

## **Stop Snitchin': Exploring Definitions of The Snitch and Implications for Urban Black Communities**

**By**

**Rachael A. Woldoff**<sup>1</sup>  
West Virginia University

**Karen G. Weiss**  
West Virginia University

---

---

Though most recently associated with hip-hop's controversial "stop snitchin'" campaign, the snitch has been a much hated figure throughout history and has played an important role in many social groups and subcultures. However, until the last several years, the academic literature on snitching focused almost exclusively on criminals who have served as police informants in exchange for more lenient treatment by the criminal justice system. In this paper, we expand the concept of the snitch by identifying variations of the snitch archetype within U.S. subcultures and by illustrating the broader application of the snitch label within high-crime urban black communities. We argue that an exaggerated anti-snitching "code of the street" weakens informal social control by stigmatizing residents who witness and report neighborhood crime, and simultaneously interferes with the system of formal social control that is necessary for crime prevention and community safety and justice for victims.

---

---

*Keywords:* snitching, witness intimidation, communities, neighborhoods, crime, African Americans, segregation, race, social control, reporting to police, hip-hop

### **INTRODUCTION**

Society has long had an ambivalent relationship with people who "rat," "tattle," "squeal," "narc," or "snitch" on their peers, with one writer describing the quandary as

---

<sup>1</sup> Rachael A. Woldoff, PhD. West Virginia University. Division of Sociology and Anthropology. PO Box 6326. 319 Knapp Hall. Morgantown, WV 26506-6326. Telephone: (304) 293-8831. Fax: (304) 293-5994. Email: [rachael.woldoff@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:rachael.woldoff@mail.wvu.edu)

“damned if you do, damned if you don’t” (Hill, 2006a, 2006b). On the one hand, society encourages individuals to report lawbreakers and troublemakers to the police or other authority figures as part of their civic or social responsibility; yet on the other hand, individuals have also learned that in many situations they should mind their own business. With the coexistence of these conflicting messages, community members who witness crimes face a difficult dilemma regarding whether or not to report criminal behavior to the police.

While there are many reasons why individuals choose not to report crimes to police, the potential of being stigmatized as a snitch can certainly influence reporting decisions. The snitch is a despised character, and being labeled as a snitch can potentially place individuals at risk of social stigma and physical harm. Within specific social groups, the snitch is a traitor who reveals group secrets or cooperates with a group’s enemies, whether they are peer rivals, outsiders, or formal authority figures, such as the police. Though the snitch’s motives for informing can be altruistic, he or she is mostly seen as betraying the group. Thus, the snitch is the ultimate backstabber, much like historical figures such as Judas who broke trust with Jesus Christ for 30 pieces of silver, or the artist Elia Kazan who informed on communists in Hollywood to avoid being blacklisted during the Red Scare, or more recently, Linda Tripp, who secretly taped her friend, Monica Lewinsky and shared the tape during the Clinton sex scandal (Cool ‘Eh, 2006; Redden, 2001).

While each of the aforementioned figures has been vilified for cooperating with formal authorities, not everyone who “blows the whistle” is considered to be a snitch. In fact, Good Samaritans and corporate whistleblowers tend to be considered heroes and are even celebrated in our culture. Hollywood biopics often depict corporate whistleblowers as selfless and brave individuals whose actions protect communities from the corruption and

exploitation of big business. Examples of such heroes can be seen in films like “Silkwood” (1983) (about plutonium contamination), “Good Night and Good Luck” (2005) (about television studios and the Red Scare), “Erin Brockovich” (2000) (about toxic water and utility companies), and “The Insider” (1999) (about an exposé of the tobacco industry).

Hence, the labels of “snitch” and “whistleblower” both describe the same behavior: informing. However, perspective matters in choosing which label to attach to a person. Foremost, what appears to distinguish the snitch from the hero is whether or not both the “snitch” and the person “ratted on” belong to the same social group. Within this context, a snitch is someone who turns on one of his own, becoming a traitor to the group. This may explain why the snitch is such an abhorred image in many subcultures and why an anti-snitching subcultural norm, like that which has most recently surfaced in hip-hop’s “stop snitchin’” campaign, persists.

Various manifestations of an anti-snitching norm are practiced by members of many social groups across society, whether it is the seemingly innocuous vow to protect a friend’s secret, a child’s refusal to tattle on classmates or an employee who refuses to report misconduct by colleagues. Such norms are also reflected in college fraternities’ codes of silence surrounding hazing, police codes to protect fellow officers such as the “blue wall of silence” (USDOJ, 2009), and finally, community “codes of the street” that result in the refusal of neighbors to cooperate with the police when crimes occur where they live.

Despite the presence of anti-snitching narratives within a variety of U.S. subcultures, academic research has largely ignored the snitch outside of the limited discourse on informants in criminal justice investigations (Ayad, 2007; Bloom, 2002; Brown, 2007; Gregory, 2005; Rosenfeld, Jacobs, & Wright, 2003; Topalli, 2005). Perhaps, this makes

sense given that snitches have long played a critical role in criminal justice and have become increasingly central to the prosecution of drug dealers.

Some of the best-known examples of snitches in popular culture are informant-snitches such as high-profile Mafia members who break the “omerta” (i.e., code of silence) to cooperate with the police and other government officials (Raab, 2005). While often celebrated by law enforcement and civic-minded citizens alike, informant-snitches are also condemned as traitors within their own social groups. This contradiction is reflected in various forms of media, especially in genres that depict stories about urban life, such as hip-hop music. For instance, hip-hop artist Akon was featured on a 2006 song called “Snitch” that criticized Salvatore “Sammy the Bull” Gravano, a Mafia member who informed on mob leader John Gotti in exchange for a reduced sentence and placement in the witness protection program (Raab, 1991).

Though in popular culture informants (and informant-snitches) are often associated with the Mafia, poor black neighborhoods are also contexts where police informants have gained visibility, where witness intimidation has become an epidemic and where the snitch-informant has come under assault. Many of these communities are ground zero in the street-level war on drugs, and as is true in Mafia cases, informants are integral to investigations, sting operations, and prosecution strategies. And just like their Mafia counterparts, informants who receive reduced sentences as part of plea agreements are also vulnerable to stigma and retaliation by those against whom they testify. Indeed, every year, drug informants are assaulted, raped, and murdered, leading prosecutors in cities like Baltimore to characterize witness intimidation as “the number one public safety issue facing the citizens” (Ostrovsky, 2006).

While informant-snitches are arguably the most recognizable and detested kind of snitch, this paper seeks to expand the theoretical discourse on the snitch. We argue that the vilification of snitching in many contemporary communities has become distorted and broadened to include anyone who calls the police or cooperates with criminal justice officials (Kahn, 2007). This suggests that the traditional requirement that a snitch be a member of the social group on whom he or she is informing has been extended to include anyone who is a resident of the neighborhood where the crime has taken place. It is this expanded definition of the snitch and its negative consequences for entire communities and the criminal justice process that makes the snitch an important subject for academic study.

We begin our analysis with an examination of the various ways in which the snitch appears within popular culture and subcultures across U.S. society. We then focus our attention on the impact of hip-hop's "stop snitchin'" campaign within the milieu of black urban neighborhood life. Drawing upon theories of urban communities and subculture, we discuss possible reasons for the persistence of an anti-snitching message within these neighborhoods. Finally, we end the paper with a discussion of the consequences of the exaggerated anti-snitching narrative within black urban communities and provide suggestions for future research.

### **THE SNITCH AS EMBEDDED IN POPULAR CULTURE: THE CASE OF HIP-HOP**

The role of the snitch and its corresponding negative impact within urban black communities has become a hot topic within the mainstream media in recent years. Perhaps most notably, CNN's Anderson Cooper (Court & Sharman, 2007) reported on the topic of "urban snitching" on *60 Minutes* in April of 2007. In the story, Cooper suggested that hip-

hop endorses a “stop snitching” message aimed at black urban youth that implores listeners to refrain from police cooperation in *all* circumstances, whether simply reporting crime or becoming an official informant. In the segment, Cooper interviewed a black community activist who argued that the pervasive anti-snitching code in black neighborhoods contributes to witnesses’ fears of coming forward to cooperate with the police. The show also included an interview with rapper Cam’ron (formerly known as “Killa Cam”) from Harlem, who insisted that cooperating with the police violates a code of ethics in many black communities. In response to a question about his own attitudes towards snitching, Cam’ron said that even if a serial killer was living next-door to him, he would not report it to the police: “No. I wouldn’t call or tell anybody about him. I’d probably move, but I wouldn’t call anybody” (Court & Sharman, 2007).

Much of the media’s recent interest in urban snitching was triggered by the 2004 release of an underground DVD about witness intimidation called “Stop Fuckin’ Snitching.” This 108-minute film, produced in Baltimore and distributed widely on the Internet, features drug dealers in Baltimore neighborhoods threatening to harm all who interfere with their criminal activities, including those who “roll over” on their peers in exchange for lighter sentences (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). The media devoted special attention to the DVD because it featured Carmelo Anthony, an NBA player for the Denver Nuggets. The DVD’s producers have made contradictory claims that the film was both a joke and a documentary.

Not long after the DVD release, teens in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, New York City, and Washington D.C. were wearing “stop snitchin’” t-shirts, a style further popularized by many hip-hop celebrities. The wording on the shirts included many

variations, such as: “Niggas Just Lookin’ for a Deal,” “Snitches Get Stitches,” “Street Code #1: Never Snitch!,” and “You Have the Right to Remain Silent.” Soon, the anti-snitch fashion statement could be seen on a wide range of people in many different contexts, including students attending class in Washington D.C., daycare workers in Boston, and mothers appearing at juvenile court hearings (Hampson, 2006; Rothstein, 2005). In 2005, after controversy over the implications of this message began to surface, Boston’s mayor actually attempted to have the shirts banned (Bohan, 2006).

Hip-hop music has been a prominent cultural outlet of the anti-snitching message, with black youth as the main target audience. Whether viewed as an aesthetic form or a social movement (Cobb, 2007), hip-hop is an influential voice of black culture, and the musical genre often explores themes related to race and class injustice, stratification, and social control. Rapper Chuck D (formerly of the politically-minded hip-hop group Public Enemy) once referred to hip-hop as “the black CNN” (Mansbach, 2003). Hip-hop music dominates the listening preferences of black teens, with 84% of black teens listening to the genre (Roberts & Foehr, 2004). In addition, hip-hop’s messages tend to be more meaningful to urban blacks, for whom the narratives may reflect a shared reality (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). The stories told in hip-hop music may also especially appeal to younger blacks due to their desire for group belonging or black urban authenticity (Bourdieu, 1983).

Arguably, the anti-snitching message has emerged as a central theme within hip-hop. Yet despite criticism of hip-hop’s sexist messages and glamorization of violence (hooks, 1994; Messerschmidt, 1993; Perkins, 1996), the genre’s messages about snitching have only recently gained attention (Sanneh, 2007). Much of the latest scrutiny of hip-hop’s view of snitching originates from the murders of the genre’s icons, including Tupac Shakur, Biggie

Smalls (The Notorious B.I.G.), and Jam Master Jay (of Run DMC). These murders all remain unsolved, largely because key witnesses have refused to come forward and cooperate with the police (Hampson, 2006). During these and other criminal investigations, numerous hip-hop artists have spoken out against snitching and have demonstrated their oppositional stance by refusing to cooperate with the police. For instance, in 2005, rapper Lil' Kim admitted that she lied in court about a shooting in order to avoid snitching on an associate. Rather than cooperate, she served jail time after being convicted on three counts of perjury and one count of conspiracy. Segments of the hip-hop music media industry celebrated her decision to stay silent (Sulugiuc, 2005). In another well-known case, rapper Busta Rhymes refused to provide information in the 2006 murder of his friend and bodyguard (Mapson, 2006), an act that many in the hip-hop community viewed as essential to maintaining the "street cred" upon which his career depends. Finally, in October 2007, T.I., a rapper and felon, was arrested by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms for possessing firearms and attempting to buy machine guns and silencers. In the aftermath, numerous hip-hop blogs referred to his bodyguard, who served as an informant, as a "snitch" for cooperating with the police.

Hip-hop's anti-snitching message can be viewed in at least three ways. First, it can be seen as a commercial, income-generating strategy. In contrast to the view that hip-hop in general, and gangsta rap specifically, is an authentic reflection of reality, often described as "keeping it real" (Lena, 2006), hip-hop can also be seen as superficial "fronting" or a rebellious, anti-authority lyrical style that is profitable to record companies and hip-hop artists. This cynical view of hip-hop suggests that an anti-snitching sentiment is merely part of a manufactured "gangsta-style" promotional campaign to sell music (Chatterji, 2007).



In a second view, the anti-snitching message in hip-hop can be seen as more authentic, stemming from real concerns about the police presence in black neighborhoods. Some researchers have gone so far as to state that police distrust among blacks dates back to slave patrols and fear of capture within the Underground Railroad network (Lovell, 2003). While a theme of police distrust permeates many forms of popular culture, it is especially prominent in media formats with large black audiences and in storylines that focus on black communities. Black music, television, and film are the media outlets that also contain some of the most extreme manifestations of an anti-snitch message, reflecting the often antagonistic relations between police and young black males (Masten, 2009).<sup>2</sup>

Finally, in some respects, hip-hop's anti-snitching message may be a manifestation of self-interested drug dealers and other criminals in poor urban neighborhoods, many of which are racially segregated (Hill, 2006a, 2006b). For workers in the underground economy of drug dealing, the anti-snitching message reflects the criminals' backlash against the criminal justice system, especially as it relates to sentencing for drug crimes and deal-making between informants and police (Brown, 2007). Such anti-snitch sentiments appear to have expanded to target all people who are perceived to be threats to viable criminal enterprises. Thus, neighbors who report neighborhood drug dealers or other underground "entrepreneurs" to the police are seen as interfering with the livelihood of some community residents (Mitter, 2006). In this manner, the anti-snitching message intimidates residents into minding their own business, allowing the informal economy and any associated violence to persist. However intended, the various meanings of the anti-snitch message in hip-hop are open to interpretation. As the law professor Imani Perry (2008, p. 166) wrote about "poor, young black men" and hip-hop "longings," "cultural products are often produced with ambiguous meanings, and different audiences latch onto different meanings within the music."

---

<sup>2</sup> For instance, the topic of snitching in black neighborhoods was frequently seen in HBO's "The Wire" (Crosley, 2007). On the more positive side, the Black Entertainment Television (BET) program "The Chop Up" featured a 2006 episode entitled "Season of the Snitch" to discuss the anti-snitch generation of hip-hop artists and their negative impact on urban black communities.

### **“STOP SNITCHIN” AS A SUBCULTURAL NORM**

While perhaps most prevalent within the hip-hop genre, the applicability of the “stop snitchin” concept is far broader than hip-hop music, fashion, and culture. Within the context of many social groups and subcultures, the snitch is vilified as a traitor, and an anti-snitching narrative is believed to reinforce group solidarity and promise protection from outside interference. This definition may help to explain why many of the most exclusive social groups with highly selective memberships and clandestine initiation rites (e.g., fraternities, professional organizations) tend to adhere to some form of an anti-snitching norm. Below, we provide an overview of two subcultural groups with especially strong anti-snitching norms: members of fraternal organizations and male prison inmates.

#### *The Fraternal Snitch: Military and Police Organizations*

The snitch plays a prominent role within two subcultural groups that are dominated by men: the military and the police. As part of their training and socialization, soldiers are exposed to explicit and implicit messages about what they can and cannot share with the general public. For instance, hazing rituals are a widespread part of initiation rites in the military, but are kept secret from civilians (Burke, 2004; Pershing, 2003a, 2003b). The norm of silence may have even helped fuel the cruel and sexualized torture of inmates in Abu Ghraib prison and the maltreatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay that came to the public’s attention in 2004. To members of the military, violating a code of silence is more than abuse of trust; it is an affront to the honored code of brotherhood and respect for the chain of command. A military snitch is a traitor not just to his brothers-in-arms, but to the institution charged with protecting the ideals, rights, and culture of the country.

Like the military, members of police departments also see themselves as a brotherhood of sorts. Curiously, even though the police are highly critical of crime witnesses who refuse to snitch on friends and neighbors, police officers themselves often adhere to an anti-snitching code. Approximately 79% of police officers agree that a “code of silence” exists within departments, and 52% report that this code “doesn’t really bother them” (Trautman, 2000). This is especially problematic when law enforcement’s anti-snitching norm extends beyond passive silence into the realms of fabrications and cover-ups (Hunt and Manning, 1991). A prime example of the importance of the police’s anti-snitch code is the notoriety associated with the internal affairs (I.A.) units of police departments, charged with investigating officers who are suspected of misconduct and “bad shootings” (i.e., unjustified lethal force). Law enforcement officers often refer to I.A. units as “rat squads,” and I.A. officers are highly stigmatized within law enforcement organizations (Mulcahy, 1995). Many civilians, aware that a code of silence exists among police, may be unsympathetic when police complain about the anti-snitching subculture that interferes with neighborhood crime investigations.

### *The Prison Snitch*

The snitch is an especially hated character within the inmate subcultures of men’s prisons. While official institutional rules dictate that prisoners show deference to guards and avoid trouble, an informal set of codes enforced by fellow inmates expects prisoners to be loyal to one another over staff, never to whine or back down from a fight, never to trust guards, and most importantly, never to snitch on fellow inmates (Carceral, Bernard, Alarid,

Bikle, & Bikle, 2004; Irwin, 1970; Mays & Winfree, 2005; Santos, 2003).<sup>3</sup> According to the inmate code, snitching can include seemingly benign activities like talking too frequently to guards (Åkerström, 1991) or even seeking services from prison staff members for mental or physical health problems (Hanser, 2002). Snitching also encompasses telling guards about victimization incidents, such as rape, assault, or other forms of inmate-on-inmate violence. From the inmates' perspective, any interaction with staff members may be seen as conspiratorial, demonstrating that inmates are sympathetic to the people in charge.

It is important to note that part of inmates' hatred of the snitch stems from the prison system's dependence upon snitches. Just as police officers encourage suspects to inform on each other in order to make additional arrests, prison guards encourage snitching among the prison population in exchange for reduced sentences or better treatment from prison staff members, even as they know that snitching jeopardizes inmates' safety. In this way, snitches lose two times over: their peers see them as fools because they have ill-advisedly trusted the prison staff, and fellow inmates view them as conniving traitors who have violated one of the most important prison subcultural codes (Gordon, 2000).

According to Carceral and Bernard (2005), the inmate's anti-snitching code is one of the fundamental norms shaping contemporary male prisoners' lives behind bars. Inmates who refuse to snitch are deemed trustworthy, an important character trait in an environment ruled by informal social control mechanisms established and maintained by the inmates themselves. Informal sanctions, such as rumors and ostracism, can destroy an inmate's reputation, marking him as an outcast for his remaining time in prison. Moreover, being

---

<sup>3</sup> According to Kauffman (1988), correctional officers as a social group also maintain their own anti-snitching codes that warn against snitching on fellow officers. The code is often considered part of survival within maximum security prisons where guards are outnumbered by convicts.

labeled as a snitch places inmates in grave physical danger (Carceral & Bernard, 2005). One inmate described the anti-snitch code as “Darwin’s code: survival of the fittest” (Hassine, 2008).

Importantly, abiding by an anti-snitching code within prison is also integral to an inmate’s masculine identity (Kupers, 2005). For instance, snitches are associated with weakness and femininity (e.g., as reflected in labels such as “punk-ass bitches”), labels that men, and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have spent their entire lives avoiding (Anderson, 1999; Lerner, 2002). Snitching is a violation of masculinity since “real men” are required to “act hard” and endure problems they face without the help of outsiders (e.g., guards, police) (Sabo, Kupers, & London, 2001). Thus, within the world of the men’s prison, to snitch is to surrender one’s identity as a man (Messerschmidt, 1999).

While many people are unsympathetic to the struggles of inmates and are unconcerned about the injustices that may occur inside prisons, the reality that more than 95% of state prisoners eventually will be released back into our communities (Hughes & Wilson, 2003) makes inmate codes quite relevant to the rest of society. In fact, the anti-snitch code, so integral to social interaction among inmates while inside prison, appears most prominently within neighborhoods where large numbers of ex-convicts settle after release from prison.<sup>4</sup> Though it is unknown whether the anti-snitch codes found in many high-crime

---

<sup>4</sup> It could be argued that black neighborhoods have been disproportionately affected by the release of inmates into urban communities since black youth culture and prison subculture have been shown to overlap on a number of dimensions (Kitwana, 2002). For instance, many inmates join gangs for protection, and gangs in prison are often affiliated with neighborhood-based gangs on the outside. Further, research shows that when young inmates are released, they are likely to continue to be active in their gang affiliations (Conly, 1993). Beyond the neighborhood, prisoner subculture has also affected segments of popular culture that are directly marketed to black youth. For instance, some of the “gangsta” fashions that have been especially ubiquitous in urban areas (e.g., oversized pants and Velcro “prison issue #23” sneakers) are based on the prison issue clothing from correctional facilities (Koppel, 2007; Sherman, 2007; Wilbekin, 1999).

urban areas have emigrated with ex-convicts or if the codes were already in place and were imported *from* the streets (Irwin & Cressey 1962), it is clear that urban black communities are disproportionately affected by the anti-snitching norm. In the following sections, we address the anti-snitching message within low-income, black urban neighborhoods, which are disproportionately affected by violent crime and where hip-hop's "stop snitchin'" campaign arguably has been most influential. In doing so, we most closely examine the influence of the anti-snitch code on crime reporting and social control.

### **THE ANTI-SNITCH MESSAGE IN BLACK URBAN COMMUNITIES**

While much has been written on the social structural constraints that have produced crime in black disadvantaged communities, the topic of culture has often taken a backseat (Patterson, 2003) and has even been met with a backlash (Pattillo, 2007). We argue that culture, or more specifically, subcultures, cannot be ignored in discussions of crime. This is because the pronouncement of subcultural norms, such as the anti-snitch code, often overrides the formal control mechanisms that help to deter crime and punish criminals. The stigmatization of citizens who cooperate with police also prohibits residents from acting as capable guardians and watching out for one another. While we are not trying to suggest that anti-snitching campaigns can explain the relatively high violent crime levels in many black urban communities, we argue that an anti-snitching code exacerbates the crime problem by weakening social control which, in turn, opens up a niche for an alternative justice system that functions through intimidation and violence.

*Structure First: The Context of Poor Urban Black Neighborhoods*

In the U.S., African Americans as a group remain disproportionately poor and often live in black neighborhoods with high crime rates (Charles, 2003; Massey & Denton, 1993). In 2006, blacks represented only 13% of the population, but constituted 39% of violent crime arrests (FBI, 2007). For homicide, the racial gap is especially wide, with blacks making up 51% of homicide arrests (FBI, 2007). Furthermore, in 2006, the violent victimization rate was 32.7 per 1,000 for blacks compared to 23.2 for whites (Rand & Catalano, 2007).

Two strains of research have informed the body of work that has attempted to explain racial disparities in urban crime. The first is William Julius Wilson's (1987) research on the context of urban poverty, which focuses on the effects of structural changes in the U.S. economy on black neighborhoods. One of Wilson's key findings is that the shift from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy eliminated large numbers of low-skill, high-paying jobs in cities, interfering with the financial success of black families and entire black neighborhoods in urban areas. As a result, blacks are far more likely than whites to live in urban areas with concentrated poverty, high rates of joblessness, low levels of educational attainment, and low incomes. Within such neighborhoods, black residents are also more likely to be exposed to crime, violence, and disorder (Cutler & Glaeser, 1997; Jargowsky, 1996; Krivo & Peterson, 1996; Massey & Denton, 1993; Peterson & Krivo, 1999; Wilson, 1987).

The second stream of research, best known by the work of Massey and Denton (1993), supports Wilson's argument about economic influences on crime, but asserts that the negative effects of a changing economy have been especially harsh for African Americans due to segregation. In this body of work, African American communities are characterized

as “densely settled, tightly packed, and geographically isolated areas” (Massey & Denton, 1993, p. 8). In later research, Massey (1995, p. 1203) elaborated on the ways in which such high levels of poverty and segregation interact to create a “unique ecological niche” for black residents. The integration of these bodies of research on the ways that poor black urban residents have adapted to disadvantage has resulted in a unique argument that urban crime is a response to structural disadvantage and economic strain. It is within these structurally disadvantaged niches that underground drug economies, accompanied by gangs and territorial violence, thrive (Bourgois, 1995). Consequently, it is also within these neighborhoods where an anti-snitching norm appears to be most pronounced (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003).

#### *Integrating Culture into the Discourse on Urban Neighborhood Crime*

Few would dispute the strong effects of structural factors, such as poverty, population turnover, and racial composition on neighborhood crime rates. Yet subcultural factors remain a taboo subject in many social science studies of racial and class disparities, especially when addressing racial disparities in urban violent crime. Fortunately, the tide is slowly changing, and now, even structuralists like the sociologist William Julius Wilson (2009) have begun to explore more closely the linkages between structural factors and subcultural codes in low-income black communities. Wilson, along with Sandra Susan Smith (2007), recently argued that residents of poor black inner city neighborhoods have developed a subculture of distrust and individualism that undermines the development of cooperative relationships (Smith, 2007). Unfortunately, the formation of cooperative relationships within communities is essential for reducing crime. According to Sampson,



Raudenbush, and Earls (1997: 918), collective efficacy or “social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good” reduces violence in communities. In general, violence permeates poor, unstable communities, in part, due to their lower levels of collective efficacy (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997). Given that collective efficacy can only occur in an environment where there is a cultural norm of intervention, the spread of an anti-snitching code thwarts effective social control. In the absence of collective efficacy, neighborhood cooperation with the police, and effective policing, communities may replace the formal social control system with an informal one. This informal system may become pathological when it is governed by subcultural norms and values that are sympathetic to crime and violence and when residents who participate in enforcing pro-criminal values are rewarded with status and prestige.

Subcultural theorists (Cohen, 1955, 1965, 1977; Lemert, 1999; Miller, 1958) have long argued that people who are involved in violent crime are more likely to live in communities with oppositional norms, where the “ethics of violence, toughness and respect dominate the social landscape” (Topalli, 2005, p. 1). Versions of strain theory also point to the influence of culture on crime. Merton (1938) argued that the cultural goal of economic success motivates individuals from poor populations without legitimate access to money, to commit crime. Meanwhile, Cohen’s (1955) version of strain theory argued that low-income children and teens experience “cultural ambivalence” as they struggle to achieve middle-class goals without the necessary means; they eventually gain status from rejecting middle-class norms and attaining “success,” or at least, respect via violence.

Philippe Bourgois (1989, 1995), in his studies of drug dealing in Spanish Harlem, has suggested that the violence and other subcultural norms practiced by many inner city youth

are strongly connected to the underground economy of drug dealing, which provides both a source of income and a sense of respect for young men in poor urban communities.

However, because such “business” activities are not legitimate, conflicts that arise cannot be handled through agents of legitimate social control, like the police. Instead, dealers settle scores through violent vigilante justice that depends upon intimidation, threats, and silence from witnesses. What starts out as a cultural dynamic of resistance to poverty and exploitation, often leads to further oppression of the people who live within these communities (Bourgois, 1989). Bourgois refers to this as self-reinforced marginalization on the street level.

Perhaps the best known scholar on subcultures in poor black neighborhoods is Elijah Anderson (1999), who claims that a “code of the street” exists in many poor urban environments that are organized around a search for respect, street justice, and toughness. In his seminal ethnography, Anderson (1999) provides evidence that many young men in poor urban communities are on a quest to prove their manhood and gain the respect of their peers by conforming to a code that includes the norms of minding one’s own business and taking care of matters by oneself. As Anderson explains it, the code of the street is an oppositional culture spawned from a sense of alienation from mainstream society as well as a cultural adaptation to residents’ profound lack of faith in police and the criminal justice system. Respect based on one’s reputation for fighting and keeping one’s mouth shut is a form of social capital in such environments.

The code is a kind of policing mechanism, and adherence to the code is especially essential for the success of the drug trade, which has become a way of life in many inner city

communities.<sup>5</sup> As part of this code, talking to the police about criminal activities is highly discouraged and negatively sanctioned (Anderson, 1999). For instance, while conventional or “mainstream” norms dictate that citizens cooperate with the police and report criminal activities, the code of these streets suggests the opposite. In fact, people who live in disadvantaged neighborhoods are often stigmatized, ostracized, or physically injured for cooperating with police (Topalli, 2005). Even being seen talking to the police can expose residents to neighborhood gossip and retaliation based on others’ assumption that they are snitches. Further, witnesses who become targets of retaliation by local criminals are often seen as getting their “just deserts” (Anderson, 1999). The more powerful or visible criminals in such communities may go so far as to reward those residents who keep silent by providing them with financial assistance or by promising to protect them in the future (Venkatesh, 2000; Wilkinson, 2007).

As with any subcultural norm, residents learn the anti-snitching code as part of a socialization process. According to a study by the National Center for Victims of Crime (Whitman & Davis, 2007), the anti-snitching message tends to be disseminated within urban neighborhoods on two levels: 1) by direct and indirect threats and assaults against witnesses; and 2) by widespread campaigns directed at entire communities. On an individual level, threats and violence serve as reminders to witnesses that cooperating with the police may be hazardous to their safety. For instance, while calling or cooperating with the police is seldom

---

<sup>5</sup> Low reporting rates are not exclusive to those living in urban black neighborhoods or communities with a thriving drug economy. In fact, less than half of all crime in the U.S. is reported to police. There are a number of reasons for this, including victims and witnesses believing that reporting to the police is a waste of time or that reporting might make a bad situation worse (Hart & Rennison, 2003).

an easy decision for witnesses, in neighborhoods where an anti-snitching norm thrives, the decision to report a crime may actually place witnesses at great physical risk.

From a rational choice perspective (Cornish & Clarke, 1986; Felson, Messner, Hoskin, & Deane, 2002), citizens make determinations about whether or not to call the police after assessing the social risks to themselves and their families as compared to the potential gains in reporting (e.g., stopping a crime, getting help, recovering loss, removing an offender from the community). Thus, witnesses are more likely to report crimes if they trust the police, believe that it is their place to get involved, and feel safe in doing so (Dukes & Mattley, 1977). Conversely, citizens are unlikely to report crime if they equate witnessing with snitching and if they calculate the risks of snitching as greater than the benefits of reporting.

On the community level, an anti-snitching campaign fosters a general atmosphere of fear and noncooperation among residents (Woldoff, 2006). This leads to a “see, but don’t see” norm about involvement in crime reporting (Anderson, 1999). For instance, residents might comply with an anti-snitching code out of concern for fellow neighbors or group members. In some cases, victims or witnesses may want to protect neighbors whom they know from getting arrested or prevent neighbors’ families or friends from being negatively impacted by an arrest (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). In addition to the possible incarceration of a neighbor, reporting a local crime often brings unwelcome negative attention to a neighborhood. Whether as a show of local, or even racial, solidarity, some residents may consider it disloyal to report crime that was committed by their own neighbors. Therefore, the decision to remain silent rather than cooperate with the police may represent a demonstration of group allegiance, or in terms of neutralization theory, appealing to a higher

loyalty (Sykes & Matza, 1957). In direct contradiction to the ethic of civic responsibility, the anti-snitching code mandates that good neighbors mind their own business and protect their own.

Finally, the anti-snitch sentiment may reflect a more generalized anti-police attitude that has long been present in urban black communities. In general, research shows that a common reason that many residents are reluctant to report crime is their disdain for the police and lack of confidence that the police will be of any help (Bachman, 1993; Felson et al., 2002; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Turner, 2003; Lizotte, 1985; USDOJ, 2009). Residents are unlikely to call on officials when they perceive them to be ineffective or bullies. In segregated black urban communities with high crime rates, the effects of police distrust on reporting may be amplified. In fact, it has been argued that the anti-snitching campaign is not just a social movement aimed at “nullifying the police,” but also a community response to aggressive and unjust policing practices (Delgado, 2008). Thus, the code symbolizes the black community’s contempt for a system that disrespects black citizens (Anderson, 1999). Consistent with this idea, research shows that blacks are less likely than whites to believe that police are honest or that police can protect them from violent victimization (Maguire & Pastore, 1994). Blacks are also more likely than whites to report police harassment (Fyfe, 1982; Joseph, 1992), and they are more likely than whites to report that, in their neighborhoods, police abuse their authority (Maguire & Flanagan, 1993).<sup>6</sup>

An anti-snitching narrative encourages a collective silence within these communities, or at the very least, complicates witnesses’ dilemmas about reporting crime. In fact,

---

<sup>6</sup> Additionally, black residents’ skepticism and disdain toward police can be seen as justified, as research shows that blacks fare worse within the criminal justice system, receiving more convictions and harsher sentences than whites (Bishop, 2005; Crutchfield, Bridges, & Pitchford, 1994; Thornberry, 1973).

adherents to the anti-snitch norm view retaliation against snitches as justified and see those who cooperate with the police as fools who lack street smarts and deserve the consequences of their actions (Åkerström, 1985). Not surprisingly, the individuals most likely to agree with the anti-snitch sentiment are those who benefit most directly from the code, such as young males involved in the sale of drugs (Whitman & Davis, 2007; Wilkinson, 2007). In any case, those who abide by the code may do so, at least in part, because they believe that by keeping silent they are protecting a social group with whom they identify and to whom they are loyal. For many residents of segregated U.S. cities, neighbors comprise a primary social group, so loyalty to neighborhood family, friends, and acquaintances translates into silence about community crime.

### **CONSEQUENCES OF THE STOP SNITCHIN' NARRATIVE FOR THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

While it may be argued that the “stop snitchin’” campaign, as reflected in hip-hop music, videos, t-shirts, and related paraphernalia, is little more than a fleeting fad, criminal justice professionals are concerned about the negative implications of these messages for both the efficacy of police in solving crimes and for the safety of residents within neighborhoods that have adopted this code. Indeed, the “stop snitching” narrative promotes an atmosphere where the police are seen as the enemy, making it difficult for crime witnesses to come forward. This is not to suggest that no one within these communities is willing to report crime; in fact, many still do. However, people who live in areas with a strong anti-snitching code may be more conflicted about reporting and therefore may report crimes less often or do so anonymously. They may also need to justify their cooperation with the police

in order to protect themselves against community stigma and possible retaliation. It is likely that residents within many high-crime urban communities may even need to “code-switch” (Topalli, 2005) or negotiate between an anti-snitching code and the broader societal code of civic responsibility.

Certainly, compliance with the “stop snitching” code has serious implications for both criminal justice and community life. Foremost, the “stop snitching” message erodes trust between communities and police (USDOJ, 2009), as reflected in the low clearance rates for crime in many urban neighborhoods. For instance, the FBI reports that national clearance rates for violent crime, especially homicide have been declining during the last decade (USDOJ, 2009). According to the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), which surveyed 300 law enforcement agencies and criminal justice professionals, the active “stop snitching” campaigns in urban neighborhoods have exacerbated witness distrust and lack of cooperation with police investigations. Crimes are less likely to be solved when police cannot locate witnesses or when they are afraid to come forward (Puckett & Lundman, 2003; Welford & Cronin, 1999).

Failure of victims and key witnesses to cooperate with the police is seen as the most significant obstacle to the prosecution of crimes committed by gang members (Whitman & Davis, 2007). Police in Newark, New Jersey have suggested that part of the difficulty they have in solving gang-related homicides is due to an intense anti-snitching mentality (Jacobs, 2007), and police and prosecutors in many large cities, including Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, New York City, and Baltimore, report similar problems. Empirical evidence demonstrates

that the lower clearance rates for homicides in black neighborhoods are partially attributable to residents' lack of cooperation with police (Puckett & Lundman, 2003).<sup>7</sup>

By minimizing the possibility of arrest and conviction, the anti-snitching code reduces the likelihood that criminals will be punished which, in turn, enables crime to prosper as offenders will not be deterred by risk of arrest or prosecution. Meanwhile, in the absence of formal social control, communities are left with few options for settling disputes and volatile situations; therefore, these neighborhoods become ripe for an alternative means of justice: vigilantism. Vigilante justice places residents in greater peril with its violent and intimidating mechanisms of enforcement. Just like the proverbial "inmates running the asylum," it is often the criminals within these neighborhoods who find themselves in positions of power and control as enforcers who exert their unique brand of justice. Under the guise of "protecting one's own" or group loyalty, an anti-snitching narrative constructs the police as the enemy, increases the possibility that crimes remain unsolved, and makes communities vulnerable to vigilantism.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to the negative social implications of an anti-snitch narrative for urban communities and criminal justice more broadly, we hope that this paper will encourage further theoretical and empirical research on the "snitch" and anti-snitching attitudes and behaviors. A complete and nuanced understanding of snitching requires a consideration of

---

<sup>7</sup> Research shows that overall violence against black victims is reported to police at similar or slightly higher percentages than for white victims (Catalano, 2005; Hart & Rennison, 2003). We do not argue that individual whites and blacks who have experienced personal crime victimization have different rates of reporting their victimization to the police. Instead, our paper asserts that the evidence suggests that neighborhoods vary in their cultural messages about witnesses reporting crime, and this is partially attributable to an anti-snitching code that is intended to control not just official informants and victims, but also innocent resident witnesses.



factors that predict both reporting behaviors and attitudes that favor an anti-snitch subcultural code. To this end, we recommend that researchers explore six domains of predictors, both at the individual and community levels. Together, they can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of what snitching means for communities and criminal justice.

First, future research should explore individual-level differences in the effects of socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, sex, family structure, and social class) on reporting crimes and anti-snitching attitudes. Anecdotally, we know that many young black males from disadvantaged communities have embraced an anti-snitching norm, but much more empirical research is needed to learn about members of other groups who are vulnerable to the anti-snitching code. For instance, there is evidence that colleges have problems with crime reporting and that school and college violence is often enabled by students' silence about their peers' behaviors (Gonzales, Schofield, & Schmitt, 1995). Researchers should attempt to pinpoint which kinds of people fail to report incidents to police and identify which crimes are most likely to be kept secret (e.g., stalking, rape, hate crimes, assaults, carrying guns, illegally distributing and using drugs and alcohol, and vandalizing property). Future research should also explore the degree to which the anti-snitch code extends to other kinds of rule-breaking, such as reporting academic dishonesty to college officials or worker misbehavior to employers.

Second, as argued above in discussions of subcultural theory and group loyalty, part of the reason people support anti-snitching codes is to be loyal to peers, whether that means family members, neighbors, friends, or members of the same racial or ethnic group. The influence of social groups and subcultural codes should be given more serious consideration in sociological and criminological studies. Though they are taboo topics, cultures and

subcultures reflect one's social environment and shape social behaviors, including criminal behavior and cooperation with the police. As described in this paper, the norms endorsed and enforced by subcultural groups to which people belong can, and often do, override formal codes and laws. While critics who oppose cultural explanations of crime are justified in their concern that such theories can contribute to victim-blaming, ignoring the influence of subcultural norms is not the answer. Like myths and stereotypes that distort public perception and justify discrimination, culture is a powerful influence on societies and groups and cannot be dismissed.

An understanding of the acceptance and endorsement of subcultural codes, such as the "stop snitching" narrative, is important for both neighborhood safety and criminal justice in general. This can be measured through individual-level surveys, especially when combined with network analyses that capture the strength of relationships between residents with anti-police and anti-snitch values and police. There is also the potential for classifying community-level subcultures. Studies in this realm could also link subsets of subcultural values, such as attitudes towards police, school, and work. By understanding the subcultures of neighborhoods, we can better explain the individual-level variation in attachment to anti-snitch codes.

Third, considering the role of popular culture in promoting anti-snitch messages, studies of individual-level variables should include measures of residents' media consumption and identification with hip-hop. Media consumption investigations would show how much respondents who have an anti-snitch value system are primed or reinforced by the media. Survey items could ask about the degree to which respondents watch hip-hop videos with anti-snitch or violent themes, buy and listen to music, and read hip-hop magazines or

blogs that endorse anti-snitch messages. Items capturing the degree to which individuals identify with hip-hop, especially the gangsta subgenre, could ask about music tastes, clothing preferences, as well as hobbies and activities such as rapping and doing graffiti.

Fourth, future studies might examine how residents decide when to cooperate with police and how they provide testimony without getting themselves negatively labeled or injured in the process. Though some research has touched on this (Topalli, 2005), understanding the circumstances that either enable or inhibit code-switching is an avenue for future research. For instance, are residents in violent communities more likely to call the police when harm is inflicted upon children? Does living in a community with a thriving illicit drug trade lead residents to be more dismissive of “minor” drug problems and thus, less likely to report them?

A fifth avenue of research could examine community factors that allow the anti-snitching code to flourish. In explorations of neighborhood-level differences, research should assess the variation in reporting and anti-snitch values across different types of communities. For instance, it may be that certain aggregate-level neighborhood characteristics create a social milieu in which residents are more receptive to an anti-snitching code. It would be of particular interest to identify the specific kinds of communities that embrace a “code of the streets” in terms of variations in demographics (e.g., race/ethnicity, income, age, and sex), variations in crime rates (both for violent and overall crime), variations in levels of neighborhood cohesion and satisfaction, and even aggregate differences in subcultures, as stated above.

Finally, future snitching research may aim to explore the pro-snitching messages that have begun to counter the pressure to remain silent. For instance, police and community

organizations have mounted “start snitching” campaigns and anti-violence campaigns to encourage witness cooperation. These campaigns include the release of videos and billboards (e.g., “Keep Talking” in Baltimore and “Snitch? You Bet I Told” in Rochester, New York). The goals of such programs are to encourage residents to report crime and cooperate with police, as well as to build support for witness protection programs, present pro-social messages to residents of violent communities, and foster trust between residents and patrolling officers (USDOJ, 2009). Given that the anti-snitching narrative inhibits reporting and weakens community bonds, perhaps an examination of this kind of counter-movement could help promote cooperation and intervention and increase crime prevention and overall neighborhood safety.

## CONCLUSION

We have argued in this paper that the snitch, a prominent yet much-hated figure within many U.S. subcultures, and one that is prominently featured in hip-hop’s recent “stop snitchin’” campaign, appears in an exaggerated form within black urban communities with high rates of violent crime. An anti-snitching narrative, once reserved for criminals in search of leniency in the criminal justice system, has been extended to target all citizens with knowledge of crime. This code coexists alongside a societal ethos that citizens should report crime, complicating the reporting dilemma faced by residents who witness crimes within their neighborhoods. A reporting Catch-22 is especially complicated when crimes occur within neighborhoods with structural disadvantage and where an illicit drug trade thrives. Within these communities, the snitch may be seen as the ultimate traitor. In such a context, the “stop snitching” narrative leads to a norm of noncooperation between residents and the

police. Consequently, because the police need witnesses to make arrests and remove criminals from the streets, the exaggerated anti-snitch code of “minding one’s own business” enables criminal activity to persist with little risk of criminal sanction. In these environments where police protection is so disabled, alternative routes to justice, such as vigilantism, may replace more conventional forms of social control.

Our hope is that this article will serve as a call for criminology scholars to expand their definitions of a snitch beyond informants to include citizen-witness definitions in their theoretical arguments, empirical studies, and public discourse. As this article has described, the anti-snitch code is being used to control and silence many law-abiding citizens who witness crimes. Thus, this expanded code has implications far beyond the realms of self-interested informants. In the interests of community safety, researchers, law enforcement officials, and policy makers should be encouraged to shift more of their focus and resources towards countering anti-snitch messages.

## REFERENCES

- Åkerström, M. (1985). *Crooks and squares: Lifestyles of thieves and addicts in comparison to conventional people*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- Åkerström, M. (1991). *Betrayal and betrayers: The sociology of treachery*. New York: Transaction.
- Anderson, E. (1999). *Code of the street: Decency, violence and the moral life of the inner city*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co.
- Ayad, M. (2007). Barely alive, wounded man still wouldn't talk: "Stop snitching" code has become a guide for everyone. *Pittsburgh Gazette*, August 26, 2007.
- Bachman, R. (1993). Predicting the reporting of rape victimizations. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 20(3), 254-270.
- Bishop, D.M. (2005). The role of race and ethnicity in juvenile justice processing. In D.F. Hawkins and K. Kempf-Leonard (Ed.), *Our children, their children: Confronting race and ethnic difference in American juvenile justice* (pp. 23-82). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bloom, R.M. (2002). *Ratting: The use and abuse of informants in the American justice system*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Bohan, S. (2006, July 31). Police push hard against anti-snitching movement." *Oakland Tribune*.
- Bourdieu, P. (1983). Forms of capital. In J.C. Richards (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood Press.
- Bourgois, P. (1989). "Crack in Spanish Harlem: Culture and economy in the inner city." *Anthropology Today*, 5(4), 6 -11.

- Bourgois, P. (1995). *In search of respect: Selling crack in el barrio*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, E. (2007). *Snitch: Informants, cooperators, and the corruption of justice*. New York: Perseus Publishers.
- Burke, C. (2004). *Camp all-American, Hanoi Jane, and the high and tight: Gender, folklore, and changing military culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Carceral, K.C., & Bernard, T.J. (2005). *Prison, Inc.: A convict exposes life inside a private prison*. New York: New York University Press.
- Carceral, K.C., Bernard, T.J., Alarid, L.F., Bikle, B., & Bikle, A. (2004). *Behind a convict's eyes*. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth.
- Catalano, S.M. C. (2005). Criminal victimization, 2004. Washington D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Charles, C.Z. (2003). The dynamics of racial residential segregation. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29, 167-207.
- Chatterji, A.K. (2007, May 14). Socially responsible hip-hop. *Duke University News and Communications*.
- Cobb, W.J. (2007). *To the break of dawn: A freestyle on the hip hop aesthetic*. New York: New York University Press.
- Cohen, A.K. (1955). *Delinquent boys: The culture of the gang*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Cohen, A.K. (1965). The sociology of the deviant act: Anomie theory and beyond." *American Sociological Review*, 30(1), 5-14.
- Cohen, A.K. (1977). The concept of criminal organisation. *British Journal of Criminology*, 17, 97-111.

Conly, C.H. (1993). *Street gangs: Current knowledge and strategies*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice.

Cool 'Eh. (2006). Cool'Eh guide to the snitchin'est. *Cool 'Eh Magazine*, 11, retrieved September 30, 2009, from <http://www.coolehmag.com/frontEnd/filler.php?i=18&s=14>

Cornish, D.B., & Clarke, R.V.G. (Eds.). (1986). *The reasoning criminal*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Court, A., & Sharman, K. (Producers). (2007, April 22). *60 Minutes* [Television broadcast]. Washington, D.C.: CBS News.

Crosley, H. (2007). "The Wire" taps urban music's pulse. *Billboard*, 119(50), 34-35.

Crutchfield, R.D., Bridges, G.S., & Pitchford, S.R. (1994). Analytical and aggregation biases in analyses of imprisonment: Reconciling discrepancies in studies of racial disparity. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 31(2), 166-82.

Cutler, D.M., & Glaeser, E.L. (1997). Are ghettos good or bad? *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 112, 827-872.

Delgado, R. (2008). Law enforcement in subordinated communities: Innovation and response. *Michigan Law Review*, 106, 1193-1211.

Dukes, R.L., & Mattley, C. (1977). Predicting rape victim reportage. *Sociology and Social Research*, 62 (1), 63-84.

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). (2007). "Crime in the United States. 2006." Washington D.C.: Federal Bureau of Investigation.



- Felson, R.B., Messner, S.F., Hoskin, A.W., & Deane, G. (2002). Reasons for reporting and not reporting domestic violence to the police. *American Society of Criminology*, 40(3), 617-648.
- Fisher, B.S., Daigle, L.E., Cullen, F.T., & Turner, M.G. (2003). Reporting sexual victimization to the police and others: Results from a national-level study of college women. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 30 (1), 6-38.
- Fyfe, J.J. (1982). Blind justice: Police shootings in Memphis. *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 73(2), 707-722.
- Gonzales, A.R., Schofield, R.B., and Schmitt, G.R. (2005). Sexual assault on campus: What colleges and universities are doing about it. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Gordon, R.E. (2000). *The funhouse mirror: Reflections on prison*. Pullman, Washington: Washington State Press.
- Gregory, K. (2005, August 10). Dressed to kill: Community activists protest a pro-crime T-shirt. *Philadelphia Weekly*.
- Hampson, R. (2006, March 28). Anti-snitch campaign riles police, prosecutors. *USA Today*.
- Hanser, R. (2002). Labeling theory as a paradigm for the etiology of prison rape: Implications for understanding and intervention. *Professional Issues in Counseling On-Line Journal Summer*, 11-15.
- Hart, T.C., & Rennison, C. (2003). Reporting crime to the police, 1992-2000. Washington D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Hassine, V. (2008). *Life without parole: Living in prison today*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Hill, M.L. (2006a). A snitch and time. *The Barbershop Notebooks*, 7. Retrieved at (<http://www.geoclan.com/mc/articles/thebarbershop/TheBarbershopNotebooksVol.7.html>) on November 11, 2008.
- Hill, M.L. (2006b). "Damned if you do, damned if you don't." *Cool'Eh Magazine*, 2(5), 10-13.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Outlaw culture: Resisting representations*. New York: Routledge.
- Hughes, T., & Wilson, D.J. (2003). Reentry trends in the United States: Inmates returning to the community after serving time in prison. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved at ([www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/reentry/reentry.htm](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/reentry/reentry.htm)) on November 11, 2008.
- Hunt, J., & Manning, P.K. (1991). The social context of police lying. *Symbolic Interaction*, 14(1), 51-70.
- Irwin, J. (1970). *The felon*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Irwin, J., & Cressey, D. (1962). Thieves, convicts, and the inmate subculture. *Social Problems*, 54, 590-603.
- Jacobs, A. (2007, May 27). Newark battles murder and its accomplice, silence. *New York Times*.
- Jargowsky, P.A. (1996). Take the money and run: Economic segregation in U.S. metropolitan areas. *American Sociological Review*, 61, 984-998.
- Joseph, J. (1992). A comparative study of delinquent behavior. Presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology, New Orleans, Louisiana.
- Kahn, J. (2007). The story of a snitch. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 80(4), 86-88.

- Kauffman, K. (1988). *Prison officers and their world*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kitwana, B. (2002). *The hip hop generation: Young blacks and the crisis in African American culture*. New York: Basic Books.
- Koppel, N. (2007, August 30). Are your jeans sagging? Go directly to jail.” *The New York Times*.
- Krivo, L.J., & Peterson, R.D. (1996). Extremely disadvantaged neighborhoods and urban crime. *Social Forces*, 75, 619-650.
- Kubrin, C.E., & Weitzer, R. (2003). Retaliatory homicide: Concentrated disadvantage and neighborhood crime. *Social Problems*, 50, 157-180.
- Kupers, T.A. (2005). Toxic masculinity as a barrier to mental health treatment in prison. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 61(6), 713-724.
- Lemert, C.C. (1999). *Social theory: The multicultural and classical readings*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Lena, J.C. (2006). Social context and musical content of rap music, 1979-1995. *Social Forces*, 85(1), 479-495.
- Lerner, J.A. (2002). *You got nothing coming: Notes from a prison fish*. New York: Bantam Dell Publishing Group.
- Lizotte, A J. (1985). The uniqueness of rape: Reporting assaultive violence to the police. *Crime and Delinquency*, 31(2), 169-190.
- Lovell, J.S. (2003). *Good cop, bad cop: Mass media and the cycle of police reform*. Monsey, NY: Willow Tree Press.

- Maguire, K., & Flanagan, T. (1993). *Sourcebook of criminal justice statistics 1992*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Maguire, K., & Pastore, A.L. (Eds.). (1994). *Sourcebook of criminal justice statistics 1993*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Mansbach, A. (2003, June 25). Hip-hop intellectuals: A radical generation comes of age. *San Francisco Gate*.
- Mapson, A.V. (2006). How factors related to social control might contribute to juvenile delinquency among African Americans and Caucasian females. Ph.D dissertation, Department of Social Work, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN.
- Massey, D.S. (1995). Getting away with murder: Segregation and violent crime in America. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 143(5), 1275-1284.
- Massey, D.S., & Denton, N.A. (1993). *American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Masten, J. (2009). "Ain't no snitches ridin' wit' us": How deception in the Fourth Amendment triggered the Stop Snitching movement, *Ohio State Law Journal*, 70(3), 701-753.
- Mays, G.L., Jr., & Winfree, L.T., Jr. (2005). *Essentials of corrections* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Merton, R. (1938). Social structure and anomie. *American Sociological Review* 3, 672-82.
- Messerschmidt, J.W. (1993). *Masculinities and crime: Critique and reconceptualization of theory*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.

- Messerschmidt, J.W. (1999). Making bodies matter: Adolescent masculinities, the body, and varieties of violence. *Theoretical Criminology*, 3(2), 197-220.
- Miller, W.B. (1958). Lower-class culture as a generating milieu of gang delinquency. *Journal of Social Issues*, 14, 5-20.
- Mitter, S. (Commentator]. (2006, January 30). A hip-hop backlash against “snitching.” National Public Radio, Washington, D.C.
- Mulcahy, A. (1995). “Headhunter” or “real cop”: Identity in the world of internal affairs officers. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 24(1), 99-130.
- Ostrovsky, D. (2006, March 1). Witness intimidation issue moves to Maryland Senate. *The (Baltimore) Daily Record*.
- Patterson, O. (2003, August). Culture of poverty, poverty of culture. Presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Atlanta, Georgia.
- Pattillo, M. (2007). *Black on the block: The politics of race and class in the city*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pattillo-McCoy, M. (1999). *Black picket fences: Privilege and peril among the black middle class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Perkins, K. (1996). The influence of television images on black females’ self-perceptions of physical attractiveness. *The Journal of Black Psychology*, 22(4), 453-469.
- Perry, I. (2008). “Tell us how it feels to be a problem”: Hip hop longings and poor young black men. In E. Anderson (Ed.), *Against the wall: Poor, young, Black, and male* (pp. 165-180). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Pershing, J.L. (2003a). Why women don’t report sexual harassment: A case study of an elite military institution. *Gender Issues*, 21(4), 3-30.

- Pershing, J.L. (2003b). To snitch or not to snitch? Applying the concept of neutralization techniques to the enforcement of occupational misconduct. *Sociological Perspectives*, 46(2), 149-178.
- Peterson, R.D., & Krivo, L.J. (1999). Racial segregation, the concentration of disadvantage, and black and white homicide victimization. *Sociological Forum* 14, 465-493.
- Puckett, J.L., & Lundman, R. (2003). Factors affecting homicide clearances: Multivariate analysis of a more complete conceptual framework. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 40(2), 171.
- Raab, S. (1991, November 15). How Gotti's no. 2 gangster turned his coat. *New York Times*.
- Raab, S. (2005). *Five families: The rise, decline, and resurgence of America's most powerful Mafia empires*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Rand, M., & Catalano, S. (2007). Criminal victimization, 2006." Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.
- Redden, J. (2001). *Snitch culture: How citizens are turned into the eyes and ears of the state*. Venice, CA: Feral House.
- Roberts, D.F., & Foehr, U.G. (2004). *Kids and media in America*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosenfeld, R., Jacobs, B.A., & Wright, R. (2003). Snitching and the code of the street. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 43, 291-309.
- Rothstein, K. (2005, July 22). 'Snitch' t-shirt raises red flag. *Boston Herald*, pp. 8.
- Sabo, D., Kupers, T., & London, W. (2001). *Prison masculinities*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

- Sampson, R.J., Raudenbush, S., & Earls, F. (1997). Neighborhoods and violent crime: A multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science*, 277, 918-24.
- Smith, S.S. (2007). *Lone pursuit: distrust and defensive individualism among the black poor*. New York: Sage Foundation.
- Sanneh, K. (2007, April 25). Don't blame hip-hop. *The New York Times*.
- Santos, M. (2003). *Profiles from prison: Adjusting to life behind bars*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Sherman, L.W. (2007). Use probation to prevent murder. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 6(4), 843-849.
- Sulugiuc, G. (2005, November 10). Hip-hop's code of silence hurts police. *Washington Post*.
- Sykes, G.M., & Matza, D. (1957). Techniques of neutralization: A theory of delinquency. *American Sociological Review*, 22, 664-670.
- Thornberry, T.P. (1973). Race, socioeconomic status and sentencing in the juvenile justice system. *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 64, 90-98.
- Topalli, V. (2005). When being good is bad: An expansion of neutralization theory. *Criminology* 43(3), 797-836.
- Trautman, N. (2000). Police code of silence facts revealed. Paper presented at the International Association of Chiefs of Police (Legal Officers Section).
- U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ). (2009). The stop snitching phenomenon: breaking the code of silence. Washington D.C.: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS).
- Venkatesh, S.A. (2000). *American project: The rise and fall of a modern ghetto*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Welford, C., & Cronin, J. (1999). An analysis of variables affecting the clearance of homicides: A multistate study. Washington, D.C.: Justice Research and Statistics Association, Retrieved October 17, 2008.

([http://www.jrsa.org/pubs/reports/Clearance\\_of\\_Homicide.html](http://www.jrsa.org/pubs/reports/Clearance_of_Homicide.html)).

Whitman, J.L., & Davis, R.C. (2007). Snitches get stitches: Youth, gangs and witness intimidation in Massachusetts. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Victims of Crime.

Wilbekin, E. (1999). Great aspirations: Hip hop and fashion dress for excess and success. In A. Light (Ed.), *The Vibe history of hip hop* (pp. 277-284). New York: Three Rivers Press.

Wilkinson, D.L. (2007). Local social ties and willingness to intervene: Textured views among violent urban youth of neighborhood social control dynamics and situations. *Justice Quarterly*, 24(2), 185-220.

Wilson, W.J. (1987). *The truly disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass, and public policy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Wilson, W.J. (2009). *More than just race: Being black and poor in the inner city (issues of our time)*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

Woldoff, R.A. (2006). Emphasizing fear of crime in models of neighborhood social disorganization. *Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, 8(4), 228-247.