" aspects of their worlds, hangs halfway between these two poles of concern. Born in 1939 (which would make him approximately the age of Cohen's parents), Rockaway is not free of the old timidity about representing Jewish gangsters publicly, let alone proudly; his book opens with a brief and apologetic introduction reminiscent of the titlecards required by film industry censor boards in the 1930s, when gangster movies were fantastically popular. These title cards somberly informed audiences that the purpose of the film is not to sensationalize but rather to present a problem that the American public must band together to solve. (See, for instance, the "classic" 1931 gangster movie The Public Enemy, which presents such an assurance at the beginning of the movie, and also at the end, thereby bracketing the film with disclaimer.) Along the same lines,
Rockaway promises that "[i]n no way do I seek to glorify the Jewish gangster." That impulse satisfied, he then goes comfortably on, if not to glorify the gangster, then at least to represent, and in turn create, a decided amount of attraction to these figures, an attraction parallel to that of the younger generation of gangster chroniclers exemplified by Cohen.

Rockaway's selective, anecdotal approach serves up the standard gangland slayings, kamikaze bootlegging runs, and bitter ends to the criminal life (including, for instance, a two-page description — oozing bodily fluids and all — of Lepke Buchalter's death in the electric chair). But his rather arch account also dwells upon passionate romances, lavish funerals, and elaborate family dinners. Rockaway's part-admiring, part-farcical focus on the "private" lives and characters of the gangsters results in an odd but marked aura of glamour, as when he writes of the arrest of "Sheeny" Julius Klein in New York City for robbing a woman on Sixth Avenue. The woman refused to press charges; Rockaway concludes, "the lady must have been taken by Klein's boyish looks" instead of arriving at the much more credible conclusion (supported repeatedly by Rockaway's own research) that the victim was afraid of reprisal if she sought prosecution.

Rockaway devotes a chapter to the "good works" of Jewish gangsters, called "Defenders of Their People." This notion of Jewish criminals as protectors of more vulnerable Jews is by now a fairly predictable one. And Rockaway points out that while there is evidence that some gangsters did indeed defend religious Jews as they saw fit, they also made their money, especially when they started out, by shaking down Jewish merchants and pushcart vendors in their neighborhoods. Rockaway concludes that "protecting and helping Jews was fine as long as it did not interfere with business. When the two clashed, making money superceded ethnic loyalties" (254). Thus, Rockaway is fairly clear-eyed about the limitations of gangster benevolence, although he does seem to accept that donating money to a synagogue is proof that the gangsters could sometimes be "good," rather than evidence that synagogues could sometimes be corrupted. [End page 146]

Also, there are some problems with representing the Jewish gangsters/defenders as strictly besieged by anti-Semites rather than as participating in turf wars, in which neighborhoods and criminal franchises tended to be marked off and divided up according to
ethnicity. For instance, Rockaway is able to quote, completely without self-consciousness or irony, an aged thug describing a fight that resulted when the "Pollacks" (a derogatory word for Poles) were harassing a Jew nicknamed "Izzy the Chink" (an unspeakably racist term for Chinese); furthermore, the Jews Rockaway quotes usually refer to Italians as "wops" or "dagos." The author himself indulges in a triumphant tone when he writes that Italians were unable to "strut" (222) around Jewish neighborhoods after the Jewish gangsters intervened.

One of the most valuable aspect of Rockaway's larkish account is the attention he pays to the Jewish mob in cities other than New York and Chicago, which generally claim all the attention both in popular cultural representations and in historical accounts. (A notable exception is the St. Valentine's Day Massacre of 1929, in which machine-gun wielding rivals in from Detroit mowed down six Chicago gangsters. This swift but bloody event is referenced in several Hollywood movies, including the Marilyn Monroe comedy Some Like It Hot.) Rockaway focuses especially on the notorious Purple Gang, which viciously ruled the underworld of Detroit, where the author was born and raised.

Interestingly, 2000 also saw the publication of a book entirely devoted to the Purples and organized crime in Detroit: Paul Kavieff's less quirky, and more solemn, The Purple Gang. Kavieff is less interested in making particular arguments about the Jewishness of the mobsters; his perspective seems to emphasize regionalism rather than ethnicity as such. For instance, he points out that Detroit was the first major American city to go completely "dry" during Prohibition and charts the mob's swift development in Detroit from this unique moment in the city's history. Rockaway, on the other hand, also uses Prohibition as a point of departure, but is much more intent on demonstrating that nationwide, Jews and Gentiles alike took advantage of this ill-considered law to consolidate their illegal activities.

Both Rockaway and Kavieff have sorted through an impressive amount of primary sources, such as interviews, FBI files, court records, and early newspaper accounts. Unfortunately, neither author seems to be equipped or interested in offering a context – in popular culture or in social history – for these remarkable bits of information, so they tend to remain as just that: bits of information. For instance, Rockaway writes in some detail about the death of
Chicago gangster Samuel "Nails" Morton, who worked with an Irish mob and was known as a stylish dresser who loved horseback riding. Rockaway describes Morton's blackly humorous death: he’s thrown from a horse and his gang buddies exact revenge by shooting the horse. But Rockaway fails to mention that this scenario is re-created remarkably faithfully in *The Public Enemy*, with the death of the barely fictional gangster Samuel "Nails" Nathan. If Rockaway had attended to this kind of interplay between popular culture and news headlines, he could have attained a much higher level of insight about the complicated and intense relationship between the gangsters and those who loved to watch them. Similarly, the mentions that both authors make of gangster involvement in trade unions, lacking as they do any background in labor history concerning the systematic employment of gangsters by both bosses and union leaders during contentious strikes, are limited to mere illustrations of a peculiarly intangible "old familiar sideline, labor racketeering" (Kavieff, 167).

Rockaway is an academic historian (he's a member of the Department of Jewish History at Tel Aviv University who has published several books on Jewish immigration to the United States), but *He Was Good to His Mother* is not an academic book; it’s much more likely to be shelved in the "True Crime" section of a bookstore than in "American History," and it's probably unfair to hold that against it. (Although the author photo on the book's back cover, which pictures Rockaway holding a pistol and grinning, betrays perhaps too much authorial investment in the glamour of his topic). Likewise, *The Purple Gang*, written by a member of Wayne State University's engineering faculty, seems to be more the product of a non-specialist's long-standing fascination than of an analytical impulse. (And the overwhelming number of grammatical, typographical, and stylistic errors that were allowed to stand in the book makes it hard even to read through to the end.) As such, both books serve primarily as current examples of our continued fascination with Jewish gangsters, real and imagined, as we move into the twenty-first century. But for the patient reader, these two books also represent a treasure-trove of material, which, more carefully explicated and contextualized, could reveal an important and compelling chapter of American Jewish history.

ENDNOTE

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Review of *Well-Founded Fear*

by

Sarah J. Mahler

Florida International University

Video: *Well-Founded Fear*
Filmmakers: Shari Robertson and Michael Camerini
Released: On PBS’s *P.O.V.*
Year: 2000

*Well-Founded Fear* is a powerful yet puzzling video that chronicles the strange space of the political asylum unit at the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in New York. The eye of the camera captures the sterility of the hard plastic chairs that accommodate asylum applicants as they wait to tell their testimonies to asylum officers. We hear snippets of nervous conversations with family members and interpreters in the final moments before an officer calls their names. The camera then follows the applicants behind the closed doors into the intimate spaces of the officials’ offices as they conduct interviews with the applicants and attempt to mete out the truth or falsity of their claims. Viewers are privy to these confidential proceedings (all participation in the documentary, we are told at the outset, is voluntary), but, unlike the applicants themselves, viewers are also allowed into the deliberations officials have with themselves, their colleagues, and their superiors over the merits of different cases. Occasionally, viewers are also treated to glimpses of the applicants’ lives outside the INS, a privileged perspective that officials do not share. We also enjoy translations, both of what applicants say and what interpreters convey of their words to the asylum officers (needless-to-say these two do not always coincide). Do these advantages afford viewers better information to decide who deserves safe haven in the U. S. and who does not? Not necessarily.

The film is a treatise on subjectivity and positionality; it is also
about how these elements assist in telling compelling, believable stories or not. Asylum officers tell about how gullible they were when first on the job when they tended to believe each sad story and how they have become more cynical — and more judicious — over time. We see some who seem awed by the responsibility of determining the fate of another human being and we encounter others who no longer see individuals but rather faces that utter the repeated scripts of the same, trumped up story. Some, no most, asylum applicants cry as they are interviewed and some trip over dates, names, and other details. Those with doctorates, thick files, or NGO lawyers exude credibility; peasants, women with finely painted nails, and those with thin files and messy paperwork, are treated circumspectly.

Ultimately, though, winning and losing are determined less on the basis of merit and more by the roulette wheel of which INS officer is assigned a case — someone who still retains the foibles of human subjectivity or someone who has morphed into a bureaucrat. One of the latter walks down a dreary hallway into the room where he retrieves his next brown file by mumbling, "Once again, into the breech." It is hard to believe that anyone can remain humane in this atmosphere, a place of long, sterile corridors, windowless offices, and interminable rows of ugly brown file folders. Yet just as you lose all belief in humanity, let alone justice, you hear the voice of a clerk congratulating a new asylee on winning his case or the faith of the Rumanian applicant who, despite it all, still believes that the U. S. is "the best thing in the world...because indeed everything is possible here." Unfortunately, the filmmakers splice in views of the Statue of Liberty at this point, offering an unbearably melodramatic yet upbeat ending to an otherwise solemn critique of "America."

The ending scenes raise the most profound and troubling question about this film: What is it intended to do and for whom? If its intention is to educate the public about the political asylum system, it falls way short for there is, aside from a brief rolling definition of the 1967 U. N. protocol definition of a refugee that is later adopted by the U. S., almost no background about political asylum and the history behind the special asylum units offered to the viewer. As someone who translated for scores of asylum applicants before these special units were begun — under duress from litigation showing how discriminatory the previous, and worse, system was — I know that this film provides a more
charitable perspective than most applicants faced not so many years ago. In those days, applicants presented their stories, however horrible and divulging, in immigration court where there was no pretense of confidentiality and wherein judges, towering high above applicants from their judicial thrones, frequently screamed at them with impunity if they faltered during testimony. The odds of winning a case then were also worse, so bad for people fleeing regimes allied with the U. S. government such as El Salvador and Guatemala, that even extremely strong cases with thick files and NGO lawyers were no guarantee of safe haven. There is one commonality between then and the view given in the film: The person who is assigned his or her case still primarily determines the applicant’s fate. Supposedly, the 1980 Refugee Act was passed to remove foreign policy and politics from influencing the evaluations of asylum and refugee applications, yet these biases have never been eliminated. Indeed, the film touches only very lightly on this topic through its allusions to the State Department country reports that officers use to contextualize claims. And only in the final credits does it make reference to the 1996 law that, for all intents and purposes, gutted the 1980 Refugee law. Viewers, unfortunately, receive almost none of this historical background and so, unless unusually well educated in this arcane area, are not well prepared by the film to comprehend the system they watch, let alone to judge it.

Perhaps the objective of the film, alternatively, is to side with applicants and show the forces that they are up against. We see, for example, how much is lost and sometimes distorted in the process of interpretation. Compelling original testimony is translated into the undistinguished drawl heard by officers who must judge its credibility and persuasiveness. And we see the same officers discussing the cases behind the scenes, away from applicants. But we are not offered any other information that would help us judge the cases, such as an investigation of the information presented or even follow-up interviews with applicants. [End page 150]
improvements in the asylum decision-making process over its hellish past, but I know it more intimately and thoroughly than I imagine most viewers can. Something tells me, however, that this is not the intention of the film — not that it is not one of its aims, but not its overall purpose.

And that brings me to the film’s title, *Well-Founded Fear*. The 1967 Protocol defines a refugee as someone who has been persecuted or has a "well-founded fear" of persecution. This is one of the gray areas in the definition that actually allows for so much latitude in interpretation. What is a "well-founded" fear? The film actually explores some of the subtleties of this term but without ever doing so directly. An Algerian woman testifies that she and her family were on a beach when two bombs exploded, nearly blowing them up. The officer hearing the case is heard saying that all people in Algeria are at risk. We hear how the woman’s family has been politically involved for generations and she believes the bombs were targeting her family because of their political ties. But she is not granted asylum; her case is referred up a level. Why? Because virtually everyone in the country is at risk and she has not sufficiently shown how she and her family have been singled out. But doesn’t she have a "well-founded" fear of persecution? I shouted to myself. I could feel the hurdle bar still being jerked higher in her case than for some others, and I wondered what invisible and visible hands manipulate it. Ultimately, this, I think, is the intention of the film. After all is said and done, after all the rational procedures are put in place, our fates are still largely determined by the whims of our humanity.

**ENDNOTE**

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Conversation across the disciplines is notoriously difficult, and therefore I am grateful to Peter K. Manning, an award-winning social scientist and police scholar, for taking the time to review my book (Cop Knowledge: Police Power and Cultural Narrative in Twentieth Century America) in Volume 8, Issue 1 of the Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture. (And thanks, too, to the journal’s editors for allowing us to extend our conversation here). That being said, I think the review highlights some important differences between Professor Manning’s approach and my own that the readers of the JCJPC might find of interest.

My main concern, I guess, is that these readers wouldn’t be able to discern my book’s overall argument and approach from his review at all. (Other reviewers have no trouble in this respect: readers may wish to consult, for instance, Stuart A. Scheingold’s fair-minded summary in the Law and Politics Book Review at http://www.polsci.wvu.edu/lpbr/subpages/reviews/wilson.html.) Professor Manning, instead, devotes over half of his review to a semiotic extrapolation upon two words in my title – and thus, no doubt unintentionally, is forced into telegraphic and (I’m afraid) misleading synopses for the rest. For instance, his opening characterization of me as a "cultural studies" scholar would be understandable, were it not that my introduction explicitly says otherwise, and that he uses that notoriously broad label in such a dismissive way. As a result, JCJPC readers won’t easily discern that my book is actually a work of cultural history, and that each chapter takes issue with some of the dominant theoretical paradigms in "cultural studies" as such. Professor Manning’s summaries of my chapters might also lead readers to believe that I
am relying on popular-cultural texts as "an evidentiary base" (his words) of police consciousness or tactics. In fact, these chapters consult dozens of works by historians, as well as police manuals, police advocacy texts, memoirs, interviews, criminological studies, news accounts and more. It is reductive and misleading to say, therefore, that my first chapter’s account of a "progressive view" of the police is "based on" the writings of Crane and Steffens; nor is my third chapter "based on" Wambaugh (it draws upon ethnographer Steve Herbert, several historians of the LAPD, and ends by discussing a Chicano gang memoir). And so on. Contrary to his synopsis, chapter 5 is concerned with the murder of two African American boys, age 11 and 15, not "a teen-ager." Perhaps most characteristically, Professor Manning suggests that my book is just full of "off-handed observations on the meaning of films" while it has summarily "dismissed" what he calls "serious and careful studies (e.g. the work of [Albert] Reiss. . .)." The truth of it is that, taking all five of my chapters together, I discuss "the meaning" of one film – by looking at the crime on which it was based, by recounting some of its production history, and by a close reading of its original script. And I actually offer an extended critique (about a third of a chapter) of Reiss’s *The Police and the Public* (1971) and his contemporaries. (I would have much preferred accuracy on Manning's part to a computation of my footnote-to-page ratio.)

I know what *JCJPC* readers may be thinking: an author’s defensiveness about a reviewer’s inaccuracies can be tiresome. My intention is simply to ask whether Professor Manning’s willingness to engage in interdisciplinary exchange might be inhibited by his seeming indifference to well-accepted methods of historical documentation (what else can his "apparently detailed" mean?), as well as his obvious impatience with textual analysis other than the semiotic. As for his sense that ethnographic field work on the "knowledge police have about policing" is a far more legitimate enterprise than examining the interactions of policing with media forms, as I have done – well, I guess that’s for readers to decide. But let me take our disagreement about Reiss as a final example of what may really be at issue here.

The central point of Professor Manning’s excursion into semiotics, I gather – and I have to admit, I still don’t fully understand all of it – is that I don’t sufficiently differentiate among what he sees as "kinds" of police knowledge that, he asserts, can be separated analytically (cpk1, cpk2, etc.). Again, perhaps it’s best
left to readers to decide whether I do or I don’t. But the more salient interpretive issue is whether such "kinds" can be so easily differentiated in practice, in a world where policing is now saturated with public relations, political spin-doctoring, and media co-production, all creating – alas – feedback loops and trap doors even in ethnographic practice itself. My examination of Reiss, therefore, draws upon the recent challenges to ethnographic "realism," to the notion that what police do (not only, as Manning suggests, what they say they know) can be transcribed from the statements of reliable informants or observations by a neutral observer. (For instance, Reiss’s less-than-careful conclusion that "race is not an issue in the unnecessary use of force by the police" [Reiss 147]). My worry, in fact, would be that Professor Manning’s semiotic "kinds" would actually work to reinstall the brittle empiricist distinctions between material practices and symbolic authority that my book is trying to rethink.

I apologize if this all sounds too defensive: Professor Manning’s final paragraphs (as well as his own extensive work on community policing) suggest we actually agree about a lot of things. I also endorse the kind of investigation he describes in his last lines. But even if ethnographic accounting were the gold standard for us all, its applications for interdisciplinary analysis run into barriers I would hope someone with Professor Manning’s experience and perspective could address. In closing I would emphasize three such limits. First, its limitations for cultural historians like me, who obviously can’t do field work among the dead. Second, its proclivities for using the empirical ground of what cops say? – know? do? – as a supposedly unmediated "evidentiary base" to disparage the textual or rhetorical analyses employed by other disciplines. And third: if, as my book tries to show, police work is customarily informal, discretionary, out of view – as well as "increasingly mediated," as Professor Manning himself says – what then?

ENDNOTE

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