TELLING STORIES OF VIOLENCE

A qualitative study of how storytelling leads to the normalization of violent behavior and identity work among street-oriented male youth

Frøja Storm-Mathisen

Master's thesis, Sociology

Department of Sociology and Human Geography

Faculty of Social Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

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Summary

This is a master's thesis on the normalization of violent behavior and identity work among street-oriented male youth in Oslo, Norway. It is motivated by the fact that levels of violence and violent crime among young people are on the rise in the northern countries where evidence of lawlessness is seen to increase particularly within street cultures in urban areas. For this reason, it is important to understand the social forces that makes violence attractive among young people associated with street cultures. While most research in this landscape leaves people's stories out of the equation, this thesis centres its analysis on the idea that stories and storytelling have important functions that guide people to live according to their plotlines.

Based on qualitative in-depth interviews, this study attempts to flesh out how storytelling transmits street cultural values that normalize violent identity work among male youths. In the course of four months, fifteen interviews were conducted with male members of a violent street culture in the inner-eastern regions of Oslo. By taking a narrative criminology approach to investigate what role stories play in the process of normalization, the author is primarily attentive to the participants' stories, and not to the events purportedly behind their stories. The analysis discusses five identity narratives about violence by asking what stories do for their tellers and their listeners. It argues that these identity narratives are collectively shared and that the social exchange and reproduction of them play an important role in their continued normalization of violence.

This study contributes to existing knowledge on the normalization of violence in street cultures on two main grounds. On the one hand, it contributes to larger theories by offering a new approach to study normalization that illustrates narrative criminology as a fruitful framework for this inquiry. The thesis is thus original in the way that it shows how shared identity narratives that create symbolic boundaries may lead to normalization of violent behavior and identity work in street cultures. On the other hand, it contributes to our knowledge about the narrative world of young male members of violent street cultures, showing that storytelling is a fundamental strategy for how they evaluate personal challenges, navigate difficult barriers, create their sense of self and define what types of actions they accept or not. It shows how collectively shared stories are projected into the future identity work of street youth, and how certain stories may complicate their transition to successfully desisting adulthood.

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Oslo, May 2022.

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1 Introduction

Although research in the last two decades has found declining levels of violent behavior among youth[1] (Arnett 2018), the Scandinavian countries have seen a trend change in the last few years. In Norway, we see an increase in violent crime among young people (The City of Oslo and Oslo Police District 2019), in Sweden a rise of crime in general among young men (The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 2020), and in Denmark, the level of registered violent crime in the population is at its highest since 1995 (Statistics Denmark 2020).

This thesis addresses youth violence in the eastern regions of Oslo, Norway. In a Norwegian context, Oslo have been described as a uniquely 'class divided city' where prosperous groups with high socio-economic backgrounds live on the west side and those with lower status and poorer living conditions live on the east side (Ljunggren and Andersen 2017). The city is also divided regarding youth violence which is significantly more widespread on the east side (Kjenn and Bakosgjelten 2021). In Oslo, registered crimes of violence and abuse among youth increased with 54% from 2016 to 2019 (Kjenn and Bakosgjelten 2021). While the lockdown of 2020 showed decrease of -30%, 2020 still held the fourth-highest number of registered youth crime in Oslo for the last fifteen years (Kjenn and Bakosgjelten 2021, p. 6). As society has opened again, the registered youth violence has increased even more, with November of 2021 alone having a higher number of cases of violence, bodily harm, and knife threats registered among male youth in Oslo than for the whole of 2019 (Kjenn and Bakosgjelten 2021, p. 6). In the prevalence of youth violence, these changes signals the importance of increasing our knowledge about the factors that inspire, motivate, and normalize violent behavior among young men in our society.

Following the influential studies of Elijah Anderson (1990, 1999) and William Wilson (1987, 1996), much of contemporary research on youth violence has relied on the concept of 'street culture' to better understand the high prevalence of violence and other crime in poor urban neighbourhoods (e.g., Bourgois 2003; Ilan 2015; Stewart and Simons 2010). This literature provides descriptions of inner-city youths' motivations, decision-making processes, and culturally specific behaviors that precede criminal activity. But although scholars generally agree that street culture is transmitted through street socialization (Kirk and Papachristos 2011;

[1] While there are no universally accepted definitions of youth, youth are for statistical purposes often regarded as those between 15-24 years (the United Nations n.d.).

Oliver 2006; Vigil 1991, 2002, 2007), few have carefully examined the specific socialization that construct and transmit normalizing violent elements of street culture among male youth (see Brezina et al. 2004; Lauger 2014).

While researchers often assume that the process of street socialization transmits cultural ideas (see Oliver 2006), sociologists who examine non-street socialization repeatedly argue that cultural transmission often occurs during social routines, which are the basic and common activities in peoples' daily lives (see Eder and Nenga 2003; Lauger 2014). Storytelling is one form of social routine that pervades our everyday life. Like Michael Murray (2007, p. 111) states, "We are born into a narrative world, live our lives through narrative and afterwards are described in terms of narrative." In other words, storytelling is an essential social routine that allows people to communicate cultural ideas by articulating sequenced events (Lauger 2014, p. 185). While stories are orchestrated and infused with subjectivity, they are also structured in culturally appropriate ways so that the storyteller's actions appear justified to a given audience (Lauger 2014; Ochs and Capps 1996; Presser and Sandberg 2015). Narratives are therefore central to our self-definition, as Dan McAdams (1985, p. 11) have said: "We are all tellers of tales. We each seek to provide our scattered and often confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging the episodes of our lives into stories." Stories may therefore provide fruitful insights into how groups understand the meaning and consequences of their own and others behavior (Lauger 2014, p. 186).

Although violent behavior among street-oriented youth have been investigated in a range of studies, both internationally[2] and in the northern countries[3], few studies include a narrative dimension to investigate the normalization of violent behavior and identity work in youth street cultures. However, in this thesis I aim to show that the process of normalization is bound to language, and that stories collectively told and retold by street-oriented male youth is fundamental in shaping beliefs, attitudes, and aspirations that are positively attuned to violence. The overarching research problematic serving this study is therefore to investigate storytelling as a key linguistic mechanism for the normalization of violent behavior and identity work among street-oriented male youth in Oslo.

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[2] See for example Bourgois 2003; Ilan 2015; Jacobs and Wright 1999, 2006; Kirk and Papachristos 2011; Oliver 2006; Papachristos 2009; Stewart and Simons 2010; Vigil 1991, 2002, 2007.

[3] See for example Ejrnæs and Monrad 2020; Frøyland et al. 2020; Frøyland and von Soeast 2018; Homboe 2020; Petersen 2018; Solhjell et al. 2019; Sollund 2006, 2007.

For this inquiry, I have interviewed 15 young men from the east parts of Oslo. Each of the research participants have different degrees of experience with violence, however most are formerly convicted of violent offenses. I will be taking a narrative criminology approach (Fleetwood et al. 2019; Presser and Sandberg 2015) to inspect their stories – a choice motivated by the fact that narrative criminology pays special attention to people's language and emphasizes that crime and other harmful action may best be seen as a function of the stories that actors tell about themselves and others (Presser 2012, p. 5). Building on my overarching research problematic, I investigate three research questions.

The first question will guide the first analysis Chapter by asking: Which stories about violence do young men tell when talking about their youth in a street culture in Oslo? Here, I examine the meeting between my participants and their socio-cultural context. In order to grasp the normalization of violent behavior and identity work among street-oriented youth, I find it necessary to gain insight into the social terrain in which my participants tell their stories. This choice is guided by a reflection that if I were to not include how their stories relate to their specific social context, I could run the risk of creating a divide with those unfamiliar, potentially forming a gap between the participants and myself, as well as losing my audience. Doing a closer reading of their socio-cultural context thus allow me to trace the participants context specific relations and view their stories as performatives of this meeting.

The following Chapter moves the focus over to the participants personal and collective identity constructions by asking: What stories do street-oriented male youth tell when constructing their personal and collective identities? In this Chapter I am particularly interested in which stories make violence attractive, and how stories of violent participation can be interpreted as a way of constructing identity. The young men involved in this study often communicated essential cultural ideas when telling stories about their personal experiences with violence. In turn this helped them contextualize and shape elements of their street culture, by reinforcing how, why, when, and for who violence is normalized. In this Chapter I will therefore examine how the participants narratively create symbolic boundaries that mark the difference between groups of people and their violent behavior.

Then in the third analysis Chapter I follow up these issues with a research question that focus on one of the fundamental ideas of narrative criminology, which is that stories, when

internalized by human actors, may inspire and shape future action and identity work (Presser 2016; Presser and Sandberg 2015). I ask: How do these stories condition the present and future-oriented self-narrative construction of young men affiliated with a violent street culture in Oslo? By investigating the participant's present self-narrative constructions through three case studies, this Chapter considers exposure to violence and the willingness for violent identity work in premature exits to adulthood to argue that stories are embedded in and re-produce social practices that normalize violent identity work. In turn, these stories are hard to 'get out' of.

The thesis will have the following structure: Chapter 2 is devoted to a review of literature specific to my inquiry. In Chapter 3, a theoretical outline of stories leading to normalization is presented. Thereafter, Chapter 4 provides a review of the methodological approach used to collect and construct the data. Then I move on to the analysis in the subsequent chapters. In Chapter 5, research participants' stories about violence in their socio-cultural context provide important insights to understand how the normalization of violent identity work in youth street cultures are guided by stories. Chapter 6 illustrates how narrative boundary work is an essential part of the normalization work among violent street-oriented male youth. In Chapter 7, I present three case studies to show how stories, when internalized by human actors, condition future action and identity work. Then in Chapter 8, I discuss my main findings and their contribution to existing knowledge. And finally in Chapter 9 I offer the conclusion of my work.

2 Street culture, violence stories, and the normalization of violence

Among contemporary sociologists, culture is generally viewed as comprised of schematic structures that organize information and develop strategies for action (DiMaggio 1997; Swidler 1986; see also Kirk and Papachristos 2011). In that sense, culture is seen to supply a repertoire of tools, that consist of symbols, stories, rituals, and worldviews, which are used by individual actors to shape their interpretations of situations and contexts (Swidler 1986). As Ann Swidler (1986) argues, people have a “toolkit” that not only allows them to navigate an array of different situations but also actively engage in manipulating and constructing elements of culture. Definitions of culture may thus be defined, measured, or observed independently of specific behaviors like violence (Lauger 2014).

Street cultures may be viewed as complex systems of cognitive structures organized around a primary framework that emphasizes a struggle for surviving on the streets (Lauger 2014, p. 184). Because street cultures refer to the values and way of life of special groups, they are often viewed as subcultures (Sandberg 2008b, p. 76). Much of the existing research on street culture revolves around active and symbolic youth groups and their forms of expression (Sandberg 2008b, p. 76). This focus date back to early contributions by researchers in the wake of the so-called Chicago School[4], which work spun around the concept of deviation. From the early 1970s, the British Birmingham School then made the most important contributions, with the key concept being resistance, where the main idea was that oppressed groups, most often based on the working class and out of step with the middle class’s values, formulated an active rebellion against the dominant culture (Sandberg 2008b, p. 76). Today, research on street culture identifies a range of cultural devices that influence behavior, with interpersonal violence being of particular interest (Lauger 2014, p. 184).

Much of recent work on violent subcultures draw on Elijah Anderson’s (1999) seminal work *The Code of the Street*. Anderson (1999, p. 33) defined street codes as “a set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior, particularly violence. The rules prescribe both proper comportment and the proper way to respond if challenged. They regulate the use of violence and so supply a rationale allowing those inclined to aggression to precipitate violent encounters in an approved way.” According to Anderson (1999), the code of the street evolves from a

[4] For an introduction, see Hauge (2001).

street culture that rests on assumptions about respect and deference which provide devices for choosing when and who violence is accepted for. In that sense, street codes also reflect a "toolkit" (Swidler 1986) that allows individuals to make sense of and successfully navigate interpersonal violent interactions (see Lauger 2014).

There is significant empirical support for Anderson's (1999) claim that adhering to the code contributes to violence in street cultures, both within the US (see Rich and Grey 2005; Brunson and Stewart 2006) and in Europe (Brookman et al. 2011; Sandberg 2008ab, 2009ab). There are also many ethnographic studies supportive of Anderson's claims of street cultures, which have not been specifically designed to assess the code of the street. For example, research on retaliation (Jacobs and Wright 2006), snitching (Rosenfeld, Jacobs, and Wright 2003), street masculinity (Mullins 2006), street violence (Wright, Brookman, and Bennett 2006), drug markets (Marsh 2020), and rap battles (Lee 2009) have highlighted the value placed on physically standing up for oneself in impoverished areas and among street-life participants. In other words, there is good reason to be confident in the code.

However, some scholars have questioned the lack of specificity of Anderson's (1999) street codes. For example, Loïc Wacquant (2002, p. 1491) writes that "The code is variously described as a set of 'informal rules,' an 'etiquette,' a 'value orientation,' an 'oppositional culture' and the objective regularities of conduct they prescribe, but also as a 'script,' a set of roles and their patterned expectations, a personal identity, a 'milieu,' and even as the 'fabric of everyday life.'" According to Wacquant (2002), Anderson leaves much of the discussion out, creating an abstract rather than a specified analysis. Likewise, Sveinung Sandberg and Willy Pedersen (2009) have criticized Anderson (1999) for abstractly linking codes, individual thinking, and action, to paint African American ghetto life[5] in broad strokes that avoids specifying the place of codes in culture and explicitly frame a theoretical outline.

Although Anderson (1999, p. 33) allows some flexibility by acknowledging that the code supplies a rationale for violent behavior and that people may 'code switch', he still devotes little attention to codes as symbolic resources that individuals may reference and use as strategies to make sense of their lives and construct meaningful identities (Brookman, Copes,

[5] Anderson's (1999) street codes were drawn form an ethnographic study of predominantly African American neighborhoods in Philadelphia, US.

and Hochstetler 2011, p. 402; see also Jimerson and Oware 2006). In turn, he has been criticized for presenting overly deterministic interpretations of the code (see Wacquant 2002).

In regard to this thesis' main research problem, codes are not the same as stories. However, that does not mean they do not speak of similar things. While most research on the use of street codes in street cultures focus on the subcultural relevant expectations that compel violent behavioral responses, some authors view codes with a greater attention to narrative forms, and thus in a less deterministic fashion that focus on how actors *select* and *use* codes. Departing from other examinations of the code of the street which tend to examine how codes encourage or facilitate action, Fiona Brookman, Heith Copes, and Andy Hochstetler (2011) examine how using the code of the street in narratives reflects people's ongoing construction of identity that situate their actions within a subcultural context of respect. While they agree that codes affect the way people interpret and respond to situations, their focus is primarily on how participants use the code as a 'formula story' (Loseke 2007) when discussing their own participation in violence. By building on insights from narrative identity, they discuss how inmates use references to street codes as plot devices in stories that explain or account for their past engagement in violence (Brookman, Copes, and Hochstetler 2011, p. 399). Their participants stories are thus seen to connect personal identity with generally accepted subcultural identities. In their view, codes are accultured linguistic devices that violent actors may use to present a consistent image of self when asked to explain their behavior (Brookman, Copes, and Hochstetler 2011, p. 403).

Another inspirational study that relates stories to street cultures, is Timothy Lauger's (2014) study of how personal stories about violent events shape and transmit street culture among active gang members and street-oriented youth. Lauger (2014, p. 195) writes that, "Stories exemplify how individuals and groups negotiate and transmit the meaning of lived experience during routine interactions. Youths must make sense of local violence and be able to predict how and when it will occur in the future." He claims youths understanding of violent events develops from the first exposure to violence narratives at an early age, but that youths do not become storytellers before they start to witness and participate in violence themselves (Lauger 2014, p. 195). Lauger (2014, p. 196) observes that because youth actively and creatively transmit street culture during routine conversations, "street culture is neither static nor homogeneous." He maintains that street-oriented youths' "repetitious stories of violence produce clear expectations about how contentious social interactions should unfold" (Lauger

2014, p. 196). Through storytelling about their experiences in the streets, youths variably contribute to the construction of their street subculture. Hence, “Communicative events that create, reproduce, and ascribe meaning to various frames and scripts produce subtle variations in how individuals understand the primary cognitive mechanisms that define street culture” (Lauger 2014, p. 196). These meanings then evolve with new experiences and new conversations, because as youths tell stories they also creatively interpret and employ new cultural understandings of their world and themselves.

Sveinung Sandberg, Sébastien Tutenges, and Heith Copes (2015) are also interested in stories of violence. Drawing on narrative analysis, their study examines stories of violence among a population of incarcerated Norwegian drug dealers. Their findings suggest that stories of violence are ambiguous in several ways: they are generally open-ended, they form a platform for scrutinizing issues that otherwise tend to lie hidden in the dark, they are oftentimes cyclical, repeating themes and preserve uncertain evaluations that leaves much of the interpretive work to the listener, and that stories therefore are “good at being several things at once” (Frank 2012, p. 389). Sandberg, Tutenges, and Copes (2015, p. 1182) argue that although it is unavoidable, simplification of ambiguous stories and repertoires of stories in the scholarly analysis is problematic because it runs the risk of producing stereotypes of drug dealers and others, either as “rational businessmen, violent ‘gangstas’, conventionally oriented citizens or as changing selves in treatment.” They claim that more than being the one or the other, their detailed study of drug dealers reveals that they are in fact all of these things at once. Thus, “Storytelling may be the way they deal with this complexity” and therefore stories are particularly useful and important for groups with extreme experiences (Sandberg, Tutenges, and Copes 2015, p. 1182).

Now, the normalization of violence literature is both colorful and well-established, stretching over a vast variety of contexts[6], however stories are given little attention. Particularly scholars who study the normalization of violence in inner-city neighborhoods (see Dunlap et al. 2009; Ng-Mak et al. 2002) leave a limited space for storytelling. Nevertheless, there are some scholars who focus on storytelling as an important mechanism leading to normalization of violence, albeit not among street youth. Alisa Kessel’s (2022) recent work on ‘rape culture’ is

[6] For example, in war zones (Clarno 2009; Gupta 2019; Haleem 2020), state politics (Jackson et al. 2021; Margold 1999), sporting events and recreational activities (Bloom and Smith 1996; Curry 1993; Roberts and Benjamin 2000), parenting (Dunlad et al 2009; Kotanen 2022), nursing homes and other hospital settings (Pich et al. 2010; Virkki 2007), commercial kitchens through food media (Meiser and Pantumsinchai 2021), and in heterosexual relationships (Mayeza and Mulqueeny 2022; McCarry and Lombard 2016; Wood 2001).

a great example. Kessel (2022, p. 132) defines 'rape culture' as*:* "a set of intersubjective and collectively reproduced myths, discourses, and practices which individuals use to assign interpretations of rape victimhood and perpetration, innocence and guilt, and power and powerlessness that, in turn, reproduce a culture that normalizes rape and other sexual violence as an effective (though outwardly condemned) way to reinforce relations of subordination." Her analysis illustrate a culture that entail stories about violence which is represented in film and television, in the law, in news coverage, music, and various social media to argue that such stories combined create myths, discourses, and practices of a culture to form an interpretative framework that normalizes violence (Kessel 2022, p. 132).

Another example from the normalization of violence literature that implement stories is Joshua Woods, Karen Weiss, and Brent Boyd's (2018) study of the normalization of violence in the landscape of a large mid-Atlantic college campus. By asking their participants to recall reactions to observed fights and give detailed descriptions of their thoughts and feelings, their findings suggest that the normalization of violence has limits, that there are normative boundaries in violent events, and that most of their participants held an ethic that disparages inequity in physical confrontations which placed limits on the intensity and destructiveness of violent encounters (Woods, Weiss, and Boyd 2018, p. 181). Their study suggests that the normalization of violence involves a learning process where personal experiences with violence accumulate to the point where it becomes normal. By focusing on the broader social system their study also challenges scholars to explain how even the most undesirable aspects of everyday life, like interpersonal violence, may be smoothly incorporated into society, its social networks and institutions (Woods, Weiss, and Boyd 2018, p. 181).

In short, although scholars who investigate the normalization of violence in street subcultures have left a limited space for stories, the studies mentioned in this Chapter acknowledge why it is important to include a narrative perspective to this analysis. In line with Brookman, Hochstetler, and Copes (2015) I argue that focusing on stories to understand the normalization of violent identity work becomes fruitful when connecting identity narratives to generally accepted subcultural narratives of violence. This study is therefore aimed at contributing to research on the normalization of violent behavior and identity work in street cultures, not as a substitute or alternative to other approaches, but as a forward moving addition to an already vibrant literature.

But before I present my theoretical framework in the next Chapter, I want to grapple a bit further with the concept of 'normalization.' Normalization is first and foremost about a process where stigmatized or deviant individuals, groups, or behaviors become included in as many features of 'normal' life as possible (Sandberg 2012, p. 373). Yet, these changes are often searched for at the population level (Shiner 2009), making them into objective categories (Aldridge et al. 2011). However, in this thesis I will take a different approach.

Instead of seeking to understand the normalization of beliefs, attitudes, and aspirations favourable of violence as objective or neutral concepts, I will view them more as nodal points in discourses (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) or as tools in symbolic boundary work (Lamont and Molnár 2002). In my use of the concept, normalization should therefore not be taken to indicate that a majority of male youth engage in violent offenses or create violent identities. But rather that stories of violence have become so common within a particular socio-cultural context that there is an increased motivation to commit violent crimes and create a violent persona.

This involves a change in focus from macro- to micro-social processes (Shiner 2009), where I view normalization as referring to a process where collective, group-based conceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of violent behavior function to make violent identities desired and normal within one social network. As Sandberg (2012, pp. 373-374) has pointed out regarding the normalization of illegal drug use, an important part of such an analysis is attempting to understand why people say the things they do, or to analyse 'talk as action' (Atkinson and Coffey 2003, p. 121) in a framework of narrative criminology (Presser 2009).

3 Toward a theoretical outline of stories leading to normalization

In seeking to find a fruitful theoretical framework where stories leading to normalization may become visible, I have combined perspectives on narratives, identities, and symbolic boundaries into one “singular theoretical umbrella” (Copes 2016, p. 196). More precisely, I will take a narrative criminology perspective on narratives and identity combined with the concept of symbolic boundaries to investigate which stories are told and how they shape personal and collective identities that normalize violent identity work.

Narrative criminology is a relatively new theoretical perspective that studies stories themselves, rather than the events allegedly behind stories. The American sociologist Lois Presser first coined the term ‘narrative criminology’ in 2009. Since then, there has been a growing body of literature emerging under this umbrella[7]. A collective first step, or movement, toward narrative criminology is presented in the publication of the edited collection *Narrative Criminology: Understanding Stories of Crime* (2015). Here, Lois Presser and Sveinung Sandberg (2015, p. 1) define narrative criminology as “any inquiry based on the view of stories as instigating, sustaining, or effecting desistance from harmful action.” To study narrative criminology thus essentially means studying how narratives inspire and motivate harmful action, and how narratives are used to make sense of harm. It is a constructionist approach, meaning it does not view narratives as describing events – either accurately or inaccurately – and it does not consider narratives as vehicles for thoughts or suppressed voices (Presser and Sandberg 2015, pp. 1-2). So, how then do narrative criminologists view narratives?

Most attempts at definitions of narratives, used synonymously with stories in this thesis, agree on a narrative being a subjective, temporal representation of an event or series of events (see Labov and Waletzky 1967; Ricoeur 1984, 1994). However, narrative criminologists do not view the characteristic of temporality as enough to explain a narrative. For example, a recipe, a to-do list or an instruction manual are all usually temporally ordered sequences of events, yet these are not something we typically understand as stories. Indeed, stories are also imbued with intentionality and purpose that make some sort of a morally transcendent point (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 2; see also Bruner 1990; Polletta et. al. 2011).

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[7] See for example Andersen and Sandberg 2019; Carrabine 2016; Colvin 2015; Copes and Ragland 2016; Dollinger 2018; Fleetwood 2014, 2015, 2016; Gilmer 2017; Ioannou et al. 2015, 2017; Katz 2016; Kurtz and Upton 2017; Presser 2012; Saarikkomäki 2016; Sandberg et al. 2015; Ugelvik 2016; Yardley et al. 2015.

First, narrative criminologists view narratives as one form of *discourse*. Discourses systematically form the objects of which they speak by structuring knowledge and social practice (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 3). Narratives are thus viewed as embedded in, emerging from, and upholding social institutions to achieve hegemony for some dominating narrative structures (Foucault 1970) or competing with several discourses each with their own set of narratives (Foucault 1978). According to Michel Foucault (1972, p. 117), a discourse is "made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined." In other words, discourses are broader structures of language that determine the possible speech acts of actors in a field (Foucault 1972, pp. 49, 122). In that sense, they function as a way of structuring areas for knowledge and social practice so that people can attach meaning to events and experiences. However, Foucauldian discourse analysis is controversial, and especially his early work has been criticized for lacking agency and active subjects (Sandberg 2009b, p. 527; see also Fairclough 1992).

Narrative criminology falls in line with this criticism and assumes that people are self-conscious and active. However, it also emphasises that cultural discourses form the background of people's accounts (see Sandberg 2009ab). For example, when research participants are asked questions during interviews, these may evoke different discourses to respond to, as well as varying definitions posed in the interview situation. So, while Foucault (1972) notes that discourse is "language in action," narrative criminologists further note that although viewing narratives as embedded within larger discourses highlights their power and the power relations in which they are implicated, it also highlights and contextualizes the limits of the individual narrator's agency (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 3).

By asking among other things which particular narrative discourses constructs crime, and how, narrative criminology concretizes the discursive focus of constitutive criminology (Presser and Sandberg 2019, p. 133). This means that narratives are treated as *shaping experience*. Ultimately, this view blurs the distinction between narrative and experience, where the latter is always understood and acted upon as its storied version. Viewed this way, narratives are seen to produce experience as experience is seen to produce narratives (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 4). Presser (2009, p. 181) calls this the "constitutive view of narrative," and it is by adopting this view that narrative criminology, both theoretically and methodologically, focuses on *storied experience*, instead of experience per se (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 5).

One may therefore say that narrative criminology believes in a world where experience is always storied, where actions are advanced and realized through storytelling (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 287). In that sense, narrative criminologists also claim that stories 'inspire' action (Presser and Sandberg 2015; Fleetwood et al. 2019). On the one hand, stories are seen to *legitimate* acting by leading the would-be actor on, giving him a good suggestion of what to do next, thus providing a "culturally feasible path of action" (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 288). On the other hand, stories are seen to also *captivate* actors, because a story's meaning attracts audiences and storytellers to live according to its plotline – an attraction that is both affective and practical (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 288).

Yet, despite being closely related, the relationship between narrative and experience is viewed as highly problematic (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 3). One reason is that our experiences are constantly changing, meaning that our narratives also constantly must change. In other words, "we have no once-and-for-all life story," and neither does the story of a particular event stay the same over time, because the evaluation or plot, even events themselves, are also subject to change (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 3). Narratives are therefore understood as *collective products* that "vary with the circumstances of their telling" (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 3), where "the teller must 'recipient design' his story" (Polanyi 1985, p. 33), making narratives "tailored to the purposes of storytelling" (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 3).

Especially regarding offenders' stories, this is a source of scepticism which raises suspicion about the truthfulness of empirical data. While it might not be surprising that social researchers who deal with unlawful populations assume that offenders have motives to remain undetected, questions about whether research participants are telling the truth or not are often closely linked to researchers concerns about the 'validity' of data (Sandberg 2010, p. 452). However, in this regard narrative criminology acts differently. Instead of being concerned with whether research participants are lying, narrative criminologists suggest that because "research participants cannot choose from an infinite pool of language and meaning…. [N]o matter what kinds of stories are told, or whether they are true or false, they tell us something important about values, identities, cultures, and communities" (Sandberg 2010, p. 38, 455). It is therefore not necessary to know whether a story is true or false to recognise its role in promoting criminal behavior or identities (Presser 2009).

Say for example when the protagonist of a narrative is oneself or one's group, which is the case of the participants in this study, the point of the narrative is typically concerned with who the self or the group is in the world around (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 2). From this comes the quite recent view of identity as constructed through storytelling (see Bruner 1990; Kerby 1991; Somers 1994). Although identities traditionally have not been conceived as narratives, narrative criminology group together insights from foregoing lessons in related criminological traditions to conceptualize their view of *self-narratives*. But where other traditions might see incompatibility, narrative criminology arrives at the unifying idea that one should understand identities, or self-narratives, dialectically as agency conditioned by context (see Bourdieu 1990; Giddens 1984) and as attempts at coherence that draw on a wide variety of cultural narratives and discourses (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 11).

Stories of self may thus be viewed as 'identity narratives' (see Colvin and Pisoiu 2020; Presser and Sandberg 2015), that describes "what we think they think we ought to be like – or what selves in general ought to be like" (Bruner 2002, p. 66). Such identity narratives work within the context of shared belief systems that are neither static nor singular (Colvin and Pisoiu 2020, p. 494), but "overlapping networks of relations that shift over time and space" (Somers 1994, p. 607). In the following analysis I will view identity work to mean the storied version of my participants identity presentations. Following this definition of identity narratives, my interest in 'violent identity work' means stories that promote characteristics like toughness and brute force to be individually and collectively aspired identity characteristics. In other words, my understanding of (violent) identity work builds on the argument that to understand a person's identity is to understand his story (McAdams and McLean 2013).

Similar to self-narratives, is social identity also viewed as rooted in language that construct people and things based on feelings of similarity and difference (Jenkins 2008, p. 5). This is where the concept of symbolic boundaries become significant. Because say if for example violent street-oriented youth from the east side of Oslo say that they are different from "rich kids" from the west side of Oslo, they will in the same process construct similar relationships with other violent young men on the east side. Identity is therefore always social (Copes 2016; Jenkins 2008), and social identity work is always also symbolic boundary work (Järvenin and Demant 2011, p. 168). To investigate the normalization of violent identity work, I therefore find it fruitful to include the concept of symbolic boundaries.

Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár (2002, p. 168) define symbolic boundaries as "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices […] time and space." In this perspective, symbolic boundary work includes processes in which "individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality" (Lamont and Molnár 2002, p. 168). However, these boundaries are not created by individuals alone, nor do they necessarily reflect individual conceptions and attitudes. Analysis of symbolic boundaries rather imply that people's beliefs and behaviors are built together. Much like the narrative criminology perspective on narratives are symbolic boundaries also seen as collective products created by people who relate to each other and to broader social and cultural mechanisms that make some boundaries thinkable and probable, and others unthinkable and improbable (Järvinen and Demant 2011, p. 168).

By engaging in symbolic boundary work the characteristics of group members' own selves are defined, and these definitions assist in differentiating the 'us' from 'them.' In this view, change (like the normalization of violence) is seen as the result of social processes where some belief affects the group's behavior, and reciprocally both individual and collective behaviors affect the group's beliefs (Peretti-Watel 2003). By engaging in active symbolic boundary work, group members may thus understand their own actions and retrospectively classify them as either good or bad, safe or dangerous, normal or shocking. Symbolic boundary work therefor aids individuals to pave the way for their own actions by gradually changing the standards for what is seen as 'barrier-breaking' behavior and not (Zerubavel 1991).

Heith Copes (2016) argue that narrative criminology is a fruitful framework for understanding the symbolic boundary work among those who engage in illegal or deviant behavior. Copes (2016, p. 207) explain that symbolic boundaries and the narratives that create them provide many benefits for actors, like creating possibilities for social identity development, helping to explain or account for question behaviors, and providing references for decision making. He further notes that the maintenance of symbolic boundaries is particularly important for people who are stigmatized or socially and physically near stigmatized others (Copes 2016, p. 197). Considering that the participants in this study frequently engage in illegal activities (e.g., violence, drug consumption, drug dealing, and other crimes), and that such deviant behavior often is marked with stigma by the rest of society, one may assume that maintaining boundaries that separate them and their personal activities from others is important in their identity work.

One strategy is to narratively portray one's own behavior as appropriate and the behavior of other groups as inappropriate, such as the self-proclaimed hustlers in Copes, Hochstetler and Williams (2008) study of crack-cocaine users in the US. Their analysis involved analyzing stories on a narrative level by asking how drug users talk and what typical stories they tell. However, an important element is that these stories are not really created by those who tell them. Instead, they are composed of larger cultural, institutional, and organizational narratives, or what Loseke (2007, p. 644) calls "formula stories" defined as "narratives of typical actors engaging in typical behaviors, within typical plots leading to expectable moral evaluations." But individuals do not blindly use formula stories to construct symbolic boundaries that separate 'us' from 'them.' Rather, they adapt them to their own personal and specific situations. In that sense, they are not just stories, but guidelines that aid individuals in deciding on what to accept as normal within a given social context.

In conclusion, I apply a theoretical framework that combines a narrative criminology perspective on narratives and identity with symbolic boundaries. I argue that this framework is fruitful to examine how stories lead to the normalization of violent behavior and identity work because it highlights 'talk as action' (Atkinson and Coffey 2003, p. 121) within micro-social processes that affect group-based conceptions, beliefs and aspirations. With this framework, I do not think that stories simply impose form or shape on incoherent experiences that predate them. Rather, I view stories to provide roadmaps for and structure action by "instigating, sustaining, or effecting desistance from harmful action" (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 1). In trying to understand which consequences the participants stories may have for their personal and collective identity constructions and continued behavior, I argue that the ways they evaluate and tell their stories of violent behavior is of more importance than the factual details of the events that happened. This is because a violent act may happen on impulse (Collins 2008), for excitement (Katz 1988), or as an answer to subcultural codes (Anderson 1999), but the retrospective narrative evaluation of it must be integrated in the persons larger life project and life-stories for storytellers to effectively 'moralise' the events (Sandberg, Copes, and Pedersen 2019). Focusing on the participants storied evaluations is thus aimed at understanding the linguistic mechanisms that generates the normalization of violent behavior and identity.

4 Methods and data

Sociologists often view data as actively produced and shaped in an interpretive process by research participants themselves (Sandberg 2009b, p. 527; see also Gubrium and Holstein 2001; Seale et al. 2004; Silverman 2001). However, which method one chooses in the beginning of a project will ultimately impact the data retrieved. The choice of methods must thus be assessed based on what is appropriate for generating, handling, and analysing data according to the specific research topic at hand (Silverman 2001, p. 4).

Through careful consideration of the research topic and the conditions under which the project is conducted, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate to identify what role storytelling play in the normalization of violent identity work among street-oriented male youth in Oslo. British sociologist David Silverman (2001, p. 11-12) writes that there are four main qualitative research methods, including field observation, analysis of texts and other documents, interviews, and audio or video recording. For my inquiry qualitative research interviews were deemed most fruitful. This choice was motivated by the fact that qualitative methods, more than quantitative, provide better strategies for generating knowledge on how people narratively express themselves and understand their surroundings, and that most narrative reconstructions in the ethnographic street subculture tradition are generated from qualitative research interviews, or from researchers' conversations with criminals during fieldwork (see Presser 2022; Sandberg 2008ab, 2009ab; Ugelvik 2016).

Recruitment and access

In the preliminary phase of deciding on which recruitment criteria to account for, an uncertainty regarding access to the group I wished to interview made me leave the criteria quite open. For the sake of transparency, I want to point out that my initial plan was to investigate criminal youths' perspectives on child welfare services in Oslo. My sampling criteria thus follows this research design.

I decided on four main sampling criteria. The first criteria were that the participants had a history with crime and child welfare services. Self-reports were deemed sufficient. The second criteria were that the participants were male. My decision to only interview men came from an interest in masculinity and offending (Gilgun and McLeod 1999; Messerschmidt 1993, 1997, 2018ab), combined with the fact that youth violence in Oslo predominantly is perpetrated by

young men (Kjenn and Bakosgjelten 2021). The third criteria were that the participants had grown up in the eastern regions of Oslo. This was based on statistics showing that 92% of young people registered with repeated crime in 2020 had a child welfare affiliation in Oslo with more than half in the inner eastern regions (Kjenn and Bakosgjelten 2021, p. 8). The decision was also pragmatically oriented based on my contacts in this area. The final criteria were to recruit young men over the age of 18 years – a decision based on that interviewing people under the age of 18 years is more ethically demanding because children and youth often are less aware of the risks and consequences of sharing personal information, and that researchers therefore need to gain access to parental approval (The Norwegian national research ethics committees 2021).

The ability to gain access to and establish trust with male individuals who are affiliated with a street culture and have been engaged in criminal activity is critical to this study. At the outset, this difficult-to-reach group posed as my biggest concern. However, I knew of three men from my youth who were part of criminal environments in Oslo. Because of this, I decided to use snowball sampling, a technique which is conceptually designed as a sample recruitment method that offer a way to overcome many of the recruitment challenges associated with inviting difficult-to-reach populations such as criminals (Faugier and Sargeant 1997; Sadler et al. 2010; see also Kvale and Brinkmann 2019). It is a sampling technique that relies on referrals from initial participants to generate additional participants (Vogt 1999), where the sample grows like a snowball by already recruited research participants helping the researcher to recruit new participants (Tjora 2017, p. 135). I contacted the men I knew of, and all were positively attuned to participate. By using this strategy, I was able to overcome the initial problems of sampling young men involved with crime by the advantage of using the social networks of the already recruited participants to contact potential new participants (see Thomson 1997).

The first participants I recruited may be seen as 'gatekeepers' (Fangen 2010) and have been fundamental for gaining access and building trust with new participants. At the same time, this implies that the participants most likely have analysed me depending on what these gatekeepers have told them. Some participants were very sociable and talkative, while others were more reserved. Moreover, this sampling strategy also mean that many of the participants in study might know each other. This have made it necessary to take special precautions regarding anonymity. To avoid the possibility that participants would 'tell on' each other, and that I sat

on information about people without their informed consent, I decided the best way was that the gatekeepers asked their friend fist, and if they were interested, they gave me their contact information so I could invite them to join the project myself. This contact information varied from phone numbers to social media applications like Facebook and Snapchat. I decided that the best way to contact new participants was by sending an informed message about the project, giving them the opportunity to decide when and if they were interested. It was important for me to make the participants feel appreciated and therefore I expressed my deepest gratitude and remained patient during this part of the project.

Research participants

My sample of research participants consists of 15 men: 7 men with African background, 4 men with European background, 3 men with Latino background, and 1 man with South-Asian background. These ethnicities are self-reported, and all men identified as Norwegians. At the time of the interview the men's ages ranged from 23 to 34, with a mean (and median) age of 26 years. All participants grew up in the inner east regions of Oslo, but 6 participants emigrated from Africa to Norway under the age of 7, and 1 participant moved to Norway from another European country at 12 years old. All 15 participants had various degrees of contact with child welfare services during their adolescence, 3 had drug abusing parents, 13 lacked a father figure, and all 15 men report struggles of socio-economic issues.

All 15 men also report engagement in crimes. 13 had been convicted of crimes and served time in prison between 1 and 4 times; 9 of them were repeat offenders. The majority of these convictions were from violent offenses. The other 2 participants, though never convicted, reported engagement in several criminal offenses. 12 of 15 participants also report dealing drugs in the past (cannabis, cocaine, ecstasy, amphetamine, GhB, and various pills). 5 participants report still dealing drugs in the present (cannabis and cocaine), 2 of which has it as their main income. Jointly the participants had engaged in assault; attempted homicide; homicide; robbery; burglary; kidnapping; drug trafficking; drug distribution; illegal possession of firearms; distribution of illegal firearms; drug smuggling; fraud; and theft during their youth.

As this information imply, my sample contains of quite remarkable individuals with extreme experiences and upbringings that deviate far from what most would recognize in a Norwegian context. The fact that I have been able to recruit these young men, and that they have felt

comfortable enough to share their experiences of crimes, violence, excitements, achievements, hard times, and struggles with me during research interviews has without a doubt strengthened this project.

Interviews

During the period of August-November 2021 I conducted face-to-face narrative interviews with 15 individuals. The narrative interview, classified as a qualitative research method (Riessman 1993), has rules regarding engagement which limits the interviewer's position. This form of interview goes further than all other interview methods in avoiding the pre-structuring of the interview (Bauer and Jovechlovitch 2000), and can be categorized as a form of unstructured, in-depth qualitative interview with specific features.

However, I prepared an interview guide (see Appendix 1) with some predefined themes I wanted to bring up in the conversations. These included youth environment with friends, crime and violence, child welfare services, and transition to adulthood. I kept this within close range during the first interviews but already at the second interview I knew these themes so well that I did not need the guide at hand. However, the guide structured the interviews in the sense that they started with easy background questions, followed by reflection questions that provided some themes of interest, and ended with debriefing questions. While I tried to avoid structuring the conversations by using a specific form of daily communication, namely storytelling and listening, the interviews may be best categorized as semi-structured.

In line with narrative interviews, I did nevertheless envision a setting that would encourage and stimulate the participants to tell their own stories (Bauer and Jovechlovitch 2000). It was therefore important that we met at a place where we would not be interrupted, and where they would feel comfortable and safe to speak without inhibitions. As such, I let the participants choose where to meet. Those interviews which were not held at the participants home or other apartments, were held outside in parks around Oslo. To obtain precise quotations, secure the level of validity, and be able to devote my fullest attention to my research participants in situ (Silverman 2001), all interviews were recorded. The duration of the interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 3 hours, with an average of about 1 hour.

In each case, I started with a briefing that included information about the project. This was a recapitulation of information I had already sent to the participant (see Appendix 2), and included important points concerning informed consent, anonymity, possibility for withdrawal, and a reminder that the interview would be audio recorded. I then began each interview with a series of simple small talk questions asking about their childhood, where they grew up, and family situation. This was meant to enable us to ease into the interview as well as providing background information for subsequent conversation. To follow the underlying premise of narrative interviews, that participants' perspectives are best revealed in stories where they use their own spontaneous language in the narrating of events (Bauer and Jovechlovitch 2000), and I therefore encouraged them to tell their stories like they were speaking with a friend.

The next part of the interview provided the most knowledge about the participants' stories. Here, I asked about themes like friendships, social life, status, participation in crime and violence, experiences with police and child welfare services. I enabled participants to tell stories from their life by either asking them directly (e.g., "do remember a specific incident?") or indirectly (e.g., "what do you mean?", "can you elaborate on that?"). I followed these themes as long they served the function to encourage storytelling, or as long as the participants seemed interested in talking about them.

Many of the men did not hesitate to bring up subjects of crime enacted by themselves within the first few minutes of the interview. They spoke at length, giving detailed stories about different aspects of the criminal environments they grew up in, crimes they had participated in, conviction, and other issues they had faced in their life. Some also showed me illegal firearms, knifes, and drugs they had I their apartments, or pictures of varying illegal incidents. My impression was that the majority seemed comfortable speaking about crime and conviction, both the trivial and the serious parts. Even those who had chosen a location outside, spoke loudly and seemingly unaffected or without care for people walking by.

However, some of the men did exhibit signs of discomfort regarding my recording device. As I pressed play, some commented things like "Oh it's just like at the police station" or "Am I getting interrogated now?". Although I experienced these statements as jokes, they are still good indications of these men's background. The recording device would also oftentimes be

forgotten during the course of the interviews[8]. When it suddenly was remembered again, that caused a 'glitch' in the conversation. As one participant said: "Oh shit that's right [pointing at the recorder] this is an interview [laughing] I forgot [laughing]". In these cases, I would simply reaffirm that it was anonymous, and that I would be the only person to listen to the recording.

There were also other episodes where I interpreted signs of discomfort, mostly when participants spoke about difficult topics related to family. In these cases, I attempted to adjust my voice and remind the person that he did not have to say anything he did not want to. In cases where the participant did not want to continue, I quickly asked another question to change the course of our conversation. However, in some of these moments I also found myself struggling to respond and react. For example, when participants told of very difficult issues like personal attempts of suicide, friends who had committed suicide or been murdered, and even committing murder themselves. These stories clearly represented sadness, hard struggle, and shame. Because I read these situations as demanding for the participant, I tried to appear as understanding as possible, without putting any judgement or asking for elaborations.

To end the interviews, I asked if there was anything the participant would like to add to our conversation, or if there was something we had missed. Once I switched off the recording device, I thanked the participants for meeting me, and asked how they had experienced the interview. All the participants indicated that it had been nice to talk about their life to someone else, like one participant said:

> "I've been very honest with you now. Told you things I've never told anyone, and never talk about. But it's good to talk about things that are hard too. I'm never serious, never, so just sitting here talking and being completely honest, I guess it's good".

Most of the men I interviewed commented that talking about these topics, or about feelings in general, is something they rarely did, as another participant said: "I've spoken more in depth with you today, than I ever have before", even claiming he was going to contact a psychiatrist for the first time. Although I experienced the interviews as successful, accounts like these may also suggest that the invitation to narrate their past and present experiences and future hopes offered a therapeutic opportunity for them (see Birch and Miller 2000). Either way, I read these

[8] For a discussion on linguistic ethnography and non-overt orientation to the recording device see Heinrichsmeier (2015).

accounts as an indication that the interviews signalised something distinct and perhaps special for the men in this study.

Researcher's role and relationship to participants

There is always an area of uncertainty regarding the tension between personal friendship and professional distance when reflecting upon the researcher's role in an interview setting (Kvale and Brinkmann 2019, p. 108). Because the participants in this study are engaged in criminal activity, one may assume that this distance would be even greater and potentially create a source of scepticism on their part (Sandberg 2010, p. 448). Although I did not notice much scepticism from the participants, some expressed that they did not understand the meaning of the study, or how their stories would contribute to social research. As one participant said, "You've only asked about me and like my life, how is that scientifically interesting?"

Moreover, a researchers' background and life experiences will also impact how we communicate with participants, and how they relate to us. My many personal attributes, being an ethnic Norwegian 26-year-old female master student from the east side of Oslo have most likely affected the research participants relation and understandings of me. However, for this study I have experienced some of my personal attributes as strengths. First of all, I have grown up in similar areas as the participants, meaning that I have knowledge of the social values among the men I have interviewed. This has made it easier to gain access to participants, ask relevant questions, and encourage storytelling about specific cultural knowledge and codes. Understanding linguistic strategies and slang have also made me able to adjust to their language from the beginning. As such, the participants have not had the need to stop their storytelling to explain the meanings of certain words or phrases. Moreover, by being a woman I have not challenged any masculine ideals. If I had been a man, the participants would most likely have given quite different answers and stories during the interviews. At least, one could assume that they would have shown a more masculine side of themselves, and not elaborate as much on emotional aspects (For a discussion on 'when women study men' see Lefkowich 2019).

Nevertheless, I do not share the same experiences as the men I have interviewed. As such, I have been able to obtain some degree of emotional distance and independence to my research participants (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015, p. 108). At the same time, I agree with Huberman and Miles' (2002, p. 41) claim that is impossible to step outside of one's own experience "to

obtain some observer-independent account of what we experience". It has been a comprehensive process of reflecting on my motivation for doing this study, my role as researcher, and how my commitment to the study and the research participants has influenced and possibly created biased interpretations of the data. In the following analysis I therefore try to stay as reflexive as possible about personal inputs.

Analytical approach

The audio recordings of the interviews were first transcribed using the software programme F4transcript. When transforming the interview conversations to written from, the specific ways the participants expressed themselves were seen as an important part (see Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). To reproduce the interviews as precise as possible, I have therefore included all linguistic elements in the transcriptions. That means utterances like "mhm" or "eh" are included, moreover (.) (..) (…) are used to document pauses reaching from a mere moment to several seconds, and I use [ ] when providing additional information like the participants emotional utterances, body language or slang translations, for example [laughing] or [clenching his fist]. The interviews were also translated from Norwegian to English for the purpose of this thesis, a work which has been challenging for several reasons. However, I have been particularly concerned with staying true to meaning, as well as finding similar laden words in English, rather than providing word for word translations.

The transcriptions came to a relatively large quantity of data that stretched over 300 pages. To get to know the totality of this data, I had to get an overview of its content and meaning. First, I read through my transcripts many times, looking for patterns and similar stories. I made both descriptive and analytical notes along the way. I then coded the transcriptions into nodes and sub-nodes according to various themes that gave me an overview of the interview's contents. This was done using the software programme Nvivo. The codes were constructed on the basic methodological premise that researchers should develop codes based on what research participants have said (Tjora 2017, p. 198). My codes were thus textually close to the interview transcripts, with some of the most important broader codes being: street culture, gangsters, violence is normal, being violent means respect, everyone does drugs, all cops are bastards (ACAB), child welfare services is the enemy, prison steals time, prison is storage not rehabilitation, you do not speak of mental health issues, and transitioning to adulthood is hard.

Looking for identity narratives in this data, made me realise that they were hard to distinguish. The narratives were not simply there in the classic Labovian form. Oftentimes, participants would only hint at a narrative, letting me grasp and fill in the blanks of what may be the fuller narrative and its meaning. As such, the coproduction of narratives between the research participants and myself became even more apparent during this process. The stories I gathered were also often fractured, and at times shifting during the same conversation. This made me realise what Bakhtin (1981, p. 261) proclaimed a long time ago: that a teller's voice is "one voice amongst many." While researchers have identified and continue to search for coherence in what people say, or as Brookman (2015, p. 228) state "find order amongst chaos", I realised that my desire to find just 'one voice' was hopeless, and that I had to narrow my perspective.

Qualitative research is known for its flexibility, and I have made use of this flexible advantage by having an open and inductive approach throughout this project. Aiming to tell the story of the research, I realised that my initial plan to investigate criminal youths' perspectives and experiences of child welfare services had to be revised. While some participants told many stories of their experiences with child welfare, most of the sample did not elaborate as much on this. The participants rather emphasized stories of everyday use of illegal drugs like cocaine and amphetamines, of owning and using firearms, of brutal police encounters, and of extreme crimes that were never written about in the media and only known to a number of teenage boys within their inner circle. The fact that stories of violence, street culture and conviction were so much more widespread than stories of child welfare services, indicated that street life and violence may have been just as important, if not a more important, part of their life and identity projects. Inductively I decided to focus my thesis on the narrative normalization of violent behavior and identity work among street-oriented male youth in Oslo instead.

Methodological reflections

Just as formerly incarcerated young men affiliated with street culture are made up of multiple voices drawn from various cultural and intuitional stories, so are a researcher's analysis of narratives also multi-layered and dependent upon exposure to specific modes of analysis and specific stories (Brookman 2015, p. 229). What I have interpreted by reading segments of narratives may thus be my own take on it. It is therefore important to keep in mind that narrative constructions may also be a product of the methodological approach.

Loseke (2012, p. 256) argues that stories have “multiple and often contradictory meanings and evaluation, depending upon audience characteristics.” My presence and in what ways I have framed questions during the research interviews therefore matter a great deal. As Sandberg (2013, p. 71) have observed, “If street offenders are only asked about crime, violence and illegal drugs, for example, they will often present a relatively coherent ‘code of the street’ (Anderson 1999). Asking about family, upbringing and children can bring about a quite different self-narrative.” Because I had an initial plan to investigate the connection between child welfare services and young men who perpetrate crimes, much of the interviews were centred on topics about family relations and mental health issues. The interviews are therefore not purely based on talk about crime. While this is worth mentioning it does not exclude the fact that there is an asymmetrical relationship between me and my participants concerning my power to define what their self-narratives entail or not. This asymmetry also raises questions regarding how to access and measure self-narratives.

To reliably access a self-narrative that is thought to be an internal construct is a core challenge because a self-narrative is not the same thing as the narratives research participants tell a researcher during an interview (Maruna and Liem 2021, p. 135). However, that does not by itself make spoken narratives irrelevant or unrelated to the stories that people live by. While the things people say may function to merely make them ‘look good,’ and although much will remain untold during an interview no matter how successful or intimate, Dan McAdams (1993, p. 20) argues that individuals do not “simply invent a personal myth in the course of an interview. The myth is there all along, inside the mind. It is a psychological structure that evolves slowly over time, infusing life with meaning and purpose.” According to McAdams (1993, p. 20) an interview can therefore elicit aspects of people’s personal myths, or self-narratives by offering hints that concern what is “already in place in the mind of the teller.”

Hence, I argue that apart from being the most traditional and often-used method to acquire self-narratives (Maruna and Liem 2021, p. 135), the method I have used – a confidential, one-on-one, private audio recorded, semi-structured interview that pays special attention to narratives and promises anonymity – has been the most fruitful for my inquiry, given the subject at hand.

Ethical considerations

Researching small milieus with vulnerable populations raises many ethical issues that particularly relate to problems of obtaining informed consent and maintaining privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality (The Norwegian national research ethics committees 2021). This study is registered and approved by the Norwegian agency for shared services in education and research (NSD). The study approval stipulates that recorded material be destroyed upon completion of the study, and that digital recordings and typed transcripts be stored in encrypted form until then. All data have therefore been stored in Services for sensitive data (TSD), a service that fulfils the strong demands of handling and storing sensitive, or sometimes referred to as black, research data. NSD also made me aware of the importance that participants spoke of families, friends, and other third parties in a more general way to avoid conflict, which I informed participants of at the beginning of each interview.

The participants were also thoroughly informed about the study and the implications of participating. I have been concerned with giving participants enough time to consider implications of joining the project before giving me a final answer. Those that accepted my invitation, received a document detailing the aims of the study, including the possibility of withdrawal (see Appendix 2). This was given both in advance and summarized before each interview. Because I spoke with the participants about engagement in illegal activities, both past and present, and because anonymity was important, I did not require signed consent forms as this would produce a traceable paper trail and perhaps be uncomfortable considering the topic at hand. With approval from NSD, research participants instead gave verbal informed consent before the interview started.

While some of the participants were not at all concerned about anonymity, even stating I should use their real name in the final report, there were several occasions where other participants would stop mid interview to double-check that what they were saying was kept between the two of us. The fact of anonymity has been one of my biggest concerns throughout this project. Apart from giving all participants pseudonyms, I have also obscured personal characteristics. The analysis, following this chapter, is however full of interview excerpts, and in line with doing a qualitative study I have effortfully documented the participants voices to let them guide my analysis from the beginning to the end.

5 Capable of violence narratives: Normalizing street life

> Crime and violence? I mean, that's where you felt success, respect. That's where you felt capable, that's where the economy was, that's where the opportunities were. And I mean status, belonging, all these things, but mainly just that feeling of succeeding at something. Opposed to like school and work that has always told you "You will never make it here". I mean then you need to find another arena to be good at, it is, I mean we are human, we need something to be proud of, something to succeed at. (Carlos)

One can learn a lot about the social dynamic of storytelling and its role in shaping experience by the way street-oriented young men describe participation in, and the social context of, specific violent events in their lives. This chapter investigates storytelling as a key linguistic mechanism for the normalization of violent behavior and identity work among street-oriented male youth by investigating which stories of violence my participants tell when talking about their youth in a street culture in Oslo.

It is not an overstatement to say that participants were unified in their emphasis on the importance of being capable of violence when talking about their youth. That violent capability figured largely in the participants accounts in this study falls in line with the aforementioned research (e.g., Anderson 1999; Brookman, Copes, and Hochstetler 2011; Lauger 2014). The focus on being violent also form the basis for one of the most expressed, and perhaps, important stories told among the young men involved in this study, an identity narrative that I have called the *capable of violence narrative*.

The participants strategic use of this narrative reflects Jenkins (2008, p. 9) argument that people collectively identify themselves and others to conduct their lives in terms of those identities. Action is thus connected to identity in the sense that "we seek to corroborate our identity" by acting in accordance with who we think we are, and in the sense that we aspire to certain identities, we act to realize a certain desired self (Presser 2016, p. 145). When telling *capable of violence narratives*, the men I interviewed conveyed to themselves and to others who they are, how they come to be this way, and where they think their life may be going in the future.

The *capable of violence narrative* rests on three main subsequent stories that inspire and motivate normalizing effects on violent behavior, each in its own way. I have structured this

chapter after these three stories. In the first story, being capable of violence is framed as a necessary consequence of the illegal drug market. In these stories, violence is normalized as a natural, but necessary, product of street life. The second story frames being capable of violence as a mean to gain or uphold respect. Here, violence is normalized as a mean to realize a certain desired identity in the subculture. Then, in the third story violence and violent capability is framed as a simply normal part of everyday group life. Violence is thus normalized based on sameness, because to not act in accordance with the groups desired identity may position the individual outside the group. In effect the telling and retelling of *capable of violence narratives* are seen to re-produce social violent practices and provide normalizing effects for both their tellers and listeners.

Capable of violence: A consequence of the illegal drug market

In the participants stories about violence as part of their socio-cultural context, consumption and distribution of illegal drugs are depicted as a huge part of its social makeup. All the participants report using illegal drugs, and most also report dealing drugs. One participant, Mateo, explained it like this:

> Everyone was dealing drugs and doing robberies. Primarily hashish, weed, and cocaine. At least at the time when we were in our teens. Because we were outside all the fucking time right, and we needed food, so it was like "okay we need money" and the easiest way to get it was to deal drugs or rob someone. So, all the guys were dealing and robbing.

When asked to tell stories about violence, many of them would also indicate how the social context in the illegal drug market demanded violent means. That violence is an ever-present possibility in the illegal drug trade is evident in the existing literature (see Marsh 2020). Violence is even said to be one of the features that define the structure of identifiable groups and status within extended trading networks (Hobbs 2003, 2012, 2013), where the possibility of violence often is experienced as lurking in the background of both transactions and social relationships (Marsh 2020). This is confirmed in the participants stories about violence as a necessary consequence in the illegal drug market, at the same time revealing a daunting picture of young drug dealers' social reality in Oslo.

However, I am primarily attentive to the participants stories and their ability to shape normalizing attitudes toward violence. By asking what the participants stories do for their tellers and their listeners, I find that their stories fuel a deeper understanding of the social forces that contribute to a normalization process. In the following excerpt, Yasin tells a captivating story of why he found himself motivated to be capable of violence:

> Yasin: Things has big consequences, and you need to learn to think on your own and get things done.
>
> Frøja: What kind of consequences?
>
> Yasin: Like violence and prison sentences for example. I mean as a teenager I had millions of kroners in drugs that I was responsible for and sold and if you lose that kind of money, it doesn't have anything to say if you're 17-years-old. If you lose millions of kroners, it will go badly for you.
>
> Frøja: What could've happened? Like, what were you scared of?
>
> Yasin: If you for example had lost or got yourself into a situation where you owed someone something, then first of all you could get exposed to a lot of violence, and then get exposed to extorsion for a long time, and still get exposed to violence, and get forced to commit other crimes to cover your debt, and even after you've covered your debt you're still in their pocket. Kidnappings were common, ehm serious violence, people got cut up and hanged and beaten (..) and yea. So, you had to become tough. Violence was just a part of that.

In Yasin's story, violence is evaluated as a response to a series of alarming issues that young drug dealers may face on the streets of Oslo. His story indicates that as a drug dealer your first priority is to make money, if not for yourself, then at least to pay your debts. By suggesting that debts must be paid regardless of the personal circumstances of the individual, Yasin is also implying what Hobbs (2012, p. 165) has previously argued, that the drug trade has few acceptable sob stories because "predatory market engagement is the name of the game."

When stating that "it doesn't have anything to say if you're 17-years-old. If you lose millions of kroners, it will go badly for you" Yasin further suggests that responsibility for collecting and paying debts is the drug dealers alone. When studying an illegal drug market in Dublin, Marsh (2020, p.78) observed a similar tendency, arguing that violence is prevalent in the illegal drug trade due to the often unmanageable and chaotic nature of those who populate the street

retail market. Just as Yasin points to, coming up short with payment can elicit violent retribution and especially when great sums of money are on the line, a dealer's reputation or even life can be put in jeopardy (Marsh 2020, p. 78-79). In cases like this, it seems having a violent identity is essential to protect oneself.

While the possible outcomes listed by Yasin (e.g., violence, prison sentences, extorsion, kidnapping, murder) could surely be seen as motivation enough to become capable of violence, it is the way he shapes his experience of these outcomes that catches my attention. In line with narrative criminologists, I believe that a narrative serves numerous functions (see Presser and Sandberg 2015), and by viewing stories as 'shaping experience' (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 4) the participants use of *capable of violence narratives* may also show how storytelling is fundamental for their identity development (see Gubrium and Holstein 2000).

The plot of the *capable of violence narrative* in regard to identity development is to display masculinity. Yasin captivates this when stating that, "you had to become tough. Violence was just a part of that." Another participant Ahmed formulated it as "To be violent was the same as to be tough, to be a man." Usman similarly explained that: "We thought that to be a man was to be tough, to be a gangster. To be a G was to be man. But really it was just about fitting in."

Although this is not an original observation of identity performance among members of violent street cultures (see Berggren 2014; Matza and Sykes 1961; Messerschmidt 1997, 2004, 2018ab), few scholars attempt to illustrate how stories about being capable of violence may have normalizing effects on its tellers and listeners within violent populations (see Andersen and Sandberg 2019; Sandberg and Fleetwood 2017). Highlighting the linguistic use of such narratives could therefore tell us something important about which role stories play in the process of normalization.

As suggested in the aforementioned excerpts, the *capable of violence narratives* construct narrators lives and life-circumstances within this particular socio-cultural context by forging connections between their own and others' experiences, actions, and aspirations. This aids them to collectively identify themselves with each other by conducting their everyday lives on the streets of Oslo in terms of identities that are precisely capable of violence. In acting and presenting themselves in accordance with this narrative, these young men collectively create aspirations of violent identities. However, in order to realize this aspired identity, they also

have to participate in violent action. As Lauger (2014) maintains, the meaning of violence evolves with new experiences and new conversations, because when street-oriented youth tell stories they also creatively interpret and employ new cultural understandings of themselves and the world around them. When reading the participants stories, I arrive at the idea that storytelling is an important element of how they come to hold normalizing attitudes towards violent behavior. Yet, their stories also indicate that offending and victimization are intimately connected (Lauritzen et al. 1991, p. 267). Chris shares this sentiment:

> A friend of mine owed 100 000 kroners for amphetamine, and he lost ten fingers for it. They came and snapped all ten of his fingers, snapped one finger at a time and just said "hey you can think ten times." So, he managed to come up with the money afterwards, but it was pretty fucking brutal! And people did way worse things too.

Chris' story illustrate how offending and victimization is interrelated. But despite the general acknowledgement of street cultures around the world (Baumer et al. 2003; Fraser 2013; Herber 2012; Jensen 2006; Wright et al. 2006), the relationship between street culture and offending and victimization risks is still a debatable topic (Lauritsen 2012; Lindegaard and Zimmermann 2017). Some studies have suggested that street culture performances increase the risks of offending and thereby also the risks of victimization (Garot 2010; Mears et al. 2013; Stewart et al. 2006). For example, Garot (2010, p. 140) have argued that "none of the young people I met suggested that following the code of the street led to greater safety. In fact, young people often informed me that not following the code led to safety."

Other studies have suggested that performance of street culture protect against victimization (Anderson 1999; Baron et al. 2001; Jacobs 2004). Like Rich and Grey (2005, p. 818) who have argued that "Since these young men understand the code of the street, they know that people who have the reputation of ''sucker'' or ''punk'' are vulnerable to repeated victimization because potential assailants believe they will not defend themselves." Although Chris' story falls more in line with Garot's (2010) study, he followed up this story by stating: "but yeah, there was a lot of necessary violence," which is more akin to Rich and Grey's (2005) observations. Nevertheless, exactly how street culture impact offending and victimization outcomes, and especially how street-oriented youth engage in risk management, remains unclear in the research literature.

The participants stories of violence as a necessary consequence of the illegal drug trade include several elements of risk management concerning both offending and victimization. These stories most often take the form of how being capable of violence is a way of managing risks on the street (see Rich and Grey 2005). By narrating risk management this way, individuals' may be understood as connecting their actions to the group's aspirations of a certain desired identity. In the next quote, Kenneth gives a good example of this:

> The thing is, if you have a brick or half a brick or something, you usually owe a lot of money, and that doesn't come without threats. Most likely your family will be threatened, most likely you'll get a photo of your little brother walking to school. Like "Hint, hint, we can get you when we want to". So, to think about beating someone up and taking their money, watches whatever, and maybe spending six months in jail outweighs that they take your little brother. You take those six months right, you rob that guy. You don't think criminal anymore, you think "How am I going to fix this?"

Here, Kenneth illustrates risk management by describing what may be the alternative to commit violent crimes, or rather the motivation for being capable of violence. He puts a lot of work into breaking this down for me. First, he describes that being a drug dealer means you owe money. He explains this with reference to the word "brick", which in Norwegian street lingo is 'kloss,'[9] meaning one kilo of typically cocaine or amphetamine. On the streets of Oslo, 1 gram of cocaine usually has a street value of 1000 kroner. Being in the possession of 1 kilo will naturally imply that you owe a lot of money.

Kenneth explains that because owing someone money in the street drug retail market often also involves threats of violence, it is necessary to be capable of violence. The statement "maybe spending six months in jail outweighs that they take your little brother" offers an explanation, as well as a legitimation of violent crimes. Through statements like "you don't think criminal anymore" Kenneth's story also justifies violence based on the possible consequences of averting such acts, simultaneously showing how *capable of violence narratives* shape strategies for managing risk on the street by providing guidelines that aid individuals to accept and normalize violence in certain situations.

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[9] Anything starting with a 'K' indicates 'kilo' when talking about amounts of drugs on the street in Oslo. But in Norwegian street lingo, specific words sometimes mean specific drugs, for example 'kylling', meaning 'chicken', stands for 1 kilo of cocaine.

Regarding the normalization work involved in this story, Kenneth illustrates how narratives of being capable of violence equip tellers and listeners with a natural inclination to commit violent offences in this social environment. If the choice is between family and violence, the obvious answer would be to commit violence to save your family. While this sort of risk-management does not really differ from mainstream cultural narratives of violence as an acceptable response to self-defence, what is interesting here is that all of the participants I spoke with who have experience with dealing drugs would tell stories of specific situations where violence was the correct response. In other words it looks like this particular socio-cultural context creates many stories where violence is normalized as the correct way to manage risks.

Highlighting this mechanism of *capable of violence* narratives expose how these stories are performative of a meeting between these individuals and this specific socio-cultural context. It highlights that a narrator is an active agent who is also part of a social world, which he may engage in through storytelling (see Murray 2007, p. 116). I assert that the participants stories about violence as a normal but necessary consequence of the illegal drug market on the streets of Oslo contributes to a normalizing perspective on violence by teaching tellers and listeners who they are and how they should behave in certain situations.

Being capable of violence is a mean to gain and uphold respect

The research participants aspirations to be capable of violence are also evident in their stories about respect. This confirms what Brookman, Copes, and Hochstetler (2015) maintains, that using street codes in narratives reflect people's ongoing construction of identity by situating their actions within a subcultural context of respect (see also Wilkinson 2001). Among those means to gain respect listed by the participants in this study, respect was talked about as the result of "being a good fighter" (Ahmed), "being socially good or like charismatic" (John), "being the toughest motherfucker" (Yasin), "committing serious acts of violence," (Noah), "being good at doing serious crime" (Kenneth), to be good at "dealing a lot of drugs" (Abdi), "having guns or like being crazy enough to rob just anyone" (Tahiil), or having served time in prison, like Chris explains in the next quote:

> The only thing that has influenced me by spending some time in jail is that when people have asked, I can say that I have, because you know it's about respect, so the only thing it has done for me is that I can say "yes I've been inside."

In the participants descriptions of means to gain respect, a gangster-like reputation is portrayed as important. Such a reputation is said to build on the lack of characteristics like cowardice, fear-based reactions, conformity, or like Yusef said "you can't show any weakness." Lacking these characteristics then demands respect. In reverse, respect means being recognised as dangerous, competent, and capable of violence, or as Joakim said "the craziest in fights were the coolest guy." When asked about specific violent events, the participants stories show how these characteristics are important to uphold. In the next quote Mateo explains "jumping" which means group fights by reference to violence as a mean to gain respect:

> I started dealing white [cocaine], when I was 13, 14 years old, and of course I used more the more I sold, so there was also a lot of jumping and this and that, because it was about respect right. Those people could not look at us and such and such. I remember when we walked in, people moved, so we started to get arrogant and just demand respect no matter where we went.

Violence as a mean to gain respect figured largely in the participants stories. And as these quotes indicate, respect was seen as an almost external entity – something to want, to demand, to cherish. However, respect was also talked about as something one could easily lose. In line with previous research on violent populations evaluations of respect (e.g., Anderson 1999; Bourgois 2003; Lauger 2014; Ravn 2018; Sandberg 2009a; Vigil 2002) many of the participants in this study would explain specific violent acts by claiming that they in varying ways had been insulted or disrespected. Tahiil lays this out perfectly when telling the story of the first out of three times he went to prison for committing violent crimes, explaining violence as both an expected and reasonable reaction to disrespect:

> What happened was, I was out, I was walking on the street, and I was with two buddies and a female friend. And I was completely shitfaced, so I kick a garbage bin. And from the other side of the street comes a guy out of a bar with a lady, and he yells to me "Hey! Pick up that trash!". So, he comes over to me and the first thing that happens is I go over to him, and he says "Hey! You're in my comfort sone" and he

> pushes me down. And what happens is he pushes me down in front of two of friends and this girl, and I fall! So, I feel embarrassed within my heart right. So, I get up and say, “What do you want?” and just “Bap!” Ba ba ba!” [Tahiil punches the air]. You know, I feel like I can’t lose a fight. It’s not possible, you have to like, you have to be a man! There is nothing that’s called back down. The thing is, it’s all about respect. You don’t want to be seen as a pussy. So, you either stand up and fight, or people look down at you. It’s that simple.

Tahiil’s story shares many similarities with other participants in this study. For one, he is narrating a violent self by putting his emphasis on not losing a fight, being a man, and not backing down. Such articulations make it clear that participants are committed to a subcultural code for violent retaliation. Researchers studying violent street cultures have previously analysed violence as a way that marginalized men search for respect (Anderson 1999; Bourgois 2003; Vigil 2002). For Anderson (1999, p. 37) violent criminals are street-oriented youth who are especially alienated and prone to gang association. He argued that these youth develop a favourable disposition to informal justice and a violent “code of the street.” Anderson (1999) calls this code for “people’s law” based on “street justice,” (p.10) and through this code, street-oriented youth’s reputation and respect is acquired through “nerve,” (p. 91) a ruthlessness and willingness to use physical violence despite the odds.

The *capable of violence narratives* convey some of these values too. However, instead of simply compelling violent behavior (see Anderson 1999) the participants stories about being capable of violence suggests that violent retaliation is a decisive part of a desired identity in the street culture they are embedded in. So, in telling stories about violent retaliation they are also connecting their personal identity with this desired violent identity that is aspired and accepted by the larger subculture. These narratives thus work to portray storytellers as someone you should not mess with. In Tahiil’s story for example, he makes his violent potential known, showing his ability to command respect and convey the values embraced by the culture around him. This bears some similarity with what Sandberg (2009a p. 506) have argued, that respect may be searched for by using the discourse characteristic of a street subculture, where deviance can be interpreted as a “narrative search for respect” that emerge from stigmatization to construct respect though “fascinating narratives of the self.”

Stories like this demonstrate the importance of street 'codes' as guidelines for social practice. But they also establish a consistent image of a violently capable self. As noted by Jacobs and Wright (2006), violent retaliation is often driven by the symbolic meaning of the original affront, and thus by the symbolic meaning that the retaliatory violence delivers. By being pushed to the ground Tahiil's personal authority is challenged, and the symbolic meaning of this makes violent retaliation the only mean to restore his self-image.

Because, remember that respect means the absence of emasculation in the eyes of everyone that matters, that be peers, enemies, or even oneself (Marsh 2020, p. 122). In this story, Tahiil's self-regard is clearly oriented towards not losing face and upholding a certain reputation among his peers. Among the participants many stories of violence, upholding a violently capable identity is depicted alongside upholding respect. Tahiil thoroughly undress this in his ending note: "The thing is, it's all about respect. You don't want to be seen as a pussy. So, you either stand up and fight, or people look down at you. It's that simple". The distinction between weak and tough is evident throughout the participants stories, and because identification with being weak contrasts the groups desired identity, violence is not only narratively created as accepted behavior, it is socially supported, and in situations like the one depicted by Tahiil, it is also socially expected. When a type of behavior becomes expected it may in turn be normalized as a taken-for granted response in everyday life.

Attributes of respect among the men I have interviewed are seemingly encompassed in and communicated through stories like capable of violence. This indicates that personal reputations are socially constructed and become a decisive part of the narrative identities in the street culture my participants are embedded in. Hence, these stories do not just "fill conversations by being exciting and entertaining" (Andersen and Sandberg 2019). They also establish the borders of identity construction by clarifying legitimate targets for violence, signaling participation in violence, conveying values and confirming or challenging the reproduction of violent identities within a peer network. In that sense, Tahiil's story does not simply talk of a violent episode that resulted in his first incarceration, it also includes a telling of not just the capacity for violence as exemplified through the *capable of violence narratives*, but the socially constructed personal reputation and characteristics of violence within this socio-cultural context.

Tahiil's personal narrative and the more common *capable of violence narratives* speak of how possible words and actions can challenge the 'symbolic identity' (Winlow 2001) of street youth in Oslo. These narratives thus support the claim that stories cast future aspersions of social prestige. I want to argue that narratives like this should be seen as aiding the normalization of violent identity work. In the case of violent behavior being normalized as a mean to gain or uphold respect, being capable of violent retaliation is narratively constructed by the characteristic of being socially expected rather than deviant and shocking. In turn, these stories assertedly play an important role in making "criminologically relevant things happen" (Presser 2016, p. 139) for street-oriented male youth in Oslo.

Violence is simply normal group behavior

It was evident from the participants accounts that they perceived violence as an integral part of their daily life. Overall, participants told stories of being capable of violence that were conscious of violence as normal, or typical, everyday group behavior. For example, Noah stated that "It's normal, violence is completely normal." Abdi explained that: "Violence is, violence is always, has always been a part of life." Kenneth told of various settings where violence would occur: "There was always violence. There is always someone who's fighting, always someone getting stabbed, always someone owing money to someone you're not supposed to owe money to. So, there's always some kind of fuss." And Yusef similarly explained:

> There is always someone running their mouth or saying the wrong things, and then there's violence. If you owe someone money and are acting smart, then there's violence. If you touch someone's lady, there's violence. It's like almost every outcome you can think about, there's violence [laughing].

Normalization, as a process through which deviant ideas or behaviors come to be regarded as 'normal,' is indicated in all of these accounts. One may for example read the repeated use of the word 'always' as a linguistic mechanism with normalizing effects. But while general dismissive views of violence are often contrasted by groups of youth that consider violence as an expected, necessary, and even joyful aspect of everyday life (Jackson-Jacobs 2004), the notion to talk about violence and acceptable situations for violent encounters does not seem to be framed as negative nor frightening in these accounts. Rather, violence is predominantly represented as an ever-pervasive part of life and thus strongly tied to the group's life situations.

When street-oriented youth in Oslo define being capable of violence as ‘normal’ in their socio-cultural context, they also agree upon a definition of reality that includes conceptual distinctions that categorize violent practice as part of the lifestyle, a product of the environment, and as a natural result of external forces outside of their control.

Beck (2000, p. 215) argues that what he sees as the ‘logic of control’, a desire to exert control over the conditions of life and a belief that this can be done using rational processes, has become eroded under the conditions of late modernity. He claims that control has become an illusory hope because the nature of contemporary risks is based on seriousness, incalculability, and unpredictability (Beck 2000). However, contrary to Beck’s (2000) argument, the degree of rational judgement on whether or not to engage in violence does not seem to be based on risk-calculation nor fear of the outcome in the participants stories about violence as normal everyday group behavior. Instead, by narrating how being capable of violence is normal, participants come to categorise control over risks of violence by normalizing such behavior, making it a mundane activity instead of a concern. Like Noah explained:

> When it happens [punches his hand] then it's not so bad, then it's over. It's not so bad to get a hard punch in the face, it's not that painful, it's like falling off a bike, not even that. I go to training and get a little beating right, that's just fun [laughing].

While violence as a risk-factor may be categorized as non-controllable, the participants talk of this as how other people’s actions are beyond their control rather than because the risks are seen to be incalculable themselves. By framing violence as normal, as an argument that ‘everyone does it,’ the participants rather indicate ‘sameness,’ which downplays the differences between themself and other members of their social environment. A potential effect of this narrative strategy may be that it is harder to condemn and easier to sympathise with in-group members violent behavior (see Sandberg 2009b). Telling stories of how normal it is to commit violence may in turn inspire violent action. John gives a good example of this:

> John: Crime, I mean I’m not going to make it sound like to was something special, it was just, I don’t know, a part of life. It wasn’t like we thought about doing something criminal or beating someone up, it was just part of the life we lived, a part of the lifestyle, or of daily life really.
>
> Frøja: Was there anything who inspired you to have crime in your daily life?

> John: I guess we had aspirations to be like older guys and do what they did and those things. But like, I think it's very normal among many people, especially here in Oslo it's normal in the centre and east and probably smaller places around Norway. And I think if you look at the world, you'll see that it's not unnormal at all.

Like many participants in this study, John evaluates crime and violence as simply "a part of the lifestyle." That stories of crime and violence are framed as daily routine, allows members of this street culture to create violence as something ordinary, as "nothing special" (Hugo). In effect, these stories resonate with a view on violence as morally justified in their socio-cultural context. Because stories recount past events in a logical, temporal order with characters who relate to each other typically within the context of opposition or a struggle (Chen 2012; Ewick and Silby 1995), like John does in the excerpt above relating to his own social environment in Oslo and similar environments around Norway and in the world, the retelling of past experiences allow storytellers to reinterpret an event while simultaneously providing the opportunity to utilize a script, or story, for how the event come to pass (Lauger 2014).

Moreover, when people gather and converse about a specific event, those who are familiar with the incident serve as the primary storytellers, however, the whole group participates in negotiating the meaning of the story (Lauger 2014, p. 185). Hence, in telling a story, the group collectively uses its personal characterizations, labels, and cultural categories, which are linked together by a plot (Hollander and Gordon 2006). When storytellers like John tell and retell stories about violence as "I'm not going to make it sound like to was something special, it was just, I don't know, a part of life […] a part of the lifestyle, or of daily life really", these stories continue to create a set of intersubjective and collectively reproduced stories and practices that individual's use to assign normalizing attitudes and interpretations of violence within this social context (see Kessel 2022).

Zerubavel (1991, p. 11) uses the term "framing" to describe how a group gives specific acts a distinctive "accent of reality." In the participants stories of violence as normal, describing violence as "nothing special" (Hugo) or as "part of daily life" (John), may be seen as narrators framing violence as the normative outlines for people's behaviors. Group members may thus use these stories to justify theirs and others violent actions, and thereby classify them as legitimate. In substance, this points to how street youths' beliefs and behaviors are socially built through storytelling. A fascinating element of this process is how stories provide a

culturally feasible path of action (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 288). Like Usman said: “Honestly, what was cool was to be the toughest, and that kind of meant everything. It meant that if you're with the guys, you want to be the one that beats up a guy and takes his wallet.”

The implication with this, however, is that motivation always is a prior event which the actor simply requires legitimation to proceed (Presser and Sandberg 2015). I find that the participants in this study tell certain stories of violence that paint a picture of the causes of violence synonymously with the motivations for violence. Usman indicates this tendency in the quote above, showing that being capable of violence is both motivated and caused by the groups desired identities, by what the socio-cultural contexts demands, and by their collective aspirations to gain and uphold respect. Similarly, Ibrahim also talked of his motivations to commit violent acts with reference to the groups’ collective aspirations:

> You wanted to be good at fighting, you wanted to stand up for the guys. That was it, if you're good at fighting, and people think you’re crazy, then you got a higher status, you know? It's all about what people need right, and everyone needs a guy who can fight. If you're a guy who can fight, then you're a protection, and that has a lot of value.

Ibrahim frames being capable of violence as both caused and motivated by the subcultures desired identity. In the book *Normalization of Violence* Irm Haleem (2020, p. 2) points out that this is a problematic tendency because ‘motivations’ may be a product of several ‘causes’ that intertwine to generate violence. I acknowledge that explaining street-oriented youths’ normalization of violent behavior and identity work with reference to only one identity narrative is a simplification. However, my aim is to show that the normalization of violence is a result of collectively shared stories that construct violent acts and identities as common within street cultures in Oslo. By highlighting how these stories are told and re-told among young male members of street cultures, we come closer to understand how storytelling is in fact a key linguistic mechanism in the normalization of violent behavior.

Concluding remarks

The *capable of violence narratives* work to normalize violent youth behavior by guiding both tellers and listeners to aspire to subcultural values about masculinity, toughness, and respect. That these stories are repeatedly told by participants across my sample indicates that stories

like this are collectively shared by actors in this socio-cultural context. The examples given in this Chapter thus provide evidence to argue that stories inspire violent action and the perception that violent retaliation is expected and accepted. In other words, my findings suggest that street-oriented male youth construct their lives and life-circumstances as stories through *capable of violence narratives* that forge connections between their own and others experiences, actions, and aspirations.

Moreover, these stories are good examples of how individuals and groups negotiate and transmit meaning of lived experience during storytelling (see Lauger 2014). The participants repetitious storytelling of *capable of violence narratives*, either as a consequence of the illegal drug market, as a mean to gain or uphold a desired subcultural identity about respect, or as a normal identity characteristic of their in-group, are seen to produce motivations for violent actions and identity performances among street-oriented youth in Oslo. Such stories therefore create expectancies and aspirations, and I have argued that this aids the normalization of violent identity work among male youths growing up in this social context.

As a final note, these stories help group members define the characteristics of their own violent group behavior as 'normal,' but they also make it easier for members to distinguish themselves and their violent acts from that of others. In the next Chapter I will illustrate how the participants use of identity narratives intertwines with symbolic boundary work.

6 Narrative boundaries: Normalizing violent actors

> I remember that game before you kind of accepted the role as the criminal, foreign kid. Like, you were playing, maybe doing some naughty shit, but already before the naughty shit started, the police were there and controlled us. They were always there, always stopping us. If we went outside in the evening, we were stopped and searched every fucking day, and we were like "Okay, we're already criminals in their eyes, so why the fuck shouldn't we just commit crime then?" (Tahiil).

In this Chapter I am particularly interested in which stories make violence attractive, and how stories of violent participation can be interpreted as a way of constructing identity. Aiming to understand how normalizing attitudes toward violent behavior and identity work is transmitted through storytelling among male youth in street cultures, I will investigate what stories my participants tell when retrospectively constructing their personal and collective identities. The men involved in this study often communicated essential cultural ideas when telling stories about their personal experiences with violence. In turn this helped them contextualize and shape elements of their street culture, by reinforcing how, why, when, and for who violence is normalized. Because an intrinsic part of constituting the self is engaging in symbolic boundary work (Lamont 1992, p. 11), I will focus on how the participants narratively create symbolic boundaries to differentiate between desirable groups and those they find less desirable.

I have defined three identity narratives that will structure this Chapter. I call these the *me and my guys*, *know the stakes of the game*, and *friends vs. gangs narratives*. Each of these narratives illustrate how a narrator think he ought to be like, or what selves in general ought to be like (see Bruner 2002, p. 66) within this particular street youth culture. They also illustrate how the participants involved in this study create symbolic boundaries that normalize their own violent behavior while also differentiating themselves from 'others.' I argue that the repeated and collective representation of these three identity narratives emanate from social interaction, and that their construction of symbolic boundaries that normalize in-group violent behavior should therefore be seen as the result of a collective effort in the street culture my participants grew up in. Combined I view these identity narratives to aid an understanding of how stories are important mechanisms in the normalization of violent action and identity work.

Me and my guys: Drawing lines between 'us' and 'them'

The most common identity narrative found in the participants personal and collective identity constructions is what I have called the *me and my guys narrative*. This narrative does not only serve as the basis for creating their own group identity (us), but participants also utilized this narrative as a resource to differentiate themselves from those they wished to distance from (them). Hence, the *me and my guys narratives* entail a form of boundary work that function to shape and maintain feelings of similarity through feelings of difference. As Jenkins (2008, p. 17) writes, "Identifying ourselves, or others, is a matter of meaning, and meaning always involves interaction: agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation." The narrative process of situating social actors within categories like 'me and my guys,' and thus 'other people,' is fundamental for understanding how violent identity work is normalized among street-oriented youth. It is a narrative strategy that aids both its tellers and listeners to agree upon a definition of reality where violent behavior is normal, accepted, and part of the social characteristics that make the 'group' known both to others and themselves.

The most common boundary work practiced by narrators telling *me and my guys narratives* was to "cut up the world" (Zerubavel 1991, p. 1) based on engagement in the same deviant social practices. One participant, Hugo, explained these social practices as "just being street", stating that "everyone knew what it was." Other research participants would list activities such as being out with the guys, smoking joints, drinking alcohol, doing drugs, dealing drugs, getting money, being tough, being hard, attracting women, being a good fighter, owning guns, wearing knives, standing up for yourself, and demanding respect no matter where you go or who you meet. In other words, the construction of the personal and collective identity 'me and my guys' bears many similarities with the *capable of violence* stories from the previous Chapter. Most importantly, this identity is based on categorizations of social practices that describe typical in-group behavior as engagement in crime and violence.

Zerubavel (1991) argues that things only become meaningful when they are placed in socially created categories that give them a name, an identity, and value-laden characteristics. However, it is important to note that the construction of social identities (e.g., 'man' vs. 'woman', 'good' vs. 'bad', 'criminal' vs. 'noncriminal') often are dichotomies that force people to identify with either the one or the other. In turn, categorizations of the 'other' are usually not adequate (Copes 2016). This is evident in the participants *me and my guys* stories,

which tended to describe the assumed experiences of out-groups and their unique characteristics by portraying them as high-drama caricatures that ignore real life complexity (see Loseke 2007). Abdi exemplifies this tendency:

> Abdi: I know a lot of people who has robbed rich kids on the west side and then later sit's a year for it, and it's just piss, right, stabbing a guy, you know a real rich kid, it's just like what the fuck. It's not cool. It's not tough to stab a guy from, from like Frogner, you know?
>
> Frøja: Yeah, okay so is it cooler to stab a guy from Grønland or what?
>
> Abdi: No, but then, then at least you stab a guy who can stab you back [smiling] you know what I mean? It's like I'm a 25-year-old and go beat up a 15-year-old, you know what I mean? It's like, you know you're going to win, do you understand? So, if you stab a guy, you know you can beat, why the fuck do you? [laughing]

Here, Abdi constructs a social identity of "rich kids" [10] as weak contradictions of "me and my guys." Rich kids represent young men from wealthy families living in the west part of Oslo, and the most predominant picture painted of rich kids in the participants accounts was some sort of opposite, one-dimensional character, with traits like that of weak and helpless child, compared to the tough and resilient guys from "our side of town." The participants use of *me and my guys narratives* illustrate this boundary work. Abdi's story is a good example. In this story he is not a weak rich kid from Frogner and by distancing himself from people who might be categorized as such he narratively creates a social identity for 'them' to construct a personal identity for himself. In turn, the 'rich kid out-group' becomes vague and Abdi's personal stories become specific. This exemplifies how participants utilized the *me and my guys narratives* as a strategy to maintain and strengthen their feelings of difference to this other group.

However, the use of this narrative also incorporates themes from larger cultural stories, what Loseke (2007) describes as "formula stories" that exist at the cultural level. He claims these stories are essential for both the construction and representation of subcultural identities. The *me and my guys narratives* reveal a formula story that constitute what one should value, know, and how one should behave within this street culture. As Abid's story is an example of,

[10] The Norwegian term for 'rich kid' is 'soss'. This is a well-known expression for people who have money and are usually born on the west side of Oslo (ref. Frogner as example). The participants would also use 'daddy's boys' synonymous with 'rich kids.'

perpetrating violence on someone who cannot defend himself does not increase respect as the fight is considered 'won' even before it begins. Drawing on a formula story about 'fair fights' when describing a violent act, one may view Abdi as strategically using the *me and my guys narrative* to bridge gaps between this untoward behavior and the social audiences' presumed moral expectations (in this case me).

By being based on a collectively shared understanding, formula stories may also allow actors to avoid elaborating on their actions, because relating them to larger narratives often will suffice by itself (Brookman et al. 2011, p. 399). So, although narratives usually have a clear structure, with beginnings, middles, and ends (Riessman 2008), stories may also become so common that they are recognizable with just a simple reference to themes or generic topics (Sandberg 2016). In other words, short phrases or even single words can be used to illustrate entire stories (Copes 2016). The social identity rich kids mirror this point. But in the case of violent male youth, such identifiable phrases may also relate to familiar people like violent offenders or gangsters, and thus to familiar behavior like fighting or dealing drugs.

The boundary work within the participants uses of *me and my guys narratives* seem to differ from what is usually assumed among stigmatized groups maintenance of symbolic boundaries on this matter. Like Copes (2016, p. 197) have argued, maintaining boundaries is particularly important for stigmatized people. But although the participants involved in this study could be seen as stigmatized because they engage in deviant and illegal behavior, most did not maintain symbolic boundaries to distance themselves away from stigmatized or low-status labels like thug or murderer. For example, Mateo constructed his groups collective identity as: "We were criminal minded motherfuckers, all of us alfa dogs," indicating my argument that the *me and my guys narratives* may be seen as a resource for an identity construction oriented towards strengthening a gangster image by creating out-groups as less tough and less capable. In the next quote, Chris gives another good example of how participants would use this narrative to identify themselves by explanation of category-bound activities that define members of offender categories and thereby maintain boundaries to less desirable out-groups:

> Ehm [laughing] we were all just a bunch of gangsters really, just crazy. And ehm I mean other people didn't get it, they've never, they couldn't even think about snorting cocaine at 16, right, do you understand? Or smoking joints at 12 or stabbing someone

> who owes you money, right. While we, we come from concrete, among killas and heavy, heavy criminals, right.

In this story, Chris' identification of self is a placement within a certain offender category, as he puts it himself: "a bunch of gangsters," "killas or heavy, heavy criminals". Although categories are sometimes viewed as the basis for how people are spoken of in everyday life (Hall et al. 2006, p. 25), and in that sense argue that our categories provide information about who people really are and how they should be evaluated or classified socially, single categories can also be used to illustrate entire stories. Chris' placement of himself and 'his guys' within offender categories like "killas" may thus be seen as him constructing an identity that describes what he thinks he and his guys ought to be like. Alternatively, one may view Chris as connecting his personal story to a larger cultural 'formula story' (Loseke 2007) about who tough and dangerous men are in our society.

When explaining that "other people don't get it", Chris further illustrates symbolic boundary work as a narrative strategy to construct the in-group as tough and dangerous and the outgroup as weak. The differences between 'us' and 'them' thus effectively distinguish how 'we' are tougher and better than 'them.' Chris' construction of his personal and his group's collective identity is therefore working within the context of a shared belief system (see Colvin and Pisoiu 2020). As Scott and Lyman (1968, p. 54) noted in their influential article on 'accounts', people struggle to work outside of these systems because accounts are "deemed unreasonable when the stated grounds for action cannot be 'normalized' in terms of the background expectancies of what 'everybody knows.'"

However, it appears the participants use of *me and my guys narratives* to construct self-identities are somewhat less fluid than what others have previously found when investigating the narratives of violent populations. For example, Hochstetler and colleagues (2010) investigated the "criminal selfhood" in "nonviolent violent offenders" (p. 494) and observed that cognizant of mainstream culture's condemnation of their violence, these narrators distinguished self from behavior to present themselves as "basically good people, despite their violent acts" (p. 497). Similarly, in Green, South, and Smith's (2006) study of "dangerous individuals", participants offered "good at heart" narratives that worked to separate their essential self from their crimes. Their analysis suggests that the key function of neutralization

in all cases were “to disavow deviance and to stress the inherent normality of the individual.” (Green, South, and Smith 2006, p. 304).

When creating symbolic boundaries that divide ‘me and my guys’ from ‘other people’ based on engagement in illegal social practices like violence, the research participants in this study did however not portray themselves as “basically good people, despite their violent acts” (Hochstetler et al. 2010, p. 497). Neither did they really offer “good at heart” narratives when constructing their personal and collective identities. Instead, the *me and my guys narratives* were used as a narrative resource for identity construction where the narrators stressed the normality of the deviant *acts* within their socio-cultural context. As a result of normalizing the deviant acts, they also narratively accepted the perpetrators behind such acts.

Know the stakes of the game: Constructing ‘us’ as autonomous players

The previous section illustrated how the participants would use *me and my guys narratives* as linguistic strategies to construct a gangster identity of their ingroup by created symbolic boundaries that differentiated outgroups as weak. Such stories were used as narrative resources to normalize the violent behavior perpetrated by ingroup members. However, participants would also differentiate between different violent offenders within their own street culture. In this section I present the identity narrative I call *know the stakes of the game*, using the word ‘game’ as an analogy for the street culture depicted by my participants. This narrative refers to ingroup members as ‘players,’ and participants would use this narrative to create boundaries between accepted and not accepted violent actors within their street culture. This happened on two main grounds, either by referring to distinctions in motivation to commit violent crimes, or distinctions in choosing a victim. In the next quote, Noah tells a story of violence regarding the first form of boundary work in the *know the stakes of the game narratives*:

> Violence is not so bad. But it’s like, there are really bad violence. People who are evil right, bad people who wants to hurt, hurt people because, I don’t even know what their reasons are. But like a normal fight, where two people want to fight, that’s completely natural. All animals in all species and so on do it. But people who hurt people because they want to, that’s, that’s wrong.

By distinguishing actors who engage in violence with people who reciprocally "want" to fight from actors who engage in violence because they themselves want to "hurt people," Noah illustrates *know the stakes of the game narratives* as a resource to create a moral boundary between violent actors. Here, the analogy of street culture as a 'game' and the boundary between accepted and unaccepted violent actors as 'players' becomes clear. On the one side Noah constructs unaccepted violent players as "evil" and "bad" people who "enjoy hurting" others. On the other side he constructs accepted violent players when talking about "normal" fights as situations "where two people want to fight." The action of reciprocally agreeing to engage in violence thus creates the boundary of what constitutes accepted violence in this story.

The use of *know the stakes of the game narratives* equip storytellers and listeners to create personal and collective identities of people within this street culture as responsible for their own actions (e.g., partaking in illegal activities) and thus the possible outcomes of them (e.g., violent retaliation). In effect, this narrative allows street-oriented youth who engage in violence to construct each other as autonomous 'players' or 'conscientious individuals' (see Rødner 2005; Wetherell and Potter 1992). In the next quote, Yusef shows how constructing ingroup-members as autonomous players impact how injury, or rather victimization, is perceived:

> Yusef: I've always had an understanding of violence.
> Frøja: How come?
> Yusef: That you grow up, look around, and you can't afford things. So, you know, it makes you take a quicker road, or quicker solutions (.) But ehm there's a lot of violence I don't understand, of course.
> Frøja: Like what?
> Yusef: Going into apartments, stripping people from kids to mothers to fathers right, just traumatising people for nothing, and then you get minimal value in return (..) I can give an example. Let's say there's bills [money] someplace that's not legal right, and the guy is a piece of shit, and he gets beaten and robbed it's like, it's not so, you know what I mean? But then you go into another home, a family that like works hard, and that, that's two different situations, and you have both those guys walking through the door right, one that hesitates and one that doesn't, you see? One guy is more okay.

Although Yusef explains that he has always had an understanding for how people can get tempted to take "quicker solutions" like committing burglary or robbing someone, he explicitly

distinguishes these sorts of violent acts by a morale about the victims of such crimes. While Noah distinguished between types of violent players based on the motivation to commit violent crimes, Yusef make further comparisons between the victims of the violent crimes committed. Yusef also make an example to explain me the difference.

On the one side, robbing a family that works hard is not acceptable. Yusef even points to how such an experience may be traumatising for the victim, as well as possibly give "minimal value in return" for the perpetrator. On the other side, to rob a person who already earns his livelihood on illegitimate means, thus being a so called 'player of the game,' and "is a piece of shit" does not fall in under the same type of morale. As Yusef states "that's two different situations." This boundary work thus distinguishes types of violent actors by reference to the morale of choosing a victim. In Yusef's story, it is the victim that generates if a violent act is normalized or not.

I interpret the use of *know the stakes of the game narratives* as attempts to demonstrate how street-oriented male youth in Oslo are autonomous individuals (players) who partake in illegal social practices (the game) on their own accord. This bears some resemblance to the participants stories of violence as a consequence of the illegal drug market. It is also similar to what Sandberg (2009a) identify among street cannabis dealers in Oslo as "it was my own choice" narratives, which demonstrate that street dealers are in control of their own situation and behavior.

Regarding the normalization of violence, Haleem (2020, p. 12) states that "Violence is normalized when it is no longer viewed as immoral or unconscionable, but as instead moral and ordinary". So, when a normalization of violence materialises, he claims "all forms of violence become accepted as simply matters of routine behavior" (Haleem 2020, p. 12). However, like Noah and Yusuf's stories are examples of, the normalization of violent behavior in the participants use of *know the stakes of the game narratives* included symbolic boundaries that only accept certain violent actors and actions. This normalization work thus differ from the *me and my guys narratives* because it does not include all violent behavior.

The comparison of motivations to commit violence and the comparison of victims within this narrative point out that the following definition of injury changes when a person is considered as a conscious and autonomous player of the game. Through *know the stakes of the game narratives* street-oriented youth may therefore reconstruct the result of injury as not causing

any real or unjust harm. A function of this is that it becomes easier to legitimise violence as reasonable, accepted, and expected. This narrative may thus be used as a resource to create moral boundaries for violent perpetration.

Friends vs. gangs: An important boundary between street identities

Investigating what stories street-oriented male youth tell when constructing their personal and collective identities, this section presents the identity narrative I have called *friends vs. gangs*. As the name imply this narrative involves boundary work that distinguish groups of friends who commit crime from organized criminal gangs who commit crime. Next to all the young men I spoke with differentiated these two specific identities. While both are made up of violent actors within street cultures in Oslo, the research participants were clear on the distinction between them, like Yasin expressed "I'd be careful calling it a gang if I were you. We were not a criminal gang [serious face], (.) just criminal friends [smiling]."

The participants would talk about their group identity by referencing a gang mentality, like Usman who proclaimed, "We had a gang-mentality, but it was an organic way of having a gang, without anyone, no big, older guys coming in and saying, "this is how, and this is how we do it". No, it just happened." However, the distinction between groups of friends and organized criminal gangs were still mentioned as supplementary information in most of the participants accounts. Still, it is worth mentioning that the word 'gang' pose as problematic for several reasons. In Norwegian, a 'group of friends' is 'vennegjeng', and 'gjeng' means 'gang'. When simultaneously having a topic revolving crime, it should perhaps not come as a big surprise that the word 'gang' was given special attention. So, although participants would state that there was a "gang-mentality", it is evident that they felt the need to explicitly clarify how they were not an organized criminal gang. John gives a good example of this:

> John: There were different gangs, but it wasn't like "This is the Gamlebyen gang" and "This is the Tøyen gang", everyone go together and this and that. I mean you build relationships with people you like or of practical reasons, so it wasn't like a unified gang with a name and a clear agenda.
>
> Frøja: So, a group of friends then?
>
> John: A group of friends, yes, but a very violent group of friends [laughing].

Similar to Yasin and Usman, John explains the organic process of building relationships with friends to further differentiate these sorts of relationships from that of "a unified gang with a name and a clear agenda." Here, John's story is clear: a group of friends, even a violent group friends, is not the same as an organized criminal gang. Although participants elaborated on the level of violence in their social environment, explaining that "there was a lot of violence all the time" (Ibrahim), oftentimes "neighbourhood against neighbourhood" (Joakim), pointing out that "we had huge fights, mass-fights, but it wasn't gangs either right" (Ahmed), the topic of gangs as an important distinguishing feature between street identities in Oslo was specific in the participants accounts. Carlos gave a detailed and emotional depiction of this difference:

> When I think about a gang, I think about organization, I think about hierarchy, someone pulling the threads, and that there is some sort of structure. But there was no structure in what we did. I mean some people have natural leading skills, but it wasn't like we had a name, there was never any organizing going on. But eventually these overlapping friend groups let's say, were called "Young G" by the police in the media. So, although it never was a gang, the police said, "this is the gang, and this is the leaders", and then all of a sudden it became an organization with a centralized power structure! And that's a big difference! They [the police] could now use the mafia-paragraph on us. And what's even more dangerous is that like those who are deprived and marginalized in society don't have the defining power over their own reality, it is the media and police and the greater society that does. And when you don't have the defining power over yourself, you just have to let other people define you, right. That's in relation to that gang thing too, if the police say, "you're a gang, you're a gang, you're a gang," eventually you become a gang. I mean, that's how the human brain works, we protect ourselves from it by taking on that role.

Here, Carlos stresses the point of the *friends vs. gangs narrative*, which is the blurring of distinction between organized criminal gangs and groups of friends who might be involved in various criminal activity. He differentiates his group of friends from that of a criminal gang by characterizing the latter as "organized", "hierarchical", and "structured". Similar to John, Carlos then explains how his group of friends did not have a name nor a structure, and as such that they by definition were not an organized criminal gang. Even more importantly, they did not see themselves as such. This highlights what Hallsworth (2011, p. 184) has previously emphasized, that even if 'gang' members commit offenses it is often "not evident that the

offense in question is motivated by ‘gang’ membership in and of itself.”

Consistent with previous research (Deuchar 2009; 2015; Hallsworth and Young 2008), the participants in this study who told stories of being labelled as ‘gang members’[11] did not conceptualize the peer groups with who they associate as ‘gangs’ but rather as ‘peer networks’ or ‘friendship groups.’ Their use of *friends vs. gangs narratives* illustrate this point. By studying this narrative as a linguistic strategy to create boundaries that differentiate between two street identities, I find that street youth violence is rather unregulated, and that the participants use of this narrative enlarge a fact of how street youth violence in fact lacks social orientation in many respects. It also amplifies that to only focus on stereotypes of gang culture and violence can make us lose sight of the wider issues that lead to street youth violence (see Hallsworth and Young 2008).

Carlos mentions some of these wider issues through statements like “those who are deprived and marginalized in society don’t have the defining power over their own reality.” He also points to external forces which are part of the risk factors of joining a gang. Such risk factors are said to be a combination of ‘structural factors’ like poverty, housing precarity, poor educational institutions, employment discrimination, and police harassment, as well as ‘individual factors’ like marginalization in form of weak commitment to institutions such as family, school and leisure activities, lack of recognition, and experience with discrimination (see Decker et al. 2009, Flores 2013; Moore and Stuart 2022).

Most participants in this study told of experience with social factors like these when growing up. In effect, such factors may create circulating cultural narratives that provide roadmaps for certain forms action among street-oriented male youth in Oslo. As is indicated in Carlos ending statement: “if the police say, “you’re a gang, you’re a gang, you’re a gang,” eventually you become a gang. I mean, that’s how the human brain works, we protect ourselves from it by taking on that role,” it has been argued that there is a mutually constitutive relationship between state’s material and discursive generation of ‘gangs’ (Moore and Stuart 2022, p. 309). Many of the participants in this study would blame the police and the media for creating an image of their group of friends as an organized criminal gang. This illustrates that *friends vs. gangs*

[11] More than just a few, but by no means all, of the participants in this study report experiences with being labelled as a gang member during their youth or entry to adulthood.

stories work within the context of a shared belief system where 'formula stories' (Loseke 2007) about deviant groups in society are socially circulating.

According to Sandberg (2013) it is therefore necessary to view personal narratives as individual attempts at coherency that draw on a wide repertoire of cultural narratives and discourses, which then later on are made to fit the storyteller in personalised ways. In order to grasp how the normalization of violent behavior and identity work intertwine with active symbolic boundary work, it may thus be fruitful to acknowledge that a large reason why identity narratives make sense, is because they construct coherent connections among life events and larger cultural narratives. Joakim illustrates this when describing his group of friends growing up: "We were a small group of friends who thought the same things were cool. And we were all preoccupied with crime and being the toughest guys who dared the most." In this narrative Joakim connect his group to a larger cultural narrative about what was cool and what one should aspire to be in this subculture. I assert that by locating the research participants identity constructions as connected to larger structures that provide convenient devices for evaluating deviant behaviors and identities, allows for an analysis of how interactions among street-oriented young men associate with larger cultural groups.

However, the *friends vs. gangs narrative* figures in the construction of a significant moral boundary between the participants as groups of friends who commit violent crimes and those who engage in organized criminal activity. Previous studies seem to reflect isolated social contexts, either institutions or 'street,' with the dominating discursive strategies being neutralization that use conventional discourse (Sykes and Matza 1957) or "neutralizing being good" (Topalli 2005) and "telling the code of the street" (Jimerson and Oware 2006). Sandberg (2009a) however demonstrate that one must include both conventional and gangster discourse to see the full discursive repertoire of young criminal offenders. He claims that such ambivalence and interdiscursivity actually challenge concepts like "the code of the street" (Anderson 1999) and "street culture" (Bourgois 2003). This will be brought to the frontline in the following Chapter, however the *friends vs. gangs narratives* also indicate what Sandberg (2009a, p. 506) have previously observed, that street-oriented male youth involved in violence and crime on the streets of Oslo should not be seen as completely isolated within one subculture, but rather as "drifting" between mainstream and subcultural discourses.

In searching for stories that street-oriented young men tell when constructing their personal

and collective identities, and in what ways these stories normalize violent behavior, I find that *friends vs. gangs* stories link personal experiences and behaviors to larger, culturally meaningful groups. I view this as an indication of how larger cultural narratives work among young men who partake in violent crimes on the streets of Oslo. It is illustrative of how definitions with varying levels of motivation to break the law are created through the telling and retelling of stories. Moreover, the use of this narratives maintains what Deuchar (2015) have professed on the importance for academics to move beyond the "gang gaze."

For example, participants would often make conceptual distinctions to society, the state, the police, and school. Like Ahmed carefully formulates in his account about violent crimes: "For me at least, it was almost encouraged, like a fuck-you-finger to society and I was on purpose parted away from that and everything like school, the police, fuck the police!" This may be seen as a narrative strategy to create definitions of a reality where the group purposefully separate themselves away from conventional society. Carlos also illustrates this when stating: "we protect ourselves from it by taking on that role." By pointing to the ascribed role of being a criminal gang member, Carlos suggest how being labelled as criminal from a young age might work as a self-fulfilling prophesy. As Moore and Stuart (2022, p. 312) argues, when young individuals and their neighbourhood peers become gang-associated, they "may adopt the names and/or cultural practices from local gangs." With this, I argue that it is dangerous to credit categories of organised criminal gang members to male youth who do not view themselves as such, although they participate in illegal social practices.

The participants use of *friends vs. gangs narratives* show that social identity work intertwines with symbolic boundary work. The differentiation between 'violent groups of friends' and 'organized criminal gangs' seems to come alongside a way of framing and contextualising both the individual and the group's social identity in a larger context. Stories that differentiate friends vs. gangs work to draw lines between the group the participants identify with and this specific other group that others identify them as. The participants express this as a very important boundary between street-oriented groups in Oslo because identification with one or the other can have huge consequences for the individual, such as harder convictions or social exclusion.

I argue that the collective representations of these two groups is birthed in social interaction among street-oriented young people in Oslo. Like Zerubavel (1991, p. 32) points out, collective

representations or images are “the very stuff that our social life is made of”, and as such they are consequential – an individual group member cannot ignore them, whether he agrees with them or not. In this light, male youth that participate in violent and other deviant behavior on the streets of Oslo may be seen to create and consume specific images and interpretations of their own and each other’s experiences. I argue that these images, or stories, help street youth develop guidelines and symbolic boundaries for understanding their own violent actions and retrospectively classify them in justifiable ways that work to normalize such behavior.

Concluding remarks

In this Chapter I have been particularly interested in which stories make violence attractive, and how stories of violent participation can be interpreted as a way of constructing identity. I have presented three identity narratives that were used by the research participants in this study when constructing their personal and collective identities during research interviews. I have argued that these stories aid street-oriented youth in contextualizing and shape elements of their street culture, by reinforcing how, why, when, and for who violence is normalized.

The *me and my guys narratives* embrace the most common story found among the participants personal and collective identity constructions. These narratives bear similarities to the capable of violence stories from the previous Chapter regarding descriptions of typical in-group behavior as engagement in crime and violence. I have illustrated how participants would use *me and my guys narratives* as a linguistic strategy to create symbolic boundaries that differentiated their desired in-group from other less desirable groups. This worked to narratively create ingroup members as tough and capable, while simultaneously creating outgroup members as weak – a tendency exemplified by the social identity “rich kids.” By relating to larger cultural ‘formula stories’ (Loseke 2007) about who tough and dangerous men are in our society, I have argued that the *me and my guys narratives* form a shared belief system that shapes the subcultures desired identity constructions. They are thus collective products that constitute what street-oriented male youth should value, know, and how they should behave in certain situations. I have identified that the repeated telling of this narrative normalize collective violent behavior and that it maintains symbolic boundaries, not to distance away from stigmatized labels like ‘criminal’ or ‘killer,’ but to strengthen the groups gangster image. The strategic use of this narrative therefore indicates that masculine ideals of being tough, standing your ground, and being capable of violence are important and aspiring identity

features within youth street cultures in Oslo. It is therefore fundamental to acknowledge stories like this when trying to understand how street youth violence is normalized.

In this Chapter I have also presented what I term the *know the stakes of the game narratives,* which refer to members of the 'us' identity among street-oriented male youths in Oslo. The name signals an analogy, where the street culture depicted by the participants is referred to as 'a game' and the participants or other members of the subculture are referred to as 'players.' Regarding the normalization work in this narrative, I have showed how participants differentiated between violent offenders based on motivation to conduct violent crimes and on choosing a victim. In turn, I argue that this narrative strategy allows street-oriented youth who engage in violence to construct each other as autonomous individuals (players) that partake in illegal social practices (the game) on their own accord. These stories therefore narratively create symbolic boundaries that divide certain victims and offenders into normative categories decisive of whether crimes committed are accepted, or not. By comparing the motivations to commit violence and the victims of violent acts, this narrative indicates that the following definition of injury changes when a person is considered as an autonomous player the game. I argue that these stories make it easier to legitimise violence as reasonable, accepted, and expected, and thus that *know the stakes of the game narratives* create moral boundaries that distinguish what types of violent behvaior is normalized within Oslo street life.

The third narrative presented in this Chapter is the *friends vs. gangs narratives* which involves a specific boundary work that distinguish groups of friends who commit crime from organized criminal gangs who commit crime. It is a narrative that stress the blurring of distinction between these two street identities, and I have showed that this narrative project identity constructions through a 'formula story' (Loseke 2007) of action by representing cultural narratives about deviant groups in society. I assert that these narratives figures in the construction of a significant moral boundary between the two groups – a differentiation which seems to come alongside a way of framing and contextualising both the individual and the group's social identity in a larger context. Moreover, I have stressed the danger of crediting categories of organised criminal gang members to male youth who do not view themselves as such, although they participate in illegal social practices. By locating how the use of this identity narrative project personal identity constructions that connects to larger narrative structures, I assert that we may better understand how they provide convenient devices for deviant behavior which street-oriented youth integrate in their identity work.

Combined these findings suggest that taking a narrative criminology approach sparring with symbolic boundaries is fruitful to investigate the normalization of violent behavior and identity work. The collectively shared identity narratives defined in this thesis thus contributes to expand the knowledge we have on how violent behavior and identities are normalized among male street youth. As a final remark, I assert that these identity narratives illustrate how stories when internalized by human actors can make "criminologically relevant things happen" and "shape the morally significant things that we do" (Presser 2016, pp. 139–40). As the next Chapter will illustrate, these narratives may therefore also tell us something about the future behavior and identity work of young men affiliated with a street culture in Oslo.

7 Getting out: The narrative shifts of formerly incarcerated men

Athens (1997, p. 54) points out that "one of the most vital facts that can be known about human beings is how they see themselves, their self-portraits. However, sufficient attention must always be paid to the date when the self-portrait was painted." Up to this point I have investigated storytelling as a key linguistic mechanism for the normalization of violent behavior and identity work among street-oriented male youth in Oslo. I have examined which stories they tell about violence when talking about their youth and retrospectively constructing their personal and collective identities in conversation with me. Aiming to identify how these stories shape normalizing attitudes toward violence I have defined four collectively reproduced identity narratives, all of which reflect images from the participants youth in a violent street culture in Oslo. But in line with narrative criminology, I believe that when a narrative becomes internalized by human actors, they may also provide roadmaps for future action (Presser and Sandberg 2015). In this final analysis Chapter I will therefore attempt to capture how the internalized identity narratives previously presented have shaped these young men's future action and self-narrative constructions.

Among the participants self-narrative constructions, I have identified yet another narrative that talks of the difficulty of leaving a violent, criminal past behind. Its plot is oriented toward a separation from the identity narratives presented in the previous two chapters, and fundamentally points to street-oriented, formerly incarcerated young men's struggle of transitioning to adulthood, becoming a successfully desisting individual, re-creating oneself post incarceration, and 'getting out' of a criminal lifestyle. I call this the *getting out narrative*.

However, most of the participants portrayed a wider repertory of self-representations that shifted depending on whether they were situating their self-narrative pre or post their incarceration(s). I find that Fairclough's (1992, 1995, 2003) concept of *interdiscursivity* is fruitful to both highlight the participants narrative shifts and to describe how the research interview is a special mix of discourses articulated together (see also Sandberg 2009ab). Moreover, some of the participants self-narratives were generated from explorations of specific violent acts, while others came from conversation about the participants life or sense of self. I will therefore also be using Brookman's (2015) conceptions of *action* and *reflection narratives* to examine how participants utilize certain stories (see chapter 5 and 6) interdiscursively when providing their present and future-oriented self-narratives.

The discourses that came up during the interviews relate to conventional, subcultural, oppression and gangster (Sandberg 2009a), street, vulnerability and disadvantage (Brookman 2015). However, the participants discursive repertoires were especially seen in shifting between the discourse of a street subculture which is represented in the four identity narratives from the previous two chapters and in most of the participants stories situated before incarceration, and a more conventional discourse that refer to the struggle of entering adulthood and becoming a desisting individual post incarceration. Similar to what Sandberg (2009a, p. 494) observed when conducting interviews with a similar group as my participants, *meaning* appeared to be constructed locally, from minute to minute, but always in a way that reflected the "discursive environment" (Gubrium and Holstein 2003) and "shared narrative formats" (Atkinson and Coffey 2003).

In this analysis I will only present extracts from three of the 15 interviews, namely Mateo, Ibrahim, and Carlos. These are presented as case studies, and I have chosen them specifically because of the way they utilize the identity narratives from Chapter 5 and 6 to tell *getting out narratives* that represent a lot of the same patterns found in the other interviews. My decision to only draw from a small number of the interviews is also made to allow for space to present as much as possible of the participants interdiscursivity and self-narrative constructions, or as Brookman (2015, p. 212) say "to forgo breadth for the sake of depth".

Mateo

Mateo was twenty-four at the time of the interview and had served two prison sentences for violent offenses. He had an energetic persona and spoke fast paced about the many struggles he has faced, sharing both trivial and deep reflections about his life, actions, and perceptions of himself and others. In the following quote, he provides an action narrative of a violent act that resulted in his second conviction:

> I sat eight months, so I got out after just two thirds, but like really, I got ten months. Anyway, I wasn't so fucking bitter because I've done a lot of shit that I like could've sat for. But anyway, got in a fight with some guys and I knock out the teeth on one of them, and it was bad! [smiling] Look I still have scars all over my hand! [showing me his right knuckle] But I remember how I got caught, jumping over cars and shit, just

> bam bam bam, running, got on a bus and there was sirens everywhere, and this was in the middle of a fucking bar street right, and I remember the police stopped the bus, got on, and I look down and see that there's blood everywhere on my pants, so I was just like "fuck", take off my jumper to try and hide it, but my hands where covered and yea I was easy to spot, so I got caught.

Mateo opens his account by using limiting or minimising language (McKendy 2006) about his conviction, stating for example "I got out after *just* two thirds" and "I *wasn't* so fucking bitter". He thus starts with presenting himself as a 'good' inmate, acknowledging his prison sentence as fair punishment. By taking responsibility for his actions, Mateo can be seen to draw on conventional discourse to begin with. However, he quickly changes his account by providing more details about the act that caused his conviction. Almost bragging about his violent behavior (e.g., "I knock out the teeth on one," "it was bad!"), and showing off his 'battle scars,' Mateo gives a less sanitised presentation of himself. He is now creating some tension between what first seemed like a redemption story and a quite different subcultural tale where a *capable of violence narrative* is used to provide a tough, gangster-like self-image.

Moreover, Mateo tells the story in an action-type of way, almost movie-like, using present tense as if we are both there in the story. Utterances such as "I knock out the teeth on one of them", "jumping over cars", "bam bam bam, running" and "sirens everywhere" describes the act in situ and provides a captivating story for the listener. As Sandberg and Fleetwood (2017, p. 374) has observed "Stories of violence fill conversations by being exciting and entertaining." Hence, the way Mateo tell his story makes me wonder if he has told it many times before. Nevertheless, he positions himself as the violent perpetrator, using first-person pronoun "I" throughout, effectively taking responsibility for his violent act.

Mateo presents himself as violent in this action narrative (e.g., "I've done a lot of shit that I like could've sat for", "look I still have scars all over my hand", and "there's blood everywhere"), thereby embedding himself quite clearly within a violent subcultural discourse in favour of the identity narratives presented in the previous two chapters. However, as the conversation continues, he provides a reflection narrative of his present self-image, at the same time switching his discursive standpoint:

Frøja: Has all this violence in any way impacted who you are today?

Mateo: Yes, it has left its mark, but I don't know, I think [hesitating] because I see it more with aggression, like violence comes up as a solution in my head when it shouldn't you understand? Or solving something with violence, or I don't know, just theoretical fucking violent episodes that now I don't act on, I let it be just a thought. Or (..) I rarely get in fights, and if I do, then it's usually alcohol or drugs involved you know?

At first, Mateo continues to draw on subcultural discourse by confidently stating that "Yes, [violence] has left its mark", implying that he is aggressive and may still view violence as a solution to solve problems. However, as O'Connor (1995) suggests, epistemic expressions such as "I don't know" may illustrate evaluation and speculation regarding violence on personal agency. Mateo's repeated use of deflecting or passivizing language (see O'Connor 1995), like for instance "I don't know", "it shouldn't", and "now I don't", may thus indicate a shift over to a conventional discourse objecting of violence. In other words, Mateo is making an effort to present a changed self-narrative according to the plot of a *getting out* story.

Although implying that his present self-image is still aligned in a subcultural discourse, confessing that he sometimes "get in fights", Mateo also neutralizes his present violent behavior by framing it as "rare" and usually under the influence of alcohol or drugs. He thus captivates tensions between agency or responsibility on the one hand and external factors that contribute to violent behavior on the other. This may be seen in line with what Lindegaard and Zimmermann (2017) term "flexible cultural repertoires", which refer to young men affiliated with street culture's ability to shift between conventional and street repertoires. They argue that the ability to fit in with both contexts avoid offending and victimization (Lindegaard and Zimmermann 2017). In his reflection narrative, Mateo oscillates between subcultural and conventional discourse, a fluctuation, or flexibility, which becomes more evident as the conversation progress:

Mateo: I've been through a fucking rollercoaster right, where in prison I finally came to the point "what do you really want?". Because all my values were crushed, none of it made sense anymore, none of the goals I had before made sense anymore, right, so I had to really grow more to recreate, or (.) to create something new.

Frøja: How do you mean?

Mateo: I mean, you have many parts of yourself from the things you've experienced, and you could probably diagnose me with PTSD of some sort because of the scars from my past (..) There has been a lot of challenges, and there's still a lot of things I struggle with, partly because of my past, but also, I don't know, things like tax. I've never gotten any help along the way figuring out shit like that right. And it's hard to ask for help, you know? At the same time, most of my friends are still stone-cold fucking gangsters, drug addicts, or at least people from the street, you know? And this makes it harder to get out.

Here, Mateo identifies several criminogenic forces in his life and social environment (e.g., "I've been through a fucking rollercoaster", "all my values were crushed", "none of the goals I had *before* made sense *anymore*", "It has been a lot of challenges", and "I've never gotten any help along the way"). He effectively assesses external influences to explain his past violent behavior and his endeavour to take control over these conditions. One may view this in line with what Shadd Maruna (2001) labels a 'redemption-script.' In his ground-breaking book *Making Good,* studying ex-prisoners in Liverpool, UK, Maruna (2001) found discernible patterns among the self-narratives of successfully desisting individuals that included a shift in agency where the individual had managed to take control over external circumstances (e.g., peer pressure, abusive past or lack of opportunity) rather than be a victim of them.

In telling a form of 'redemption-script' (Maruna 2001), Mateo illustrates a *getting out* story. First, we see a shift in agency take form through Mateo's repeated use of "anymore" which implicitly points to a change from who he was prior to his incarcerated moment of realization ("in prison I finally came to the point "what do you really want?""). In this story, I observe a struggle for change towards a successfully desisting individual, or at least an individual trying to 'get out.' Here, Mateo is complex in his telling. He is less aligned with subcultural discourse and rather shifts over to a conventional discursive stance. By using his conviction as a narrative resource Mateo is further able to construct a present and future-oriented self-narrative of a man struggling to start fresh. Statements such as "I had to really grow to recreate or (..) to create something new" underlines this struggle.

At the same time, Mateo situates himself as a product of past environments. Hence, we may see the internalization of the previously mentioned identity narratives still present within his self-narrative. Mateo may further be seen to draw on a disadvantage discourse where he

perceives himself as being acted upon rather than being the acter of. In statements such as “you could probably diagnose me with PTSD of some sort because of the scars from my past” he also enters an oppression discourse. Furthermore, his frequent use of tag questions such as “right?” and “you know?” may also imply that he wants to solicit support and understanding from the listener (see McKendy 2006, p. 487). Mateo’s story may therefore, at least in part, be seen as a ‘sad tale’ (Goffman 1961) where he is putting his crimes into a context that makes them understandable and institutionalized in welfare and penal systems. In any event, it is clear that Mateo is trying to reject a previous violent self-image: in his own words “recreate” himself.

According to Maruna (2011) ex-offenders need to reconstruct their biography to be reintegrated and re-accepted in the wider society post prison release. This process may be referred to as ‘knifing off’ one’s criminal past (Maruna and Roy 2007) and can be done either by detaching oneself from a past identity through geographical re-location (Laub and Sampson 2001) or by reconstructing one’s biography by revising the past to make it consistent with one’s script for the future (Maruna, 2001; 2011). Such a re-biography involves developing a coherent and pro-social identity that hold an acceptance of one’s past self-narrative, while also preserving a positive self-narrative in the present (Maruna 2011).

This latter strategy of knifing off is evident throughout Mateo’s effort to portray a changed self-narrative. However, as with the majority of other participants, Mateo touch on the difficulty of knifing off one’s criminal past with reference to geographical re-location (see Laub and Sampson 2001). Ending on a note of explaining his current friends as “stone-cold fucking gangsters, drug addicts or at least people from the street”, Mateo effectively problematises how such external forces “makes it hard*er* to *get out*”. By reflecting on his will to detach from a past criminal identity, he also points out the difficulty of having stayed within the same social environment post incarceration.

In summary, the action narrative provided by Mateo is mostly embedded within subcultural discourse, which function to construct a self-narrative as a tough man ‘capable of violence.’ However, in his reflection narrative, Mateo begins to shift over to conventional discourse, creating an image of himself as struggling for change. He is now telling a *getting out* story. Although the interdiscursivity in Mateo’s self-narrative moves between subcultural (action) and conventional (reflection) discourses, the part of ‘getting out’ also draws on disadvantage discourse explaining external criminogenic forces as a challenge he works on moving past.

Here, Mateo strategically use his conviction and criminal past to provide a more sanitised self-narrative. In part, this may be seen as corresponding with a redemption-script (Maruna 2001), and in effect Mateo is able to present himself as in the process of changing into a desisting individual. The main plot of Mateo's story seems to be about 'getting out' to re-create himself post incarceration. He talks of the struggle to detach from a previously internalized identity as tough and violent, a plot which become even more visible when I now turn to Ibrahim.

Ibrahim

Ibrahim was twenty-eight years old at the time of the interview and had spent three years in prison for distribution and trafficking of cocaine. During our meeting, Ibrahim came across as a calm and sincere man. He spoke emotionally, yet laid back, reflecting deeply on how crime and conviction has impacted his life. Ibrahim report engagement in several violent episodes, mostly as a consequence of the illegal drug market. In telling a story of a violent episode, Ibrahim constructs an action narrative to explain his experience of the aftermath of violence:

> It was a rush when it happened, but I always thought it was nasty afterwards, too much adrenalin, then you get stressed thinking "oh fuck I hope they're okay" or like "shit are they coming after me now?" things like that. But you just have to do it, get revenge, and be tough right. Still, I was never fond of it.

In a matter of seconds, Ibrahim draws upon numerous distinct discourses when explaining his experience with violence. The first thing he mentions is the "rush." That violence may trigger a rush of excitement is clearly embedded in subcultural discourse and may be seen close to what Brookman (2015) terms 'thrills discourses' that recognizes the allure, excitement, and risks associated with violent crimes (for more on 'thrill' and 'risk' see Katz 1988; Lyng 2004). But within the same sentence, Ibrahim shifts over to a conventional discourse claiming that "it was always nasty afterwards", commenting that the adrenalin was "too much." This function to position him as remorseful rather than a violent person who gets a rush from inflicting pain. Explaining that he would get stressed in the aftermath of a violent episode, on the one side feeling compassion for the victim, and on the other concern about being retaliated himself, is a further indication that Ibrahim is trying to separate himself from a violent self-image.

Although shifting back into a subcultural, gangster discourse stating that "you just have to do it, get revenge and be tough right", in effect telling a *capable of violence narrative*, Ibrahim

still positions himself on the line of a vulnerability discourse that brings in external factors as an explanation for his agency in violence. His violent actions are thus framed as him being forced to act rather than being the authorizer himself. By stating that he was "never fond of it," he is yet again situating himself as a decent guy that disapproves of violence. In contrast to the *me and my guys narratives* from Chapter 6, Ibrahim may be seen to offer a "good at heart" narrative (Green et al. 2006) that separates his essential self from his violent crimes. When continuing the conversation, he provides a reflection narrative that reveals a more detailed picture of an inner battle between a subcultural aspiration and 'the real him':

> Frøja: How do you look at this today?
>
> Ibrahim: I'm glad about that now, that I have sympathy and such, even though I couldn't identify that back then, now I do. You know I didn't clip peoples' fingers off if they owed me money and those things, other people did, but I just couldn't do that. Still, I wished I was that crazy back then, and I aspired to be like that in a way too.
>
> Frøja: Why do you think that is?
>
> Ibrahim: I guess I've had a romantic fantasy that being a gangster was cool, but then it hasn't really been so natural for me even though the conditions have been conducive to that and everything.

In this story, I observe several attempts to establish a nonviolent self. Ibrahim's reflection narrative thus relate to a *getting out* story. First, he is trying to mend an earlier self-image to account for a more sympathetic and moral present self. Segal (1991, pp. 126-128) terms the distancing of self from one's past or current actions, emotions, beliefs, or even the totality of one's life, for 'alienness.' In stating that: "I'm glad about that now, that I have sympathy and such, even though I couldn't identify that back then, now I do", Ibrahim may be seen to alienate himself from his past person. In effect, he is able to separate his present self from his past.

In addition, Ibrahim portrays himself as distinct from "other people" who commit violent offenses. By explaining that he could not get himself to "clip peoples' fingers off" if he was owed money although "other people did," Ibrahim is drawing symbolic boundaries between himself and other violent people in his social environment. Through a process, close to what Bamberg (2010, 2012) calls "self-other differentiation", Ibrahim is creating a self-narrative of himself as a nonviolent person by differentiating himself from more violent people. Ibrahim may thus be seen to alter between narratives of choice and agency (e.g., "I *didn't* clip people's

fingers off' and "*I* just *couldn't* do that") to those of external control ("*other people* did"). As such, he is presenting himself as both an 'agent' and an 'undergoer'[12] (Bamberg 2010) by moving between narratives of acceptance and resistance on his personal responsibility.

This bears some likeness to the narrative boundaries reflected in the *me and my guys, know the stakes of the game,* and *friends vs. gangs narratives*. But while these past self-narrative constructions were mostly oriented towards strengthening a gangster image by creating out-groups as less tough and less capable of violence. Ibrahim's present self-narrative, on the other hand, seems to do the opposite. Instead of presenting himself as a gangster, Ibrahim draws lines between his gangster image and his 'true self' (Maruna 2001), creating a dual-person identity that he divides both temporally and culturally.

First, he recognizes that what he perceived as "cool" (e.g., "clip peoples' finger's off") and aspired to be (e.g., "crazy") is a matter of past attitudes and beliefs prior to his conviction (e.g., "back then"). He thus situates his aspirations to be a gangster in the past to construct a present self-narrative perceived as more empathically and morally connected. Second, by claiming that violence "hasn't really been so natural for me even though the conditions have been conducive to that", Ibrahim's violence, coolness, and criminality are associated with a particular subculture (e.g., gangster, criminal, street). So, in providing a present self-narrative within conventional or vulnerability discourse, as opposed to a violent subcultural discourse, Ibrahim reconceptualizes his biography in a way that frames his past bad actions as not his 'true self' (see Maruna 2001). As he continues to reflect on how his criminal past has impacted his life, in particular his time spent in prison, the issue of having a 'true' or 'authentic' self increase:

> Ibrahim: I mean spending a long fucking time in prison has impacted me, of course it has. But the biggest problem is all the time that has gone to it, and who are you after that?
>
> Frøja: How do you mean? Can you explain that to me?
>
> Ibrahim: Ehm, like, I think the biggest thing is that I've thought being a gangster and being criminal was what I was supposed to be, and I've used so much time and energy and focus on becoming as much like that as possible. And it's hard to get out of it in

[12] Bamberg (2010, p. 7) state that issues of agency typically are viewed in terms of "who-is-in-control," asking 1) is it the person, the I-as-agent, who constructs the world the way it is? Or 2) is it the person, the me as undergoer, who is constructed by the way the world is, subjected to it? This binary division is typically viewed as one between inside (of the individual) versus outside (as in society).

> adulthood and to sort of find oneself again. Because you are the same person of course, you are not someone else, you should not make up a different character, but you should try to figure out how to use the things you have for something other than crime, right. So, that is the biggest challenge, and that I have wasted so much time on it that now I'm left with many habits and thought patterns and things that I need to get away from.

In line with my aim of showing how formerly internalized identity narratives favorable of crime and violence may shape future action, Ibrahim's self-reflexive position is particularly compelling in his rhetorical question, "who are you after that?" By captivating the core point of the *getting out narratives*, this question shows how Ibrahim centres his self-narrative around his conviction. In turn, his conviction is perceived almost like a border between his past and present self. The construction of his past self-narrative connects with a subcultural, gangster discourse, which functions to provide a past image of Ibrahim as a criminal gangster who is 'capable of violence' and knows how to 'play the game.' However, in problematizing the "time and energy and focus" he has dedicated to becoming "as much like that as possible", Ibrahim, similar to Mateo's reflections in the previous section, shifts over to both a vulnerability and a disadvantage discourse. In effect, Ibrahim tells a *getting out* story illustrative of the difficulty of leaving a criminal life behind.

According to Presser and Sandberg (2015, p. 119), instead of resisting the changes that are required for a new normal, offenders may be better off by accepting a moral habilitation and regulation as a path to crafting a new, nonoffending life for themselves. This task, they claim, involves rejecting the notions of an authentic self in favour of re-storying their lives in a more dynamic fashion (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 119). However, in Ibrahim's story, the rejection of an authentic self is depicted as a challenge itself (e.g., "you are the same person, you're not someone else, you're not supposed to create a new character"). Ibrahim rather frames "the biggest challenge" of re-entering society or figuring out who he *is* post-incarceration, as having "wasted a lot of time" and having integrated "a lot of habits and thought patterns" that he in the present moment "need to get away from."

I read Ibrahim's present self-narrative as him working to separate from his normalizing attitudes towards crime and violence. In emphasizing the language used for self-awareness in his reflection narrative, he may further be seen to construct a story of transformation by using his conviction as a tool to precisely separate his past and present self. The stories around him

about which acts increased status or respect in the past appear to have been an important motivation for his participation in violence. However, in the present moment, he uses these same stories differently – they have become a source to distance himself from rather than aspire to be.

Maruna (2001, p. 85) argues that ex-offenders must create a coherent prosocial identity in story form to be able to desist from crime. Regarding transformation, he writes: "If such an enormous life transformation is to be believed, the person needs a coherent narrative to explain and justify this turnaround" (Maruna 2001, p. 85). In his reflection narrative, Ibrahim gives a self-reflexive and dynamic process of narrativization accounts of his criminal actions which makes him able to move past his criminal offenses and the lifestyle that has contributed to them. In doing so, Ibrahim makes space for personal responsibility (see McKendy 2006) and by using his conviction as a narrative resource he justifies his 'turnaround' (Maruna 2001, p. 85).

Although Ibrahim draws on a subcultural discourse to acknowledge his involvement in violent offenses and portray himself as an aspiring gangster, he frames this as a past representation of himself. In effect, Ibrahim is telling a *getting out narrative* that emphasizes how formerly incarcerated men narratively may utilize their conviction as a resource to divide their past and present selves, not necessarily depending on a code of morale, but based on the pragmatics of re-entering society post-incarceration.

In summary, Ibrahim's present self-narrative largely illustrates the interdiscursivity of formerly incarcerated men's present and future-oriented self-narrative constructions. His action narrative alters between subcultural and conventional discourse, while his reflection narrative mostly rests on conventional and vulnerability discourse. As argued by Maruna and Matravers (2007), there is a diminishing amount of space for detailed analysis of offenders' emotions in today's research. Yet, the shifting nature of Ibrahim's narratives seems to be largely connected to his prison conviction and emotional life. Together they signal the struggle to reintegrate into society post-incarceration, in Ibrahim's own words: of figuring out "who are you after that?" In the next section, Carlos' case reveals more of the complex and emotional struggles of street life, prison, and early exits to adulthood.

Carlos

Carlos was thirty years old when we met. In his late teens and early twenties, he had served three sentences in prison for assault offenses. Carlos spoke in a charismatic and politically oriented way, sharing many thoughts on inequality, discrimination, loss, and mental health. Although being a repeat offender, Carlos explained that all of his convictions were the result of him being attacked and forced to retaliate, which may speak of how *capable of violence narratives* provide roadmaps for action like violent retaliation. In relation to the other participants involved in this study, Carlos' story deviates somewhat. However, I have chosen him as one of three cases anyway because he illustrates the *getting out narrative* in detail and shows several of the same patterns found in other participant accounts. Next, is Carlos' action narrative of a violent episode that ended with him being convicted and sentenced to ten months in jail:

> It was a serious case of violence. I was attacked by four guys when I was out writing [doing graffiti]. I was beaten by these four guys, and I was only 21 at the time, but I had a knife on me that day, so I pulled up the knife and tried to keep them away and one of them jumped on me while I sort of fenced them off, because I, I began to lose my sight right and I was about to go to the ground. And then I pulled up the knife, tried to keep them away and then he came and grabbed my hand and I stabbed him and hit his main artery. So, the blood just [makes squirting sound] three meters up in the air and I just froze.

Starting with the statement "It was a serious case of violence. *I* was attacked by four guys", Carlos is situating himself as the victim of this violent act. He uses several terms to minimize the violent elements of his agency in the offense, for example: "I was beaten between four guys", "I was only 21 at the time", "I began to lose my sight", and "I was about to go to the ground". In effect, he provides a self-narrative as nonviolent. One may see this as Carlos positioning himself through linguistic mechanisms in what Erving Goffman (1974) calls "frame breaks." With the concept of frame, Goffman (1974, pp. 10-11) "assume that definitions of a situation are built up by principles of organizations which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them". In other words, Goffman (1974) uses the word 'frame' to refer to such basic identifiable elements as Carlos uses when interrupting the narrative of the violent act at various points. Instead of completing the description of the

violence, Carlos rather describes his identification of the other party in the violent act's responses and thus *their* agency. As such, he is classifying his experience according to guiding frames of reference that place the focus on the other party's involvement instead of his own.

While we saw how Ibrahim rapidly shifted between contrasting discourses in his action narrative, and although Carlos' repeated statement, "*I* tried to keep *them* away" may suggest that he is drawing on a subcultural discourse where retaliation is an accepted response to violence (Anderson 1999; Brookman et al. 2011; Jacob and Wright 2006), I would like to argue that Carlos is fairly consistent in framing his violent engagement as protecting himself from being attacked. Consequently, Carlos places this narrative within an oppression discourse, and even as he gets to the point of the actual violent act – Carlos stabbing another person in the main artery with a knife – he still commits to an oppression discourse, framing his agency as self-defence.

Although I had asked Carlos to recall the violent act, he did not elaborate much on his own engagement. This might suggest several things. First of all, it might signify that he is struggling to relate to this particular aspect of the event, that he does not recognize himself in this way anymore, or ever did. Yet, as Brookman (2015, p. 217) has observed, offenders often do not depict themselves in alignment with how they depict particular acts of violence. As such, Carlos could be avoiding his role in the violent act to overcome the stigma associated with this offense (Goffman 1971) or perhaps to claim an identity "as morally decent in the present" (Presser 2004, p. 86).

In any event, this illustrates the importance of paying attention to how the basic act of narrating pledges to influence others. That Carlos seemingly does not want to focus on his participation in the violent act might imply that he does not want to alienate me, the listener. This would not be that strange considering that all narratives are tailored to social conventions and general normative standards (see Mills 1940), making statements consequently designed to manipulate outcomes (Presser 2009). Hence, it could be that Carlos is using the situation at hand as a narrative recourse to create an agency in the violent act that 'fits' what he thinks the listener, me, will wave towards and accept. Whatever might be the case, Carlos is positioning himself as nonviolent. When I prompt a question to give him the opportunity to provide a reflection narrative, Carlos places his story within a larger cultural narrative about ex-offenders:

Frøja: Would you say this has impacted who you are today?

Carlos: I mean, yes, yes it has, definitely. You have no security. No one cares about you if you're previously convicted. You never lose that mark. No matter what, in meeting with the police and the law, you will always be met with the same scepsis. Or even like going into the school situation, I started studying this year, and like, I've struggled with anxiety all summer because of it.

Carlos uses his conviction differently than the previous two research participants. While Mateo and Ibrahim would use their conviction almost like a symbolic barrier between their past and present, Carlos on the other hand, use his conviction by drawing on an oppression discourse about how formerly incarcerated men are disadvantaged and continue to be marked with stigma post-incarceration. In that regard, Carlos' is telling a *getting out* story that reflects the extended disadvantages and social barriers that formerly incarcerated men face. Through statements such as: "You have no security", "No one cares about you if you're previously convicted", "You never lose that mark" and "You will always be met with the same scepsis," Carlos is constructing a present self-narrative which is largely embedded in a mix of discrimination, vulnerability, disadvantage, and oppression discourse connected to how formerly incarcerated men are met with prejudice (see Allport 1954) and stigma (see Goffman 1963) in society.

Men who have been convicted of crime(s) often experience differential treatment because of their status as an "ex-offender" (Rade et al. 2016, p. 1261). However, the stigma and prejudice toward formerly incarcerated men and people's desire for social distance toward this group can also manifest as social barriers to ex-offenders' access to services in the community, for example, education (see Berson 2013). The first time Carlos enrolled in the educational system he was kicked out shortly after because the school board found him unfit because he had a criminal record. This was not and is not a protocol in the Norwegian educational system. Nevertheless, Carlos explains feelings of prejudice and stigma as a result of his status as an ex-offender. Proceeding to explain that he had recently started studying again, Carlos talks of feelings of anxiety before his entry, elaborating on how mechanisms of discrimination and stigma also before his offending(s) has manifested in him feeling alienated:

Carlos: You know the only real relation I have with the system, or the organised society structure, is prison right. And school when I was young was just as bad as prison.

Frøja: But now that you're an adult, do you experience school the same or differently?

> Carlos: I'm an adult now, but it's still, like that alienation from I was a kid, it's just as strong today. It's the exact same feeling, the exact same anxiety, and paranoia. So, I still feel a sense of insecurity, like "have I tricked myself in here? Do I belong here?" That, that alienation is always there, and I never see it go away, ever. Not until I see some real inclusion of me, and people like me. And so far, I've not been convinced.

Carlos describes his experience with the educational system as equal to the prison institution by referencing feelings of alienation. While education is among the most notable dynamic risk factors that serve as barriers to success among males previously convicted of violent offenses (Berson 2013), there is also convincing evidence for mechanisms between incarceration and mental health in the research literature (Blaauw and Van Merle 2007; Pekala-Wojciechowska et al. 2021). Like the American psychologist Craig Haney (2002) notes, "At the very least, prison is painful, and incarcerated persons often suffer long-term consequences from having been subjected to pain, deprivation, and extremely atypical patterns and norms of living and interacting with others." That Carlos integrates feelings of anxiety, paranoia, insecurity, stigmatization, discrimination, and alienation related to his criminal past in his present and future-oriented self-narrative may thus be psychosocial reactions to afflictions of prison. It is evident that Carlos' time(s) spent in prison play a big part in the construction of his present self-narrative, which in effect is largely embedded in a mix of discrimination, vulnerability, disadvantage, and oppression discourse. He is seen to present a complex appraisal of his self-image, where his convictions are not used to suggest an inner bad core creating a gangster image (drawing on subcultural discourse), but rather as a narrative resource to provide a self-narrative where Carlos is the victim of structural oppression.

However, Carlos' discourse may also be seen to develop in response to further questioning. As such, he illustrates how narratives evolve in situ as dynamic and coproduced constructions (Frank 2010). Towards the end, Carlos also places himself within a certain group. Through statements such as "inclusion of me and people like me," he indicates a self-narrative shifting toward a larger cultural narrative about who offenders are and look like, simultaneously engaging in symbolic boundary work (see Lamont and Molnár 2002). Thus, by emphasizing "me and people like me" Carlos makes conceptual distinctions to agree upon a definition of his reality.

In summary, Carlos told a relatively coherent defence tale. While the other two participants would shifted quite rapidly between subcultural and conventional discourse, Carlos situated himself within an oppression discourse (akin to conventional discourse) in both his action and reflection narratives. In turn, Carlos was able to justify his criminal behavior and use his conviction(s) to portray himself as the victim of structural oppression rather than as a repeat violent offender. Carlos thus constructed a present self-narrative of a man struggling to overcome discrimination, stigma, and alienation. In other words, Carlos is a great example of how *getting out narratives* stand in an oppositional relation to the subcultural narratives formerly presented.

Concluding remarks

Aiming to show how stories may also condition future action and identity work, I have investigated how the narratives identified as *capable of violence, me and my guys, know the stakes of the game,* and *friends vs. gangs* function in the present and future-oriented self-narratives of formerly incarcerated young men affiliated with a street culture in Oslo. When talking about how they see themselves in the current moment and of who they want to become, all of the formerly incarcerated participants involved in this study told stories that in varying ways touched on the difficulty of 'getting out' of a criminal lifestyle. I have argued that these stories reflect a conflict regarding the internalization of identity narratives like for example *capable of violence* or *know the stakes of the game* which are used to portray oneself in accordance with characteristics that are favoured by the subculture (e.g., being though and violent). However, when portraying themselves in the present moment, storytellers would divide this conflict both temporally and culturally within an overall identity narrative that I have termed the *getting out narrative*.

By combining the action and reflection narratives of three cases within my sample, this Chapter identify the shifting narratives of formerly incarcerated men. It shows how the interdiscursivity in the participant's narratives differ depending on whether they are providing past or present narratives of themselves, situated pre or post their incarceration, to provide either action or reflection narratives. By identifying how storytellers use *getting out narratives*, I have highlighted the difficulties of leaving behind a violent past, including the criminogenic identity narratives that they have previously been internalized. This is exemplified in statements like "I'm left with many habits and thought patterns and things that I need to get away from" (Ibrahim).

But what can we tell from this interdiscursivity? I want to make the point that the narrative shifts presented in this Chapter indicate how one story does many kinds of work (see Sandberg, Tutenges, and Copes 2015). In this thesis I have explored how street-oriented young men tell stories of violence, and for analytical purposes I have identified the most common and collectively shared stories that were told. However, these stories are still multifaceted and told for different reasons. The main stories I have constructed from the participants accounts may thus best be viewed as 'ideal types' or "theoretical constructions designed to describe some empirical tendency" (Frank 1995, p. 29). It has been important to identify these ideal types in order to understand the kind of work stories do for their tellers and how certain stories may lead to the normalization of violent identity work that condition future action. However, it is also important to notice that the stories identified in this thesis are simplifications of an otherwise diverse world of stories that have many effects and functions all at once.

Scholars have previously shown that stories are particularly useful for marginalized groups with extreme experiences because they have something tellable that require a discursive form which does not alienate their audience (Polletta and Lee 2006; Sandberg et al. 2015). Stories are good for such purposes because they are flexible, open-ended, and multi-voiced (Sandberg et al. 2015, p. 1182). The three case studies presented in this Chapter show that *getting out narratives* are used to explain many things. On the one side, the difficulty of getting out of a criminal lifestyle post-incarceration, the difficulty of changing into a successfully desisting individual, of 'knifing off' (Roy and Maruna 2007) one's criminal past through geographical re-location, of figuring out 'who to be', and of overcoming stigma and prejudice. And on the other side, to portray the storyteller as tough and capable of violence, as an autonomous player with many skills, and as a person who can act like a gangster, but who chooses not to.

As a final statement, the self-narratives presented in this Chapter show that formerly incarcerated men provide complex narratives of past acts of violence and themselves. By shifting from a subcultural gangster discourse to a conventional one of oppression and discrimination, the storytellers were able to provide a flexible image of themselves. The *getting out narratives* therefore illustrate how previously internalized identity narratives may condition future action, either as a source to distance from or as a source to aspire to be. In other words, it shows how storytellers choose which stories to tell according to context, and that one *getting out* story may draw on both a subcultural and a conventional repertoire at once.

8 Discussion

In this thesis, I have aimed to understand how storytelling is a key linguistic mechanism for the normalization of violent behavior and identity work among street-oriented male youth in Oslo, Norway. This inquiry has been guided by 15 in-depth interviews with young men affiliated with a violent and criminal street subculture, and the three analysis Chapters have answered separate research questions that each highlight different aspects of the functions of telling stories of violence.

First, I have investigated which stories of violence young men tell when talking about their youth in a street culture in Oslo. From their stories, I identified one overarching identity narrative which I have called *capable of violence narratives*. I have argued that the collective use of this narrative works to normalize violent youth behavior by guiding both tellers and listeners to aspire to subcultural values about masculinity, toughness, and respect. The repeated telling of these stories indicates that they are internalized collectively by actors in this socio-cultural context, and I have argued that they provide evidence for how street-oriented male youth construct their lives and life circumstances as stories by forging connections between theirs and others' experiences, actions, and aspirations. In effect, this analysis indicate how stories may inspire the normalization of violence by guiding its audience to live according to its plotline.

Thereafter I have investigated what stories street-oriented male youth tell when constructing their personal and collective identities. From this inquiry, I defined three identity narratives. The first of these is the *me and my guys narratives,* used to draw symbolic boundaries that differentiated the tough desired in-group from less desired, weak out-groups (e.g. "rich kids"). By relating to larger cultural 'formula stories' (Loseke 2007) about who tough and dangerous men are in our society, I have argued that this narrative forms a shared belief system that shape the desired identity constructions within this subculture. They are thus collective products that constitute what street-oriented male youth should value, know, and how they should behave.

The second identity narrative presented in this chapter is what I have termed *know the stakes of the game narratives*. These stories refer to the 'us' identity, and the normalization work in this narrative is based on differentiating between violent offenders' motivation to conduct violent crimes and on who takes up the victimhood position. I have argued that this narrative

aid street-oriented youth who engage in violence to construct each other as autonomous individuals (players) that partake in illegal social practices (the game) on their own accord. These stories therefore narratively create symbolic boundaries that divide certain victims and offenders into normative categories decisive of whether or not violent crimes are normalized.

The final identity narrative presented in this chapter is the *friends vs. gangs narratives*. These stories involved boundary work that distinguished groups of friends who commit crimes from organized criminal gangs who commit crimes. It fundamentally stresses the blurring of the distinction between these two street identities to indicates that crediting categories of organized criminal gang members to male youth who do not view themselves as such is dangerous. I have argued that locating how this identity narrative connect to larger narrative structures, or formula stories, one may come closer to an analysis of how they also provide convenient devices for deviant behavior that street-oriented youth integrate in their identity building projects.

Finally, with an aim to account for how these four identity narratives, when internalized by street-oriented youth, may shape or inspire their future action and identity work (ref. narrative criminology, see Presser and Sandberg 2015), I have investigated how these stories condition the present and future-oriented self-narrative construction of young men affiliated with a violent street culture in Oslo. From this inquiry I identified another overarching identity narrative that I call the *getting out narrative*, which represent a conflict regarding the internalization of the other four identity narratives. By combining the action and reflection narratives of three cases within my sample I have been able to identify the interdiscursivity of formerly incarcerated men's self-narratives. I have argued that their self-narratives tell *getting out* stories that are used to explain many different things. By locating the use of *getting out narratives*, I have illustrated how previously internalized identity narratives may condition future action, either as a source to distance from or as a source to aspire to be.

The main findings from this analysis may be categorized into four insights that contribute to existing knowledge on the normalization of violent behavior and identity work among street-oriented male youth. The first of these insights is theoretical, indicating that combining a narrative criminology perspective on narratives and identity with symbolic boundaries is a fruitful framework to study normalization. The second insight demonstrates that narrative boundary work is an important element in the process of normalization. Adding to the former two insights, the third illustrates how collectively shared stories condition future action and

identity work. And building on the last three, the final insight show how when collectively shared stories are internalized, they are difficult to 'get out' of. Although these insights interlace, I will discuss them separately in the following sections to show how they challenge, conform to, or enlarge existing theory and knowledge.

Narrative criminology is fruitful to study normalization

In line with narrative criminology (Fleetwood et al. 2019; Presser and Sandberg 2015; Sandberg et al. 2019; Sandberg and Ugelvik 2016), I have viewed stories "as instigating, sustaining, or effecting desistance from harmful action" (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p. 1). I have taken stories to be "social forces in their own right, rather than merely stories of information *about* social forces" (Presser and Sandberg 2016, p. 133). In other words, the main object of interest in this inquiry has been the participant's stories. I have argued that the stories told and collectively shared among street-oriented male youth provide roadmaps for and structure violent action. In conclusion, I argue that the participant's use of identity narratives is important in the construction of beliefs, definitions, attitudes, and aspirations that aid the normalization of violent behavior and identity work among male street youth in Oslo.

In seeking to relate these findings to larger constructs or theories, the identity narratives I have presented in this thesis comply with much of the general acknowledgment of street culture in previous research (Baumer et al. 2003; Fraser 2013; Herber 2012; Jensen 2006; Wright et al 2006). In the existing literature, explanations of crime involvement have largely focused on subcultures of violence (Wolfgang et al. 1967), and especially on the impact of street culture (Hagedorn 2008; Jacobs and Wright 1999; Sandberg 2008ab). Scholars have argued that young men tend to get involved in violence and other crimes because they lack the means to achieve conventional forms of social status, such as education or employment (Lindegaard and Jacques 2014; Wilson 1996), and that male youth who engage in street culture reproduce *the code of the street,* which creates a willingness to participate in violence (Anderson 1999).

But although there is a wealth of information on how people who value fighting as a sign of character make sense of and justify their violent actions (e.g., Anderson 1999; Bourgois 2003; Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967), this thesis illustrates that stories of violence are just as important as the factual details of the events when trying to understand the consequences they have for personal identity and continued behavior. So, even though scholars who investigate violent

populations tend to use a subcultural framework that emphasizes a ‘subculture of violence’ to understand what may facilitate or constrain violent actions (e.g., Anderson 1999; Bourgois 2003; Ilan 2015; Jacobs et al. 2000; Jacobs and Wright 1999; Vigil 2002), there are few scholars who attempts to capture how people’s stories function for their identity projects, transmits street culture, and shape future action.

By taking a narrative criminology approach (Presser and Sandberg 2015; Sandberg and Ugelvik 2016; Fleetwood et al. 2019; Sandberg, Copes, and Pedersen 2019), I have explored the normalization of violent identities by implementing a narrative dimension that shows how identity narratives condition the continued normalization of violent behavior and identity work among street-oriented male youth. Although I acknowledge that my identification of identity narratives is a simplification of the complex and ever-changing process of self-narrative construction (see Presser and Sandberg 2015; Sandberg et al. 2015), this study still highlights the strength of using a narrative criminological framework when studying stories’ normalizing effects. More than that, it shows how changing the focus from macro- to micro-social processes (Shiner 2009), viewing normalization as referring to a process where collective, group-based conceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of violent behavior function to make violent identities desired and normal within one social network is fruitful in order to grasp storytelling’s role in promoting normalization. In conclusion, this thesis is an original contribution to the emerging field of narrative criminology (Fleetwood et al. 2019; Presser and Sandberg 2015) by documenting how it may also be used to to study normalization.

Narrative boundary work leads to normalization

My findings further suggest that the participant’s identity work involves narratively creating symbolic boundaries to differentiate ‘us’ as tough and ‘them’ as weak. I assert that these narrative boundaries are collective products, created by street-oriented male youth who relate to each other and to broader social and cultural mechanisms by drawing on larger cultural narratives. The social nature of these boundaries, and the narratives that create them, thus make them critical for the emergence of definitions and attitudes that normalize violent personas.

In previous research that investigates the creation and maintenance of symbolic boundaries, social scientists mostly emphasize in what ways boundaries reinforce inequalities between gender, race, and class (Copes 2016, p. 195), or how boundaries are used to create subcultural

identities (Smith 2007). But contrary to Copes' (2016) argument that maintaining symbolic boundaries is specifically important for people who are physically and socially near stigmatized others (e.g., offenders or drug dealers), the participants in this study did mostly not create boundaries to distance themselves from stigmatized labels. Rather, the active symbolic boundary work used by the narrators in this project suggests that instead of trying to distance themselves away from stigmatized labels such as offender, criminal, gangster, or killer, they highlighted these labels as means to strengthen the gangster identity construction of 'us.' These collectively internalized stories thus seem to inspire violent action and the formation of violent identities. As such, they also contribute to knowledge about how linguistic mechanisms may boost the normalization of violence in street cultures.

The deviant character of the social practices I have identified in my participants stories (e.g., violence, drug consumption, drug dealing, being hard) both confirm and relate to larger theories and previous studies suggesting that reproduction of street codes is a way to gain respect and avoid repeat victimization in street cultures (e.g., Anderson 1999; Jacobs 2004; Rich and Grey 2005; Sandberg 2009b; Stuart and Benezra 2018). However, my findings also illustrate how symbolic boundary work, and the identity narratives that create them, shape attitudes and conceptions favourable of violence that contribute to the normalization of violent identity work among street-oriented male youths in Oslo. In conclusion, this thesis introduces an analytical approach where identity narratives and symbolic boundary work leading to normalization becomes visible (see also Järvenin and Demant 2011).

Collectively shared stories condition future identity work

The identity narratives defined in this thesis show how the collective building of beliefs, attitudes, and classificatory processes may condition expectancies for action. Moreover, they suggest some interesting effects and functions for future action among street-oriented male youth. They illustrate that the identity construction of 'us' is based on participation in deviating social practices that function to construct 'them' as a weak, opposite outgroup. As such they encourage general differences among groups that signal projected guidelines for positively or negatively valued violent behavior. A possible function of this process is that young men internalize violent attitudes and beliefs.

Combined, these collectively shared stories inform about ideals of masculinity, violent retaliation, and acceptance of violent behavior. While I have argued that they also inform about how shared stories may contribute to a normalization process of violent identities, the argument that crime may be used as a resource for doing masculinity, and in particular that 'being capable of violence' is strongly linked to the performance of masculinity, is evident in a range of other studies (e.g., Anderson 1999; Messerschmidt 1997, 2004, 2018ab; Sandberg 2009a; Sandberg and Pedersen 2009). For example, Skrinjar and Petterson (2020) have argued that crime narratives provide opportunities for authors to be portrayed as risk-takers, fearless, innovative, rebellious, strong, and capable of violence – all markers of masculinity.

In other words, my findings of masculine values like being 'tough', 'standing your ground', 'being loyal to friends', and being 'capable of violence' are not an original observation. However, it is important to keep in mind that masculinities come in plural (Connell 2005). While my identification of identity narratives falls in line with similar findings in the existing literature, they do however illustrate how collectively shared stories may shape storytellers' future actions. In conclusion, they are consistent with the narrative criminology belief that narratives both explain past events and are important contributors to future action.

Difficult to 'get out' post-incarceration

About the effects and functions of the identity narratives identified in this thesis, I have explored how formerly incarcerated young men affiliated with a violent street culture in Oslo use the identity narratives defined as *capable of violence, me and my guys, know the stakes of the game,* and *friends vs. gangs* when constructing present and future-oriented self-narratives during research interview. This investigation was aimed at a more in-depth understanding of how shared stories might affect individuals' future behavior and sense of self. By highlighting three case studies that to a large extent represent my sample, I found that because these stories are internalized by individuals and shared among members of the same social network, they also project collective identity constructions that provide templates for future action. This makes it hard to get away from them. Through the identity narrative that I have called *getting out*, participants would portray a conflictual relationship to their past that revealed a struggle of becoming a successfully desisting individual post-incarceration.

In the desistance literature, formerly incarcerated men are seen to desist from a lifestyle of crime and negativity by making an intentional effort to recreate their lives (Laub and Sampson 2001; Maruna, 2001). Moreover, desistance theorists views re-entry as both the event of a release from incarceration and the process of reintegration into family and community (Palmer and Christian 2019, s. 586). Within this, an orientation towards the future is seen to help people make meaning of their past and provide incentives to continue improving (Maruna 2001). In that sense, the *getting out narratives* relate to the larger view within the desistance literature.

However, most previous research examining re-entry tends to focus on recidivism, measured as new contact with the justice system such as technical arrest, conviction, parole violation, or incarceration (For a discussion, see Ruggero et al. 2015). Now, most of the participants in my study are repeat offenders and using recidivism as the outcome indicator of their struggle for 'successful re-entry into society,' which is the main conflict within the *getting out narratives,* would diminish the importance of other significant factors (see Petersilia 2004; Visher and Travis 2003). As Lynch (2006, pp. 405-406) notes, "re-entry is more than recidivism," and one could even argue that focusing on recidivism alone is the same as reducing individuals to a single incident post-release. Like Bowman and Travis (2012) argue, 'lack of recidivism' used as the sole indicator of 'successful re-entry' overlooks human and social factors like active relationships with others, physical and psychological well-being, occupational and educational goals, and other prosocial engagements.

However, by highlighting the narrative shifts in formerly incarcerated men's present self-narrative constructions through action and reflection narratives (Brookman 2015) I have illustrated how these men are a great deal more than just their bleak odds (see Abrams and Terry 2017). The *getting out narratives* shows more than the fact of recidivism. They show the words, stories, goals, and struggles of young men finding their way towards desisting adulthood after spending significant time in criminal environments and incarceration during their youth.

The *getting out narratives* illustrated in this thesis focus on how formerly internalized identity narratives that are favorable to violence function for the present and future-oriented self-narratives of formerly incarcerated men. While this bears some likeness to the study of Andersen and colleagues (2020) who attempt to go beyond classic recidivism outcomes by examining what success following incarceration means to those navigating the re-entry process to illustrate formerly incarcerated men's specific goals and needs by highlighting their own

perceptions of successful re-entry. My identification of *getting out narratives* still contribute to our knowledge of how formerly incarcerated male members of street culture strategically shift between different discourses to navigate their lives post-incarceration.

I assert that the identity narratives defined in this study have profound effects and functions for members who later on in life try to change into successfully desisting individuals. The *getting out narratives* reveals a picture of how formerly incarcerated young men affiliated with street cultures in Oslo provide complex narratives of themselves and past acts of violence. Their shifts from a subcultural gangster discourse to a conventional one of oppression and discrimination also illustrate how interdiscursivity is largely connected to their prison convictions, their emotional life, and to their struggle to re-integrating into society post-incarceration. In conclusion, my findings show how many street youth grow up to be men who battle stigma, prejudice, mental health issues, the difficulty of employment, and entry into the educational system. The shifting nature of their self-narratives may thus be seen as a strategy to obtain both subcultural and conventional values – as neither seems to be chosen exclusively.

9 Conclusion

In this thesis I have asked what stories do for their tellers and their listeners. Upon analysing the participants stories, I have concluded that stories told and shared among street-oriented male youth entail symbolic boundary work that effectively separates their in-group from others to create outgroups as less tough and less violently capable. I have argued that these stories are essentially social, and because they are told and retold interactively within the participant's social network, they provide roadmaps for future action. The effects and functions of these shared stories are thus projected into the future lives of these young men. In turn, they are hard to leave behind, or as the participants reflected; 'get out' of. These insights give credit to the claim that investigating people's stories is fruitful when trying to understand street-oriented male youths continued normalization of violent behavior and identity work.

This thesis has provided new insights to understand the normalization of violent behavior and identity work in street cultures on two main grounds. First, it contributes to larger theories by illustrating that a narrative criminology perspective on narratives and identity combined with symbolic boundaries is a fruitful framework to investigate normalization. Second, it contributes to our knowledge about how street-oriented male youths in Oslo evaluate the challenges they face, transition to adulthood post incarceration, navigate difficult barriers, conclude on what to view as personal achievements or not, and especially the important role that stories play in their personal and collective interpretations of themselves, each other, and the world around them.

The most striking thing about the stories presented in this thesis, is that violence and other crimes seem to be constructed as relatively "normal" behavior. That these young men are actively involved in the normalization of violent social practices that take place in social interaction with acquired knowledge about what goes on in the socio-cultural context around them, could have significant implications for the formulation and implementation of policies aimed at prevention of violence and crime among young people. Recognizing that violent encounters and available information about what is or rather should be considered normal and deviant in large part is created through the stories of violence that are told and retold, could have an impact on what information and services are offered to young people to prevent injuries associated with violence.

Although I have not implemented a political aspect in this thesis, I hope my findings may inspire others to do so. I also hope this thesis may orientate adults who work with violent street-oriented male youth to gain a deeper understanding of how they relate to violence and crime. Being cognizant of storytelling as an important linguistic mechanism in the normalization of violence and violent identity work among this group in our society may assist an understanding of why violence become so attractive among many young men. I will end this thesis with one final quote from a study participant:

> "More and more fall deeper and deeper into it, and the older I get the more people fall out. Either with psychological issues, physical issues, drug addiction, by being injured from violence, being sentenced to long times in prison, or by being shot and killed or committing suicide themselves. So, I'm left with a smaller and smaller core of people who are partly stable. And growing up with this stuff isn't easy (..) I must say."

This participant's choice of words presents an understanding of street-oriented youths transition to adulthood in a rather extreme fashion, however the tendencies in the data that I have presented suggest that this severe existence is present in the lives of many street-oriented male youths in Oslo. These data also show that male youth who are affiliated with street cultures in Oslo draw upon narratives embedded in normative standards that normalize their desire for being recognized as violent and dangerous, rather than narratives that recognize the traumatizing consequences of violence.

It will be important to provide further insight into how violence is woven into young people's identity projects, what norms regulate violent engagement and what significance this has on their transition to adulthood. Qualitative research that addresses these issues will be able to provide deeper insight into the broader street culture in youth environments around Oslo, and other places. To seek out knowledge about how young men, and women, affiliated with street cultures deal with their transition to adulthood, what barriers they have to cross, and what they themselves think may help in overcoming these could advice those who fall out of step and contribute to better and stable long-term prevention.

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Appendix 1: Interview guide

Intervjuguide

Jeg har tenkt å gjennomføre narrative intervjuer, en metode som fordrer at man ikke har en prestrukturert intervjuguide. Jeg har imidlertid en del tematikker jeg på forhånd er interessert i, som jeg i dette skrivet legger frem mulige spørsmål til.

- Kan du fortelle meg litt om deg selv og bakgrunnen din?
    - Hvor har du vokst opp?
    - Hvordan var livssituasjonen din som barn og ungdom?
- Kan du beskrive ungdomsmiljøet du vokste opp i?
    - Hvordan ville du karakterisert dere?
    - Hvordan tror du andre ville karakterisert dere?
    - Hvordan ville du beskrevet fellesskapet dere imellom?
    - Kan du fortelle om hva dere pleide å gjøre?
    - Hvordan foregikk en helt alminnelig dag?
    - Hvordan var det å vokse opp i dette miljøet? o Hvilke ressurser var viktige for dere?
    - Kan du fortelle meg om en hendelse hvor du opplevde at du selv eller noen andre gjorde noe som ga status?
    - Kan du fortelle meg om en hendelse hvor du opplevde at du selv eller noen andre gjorde noe som de ble sett ned på av de andre for?
- Hvordan opplevde du kriminalitet som ungdom?
    - Hva er vold for deg?
    - Hva slags rolle hadde vold for deg og vennene dine?
    - Hvordan opplevde du utførelsen av vold selv?
    - Hva med rus? Hvilken rolle hadde rus for deg og vennene dine som ungdom?
- Kan du fortelle litt om hva slags kriminalitet du har opplevd?
    - Hva muliggjorde slike handlinger for deg?
    - Var det lett eller vanskelig på noen måte?
- Kan du fortelle om ditt forhold til barnevernet?
    - Hvorfor kom du i kontakt med barnevernet første gang?
    - Hvordan opplevde du første kontakt?
    - Hvordan opplevde du videre oppfølging?

    - Hvordan opplevde du tillit til barnevernet?
- Kan du fortelle om interaksjonen med barnevernsarbeiderne du møtte?
    - Er det noe eller noen du husker spesielt godt (uten å nevne navn)?
    - Hvorfor husker du dette/han/hun spesielt godt?
    - Hva var det med denne hendelsen/personen som gjør at du fremdeles husker det/han/hun i dag?
- Hvordan opplevde du å gå fra barn til voksen?
    - Hvordan påvirket barnevernet deg under denne tiden?
    - Hvordan påvirket miljøet ditt deg?
    - Hvordan påvirket bakgrunnen din deg?
    - Hvordan påvirket kriminalitet deg?
- Er det noe du har lyst til å tilføye?
    - Noe du føler kan være relevant som ikke jeg har spurt etter eller som ikke har kommet opp under samtalen vår så langt

Appendix 2: Invitation to participate in the study – Verbal consent form

Har du lyst til å delta i prosjektet
'Learning from Juvenile Delinquents Narratives about Child Welfare in Norway: Investigating Transitions into Adulthood when Coping with Criminalisation'?

Dette spørsmålet er til deg som ønsker å delta i et forskningsprosjekt som søker å forstå hva vi kan lære fra fortellinger om barnevern og ungdomskriminalitet med Oslo som kontekst. Hvordan er det å vokse opp med kriminalitet og barnevern i Oslo? Hvordan beveger man seg fra barn til voksen under slike omstendigheter? I dette skrivet gis informasjon om prosjektets mål og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål
Formålet med prosjektet er å utforske fortellinger fra unge menn som har begått kriminalitet i ungdommen og vært i kontakt med barnevernet under sin oppvekst. Gjennom dette har prosjektet et mål om å bidra til en bedre forståelse av hvilken rolle norsk barnevern har for ungdommer i Oslo som begår kriminalitet. Prosjektet er særlig interessant fordi vi mangler kunnskap om ungdommers egne erfaringer av barnevern i Norge. I tillegg mangler vi kunnskap om den kulturelle konteksten rundt unge mennesker som begår kriminalitet og deres opplevelser av kontakt med hjelpeapparater som barnevernet i vårt samfunn. Ved å tilegne oss mer kunnskap om nettopp ungdommers egne perspektiver og fortellinger om barnevern kan dette prosjektet oppmuntre til en dypere sosiologisk interesse og forståelse for ungdomskriminalitet og barnevernets forebyggende rolle.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?
Eirik Jerven Berger (doktorstipendiat og hovedveileder) og Frøja Storm-Mathisen (masterstudent) fra Universitetet i Oslo er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor blir du spurt om å delta?
Du blir spurt om å delta fordi du er en ung voksen mann, oppvokst i indre Oslo øst, har vært involvert i kriminelle handlinger i din ungdomstid og har hatt kontakt med barnevernet. Vi har enten støtt på hverandre i en sosial sammenheng som jeg (Frøja Storm-Mathisen) har oppsøkt i forbindelse med mitt feltarbeid, fordi vi har felles kjente som har anbefalt meg å ta kontakt med deg eller fordi du har hørt om prosjektet og tatt kontakt på eget initiativ.

Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?
Deltakelse i dette prosjektet innebærer å bli intervjuet av meg (Frøja Storm-Mathisen). Intervjuet vil foregå ved at vi møtes på et sted du føler deg komfortabel som du selv velger. Dersom det heller er ønskelig at jeg foreslår et trygt og skjermet sted, kan vi møtes på et rom under fire øyne på Universitetet i Oslo. Intervjuet vil ta ca. 1-3 timer. Spørsmålene vil dreie seg om dine opplevelser av barnevernet, miljøet du har vokst opp i, hvordan miljøet kan ha bidratt til å begå kriminelle handlinger og barnevernets opplevde rolle i din ungdomstid. Data vil registreres ved notater i tillegg til lydopptak.

Det er frivillig å delta
Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket ditt uten å oppgi noen grunn til hvorfor. Alle opplysninger om deg vil

anonymiseres. Det vil altså ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg om du deltar, ikke deltar eller velger å trekke deg på et senere tidspunkt.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vil dine opplysninger bli oppbevart og brukt?
Opplysningene om deg vil kun brukes til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Alle opplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- De som vil ha tilgang til dine opplysninger er masterstudent Frøja Storm-Mathisen og veiledere på masterprosjektet Eirik Jerven Berger og Kjell Erling Kjellman.
- For å sikre at ingen uvedkommende vil kunne få tilgang til dine personopplysninger vil ditt navn og kontaktopplysninger erstattes med en kode. Nøkkelen til koden vil bli lagret på en egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrige data.
- Lydopptak fra intervjuer vil bli oppbevart på TSD – Tjenester for sensitive data og vil slettes når prosjektet avsluttes i mai 2022.

Det kommer ikke til å være mulig å gjenkjenne deg i den ferdigstilte rapporten eller eventuelle publikasjoner av prosjektet. Alle data vil anonymiseres underveis og før eventuelle publikasjoner. Som student på masternivå har jeg taushetsplikt – som vil si at jeg ikke kan fortelle andre om hvem jeg snakker med eller hva vi snakker om. Jeg har ikke meldeplikt – som vil si at hvis jeg får vite om tidligere begåtte straffbare forhold har jeg ikke noen plikt til å melde fra om det til noen. Dette ville vært et brudd på min taushetsplikt, som gjør at jeg heller ikke har lov til å fortelle om spesifikke kriminelle handlinger eller lignende.

Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?
Etter planen skal prosjektet avsluttes i mai 2022. Personopplysninger og lydopptak vil da slettes. Om du velger å trekke deg underveis i prosjektet, vil alt datamateriale om deg slettes øyeblikkelig.

Dine rettigheter
Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, har du rett til:

- Innsyn i personopplysningene som registres om deg.
- Å rette på personopplysninger om deg.
- Få slettet personopplysninger om deg.
- Få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet).
- Klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

Hvorfor har vi rett til å behandle dine personopplysninger?
Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt eget samtykke.

NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS har vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Hvor kan du finne ut mer?
Om du har spørsmål eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, kan du ta kontakt med:

- Veileder for prosjektet Eirik Jerven Berger ved Universitetet i Oslo på e-post: e.j.berger@sosgeo.uio.no eller meg (Frøja Storm-Mathisen) på e-post: frojais@student.sv.uio.no eller telefon: 0047 99 37 29 09.
- Vår kontakt hos personvernombudet: Eva J. B. Payne

- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på e-post: personverntjenester@nsd.no eller telefon: 0047 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen
Frøja Storm-Mathisen Masterstudent i Sosiologi – Institutt for sosiologi og samfunnsgeografi

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Verbal samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet *'Learning from Juvenile Delinquents Narratives about Child Welfare in Norway: Investigating Transitions into Adulthood when Coping with Criminalisation'* og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til å delta på intervju og til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet avsluttes i mai 2022

Appendix 3: Ethical approval from the Norwegian center for research data

Learning from Juvenile Delinquents narratives about Child Welfare Services (CWS) in Norway: Investigating Transitions into Adulthood when Coping with Criminalization

Referanse
971045

Sluttvurdering (planlagt) 31.05.2022 02:00

Melding 05.08.2021 16:15

Behandlingen av personopplysninger er vurdert av NSD. Vurderingen er:

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen, så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet 05.08.2021 med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET
Prosjektet vil behandle alminnelige personopplysninger, særlige kategorier av personopplysninger om etnisk opprinnelse og religion, og personopplysninger om straffedommer og lovovertredelser, frem til 31.05.2022.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG – UTVALG 1
Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra informantene til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake.

For alminnelige personopplysninger vil lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen være den registrertes samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 a. For særlige kategorier av personopplysninger vil lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen være den registrertes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

For personopplysninger om straffedommer og lovovertredelser vil lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen være den registrertes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. art 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. art. 10, jf. personopplysningsloven §§ 11 (1) og 11 (2) bokstav a.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG - TREDJEPERSONER

Siden intervjuene vil baseres på fortellinger om deltakernes ungdomstid vil opplysninger om familiemedlemmer og venner kunne komme frem og bli registrert på lydopptak. Slike opplysninger vil kunne inkludere særlige kategorier av personopplysninger og opplysninger om straffedommer og lovovertredelser.

Behandlingen anses som nødvendig for formålet fordi det vil være vanskelig for informantene å fortelle om livet sitt uten å vise indirekte til andre personer. Fokuset vil være på informantene og deres oppfatninger og erfaringer, og tredjepersonsopplysninger vil anonymiseres/slettes under transkriberingen. Studenten vil i forkant av intervjuene informere deltakere om at de helst skal unngå å oppgi identifiserbar informasjon om andre personer. Innsamlede personopplysninger vil kun behandles i en kort periode og ingen vil kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjoner.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen av alminnelige personopplysninger er dermed at den er nødvendig for å utføre en oppgave i allmennhetens interesse, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav e, samt for formål knyttet til vitenskapelig forskning, jf. personopplysningsloven § 8, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 3 bokstav b.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen av særlige kategorier av personopplysninger er at den er nødvendig for formål knyttet til vitenskapelig forskning, jf. personvernforordningen art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav j, jf. personopplysningsloven § 9.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen av personopplysninger om straffedommer og lovovertredelser er at den er nødvendig for formål knyttet til vitenskapelig forskning, jf. personvernforordningen art. 10, jf. art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav j, jf. personopplysningsloven § 9, jf. § 11 første ledd.

Behandlingen er omfattet av nødvendige garantier for å sikre den registrertes rettigheter og friheter, jf. personvernforordningen art. 89 nr. 1. Innsamlede data vil lagres i TSD.

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen:

- om lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at informantene får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet.

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

NSD vurderer at informasjonen om behandlingen som informantene vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13. Så lenge informantene kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18) og dataportabilitet (art. 20).

Dersom eventuelle tredjepersoner kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18) og protest (art. 21). Det kan unntas fra informasjonsplikt etter art. 14 nr. 5 b), der personopplysninger ikke har blitt samlet inn fra den registrerte, siden det vil innebære en uforholdsmessig stor innsats å gi individuell informasjon til tredjepersoner, sett opp mot nytten av å motta informasjon. Slike opplysninger vil anonymiseres/slettes under transkriberingen.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må prosjektansvarlig følge interne retningslinjer/rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER

Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilken type endringer det er nødvendig å melde: nsd.no/personverntjenester/fylle-ut-meldeskjema-for-personopplysninger/meldeendringer-i-meldeskjema

Du må vente på svar fra NSD før endringen gjennomføres.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Eva J. B. Payne