Deviant Behavior

ISSN: 0163-9625 (Print) 1521-0456 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/udbh20

"It's Just Paint": Street Taggers' Use of Neutralization Techniques

Arthur Vasquez & Lynne M. Vieraitis

To cite this article: Arthur Vasquez & Lynne M. Vieraitis (2016): "It's Just Paint": Street Taggers' Use of Neutralization Techniques, Deviant Behavior, DOI: 10.1080/01639625.2016.1169830

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2016.1169830

Published online: 09 May 2016.

DEVIANT BEHAVIOR
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2016.1169830

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

"It's Just Paint": Street Taggers' Use of Neutralization Techniques

Arthur Vasquez and Lynne M. Vieraitis

University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, Texas, USA

ABSTRACT

Neutralization theory posits that individuals use various linguistic techniques to free themselves from guilt associated with offending and/or to maintain a non-criminal self-image. Drawing on interviews with 25 active juvenile street taggers in a large metropolitan area of Texas, this study explores their use of Sykes and Matza's five techniques of neutralizations and the reasons they give for drifting in and out of offending. Results suggest that offenders have several common stressors that lead them to engage in tagging and that they make extensive use of neutralization techniques to justify their actions.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 4 September 2015
Accepted 12 October 2015

> …it's not like we robbed someone … we were just throwing it up.
>
> —TAPP, 15 year old street tagger

Graffiti has been the source of much public fascination and concern, often both glamorized and demonized in the media and labeled a menace to the communities by law enforcement and other agents of social control. The costs to the public associated with graffiti include financial costs (e.g., an estimated $12 billion dollars annually toward clean-up efforts, declining property values, and lost revenue associated with reduced use of public transportation) as well as social costs (e.g., public fear of gang activity) (Weisel 2004). Despite its prevalence, few offenders are apprehended and as such we know little about those who participate in this crime (for exceptions see Ferrell 1995; Halsey and Young 2006; Lachmann 1988; Monto, Machalek and Anderson 2012; Taylor 2012; Taylor, Marais, and Cottman 2012). Accordingly, we examine the various linguistic techniques street taggers employ to overcome any feelings of apprehension, shame, or guilt associated with their activities.[1] Specifically, we explore the immediate factors that active young street taggers identify for motivating them to engage in tagging and their use of neutralization techniques to excuse or justify their illegal conduct and minimize feelings of guilt about engaging in such acts.

Street tagging in context

During the last half of the twentieth century, society has witnessed a rapid expansion of adolescent street taggers and the development of tagging krews[2] in some of America's larger cities (Weisel 2004). Street tagging is a type of graffiti that has evolved over time. Unlike graffiti, which the public commonly associates with gang activity, street tagging represents a form of non-gang related graffiti characterized mainly by nicknames or "tags" by individuals known as "taggers" or "writers."[3] A tag is the offender's alias, a throwup, or a moniker used by a specific

CONTACT Lynne M. Vieraitis lynnev@utdallas.edu University of Texas at Dallas, School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences, Criminology Program, 800 W. Campbell Rd., GR31, Richardson, TX 75080-3021, USA.

[1]Graffiti is a term used widely to describe most cases of illegal street tagging. The term "street tagging" is used here to differentiate street tagging (writers) from general graffiti (commonly associated with gangs), and muralists.

[2]"Krew" is the spelling used by participants in the study.

[3]Although some street taggers are also gang members, the focus of this research is on street taggers who are not members of gangs. All respondents included in our sample are non-gang- affiliated street taggers.

individual, typically a stylish marking, name, acronym, or a picture that represents the individual tagger. In one's quest to be unique, the individual's tag is their signature mark (Lachmann 1988; Powers 1996). As street tagging evolved, taggers began to compete with one another to gain recognition and reputation among their peers, referred to as "getting up" (Ferrell 1995, 1996; Powers 1996; Snyder 2009). "Getting up" typically occurs when a street tagger receives special recognition from his/her peers for completing a tag in a difficult to reach location such as a highway bridge (Powers 1996). The tagger's ultimate goal, in "getting up" is to have one's tag name exhibited more regularly and prominently than other street taggers.

Although scholars have explored the thematic content of graffiti and street art, few studies have examined qualitatively the decision-making processes of active street taggers, particularly those under the age of 18 years. Thus, little is known about the perceptions of juvenile street taggers who are actively breaking the law, including their views on street tagging, as well as the decisions made before, during, and after the criminal event. These specifics matter "because they constitute the experiential setting of deviance and criminality, the immediate interactional dynamic through which criminals construct crime" (Ferrell 1996). Exploring street tagging by analyzing the words of juveniles actively engaged in offending may deepen our understanding of street tagging as well as juvenile offending in general, and help policymakers design better policies to control offending.

Drawing on data collected from field interviews with street taggers, this study adds to the body of research that focuses on juvenile offenders by exploring the reasons they give for participating in criminal behavior. Specifically, we collected data from field interviews with 25 active juvenile street taggers, to assess why they engage in tagging and their use of excuses and justifications to minimize the guilt associated with offending and/or to maintain a non-criminal identity.[4] Street tagging includes illegal acts of graffiti in the forms of pieces, bombs, tags, and throw-ups done by juveniles who call themselves "taggers" or "writers."[5]

Theoretical background

Regardless of the type and severity of crime, criminologists and others want to know why offenders do it. However, when seeking motives for crimes it is often hard to distinguish motivations from socially constructed explanations, or what Mills (1940) called vocabularies of motives. Sykes and Matza (1957) argued that individuals are more easily able to violate norms when moral obstacles are removed through various learned techniques of neutralization. This highlights one of the more intriguing questions regarding human nature: "why do people violate the conventional norms they claim to believe in?" (Sykes and Matza 1957). For Sykes and Matza (1957), deviant acts occur only after an individual develops justifications for the acts, whereas prior to commission of a crime, the individual is "more or less" committed to conventional moral beliefs. Their argument developed out of the observation that most delinquents were not engaged continually in delinquent behavior but drifted between conventional and delinquent activities. Sykes and Matza (1957:666) claimed that juvenile delinquents were at least committed partially to the dominant social order because the juvenile "frequently exhibits guilt or shame when he violates its proscriptions, accords approval to certain conforming figures, and distinguishes between appropriate and inappropriate targets for his deviance." Thus, while delinquents and non-delinquents may maintain fundamentally the same moral beliefs, delinquents learn specific rationalizations, motivations, and attitudes favorable to

[4]In Taylor (2013), "active" refers to writers who graffiti on a regular basis. We use "active" to indicate that participants were in the process of, engaged in, or recently finished engaging in tagging when interviewed.

[5]"Piece" is an abbreviation for masterpiece, which consists of multicolored and elaborate graffiti. The term "bomb" is used interchangeably with "piece." A "tag" is a person's unique stylized signature or street name. "Throw-up" refers to a shortened or abbreviated version of the individual's tag name. Throw-ups are typically less elaborate than pieces and bombs and therefore, require less artistic skill.

committing crime which in turn allow them to excuse and justify (i.e., neutralize their deviant behavior under certain circumstances) (Agnew 1994; Minor 1981; Sykes and Matza, 1957; Topalli 2006). Individuals, who use neutralization techniques to commit deviant acts, do so to eliminate temporarily the inhibitions of conventional morality allowing them to "drift" (Sykes and Matza 1957).

According to Matza (1964), delinquents are not solely free nor are they solely constrained; therefore, the delinquent is never fully a law violator but is easily able to drift into delinquency. It is this process of "drift" that provides researchers an opportunity to explore why "good" people sometimes do "bad" things, and why "bad" people are sometimes "good" (Sykes and Matza 1957).[6] It is in this state of "drift" that offenders use rationalizations to minimize the consequences and significance of the impending act, while at the same time avoiding harm to their self-image.[7] To neutralize the consequences, offenders redefine their contemplated activity in order to make it acceptable by drawing upon one or more of five neutralization techniques (Ball 1968; Hindelang 1970, 1973; Maruna and Copes 2005; Priest and McGrath 1970; Sykes and Matza 1957). Using these techniques, allows them to participate in deviant behavior without damaging their self-image (Mitchell, Dodder, and Norris 1990). In their original article, Sykes and Matza (1957:667–669), identify five techniques of neutralization:

Denial of Victim: The individual acknowledges that there *is* a victim and *accepts* responsibility; however, he/she believes their actions are justified based on the belief the victim deserves victimization.

Denial of Injury: The individual accepts responsibility for his/her actions while at the same time claiming no one was hurt.

Denial of Responsibility: The individual fails to accept responsibility for his/her actions by claiming they were not in control, it was an accident, or push the blame onto their environment, peers, or families.

Condemnation of the Condemners: The individual admits to the delinquent act but claims it was acceptable since others commit similar or even worse acts.

Appeal to Higher Loyalties: The individual understands that his/her activity is wrong but excuses and justifies their actions by referencing allegiance to someone or some group.

Although neutralization theory was developed as an explanation of juvenile delinquency, subsequent research has examined a wide range of offenders including those engaged in violent crime (Pogrebin et al. 2006; Presser 2003), property crime (Copes 2003; Cromwell and Thurman 2003), and white collar and other economic crimes (Copes and Vieraitis 2009; Vieraitis et al. 2012). As a result, in addition to the five techniques of neutralization as delineated by Sykes and Matza (1957), researchers have identified other excuses and justifications used by offenders. These include: sad tales (Copes et al. 2013; Scott and Lyman 1968), the metaphor of the ledger (Klockars 1974), defense of necessity (Minor 1981), defeasibility, justification by comparison (Cromwell and Thurman 2003), the claim of entitlement (Conklin 2004) and the claim of normality (Coleman 2002). However, much of this research has focused on adult offenders and none has examined active street taggers.

[6]Recent research suggests that it is possible for offenders to neutralize without drift (Jacobs and Copes 2015).

[7]It is important to note that Sykes and Matza posited that these techniques of neutralization are made before the individual commits the delinquent act so that they can free themselves of guilt and/or shame and as such explains the onset of criminal behavior. Others, however, argue that offenders use neutralizations after commission of the illegal act for the purposes of maintaining a positive self-image in the face of norm violating behavior and thus neutralization theory is best understood as an explanation of persistence (Maruna and Copes 2005). See Topalli, Higgins, and Copes (2014) for a discussion of the temporal ordering of neutralizations among juveniles.

Prior research

A number of studies have used qualitative data to examine the reasons street taggers give for engaging in tagging (Ferrell 1995, 1997; Halsey and Young 2006; Taylor 2012). Taylor's (2012) analysis of data collected through semi-structured interviews (face-to-face or telephone), web-blog comments, and newspaper incident reports revealed several factors that motivate adolescents to become involved in tagging. These included the need to alleviate boredom, seeing their peers engage in writing, the adrenaline rush they experience from their activities including the act of tagging as well as the "rush" that comes from provoking a fight (e.g., by marking out someone else's work) and seeking an identity as a non-conformist (Taylor 2012). Older adolescents gave reasons focused on recognition—being recognized for their style, gaining recognition from others, gaining acceptance from a crew, and getting a reputation (Taylor 2012). Although the reasons offenders gave are consistent with the impulsive rush-seeking nature of much adolescent behavior, Taylor (2012) notes that this gives way to the core reasons they offend—it is an addiction. More specifically, writers develop an addiction to the risk, recognition, and respect that the graffiti lifestyle provides (Taylor 2012:66). The risk-taking behavior that accompanies street tagging produces a rush experience, one that the individual attempts to constantly reacquire by continuously going out to tag. Over time, tagging may grow into an addiction as the offender seeks the continual rewards of the experience. The individual also gains other rewards including a status, an identity as a non-conformist, and the highly sought after reputation as an "up" writer. As the writer moves into adulthood, the addictive behavior shifts away from "risk taking" and toward a compulsive need for respect from the community (Taylor 2012).

Halsey and Young (2006) also described the sensations associated with writing that included pride, pleasure, and recognition from other writers. The main motivation cited by the study participants (ages 11 to 18 years) was that they found graffiti to be aesthetically pleasing and that it was a "gregarious" activity through which they could make friends. Boredom and rebellion were also mentioned but much less so than those mentioned above.

Other research explores the dynamics of street tagging within the framework of legal, political, and social control and posits that offenders' behavior may be viewed as opposition to this control (Ferrell 1995). Relying on data collected from four years of fieldwork in Denver, Colorado, and on field and document research in other U.S. and European cities, Ferrell (1995) argues that street taggers' attempts to resist society's control resulted in the creation of new identities and the construction of a collectivist alternative community (of taggers). These communities are viewed as areas of cultural space wherein writers are free to further construct their identities separate from the threat of authoritarian control (Ferrell 1997). However, the constant battle between these new alternative cultural spaces and the forces of mainstream social and cultural control resulted in the criminalization of young graffiti writers (Ferrell 1997). In this framework, tagging becomes a form of resistance to society's attempts to control behavior through the criminalization of tagging.

Previous research recognizes that a large number of writers and street tagging krews (i.e., alternative communities) are comprised primarily of males because street tagging normally requires boldness, daring, and physical and legal risks (Austin 2001; Castleman 1982; Miller and Thompson 2002; Monto, Machalek, and Anderson 2012). These attributes are more commonly associated with notions of masculinity and the construction of masculine identity (Messerschmidt 2005). For some researchers street tagging is one method by which young men construct gender (Monto et al. 2012) whereas others argue that street tagging is based on the experiences of minority and poverty status and not solely on gender (Ferrell 1995, 1996; Miller 1996; Miller and Thompson 2002). Other scholars point out that writers have included middle-class and white individuals from the beginning (Castleman 1982; Lasley 1995). Regardless of gender and socioeconomic status, street tagging provides writers an outlet to rebel against social constraints experienced by them (Ferrell 1995; Monto et al. 2012).

Despite a number of recent studies that have relied on qualitative interviews with offenders (e.g., Ferrell 1995, 1997; Halsey and Young 2006; Taylor 2012, 2013), the empirical research on street taggers, particularly active juvenile offenders, is limited. The aim of the current study is to gain a better understanding of street tagging by analyzing data collected from interviews with active juvenile street taggers who have had no prior contact with law enforcement. We explore the reasons they give for why they engage in tagging as well as the excuses and justifications they employ to minimize guilt and maintain a "noncriminal" self-image.

Methodology

Qualitative research offers opportunities to study juvenile street taggers' perspectives of tagging as social processes, interactions, and meaning-making in the everyday context of particular settings. When investigating active offenders, personal interviews allow the researcher to identify their motives and rationalizations in committing crime. One of the advantages to studying active offenders is that the researcher is in the field with the offender as they are contemplating, engaging in, or recently finished engaging in the behavior under study. Moreover, it allows the researcher to get close enough to experience first-hand the writer's motives, feelings, and intentions, which are difficult to capture with quantitative methods.

By allowing participants to discuss their own experiences and behaviors we can develop a deeper understanding of their participation in tagging as individuals and in the context of their environment (Decker and van Winkle 1996). In this study, we use participant observation and in-depth interviews with active, juvenile street taggers to examine their motives and justifications for engaging in street tagging. Prior studies of street tagging/graffiti have not explored the motivations and use of neutralization techniques by active, adolescent street taggers.

Sampling strategy

The data for the study were acquired from semi-structured interviews with 25 active street taggers from a metropolitan area in Texas. Active street taggers were defined as individuals who had committed at least two or more acts of illegal street tagging within the previous two months and who were not currently incarcerated nor identified through law enforcement contacts. All respondents admitted to committing acts of illegal graffiti within the past month, defined themselves as being active street taggers, and were considered active by other street taggers.

Participants were recruited from the streets of the metropolitan area through the use of snowball sampling. The first author,[8] a gang interventionist, was able to identify an active street tagger with a strong reputation among taggers and extensive connections within networks comprised of street taggers and graffiti artists. This individual, whom the interviewer has known for over four years, served as a gatekeeper. Using the informant's reputation, the interviewer was able to penetrate the street code of silence and was introduced to the informant's associates and street tagging krews who were actively participating in illegal street tagging. The informant helped to clarify the research objectives to potential respondents and validated the interviewer as non-threatening to their legal and social status. At the end of each interview, the interviewer asked the respondent to provide referrals of other active street taggers. Although not all of the respondents made referrals, most of them did.

Respondents ranged in age from 13 to 18 years old. All were Latino, except for one African American, and all were male. The respondents interviewed came from various family units ranging from single-parent, two-parent, and multiple family households. The respondents were in seventh through eleventh grade and, at the time of interview, were enrolled in a public school system. A majority of the respondents came from a low socioeconomic background; however, two of the

[8]The first author, referred to hereafter as the interviewer, conducted the data collection.

respondents were considered middle and upper-middle class. Most resided in an area classified as "high poverty" with an overall poverty rate of 18.3% and nearly a quarter (24.9%) of the population under the age of 18 years living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau 2013). The neighborhoods within this area are known to be infested with drugs and gangs as well as being well known for high teen pregnancy rates at 27.3 per 1,000 females (Children's Medical Center and the Coalition for North Texas Children 2007) and high dropout rates, with only a 46.6% high school graduation rate (Swanson 2008). The school district in which the respondents attended school reported 114 gangs within their district by the end of the 2012–2013 school year (Dovick 2013). The neighborhoods where the respondents resided were identified as hot spots for graffiti abatement with an average of 60 new reports of street tagging/graffiti each week, 95% of which was the work of street taggers and not gang related (Brown 2012). A visual inspection revealed that there were no city blocks or alleys that were tag (graffiti) free including most street signs, bus stops, and freeways. In sum, the neighborhoods from which participants came were impoverished, suffered from multiple poor quality of life indicators and were "hot spots" for crime including graffiti.

Data collection

The interviews were semi-structured and conducted in a non-formal manner, which allowed the content and order of questions to vary from one interview to another. This type of interviewing style allowed the participants to feel at ease in their own environment and to speak freely (Polsky 1969; Wright et al. 1992). Not all questions were posed to every respondent but were based upon rapport and flow of the interview (Wright et al. 1992). To produce a more comfortable setting and to increase the level of cooperation, all participants were promised confidentiality. Each participant provided a self-assigned street moniker for the purpose of the interview. We have changed these monikers to further protect the identities of the participants.[9]

The interviews were conducted over a one-year period beginning in September 2011 and ending in September 2012. They typically lasted between 45 minutes to one hour, were audio recorded, and then transcribed at a later date. The majority of interviews took place "in the street" where taggers met, although some were conducted in homes, fast food restaurants, and cars. After consenting to the interview, the participants were asked to discuss their most recent involvement in street tagging. This style of descriptive, structural, and contrast questions enabled the respondent to discuss a specific series of events related to tagging (Spradley 1979). During the interview, the interviewer prompted respondents with questions about why they engaged in tagging, their perceptions of the risks and rewards, as well as their specific event decisions before, during, and after commission of the crime. He also devoted a substantial amount of time to ensuring respondents understood the questions as well as probing their answers for clarification. During the interview, he took notes on respondents' descriptions of the illegal behavior to monitor their responses by questioning any vague or inconsistent answers. Although most street taggers were reluctant at first to discuss freely their criminal activity, most of them opened up once the interview got underway. However, the majority opened up only after testing the interviewer's knowledge of the illegal underground world of street graffiti. Once he was fully accepted, the respondents were willing to discuss openly their experiences.

Coding method

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by way of inductive and deductive coding (Strauss 1987). Open coding initially took place to identify common themes throughout the transcripts. Next, conceptualization was interpreted directly, pulled apart, and then organized into a more meaningful pattern (Stake 1995). The main goal of conceptualization and coding was to

[9]We have retained the "style" of their tagging names (i.e., capitalization).

provide a detailed description of what was observed in the transcripts and to then make sense of why it was important. The transcripts were manually coded inductively to look for patterns. Coding frames were used to organize and identify categories. Any possible relationships were explored to discover potential latent themes. Next, deductive coding was used in order to analyze the data through neutralization theory.

We read each interview and coded deductively based on how the street tagger made sense of their crime using Sykes and Matza's (1957) neutralization theory as a guide. The goal of this research was to understand the ways in which street taggers used neutralizations to excuse or justify their crimes. As we discovered during coding, many respondents employed one or more of Sykes and Matza's (1957) five neutralization techniques but also made reference to another technique—"justification by comparison" (Cromwell and Thurman 2003). Therefore, our analysis is based on Sykes and Matza's (1957) five neutralization techniques as well as Cromwell and Thurman's (2003) justification by comparison. In addition, to neutralization techniques, we also made note of the specific reasons participants gave for why they were engaging in tagging at the time of the field interview. That is, we asked participants what event, if any, led them to go out to tag. Participants identified a number of motivations and the data were coded and classified into four different categories: overcoming boredom, excitement and addiction, dealing with feelings, and "getting up." The data suggest that these stressors provided the "push" into offending and the ready availability of excuses and justifications allowed offenders to "freely" drift into tagging. In the next section, we present the results for stressors followed by the techniques of neutralization.

Results: Motivations

Previous studies have discussed the motivations for street taggers as a way to gain recognition and reputation among their peers (Powers 1996). Their goal, "getting up," has led to a competition among the street taggers to see who can achieve the highest status among their peers (Ferrell 1996, 1995; Powers 1996; Snyder 2009). Our data suggest that while "getting up" was also common among participants in our study, the immediate "push" into offending was the result of several stressors experienced by participants (i.e., tagging was the way they dealt with stress originating from several different sources). During the interviews, respondents often revealed that the underlying goal in participating in illegal street tagging was to avoid or relieve anxiety brought on by a variety of factors, including overcoming boredom and dealing with feelings often associated with family matters. It was these stressors that the juvenile taggers were attempting to cope with by going out to tag and they often claimed that tagging was the only way they knew how to handle them. Moreover, their attempts to relieve boredom and stress through tagging were successful and further reinforced by the exciting and addictive nature of tagging.

Overcoming boredom

The most common reason for tagging according to participants was to alleviate boredom. As HOSE stated, "I went to write cuz I didn't have nothing to do." They simply wanted to get out and do something and the only thing they perceived to be available to them was street tagging. ROOK elaborated:

> Yeah, cuz I'm bored, there's nothing to do, so I just go outside and I just walk around the hood, and just see if I find something … or if I got stamps, just stamp it on something, like on stop signs, stamp it like bam … there is no one to hang out with, so I mostly hang out with taggers, so when I'm bored I just go write with my friends.

Many respondents stated that there were no other available recreational activities to participate in within their neighborhood, unless they wanted to join a gang. For participants, gang life was not

viewed as attractive as it was to many other teenagers in their neighborhood. ROE and DEUX described the options available in their neighborhood:

> ROE: In my hood there's a lot of stuff you can get into, drugs, gangs, graffiti. I just chose to do something that is not so bad cuz I love art and seeing all the colors up in the hood.

> DEUX: Yeah, I got into tagging cuz, being from my hood, there ain't shit to do outside of school. So you either gonna be banging or you gonna be a writer. I chose to be a writer.

Thus, participants perceived that there were limited options—joining a gang or street tagging—available in their neighborhood for relieving boredom. And when weighing the available options, for example, tagging or gang banging, the former was deemed more acceptable for a variety of reasons. As we will discuss later, these reasons are also easily justified through the employment of various techniques of neutralization.

Excitement and addiction

Many interviewees discussed the rush or excitement they experience when they are in the process of street tagging. For some, the mere thought of tagging is enough to feel a "rush" and a few noted during the interview that just talking about tagging made them want to go tag. SCRAB said, "once I got started tagging, I couldn't stop. I wanted to go all the time. Shit, just talking about it makes me want to go right now." The excitement associated with tagging was tied closely with their desire to relieve boredom, that is, it is fun, it feels good, and allows them to do something meaningful or escape from the stress of home life albeit temporarily. DEUX described the reasons he tagged: "When I go I get that adrenaline rush … I just tag for the fun of it and the excitement … tagging is like a rush. Yeah I tag for the art and it helps me get things off my mind, but it really gives me a huge rush and I like that rush feeling."

For others, the rush of tagging eventually gives way to addiction. As several participants described:

> Tagging is like a drug. I love to tag, I just can't get enough of it. It's like I'm addicted to tagging, cuz it's always on my mind. I don't' even think about girls that much, cuz I'm always thinking about tagging … tagging is my life (ORE).

> … like I said I love to tag. I've been doing it so long that I don't know what to do if I did stop, it's part of me now (EIGHT).

Dealing with feelings

Another stressor that was often discussed by participants was individual feelings. It is well understood that most teenagers go through a period where they are trying to find themselves, exert their independence, and in some cases challenge the authority of parents, teachers, or other significant adults in their lives. It is during this period of self-discovery in which many teenagers find various ways with which to express themselves. Some fulfill this need by engaging in activities such as music, sports, and academics, while others engage in criminal activities. For the respondents in this study, many identified street tagging as their chosen method of expressing their feelings. For example, as several taggers explained:

> Like I said, I like the way it makes me feel. I like drawing. Like drawing and music expresses my feelings. Well, it doesn't always express my feelings, but it helps take away my anger. Like tagging helps to take away any bad feelings that I got in there. Everyone says that they tag for different reasons; some say that they are bored, some do it when they are mad, but me, I do it when Im [I am] sad or Im mad (DRE).

> I would say that I tag when Im sad or mad. I would be like, I need to go tag, to get my mind off of things. But also, I like to go tag cuz I like art. I do different styles when I have different moods (BRAG).

> … I usually just go tag to help clear my head from problems. It helps me to get things off my chest, Like, when Im tagging, nothing else matters. I can create something that someone can look at and say damn, that looks tight (POKER).

Tagging was seen as a method by which participants could express themselves. More specifically, they made explicit in their explanations that tagging was an art form (i.e., they were expressing themselves through their art).

Dealing with feelings was often associated with the stress brought on by various family issues. Many respondents claimed that their home life was unstable and volatile. For some participants, stress arose from communication issues between parent and child, poor relationships between the child and a stepparent, or a dislike of a parent's boyfriend or girlfriend. The stress associated with poverty was also a source of anxiety for participants. In addition, some participants described the stress associated with family members struggling with medical issues. BRAG described his family situation and the anxiety he felt:

> Shit. I'd say I love to tag. But outside, cuz my family be struggling, my brother thinks he gots problems cuz of his pain in his head, and my mom and my dad got diabetes, so like I just go tag cuz Im mad, Im sad. Tagging just helps me stay normal, you know what Im saying. You tag for a reason, you know what Im saying, not just cuz to tag, but for a reason. … tagging helps take my mind of things that I have to deal with at home. I clears my head… I see it as me taking my mind off my stress, and I see it as art.

OMI also associated his decision to tag with family issues:

> I started to tag cuz it got the problems out of my head and all that. Tagging gets me distracted from problems at home and at school … my family is always like yelling and screaming and shit. … one day, I was getting yelled at a lot, and I screamed back to my family … I use tagging to get over the crap at home. I tag cuz I enjoy it, and it really gets things off my mind. When you tag, you really don't think about anything else. … I guess you can say that I do drift off into tagger world, cuz I'm so focused on my tag looking good, that I don't worry too much about what's going on around me. I guess I come back to reality when my piece is done.

Participants explained their participation in street tagging as a way to deal with various stressors in their lives. These included boredom and feelings often associated with family issues but these factors alone were not necessarily enough to push young people into crime. For example, while the youths cited a lack of opportunities for legitimate recreational activities in their neighborhood they also claimed that there were plenty of opportunities for illegitimate activities associated with gangs. Yet, despite the availability of these criminal opportunities, they expressed their unwillingness to join a gang and made clear the distinction between gang banging and street tagging. Although both are illegal, participants were able to draw upon various justifications for tagging and thus were freed to drift into such behavior when they needed to relieve stress. Moreover, the excitement or "rush" taggers experienced while tagging and the addiction that followed for some, further reinforced their desire to tag and led many to persist.

Getting up

Although almost all of the participants claimed they tagged to relieve boredom or stress or to fulfill their need for excitement many also reported that they wanted to be recognized (or "get up") especially by other taggers. ACE defined the meaning of "getting up" in terms of quantity as well as quality:

> Yeah, getting up means who is tagging a lot. But it also has to be good work not some fake stuff. … When they [taggers] say that they are trying to "get up" that means that they trying, like they want more people to know them, like TORO. Like they trying to "get up" so that everyone knows 'em, just like BIKE. A lot of people is starting to know him. Like you know how the Krew XYZ, everyone's knows 'em like that you wanna get up like that.

Taggers derive much personal satisfaction from achieving their goals of recognition. When asked what it was like when he throws one up, EPIC responded, "after I'm done throwing it up, and I know

it looks good, I know a lot of people are going to see my work and say like, damn, that shits tight." MILO explained:

> Getting up the main reason why taggers go write, I mean why tag if you don't want to get up. It's like a challenge to see who can get up … like when I go out and my work is looking good, I know that everyone sees it too, like it makes me feel good to hear people talk about my piece.

Although many participants talked about being recognized by people, getting recognized is typically confined to recognition among other taggers. Should others, such as law enforcement or property owners, know the identity of the tagger, consequences may follow. Many taggers dismissed this concern as they pointed to the inability of outsiders (i.e., nontaggers) to "read" their tags. Others defined more clearly that it is other taggers, specifically older taggers, from whom they seek recognition for their art. Some respondents like ACE saw it as a contest: "Yeah, tagging for me is all about getting up so I show that I can do it. It is like a challenge and since I wanna show the old school taggers that I can get up too." However the underlying goal is still to create a positive self-image or an identity as an authentic tagger, as in the case of ORE who said: "yeah, I'm watching lil toys trying to come up, but they ain't as good as me. I like it when lil toys are all excited when they meet me. It's like I'm a super star." Other street taggers responded similarly when asked about maintaining status while at the same time damaging someone's property. When asked, SCOPA paused for a while and responded:

> Uh, uh, to tell you the truth I really don't think about nothing. Like when I go out to write, it's just that I go out to tag. I don't think about how I'm damaging someone property. Um, I don't think really think about it. I know that's stupid, but there really ain't nothing to it. But for me, I just really want to get my name up there where everyone knows you as that one name. But outsiders don't have a clue of who you are. So, like to get up is to have your burns looking good, nice, and colorful. Not this small graffiti crap.

Getting up was not just a goal of the young taggers (13 to 15 years old). Even older ones (16–18 years old) expressed a desire to remain current and visible. Accordingly, staying up was at the forefront of their attention. Veteran street tagger SCRAB, who had been tagging for over four years and was well known for his style within the graffiti underworld, still strove to maintain his "up" status. He claimed: "Yeah my nigga, I'm up, you know this. You can't go anywhere in the city and not see my work. But damn, I see some other lil bitches trying to copy my shit, so I gotta keep out doing their lil fake ass shit. I don't care if the law knows me, I'm gonna stay up."

Neutralizing tagging

As participants offered several reasons for why they tag—to relieve boredom, cope with stress, feel the "rush" and addiction, and getting up they were invariably followed by a number of justifications for their offending. According to Sykes and Matza (1957), neutralizations are used by the individual as a way to protect their self-image in the face of illegal behavior. Thus, one accepts responsibility for committing the crime but at the same time denies the pejorative motive through various excuses and justifications. Our analyses demonstrated that street taggers relied primarily on the following neutralizations: denial of injury, denial of victim, appeal to higher loyalties, denial of responsibility, and justification by comparison. Results are presented in order by the frequency with which offenders employed the various techniques of neutralization in order from the most to least common.

Denial of injury

The most common neutralization technique used by street taggers was to deny that they hurt anyone by spraying graffiti onto property. Street taggers admitted that they engaged in illegal behavior but argued that the act was acceptable since "no one was really hurt." Respondents recalled the act of

street tagging as "not hurting anyone," or "it's just paint." As ROOK stated, "It is just paint. I mean why do they gotta try to lock up taggers for writing, I mean, we are not hurting anyone. It is just vandalism. Jail is for bad people that hurt someone. Like, they can fix graffiti by just painting over it, it ain't hurting anyone."

Numerous street taggers believed their street tags did not result in any major damages to the places where they put up their tags and any minor damages could be fixed easily. Some respondents assumed that the property owners had insurance to fix the damages, which further strengthened their belief that they caused no real harm. In response to the question, "How do you feel about tagging on someone's property?" SKAT responded, "Ok well truthfully, naw, I don't care. I like writing too much. I mean, it's not like I'm doing anything serious by taggin' up someone's wall. Shit that's what insurance is for (laughter)." ETORI had a similar response: "I'm not hurting anyone with my art work. It is just paint, if they don't like it, then they can just repaint over my stuff." Other street taggers, like MILO, claimed that their crimes helped his neighborhood, while at the same time blaming the city for selectively taking graffiti down only in certain neighborhoods. When MILO was told that it does hurt the city since it costs money to take it down, he responded with:

> So, are you saying the city ain't got the money to buy a little paint? Hell they got money to take down graffiti in the white neighborhoods, why not ours? The city gots money, they don't just want to pay someone to cover up graffiti, see, the way I see it, I'm not really hurting anyone with my graffiti, I'm just helping my hood look more like my own.

Still other street taggers denied injury by downplaying the consequences because they did not see their actions as harmful to individuals. When street tagger LOBA was asked if he was concerned about the consequences of committing illegal graffiti, he replied, "Shit, really naw. Graffiti is just some paint on someone's wall. The police don't care about some 'lil paint on some random wall. We are not hurting anyone with paint and we are not bangin'."

Not only did many taggers deny that their actions were harmful to anyone or anything (the city), some believe that their work benefited the community. Similarly, ROOK claimed that he was not hurting anyone and in fact he was helping the city and its employees: "I'm not hurting anyone, in fact I'm giving workers something to do … it's like I'm keeping them on the job. … I mean I helped make the train station look better with some art work." HOSE echoed these sentiments by claiming, "… when we go we try to make it different and good. We're making the city look good with our artwork." Often these claims were accompanied by "justification by comparison" as offenders referenced other types of offenders, such as gang bangers, robbers, or terrorists, as causing harm while defining their own offenses as artwork rather than graffiti and meant to make the city look good (see discussion below). For example, SCOPA stated, "it ain't like I'm some terrorist you know … we are just writers, making the city look better."

Denial of victim

The second most common neutralization technique employed by taggers was denial of victim. Rather than denying a victim based on the idea that the victim deserved punishment, taggers portrayed their victims as vague abstractions. They claimed that the victim was either unknown or absent and in doing so, they sought to minimize the victim as well as their own illegal behavior. When asked how he selected the locations to tag, GAME responded, "Abandoned buildings are open for people to tag 'em, you know. I mean they're abandoned so they're gonna tag it up anyways 'cuz nobody's gonna use it." He continued with this reasoning when asked to rank his target selection by preference:

> … I'd tag an abandoned building first, cuz it's easier, and then the streets, then a business last. I mean no one cares about the abandoned buildings, 'cuz if they did they wouldn't be abandoned right? No one cares about the abandoned buildings, so it's ok to tag 'em up.

In GAME's explanation, he could not associate the abandoned building with an actual human victim (i.e., the owner) and therefore he showed no regret for his actions. Likewise, DRAW did not feel bad for tagging up vacant buildings as he perceived them as "free space to write on since no one owns or cares for them." He added, "I'm not hurting anyone since no one owns that old building, that's why it's abandoned." Their neutralization was based on their belief that no one owned the property since it was left in disarray; therefore they were able to avoid feelings of guilt. In short, the state of the building indicated to the offenders that there was no owner and thus it allowed them to claim that there were no "real" victims to their actions.

Appeal to higher loyalties

Street taggers often claimed their actions were only committed in response to the demands of friends or groups to which they belonged, in this case "tagging krews." Tagging krews are comprised of one or more individual street taggers who join together under one group name. When tagging, a street tagger can either tag as an individual or as part of a "tagging krew." Respondents who were in "tagging krews" indicated that they were pressured to continue tagging even when they expressed a desire to quit. Membership in a tagging krew engendered a sense of obligation in its members and many respondents stated that they continued tagging because of their loyalty to their peers or krews. When asked if he had told his tagging krew that he wanted to quit, SCOPA responded:

> Oh yes, like the Krew, I mean, like the little clique I'm with. I tell 'em every once and a while that I wanna quit. But like when they wanna go do this and tag that, I'm like "yeah, I'll go. But, um," I'll go but, I don't know, you know. I'll say, you gotta stop one day or another. But they're like yeah you ain't gonna stop now. So, I guess that they don't take me serious when I tell 'em that I want to stop. Like, uh, it's kind of hard because you don't want to let them down. Especially since you are the one that started it with them and made the little clique, you know. Like I'm the one that started them. Like, I use to be the one to say "let's go tag" you know. I'm pretty sure that they liked it, since now they are the ones that want to go tag more.

He went on to explain that while his goal was to end his participation in tagging, he maintained his allegiance to the krew by merely reducing his role rather than ceasing completely. "Yeah, we have been tagging together for a couple years now, and if I walk away, I will feel bad for leaving them, so now when I go tag with them. I try not to paint, I'm just the lookout guy" (SCOPA).

Several of the respondents admitted to trying to quit, but were pressured to continue offending out of loyalty to their peers. ACE reported trying to quit but explained how hard it was: "Yep, I still go out to tag, 'cuz like I said I do it just 'cuz of my friends. They hound on me to go, and if I don't go, they mess with me, and I can't have them calling me weak." As ACE's response illustrates, his actions were based on the desire to "save face" within his peer group.

When respondents invoked the appeal to higher loyalties technique, they often stated that their delinquency was acceptable since it did not directly benefit themselves. "Fitting in" and "saving face" for these juveniles was more important to them than following the law. Some acknowledged the potential harm of tagging, but believed that they must break the law to stay attached to or accepted by their peer group. It was common for respondents who tagged with a group to excuse their actions based on their loyalty to their street "tagging krews." Echoing this was OMI who said, "I go out to tag cuz of my krew, not for me. In fact most of the time I don't even tag my own street name." Other respondents made similar claims such as LOBA who said: "Naw nigga, I'm not slowing down. Fuck it. I got show up for my krew."

Denial of responsibility

Respondents also neutralized the harm of their behaviors by denying responsibility for their actions. In denying responsibility, respondents were able to denounce guilt by blaming their actions on extenuating circumstances. While taggers stated that they knew they committed a delinquent act, they often blamed their actions on outside forces such as their neighborhoods. Consequently

respondents stated that their neighborhood was either too trashy or did not have anything else for them to do so they just tagged it up. Street tagger AGRAM illustrated this belief:

> My hood is full of trash and graffiti. People in my hood don't care if there is graffiti up everywhere. Shit, the city don't care about my hood. Hell when I walk 'bout my hood, I see all da graffiti and I just wanna hit it up too. It's like the walls in my hood are telling me to tag. I hear them calling my name errday [everyday] when I walk home.

A number of street taggers reported committing illegal acts because their neighborhood did not offer anything else for them. When asked why they started to participate in tagging respondents such as DEUX claimed, "Being from my hood, there ain't shit to do outside of school. So you either gonna be banging or you gonna be a writer."

Whereas some respondents blamed their neighborhoods, others blamed their actions on drugs and alcohol. Although a majority of respondents reported not using drugs or alcohol during the commission of their crimes because it slowed their response time, a few reported committing crimes only when they were under the influence of drugs and alcohol. DAI stated, "I take bars [Xanax] before I goes out en tag 'cuz it helps relax me." When asked if he would go tag if he didn't have any Xanax, DAI respondent: "naw, when I'm on bars, it makes me wanna go tag." Similarly, EIGHT said: "when I'm high, I'm down to write. But when I'm barred out, I'm really down to get up."

Justification by comparison

During the interviews respondents made numerous comparisons between their activities as taggers and the actions of other criminals. Research on juvenile property offenders has demonstrated that delinquents often compare their criminal acts to other serious acts to minimize their own criminal behaviors (Cromwell and Thurman 2003). Respondents often downplayed their delinquency by stating that they were really not hurting anyone since it was just paint, but did so while at the same time comparing themselves to violent offenders. For example, TAPP compared his delinquency to robbery when he stated: "it's not like we robbed someone, we were just throwing it up." PUSH's response also reflected this belief: "I don't see why the cops mess with us; we are just writers getting up. I mean we aren't banging, and we ain't shooting anyone. Don't the cops have more serious shit to worry about than fucking with us?" SCOPA justified tagging by comparing it to terrorism saying:

> [Police] go through your cell phone. It's not like they caught me tagging. I'm just walking you know. But the cops have an idea who I am you know. It ain't like I'm some terrorist you know. Searching through my cell like I have terrorist contacts, hell, they be trippin' you know. We are just writers, making the city look better.

AGRAM compared tagging with drug dealing:

> … they [police] should not be worrying about writers and be more worrying about some real criminals like those dope dealers. They are the real bad guys. … I add color to the city of boring, bland, concrete walls. Those drug dealers are the ones who fuck people up by making them junkies so that they end up stealing shit. …

When asked if he thought he was being treated fairly by authorities, SCOPA responded, "Not when I ain't doing nothing, you know. They can't treat me like a wanted criminal just 'cuz they have an idea that I'm a tagger, I mean, come on, it's just paint."

Downplaying the seriousness of illegal graffiti was a common theme among the respondents. Almost all of the street taggers argued that street tagging crime was minor when compared to violent crimes such as robbing, gang banging, or terrorism. Respondents often saw themselves as contributors to their community's aesthetics, and were thereby able to avoid the feeling of being labeled as a criminal. Thirteen year old street tagger MAO expressed his sentiments regarding graffiti by saying: "I don't see what the big deal is all about. I mean it's just paint, they can take it down anytime. It's not like we are beating someone up, we're making the city look beautiful."

One of the final questions poised to respondents was to ask (while taking into consideration that they knew they were breaking the law, and that they knew that they were damaging someone's property), why they still chose to tag? Respondent SCOPA explained:

> Truthfully, when I go out to tag, I really don't think about it as much. I mean I don't think about breaking the law or damaging the city's property. But then again when uh, my dad was talking to me about it, he was telling me "how would you like it if it was your wall? What if they're going through problems? And now they got a wall that's been damaged, now they got to go in their pocket and pay for it to be re-painted." Sometimes I do think about it 'cuz I do believe in karma, you know "what goes around, comes around." But then again like, I know it's just the stupid decisions that I make.

Discussion

In this study, we examined the reasons active juvenile street taggers gave to explain their participation in street tagging. Results of 25 field interviews with active offenders suggested that they committed their crimes to overcome boredom, to fulfill a need for excitement, to relieve stress associated with family issues, and to "get up" or gain recognition as an authentic tagger. These stressors precipitated their immediate decision to engage in tagging; however, the data also suggested that the ready availability of justifications made the decision to participate in tagging relatively easy. To overcome any feelings of guilt or shame, participants drew on a number of linguistic devices to neutralize their feelings and justify their reasons for offending. These neutralizations included denial of injury, denial of victim, appeal to higher loyalties, denial of responsibility and justification by comparison.

The primary goal of tagging was to alleviate boredom. Many participants indicated that a lack of available recreational activities within their neighborhood left few options for relieving their boredom and in some cases, participants claimed that the only options available to them were gang membership or tagging. However, all reported that joining a gang was not an option which they considered seriously and they made clear distinctions between tagging and other crimes including joining a gang. In other words, they easily explained their participation in tagging by offering a comparison to other crimes (i.e., justification by comparison) with the former being much less serious. For participants, tagging was simply seen as the only viable option for relieving boredom.

Taggers also reported that they chose to tag because of the "rush" or excitement that tagging provided them. Interviews illustrated that they often experienced a physical rush while committing their crimes. Although the act of tagging typically lasts a short time, under 10 minutes, the feeling of excitement may last for hours and even days. Again, participants often claimed their involvement was due to a lack of legitimate alternatives and thus excitement was closely tied with their desire to relieve boredom. By referencing the structural factors that limited their access to legitimate recreational activities, for example high community rates of poverty and unemployment as well as limited community supported recreational opportunities; participants were easily able to deny responsibility for their behaviors. The good feelings brought on by tagging and, in some cases just thinking about tagging, were also ways in which participants said they relieved stress. Many respondents said their family situation was a source of stress brought on by poor communication between parent and child, poor relationships with a parent's partner as well as the anxiety associated with poverty.

Once a tag was completed, participants often indicated they felt not only a "rush" feeling from knowing they completed it, but also felt a sense of pride knowing that other writers would see their work. Respondents reported participating in the illegal behavior to be recognized, or as they stated—to "get up." In so doing, respondents continuously attempted to tag in order to have something they did be noticed by others, regardless whether they were individually identified. Although the general public may not be able to associate the moniker with an individual, the mere fact that their tag was visible to the public and peers superseded any feelings of guilt over engaging in tagging. Their ability

to maintain this positive identity as an "up" tagger is made easier when one can deny their behavior causes injury or deny that there is a victim. Taggers frequently claimed that tagging did not hurt anyone and that it was easily repaired by the business owner or city maintenance workers. Denial of injury was frequently invoked because respondents did not view their activity as harmful (i.e., they did not inflict physical harm on a person). By excusing their offending on the idea of what they did was "not as serious," they could align their actions as being justified. When respondents denied the victim they were not being vindictive but instead based this rationalization on the property owner's absence. In general, individuals have a more tolerable attitude toward crime when the victim is unknown (Landsheer, Hart, and Kox 1994). Most taggers never have the opportunity to meet those who are harmed by their criminal behavior; in turn this makes it more likely to claim that no one was injured. This resulted in the respondents' ability to detach themselves from guilt and ownership of the illegal behavior. In addition, participants who were active within a "tagging krew" often invoked an appeal to higher loyalties when discussing their tagging. Their actions were viewed as acceptable for the sake of their "krew" or similarly situated peers rather than solely for the sake of self-gain.

Unlike many street crimes, the reasons taggers give for participating in tagging are not based on monetary rewards but rather as a means to alleviate boredom, relieve stress, experience excitement or to be recognized (get up) for their artistic talents. Our findings suggest that tagging is a way to fulfill these needs and that taggers easily excuse and justify their actions. Although participants indicated that their needs could have been satisfied through conventional and acceptable means, access to such activities were not available within their neighborhoods. As a result, the taggers can easily justify the absence of causing any "real" harm.

A considerable amount of research has been conducted on neutralization and crime, however, research on active juvenile offenders particularly those engaged in tagging is limited. Our field interviews with 25 young male street taggers offered a glimpse into this understudied world and provided data to increase our understanding of why taggers chose to offend. We do note that there are limitations in our research, including the possibility that the accounts provided by the taggers in our study are different from those offenders whom we did not interview. As such we cannot know whether our findings are generalizable to other taggers. However, we do think based on the interviewers' many years of experience with the community and juveniles, that they do represent some or possibility most of them.

Notes on contributors

ARTHUR VASQUEZ is a doctoral student in criminology at the University of Texas at Dallas and Senior Lecturer of Criminology at the University of Texas at Arlington. His primary research interests include juvenile delinquency, gangs, graffiti, neutralization theory, reality/choice theory, and ethnographic methods.

LYNNE M. VIERAITIS is Associate Professor and Program Head of Criminology at the University of Texas at Dallas. Her research interests include identity theft, crime policy, and inequality and violence. She is co-author (with Heith Copes) of the book, *Identity Thieves: Motives and Methods* published by Northeastern University Press.

References

Agnew, Robert. 1994. "The Techniques of Neutralization and Violence." *Criminology* 32(4):555–80.

Austin, Joe. 2001. *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art became an Urban Crisis in New York City*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ball, Richard A. 1968. "An Empirical Explanation of Neutralization Theory." Pp. 255–265 in *Approaches to Deviance: Theories, Concepts, and Research Findings*, edited by Mark Lefton, James Skipper, and Charles McCaghy. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Brown, David O. 2012. *Graffiti Arts Project. Public Safety Committee*. "City", TX.

Children's Medical Center and the Coalition for North Texas Children. 2007. "Beyond ABC: Growing up in LARGE County: Assessing our Children's Quality of Life."

Castleman, Craig. 1982. *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Coleman, James W. 2002. *The Criminal Elite: The Sociology of White-collar Crime*. 5th ed. New York: St. Martin's.
Conklin, John E. 2004. *Criminology*. 8th ed. Boston: Pearson.
Copes, Heith. 2003. "Societal Attachments, Offending Frequency, and Techniques of Neutralization." *Deviant Behavior* 24(2):101–127.
Copes, Heith and Lynne M. Vieraitis. 2009. "Understanding Identity Theft: Offenders Accounts of their Lives and Crimes." *Criminal Justice Review* 34(3):329–349.
Copes, Heith, Lynne M. Vieraitis, Stephanie M. Cardwell, and Arthur Vasquez. 2013. "Accounting for Identity Theft: The Roles of Lifestyles and Enactment." *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 29(3):351–368.
Cromwell, Paul and Quint Thurman. 2003. "The Devil Made Me Do It: Use of Neutralizations by Shoplifters." *Deviant Behavior* 24(6):535–550.
Decker, Scott H. and Barrik van Winkle. 1996. *Life in the Gang: Family, Friends, and Violence*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
Dovick, Mike. 2013. Personal Communication, August 31, 2013. Gang Intelligence Unit, School District.
Ferrell, Jeff. 1995. "Urban Graffiti: Crime, Control, and Resistance." *Youth and Society* 27(1): 73–92.
———. 1996. *Crimes of Style: Urban Graffiti* and *the Politics of Criminality*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
———. 1997. "Youth, Crime and Cultural Space." *Social Justice 24* (4):21–38
Halsey, Mark and Alison Young. 2006. "'Our Desires are Ungovernable': Writing Graffiti in Urban Space." *Theoretical Criminology* 10(3):275–306.
Hindelang, Michael. 1970. "The Commitment of Delinquents to their Misdeeds: Do Delinquents Drift?" *Social Problems* 17(20):502–509.
———. 1973. "Causes of Delinquency: A Partial Replication and Extension." *Social Problems* 20(4):471–487.
Jacobs, Bruce and Heith Copes. 2015. "Neutralizing without Drift: Criminal Commitment Among Persistent Offenders." *British Journal of Criminology* 55(2):286–302.
Klockars, Carl B. 1974. *The Professional Fence*. New York: Free Press.
Lachmann, Richard. 1988. "Graffiti as a Career and Ideology." *American Journal of Sociology* 94(2):229–250.
Landsheer, Johannes A., Hennie T. Hart, and Wolfgang Kox. 1994. "Delinquent Values and Victim Damage: Exploring the Limits of Neutralization Theory." *British Journal of Criminology* 34(1):44–53.
Lasley, James R. 1995. "New Writing on the Wall: Exploring the Middle-Class Graffiti Writing Subculture." *Deviant Behavior* 16(2):151–167.
Maruna, Shadd and Heith Copes. 2005. "What have we Learned from Five Decades of Neutralization Research?" *Crime and Justice* 32:221–320.
Matza, David. 1964. *Delinquency and Drift*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
Messerschmidt, James W. 2005. "Men, Masculinities and crime." Pp. 196–212 in *Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities*, edited by Michael Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, and Robert Connell. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Miller, Ivor. 1996. "Vandalized Names: The Search for a Title." *Race or Class* 38:49–63.
Miller, Ivor and Robert F. Thompson. 2002. *Aerosol Kingdom, Subway Painters of New York City*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
Mills, C. Wright. 1940. "Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive." *American Sociological Review* 5(6):904–913.
Minor, W. William. 1981. "Techniques of Neutralization: A Reconceptualization and Empirical Examination." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 18(2):295–318.
Mitchell, Jim, Richard A. Dodder, and Terry D. Norris. 1990. "Neutralization and Delinquency: A Comparison by Sex and Ethnicity." *Adolescence* 25(98):487–497.
Monto, Martin A., Janna Machalek, and Terri L. Anderson. 2012. "Boys Doing Art: The Construction of Outlaw Masculinity in a Portland, Oregon Graffiti Crew." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 42(3):1–32.
Pogrebin, Mark R., Paul B. Stretesky, N. Prabha Unnithan, and Gerry Venor. 2006. "Retrospective Accounts of Violent Events by Gun Offenders." *Deviant Behavior* 27(4):479–501.
Polsky, Ned. 1969. *Hustlers, Beats, and Others*. Garden City, NJ: Anchor.
Powers, Lynn, A. 1996. "Whatever Happened to the Graffiti Art Movement?" *Journal of Popular Culture* 29 (4):137–142.
Presser, Lois. 2003. "Remorse and Neutralization among Violent Male Offenders." *Justice Quarterly* 20(4):801–825.
Priest, Thomas B. and John McGrath, III. 1970. "Techniques of Neutralization: Young Adult Marijuana Smokers." *Criminology* 8:185–94.
Scott, Marvin B. and Scott M. Lyman. 1968. "Accounts." *American Sociological Review* 33(1):46–62.
Snyder, Gregory J. 2009. *Graffiti Lives: Beyond the Tag in the New York's Urban Underground*. New York: New York University Press.
Spradley, James P. 1979. *The Ethnographic Interview*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.
Stake, Robert E. 1995. *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Strauss, Anselm. L. 1987. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
Swanson, Christopher B. 2008. *Cities in Crisis: A Special Analytic Report on High School Graduation*. Bethesda, MD: Editorial Projects in Education: Research Center.

Sykes, Gresham and David Matza. 1957. "Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency." *American Sociological Review* 22:664–670.

Taylor, Myra F. 2012. "Addicted to the Risk, Recognition, and Respect that Graffiti Lifestyle Provides: Towards an Understanding of the Reasons for Graffiti Engagement." *International Journal of Mental Health Addiction* 10 (1):54–68.

———. 2013. "Toward Understanding the Street Code of Silence that Exists among Prolific Graffiti Offenders." *Victims & Offenders: An International Journal of Evidence-based Research, Policy, and Practice* 8(2):185–208.

Taylor, Myra F., Ida Marais, and Robyn Cottman. 2012. "Patterns of Graffiti Offending: Towards Recognition that Graffiti Offending is More than 'Kids Messing Around.'" *Policing & Society* 22(2):152–168.

Topalli, Volkan. 2006. "The Seductive Nature of Autotelic Crime: How Neutralization Theory Serves as a Boundary Condition for Understanding Hardcore Street Offending." *Sociological Inquiry* 76(4):475–501.

Topalli, Volkan, George E. Higgins, and Heith Copes. 2014. "A Causal Model of Neutralization Acceptance and Delinquency." *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 41(5):553–573.

U.S. Census Bureau. 2013. "*Large* County: State and County QuickFacts." Retrieved July 15, 2014 (http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48113.html).

Weisel, Deborah L. 2004. *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police: Graffiti*. Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC.

Vieraitis, Lynne M., Nicole L. Piquero, Alex R. Piquero, Stephen G. Tibbetts, and Michael Blankenship. 2012. "Do Women and Men Differ in their Neutralizations of Corporate Crime?" *Criminal Justice Review* 37(4):478–493.

Wright, Richard, Scott H. Decker, Allison K. Redfern, and Dietrich L. Smith. 1992. "A Snowball's Chance in Hell: Doing Fieldwork with Active Residential Burglars." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 29(2):148–161.