Seductions of Criminology: Katz on Magical Meanness and Other Distractions

Austin T. Turk


Seductions of Crime is an important book, not because it resolves the problems of theoretical criminology (it does not) but because it pressures criminologists to reconsider their assumptions and methods—and their politics. Katz identifies conceptual and methodological shortcomings in much criminological research, but his own work exemplifies some of the distractions that limit the scope and power of our inquiries.

The major premise is that traditional criminology has failed to explain criminal behavior because social "background" variables (class, ethnicity, etc.) have been treated as if they directly caused individual behavior. (Merton’s anomie theory is especially criticized as the prototype of such theorizing.) Katz argues that research stemming from traditional theories has consequently been off target, characterized by a "background to foreground" approach unable to get at the motivational dynamics of actual individuals electing to commit deviant acts. The meaning of deviance for

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This assessment benefited greatly from discussions with colleagues at Washington State University, especially Charles Tittle and James F. Short, Jr., and from comments on the initial version by Howard Erlanger and Ruth-Ellen Grimes. It originated in an "Author Meets Critics" session at the 1989 meetings of the Law and Society Association. Some of my initial impressions were confirmed, others modified, in attending a similar session at the subsequent meetings of the American Society of Criminology. I wish publically to commend Jack Katz for his patience and grace under fire in responding to those of us who have on occasion perhaps overemphasized our problems with his book while saying too little about its accomplishments.

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0897-6546/91/1601-0181$01.00
the actor is considered to be the crucial focus for explaining such behavior. The argument is that phenomenological analysis must be used to determine the meaningfulness of crime, and that it is the basis for a “foreground to background” alternative research strategy that promises a comprehensive theory. The approach is first to establish the phenomenological meaning of criminal acts, then learn whether and how background variables are involved.

Katz illustrates his approach in several creative and colorful essays. In each, he (a) analyzes the feelings and purposes of an assortment of people deviating from and/or trying to assert what in most instances they themselves understand to be moral or legal norms, then (b) considers the relevance of background factors. He relies heavily on ethnographies, case studies, and fictional portrayals of how people subjectively create and cross moral boundaries, and emphasizes their importance versus the conceptual poverty and methodological deficiencies of quantophrenic research which assumes the validity and reliability of official statistics.

CRIMINALS AS PEOPLE

What all Katz's criminal types have in common with other people, we are told, is the need to feel worthy and the inclination to link the sense of personal worth to a conception of higher meaning. From such a perspective, the point of their acts is to make these feelings personally real—in their case by creating “magical environments” in which crimes from the most banal to the most brutal have transcendent meaning for the offender. Having selected his types in view of the availability of relevant materials, Katz in each analysis generates provocative insights into the psychodynamics of criminal motivation and self-justification. He is less successful in trying to demonstrate the utility of his approach for incorporating “background” factors into a potentially comprehensive theory explaining each type. Six types are depicted: novice shoplifters, youthful “badasses,” gangbanging “street elites,” “hardman” robbers, “righteous” killers, and cold-blooded murderers.

Young Shoplifters

The interpretive theme is that beginning (prototypically young female) shoplifters are fascinated by their own capacity to create and experience “sneaky thrills” (at 52–79). “Magical environments” are created and enjoyed by creating opportunities for experiencing their acts as irresistible (“being seduced to deviance”), while at the same time realizing their capacity to carry off seeming normality, then appreciating the “euphoric thrill”
of getting away with the production. The thrill comes from success in transforming an objectively mundane event into a symbolically rich experience. Among the “metaphors” mobilized are:

- The sensation of a clearly distinct self, with its exciting hidden potential for rulebreaking
- The feeling of “scoring” in a game (albeit a secret one where the opponent unknowingly somehow “loses”)
- The awesome power to invade, defile, change a moral order heretofore felt to be mysteriously and unassailably “sacred”
- The “almost orgasmic” analogue of sexual intercourse
- “The existential interdependence of deviance and charisma,” as the reality and importance of the Self are felt in its assertion against putative external constraints

For Katz, the paradox in shoplifting is that repetition kills the thrill: The magic is lost as persistent, serious stealing changes a uniquely gratifying project of self-realization into a utilitarian routine.

Regarding background variables, Katz argues that age, gender, and class do not explain the behavior of youthful property offenders such as shoplifters. Their offenses, he emphasizes, are not to be explained as simply deriving from their status and identity problems as adolescents. “The distinctive appeal . . . is the particular dialectic of being privately deviant in public places” (at 77). This appeal is not limited to adolescents, and their crimes are not necessarily tied to any particular metaphor (game, sexuality, defiance, etc.). As for gender, males and females are seen as differing in the modes rather than the rates of lawbreaking. Social class differences are similarly viewed as modal. In fact, the class-crime relationship is left essentially unexamined: “Nothing in this chapter speaks to the social class factors that may lie behind” the possibility of a link between social disadvantage and “careers” of serious repetitive property crimes (at 79).

**Comment:** The evidence for Katz’s picture of the young shoplifter is shaky: he relies heavily on self-report essays written by some of his students. One wonders whether his students’ essays might have been influenced by their instructor’s own preoccupation with sexual and other “metaphors,” and in particular whether Katz’s perception of the essays written by females as more “sensitive” and therefore usable reflected his own analytical inclinations. In any case, the quality of evidence is too debatable for Katz’s ideas about the “foreground” dynamics of shoplifting to be taken as other than suggestive. Similarly, the failure to identify at least possible linkages between “background” and “foreground” leaves the young shoplifter merely floating about in some undefined social space.
Badasses

Young men on the street—mostly poor and racially or ethnically disad-advantaged—are perceived as forming and defending “badass” identities (at 80–113). They graduate from merely looking and talking “tough” to demonstrating how unpredictably “alien” they are, culminating in terrifying displays of sheer “meanness.” The essence of being tough is dressing and acting so as to suggest “an impenetrable self” beyond the observer’s capacity to know. Being alien is a matter of going beyond display to convincing others that one is unrestrained by any commonly understood and accepted standards of respectability or morality. Contempt for conventions of decency and normality is exhibited in undeniable meanness, proving to others that they must reflect on what it means to confront a being who is unpredictably capable of quite irrational challenge and non-reciprocity—most especially gratuitous violence. The badass must dominate. “Now and again, he must go at least a little bit mad” (at 100).

Considering background factors, Katz suggests that being a badass constitutes “tactics for struggling with what the adolescent experiences as a spatially framed dilemma”—that of relating the familiar “here” to the disturbingly unknown “there” (at 112). But he finds more significant the attractions of badass tactics for males, for whom phallic imagery is especially fascinating in its capacity to threaten to “penetrate” others. The central assertion is that the phallus has the “socially transcendent power to obliterate any awareness of boundaries between the ontologically independent, phenomenal situations of different people” (at 113).

Comment: Although many young males do adopt badass imagery and style, many others find other ways to handle the dilemmas of growing up. Disadvantaged males may be more likely to find gratification in being a badass, but one cannot know how distinctive the pattern is without attending to exceptions (“good boys in high delinquency areas”) and without comparative observations of males situated in other than lower-class urban contexts. Further, given that young men are generally fascinated with sex, the heavy symbolism of the phallus as a weapon may be considerably overdrawn—more interpretation than observation. In any case, left unexamined is the possibility of class, ethnic, or other structural variations in the salience and repercussions of any preoccupation with phallic weaponry.

Street Elites

Overlapping the world of the badass is that of the “gangbangers” posturing and performing as dangerous “street elites” (at 114–63). We are told that gangers do not like the term “gang” because it is associated with
being kids, albeit “bad” ones—being seen as immature, not to be taken seriously, even in the evil one does. The project of becoming a street elite involves three stages. First, groups of adolescent males construct their version of some ancient or mythical elite able to rule through physical intimidation. Appropriate symbols and rites are devised, featuring horrific guises and threats. Second, because such bizarre menacing displays carry the risk of being dismissed as just child’s play, members must prove they “mean it”—typically by engaging in deadly serious “turf” wars and aggression toward anyone defined as a trespassing outsider. Finally, and rather more complex, is members’ affirming to one another the meaningfulness of “being in” such a group by cooperatively resisting challenges to their assertions of personal competence—by, for example, defying school and other (adult) authorities. In Katz’s view, however questionable their claims may be from some other perspective, the street elites arrogate to themselves a superior, aristocratic status that belies the apparent reality of social deprivation and powerlessness.

Turning from foreground to background, Katz examines the view that street elitism is a response to social conditions. The “traditional approach” is rejected because it wrongly defines the problem as the “gang” and seeks “ultimate causes” in the poverty of urban minority adolescents (at 154). “The social distribution of street elites cannot be universally related to minority ethnic status, attributed to class tensions, or empirically limited to the stresses of adolescence” (at 155). Rather than structural factors, including urban conditions, he sees the really important lead as the press of adolescents collectively to play on (or against) the fears and values of their elders: for middle-class youths—rejecting cleanliness, violating boundaries, esthetic assaults, simulated lower-class rebelliousness; for lower-class youths—pseudo-aristocratic posturing that mocks the humbling adaptions of earlier generations to social powerlessness. However, he argues, even the adolescent project does not finally explain street elitism, for it extends “across the edge of adolescence” into the world of motorcycle clubs like the Hell’s Angeles (at 155)—and, implicitly, beyond.

Comment: This is an excellent descriptive analysis of gang activity as a collective acceptance and expression of badass identity. Unfortunately, the discussion of background factors offers no clear research leads. Why and when do adolescents mock the adaptations and achievements of their parents? How many of them consciously do this? There seems to be a potential class analysis here, and perhaps even a reaction-formation theory of rebellion; but no commitments are made to definite lines of inquiry and explanation.
Hardmen

Badasses and street elites often “grow up” to become persistent robbers, “doing stickup” at high risk for low reward—not really for money (Katz says) but because they are “hardmen” whose lives ultimately revolve around “action, chaos, and control” (at 164–273). The “situational contingencies” of robbery include the need to confront and dominate the victim (versus the typical hit and run of the mugger), to “declare the crime” instead of trying to hide it, to demonstrate (even beyond “reason”) that one is irrevocably committed to the act, and thus to prove that one is “a hard man—a person whose will, once manifested, must prevail, regardless of practical calculations of physical self-interest” (at 187).

Looking at the economics of life as a hardman, Katz concludes that robbery as a career makes sense only as the expression of a commitment to a lifestyle opportunistically built around “illicit action” and “the transcendent significance of being a hardman” (at 196). Self-styled “professionals” differ from amateurs not in the situational contingencies of robbery but in the fact that robbery is integrated into a life of sexual adventure, drugs, gambling, and whatever illicit opportunities may arise for fun and profit. The emphasis is on spontaneity, variety, and consumption beyond any regard for rationality about the future. Amid such chaos, the hardman “embodies transcendence by sticking up for himself, literally and figuratively” (at 225). Lacking other ways to demonstrate their conformity to stereotypes of manliness, young men on the streets are drawn to robbery. In America, young black men—being more exposed to the attractions of badness and having fewer options to the role of hardman—are disproportionately involved in the worlds of illicit action, so “are closer to the seductions of stickup” (at 241).

The projects of hardmen are found to be associated with gender and (at least in the United States) ethnicity. Though quite capable of robbery, females are much less likely to find “doing stickup” meaningful because (Katz proposes) its rationality lies in its badass (phallic) assertion of a macho definition of masculinity (at 238, 241–47). He goes on to argue that the association of robbery and other violence with minority ethnicity, and particularly with being black, is not explained by either racial bias in the criminal justice system or economic disadvantage. Rather, young black men commit disproportionately more robberies because they are more involved in worlds of illicit action, more limited in the range of hardman styles historically available to them, and uniquely engrossed in transcending racially specific obstacles to “charting out a big space in public interactions and claiming to be able to fill it” (at 271).

Comment: This is likely to be the most controversial account in the book. First, the greater involvement of males than females in robbery may
well be a matter of collective learning over time rather than a universal consequence of the phallic symbolism imputed to robbery. Second, Katz’s explanation of the greater involvement of young black men in robberies is itself in need of explanation. If discrimination and deprivation are rejected as explanatory elements, one can hardly explain how differentials in situations, motives, and behavior originate, persist, and change—which a comprehensive theory must surely do. Moreover, insofar as the hardman’s identity is as pictured—reinforced by punishment and impervious to rehabilitation—what is to be done with him? He may be fascinating, but he is also dangerous.

**Righteous Killers**

Not implausibly, the killer in a typical homicide is pictured as someone who indignantly, vengefully commits “righteous slaughter” in defense of a personal conception of conventional moral requirements (at 12–51). Confronted with a perceived challenge to basic morality, the killer (usually male) defines his situation in transcendental terms as a “last stand in defense of his basic worth” (at 19). Personal claims of moral worth are conjoined with a sense of universal moral absolutes. This conviction sustains the transformation of an “eternally” humiliating situation into a justified rage. Subsequent behavior is organized to maintain the perspective and emotional posture of being forced to defend his/her moral self. The process eventuates in an attack—often but not necessarily fatal—impelled by the need (in Katz’s conception) for a “sacrificial marking” of the victim, redefined as an offender against moral order.

In regard to background variables, righteous slaughter is found to be a disproportionately male offense and apparently a disproportionately lower-class and minority (especially black) crime. Men are more prone to potentially deadly violence (mostly against other males) not because of any innate disposition or exposure to any subculture of violence, but because traditional images of maleness stress the morality of violence in the face of insult by men or women. In contrast, traditional conceptions of femininity are more limiting, in that the self-esteem of women is tied almost exclusively to their relations with men and is not tied to a readiness to counter insult with violence. Better established and more important than gender differences in rates are gender differences in the patterning of righteous assaults: female offenders tend to be more socially isolated (in a male-dominated relationship), to attack only mates (rarely other men, or women except possibly a rival), to make the transition to rage more suddenly, and to be more shocked (afterward) by their own behavior (at 47–51).

Although lower-class males appear to commit disproportionately more righteous homicides, Katz argues that the actual distribution of such
homicides in relation to social class is unknown (at 45). Insofar as the relationship holds, he speculates that lower-class men may tend more fiercely (and ironically) to defend traditional, middle-class values, or that higher-class men may have more or other ways to escape humiliation—but finally concludes that the data are inadequate to establish or explain the putative relationship (at 45–47).

Given their relatively high homicide rates, Katz implies that black men commit more righteous killings but does not develop an argument (at 44). Instead, black male violence is discussed more generally elsewhere as a response to the particular combination of factors involved in the badass and hardman identities (see above).

**Comment:** It is plausible that many assailants justify their acts to themselves as forced by insufferable conduct on the part of their victims. That the inner dynamics of murderous assaults ("eternal" humiliation, rage at the moral injustice suffered, the need to "mark" the victim) is invariant by gender, age, class, or ethnicity is a challenging proposition. It seems most unlikely, but research is needed to determine just how general Katz's picture of the righteous killer may be. More specifically, the hypothesis that the rationalization of homicidal attacks is prior to the act needs to be tested against the observation that people commonly offer excuses later, especially when caught. Whether prior or post, the acceptance of violence as one's prerogative cannot be explained without linking variations in frequency and modes of acceptance to variations in social background. Even though the subculture of violence thesis is now out of favor, it does at least direct our attention to contextual variation—which this present work strangely minimizes.

**Cold-blooded Murderers**

To Katz, "primordial evil" is embodied in those who commit "cold-blooded," ostensibly "senseless" murder (at 274–309). Exhilarated by the sensation of being beyond all moral concerns, the ultimate killer creates a fictional image of self as cosmologically superior to all others, of one who towers over their petty inhibitions. Awed and inspired by his own sense of moral license, the killer tortures and kills if only to show that he has the power. He is "dizzy" with the experience of being truly evil. At a lower level of existence, he is aware that "being deviant gives him an edge" (at 297). He is the ultimate badass.

The key emotional dynamic on the path to these murders is a play with moral symbolics in which (1) the protagonist enters as a pariah, (2) soon becomes lost in the dizzying symbolics of deviance, and then
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The only background factor considered in regard to cold-blooded killers is social isolation. However, even this possibility is questioned as perhaps “an artificial reflection of the relationship of authors to the social means of producing their books” (at 309)—to the fact that the killers investigated were indeed isolates, while primordial killers “with a strong sense of collective place are likely to have . . . a community that is an inhospitable, daunting research site for anyone” (at 309).

Comment: As depicted, the callous torturer-killer is a truly horrifying creature. What is needed is research to determine how general is the picture—whether and when it is possible to kill so outrageously without feeling one is a pariah (Leopold and Loeb?), or “lost” in the symbolics of being deviant (Abu Nidal?), or exhilarated by a sense of being above morality (Green Berets?). How many professional assassins, terrorists, covert operations specialists, soldiers, pirates, or drug lords simply torture and kill, more or less dispassionately, out of perceived necessity or mere habit? Perhaps they are not meant to be included—but the book does begin and end opposing the instrumental and incidental violence of war. If one is neither inclined to righteous slaughter nor an exemplar of primordial evil, what other kind of killer is it possible to be?

SEDITIONS OF CRIMINOLOGY

Katz’s metaphors about the “personal projects” of people who steal, rob, assault, and kill raise an interesting possibility. If offenders are seduced by the sensual magics of their crimes, perhaps criminologists can be understood in similar terms.

The most widely assumed purpose of criminology is to understand crime and criminals, in order to predict crime, so that prevention and control of crime are facilitated. To achieve that purpose, criminologists undertake in diverse ways to learn things about crimes and criminals: to find out where offenders come from and what makes them tick; to identify patterns and correlates; to formulate and try to test explanations; to expand the scope of their efforts through dataset cumulations and/or attempts at theoretical integration; and to exchange ideas and information with one another. This view of the criminological project tends to seduce criminologists into forgetting or minimizing the problematic, socially constructed nature of criminality—and of science.1

Seduction 1: To accept the prevailing view of criminology's purpose inclines one to accept currently official or popular definitions of crimes and identifications of criminals.

Seduction 2: To the extent that nonscientists' definitions and distinctions are accepted, criminologists are disinclined to tackle controversial questions about structured differentials in power and opportunity. It is easier to become busy with the narrower, politically safer issues and predigested information provided by nonscientists, and thus routinely to violate the scientific norms of independent problem definition and data collection.

Seduction 3: Having gone this far down the path, criminologists tend to become preoccupied with explaining officially and/or popularly disapproved individual behavior. Whether emphasizing "foreground" or "background" factors, individual or microsociological or macrosociological ones, studies of acts, careers, or rates, the goal is to understand crimes and criminals as nonscientifically defined. The seduction is to individualize criminality as the thing to be explained. Moreover, even when we look for structural sources or correlates of crimes, the underlying project is to translate our findings into explanations of "why they do it."

Seduction 4: Now zeroed in on the deviating individual, criminologists as scientists cannot be satisfied with correlates. There are obvious gaps between the "characteristics" variables and the unique individuals encountered directly, or more often indirectly, through the writings and reports of others. The understandable impulse is to look for patterns and meanings in and around the personal space of the criminal. This opens up all the possibilities for exploring the bodies, personalities, minds, experiences, involvements, and problems of individual subjects. At this stage, the seduction is to redefine the criminological task as that of understanding the unique complexity of individuals—to lose sight of the goal: generalizable, therefore predictively useful, knowledge.

Seduction 5: "Critical" criminologists have reacted against the seductions of "traditional" criminology. Accordingly, some have declared and demonstrated the need to examine the macrostructural bases not only of crime but also of definitions of crime. The seduction is to move from correcting the shortcomings of criminology to asserting that the discipline itself is/ought to be a critique of capitalism, racism, or whatever. This encourages the assumption that oppression alone explains definitions of crime, so that explaining labeling has no connection with explaining individual behavior. Those seduced tend to forget that scientific analysis may or may not support sociopolitical critique, and that explanations of labeling must ultimately complement theories of deviating behavior.²

² Explaining behavior and explaining the labeling of people indeed are different projects. Austin T. Turk, Criminality and Legal Order (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969). This
Inadvertently, I believe, Katz has managed to succumb to the seductions of both traditional and critical criminology. First, he has been seduced into examining offenders as if the prevailing definitions of criminality were “objectively” unproblematic, even though he focuses on the “subjectively” problematic meaning of moral boundaries for those crossing them. Second, he considers macrostructural factors to be at best of secondary importance in explaining criminal behavior. Third, for him the priority task is to understand the individual offender, rather than the interactional and definitional context in which that person is located. Fourth, he declares that the key to understanding crime is to comprehend the (mostly implicit) sense-making mentalist constructions of lawbreakers. And fifth, he evidently feels that critical policy implications extending to international relations and combat situations can be drawn from the phenomenological analysis of individual criminal motivation—even though he is suprisingly reticent about policy implications of his work for crime control.

Nonetheless, there are implications. In his eagerness to reject materialist explanations of criminal behavior—and despite scattered disclaimers that he is indifferent to socioeconomic conditions—Katz becomes an ally of those neoconservative biopsychocriminologists who have dismissed efforts to improve living conditions as irrelevant to crime prevention. To impute so much freedom of choice in doing and becoming evil; to be so preoccupied with the psychodynamics of “how it feels” and “how it makes sense” to hit, threaten, kill, and steal (while remaining silent on how the victims feel); to dismiss repeatedly the causal relevance of structural inequalities in life chances; to discount punishment, rehabilitation, economic programs, and legal threat as ineffectual against both street crime and elite deviance—all this gives aid and comfort to those who deny or minimize the relevance of structural factors for understanding crime; to those who obstruct the effort to develop and institute policies of social amelioration and individual habilitation; and to those who foster the continuing illusion that our options are limited to policies of rigorous policing and punitive incapacitation.

It is not that Katz wishes to be in such company; he clearly does not. At various times he expresses sympathy for the downtrodden and indignation that high and mighty criminals are largely beyond the reach of effec-

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tive legal restraint. But the substance and implications of his scholarly effort do not match his sentiments. If he really cares, he cannot simply ignore the likely political fallout from such a major statement. If he believes that his work really has no such implications, he should say so. For now, the distinction between his science and his politics is unclear.

A SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

Overall, Katz makes three significant contributions: he reasserts the need to understand how individuals create and cross moral boundaries; he documents the deficiencies of research that fails to recognize the problematic nature of such boundaries; and he promotes the effort to develop better theories in criminology. But sadly his contributions are limited by the shortcomings of his work: he overemphasizes the importance of “foreground” analysis while minimizing the relevance of “background” factors; he criticizes quantitative structural studies without distinguishing clearly between poor and good ones; and he fails to demonstrate the claimed superiority of his approach to developing a comprehensive theory of crime.

Moral Boundaries

Criminological research has traditionally assumed moral boundaries instead of examining them. Katz rightly emphasizes their problematic nature, and argues strongly for an interactionist cum ethnographic research strategy for getting at the psychosocial dynamics of how individuals construct and violate moral boundaries. His ingenious use of fictional as well as nonfictional sources to construct often plausible analytical descriptions of various modes of criminal experience has produced a trove of notions worthy (and badly in need of) further development and empirical scrutiny. (See my comments above).

Here is an issue on which social scientists appear never likely to reach consensus: Katz and I evidently disagree on why interactionist-ethnographic case studies are important. Despite each essay’s addendum on the possible relevance of “background” variables, Katz obviously sees psychosocial descriptive (“foreground”) analysis as the priority, the real stuff, basically the key to genuine understanding of what crime means. In contrast, I see descriptive case studies not as the key to reality but rather as starting points and checkpoints, mainly important as sources of ideas about how individual behavior and interpersonal encounters may be patterned. Until case or type descriptions are transformed into the language of theoretical variables, their relevance for causal explanation and prediction is indeterminate.
Conceptual and Methodological Deficiencies in Research

Legalist definitions of criminality and politically determined funding opportunities tend to impose on criminology limited rather than expansive definitions of worthy and feasible research. Conventional views regarding the nature of crime, the pressures and temptations to use official records and statistics, and positivist notions of science have reinforced one another to encourage studies that do not and cannot resolve crucial issues in criminology—insofar as they assume the validity and reliability of data collected, massaged, and reported by (to adapt Thorsten Sellin’s words of more than 50 years ago) nonscientists for nonscientific purposes. Throughout his book, Katz strongly opposes the resulting quantophrenic approach to research. For example, the belief that unemployment is causally linked to crime remains, he argues, unsupported and untestable insofar as researchers have accepted the strategy of “beginning with data on the massive reality of unemployment and trying to manipulate them to demonstrate a relationship to an exceptional event like homicide” (at 329 n. 59).

In similar fashion, he rejects the strategy of attempting to test socioeconomic theories of individual criminal behavior by relating police statistics to census data, when social class data on offenders are lacking in police records and census data are aggregated for geographically bounded general populations (at 329 n. 61).

Regrettably, Katz takes his arguments far beyond what is necessary to make the point. Instead of suggesting how researchers might do better, his critique leads him to reject not only poorly conceived quantophrenic studies but apparently just about any quantitative efforts to link social structure and crime. It is not enough to show that structural theories do not directly explain individual deviant behavior; he should also consider how structural variables indirectly if not directly affect behavior, which presumably would be an essential feature of a comprehensive theory.

The Search for Comprehensive Theory

While declaring several times that the “foreground to background” approach will result in a “comprehensive” theory of crime, Katz never spells out just how this feat is to be accomplished. It is difficult to see how an approach that apparently rejects systematic theory construction (cf. at 3–4, 11, 311–24, 350 n. 5) could incorporate the findings and insights generated by quantitative studies oriented to causal modeling. Even more critically, the absence of attention to the sociology and political economy of law leaves us without the theory of social context with which a theory of criminal behavior might be integrated. How does one move from phe-
nomenological analyses of individual motivation to a theory of how structural continuities and changes affect, and are affected by, the patterning of human relationships—which social scientists commonly believe has some impact on human motivation?

As we have seen, Katz does try to show what he means: each phenomenological type analysis is followed by a discussion of evidence relating structural factors (age, class, race, ethnicity, gender) to variations in offense rates and patterns. But these generally brief addenda do not come to grips with the theoretical problem of relating "phenomenal foreground" to "structural background." Instead, in emphasizing the deficiencies and limitations of structural studies, Katz risks leaving the impression that such research is so misconceived as to be pointless.

The bottom line is that Katz finds little use for structural theorizing and research. His approach could hardly end otherwise. Phenomenological criminology originated as a hostile alternative to structural analysis, not a complement to it. If the objective is theoretical integration, a more promising strategy is to incorporate "structuring variables" in designing studies of individual motivation and behavior, instead of proceeding (as Katz does) "as though there were a direct relationship between a motivational condition and a given form of deviance." The basic difficulty with Katz's approach is that it confuses different levels of explanation. Consequently, the problem of linking different levels is never addressed.

Though his insights are at times indeed compelling, and though his call for comprehensive theorizing linking foreground and background is enticing, Katz has not succeeded in transcending the limitations of criminology itself. We have yet to learn how to avoid the seductions of criminology without giving up the effort to comprehend the paradoxical human feat of continually constructing, transgressing, and reconstructing moral and political-legal boundaries.

responsibility as deed based, avoid responsibility by denying that they knew of the crimes and by claiming that their orders were misinterpreted and misunderstood. Those further down, defining responsibility as role based, escape responsibility by claiming that they were carrying out the orders of responsible authorities as they best understood them. By invoking different bases at different points, people can make the crimes everyone's responsibility and, hence, no one's.

There is an equally insightful discussion of the close relationship between resistance and competing authority situations. The authors recognize that disobedience and rebellion are invariably collective acts. "Collective action," they write (p. 162), "helps overcome the cognitive obstacles to challenging authority by creating an alternative definition of the situation; it helps overcome the motivational obstacles by transforming disobedience from a deviant to a socially supported act and by distributing the burden of disrupting the social order." Only a countervailing authority can create the duty to disobey and provide the support that makes it possible.

In sum, this is a major book in social psychology that deserves the attention of both sociological and psychological traditions. With its focus on concepts such as legitimacy and responsibility that bridge the individual and the social system, it is firmly rooted in an interdisciplinary vision of social psychology. In its recognition that resistance to crimes of obedience depends on collective processes, it makes a major contribution to the social psychology of social movements.


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An implicit assumption of the dominant etiological paradigms of criminology is that the occurrence of a criminal event is the outcome of a weighing of the costs and benefits, often economic, associated with that action. Control theory and recent developments in deterrence theory have provided important extensions of this model by emphasizing the central role of the social costs in these decisions. Unfortunately, apart from considerations of peer-group reinforcements, the noneconomic benefits that may motivate criminal behavior have received much less attention.

In Seductions of Crime, Jack Katz has made an important contribution to our understanding of these motivational processes by emphasizing the attractive properties of the criminal act itself. As he argues in the opening chapter of the book, potential law violators may be seduced by the "sensual dynamics" (p. 4) of activities that elicit a moral, emotional reaction on the part of the actor. Not only are such reactions considered by Katz to have a causal primacy over traditional materialistic considerations, but a
central thesis of his argument is that materialistic considerations form a very minor dimension of the criminal decision-making process.

Katz organizes his argument in terms of a series of "criminal projects" that are assumed to represent fairly homogeneous forms of experience: righteous slaughter, sneaky thrills, the "badass," "street elite" fighting, the "hardman" robbery, and "senseless," cold-blooded murders. Katz has drawn from an extraordinarily broad base of (primarily) qualitative and quantitative data, as well as journalistic crime reports, to develop his argument concerning what the offender experiences when engaged in such activities.

At times, his dialectic, subjective approach provides breathtaking insights into the processes underlying these behaviors. I thought this was particularly true in his chapter on righteous slaughter, in which the insights of Luckenbill's classic 1977 paper on the situated aspects of homicide vis-à-vis victim-offender relationships are developed and extended into a very provocative theory of the dynamics of humiliation. Katz notes (p. 22) that situations evolving into righteous slaughters are either humiliating to the offender or involve the victim's self-conscious efforts to degrade the offender, thus representing a fundamental challenge to the self-worth of the offender. Through a process carefully described by Katz, this humiliation is transformed into righteous indignation in defense of self and, in turn, rage. The homicide that may follow is not the actual practical objective but an attempt to transcend the humiliation by "existentially . . . annihilating or wiping out the victim" (p. 33). Thus, as Katz notes, sometimes the violent attacks continue past the point of death. I think that his discussion of such behaviors as forms of ritual sacrifice is one of the best exercises in analytic induction found in recent qualitative sociology.

Although most of the chapters in Seductions of Crime are characterized by similarly exciting insights, at times I found the argument strained and the dominant metaphor a little difficult to take seriously. This is especially true in Katz's chapter on apparently senseless murders, in which he draws extensively from journalistic accounts. Again, Katz develops an argument based on challenges to moral existence: the "killings emerge from a dizziness in which conformity is the greatest spiritual challenge and deviance promises the peace of transendent significance" (p. 296). I was not persuaded by Katz's position that such people can be meaningfully viewed as "primordial gods" acting within a "cosmological contingency." However, this is the only chapter in which the metaphors employed by Katz detract from the effect of his argument.

Seductions of Crime is a work that will surely result in the rethinking of our common assumptions concerning the causes of crime, and in that sense its insights are extremely important. Yet there is one aspect of the book that left me feeling somewhat uneasy. Throughout the book, Katz attempts to reconcile his phenomenological approach with more traditional forms of research that focus on "background" characteristics related to crime, such as class, gender, and race. At times, he is very successful in
this endeavor. But on the whole, I was still left with a nagging question about the sources of variation in susceptibility to seduction. For example, although he documents differences in the behaviors of the street elites of different racial and ethnic statuses, his discussion remains primarily descriptive. While his explanation comes close at times to a subcultural thesis, the implications of such group membership for his model of individual decision making are not fully developed.

Perhaps this is an unfair criticism, for the primary goal of Katz’s book is to examine the dynamics by which potential offenders define the situation in which crime is possible, and in this sense the book succeeds well. Yet Katz appears to be very deliberate in this regard, for in his closing chapter he states that it may not be necessary to study the background factors that give rise to the decision-making processes discussed in his book. Rather, he argues for “a systematic empirical theory of crime” (p. 312) that would not only explain the causal processes at the individual level but also account “at the aggregate level for recurrently documented correlations with biographical and ecological background factors” (p. 312). Thus, despite occasional attempts to ground the analysis in the social history of an individual (such as in the case of the “senseless murderers”), many readers may come away from this book with a dominant image of the criminal offender as an individual unconstrained by his or her social history or position in the social structure.

While such an orientation will not sit well with many criminologists, it does not detract from the overall success of this book. For me, one of the most exciting aspects is that it may be suggesting a solution to a question that has plagued control theory for quite some time: In the light of attenuated bonds to society, why does a particular form of crime take place at a particular time in a particular place? All future work on individual decision making and crime will have to contend with the important issues and propositions raised in this book. Nevertheless, the book is begging for a sequel that fully explores the manner by which such decision-making processes are embedded in larger societal dynamics.


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In the early 1960s David Bordua, discussing youth gang theories, pointed to a “neglected historical development”—the possible emergence of a “stable American lower class,” a “hard core” population at the lowest social level, involving, among other groups, “unsuccessful immigrants and Negroes.” At first glance the major thesis of *People and Folks* might appear a confirmation of Bordua’s prediction. John Hagedorn, with his
In his searing ethnography of 1930s Southern tenant farmers, James Agee (Agee and Evans, 1960: 12-13) wrote:

If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and excrement.... A piece of the body torn out by the roots might be more to the point.

Jack Katz's Seductions of Crime: The Moral and Sensual Attractions in Doing Evil manifests the same experiential passion, the same "fascination to follow in detail the lived contours of crime" (p. 317), the same desire to confront the reader with the "lived sensuality," the "lived experience of criminality" (pp. 312, 139). If he could, Katz would surely update Agee to include video tapes of the badass "bump" and "whatchulookinat?" ploys (pp. 107-112), sound recordings of the stickup man's terse command to "give it up" (p. 176), and patches torn from the homeboy's ritually white undershirt (p. 121).

For Katz, such sensual details matter because they form the phenomenological foreground of criminality, the immediate, interactional dynamic through which criminals construct crime. Katz argues that only with an awareness and analysis of these foreground factors can we understand the "moral and sensual attractions in doing evil," and thus the nature of criminality itself. As he says, "my overall objective in this book is to demonstrate that the causes of crime are constructed by the offenders themselves, but the causes they construct are lures and pressures that they experience as independently moving them toward crime" (p. 216).

In exploring the social and epistemic dynamics of criminal events, Katz rides the borderlands between methods and domains of inquiry most often kept apart. The book's method of inquiry rests somewhere between the ethnographer's immersion in the particulars of a situation and the survey researcher's attempt to accumulate and compile trans-situational information. The book's subject matter appears at first glance to be psychological -- the cover jacket proclaims that Katz "explores the psyche and enters the soul of the criminal," and Katz does indeed investigate individual motivations, mind states, and emotions. At a closer look, though, the subject matter is sociological, concerning both the social construction of the criminal event and the criminal's psyche and soul.(1)

Moreover, the book's intention is not only to pay attention to the microsociology of crime -- the interactional strategies and personal politics out of which a criminal event is constructed -- but to link this microsociology to a macrosociological analysis of "background factors" like social class and ethnicity. Katz (p. 312) argues:

Whatever the historical causes for treating background factors as the theoretical core for the empirical study of crime, the point of this volume
is to demonstrate that it is not necessary to constitute the field
back to front. We may begin with the foreground, attempting to discover
common or homogeneous criminal projects and to test explanations
of the necessary and sufficient steps through which people
construct given forms of crime. If we take as our primary research
commitment an exploration of the distinctive phenomena of crime,
we may produce not just ad hoc bits of description or a collection of
provocative anecdotes, but a systematic empirical theory of crime -- one
that explains at the individual level the causal process of committing
a crime and that accounts at the aggregate level for recurrently
documented correlations with biographical and ecological
background factors.

As often happens in this sort of boundary-breaking work, the results are ambiguous, incomplete, disturbing -- and exciting.(2)

The Seductions of Theory and Method

In investigating the foreground of criminality and attempting to lay the groundwork for a "systematic empirical theory of crime," Katz draws on
phenomenological and interactionist traditions in sociology and criminology. He acknowledges Harold Garfinkel and Howard Becker, noting that the latter
"some thirty years ago laid out a foundation for this work" (p. vii). He likewise cites Becker's "Becoming a Marihuana User" (1953) and David Matza's
Becoming Deviant (1969) as "two prominent exceptions" to the sociology of deviance's failure to "take up the challenge of explaining the quality of
deviant experience" (p. 325 fn. 3). Beyond these direct acknowledgments and a brief mention of symbolic interactionism and phenomenology (p. 8), Katz
spends little time in conversation with earlier theories or theorists; but his emphasis is nonetheless clear. Early on, for example, his anchoring of crime's
"distinctive sensual dynamics" in "everyday, routine human experience" (p. 4), and his contention that we may catch sight of these dynamics in
"exceptional" or "incongruent" moments (p. 7), echoes Garfinkel's (1967: 35-75) early explorations into the "routine grounds of everyday activities" and
breaching. Throughout the book, Katz blends the phenomenologist's precise attention to situational detail with the interactionist's concern for the situation's
social negotiation and construction.

From this position Katz counters two elements of mainstream criminology. Broadly, he attacks the "statistical and correlational findings of positivist
criminology" (p. 3), the dislocated number sets that cross-match crime's background factors without ever getting at its phenomenological foreground. More
narrowly, he takes apart the "sentimental materialism" (p. 313) of Robert Merton (1968), and, subsequently, of Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin (1960).
Katz argues that the lived experience of crime, as engaged in by both juveniles and adult career criminals, cannot be reduced to materialist motivations, to
the adaptations of Mertonian innovators and retreatists. He concludes that the materialist perspective is therefore characterized by an "overwhelming
inadequacy for grasping the experiential facts of crime" (p. 314).

To get at the "experiential facts of crime," Katz turns away from positivist methods and to the methodology of phenomenology and interactionism: the naturalistic ethnography. If 30 years ago Becker laid Katz's theoretical foundation, he laid the methodological cornerstone as well. In Outsiders, Becker (1963: 166) not only demonstrated the methods of participant observation and ethnography, but argued for their ongoing use, since "there are simply not enough studies that provide us with facts about the lives of deviants as they live them." Around the same time, and as part of the same evolving perspective, Polsky (1969: 109, 115, 133) likewise engaged in and argued aggressively for this sort of research:

... if we are to make a major advance in our scientific understanding of criminal lifestyles, criminal subcultures, and their relation to the larger society, we must undertake genuine field research on these people ... as they normally go about their work and play.... Sociology isn't worth much if it is not ultimately about real live people in their ordinary life-situations.

Working from the legacy of Becker, Polsky, and others, Katz embraces this research tradition in criminology. He takes care to express appreciation and support for those engaged in criminological field work; draws throughout the book on a remarkable variety of ethnographies, field reports, "nonfiction novels," and other qualitative sources; and grounds his analysis in the information these sources provide.(3)

In doing so, though, Katz is seduced into a dilemma by which he does and does not follow the injunctions of Becker, Polsky, and the tradition of ethnographic/interactionist criminology. He certainly does work within the ethnographic imperative to the extent that he privileges first-hand, qualitative case studies over statistical summaries, and attempts through these case studies to pay attention to the rhythmic nuances of criminal acts and interactions. He fails to follow this imperative, though -- or at least pushes the limits of what it might reasonably mean -- in two ways. First, he draws his information not from his own ethnographic work, but rather from a wide range of extant ethnographies. Second, he supplements this second-hand ethnographic information with information from a variety of non-ethnographic studies that offer a very mixed bag of methodologies and findings.

Katz's methodological dilemma -- that he affirms first-hand field work, but utilizes it and other methods only at a distance, second-hand -- develops into a further dilemma of knowledge and perception. The strength of Katz's argument rests on his ability to capture the subtle, negotiated, situational dynamics of crime, to demonstrate the attractions and seductions that develop within the criminal event. In attempting this, though, Katz uses research that may or may not have caught these subtleties. To begin with, since the research accounts are those of others and are written from other perspectives, they may well communicate certain aspects of the criminal event, but not others. How is Katz, and how are we, to know? Moreover, although he often notes their limitations, Katz utilizes data sources -- crime reports and statistics, police records, prison interviews -- that by their nature obscure the immediate, situational dynamics of crime. Such sources, of course, come dangerously close to the "positivist" criminology that Katz criticizes and to what Polsky (1969: 141) disdained as the criminology of the "jailhouse or courthouse sociologist." Together, these problems leave Katz at times in positions that not only undercut the most basic tenets of field work, but also his line of argument: he is left to deduce from the data, and thus impute to the criminals, the very subtleties he wishes to observe and study.

Chapter Five's discussion of "Doing Stickup," for example, is based largely on a "data set" of brief narrative accounts that Franklin Zimring and James Zuehl (1986) reconstructed from police records, and that Katz subsequently reworked. Notice the layers of meaning and interpretation between the
subtleties of these events and our apprehension of them: we encounter the events and their participants by way of police records, by way of Zimring and Zuehl, and by way of Katz. Katz returns to this "data set" in Chapters Six and Seven as well, where he examines the data for "qualitative detail" (p. 251) and quantifies patterns that he discovers in them. But again, the question: What manner of "qualitative detail" remains in data sifted through so many sieves? Based on popular journalistic accounts like those of Truman Capote (1965) and Joseph Wambaugh (1973), Chapter Eight's discussion of "senseless' murder" risks a different sort of problem: the writer's imposition of too much "qualitative detail" after the fact. As Katz himself implies, the value of such works certainly must be balanced against their limitations -- limitations imposed not only by literary rather than sociological inquiry, but also by the pressures of lucrative popular media markets.(4)

Perhaps, though, these methodological problems point less to the failure of Katz's research strategy than to his success in conceptualizing crime. If we set out, with Katz, to study crime as a social event, rather than a derivative analytic category, to pay attention to crime as a lived, socially constructed experience, rather than a statistical residue, particular methodological problems must arise. As researchers, we face not only the dangerous inaccessibility of the criminal event, but also its brevity and unpredictability, its fleeting and momentary nature. As a statistical aggregate, or as the product of background variables, crime holds still for us to study; as a phenomenon constructed in the moment it occurs, crime can rarely so much as be glimpsed first hand. Studying crime as Katz defines it, then, means a paucity of observational data, a reliance on post hoc accounts, and other methodological problems.(5) There is thus a certain irony in Katz's (p. 311) reference to the "readily available, detailed meanings of common criminality": such meanings are certainly more readily available to the street fighter or stickup man than the criminologist.

These methodological problems also develop from the important, but unenviable task that Katz (p. 312) sets for himself: to "discover common or homogeneous criminal projects," and thus to begin a "systematic empirical theory of crime," by moving from the particulars of each case to accumulated, cross-case patterns. Inevitably, such projects play out a set of tensions and contradictions: between stepping into the nuances of each case and stepping back to look for commonalities and patterns between cases; between a research methodology of first-hand immersion and a theory-building technique of second-hand appropriation; between the primacy of ethnographic particulars and the elegance of theoretical models. Such contradictions are woven, of course, not only into Katz's project, but also into the broader enterprise of criminology itself.

The Sensual Attractions of Katz's Sociology

Along the way to a trans-situational notion of crime, Katz develops fascinating sociological accounts of particular criminal situations and events. Whether or not he achieves a sociology of crime, he certainly creates sensually rich sociological explorations of crimes -- that is, of distinct criminal events. At times these essays hold together, leading the reader from one to the next; at other times they read as a series of disconnected insights, as momentary bursts of creative analysis. Even in these latter cases, though, the sociology is seductive.

In Chapter Three, for example, Katz looks at the "ways of the badass" -- that is, at the ways in which young men construct tough, alien identities. Here Katz focuses on the interplay of social status, personal identity and style, and the symbolism of the badass. In a nicely detailed discussion, Katz (pp. 88, 90) considers dark sunglasses, guttural noises, the "ghetto bop and the barrio stroll," tattoos, and other stylistic strategies, which together form an "alternative deviant culture." He in turn examines specific manifestations: the "coherent deviant aesthetic" (p. 90) of the Mexican-American cholo and the British (and later U.S.) punk; the youth gang's ritualized affection for weapons; the "bump" and other stylized devices of aggression.

In this discussion -- as in his discussions of "street elite" style (see pp. 120-121, 152-153), ritualized Black street talk (see pp. 266-268), and symbolic violence (see for example pp. 34-36, 133-137) -- Katz sketches an esthetics of crime. As Hebdige (1979), Cosgrove (1984), and others have done in different contexts, Katz shows that nuances of style and meaning lie at the very heart of individual and collective deviance. The black leather jacket and the zoot suit, the cholo's closing "Shaa-haa," and the young African American's opening "shit" (see pp. 83-87) -- these are not mere "affectations" added to criminal projects and identities, but the building blocks of crime as it is lived and practiced. To speak, then, of the "culture of violence" or the "culture of crime" is to talk not only about background factors that perpetuate violence or crime, but also about the style and symbolism of its foreground.
Chapter Four's inquiry into urban adolescent "gangs" -- "street elites" -- locates this esthetic of crime within patterns of social class, ethnicity, authority, and age. Katz demonstrates not only how these groups "style themselves as elites" (p. 120), follow "esthetic leadership" (p. 151) and battle for "symbolic rewards" (p. 114), but also how these styles of deviance develop out of the lived experience of inner-city adolescence. Thus, Katz argues, "homeboys" and other low-income, minority street elites ritually celebrate their neighborhood ties, where middle-income, white adolescents attempt symbolically to conceal or destroy their origins. Street elites also collectively structure and sustain violence, and use this violence to transcend childhood, establish sovereignty, and generate an aura of dread. Moreover, when street elites encounter the "mundane authority" (p. 145) of the school, they can draw on the collective power of the group not only to oppose that authority, but also symbolically to transcend it.

As Katz discusses young "badasses" and adolescent "street elites," a pattern begins to emerge. As he discusses youthful shoplifting and other "sneaky thrills" (Chapter Two), and elsewhere the fact that "robbers are overwhelmingly young men" (p. 170), the pattern further takes shape. The pattern, of course, is formed by the intersection of youth and crime. Much of Katz's work has to do not just with the seductions of crime, but with the seductions of adolescent crime, the moral and sensual attractions of evil for the young. Katz does not seem to take much notice of this issue as such, other than, for example, his brief discussions of adolescence's limits as an explanation of shoplifting (pp. 76-78) and the inability of Merton's materialism to account for adolescent crime (pp. 314-315). Since this is not the book's focus, this inattentiveness is understandable. Nonetheless, the heavy representation of youth crime in Katz's analysis raises all sorts of intriguing questions.

Does Katz's thesis as to the sensual attractions of crime help explain specifically those forms of youthful deviance often categorized as "juvenile delinquency"? Given the social construction of youth in our culture, is there something particularly seductive about the immediate dynamic of sneak theft, trespass, and vandalism? In my own field research into urban graffiti, for example, young graffiti writers consistently report that one of the central attractions of doing graffiti is the "adrenaline rush," the incandescent excitement of creativity and illegality as the paint hits the wall. Does the same hold true for other youthful crimes? More broadly, what about youth and youth subcultures accelerates the development of distinctive styles of deviance, of an esthetically rich criminal foreground? Does this, as Katz (p. 73; see pp. 76-77) suggests in the context of "sneaky thrills," have to do with the interplay of private and public identity, and "personal esthetic triumph"? Does this in turn imply that "acceptable" youth subcultures -- those organized around music or fashion, for example -- and "deviant" youth subcultures exist not as distinct alternatives, but along a continuum of stylized social marginality and alternate meaning? Most broadly, does this then mean that the confluence of youth and crime develops out of the politics of youth, out of the relative powerlessness and marginality of the young, and their response?(6)

In Chapters Five through Seven, Katz's investigation of "stickup" likewise unpacks the phenomenological foreground and social background, and in turn raises a series of important issues. Katz begins with an elegantly intertwined analysis of two issues: the relative rationality or irrationality of robbery and the development of the "hardman" who undertakes a career in stickup. Katz argues, against the conventional view of robbery as rational, that "the commitment of the persistent robber must transcend rational considerations" (p. 179). Within this irrational commitment, though, apparently random or brutal violence becomes, for the robber, reasonable and rational. It serves several purposes, not the least of which is to establish a self-serving and self-protecting reputation as a person who engages in "irrational" violence; as Katz (p. 184) says, with a nod to Becker, "in effect, robbers can use 'irrational' violence against victims as a resource for building their careers as immoral entrepreneurs."

Here, in this violent world, emerges the hardman -- the man who builds his criminal career and his identity around the violent control of chaotic situations. As Katz (pp. 187, 193) says:

In the final analysis, the commitment according to which violence in
robberies makes sense to the offenders is the commitment to be a
hard man -- a person whose will, once manifested, must prevail, regardless
of practical calculations of physical self-interest.... Put another way, the practical constraints on making a career of stickups are such that one cannot simply adopt violence as an instrumental device, to be enacted or dropped as situational contingencies dictate.... [Y]ou must live the commitment to deviance. You must really mean it.

Embedded in the hardman's criminal career are, of course, two criminological issues. The first has to do with the situated rationality and irrationality of crime; as Katz shows, any evaluation of crime's rational or irrational properties must consider the social situations in which those properties are constructed. Given this, further questions unfold: to what extent, for example, does the hardman's violence achieve effects that he rationally calculates, and to what extent are these effects unintended by-products of violent predispositions and situations? The second has to do with the notion of a criminal "career," and, as Katz shows, the various and subtle processes that must be considered if this concept is to be applied to the evolution of criminal involvement and identity.(7)

Katz proceeds to explore the broader social context of hardmen and stickup. Katz locates stickup within a seductively hedonistic world of illicit sex, illegal drugs, gambling, and a perpetual search for "action." Moreover, he traces the manner in which career stickup men "institutionalize" action in their lives through "cross-cutting networks" (pp. 198, 210) of illicit activity, and thus "position themselves to be seduced into action time and again, over against their own better, more prudent judgment" (p. 214). Katz then expands his view to consider "gender and ethnicity in the background of stickup" (p. 237), and in so doing develops an elegant, detailed analysis of the overrepresentation of Black males in stickup. He demonstrates how "stickup enacts and extends a particular version of being male" (p. 238), which derives from patterns of illicit action, risk, and gaming. He in turn links Black ethnicity and robbery by examining the nature of the Black community, the economic structure of racketeering in contrast to the "cultural individualism and structural atomization" of hardmen, and the transcendent appeal of the "bad nigger" (pp. 262, 263).

Here and elsewhere, Katz explores not only the immediate social construction of deviance, but also its entanglement with "background factors" like gender, ethnicity, and social class. At the same time, he is careful to distance his analysis from any sort of structural determinism; he chooses to conclude his chapter on gender, ethnicity, and stickup, for example, with the statement, "straightforward class imagery does not seem to work" (p. 273). What, then, are the implications of Katz's work for critical criminology?

The Seductions of Crime and the Politics of Criminality

Although the materialism that Katz criticizes is more that of Merton than of Marx, his critique extends by implication to components of left criminology. To the extent that left criminologists rely on positivist methods and epistemologies -- that is, as far as they design their research around "objective" measures of crime and criminality, and then accept the "facts" that these measures generate as explanatory variables -- they obscure rather than reveal the interactional process through which crime is constructed. According to Katz (p. 312), to the extent that they conceptualize crime and criminality as caused or determined by structures of class inequality, they "constitute the field back to front." When Katz (p. 311) argues regarding criminology that "most of the intellectual action is within a small and relatively tame segment on the left side of the scale," it is not at all clear to which segment, or to what sort of tameness, he refers. Clearly, he thinks as little of the left side's traditional criminology as of the right's.

Despite this, the disjunctions between Katz's criminology and certain aspects of left criminology are not insurmountable; much can in fact be learned from the intersection of the two. If, for example, we understand social and economic inequality to be a cause, or at least a primary context, for crime, we can also understand that this inequality is mediated and expressed through the situational dynamics, the symbolism and style, of criminal events. To speak of a
criminal "event," then, is to talk about the act and actions of the criminal, the unfolding interactional dynamics of the crime, and the patterns of inequality and injustice embedded in the thoughts, words, and actions of those involved. In a criminal event, as in other moments of everyday life, structures of social class or ethnicity intertwine with situational decisions, personal style, and symbolic references. Thus, while we cannot make sense of crime without analyzing structures of inequality, we cannot make sense of crime by only analyzing these structures, either. The esthetics of criminal events interlocks with the political economy of criminality.

The youthful "sneaky thrills" that Katz describes in Chapter Two -- vandalism, theft, and especially shoplifting -- exemplify these interconnections. As Katz shows, the event of shoplifting has a "magical" (p. 54) and seductive quality about it that develops independently of any overt need by the shoplifter for the shoplifted product. For the shoplifter, the event unfolds as a sort of thrilling and sensually gratifying game, a dramatic and illicit adventure. Even as we focus on the criminal event of shoplifting, though, we must ask: What are the origins of this magically seductive adventure and why does it grow out of the illicit acquisition of consumer goods? Answers to this question would certainly have to do with the creation of needs, the structuring of consumption, and the commodification of desire under late capitalism. Of course, these processes alone cannot explain the particular, situational dynamic of shoplifting; but neither can that dynamic be made sense of unless these processes are understood. Shoplifting explains capitalism in the same way that capitalism explains shoplifting.

This type of criminological analysis obviously parallels recent developments in areas as disparate as mainstream U.S. sociology, British cultural studies, postmodern social theory, and feminist theory. Although certainly not reducible to a single theme, these emerging analytic orientations cluster around some central ideas: the texture of everyday life -- the popular culture of people, groups, and events -- matters. Personal choices and styles adopted within everyday life are profoundly political. Situated language, symbolism, and meaning are not epiphenomena, but rather definitive components of social life, inexorably intertwined with the economic and political structure of society.(8)

These notions, in turn, force progressive criminologists again to question conventional distinctions between crime and resistance, to muddy the boundaries between unconscious response and conscious resistance. As we coordinate Katz's phenomenological stare with the critical gaze of leftist social theory, we may wish to reexamine the experience of crime as lived by its participants. As we do, moreover, we may begin to see differently all sorts of sensually appealing, if theoretically underdeveloped, criminal events: vandalism, graffiti writing, shoplifting, and the like. Until we understand what these events mean for their perpetrators, we would be hard pressed to dismiss them as without political content.(9)

Does this imply that every broken window, every leather-jacketed street fighter spitting teeth and blood, and every scooped-out liquor store cash register, every Krylon-tagged alley signifies an act of class-conscious resistance? Absolutely not, and maybe yes. Our answer depends, at least in part, on what we mean by "conscious." As Katz has shown, the logic of such events is partly situational; understandings and meanings of the event blossom within its interactional boundaries. The question thus becomes, not "Is this crime or resistance?" but "In what ways might the participants in this event be conscious of, and resistant to, the contradictions in which they are caught?" Whatever the answer, two things seem certain. The first is that we must take the time to pay attention to what people are actually doing when they stick up liquor stores, spray graffiti, or shoplift shoes. The second is that political-economic structures -- and thus power, control, subordination, and insubordination -- are embedded in these events as surely as in governmental scandals and labor strikes.(10)

Whether or not Katz's Seductions of Crime "could have been the work that revitalized deviance theory, that brought phenomenology and symbolic interactionism back into the mainstream of criminology" (Goode, 1990: 11), it can certainly serve to spark critical criminology by renewing the creative interplay between interactionist and political-economic perspectives. In discussing the development of alternative criminology in Britain in the late 1960s, Cohen (1988: 68) has spoken of the "adoption of a structurally and politically informed version of labeling theory." Katz's work renews the possibilities for such a theory -- or, turned the other way, a critical criminology informed by interactionist perspectives. In either configuration, the dialectic between situations and structures of criminality, between the style and substance of crime, promises to be exciting.
NOTES

(1.) As Katz (p. 326fn.) says in an endnote to Chapter One:

Note that there is no question here of "getting into the offender's mind." The key evidentiary facts are what was said and done, in what order, and what was not said and not done. Neither the evidence nor the theoretical focus is on what is "in the mind" of the subject. (2.) As Feyerabend (1975) and Kuhn (1970) have shown in the philosophy of science, and as our own experience in academia tells us, the most exciting work often occurs not within disciplines or traditions, but between and beyond them. This being the case, we had best be careful about how we evaluate a new work, in a book review or elsewhere. An evaluation of a work on the basis of thoroughness, completeness, or methodological rigor, as defined within a particular tradition may not serve the cause; in fact, it may well act as a conservative force, which blocks innovation, advancement, and progressive change. (3.) Katz's perspective on crime and methodology is perhaps best reflected in Goffman's (1961: ix-x) contention that:

... any group of persons -- prisoners, primitives, pilots, or patients -- develops a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable, and normal once you get close to it,

and that a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject. (4.) Katz (p. 347 fn.) addresses this problem more directly, but not entirely satisfactorily, in an endnote to one of his chapters on "stickup":

It is reasonable to worry that the ubiquitous presence of these "sensational" themes in the life histories says more about the criteria of publishing than about robbers' lives in general. Were it not for the statistical findings of the various studies of career offenders... and the diversity of the authors' personal interests and institutional affiliations,

this methodological worry would be overwhelming. (5.) Katz (p. 281) notes this post hoc problem in regard to "senseless' murder":

... we should appreciate the constraints that are distinctive to the phenomena under study. Given that these events are exceptional in both statistical and moral senses, writers will almost invariably come to them after the fact. (6.) For more on these issues, see, for example, Cohen (1980), Greenberg (1977), Hebdige (1979), Brake (1980), and Schwendinger and Schwendinger (1985). (7.) On the dynamics of deviant careers, see, of course, Becker (1963) and Goffman (1961). See also, for example, the articles gathered in the "Into and Out of Deviant Careers" section of Soc Problems 31,2, (1983) -- especially Adler and Adler (1983) and Shover (1983) -- and Luckenbill and Best (1981) on problems with the deviant "career" notion. (8.) For a sense of the rediscovery of cultural concerns in
mainstream sociology, see, for example, Peterson (1990). Angela McRobbie's work (see, for example, 1980, 1986, 1989) offers a remarkable blend of feminist, postmodern, and cultural studies perspectives on these issues. For other British cultural studies and postmodern perspectives, see, for example, Cohen (1980), Hall and Jefferson (1976), Hebdige (1979), Foster (1985), and Chambers (1986). The work of the Frankfurt School, of course, laid much of the groundwork for any politics of culture. (9.) For more on notions of crime and resistance, see, for example, Atlanta and Alexander (1989), Sholle (1990), Hebdige (1979), and Hall and Jefferson (1976). (10.) As the left realists would remind us, this also means paying close attention to the actual, lived effects of these events on their victims. Thus, Katz's (p. vii) statement that "if guided by e this text does not compel sympathy.... I suspect that readers who follow the text through several chapters will emerge from the various offenders' worlds at least as often in disgust as symp echoes Cohen's (1980: xxviii) claim that "we can understand without being too respectful."

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Prison presents a compelling and exhaustive account of how the American public relies on popular journals to understand the meaning and implications of discipline for prisoners. The connections revealed by Sloop’s rhetorical approach to the study of crime and punishment make it a valuable contribution to scholars concerned with the intersection between discourse, morality and punishment.

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Jack Katz argues that much criminological theorizing is flawed by criminologists’ lack of first-hand knowledge of crime. This ignorance has left criminologists trying to explain the demographic and social correlates of crime on the basis of misconceptions about crime itself.

Katz attempts to overcome this misdirection of inquiry by beginning with a phenomenological study of the “foreground” of crime – a close description of the criminal event, the lifestyle of the perpetrators, and the thought processes and emotions immediately preceding and following a crime. Using analytic induction, Katz considers many cases in an attempt to obtain relatively homogeneous crime categories (which may not coincide with legal categories), and moves back and forth between theory and data as he develops a grounded theory, until every case is explained.

With the exception of accounts of shoplifting expeditions written by his UCLA students, Katz relies on autobiographies, ethnographies and “nonfiction” novels for data. Sensibly, he does not try to deal with every type of crime, but deals with a range that are relevant to contemporary American society: righteous slaughter (in which the killer is defending a conception of the Good); adolescent shoplifting; the “badass” (not a type of crime but a social role whose enactment prominently features robbery and violence); and senseless homicides that occur in the course of a robbery.

In these analyses, Katz focuses not only on cognition, but on such emotions as humiliation, rage and existential dizziness. Here Katz makes a contribution that is valuable and original. Once one reads his book, it seems remarkable how little attention has been paid to emotions in criminological theory.

The neglect of emotion in models of crime causation reflects what some might consider an exaggerated assumption of rationality in much criminological theory, most conspicuously in the utility-maximizing analyses of the economists who commonly assume the goals of crime to be material gain. This is a model against which Katz polemizes.
Katz is persuasive that this model leaves much out, and for some forms of crime, may be quite misleading. Becoming an armed robber on an ongoing basis entails a good deal more than making a calculated choice as to the most efficient way of earning money. Robbers adopt a social role, and enter into a lifestyle that they value for its own sake; robbery is undertaken to support an identity and a lifestyle, not simply because it is the most efficient way of gaining income. The robber’s high-spending lifestyle leads to the shortages of money that robbery is intended to alleviate. To understand the appeal of robbery over pick-pocketing, one must grasp its moral appeal.

I think this argument is at least partly valid, but may be overstated. In crime, as in many other activities, motivations can be mixed. In noting the importance of non-material motives one need not deny that material motives and rational choices also play a role. Ask professors about the gratifications of their job, and they will talk about the rewards of communicating the insights of their field to young minds. Yet this does not mean they are unconcerned with their salaries, or that they would continue teaching if universities stopped paying them. It seems unlikely that the robbers Katz discusses at length would rob their victims if they knew they had no money. Field researchers continue to find merit in rational choice theories of criminal behavior (Jankowski, 1991).

Moreover, rationality need not imply that goals are exclusively material. Katz notes (p. 321) that

those who persist in stickups use violence when it is not justified on cost-benefit grounds because not to use violence would be to raise chaotic questions about their purpose in life. They understand that to limit their violence by materialist concerns would weaken them in conflicts with other hardmen and would raise a series of questions about their commitment to their careers that is more intimidating than is the prospect of prison.

Here, Katz has given us a persuasive reason why it would be rational to use violence: failure to do so would encourage other “hardmen” to intimidate and rob someone who refrained from using violence in self-defence.

Katz acknowledges that he may have biased his conclusion by selecting only certain forms of crime. It is at least possible that economic rationality would play a larger role in drug-dealing, professional burglary, forgery, fencing, price-fixing, or tax evasion. The Ford Pinto case, in which company executives calculated how much they would have to pay out in liability suits and compared it to the costs of redesigning the car to prevent it from erupting in flames when struck from the rear, shows how far corporate rationality can go. Maybe adolescent shoplifters who attend UCLA steal for thrills rather than for material gain, but that doesn’t mean material motives are absent for low-income narcotics addicts who shoplift to support a habit. Numerous
as expected on the basis of rational choice theory. As criminologists explore the emotional and sensual attractions of crime, it will be important not to ignore the successes of a utility-maximizing calculus.

A good deal of what Katz has to say sounds right, yet when Katz is not reporting what the perpetrators of a crime thought or felt, but what he himself thinks their behavior means, I sometimes had reservations about the accuracy of his imputations. When one black person calls another "nigger" is that an "existential assault" (p. 268) or in some contexts, a term of affection? Do the rips in a punk's clothing signify military combat, or simply contempt for respectable clothing styles? Or consider the case of the woman who killed her abusive husband by setting his bed on fire while he slept. Katz presents this as an episode of righteous slaughter taking place in a "state of rage". But at least on the basis of the material presented, we do not know how the wife regarded her actions. All Katz tells us is that when the case was publicized, national news commentators regarded the killing as righteous. Nor does Katz present any evidence that the wife experienced the rage that is supposed to accompany righteous slaughter. We are, however, told that the police had refused to arrest the husband earlier in the day. For all we know, the wife may have killed him coolly, to prevent him from killing her.

A potentially important contribution of Katz’s work is that it opens the door to better theoretical understandings of white-collar crime. He observes that the social-psychological understandings he proposes for shoplifters, robbers and killers are not necessarily restricted to individuals of the middle and lower classes. They may have much to offer to our understanding of corporate executives, army officers, and heads of state. Katz rightly notes that even when criminologists write about white collar crime, they rarely go beyond journalistic exposés, or complaints about the inequities of the criminal justice system. His work points to possibilities for bringing war crimes, coups and subversion within the scope of criminological theory.

What is the relationship between Katz’s work and more familiar criminological concerns with the etiology of crime? Those concerns lead to such questions as: if the attraction of shoplifting to teenagers is that it provides "sneaky thrills," why do some teenagers shoplift, but not others? Do some find sneaky thefts less thrilling, and if so, why? Alternately, perhaps everyone finds sneaky thefts thrilling, but some are deterred by the possible consequences of being caught. This would be a "control theory" position, and there are some indications that Katz endorses it. The reason few affluent individuals engage in robbery or homicide, he tells us, is that they would have to be "crazy" (p. 316) to do so. He doesn’t say why, but relies on readers’ common-sense understanding that these activities would jeopardize a valued way of life and
standard of living. This is, by the way, a limited use of “rational choice” logic. Perhaps because his intended audience is an educated lay public, rather than academic criminologists, Katz doesn’t explore such theoretical issues explicitly.

Questions of etiology are often framed in terms of group rates. Why is more crime committed by members of one group than another? The group may be a race, a sex, a class, or a city or country. Earlier studies of crime that emphasized its subjective meanings tended to repudiate causal theory in favor of voluntarism, and denied the significance of social structure. In Delinquency and Drift, for example, David Matza suggested that delinquency might occur more or less uniformly in all social classes. The over-representation of lower-class youth in arrest statistics might be due to police discrimination. This suggestion is not remotely plausible for the age, class or racial distribution of specific offenses like robbery or homicide. Katz does not try to dismiss the empirical relationships between involvement in such crimes as robbery and homicide and race, sex and class. Rather, he draws on his qualitative materials to try to explain them. His explanations are creative, and point to possibilities for further research, but they are not developed to the extent that the micro-analysis is.

Katz explains the heavy over-representation of blacks in robbery – greater than in other forms of theft – by noting the over-representation of blacks in the population from which robbers are drawn, namely, those involved in other kinds of illegal activity. Of course, this over-representation itself needs to be explained, as well as the reasons blacks are more over-represented in robbery than in other forms of theft. Here, additional considerations are raised. For example, blacks are severely under-represented in businesses and unions where their presence might facilitate forms of appropriation that do not require coercive confrontation with a victim, e.g. “insider” theft from warehouses, or the embezzlement of union pension funds.

In other instances, Katz’s discussion of the “background” of crime either seems more questionable, or requires more documentation, evidence, and argument. In addressing the social backgrounds of urban delinquent youth gangs, Katz suggests that associations between delinquency on the one hand, and poverty, adolescence, minority group status and urban location on the other, are largely spurious. Katz observes that if the analysis is extended to include other forms of collective youth deviance, or forms of coercive expropriation and repression, such as motor cycle clubs, the Ku Klux Klan, the Sicilian mafia, fascist political organizations, and juntas that rule by terror, then it becomes clear that urban residence, youthfulness, poverty and minority group membership are not necessary to organized violence. It is only because elites have not found street gangs useful for oppressing the masses that they
are predominantly urban, minority and youthful. What is necessary for the existence of such groups is “a culture humbled at the prospect of entering modern, rationalized society.”

Katz’s observation that when coercive, extra-legal appropriation is given elite sponsorship it may take place in rural regions, and need not be primarily adolescent, is important. But it is not clear why in the absence of elite sponsors, adolescent gangs should form primarily in large cities, why older adults do not find the sneaky thrills of shoplifting just as enticing as teenagers do, or why fifty-year-olds are less prone to carry out stickups than men half their age.

When Katz deals with this question in the context of shoplifting, he urges us to be cautious about identifying shoplifting as a response to the peculiar stresses of adolescence. Stealing may begin before adolescence, and take the form of employee theft when adulthood is reached. Perhaps involvement in theft doesn’t decline with age, but merely takes a different form, one we don’t know much about because perpetrators of employee theft rarely appear in police records.

This, however, is merely a possibility. Katz doesn’t demonstrate the absence of desistance from stealing. His explanation is called into question by evidence that arrests for fraud and embezzlement decline with age much as they do for other offenses. Moreover, abandonment of involvement in crime is documented for many types of crime less readily disguised than employee theft. Clearly this topic deserves more attention.

Katz does not state precisely what he means by “rationalized society” – but from the context it seems to mean a world of impersonal relationships that include strangers, bureaucratic forms of social organization, and perhaps a market economy. Katz seems to be suggesting that the children of immigrants, or other minorities such as Latinos and blacks, have the option of entering that society but elect not to do so because they are intimidated at the thought. Yet in a footnote, he acknowledges the existence of extreme discrimination against blacks within that “rationalized” economy. Many immigrants left their homelands, or came to cities from the countryside, hoping to enter the “modern” capitalist economy. When they didn’t do so it was because they were not allowed to do so, or were not able to do so on terms that were both rewarding and dignified.

It is true that a cultural rejection of modernity was one theme in Nazi propaganda. Yet this appeal was quite restricted until the Great Depression, and those to whom it did appeal were already part of a modern, capitalist, though arguably not rational, economy. Though under-developed here, the project Katz is suggesting – a comparative and historical analysis of collective forms of youth deviance, is an important one that should be followed up.
Katz deals with the predominantly male composition of theft and violence in his discussion of robbery, an offense that few women commit: in 1985, 92.4% of all robbery arrests were of male. Katz suggests that this is connected with the ability of the male phallus to penetrate others, crossing the boundaries of the body. The badass robber imposes himself on others so forcefully that he virtually threatens to penetrate them bodily.

I found this surprising; I’ve been robbed a few times, but never felt that I was in jeopardy of being raped. Nor does Katz introduce evidence that robbers give robbery this eroticized significance. The high percentage of males involved in robbery does not differ much from the percentages found in many other crimes (aggravated assault 86.5%, burglary 92.6%, motor vehicle theft 90.7%, vandalism 88.2%, driving under the influence 88.4%, and drunkenness 91.1%). Some of these high percentages cannot plausibly be explained in terms of phallic symbolism.

Other factors that Katz invokes to explain the sex ratio include the fact that women do not hang out on street corners, gamble or go much to pool halls; it is in these milieux that many robberies are generated. But this begs the question of why females are not there, and why robberies couldn’t be generated in the places where females do congregate. Drawing on research by Janet Lever, Katz suggests that boys are more willing to take risks and to be competitive. Robbery, he concludes – and one may extend this to many other forms of crime – is a way of “elaborating, perhaps celebrating distinctly male forms of action and ways of being.” This tells us that sex differences in involvement in crime broadly reflect the culture of gender in our society. Undoubtedly they do, but as an explanation this seems not especially different from what many who address the gendering of crime have suggested.

*Seductions of Crime*, then, is at times provocative and insightful. On many specifics, what it has to say is dubious; yet it may do much to inspire interest in the role of emotions in crime.

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This second book of McConville’s intended four part comprehensive study of English prisons – begun with the 1981 publication of *A History of English Prison Administration: 1750–1877* (Routledge) – serves as a complementary rather than contiguous work with regard to the earlier volume. The author’s testimony indicates that this volume was a dozen years in the making, during
In his controversial challenge to criminologists, Jack Katz argues for a reexamination of situational factors that precipitate criminal acts, specifically those that concern crime's sensual dynamics. According to Katz, people's immediate social environment and experiences encourage offenders to construct crimes as sensually compelling. Although insightful, I suggest that this thesis is limited, specifically as it applies to "sneaky thrill" property crime. Katz's emphasis on the enticements of theft, at the expense of other variables, negates a considerable body of research and leaves a theoretical hiatus that encourages explanations grounded in individual pathology. I suggest a revision of Katz's approach that addresses these concerns. I test this reformulation with models of various stages of sneaky thrill theft. The results of this analysis affirm that the seduction of theft has an important instrumentalist component and is influenced by several background factors, namely, age, gender, and the strain associated with inadequate economic opportunities.

In his provocative, albeit controversial Seductions of Crime, Jack Katz (1988) argues for a redirection of the criminological gaze—from the traditional focus on background factors such as age, gender, and material conditions to foreground or situational factors that directly precipitate criminal acts and reflect crimes' sensuality. Katz is not the first writer to highlight the role of situational variables: Sutherland (1947) and Gibbons (1971) both recognize proximate effects in the etiology of crime. Moreover, Katz's focus on criminal thrills revives and elaborates on Bordua's (1961) admonition that theorists recognize the enjoyment that accompanies many offenses. Nonetheless, Katz's emphasis on crime's seductive elements is unique.

*I am indebted to Ana Bettencourt, Rosemary Gartner, John Hagan, Zheng Wu, and several anonymous reviewers for their comments. The data sets used in this paper were collected by Charles R. Tittle (1980) and Jack Katz (1988) and were obtained from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Neither the consortium nor the original data collectors bear any responsibility for the analyses and interpretations reported here.
According to Katz, many offenders feel enticed by a particular crime once they construct it as sensually compelling. To understand how people's immediate social environment, experiences, and emotional state make offenses enticing, Katz explores crime's sensual dynamics—its form and feeling as experienced by offenders. Interweaving self-report data, interviews, and popular fiction, Katz argues that seduction occurs across a range of behaviors, including muggings, gang fighting, robbery, homicides, and theft. In this article, I focus on property offenses, activities that Katz describes as "sneaky thrill" crimes whereby people construct both objects and theft as seductive.

Undeniably valuable, Katz's work is also flawed. Unlike his examinations of second-degree murder or robbery, which integrate background and foreground effects, Katz portrays sneaky thrill offenses as emotional events determined almost exclusively by situational contingencies. This approach has two shortcomings: Although many people are seduced by objects, they neither equally nor unanimously construct theft as alluring; and although offending may have a seductive component, it is attractive for reasons other than its sensuality. Katz's rejection of nonemotive factors to account for varying responses and alternative sources of seduction encourages explanations grounded in individual characteristics, especially aberrant ones.

Using Katz's data, previous research, and insights from deterrence and rational choice theories, I suggest an elaboration that addresses these problems. I argue that in addition to emotions, the seduction of theft is influenced by background variables (e.g., age, gender, and material conditions) and by instrumental, cognitive processes. Further, I propose that the various stages of sneaky thrill seductions may be uniquely influenced by these phenomena. I test this approach with survey data that measure two elements of a sneaky thrill: people's previous experiences of being seduced by something to the point of considering taking it and their predictions that, if captivated by an object at some future time, they would steal it.

CONSTRUCTING THE SEDUCTION OF A SNEAKY THRILL

According to Katz (1988:4), "something causally essential happens" just prior to the commission of a crime. In the final moments of a crime's etiological history, offenders' emotions subdue their rational selves and they experience an overpowering sense of being determined by the environment. They feel propelled into action: seduced by objects, people, and most compellingly, by crime itself. It is this "magical" and "transformative" experience that, in Katz's view (p. 3), makes crime "sensible, even
sensually compelling.” Although seduction constitutes Katz’s project, he notes that crimes are not inherently alluring; rather, offenders construct their own enticement through their framing of the social world, its inhabitants, and its contents. For Katz (p. 7), the challenge of criminological theory is to specify the stages in this “dialectic process through which a person empowers the world to seduce him (sic) to criminality.”

Katz (pp. 3-4, 56) argues that a sneaky thrill crime originates with the construction of an object as seductive. In this initial stage, people must “magically” transform articles, making them not only desirable, but captivating: They must impute to objects the ability to come to life, demand attention, dominate the senses, and overpower reason. Thus, Katz (p. 53) notes the first requirement of a sneaky thrill is to be taken by an object, rather than to contemplate taking it.1

Once people are captivated, the seduction shifts from the article to the act of theft itself. At this point, would-be offenders are struck by the excitement of committing a deviant act and intuit that stealing “would be so easy.” This awareness has two components: Potential thieves not only understand that they have the capability to steal without detection, they also recognize their capacity to be deviant.

The second stage of a sneaky thrill begins when would-be larcenists recall their existence in the world, the presence of others, and possible sources of detection. In essence, they realize the exigency of maintaining a conventional, calm appearance. Subsequently, everyday matters invade the consciousness and seem subtle and complex (e.g., shoplifters may ask themselves, How long do customers usually spend in one area of the store? or How fast do shoppers walk when they leave?). Once aware of these concerns, potential thieves employ commonsense theories to guide the various practical tasks of theft (e.g., how to hide an item or look innocent). Thus, successful sneaky thrillers accomplish a double illusion within conventional society: They make an article appear to vanish and conceal the deviant elements of their character in a facade of innocence.

Larcenists enter the third stage of a sneaky thrill when they complete their crime and experience a euphoric appreciation of its significance. In other words, sneaky thieves repeatedly savor the thrill of “getting away with it.” According to Katz (pp. 64-65), offenders understand that stealing is a symbolic experience that reflects a “moral transcendence” or an awakening: Perpetrators see themselves through a new lens that captures the unique and deviant character of the self. Thus, theft is seductive, not simply as a means of obtaining desired objects, but as a vehicle for new

1. However, in other passages Katz implies that offenders may enter situations with a preestablished desire to offend (e.g., pp. 53, 59, 61) and sometimes with a particular object in mind (e.g., pp. 59, 61).
insights, namely, the capacity for surmounting conventions and moral
codes.

Katz supports his interpretation of the etiological foreground of sneaky
thrills with university students' descriptions of their theft experiences. He
acknowledges the potential age, class, and education biases in these data,
but does not consider them significant (p. 78). Referring to the overrepre-
sentation of events during respondents' teenaged years, Katz (pp. 76–79)
cautions the reader not to assume that his explanation is unduly influenced
by the "structure of adolescence" or "causes rooted in this stage." Instead,
he suggests that it applies to all ages.

Katz's rejection of the role of material conditions is more vehement;
indeed, he maintains that theories rooted in economic conditions or strain
are guilty of "sentimental materialism." Katz (p. 79) notes that studies of
lower-class youths reveal that much of their theft is not driven by need:
They do not steal to get essentials like food, but luxuries—drugs, flashy
clothes, and other items—that reflect material tastes rather than necessity.
Thus, he concludes that "there is no basis for assuming any particular
social-class pattern in the background of sneaky thrills" (p. 79), and he
suggests we "rethink the relationship . . . [of] social class to devious prop-
erty crime" (p. 53).

Consistent with his arguments about age and class, Katz implies that
sneaky thrill crimes are unrelated to gender. Katz refers to studies of
males and occasionally introduces accounts by them, but relies mostly on
reports by females. This approach suggests that these offenses are not
only more common among females than generally assumed but, for the
most part, are equally distributed across the genders.

AN ELABORATED MODEL OF SNEAKY THRILL
PROPERTY CRIME

The partiality of Katz's theory is apparent when one considers the possi-
bility of alternative responses to seduction. Although Katz (p. 5) recog-
nizes that people are enticed by many objects and activities, his
explanation does not account for variation in reactions to seductions. Like
the thieves Katz describes, people in market economies routinely enter
dsensually compelling environments where they endow objects with desir-
ous qualities. Yet, most shoppers do not respond to these seductions by
perceiving that "it would be so easy" and resorting to theft. As evident in
Prus and Dawson's (1991) ethnography of retailers and consumers, many
follow a more rational approach: They simply purchase the articles; delay
gratification of ownership to a future, more affordable time; or accept that
possession will remain a fantasy. For others, the response is more emo-
tive, but inextricably bound to resources. As one shopper noted, "As long
as I can afford to buy it, anything's exciting!” (Prus and Dawson, 1991:152).

Cameron's (1964:41-42) classic study of shoplifting suggests that those who respond to their seductions by choosing alternatives to theft do not easily stray from them. Using a two-way mirror in a relatively secluded and purposely unsupervised part of the store, Cameron observed many “distressed” customers who either left the store without their desired objects or waited “angrily” until staff arrived. She did not see any of the patrons take advantage of their isolation and neglect by stealing. Notwithstanding allusions to the “magic” of the moment or a “secret, internal desire to be deviant” (p. 58), Katz fails to explain why object-seduced people are not equally enticed by theft. In short, he does not account for movement from one stage of seduction to the next.

Katz further limits his thesis by rejecting background factors, that is, demographic variables and other characteristics that do not change during or as a result of situational contexts. As noted above, Katz argues that material conditions are of little importance in understanding the seduction of sneaky thrill property crime. Although self-reports of high school adolescents frequently call into question the association between class and crime, this relationship is well documented in most ethnographic and areal research (Hagan, 1992). Those studies suggest that rather than simply providing a thrill, some thefts are seductively attractive because they appease a material inadequacy or the strain that it engenders. Katz's data provide examples of this phenomenon. Of the 32 respondents who mentioned resources, almost half (15) indicated that they did not have enough money to pay for the objects they stole. This condition is typified by a comment of one student (respondent 11) who related stealing a shirt for a friend because she “couldn't afford to buy him anything” and by another (respondent 27) who described his thefts as follows, “My patterns were simple in that I wanted to have many of the things that the wealthy kids I grew up with had.”

In a later passage Katz (p. 315) does state that his rejection of effects of social class or material conditions does not deny the recurrent correlation between socioeconomic status or lack of employment opportunities and property crime. Instead, he suggests that these correlations have no causal significance. However, as noted years ago by Hirschi and Selvin (1967), associations do have causal significance if one cannot find antecedent variables that make them disappear. Katz's explanation focuses on the opposite end of an offense's etiological history and thus cannot “explain away” causal relationships between economic conditions and crime.

The implication that age and gender have little effect on the enticements of sneaky thrill property crime is also questionable. Research consistently demonstrates a strong relationship between age and most types of crime
(Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). Further, although there have been some increases in female offending over the past two decades, crime remains disproportionately committed by males (Steffensmeier, 1993). Thus, the potential revival of Pollak's (1950) thesis—that there is more female crime than usually assumed—is questionable. Instead, it is more likely that like age, gender influences susceptibility to the seduction of sneaky thrills in ways similar to its effects on most types of crime.

Katz's portrayal of sneaky thrills as seductive experiences driven exclusively by emotions and the desire for excitement is also unduly restrictive. Although these are central components of offending, the seduction of crime is more complex and often embodies instrumental or rational considerations. In addition to the material considerations discussed above, several of Katz's respondents stated that their seductive thefts were encouraged by a desire to impress friends or strengthen relationships. As one person (respondent 27) explained, "Of course, a lot of my reason was to show off to my friends, you see I was the only one to never get caught." As the latter part of this statement suggests, those who responded to seductions by stealing were also influenced by past successes. However, the most frequently cited reason for taking a desired object reflected the belief that theft was not wrong, particularly when a store was perceived as overcharging for goods. Consider one person's (respondent 103) description of the theft of an item that she "really wanted":

I was . . . trying on leotards and thinking to myself what a "rip-off!" $29.00 just for a basic leotard for aerobics. The more I thought about it the more infuriated I became—the price was absurd and I wasn't going to pay for it . . .

Another respondent (99) expressed similar sentiments for stealing flu tablets, noting that, in this situation, "Right was on . . . [his] side":

I thought the manufacturers deserved to be punished for charging a ridiculously . . . high price. If those lousy, profiteering manufacturers had charged a fair price of $2, I would have been glad to pay for it. This way they could be punished, . . . the bastards.

The comments of these and other respondents are consistent with deterrence and rational choice arguments that several variables may influence a decision to offend—or act upon a seduction. For example, deterrence theory suggests that a lack of moral commitment or rejection of the legitimacy of the law may enhance crime's attractiveness (Gibbs, 1975; Grasmick and Bursik, 1990; Paternoster, 1989; Paternoster et al., 1983; Tit-tle, 1980). According to rational choice arguments, people who calculate the greatest rewards from, and the lowest costs to, crime are also more prone to undertake it (Becker, 1968; Cornish and Clarke, 1986). Thus, the
allurement of offending may depend on people’s predictions of the likelihood of sanctions and the shame, guilt, or embarrassment that may accompany them. These calculations are based on several factors, including previous behavioral and sanctioning experiences. For example, unsanctioned offenders may estimate a lower probability of future sanctions and thus be more inclined toward offending (Horney and Marshall, 1992; Piliavin et al., 1986), whereas those previously apprehended may be deterred by their experiences and greater estimates of the likelihood of future sanctions (Klepper and Nagin, 1989).

Overall Katz's denial of background and instrumental variables as influences of seduction invites the conclusion that there is something inherently different, and perhaps “wrong,” with people who allow themselves to be seduced into crime. This conclusion is reinforced by his reference to an unexplained “secret internal desire to be deviant (p. 58).” Albeit inadvertent, this potential for individual reductionism resonates with earlier criminological works. In her study of Victorian theft, Abelson (1989) notes that several early 20th-century writers promoted the idea that shoplifters, particularly women, were seduced into theft. In 1901, the French psychologist Paul Dubuisson described such women as participants in a sexually stimulating environment that fostered unrealistic desires to acquire objects they could not afford:

Temptation is so strong, surging desire so powerful, so impervious, so irresistible that the act [shoplifting] is accomplished before reason has time to plead its cause . . . for the moment pleasure is everything (quoted in Abelson, 1989:46).

Abelson (1989) argues that this view inspired explanations of shoplifting as a problem of female kleptomania, stemming from individual variations in several phenomena: menstruation, lactation, menopause, uncontrolled sexual desires, immorality, irrationality, and emotional susceptibility. Although unintentional, Katz's failure to specify the sources of seductive constructions, coupled with his rejection of gender and age, encourages a return to individual deviations as the etiological underpinnings of crime.

In a similar vein, Katz's dismissal of material conditions suggests that sneaky thrill property crimes result from the aberrations of people located in particular class positions. This conclusion may promote the revival of Victorian class distinctions (e.g., between the “dangerous” and “noble” poor) at the expense of analyses more sensitive to structural conditions. I suggest that adding background and instrumental variables to Katz's thesis circumvents these theoretical problems and offers a more inclusive explanation of sneaky thrills.
DATA, VARIABLES, AND METHODS

A comprehensive test of sneaky thrill property crime requires rather unique data. In addition to a host of background and situational variables, it demands indicators for each of the various components of a sneaky thrill: seductions by objects and by theft, thieving, and euphoric thrills. Although large-scale survey data can provide measures of some of these phenomena, Katz implies that such resources are of little value. Instead, he argues for a qualitative exploration into thieves' subjective, emotional dispositions. Alternatively, I agree with critics (see Turk, 1991) who challenge Katz's partiality for qualitative material at the expense of survey data and quantitative analyses. Restricting analyses to reports of larcenists eliminates the possibility of discerning whether the experiences delineated by Katz are indeed specific to those who steal (i.e., there is no variation on the key variables of interest) and encourages post hoc interpretations. Moreover, although survey data have weaknesses, they provide an important avenue for testing theory.

In this article, I use data collected by Tittle (1980) in a 1972 area probability survey of 1,993 residents from New Jersey, Iowa, or Oregon. One-hour interviews were completed with randomly selected respondents aged 15 and over in 57% of these households (77% of screened subjects). Tittle (1980) reports that the characteristics and criminal histories of the sample are consistent with 1970 census descriptions and data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Notwithstanding the data's representativeness, there are three sources of concern with the data used in this article. First, the survey was not designed with Katz's thesis in mind and provides only proxy measures for some concepts. Second, the data set contains information on background and instrumental variables but does not include indicators of the emotional processes that occur in the foreground of sneaky thrills. However, emotional factors are intervening variables; thus, their exclusion does not detract from the causal importance of antecedent effects (Hirschi and Selvin, 1967). Third, the survey measures only two elements of a sneaky thrill: previous seductions by objects to the point of considering theft and predictions of future stealing if similarly captivated. The deficiencies of this material indicate that subsequent research with more comprehensive and refined measures is needed to address the issues raised here.

As suggested above, I explore two aspects of the process involved in the seduction of a sneaky thrill. In each case I estimate separate models for petty and more serious thefts (taking something worth about $5 and $50, respectively), for a total of four models. These measures of general theft are appropriate because although Katz focuses on shoplifting, he notes that many types of stealing are likely to involve a sneaky thrill (pp. 76–79).
Moreover, the level of previous theft reported in these data resonates with the amateur, noncriminal career types of crime that Katz addresses: for offenders, the mean scores for petty and more serious larceny are less than 2.

The first measure of seduction uses questions that asked how often respondents would like to have taken something that did not belong to them (see table in appendix). These items capture one element of the initial enticement of a sneaky thrill: the feeling of wanting or being seduced by an object to the point of considering taking it. Yet, these measures do not necessarily include later stages: They do not ask whether the respondent believed they could “get away” with stealing, nor are they restricted to cases in which a theft occurred.

In the second series of equations, I model respondents’ predictions of the probability that they would commit a theft if seduced by an object at some time in the future. The items reflect estimations of the likelihood that respondents would steal an object—worth either about $5 or $50—if they were in a situation in which they had an extremely strong desire or need (emphasis in the question). These measures reflect respondents’ willingness to act beyond the point specified in the previous dependent variables, that is, admit to the possibility of stealing if seduced. The differences between the two stages are evident in the correlations between the first and second sets of dependent variables, which, for both types of theft, are below .3.

The dependent variables used in this analysis have two further advantages. First, they focus on crimes that involve the explicit desire for an object and thus exclude thefts undertaken for other purposes (e.g., in response to peer pressure or for payment). Second, they inquire about larceny in general, thereby averting problems that arise from using offenses that may be concentrated in one group (e.g., shoplifting among adolescents) while ignoring those that occur more frequently in other groups (e.g., theft from work among adults).

I estimate each equation in a two-stage approach. In the first, "reduced" equation, I include background factors rejected by Katz—age, gender, and measures of material conditions—together with a control for race. In this analysis, age, gender, and race are dichotomized (see appendix table for additional details). I use two measures of material conditions—socioeconomic status and strain. The former is an additive index

2. The inclusion of the word “need” in this item may introduce some measurement error because need may differ from desire. However, strong desire is often subjectively translated into perceptions of need, and as marketing research suggests, the two are not easily separable (see Spreng and Oshavsky, 1993).
that combines family income with one's education and occupation (information on the head of the household was used for respondents not in the labor force; see Tittle and Villemez, 1977, for further details). The indicator of strain reflects respondents' perceptions about the adequacy of legitimate opportunities for reaching their goals. I include strain in the reduced model because I assume it originates in people's class experiences and thus predates the more situationally affected variables introduced in the second equation.

In the second, "full" equation, I add indicators of instrumental and deterrence variables—costs, the likelihood of sanctions, and moral commitment. I use three scales to capture perceptions of costs associated with detection—concerns about formal and informal sanctions and loss of respect. My measure of consideration for formal sanctions uses three items that capture how upset respondents would feel if they were arrested, found guilty, or jailed. I assess regard for informal sanctions with estimates of the degree of distress resulting from a loss of esteem among three groups of people—those well known, those who live in the community, and family members. The third scale, perception of loss of respect, joins two items that measure the amount of respect respondents believe they would forfeit if they stole and were discovered.

I measure beliefs about the likelihood of sanctions with a four-item scale. This scale combines answers to questions about the probability that a theft by the respondent (of goods worth about $5 and $50) would result in an arrest or would be discovered by the following: someone who does not approve, people known personally, or most people in the community. I use this combination, rather than a single item on arrest, because many thieves are not charged, particularly for minor thefts. Instead, they receive warnings from victims or authorities, or if they are juveniles, their parents are contacted (Cameron, 1964; Feuerverger and Shearing, 1982). The final deterrence variable measures moral commitment. This scale is based on two indicators: respondents' beliefs that each type of theft is morally wrong and that it is a serious offense for someone like themselves.

I also add several control variables. Two scales survey respondents' prior experiences with theft and sanctions. The first uses items that measure involvement of respondents and their friends in each type of theft. The second combines three items: the frequency of respondent arrests in the five years preceding the survey, the number of people the respondents knew in their childhood who got in trouble with the law, and the number of current friends who have been in trouble for stealing. Finally, I introduce the measure of previous seduction (the dependent variable from the first series of equations) as a control variable in the equations measuring predictions of future theft.
Given the skew of the distributions for the dependent variables, I collapsed the original five-category scales into dichotomies and estimated logit equations. I also estimated ordinary least squares (OLS) equations with variables measured in their original scales. Similar to previous analyses that use multiple coding schemes for crime variables (see Hagan and McCarthy, 1992; Paternoster and Triplett, 1988), I found little difference between the logit and OLS results.

I report logit coefficients (b) and their antilogs (e^b) in the tables. To assist interpretations, I also convert the antilogs into the percentage change in the ratio of odds-ratio of the dependent variable and report these and predicted probabilities in the text. I calculate percentage change as ((e^b - 1) * 100). Predicted probabilities are obtained with the formula \( P = \frac{e^{zi}}{1 + e^{zi}} \), where \( P \) is the predicted probability, \( e \) is the base of the natural logarithms, and \( zi = bixi \) (see Aldrich and Nelson, 1984:32). For continuous variables, comparisons refer to individuals who fall at either end of the continuum measured by the variable.

RESULTS

According to the reduced equations in Table 1, gender and age are significantly related to experiences of previous seductions by both types of theft. For males, the probabilities of having contemplated taking inexpensive and more costly objects are greater by about 65% than for females (i.e., \( P = 1.70/2.70 \) and \( P = 1.98/2.98 \), respectively). For both types of items, the probabilities of object seduction are also greater for adolescents than for adults by approximately 65%. The effect of strain is not significant in either model, whereas socioeconomic background has an effect but only for seductions involving minor theft and in a counterintuitive direction: The odds of reporting previous enticements to steal inexpensive items rise by about 12% with each increase in socioeconomic status (i.e., \( [1.12 - 1] \times 100 \)).

The full equations in Table 1 reveal that previous seductions are also influenced by several deterrence and instrumental variables. The probabilities for reporting feelings of seduction for either type of theft are about 70% greater for those who believe they would not lose respect if caught stealing compared with those most convinced they would forfeit it (i.e., \( P = e^{(8 \times .13)}/1 + e^{(8 \times .13)} \) and \( P = e^{(8 \times .11)}/1 + e^{(8 \times .11)} \), respectively). The effect of moral commitment is also substantial, but pronounced for theft of more expensive goods. Compared with those with the strongest convictions about stealing's immorality, those who have no moral qualms with theft are approximately 70% more likely to report having wanted to take inexpensive items, and about 93% more likely to have considered stealing objects worth about $50. Prior exposure to theft also affects previous
Table 1. Logit Estimates of Previous Seductions by an Object to a Point of Considering Theft

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Reduced Equation</th>
<th></th>
<th>Full Equation</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>S.E.</td>
<td>(e^b)</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.53*</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.89*</td>
<td>.162</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.238</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Status</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strain</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for Formal Sanctions</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for Informal Sanctions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Respect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probability of Theft’s Discovery</td>
<td>.04*</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Commitment</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Exposure to Theft</td>
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<td>.052</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Exposure to Sanctions</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.37</td>
<td>.273</td>
<td>-3.81</td>
<td>.344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\chi^2/df)</td>
<td>61.91/5</td>
<td>367.42/12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Goods Worth About $50

| Gender                                       | .68*             | .147             | 1.98          | .28              | .166             | 1.32          |
| Age                                          | .62*             | .202             | 1.85          | .29              | .224             | 1.34          |
| Race                                         | -.02             | .281             | .99           | .49              | .317             | 1.63          |
| Socioeconomic Status                         | .09              | .059             | 1.10          | .05              | .065             | 1.05          |
| Strain                                       | .09              | .066             | 1.09          | -.07             | .074             | .93           |
| Concern for Formal Sanctions                 | -.04             | .028             | .96           | .08*             | .031             | 1.08          |
| Concern for Informal Sanctions               |                 |                  |               | .11*             | .036             | 1.11          |
| Loss of Respect                              |                 |                  |               |                  |                  |               |
| Probability of Theft’s Discovery             | .02              | .018             | 1.02          | .32*             | .061             | 1.38          |
| Moral Commitment                             | .33*             | .089             | 1.39          | .18*             | .035             | 1.20          |
| Prior Exposure to Theft                      | .18*             | .089             | 1.39          | .18*             | .035             | 1.20          |
| Prior Exposure to Sanctions                  | -.04             | .028             | 1.08          | .08*             | .031             | 1.08          |
| Constant                                     | -2.83            | .328             | -3.97         | .393             |                  |               |
| \(\chi^2/df\)                               | 36.50/5          | 186.78/12        |               |                  |                  |               |

* \(p < .05\).

Enticements. Each increase in exposure augments the odds of having desired to commit minor and more serious theft by approximately 70% and 40%, respectively.
Notwithstanding these similarities, there are three unique effects. First, the odds of reporting a previous contemplation of petty larceny rise with the strength of conviction that one's thefts are unlikely to be discovered. Second, the seductive attraction of more costly goods increases with indifference to informal sanctions. Third, each previous exposure to sanctions increases the odds of reporting an enticement of expensive objects.

The results in Table 2 reveal that a willingness to proceed with future seduction-based thefts is related to most of the variables noted above. For example, the probabilities of being willing to engage in both types of theft are about 65% greater for males than for females. As well, compared with adults, adolescents are more inclined toward stealing by about 75% and 69% for inexpensive and costly goods, respectively.

The results in Table 2 also demonstrate the importance of material conditions. The probabilities of considering either type of theft are approximately 65% greater for those most strained relative to those who perceive themselves as having sufficient opportunities. To explore further the effect of strain, I added each independent variable individually to the reduced equations. These analyses reveal that several variables (e.g., moral commitment and loss of respect) intervene between strain and theft, yet no single variable is sufficient to reduce strain's effect on larger thefts. For petty crimes, only previous exposure to theft reduces the direct effect of strain to nonsignificance.

The full equations reported in Table 2 also attest to the important effects of instrumental and deterrence variables. The probabilities of contemplating future thefts of minor and more expensive goods are approximately 70% greater for those who believe that the discovery of a theft would not cause any decrease in their respect. Minor and more serious crime are 80% more likely to be contemplated by those who do not have strong beliefs about theft's wrongness. Amenability toward future larceny also increases with previous exposure to theft and prior seductions. The former increases the odds by about 50% with each experience, whereas prior seduction augments them by about 200% for petty theft and 140% for more serious crime. In addition to these effects, each previous exposure to sanctions increases an openness to future theft of expensive goods by about 6%.

DISCUSSION

Table 2. Logit Estimates of the Predictions of a Willingness to Steal if Seduced in the Future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Reduced Equation</th>
<th>Full Equation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b)</td>
<td>S.E. (e^b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goods Worth About $5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.61*</td>
<td>.112 1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.14*</td>
<td>.155 3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.216 1.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Status</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.045 1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strain</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.050 1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for Formal Sanctions</td>
<td>- .01</td>
<td>.022  .99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for Informal Sanctions</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.027 1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Respect</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.026 1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probability of Theft’s Discovery</td>
<td>- .01</td>
<td>.015 .99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Commitment</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.038 1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Exposure to Theft</td>
<td>.40*</td>
<td>.054 1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Exposure to Sanctions</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previously Seduced</td>
<td>1.09*</td>
<td>.145 2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<tr>
<td>(\chi^2/df)</td>
<td>104.91/5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goods Worth About $50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.70*</td>
<td>.141 2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.79*</td>
<td>.187 2.20</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-.17</td>
<td>.252 .84</td>
</tr>
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<td>Socioeconomic Status</td>
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<td>.057 1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strain</td>
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<td>.060 1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for Formal Sanctions</td>
<td>- .01</td>
<td>.026 .99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for Informal Sanctions</td>
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<td>.031 1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Respect</td>
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<td>.035 1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probability of Theft’s Discovery</td>
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<td>.017 1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prior Exposure to Theft</td>
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<td>.086 1.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prior Exposure to Sanctions</td>
<td>.06*</td>
<td>.036 1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previously Seduced</td>
<td>.89*</td>
<td>.189 2.43</td>
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<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.64</td>
<td>.301 3.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>(\chi^2/df)</td>
<td>56.95/5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \(p < .05\).
Moreover, his unique integration of interviews and popular fiction provides a compelling use of information often ignored by social scientists. Unfortunately, in opening these windows Katz unnecessarily closes others.

The findings reported here reveal important relationships between various stages of sneaky thrill property crime and several nonemotive factors neglected by Katz. For example, males and adolescents are more likely to report being previously seduced by an object to a point of considering minor and more serious theft, and they are more willing to undertake both types of crime if seduced in the future. Consistent with deterrence and instrumental theories, people who believe that theft is not morally wrong or that their detection would not lead to a loss of respect are more likely to view objects with larcenous intentions, as are those exposed to theft in the past and those who believe they can steal without detection.

Notwithstanding the similarities between past and prospective considerations of sneaky thrill crimes, this analysis reveals two important differences. First, although strain's effect on the desire for objects is limited, it is an important predictor of a willingness to act upon subsequent seductions. In other words, people desire goods regardless of their structural conditions, whereas only those lacking opportunities are more willing to consider future theft if seduced. Second, in contrast to deterrence predictions, previous exposure to sanctions does not inhibit but rather encourages considerations of future theft, specifically for expensive goods. This counterintuitive finding may reflect the lack of severity or celerity of previous sanctions or sanctioned offenders' beliefs that they are "wise to the system" and can escape future sanctioning. Overall, the varying effects of strain and exposure to sanctions affirm that a combination of shared and unique factors influences each stage in the seduction of a sneaky thrill property crime.

The results reported in this article do not deny the importance of thrills and emotional states for understanding crime's attractiveness. As Katz's data and his explication demonstrate, the excitement provided by some devious property crime is undeniably seductive. Nonetheless, this analysis affirms that the attraction of crime is not due simply to emotions, but is influenced by other factors.

Although not the focus of this article, there are further avenues for embellishing explanations of crime that emphasize proximate effects. For example, in her study of Victorian shoplifting, Abelson (1989) documents how the structural foreground of department stores (e.g., structural layout and the introduction of display windows and open counters) combined with larger social and cultural changes to encourage theft among Victorian women. Similarly, in their study of street crime, McCarthy and Hagan (1992) examine relationships between various types of street crime and the structural, yet situational conditions of homelessness (e.g., unemployment,
hunger, and lack of shelter). As Birkbeck and LaFree (1993) suggest, comparable attention to the structural foreground would extend Katz's focus from individual characteristics to objective opportunities provided by particular situations.

The elaboration provided in this article is an attempt to extend Katz's ideas by adding factors that capture salient structural, instrumental, and deterrence variables to Katz's emphasis on foreground and emotional factors. Only from this broader foundation can one obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the way offenders experience the seduction of sneaky thrills and move from the enticement of objects and theft to actual thieving.

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Damphousse, Kelly R.

Feuerverger, Andrey and Clifford D. Shearing
Gibbons, Donald C.

Gibbs, Jack P.

Goode, Erich

Gottfredson, Michael R. and Travis Hirschi

Grasmick, Harold G. and Robert J. Bursik, Jr.

Hagan, John

Hagan, John and Bill McCarthy

Hirschi, Travis and Hanan C. Selvin

Horney, Julie and Ineke Haen Marshall

Katz, Jack

Katz, Steven B.

Klepper, Steven and Daniel S. Nagin

McCarty, Bill and John Hagan

Paternoster, Raymond

Paternoster, Raymond and Ruth Triplett
Paternoster, Raymond, Linda Saltzman, Gordon P. Waldo and Theodore G. Chiricos

Piliavin, Irving, Rosemary Gartner, Craig Thornton, and Ross L. Matsueda

Pollak, Otto

Prus, Robert and Lorne Dawson

Spreng, Richard and Richard Olshavsky

Steffensmeier, Darrell

Sutherland, Edwin H.

Tittle, Charles R.

Tittle, Charles R. and Wayne J. Villemez

Turk, Austin T.

Bill McCarthy is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Victoria. His research focuses on juvenile crime, particularly by the homeless, and historical variation in homicide victimization.
Appendix. Variable Names, Descriptions, and Descriptive Statistics ($N = 1,993$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Description and Coding</th>
<th>$X$</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variables</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Previous Seductions by an Object to a Point of Considering Theft</td>
<td>“How often would you like to take something that does not belong to you?” 0 = never, 3 = almost always; dichotomized as 0 = never and 1 = more than never.</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictions of a Willingness to Steal if Seduced in the Future</td>
<td>“If you were in a situation tomorrow where you had an extremely strong desire or need to, what are the chances that you would take something that does not belong to you?” 0 = almost no chance, 4 = excellent chance; dichotomized as 0 = never and 1 = any chance.</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theft of goods worth about $5</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
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<td>.31</td>
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<td>Theft of goods worth about $50</td>
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<td>.49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>0 = Nonwhite, 1 = White</td>
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<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Status</td>
<td>An ordinal variable based on three 4-category indicators: (a) occupation: 1 = laborers . . . 4 = professionals; (b) education: 1 = less than high school . . . 4 = postsecondary education; (c) income: 1 = &lt; $7,000 . . . 4 = &gt; $13,000. The items were summed and then collapsed into a 5-point ordinal scale with 1 = low and 5 = high.</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strain</td>
<td>“You personally have had enough opportunities in this country to reach your goals.” 0 = agree strongly . . . 4 = disagree strongly.</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for Formal Sanctions</td>
<td>Three-item scale ($\alpha = .84$) measuring how upset the respondent would be if (a) arrested, (b) found guilty, or (c) jailed. Each item uses a 5-point ordinal scale with 0 = very upset and 4 = not at all upset.</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for Informal Sanctions</td>
<td>Three-item scale ($\alpha = .77$) measuring how upset the respondent would be if he or she lost respect among (a) people well known, (b) the community, and (c) family. Each item uses a 5-point ordinal scale with 0 = very upset and 4 = not at all upset.</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Description and Coding</th>
<th>$X$</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Respect</td>
<td>Two-item scales ($r = .71, .61$) measuring perceptions of the amount of respect the respondent would lose (a) among people he or she knows and (b) in the community if he or she stole and were discovered. Each item uses a 5-point scale with 0 = a great deal and 4 = none.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theft of goods worth about $5</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theft of goods worth about $50</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probability of Theft's Discovery</td>
<td>Four-item scales ($\alpha = .84, .85$) measuring the respondents' perception that a theft committed by them would be discovered by someone (a) who doesn't approve, (b) who they know personally or (c) who lives in the community, or (d) that they would be arrested. Each item uses a 5-point scale with 0 = excellent chance and 4 = almost no chance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theft of goods worth about $5</td>
<td>9.84</td>
<td>4.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theft of goods worth about $50</td>
<td>6.94</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Commitment</td>
<td>Two-item scales ($r = .40, .34$) measuring perceptions of (a) moral wrongness and (b) seriousness of the behavior. Each item uses a 5-point scale with 0 = very wrong/serious and 4 = not very wrong/serious.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theft of goods worth about $5</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theft of goods worth about $50</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Exposure to Theft</td>
<td>Cumulative measures reflecting the number of times the respondent committed a theft in the last five years and the number of their friends who steal at least once a year.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theft of goods worth about $5</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theft of goods worth about $50</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Exposure to Sanctions</td>
<td>Cumulative measures of the number of (a) times the respondent was arrested in the last 5 years; (b) people the respondent knew who, while growing up, got in trouble with the law; and (c) current friends who get into trouble for stealing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theft of goods worth about $5</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theft of goods worth about $50</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>