

# Street life and masculinities

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## Introduction

Interest in street life has deep roots in North American social sciences, with many classic works in anthropology, criminology, and sociology being grounded in ethnographic research in the streets of US cities and the cultural variations found there (Thrasher, 1927; Shaw, 1930; Whyte, 1943; Cohen, 1955; Gans, 1962; Liebow, 1967). In these early studies, concerns about masculinities are an implicit over explicit concern, though authors and informants often talk about the experiences of *men* in street life contexts (e.g., Cohen titles his book *Delinquent Boys*, while both Shaw and Liebow's books have the words "men" or "boy" in their subtitles, and Whyte's dedication is to "the corner *boys* of cornerville" (1943, p. vi). Subsequent work has similarly directly or indirectly highlighted the dominating role of gender in street life subcultures and its nearly ubiquitous relevance (see, for example, MacLeod, 1987; Messerschmidt, 1993, 1997, 2014; Bourgois, 1995; Maher, 1997; Anderson, 1999; Duneier, 1999; Mullins, 2006). While numerous definitions of "street life" exist, most are focused on the subcultural nature of an alternative set of values and norms and lives on, and defines, the streets and behaviors that predominate there.

Thus, street life has normative, ideological, and geographic elements. Ross' (2018, p. 2) recent definition synthesizes prior views seeing that "street culture is basically *the beliefs, dispositions, ideologies, informal rules, practices, styles, symbols, and values associated with, adopted by, and engaged in by individuals and organizations that spend a disproportionate amount of time on the streets of large urban centers*" (emphasis in original). As others have noted, there is an oppositional nature to street life, framed as a result of geographic and socioeconomic separation and segregation (i.e., Cohen, 1955; Anderson, 1999). The multiple marginalizations that produce street life refract mainstream norms into the specific configuration found on the streets. This refraction of neoliberalism's hyper capitalist focus on social status is displayed via conspicuous consumption and fusion of street capital and masculinities.

Many of the concerns of mainstream masculinity are seen in street life: independence, competency, economic earnings, strength, and the provision of protection and support (Connell, 1995, 2002; Kimmel, 1996). Yet, the resources available on the streets are different and the ways in which capital is obtained and maintained are a product of this context. In the absence of those forms of capital – financial, human, personal, reputational, and social – preferred by mainstream cultural norms, another key association between street life and masculinity emerges: criminality. Not all men who participate in street life to greater or lesser

degrees engage in criminal behavior; but street life shares geographic and cultural space with the higher levels of crime found in urban communities, especially those with greater levels of concentrated disadvantage (Shaw & McKay, 1942; Wilson, 1987, 1996; Jencks & Peterson, 1991; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earl, 1997). This juxtapositioning creates real and symbolic linkages. On the streets individual, and masculine, reputation takes on an impermanence. It is only as strong as one's response to the last reputational challenge. As Messerschmidt points out (1993, pp. 119–120): “men exhibit unique types of public masculinities that are situationally accomplished by drawing on different forms of youth crime . . . public arenas such as the school and street are lush with gendered meanings and signals that evoke various styles of masculinity.” Simply, crime is a resource to “do masculinity”

Gender is structural and performative (West & Zimmerman, 1987, 2009; Connell, 2002). Expectations, privileges, constraints, and allowances are all situated in a social structure produced in a unique historical context. Yet, masculinities and femininities are constructed and reconstructed via social interaction between social actors who embody and reproduce the socio-historical structures. Gender is by its nature pluralistic and hierarchical. In any society, there are multiple ways of being male or female; genders vary by context, status, and agency and have differential access to capitals. We follow the work of Connell (1995, 2002) in suggesting that gender hierarchies are better understood via reference to a contextual *hegemonic masculinity* that dominates and orders other gendered roles and expressions within a given social environment. Any given hegemonic masculinity will construct *subordinate masculinities* and *emphasized femininities* in reference to itself.

Subcultures are often not fully independent of the mainstream societies within which they are embedded. Those that evolve within a broader society and in response to elements of social rejection and marginalization will not completely abandon and then remake structural foundations; the various social forces and pressures that catalyze the development of a subculture will lead to a refraction of mainstream norms and cultural forms via the lens of the derivative formation. Concerns of mainstream masculinities are recognizable within street life, though it is sharply attuned to the available resources and meaningful local contestations. Despite marked shifts in the experiences and expressions of femininities in the US over the past half-century, many core elements of hegemonic mainstream masculinity have remained largely stable. Within working- and middle-class contexts, breadwinning masculinities remain hegemonic; men are valued and judged by their ability to obtain economic resources often in support of a family. Employment, marriage, fatherhood, and home ownership all form key masculine capitals that adult men in these contexts use to establish and demonstrate masculinity. Though there are key differences in how a given family and internal family interaction dynamics may be structured, men of most class strata get the lion's share of their gender capital from these resources. Strength, independence, competency, and even aggression via competition are all writ into one's socio-occupational status and serve as key masculine capitals. On the streets, stable, career employment, educational credentials, and other pathways to breadwinning are harder to come by. Increasingly widespread collateral consequences from mass incarceration exasperate this situation in most urban minority communities (Clear, 2008) by erecting additional barriers to work. Street masculinity is shaped around alternative ways to show independence, strength, competency, and aggression/competition.

Much current literature exploring street masculinity (Messerschmidt, 1993, 1997, 2014; Mullins, 2006) focuses on criminal masculinity and its facilitation by and demonstration within street life contexts. Indeed, crime and criminality have been a strong component of street life and street capital, as we will explore later. Yet, there are noncriminal masculinity performances, which have received less attention but are nonetheless central to street life and its performance. There are many overlapping scripts and symbolisms within and between criminal and noncriminal masculinities on the streets. The remainder of this chapter will explore the nature and meanings of masculinities in street life social environments and networks. It now shifts toward the exploration of street masculinities that rely heavily on criminal capital; it then focuses on noncriminal street masculinities.

## Criminal masculinities and the streets

A large portion of the crime and masculinity literature has focused on street life norms and situations. This reflects their coexistence. Street life has largely developed in response to the multiple marginalizations of life in urban areas, the same urban areas that have disproportionately high rates of crime and criminality. Crime, be it expressive or acquisitive, develops in part in response to the same social forces that stimulate the development of subcultural values and orientations. Crime is a way to specifically and visibly embody the resistance which is at the core of street life subculture and it is also an alternative way to obtain capitals that can be of critical importance to masculinity construction.

Messerschmidt (1993, 1997, 2014) was one of the first scholars to examine the intersections of masculinities and crime at length. While he links crime to issues of power and domination among men of multiple race and class positions, in addressing specific forms of street crime he creates a link between crime and the construction masculinities distinctly connected to street life. He identifies three masculinities within a street context that rely on crime as a form of masculine capital: the pimp, the hustler, and the badass. Messerschmidt emphasizes how these gendered positions are strongly shaped by race and class as well. Thus these masculinities emerge at the intersection of urban street life, the US African American experience, and the urban working class.

In a case study of Malcom X, Messerschmidt (1997, 2014) highlights the role of street culture, specifically zoot-suit subculture, in Malcom's formation of an oppositional masculinity during his teen years in Boston. Zoot suiters were positioned as the hegemonic masculinity among street-orientated working-class African Americans. Conspicuous consumption of clothes (the eponymous zoot suits) and other fashion elements (i.e., for Malcolm, died and straightened hair) show attachment to a specific set of attitudes and social circles as well as the possession of resources to be spent on the non-ordinary attire. Later, Malcolm added criminality to his zoot-suit hipster persona to further "reject legitimate work and to privilege 'fast money' and leisure" (1997, p. 53). Robbery and burglary became additional tools to earn masculine capital, something later scholars highlight. One acquires masculine capital from the earnings of these crimes, but also from the elements of character exhibited by engaging in them. Successful crime participation shows courage, toughness, risk taking, and exhibits a criminal competency. Doing crime is doing gender in this context. While this dynamic is not limited to street life subcultures, indeed, it is present to some extent in adolescent male circles across western societies, due to the lack of other sources of capital – during adolescence and later in life – it can take on increased salience in the lives of men embedded in such street culture.

Messerschmidt (1993) explores how pimps situationally accomplish a deviant masculinity enmeshed in the streets via the domination of women. Following Miller (1986), historically pimps were the hegemonic masculinity of street life gender hierarchies. Pimps earned money and social capital by controlling a group of women engaged in sex work. He managed the women and their monies. He was disciplinarian and protector – a clear intensification of mainstream masculine household responsibilities as refracted through street norms. As with zoot suiters, expensive clothing and flashy jewelry are the norm, visibly showing the pimps ability to acquire financial resources. "Lacking other avenues and opportunities for accomplishing gender, the pimp-life style is a survival strategy that is exciting and rewarding for them *as men*" (Messerschmidt, 1993, p. 122, emphasis added). The gendered position is grounded in the domination of women and thus exhibiting their superiority over other men who must labor in varying working-class jobs for earnings.

Katz's phenomenology of violence (1988) picks up on the same gendered elements discussed so far. In discussing the "ways of the badass," Katz explores the phenomenology of empowerment felt in robbery and assault. The visceral experience of dominating others becomes a central motivation behind such criminal acts, but the potentiality, and actuality, of engaging in such behavior becomes part of a distinctly masculine presentation self-adopted in street life environs. Key masculine traits such as independence, toughness, competence, and superiority are all embodied within armed robbery and physical assault. This raw

experience gets culturally attached via masculinities to other forms of gendered dominance and aggression. For example, Messerschmidt ties the pimp's use of violence as discipline against the women they control as a strong manifestation of male dominance that not only exhibits their power to the women in their network, but to other men on the street. This capital is drawn upon by men in street contexts in general who use such violence to establish and enhance their reputations *as men* in street networks. Anderson's (1999) work touches on this dynamic in his discussion of the code of the streets.

The street code that Anderson (1999) describes operating on the streets of Philadelphia emphasizes toughness and domination embodied in "juice" – the amount of reputation one has on the streets. This reputation is built based upon how one responds to challenges to one's reputation and integrity. A challenge must be met with violence, even if unsuccessful, if one's reputation is to be maintained. Failure elicits challenges from others in the community, as they try to enhance their "juice" by taking it from others. As Anderson (1999, p. 306) explains, "[T]he code of the street says . . . that each person will test the next person . . . people who survive respond by showing their tough sides. If they can do that, they are left alone." Hegemonic masculinity amongst those embedded in street life is grounded in real and potential violence, of showing "heart," and of physically establishing a place for one's self in the street hierarchy. This too is a refraction of mainstream norms about masculinity, toughness, and independence. While by no means are such ideals limited to street culture, there is an enhanced value or meaning placed on personal reputation in this context as there are fewer available capitals to draw upon in masculinity construction.

Mullins and Wright (2003), Mullins, Wright, and Jacobs (2004), and Mullins (2006), drawing upon qualitative interviews with active offenders in a midwestern rust belt city, examines how crime shapes masculinity in street life social networks and how masculinity shapes crime. He identified a form of hegemonic masculinity he termed "street masculinity" that is defined in opposition to traditional and deviant femininities and subordinate masculinities. Following work discussed previously, here violence also plays a central role in establishing and maintaining masculine capital on the streets. Additionally, street masculinity in this context was based on several key pillars in addition to the types of violent reputation maintenance discussed earlier: establishing one's independence from others (in all social contexts), trusting no one in the street context, crime-as-work, and a profound sense of fatalism. "Real" men could, and should, stand on their own. Reliance on others was typically seen as a weakness that could undercut you at any time. Such independence also extended to one's romantic relationships – women were heavily objectified and seen as objects for the satisfaction of sexual desire and little else. Ties to others reduced one's freedom and tied one down into networks of obligation and responsibility. The common view that one should trust nobody on the streets highlighted and reinforced the masculine emphasis on independence and separation because, as one of the interviewees explicitly put it, "every motherfucker gonna punk you."

Independence from others often translated into independence from legitimate work; regular jobs were seen as undesirable not only because they were perceived as paying too little, but because they put you under the control of other people – who would gain control over what you did and when you did it. Thus, independence and competence were exhibited through successful criminal careers. The precariousness and inherent danger in street life were supported through a pervading fatalism which, despite an overarching insistence upon demonstrating mastery and control in one's life, suggested that ultimately one's fate was out of one's hands. Almost all of the interviewees readily acknowledged that they would eventually end up dead or in prison due to their street embeddedness; it was something coldly acknowledged as fact. It wasn't a question of "if" but of "when" and the forces behind determining the "when" were seen as unpredictable and uncontrollable.

Those men who failed to live up to the demands of street masculinity were labeled as "punks" by those men who did. Often, the use of this label was a way to either dismiss someone as soft or feminine – someone who could be easily targeted in a crime, or to highlight the behavior of someone they perceived as violating street code elements that attached a sense of masculine honor or fairness to fights. For example, if

someone was attacked but the perpetrators kept their identity secret or they were attacked in an ambush-style victimization. Not allowing a target to see your face or fight back was often deemed a “punk move,” at least when it was done to the speaker (interviewees often described their use of sneakiness as smart, highlighting one of the many contradictions of masculinities in the street environment). Crude honor scripts surround street violence with the grounding assumption that one gains little masculine capital from a conflict that was not a real challenge or test of one’s skills. Beating up children, women, and failed men earned no street respect.<sup>1</sup> Drug addicts were also deemed un-masculine as addicts were often seen to resort to marginal street hustles that exhibited a lack of courage and criminal competence. The very state of addiction was strongly looked down upon by other men as giving up control over one’s life to the drug. Ironically, these sentiments were often strongest amongst those criminally involved men who used large quantities of alcohol and illegal drugs (Mullins, 2006).

Much of this work is clearly drawn from the exploration of African American experiences in street life contexts. Anderson (1999) suggests that these street codes are a specific product of the US’s experiences of racial segregation and domination, both historically and contemporaneously. Bourgois’ (1995) work shows masculinity as a key factor in shaping the activities of drug dealers and markets in Latinx Harlem. He shows how deindustrialization and the growth of the crack markets precipitated a crisis in masculinity within the neighborhood he was studying. Men often met with disapproval and failure in the realm of legitimate work and by women seeking increasing power and assertiveness in the home. The inability to attain masculine capitals from mainstream or traditional sources led to increased embeddedness in street life and criminality for the younger men in Bourgois’ study.

Other work shows that marginalized populations embracing street life and street masculinity via criminality is not unique to North America. Winlow (2001) shows similar forces operating in the postindustrial northeastern England, where violence is merged with masculinity and street-orientated roles become a more important source of masculine capital in the absence of the industry available to prior generations. Sandberg and Pedersen’s (2011) work in Oslo Norway shows a similarly situated street life with similar masculinity concerns rising to prominence among mainly African immigrants finding themselves excluded from broader Scandinavian society, as does Zdun’s (2008) work with German youth.

## Noncriminal masculinities

The majority of research on street life subcultures is concerned with the relationship between “the streets” and violence, but less attention has been given to relationships between “the streets” and other areas of interest to social scientists. Worth noting is that Anderson (1999) did not explicate that there is a direct relationship between “the streets” and criminal behavior. Rather, research has described a litany of intervening mechanisms, as well as confounding variables. In general, other lines of research concerned with street life subcultures have included, but are not limited to, how education interacts with street culture (Ferguson, 2000; Payne & Brown, 2010), how street-life orientations serve as a site of resiliency for impoverished young black men (Payne, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2011), how parenting is influenced by masculinity and street culture (Roy & Dyson, 2010), the role of linguistic and cultural code-switching (Edwards & Ash, 2004), and the role of music and other artifacts of popular culture in the relationship between street-life orientations and crime (Kubrin, 2005; Oliver, 2006; Powell, 1991; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003).

A dynamic relationship exists among street culture, masculinity, and one’s social environment (Ross, 2018). Street life subculture and masculinity do not just influence behaviors and interactions between individuals within disadvantaged neighborhoods. They also carry over to influence interactions between individuals and every other aspect of society. Street culture and masculinity are thoroughly embedded into one’s everyday behavior and decision-making calculus. This is because street culture is grounded in the daily language, attitudes, clothing, beliefs, and values of individuals living in large inner-city communities.

Similarly, masculinity is fundamentally a part of one's self-concept because individuals engage and reproduce gendered structures by "doing gender" in their everyday routine behaviors.

Street culture emphasizes a kind of alternative to traditional masculinity. Oliver (1994) referenced a black compulsive masculinity alternative that was largely grounded in street culture. Oliver's (1994) notion of black compulsive masculinity was characterized by an emphasis on toughness, sexual conquest, manipulation, and thrill-seeking. This alternative black masculinity is in direct contrast to the characteristics of traditional masculinity which emphasize that men be self-sustaining, achieve success within United States' conventional occupational system, and that men provide for their families (see also Cazanave, 1981). Oliver (1994) argued that black masculinity was a problematic adaptation to the oppression and marginalization that prevents young black men from attaining social achievements, standards, and success in society by conventional means. They specifically referenced black compulsive masculinity as a "*dysfunctional compensatory adaptation*" to mask the failure to "meet the standards of the traditional masculine role" (p. 199, emphasis added). This adaptation was noted to be problematic by Oliver (1994) because it is an ineffective response to environmental stressors such as racial oppression, economic deprivation, and low self-esteem. Rather than this alternative black masculinity solving their problems, it created new ones. They specifically highlighted how adherence to norms pertaining to toughness led to additional social problems such as violence between young black men, marital violence, fear of other blacks, and emotional detachment. They argued that this compulsive masculinity alternative not only caused additional social problems, but also hindered solidarity and collective efficacy among black communities.

While Oliver (1994) focused on alternative black masculinities, they would later focus on the actual socialization processes of young black males. Oliver (2006) described how some young black men undergo a socialization process that differs from traditional socialization that includes education systems and the family as agents of socialization. They argued that "the streets" act as an alternative agent of socialization and play a vital role in shaping the identities and behaviors of young black men. Oliver (2006; see also Oliver, 1994) describes how street environments not only teach and reinforce the values and norms of street culture, but they also act as a stage for young black men to perform and express their masculinity in the presence of communal peer spectators. This description of street culture and black masculinity is in line with Fine and Kuriloff's (2006) assertion that gender is performed in spaces that are distinct across social class and racial lines. Oliver (2006) argued that young black men's behaviors are not valid unless observed by their peers. Thus, they note that young black men "do" gender, and that this masculine performance is not validated by "the streets" unless it is witnessed by other young black men in the community. They argued that young black men socialized by "the streets" value three unexclusive masculine roles: *The Tough Guy*, *The Player*, and *The Hustler*. These masculine roles explain, at least in part, the importance within street culture of appearing tough, achieving success by unconventional means, and the ritualized pursuit of women as sexual objects. Young black men's pursuit of these masculine roles results in a handful of negative consequences such as increased economic marginalization and social seclusion, disrupted family lives, increased frequency of interpersonal conflict and violence, and disproportionately high rates of incarceration.

### **Code-switching**

One's culture and identity are not immediately abandoned when they venture outside of where they spend a disproportionate amount of their time. Anderson (1999) noted that decent-acting youth can be socialized to adjust their behavior and reactions in settings where interaction with street-oriented youth becomes necessary. This conscious adjustment of behaviors is known as *code-switching*. This term is commonly used by linguistic scholars to describe the use of slang, a different language, or a change in speaking form and style in different social settings to facilitate interaction with dissimilar ethnic groups, subcultures, or other group identities (Blom & Gumperz, 1972; Doran, 2004; Lytra, 2016). However, code-switching is not limited to linguistics. Other scholars have highlighted that one can switch codes by other means such as their

style of dress or changing other communicative social cues (Alvarez-Cáccamo, 1990; Anderson, 1999). Code-switching youth from decent families may speak with more slang than they typically would, dress differently, or engage in certain deviant behaviors when interacting with their street-oriented peers. These behavioral, attitudinal, and presentational adjustments are done by some individuals as a means of adapting to their surrounding social environment.

One thing not discussed by Anderson (1999) is whether street-oriented youth are capable of code-switching in settings outside of their normal street environments. There is very little research on this issue. That being said, language is one aspect of street culture that has been thoroughly addressed by social scientists. Linguistics scholars have found that individuals whose speech patterns routinely incorporated African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) are more than capable of also speaking Standard American English (SAE) (Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Edwards & Ash, 2004; Warner, 2007). Of particular note, Edwards and Ash (2004) examined the music lyrics, speeches, and poetry of Tupac Shakur, to compare his use of language for each form of expression and communication. Each particular type of communication is arguably aimed at a different type of audience. They found that his linguistic orientation varied considerably depending on the form of communication examined. Specifically, they found that his music lyrics overwhelmingly contained AAVE features in comparison to his speeches from interviews. Likewise, they found that Tupac's poetry contained very little AAVE features. In fact, the authors argued that the dramatic lack of AAVE features in Tupac's poetry suggests that he intentionally and consciously chose to not include slang and other AAVE properties. Overall, this line of linguistics research suggests that street-oriented youth are also capable of code-switching, and that this code-switching occurs as a means to better communicate to different and distinct groups of people. The counterargument would be that individuals capable of speaking the "language of the street" (Edwards & Ash, 2004, p. 165) and SAE are actually decent-oriented individuals that are code-switching to portray themselves as street-oriented (Anderson, 1999).

In many ways, street culture is counterculture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2004). However, contemporary research on street life identities has found at least one social institution where this theoretical assumption has been incorrect. Research on the relationship between street-oriented youth and education shows that young males find formal education to be important in their lives and generally view it in a positive manner. Although young men were found to hold positive views of formal education, they also reported negative views of their actual educational experiences. Payne and Brown (2010) argued that young men embraced a street orientation as an adaptive survival strategy while attending school. Many young black males attending inner-city urban high schools describe educational environments that are dangerous and violent. These claims are supported by studies which indicate that black adolescents report fearing assault at greater rates than reported by other adolescents (Snyder, Sickmund, & Poe-Yamagata, 1999; NCES, 2009). Rather than young black males being resistant to education and purposefully confrontational with educators, their behavior is an adaptive response to their environment and education experiences. Payne and Brown (2010) go on to argue that the false perception that black youth do not care about their education partially explains why young black men are formally disciplined more often and punitively by school officials.

### ***Resilience and street culture***

Despite perceptions about negative aspects of street masculinity, especially black urban masculinity, some research has suggested that the streets in general, and street masculinity in particular, provides resiliency for young black men (Payne, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2011; Payne & Brown, 2010). Payne (2006) addressed the relationship between masculinity and street culture. They specifically found that masculinity is forged amidst oppressive socioeconomic circumstances for many young black men and has an essential role in the street-life orientations of young black males. Opportunity plays a vital function in the lives of young black

men because street-life oriented individuals are typically raised in economically marginalized communities. These “street” communities are characterized by high unemployment rates, poorly funded schools, ramshackle housing, and high rates of crime and police misconduct. Taken together, impoverished neighborhoods are physical areas rife with blocked opportunities. Payne (2008) argued that young black men in impoverished neighborhoods developed street-life orientations as a direct adaptation to these blocked opportunities (see also Wilson, 1996).

Furthermore, Payne (2008) asserted that street orientations act as a “site of resiliency” (p. 5) for young impoverished black males. According to Payne (2005, 2006, 2008), sites of resiliency provide “psychological and physical spaces” (Payne, 2008, p. 5) that function together to produce resilience in young black men that are street-life oriented. Payne (2008) argued that individuals from impoverished communities must deal with a disproportionate amount of blocked opportunities, and that men from these lower-income communities adopt street-life orientations as a survival mechanism in response. Payne (2011) viewed the adoption of street identities not as a free choice, but instead, as a choice greatly influenced by discord in one’s life and economic disadvantage. Furthermore, they asserted that there are differing degrees of street life immersion that are influenced by intersection of race and ethnicity, social class, masculinity, livelihood (legal or illicit), street status, geographic region, and age.

Payne (2006, 2008, 2011) and Oliver’s (1994) notion that nontraditional masculine roles and street life orientations are responses to oppressive and disadvantaged social conditions is in line with Majors and Billson’s (1993) description of black men adopting a cool pose. Majors and Billson (1993) asserted that many black men adopted a cool pose as a coping response to their failure to achieve traditional masculine roles. Adopting a cool pose is not unlike Oliver’s (1994) explanation of how some street-oriented black men adopt an alternative masculine role of a *Tough Guy*. A cool pose can enhance one’s self-esteem, social competence, and dignity, but can also contribute to problems in school, criminality, and disrupt personal relationships.

### **Media representations**

Kubrin (2005) built upon prior literature on street culture with her analysis of rap music. Prior to Kubrin (2005), popular culture was largely ignored by scholars of street life and it was largely assumed that neighborhood processes produced and perpetuated street culture. A content analysis of hundreds of rap songs from throughout the 1990s revealed rap music reinforcing specific elements of street culture, namely the use of violence to gain and maintain respect among peers. They specifically noted that rap music called for and justified the use of violence in response to snitching, being challenged by peers, as a form of retaliation, or to resist victimization. Therefore, rap music acts as a platform that educates individuals about the street (see also Powell, 1991). Kubrin’s (2005) research found that street culture is not limited to being found in the streets themselves. Rather, rap music also contains elements of street culture that buttresses street life values and norms, and thus identities of those who identify with it.

Weitzer and Kubrin (2009), in a later analysis, found that this music not only reinforces street codes concerning respect and violence, but also hegemonic masculinity. While they found that the vast majority of rap music was not misogynistic or disrespectful of women, roughly 22% of the songs examined contained misogynistic elements that shamed the behaviors of females, referenced females as sexual objects, questioned the trustworthiness of women, and legitimated violence against women. Furthermore, the songs not only identified proper conduct for women in the streets, but also explicitly acknowledged the sanctions that may occur for the violations of that code of conduct. Weitzer and Kubrin (2009) do not hesitate to point out that this relationship between music, identity, and street culture is not a unidirectional relationship. Rather, it is likely reciprocal. Taken together, Kubrin’s (2005; also Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009) research showed that there is a clear and complex link between rap music, street culture, hegemonic masculinity, and identity.



## Conclusion

Most of the core theoretical work discussed in this chapter has been derived from a United States context. This reflects the focus of most existing scholarship. Yet, increasingly, many of the fundamental dynamics and aspects of street culture described in North America are also being seen in European states. Further, much of the work discussed here (and that exists in general) focuses explicitly or implicitly on African-American street life, though in the US street life is embraced across racial and ethnic lines; this is even truer in Europe and elsewhere where street life norms, language, and fashion are adopted by a high variety of ethnic groups – but most often among those experiencing social and economic marginalization.

This raises a fundamental issue of cultural origin and cultural diffusion. Theorists of a specifically criminal street masculinity in the US highlight the role of race and racial discrimination in evolutionary formation of these gender positions. Specifically, historical and contemporary racial discrimination are seen as both contextual and individual motivators behind shaping and adopting an alternative value structure. Yet, we are seeing the documentation of easily recognizable street masculinities in societies with highly different racial histories and varying forms of ethnic and/or racial marginalization. In some manifestations, street culture and masculinity are adopted and enacted by ethnic groups that experience marginalization – though of a type unique to the specific context. For example, work on Norway highlights the role of street culture in shaping the lives of more recent African immigrant populations (see Sandberg & Pedersen, 2011). US street culture, and street masculinity, is diffused via global media and seemingly finding fertile soil to take root in European populations whose current marginalization resonates with that of black and brown populations in North America. Hopefully future work on street life and gender will take a more explicitly comparative approach, over the current crude transference theoretical frames from one cultural context to another.

## Note

Though the rules for using violence, especially violence against women, were more complex and nuanced, see Mullins (2006, Chapters 5 & 6) and Mullins, Wright, and Jacobs (2004).

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