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**Performing gang subculture in Swedish police
interrogations**

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Abstract

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This study explores why gang suspects appear to be making increasingly more use of “no comment” responses during interrogations in Sweden and how it connects to gang subculture. By applying subcultural and interactionist theories as well as previous literature regarding interrogations and gang subculture, this study seeks to contribute with a subcultural understanding of gang suspects behaviours during interrogations. A document analysis was conducted on 102 preliminary police investigation documents containing interrogation transcripts, photographic evidence and chat logs to gain access to the interrogation space and analyse the gang suspects responses. The findings showed that “no comment” responses are being used even when it might not benefit them judicially and that gang suspects seemingly do not care about the evidence being presented. Instead, a way to understand their use of “no comment” responses is that they are being used to abide by the gang subculture that follows the fundamental aspects of the code of the street. Resulting in a situation where not talking to the police is considered the norm. The use “no comment” responses is motivated by a desire to prove yourself and fear of retaliation if one were to talk. Furthermore, gang suspects put on a performance that abides by the subculture to reap the benefits from being perceived as “street”. This together with the open access nature of these documents and digitization of society has resulted in interrogations no longer being private spaces, which encourages gang criminals to never let go of their performance. This performance could also be seen as an extension and byproduct of a modern society where private spaces are becoming a rarity.

Keywords: “No comment” responses; gang suspects; gang subculture; interrogations; code of the street; frontstage; backstage

Popular science summary

In Sweden it has become more common for gang suspects to say “no comment” or in any way evoke their right to remain silent during interrogations. At the same time Sweden has also seen an increase in technical and digital evidence that can be used to incriminate these gang suspects. Despite this, gang suspects still make use of “no comment” responses instead of admitting in hopes of getting a reduced sentence, hinting at there being benefits for these gang suspects to remain silent that cannot be found within the interrogation space. This study investigates this by looking at why they make use of “no comment” responses and how it can be connected to gang subculture.

This study builds on a document analysis of 102 preliminary police investigation documents containing interrogation transcripts as well as photographs and chat logs connected to the crime and gang suspect. By applying theories used to understand subculture and interactions between people while also taking inspiration from previous studies that look at the criminal lifestyle and subculture such as Elijah Anderssons’s (1999) *Code of the street*, this study seeks to contribute with greater understanding of gang criminals use of “no comment” responses from a subcultural perspective.

The findings show that gang suspects make use of multiple forms of “no comment” responses regardless of the evidence being presented. Their motivations for this can be connected to a desire to uphold their subculture where not talking to the police is encouraged and considered the norm. Furthermore, there also seem to be motivations outside of the interrogation room, such as using “no comment” responses to prove yourself to other gang criminals or out of fear that gangs might retaliate if you talk. This, among other things, result in the gang suspect having to put on a performance to abide by their subculture. This together with the open access nature of Swedish interrogations point to interrogations having become less private, with gang suspects having to always put on a performance for other gang criminals who can read the interrogation transcripts afterwards. This performance and its benefits could be a side-effect of the reduction of private spaces in society which has also affected the gangs and their lifestyle. This, from a subcultural perspective, forces us to change our understanding of Swedish interrogations, gangs and the subculture they live in.

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1. Introduction

It is an early summer morning and the Attunda police are busier than ever. They have just started interrogating people suspected of being involved in a large drug chain connected to the infamous Foxtrot gang, one of Sweden's most prominent crime syndicates and main distributors of narcotics (Acta Publica, 2025). Foxtrot is also responsible for the increase in lethal shootings and bombings in recent years, especially in late 2022 during a conflict between Foxtrot and another gang known as Dalennätverket as well as in 2023 when a violent internal conflict within Foxtrot took place (Bergsten, et.al, 2025). After having gotten access to multiple suspects phones, the Attunda police had acquired large quantities of text messages and social media chat logs containing clear incriminating evidence. On top of this the conversations between the suspects contained not only words pointing to their crimes but also incriminating photos and videos, further proving that these people were involved in the drug chain as well as having strong ties to the notorious Rawa Majid, the leader of Foxtrot.

When the time came to interrogate one of the suspects, we will call him Kent, you would think that the evidence would be too significant for him to dismiss. Surely, faced with such a vast amount of clear-cut evidence cementing his guilt beyond any doubt, Kent would realize the position he is in and admit, but no. The interrogation starts off much like any other interrogation. The interrogator informs Kent of what he is suspected of as well as his rights. When the interrogator starts asking questions Kent answers with a simple "no comment" to not only the first, but to every single question. Even though the evidence tells its own clear story, "no comment" remains his only "defence".

Where do you live? With whom?

No comment

What do you do during the weeks?

No comment

What do you do for a living?

No comment

Do you have a girlfriend? What is her name? Where does she live?

No comment

What did you do on 2021-08-02? Explain freely?

No comment

Did you wear the same clothes you wore at the restaurant as the ones you wore when the police arrested you the same evening?

No comment

(FUP B 5369-22, p. 294)

This char gong of “no comment” responses would continue throughout the rest of the interrogation. It does not matter what question is being asked or what evidence he is being shown. No matter how damaging and incriminating it was, Kent did not stray from his tactic. It would take months for this case to close and many interrogations with Kent had been conducted. Yet, during every interrogation, the only words that escaped from his mouth was “no comment”.

During police interrogations, police officers and other law enforcers in Sweden and other countries are obligated to tell the individual being interrogated about their rights. Well known examples of these obligations are the “Miranda warning” in USA and the “caution” in the UK (Stokoe, et.al, 2016). Because of this, the fact that suspects can and have the right to stay silent during interrogations is nothing new and it should therefore to some degree be expected that some choose to remain silent during interrogations. However, in current day Sweden cases such as the one presented above seem to have become more commonplace. Particularly gang criminals seem to be going into interrogations with the mentality of only saying “no comment” to every question being asked – and if they do not say “no comment”, they choose other ways of not talking. That being said, it should come as no surprise that gang criminals in today’s Sweden also do not speak with the police in general, as has been documented to be a common trend during interactions between gang criminals and authority (see Brå, 2018, 2019). However, what makes this case of constant “no comment” responses interesting is that

research has also shown that there is a greater tendency for suspects to admit to their own crimes if the evidence is too great to disregard (Deslauriers-Varin, et.al, 2011). Furthermore, it is quite puzzling that Sweden has seen a rise in gang suspects saying “no comment” while at the same time seeing an increase in technical and digital evidence that is inevitably incriminating.

The question is of course why? Why the silence? Why the excessive use of “no comment” responses? By applying subcultural perspectives and theories regarding gang culture and the dramaturgical presentation of gang identity, this thesis will investigate this “no comment” phenomenon by looking at the underlying subcultural reasons for why gang suspects choose to employ “no comment” responses during interrogations. The aim for this paper will therefore be to investigate from a subcultural perspective why gang suspects use “no comment” responses during interrogations and how it connects to gang subculture.

Building on a document analysis of 102 preliminary police investigation documents containing transcriptions of interrogations with gang related suspects between 2019-2024, this paper will analyse codes and themes found in the interrogation transcripts. These codes and themes will mainly cover the subcultural explanations for why gang suspects make use of “no comment” responses during interrogations.

This thesis will of course not be the first to research gangs and their activities (see Gambetta, 2009, Moore & Stuart, 2022 and Sausdal & Hannerz, 2025). Neither is it the first to look more closely at their relations and reactions in criminal justice situations and in police interrogations (see Noone, 2019). However, it will seek to close the gap within Scandinavian research regarding gang subculture and their members' behaviour during interrogations while also contributing with an understanding of the subcultural reasons for gang suspects excessive “no comment” responses. Both in a particular Swedish context of “open access” justice and in a digitized, post-modern era where even interrogation rooms may have become part of the social stages where individuals perform and (re)produce their subcultural ethos.

2. Previous research

Given that this study will investigate how gang suspects handle interrogations, it is of high relevance to present and make use of previous research that has covered the interrogation space and its actors. When diving deeper into this research, three different perspectives can be found that may be said to make up the state of the art of current-day interrogation research. These perspectives being as follows; “the interrogator’s point of view”, “the rational” and “the subcultural”. These perspectives will be presented in the following segment. It is important to note that they overlap to some extent and should not be seen as direct successors of one another. Due to the topic of this study, the subcultural perspective will be of extra importance, with Elijah Andersson’s (1999) “code of the street” as the main focus.

2.1. Focusing on the interrogator

A common factor within previous research regarding interrogations is that they are quite pragmatic by nature. They tend to focus on gaining knowledge about the interrogations on a fundamental level, given that interrogations usually are conducted in privacy, shut off from the eyes of the observer. They specifically home in on the more structural and, to a lesser extent, psychological aspects of interrogations to localize which methods and strategies are most common and effective when trying to bring about a confession from the suspect (see Lebaron & Streeck, 1997, Leo, 1996 and Shuy, 1998). It was therefore the interrogators who became the stars of the show with previous research mainly viewing the interrogation spaces from their point of view by focusing on the tactics they would employ and the effectiveness of those tactics (Leo, 1996). It was also of interest to map out factors that affected the length and outcomes of the interrogation as well as their frequency (Leo, 1996). However, the suspect was not completely excluded from the research. Some did also investigate the behaviour of the suspects during interrogations as well as how and when they would invoke their Miranda rights (Leo, 1996).

Beyond looking at the frequency and effectiveness of their methods, the dramaturgical and interactive aspects of interrogations were also covered. Lebaron and Streeck’s (1997) research on video-taped murder interrogations highlighted what Leo’s (1996) quantitative approach could not by stressing the importance of spatial manipulation and dominance if one

wishes to bring about a confession from the suspect. This study moved research on interrogations a step closer to focusing more on the actors within the interrogation, the interplay between how they make use of the interrogation space, how they choose to act and how it affects the outcome of the interrogation. However, the focus still lied in localizing and analysing what methods were most effective in bringing out a confession from the suspect (Lebaron & Streeck, 1997). By following in the footsteps of Lebaron and Streeck (1997), Shuy (1998) stressed the importance of how the conditions under which one's statements are made have much to do with their meaning. Shuy (1998) highlighted the interplay between interrogator and suspect and expressed that one cannot simply assume that these actors on a surface level mean what they say. Thereby showing slight awareness of the underlying meanings that exist in everything that the interrogators and suspects say albeit not fully delving deeper into what these underlying meanings imply and where they originate.

As a matter of fact, this slight hint of awareness is a good representation of the limits that these prior studies suffer from. As mentioned above, prior research has been quite pragmatic, mainly looking at the overall format of the interrogations as well as the effectiveness of the methods that the interrogators may employ to elicit a confession from the suspects. Indeed, the suspects do not seem to have been the focus at all. What makes this problematic is that it severely underestimates the position of the suspect as an actor within the interrogation space. When the role of the suspect and their behaviour is being investigated, it is usually from the lens of the interrogator. The suspect is therefore only viewed as an actor that reacts and responds accordingly to the tactics and spatial manoeuvres that the interrogators choose to employ. There is never any mention of any underlying reasons that stretches outside of the interrogation room for why the suspects act and talk in the way they do.

2.2. The rational suspect

Apart from mainly focusing on the interrogators and the effectiveness of their methods, a lot of prior research tended to view the suspect through the lens of rationality, with Sykes and Matza (1957) arguably having led this logic with their work on techniques of neutralization, i.e. how criminal suspects and groups in different ways justify their criminality by referring to a range of morally and practically “neutralizing” excuses. Despite having been subjected criticism over the years within different intellectual fields (see Herfeld, 2022 and Steinmetz

& Pratt, 2024) it did not stop their work from having a cultural impact within criminology and criminal justice which can still be felt to this day. This rational perspective also made its way into the interrogation room with the suspects being seen as rational actors that navigate the interrogations in a way that minimizes risk. Because of this, there seemed to have been an increased interest regarding suspects who are unwilling to cooperate with the interrogators, with research gradually starting to focus on the strategies that the interrogators would employ to make the suspect talk or confess. This form of risk management could take many forms with some prior research looking at cases where the suspects would lie about what had happened and leave out incriminating information to save face (Komter, 2003). Interrogators would therefore manipulate the conversation in a way that emotionally affects the suspect, thereby persuading them to tell the truth and admit (Komter, 2003). In this way, the interrogator treats the suspect as a lock that requires a key to unlock the truth (Komter, 2003). The key in this case being conversational manipulation and persuasion.

Other, quite unconventional methods have also been used for convincing suspects to confess, that being “silly questions” (for example, “did you have permission to smash your neighbour's door?”) (Stokoe & Edwards, 2008). By analysing how silly questions are being used in British police interrogations, Stokoe and Edwards (2008) showed that these types of questions were used most often at the end of the interrogations after the interrogators have formulated the suspects testimony, which the suspect then has the chance to confirm or even help produce by answering the silly questions (Stokoe & Edwards, 2008). In this way, much like what was shown in Komter’s (2003) research, the interrogators use silly questions to affect the suspects’ state of mind in a way that makes them want to talk or admit to their crime. These questions are therefore not just unimportant, routine questions that need to be asked, but are in fact effective forms of communicative manipulation that guide the suspect to a more indirect confession.

While these studies highlight the more psychological methods the interrogators use to bring about answers or confessions from suspects, they do not account for cases where the suspect remains silent apart from briefly noting that it is either a problem from the interrogators point of view or that it is a “rational” manoeuvre from the suspect’s point of view. Arguably because the studies presented here carry a narrative that assumed that it is simply a matter of

time, and well executed strategies from the interrogators, until the suspects admit and start telling the truth. In other words, it seemed to have been expected that suspects would admit to their crimes sooner or later, which is why they focused on twisting the interrogation so that they do. They therefore ignored or spoke very little of situations where the suspect says “no comment” or remain silent in any way. Almost as if “no comment” answers are so rare that they do not even consider it. These studies also still viewed the interrogation from the interrogators point of view and continued the trend of not investigating the underlying reasons for why some suspects are reluctant to talk or confess.

However, this does not mean that prior research has been completely void of investigations regarding these underlying reasons, with fear of retaliation from gangs who might hurt the suspect or their families being considered a big motivational factor for not talking (Zulwaski & Wicklander, 2002). Depending on the crime committed, social exclusion and physical assault by other prisoners within the prison system was also a big factor for not wanting to talk or admit, which was especially prominent among child molesters (Zulwaski & Wicklander, 2002). Furthermore, because of the view of suspects as rational actors, the interrogators utilize this rationality by making it seem as if they are understanding of the suspects actions (Zulwaski & Wicklander, 2002). For example, by expressing that they understand why the suspect would carry a gun in order to protect their family (Zulwaski, Wicklander, 2002, p. 391). On the contrary however, studies have also found that career criminals, gang criminals and “wannabe” gang criminals might willingly confess to their crimes to prove themselves within the gang and to build status and reputation (Zulwaski & Wicklander, 2002). It becomes a form of bragging right that you have committed these crimes, therefore challenging the traditional view of the suspect as a rational actor wanting to eliminate risks of being caught. Proving that gang criminals might act outside of the realms of rationality.

While there has been international research conducted on how specifically gang members and other criminal suspects act and behave during interrogations (see Alison, et.al. 2014 and Noone, 2019), surprisingly little research has been conducted from a Scandinavian viewpoint (see Magnusson, et.al, 2022), with most of it focusing on policing and interrogation strategies, rather than the suspects (see Høigård, 2011). Given the increase in gang crime and

gang activity in Sweden in recent years, which has now bled out to our neighbouring countries, further research of how gang criminals operate and express their criminality is of much relevance if we wish to gain more understanding about their subculture and how they operate. Moreover, little attention has been given to countries where the interrogations are not immediately terminated after the suspects' right to remain silent has been evoked (Magnusson, et.al, 2022, p. 47). One exception would be Magnusson, et.al (2022) who investigated the different interview strategies that Swedish police employ when faced with a suspect who evokes their right to remain silent. However, much like the international research before it, their study only covered the topic from the interrogators' point of view and did not include any explanations for why suspects choose to remain silent in the first place.

2.3. Subcultural motivations

While prior research has covered a lot of interesting angles, one aspect that has been less explored are the underlying cultural/subcultural reasons as for why suspects say “no comment” or in any way remain silent during interrogations. While some research does hint at underlying motivational factors for why suspects talk (or do not talk) about certain things, research has generally just glossed over or simply not considered these factors in favour of gaining knowledge about the interrogators rather than the suspects (see Leo, 1996, Lebaron & Streecks, 1997, Shuy, 1998, Høigård, 2011 and Magnusson, 2022). Priority also lied in viewing the interrogation process and the suspect’s actions within the confines of rationality, which in this case has blurred researchers from looking past the idea that the suspects actions is motivated by nothing more than risk management or “neutralizing” ideas (see Komter, 2003, Stokoe & Edwards, 2008 and Zulwaski & Wicklander, 2002). The theory regarding techniques of neutralization has also been criticized for focusing too much on what some might consider every day petty criminal acts or criminals who are still committed to mainstream values (James, 2019. p. 3), thereby failing to incorporate individuals who have devoted themselves fully to the criminal lifestyle where emotion overweigh rational thinking. While these shortcomings could to some degree be explained by their desire to close the so called “gap” problem - the “gap” between how law is written and how it is practiced (Leo, 1996), which would explain their insistency on focusing on the pragmatic aspects of interrogators and their methods, it ironically has resulted in another “gap” being created. This “gap” I argue in this thesis is the lack of knowledge regarding how subcultural factors as well

as the world beyond the interrogation might affect the suspects strategies during interrogations as well as a lack of understanding of motivations that goes against rational choice and risk management. That being said, there are however some studies that have sought to close this new “gap” and localize these subcultural motivations that affect how, mainly gang suspects, act during interrogations, even within a Swedish context.

As already established, there has been a lack in Scandinavian research regarding how gang members and other criminal suspects act and behave during interrogations. However, if one were to step outside of the interrogation room, they would see that such research has been conducted within a Swedish context. Such research has shown that individuals who live in marginalized areas, mainly gang affiliated individuals, have developed a culture of silence towards the judicial system (Brå, 2019). Mainly, this culture of silence stems from the fear that the gang might retaliate against those who talk to authority (Brå, 2019). Similar findings were brought to light by using taped gang conversations, where gang criminals expressed that any form of transgression must be avenged to maintain their structure and culture (Beare & Hogg, 2013). This can of course be connected to the fear of retaliation that Zulawski and Wicklander (2002) found to be a prominent motivator for suspects unwillingness to talk. This fear of talking was also especially prominent within non-gang members who live in areas with high levels of gang activity (Brå, 2019). This fear of retaliation is further motivated by the fact that the open access nature of Swedish preliminary police investigations has resulted in a climate where anyone can read and discuss these investigations, especially online where entire communities are formed just to gain information and talk about these investigations and the people connected to them (Hannerz, et.al, 2023). It has also been established for a long time that gang criminals read these documents, specifically to find out whether the suspect talked (Wolf-Watz, 2019).

As a gang criminal, remaining silent towards authority is valued highly and is considered an effective way of proving yourself to the gang (Brå, 2019). Some people lower in the hierarchy might also only talk about themselves and leave out information regarding the other suspects or even admit to having committed a crime in order to save others from being found guilty (Brå, 2019). All of this, Brå (2019) argues, stem from a desire within these communities to solve things in their own way without the involvement of law enforcement.

In other words, they create their own cultural rules to create order and if you were to break these rules, such as talking to the police, you risk being excluded from the only community you feel solidarity towards (Brå, (2019). In a similar vein, studies in the UK have found that young people are being encouraged by their peer groups to not talk to the police if they wish to not be excluded from the group or community (Clayman & Skinns, 2012). Young people also thought that using one's contacts and “olders” (older relatives or friends, usually gang affiliated) was oftentimes a more respected and effective way of dealing with problems instead of calling the police (Clayman & Skinns, 2012). Values from “olders” also overshadow or downright replace the values learnt from families and mainstream society, thereby resulting in young people not talking to police and prioritizing solidarity towards the criminal subculture they identify with (Clayman & Skinns, 2012). This culture of solidarity towards one's community and animosity towards authority is strengthened by the gangs who live in these areas (Brå, 2018).

While Brå's (2018 & 2019) research does not focus on interrogations with gang criminals, they still show that gangs not only spread this so-called culture of silence, but are also leading figures within it, resulting in a culture where not talking to authority becomes the norm (Brå, 2018). It would therefore not be too farfetched to believe that it is this mentality that affect how they behave during interrogations and encourage them to remain silent or say “no comment”. Thereby going against and disproving Zulwaski and Wicklanders (2002) notion that it is socially profitable for gang affiliated suspects to admit to their crime when in reality, they would prove themselves to be more loyal by not speaking at all.

2.4. Code of the street

Perhaps one of the most profound explorations of criminal subculture and how it manifests in everyday life is Elijah Andersson's (1999) “code of the street”. Originally developed after years of qualitative ethnographic work within a disadvantaged inner-city black community in Philadelphia, Andersson (1999) describe that, at its core, the code of the street is “a set of prescriptions and proscriptions, or informal rules, or behaviour organized around a desperate search for respect that governs public relations”. Andersson (1999) further elaborates by explaining that the code develops within these areas due to an abdication and lack of trust in authorities as well as a lack in conventional forms of capital, resulting in the development of

a street-code symbolized by “people’s law” and “street justice”. In other words, the code of the street starts where police influence ends and personal responsibility for one’s health is felt to begin (Andersson, 1999). This has resulted in violence having become a form of capital that garners respect, which is also a form of capital. In fact, Andersson (1999) speaks of the three R: s, namely respect, reputation and retaliation, which can be seen as the three pillars of the code of the street that constantly feed into each other with violence being a source for respect and retaliation being the best way to regain loss of respect. These street-code values are first developed at a young age, mainly in homes, neighbourhoods and schools. Andersson (1999) argues,

“As children grow and their parents’ control wanes, they go through a shuffling process that can affirm – or test or undermine – much of the socialization they have received at home. In other words, the street serves as a mediating influence under which children may come to reconsider and rearrange their orientations. This is a time of status passage, a formative stage for social identity, as children sort out their ways of being. It is a critical period of flux, and a child can go either way – decent or street.”

The “decent” individual being someone who has been raised by parents who focus on giving their child a superficial sense of family, force their children to take school seriously and walk a moral line (Andersson, 1999 & 2008). The “street” individual is the opposite. An individual who has been raised by parents and in an environment that has embraced the code, with the parents often encouraging their children to use violence, especially as a form of retaliation after having been disrespected in any way (Andersson, 1999 & 2008). However, while “decent” families are seen as the most powerful counter to negative influences, even they are still taught the code from an early age, and by the time the children have become adults, it has become a working concept for them (Andersson, 1999). In fact, despite being a catalyst for making people turn to the street life and a criminal lifestyle, understanding and abiding by the code if the street is considered necessary if one wishes to survive in these areas (Andersson, 1999). It is considered even more dangerous to not embrace the code of the street since it might make you unknowledgeable, inexperienced and vulnerable (Andersson, 1999). Of course, all this stems from a lack of trust in authority as well as a lack of motivation from these authorities to step in, resulting in the people within these areas having to create their

own form of order and justice (Andersson, 1999). This in turn has resulted in people being looked down on or being downright punished if they decide to get authorities involved, which is very much akin to the notion “snitches get stitches” (Whitman & Davis, 2007). All of this results in the respect you would gain in mainstream society paling in comparison to the respect you gain on the street (Andersson, 1999). At the end of the day, it is more beneficial to always be on guard and uphold the identity of the “street”, otherwise it could prove fatal both socially and physically (Andersson, 1999).

2.4.1. Generalizing the code

While the ethnographic nature of Andersson’s (1999) research resulted in a fruitful array of detail and complexity, it has been criticized for not having been shielded from subjectivity and observation bias, which he himself discussed alongside other criticisms against ethnography (Andersson, 2002). While this subjectivity is seen as a weakness in the eyes of academics, Andersson (2002) argues that it can be a benefit during ethnographic work since it results in a profound insight into the lives of those being studied. Future studies, mostly of a quantitative nature, have sought out to investigate the generality of his findings as well as broadening the geographical context of the code of the street. These studies yielded similar findings as Andersson (1999) by finding that violence does have a higher chance of happening among those who endorse beliefs that connect to the code of the street as well as among those who join gangs (Brezina, et.al, 2004 and Matsuda, et.al, 2012). In a similar fashion, Bennett and Brookman (2011) found that among street offenders in the UK upholding a frightening and formidable reputation, showing self-reliance during disputes, expressing violence and punishing disrespect were key elements in avoiding victimization. Much like Andersson (1999) they also stressed the importance of looking at more innovative social and subcultural approaches regarding crime prevention rather than sticking to the limited traditional methods regarding surveillance and technology (Bennett, & Brookman, 2011).

While most studies do strengthen Andersson’s (1999) findings, some of his findings regarding victimization has not shown to be consistent over the years with Stewart, et.al (2006) arguing in their quantitative study that adopting the code of the street increases the risk of being victimized rather than lowering it. The street code encourage behaviour that leads to violence, but this also gives rise to retaliations which results in the victimization of those upholding the

street code (Stewart, et.al, 2006). However, even though upholding the street code might put these individuals in danger of being victimized, it could be argued that not upholding the code might be even more detrimental to one's safety and social standing (see Andersson, 1999, Sandberg, 2008 and Stuart, 2020).

3. Theory

This thesis will employ Pierre Bourdieu's (1996) theory of habitus as well as Sveinung Sandberg's (2008 & 2016) concept of street capital to give further nuance to the discussions revolving how gang suspects use of "no comment" responses can be traced back to the code of the street. These theories were chosen due to both sharing strong ties with the foundational aspects of the code of the street while also offering an opportunity to further develop and understand gang suspects beyond "the street". Furthermore, this thesis will also apply aspects of Erwin Goffman's (2014) dramaturgical perspective to gain a deeper understanding of the presentation of gang identity within interrogations and how this presentation, due to the digitization of society, might stretch outside of the interrogation room.

3.1. Habitus and street capital

Habitus is seen as a set of deeply rooted habits, ways of acting, body language, etc. that are formed by one's upbringing and social milieu (Bourdieu, 1996). In his own words; "Habitus are these generative unifying principles which retranslate the intrinsic and relational characteristics of a position into a unitary lifestyle, that is, a unitary set of persons, goods, practices" (Bourdieu, 1996, p.15). Given that habitus is created from one's past experiences and social environment, it is not geographically limited in where it can manifest, but each individual habitus is intimately tied to the social space and context in which it was created (Bourdieu, 1996). Habitus in this way functions as an invisible framework for how people navigate social spaces which in turn reproduces social structures (Bourdieu, 1996). Not only does this bring individuals closer to the social space they belong to such as a specific group or culture, but it also alienates other social spaces that do not share the same habitus (Bourdieu, 1996). It is because of this that Bourdieu (1996) argues that people who belong in different social spaces will find it difficult to understand each other. Habitus can therefore be

seen as a force that unites those belonging to the same social space while potentially antagonising those who are not part of it or oppose it.

By taking inspiration from both Andersson's (1999) definition of capital and Bourdieu's (1996) cultural capital, Sveinung Sandberg (2008) developed the concept of "street capital" to explain the knowledge, skills and competence required to navigate, gain status and manage life within street culture or criminal subculture. In other words, it can be seen as the cultural capital of street culture (Shammas & Sandberg, 2016). Much like Andersson (1999), Sandberg (2008) argues that violence functions as an effective form of street capital which in turn upholds the violent street culture by becoming embodied in the street habitus. This is a fundamental reason for why street capital carries little importance in mainstream society and is seen as a form of power that only the structurally oppressed can utilize (Sandberg, 2008). While this does alienate and separate people within street culture from mainstream society, it is important to note that street capital is considered a fundamental tool for these individuals to navigate their social space (Sandberg, 2008). Given that it is part of their habitus, it also means that they identify with it and therefore see no point in adhering to the mainstream way of thinking (Sandberg, 2016). Furthermore, they also benefit from having street capital. For example, it can serve useful to pose as a gangster and to create a dangerous appearance to gain respect and avoid trouble (Sandberg, 2008). Not too far off from the literature mentioned above that also highlight how animosity towards the mainstream and an embrace of the street culture are connected and feed into one another (see Andersson, 1999, Brå, 2018 & 2019, Calyman & Skinns, 2012 and Stuart, 2020).

3.2. The dramaturgical perspective

Finally, this study will also apply a Goffmanian framework based on how interactions in daily life can be compared to that of a theatre or drama, or what Goffman (2014) calls dramaturgy. This study will mainly focus on his concept of "frontstage" and "backstage" that are used to describe the two "scenes" that humans perform in (Goffman, 2014). "Frontstage" being places and scenarios where individuals adapt their behaviour, physical appearance and overall demeanour to portray a specific image of themselves to the "audience", that being people they engage with in any way (Goffman, 2014). "Backstage" on the other hand is

described as places and scenarios in which the individual can relax and take off their social mask or prepare themselves for the “frontstage” (Goffman, 2014). Examples of “backstage” environments include places where the individual is alone or around people in which they carry great trust in and can therefore be themselves (Goffman, 2014). These terms are further used by Goffman (2014) to explain how individuals conduct “impression management” - willingly present a desired image of themselves to the people around them in order to be portrayed in a certain way by others.

While Goffman’s (2014) dramaturgical analysis has garnered great renown and influence, it has been questioned whether his findings are still applicable within in the context of today’s global, digitized and in many ways much more intertwined society (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). This argument stems from the fact that technological advancements regarding communication like the internet simply did not exist when Goffman (2014) founded this framework which does strengthen the argument that it could be seen as outdated or should at least be remodelled to incorporate progress in technology (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). Now, while this criticism is valid to some extent, especially since Goffman (2014) himself stated that his work was done within the confines of physical human interaction in the real world, it has also been argued that digital communication is simply a natural extension to what he posited (Miller, 1995). Most research that have applied the dramaturgical framework on different kinds of digital communications and interactions have found many similarities with real life interactions, with arguably some aspects like “impression management” being even more prevalent on the internet (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). People are also more keen on presenting themselves in a way that differs from their true selves and exaggerate their persona for validation, respect, etc. (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). Not unlike the “impression management” that takes place in the real and physical “frontstage”. Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) demonstrate through these findings that Goffman's original framework is still applicable as well as useful for understanding identity through interaction and presentation of self in the online world.

3.2.1. Online dramaturgy among gang criminals

This kind of presentation of self via online platforms is also very prevalent among gang criminals. Stuart (2020) brought this aspect of online dramaturgy to light by investigating

how people apply the code of the street in a digital context while also highlighting how it has become increasingly important to uphold a “street” persona even in more private settings. It is argued that due to an increased use of social media as platforms for presenting oneself and engaging with others, a type of “parallelism” has emerged where one’s online activity merge with offline activity (Stuart, 2020). This “parallelism” has been especially prominent amongst gang members, who use social media as a platform to perform their criminal identity and start conflicts with other gang members (Stuart, 2020). This has resulted in gang members being able to conduct a form of “lateral surveillance”; gaining access to information about other gang members and rivals via social media and other digital platforms, mainly to plan and execute attacks on them (Stuart, 2020). This has made it especially important for gang criminals to uphold the image that they present online in real life as well, otherwise they might be “caught lacking” by their rivals who “call their bluffs” which increases the risk of them being victimized and their image being destroyed (Stuart, 2020).

Lateral surveillance is deeply connected to the idea that increased gang activity online has resulted in a type of “context collapse”; in this case a collapse between their criminal life and their private life (Sausdal & Hannerz, 2025, p. 83-84). This occurs when a gang member might have presented themselves in a more “private” way online, for example by uploading a picture of them on a Christmas dinner, meant to be seen by family and friends, but is also seen by other gang criminals. This could later be used as evidence of them being “caught lacking”. The lateral surveillance plays a big part in this and result in gang criminals never being able to let go of their “street” persona (Stuart, 2020). Sausdal and Hannerz (2025, p. 84) has built upon this by explaining that differentiating between being “on” and “off” (switching on and off the gang persona) has become more difficult for gang criminals due to this lateral surveillance and fear of a potential context collapse. Previously when there was more emphasis on the physical space and physical interactions, keeping a balance between being “on” and “off” was a lot easier (Sausdal & Hannerz, 2025, p. 84). However, the digitization of gangs has made this difficult, resulting in them not being able to turn off the gang persona in fear of being “caught lacking” even in private settings (Sausdal & Hannerz, 2025, p. 84). This means that gang criminals in the digital age must uphold their “street” identity even in “backstage” settings (Stuart, 2020). Thereby creating a merge between “backstage” and “frontstage”.

Indeed, it is this merge that makes Goffman's framework interesting when applied to online interaction, with other studies having found that the border between "frontstage" and "backstage" is much smaller within the online context (Serpa & Ferreira, 2018). Especially on social media where a lot of people tend to bring the private domain to the public domain "in the context that cultures of communication on social media tend to embody freedom and openness of expression" (Bullock, 2018, p. 356). This carries similarities to what Stuart (2020) found regarding gang members online activity as mentioned above – that they must constantly remain in the "frontstage" even in spaces that would normally be "backstage" to maintain their gang performance and not be "caught lacking". This challenges the notion that "performance is merely a representation of reality, not reality itself" (Serpa & Ferreira, 2018) given that these people never let go of their performance even in the online world.

4. Methods

This thesis builds on 470 preliminary police investigation documents, later cut down to 102 documents that include interrogation transcriptions containing "no comment" or other phrases and methods used by gang suspects to remain silent. Documents such as these can be particularly useful for gaining access to the usually private interrogation spaces where the answers for why gang suspects make use of "no comment" response and how it can be connected to gang subculture might lie. These documents were collected in order to conduct a document analysis where the underlying ideas, values and social identities of what is being said will be analysed through a latent thematic analysis. Codes and themes were created in order to locate the most relevant and prevalent findings that will make up the foundation of the analysis.

4.1. The Swedish context

What initially inspired this thesis was that, compared to most other countries, Sweden is a rather unique case regarding its handling of preliminary police investigations. In most countries it would not be possible for the public to gain access to preliminary police investigations even after the cases have been closed. However, while you cannot access

ongoing preliminary police investigations, in Sweden it is possible to access them once the cases have been closed. The reason for why this is possible is because of “offentlighetsprincipen”, one of the constitutional laws of Sweden that states that documents created by and stored within the state, municipalities and other authoritarian actors are to be considered public records, which means that the public as well as media has the right to gain insight and access to these documents (Regeringskansliet, 2015). This is further motivated by 2 ch. 1 § “tryckfrihetsförordningen” (2018:1801) which states that to maintain a free exchange of ideas, a free and comprehensive exchange of information as well as free artistic expression, everyone shall have the right to access public records. According to 2 ch. 2 § “tryckfrihetsförordningen” (2018:1801), public records can only be restricted if their publicity poses a threat to the kingdom and political relationships with other countries and organizations, municipalities, people and nature. Because preliminary police investigations fall under these laws, it is possible for anyone to access and read them. This has made it easier to explore the interrogation space within a Swedish context and can therefore help in acquiring more profound material to answer the research question. Furthermore, given the difficult nature of gaining access to the interrogation space as well as both physical and digital forms of communication with gang criminals, a more indirect interaction with these spaces and individuals through preliminary police interrogations are in order.

4.2. Document analysis

This thesis has taken inspiration from previous studies that have explored different kinds of court and police records through document analysis (see Ballinger 2019, Brookman 1999, Wilczynski, 1995) A document analysis will therefore be conducted based on a sample of 102 preliminary police investigation documents that contain transcriptions of interrogations where the suspected gang criminal has said “no comment” or through other means remained silent. Some relevant pictures and chat logs found in the preliminary police investigation documents will also be included and analysed to further strengthen and exemplify the arguments being made. As a document analysis methodologist, Bowen, (2009, p. 29) has argued that document analysis as a systematic evaluation and review of physical and digital documents is an effective research method when investigating documents containing rich descriptions of a specific phenomenon, event, organization, etc. For this study, implementing a document analysis will help in gaining more contextual information that methods of a more

quantitative nature would have lacked (Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p. 112-113). While document analysis usually limits the researcher's ability to create their own material compared to interviews where you, to some extent, control what will be said, document analysis usually grants more coverage and can cover longer time spans as well as multiple events and settings (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). In this case it made it possible to acquire transcribed police interrogations spanning multiple years and locations, which can help increase the representability of this study's findings. It should also be noted that as opposed to interviews, document analysis is non-reactive and unobtrusive, resulting in the material not being affected by the researcher's presence which also enables for repeated investigations into the material (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). All this results in document analysis, on top of being a data selection process rather than data collection process, functioning as a time efficient method that also makes it possible for me to gain access to a field that I otherwise would have been able to access (Bowen, 2009, p. 31), that being the interrogation space. Interviewing gang criminals who have been interrogated could also be a fruitful method in order to gain more direct knowledge regarding their own takes on the subcultural motivations for why they use "no comment" responses. This would also remove some of the more interpretative aspects of this study. However, because of the difficulty in gaining access to these individuals as well as the motivations mentioned above, doing interviews would be a far less reliable and productive method.

4.3. Acquiring and sampling process

The phenomenon of gang suspects making use of "no comment" responses during interrogations was admittedly one of the first things I noticed after having gotten the opportunity to read and analyse preliminary police investigations. The "no comment" phenomenon was something that stood out due to it being present in almost all of the interrogation transcripts I read. This experience functioned as my introduction to this topic while also giving me knowledge regarding where to find the material for this study.

In order to acquire relevant preliminary police investigations that cover cases involving gang criminals and include interrogation transcriptions containing "no comment" responses, for example "Ingen kommentar" ("No comment"), "Jag kan inte yttra mig" (I cannot speak on the matter"), complete silence, etc., the first step involved finding such cases. This was done

by gaining access to the website InfoTorg that archives most settled court cases in Sweden. I would then use keywords such as “gängkriminalitet” (“gang crime”), “gäng” (“gangs”), “Foxtrot” and “Dalennätverket” (“The Dalen network”) in order to filter out irrelevant cases and find ones that involved gang crime to some capacity. The reason for keywords such as “Foxtrot” and “Dalennätverket” being used was because they are the names of two gangs that were at the centre of a large-scale gang conflict in 2023. Using their names as keywords thereby increased the chance of finding relevant cases since focusing on these two would better centre the research on issues of gang crime and gang subculture. I would then go through the court verdict documents in order to confirm whether the cases were relevant or not. There was no geographical limitation to the searches other than it being limited to Sweden. The cases that were deemed relevant were put into a list containing information regarding what court had handled the case, the crimes the suspects were convicted of, the case number and when the trial as well as the crime had occurred. The courts in question were then contacted via email where I requested to gain access to the preliminary police investigations of these court cases by giving them the case numbers of set cases.

While most courts would send the documents digitally within 24 hours, some had to be sent physically on a USB-stick which obviously took longer. Furthermore, an inconsistency started propping up due to how some courts handled the distribution of the preliminary police investigations, this being that some charged money for the documents, with the amount seemingly scaling with either the size and/or sensitiveness of the documents. This happened despite Swedish law stating that researchers and journalists do not need to pay for these documents. Ironically, one of the courts that were contacted did mention this law and decided that I did not have to pay for those documents, further highlighting the inconsistency among the courts handling of these documents.

In total, 470 documents were collected from over 100 different court cases, all of which covering cases that had happened between 2019-2024. The reason for why no cases from 2025 onward were included was because the acquiring process happened between September 2025-January 2026 and at that time most cases of 2025 had not been registered on InfoTorg. 2019 was chosen as the starting point rather naturally due to there being significantly less registered gang related court cases before 2019. This timeframe also keeps the material

relevant. However, since a large number of documents did not contain any interrogation transcripts, the first sampling consisted of me excluding all documents that did not contain any interrogation transcripts at all as well as documents that did contain interrogation transcriptions but lacked any “no comment” responses. Therefore, the first sample cut down the number of documents drastically from 470 to 141. The second sampling process narrowed it down further by only including interrogations where the suspects overall behaviour and choice of words could be connected to the fundamental aspects of code of the street and the theoretical framework that is being applied in this study. After having reached a point of redundancy (Morgan, 2022, p. 72) this second sample narrowed the material down to 102 documents consisting of interrogation transcripts of varying lengths and detail. Due to the nature of the material as well as the goal of the study, conducting purposive samplings was deemed most fitting in order to keep the material relevant and fruitful for answering the research question (Campbell, et.al, 2020, p. 653-654). Excerpts from the interrogation transcripts will be included in the analysis. The initials that represent the people present in these examples used are as follows;

I: Interrogator

S: Suspect

P: Prosecutor

4.4. Coding and analysis

This study employs a form of latent thematic analysis where codes were created and later grouped into interpreted themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017). These codes and themes were used to look beneath the surface of the material to investigate the latent (underlying) ideas, values and social identities that hide beneath what is being said (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84-85). In other words, applying a latent thematic analysis helped in localizing the potentially hidden subcultural motivations behind the gang suspects answers and behaviours during interrogations. This abductive approach lends well with this kind of study that applies existing theories to explain the patterns found in the material whilst also remaining grounded. The themes that have been created will make up the structure of the analysis.

4.5. Limitations

While there are benefits to using material that has been created by external actors outside of the research process as mentioned above, it also means that the material was created for purposes other than research (Komter, 2006, p. 201-202), namely as part of police reports that are later meant to be used in courts by prosecutors. This can result in a potential lack in sufficient information to answer the research question (Bowen, 2009, p. 31-32). Furthermore, the selected transcriptions from the preliminary police investigations were not created for research purposes, resulting in me, through interpretive work, having to connect it to the research question. This in turn might increase the risk of already existing personal bias since document analysis already puts strong emphasis on the researcher's own interpretation of the content within the documents (Bowen, 2009). On top of this, institutional bias might also influence the content of the transcriptions due to there always being a risk of individual actors within the institution handling and defining things differently (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the case of this study, the transcriptions of the interrogations could be affected by how the transcriber writes and what they decide to include. It would therefore be a mistake to simply take the objective nature of public documents for granted, given that there is always a risk for bias in how the material is being treated. This could be somewhat circumvented by simply excluding interrogation transcriptions that were too short or not detailed enough to give an adequate amount of information. Triangulation is oftentimes an effective method for minimizing bias and increasing credibility as well as generality by including different methodologies as complementary data (Bowen, 2009). However, in the case of this study it will be difficult to triangulate due to the difficulty in finding such complementary data, for example through interviews with gang criminals which is both difficult in terms of gaining access to them but is also fraught with safety risks. This study does however conduct a more limited form of triangulation by using some of the previous literature to generalize the findings.

4.6. Ethics

Sensitive research usually refers to research that cover emotionally difficult topics that the participants consider personal, painful, stigmatizing, intrusive, taboo or embarrassing (Wallner, 2022, p. 1). It is important however to note that depending on the context any topic can be considered sensitive (Wallner, 2022, p. 1). Going by this definition, this study

constitutes as sensitive research due to the content of the documents being used, all of which containing personal information about the suspects as well as the victims, images and chat conversations, the suspects and victims own retellings of their experiences, etc. While it could be argued that these ethical concerns regarding privacy are not as prominent given the fact that these preliminary police investigations are public access and are meant to be accessible to the public, it is still important to keep the suspects and victims anonymized due to them not personally having been able to approve to being included in this study. Because of this, all names have been altered except for the usernames they use in chat conversations since these usernames already are anonymized codenames. In correlation to this, it is important to reflect on whether the creators of these documents really put into consideration that they would become public (Morgan, 2022, p. 69). Similarly, did the suspects who partook in the interrogations really think about the fact that their information would become public? As mentioned, this might not be an issue due to these documents being public access by law, but because of the uncertainty regarding whether the people mentioned in the document put that into consideration mean that anonymizing them become a matter of respect rather than following legal and ethical guidelines.

A major part of the analysis will consist of a discussion around how gang criminals perform their criminality using “no comment” responses during interrogations. This will be analysed by applying Goffman’s (2014) dramaturgical framework to develop the argument that gang criminals perform their criminality and subculture to a perceived audience that exists outside of the interrogation room. What makes this potentially problematic is that by reading and writing about these interrogations I not only become part of that audience, but I also become part of “the drama” by spreading their message through this study. Because of this, as a researcher who consume this material, I am no longer a passive observer, but someone who partake in both consuming and spreading their performance. This in turn makes it difficult, if not impossible, to separate me as a researcher from the phenomenon that is being studied as well as the material. These dilemmas and concerns have long been at the forefront of ethical discussions regarding gang research, with people being afraid of actively taking part in increasing moral panics, strengthen gang identity and so on (see Aldridge, et.al, 2008 and Klein, 2001) Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that as researchers we do not just document culture, we (re)produce it in different ways through our texts. While this might pose a problem ethically, it is this exact phenomenon that is being studied – the idea that gang

criminals preform their criminality during interrogations, which means that there must be an audience, namely the interrogators and those who read the documents. It would be naive to believe that researchers would somehow not be considered part of that audience. This is somewhat levitated by anonymizing the gang suspects but is not by any means a perfect solution.

5. Analysis

Before heading into the analysis, there are some details worth mentioning. Most of the interrogation transcripts in the analysed preliminary police investigations mainly consisted of gang suspects only saying “no comment”. Because of this, the analysis will mainly focus on interpreting this to find out why this is the case and what it could symbolize from a subcultural perspective. This also means that the thesis’ analysis is indeed interpretive in nature; i.e. it is based on my interpretation of their tendency to use “no comment” responses (thus using empirical material with previous research and theories) more so than it being an evidence-based, positivistic analysis. The analysis will consist of five main parts. The first part will present when and how “no comment” responses were used. The second, third and fourth part will delve deeper into the subcultural reasons for why “no comment” responses are being used, their usefulness outside of the interrogation room and what they represent on a macro level. The fifth and final part delves deeper into the discussion of how “no comment” responses can be understood as a larger criminological phenomenon and problem as well as the international scale of this phenomenon. Important to note is that these discussions should not be considered concrete templates for what should be done to combat “no comment” responses but should rather be seen as a discussion that encourages further research into the matter. The subheadings within these parts also represent the different themes that were found and make up the foundations of the main parts.

5.1. “No comment” responses

After having been suspected of possessing, storing and transporting large quantities of narcotics, namely 230kg amphetamine as well as 220kg cannabis, Abdul was quickly put into the interrogation room. This case was especially serious given its strong connection to the

Foxtrot gang. However, it quickly becomes apparent that Abdul has set his mind on one single response.

I: During a review of the content in your phone, an iPhone 6, we found Signal chats. Do you recognize them?

S: No comment

I: In one of these chats, we can ascertain that you, during 26 November 2022 participate together with a DR PHIL 2.0 and Animal Shopping. What is your comment to that?

S: No comment

I: Who is DR PHIL 2.0?

S: No comment

I: What kind of relationship do you have with the person behind the username DR PHIL 2.0?

S: No comment

I: Who is Animal Shopping?

S: No comment

I: What kind of relationship do you have with the person behind the username Animal Shopping?

S: No comment

(B 8369-22, p. 1238)

As already stated, when looking at the transcribed interrogations inside of the preliminary police investigation documents it becomes clear early on that “no comment” is one of, if not the most common response among gang suspects. The example presented above is one of many where the suspect responds by only saying “no comment”. Because of its common occurrence it is not unusual for the interrogators to ask the suspects “Why do you not want to comment?” which often is followed up by either “I want to make use of my rights” or just “No comment”. It is again important to note that “no comment” responses can come in a

variety of different forms other than “no comment”. Oftentimes the suspect also says “I don’t know”, “I don’t remember” or simply remain silent throughout the interrogation. More uncommon forms of “no comment” responses are “I will talk in court” or “I don’t want to talk without a lawyer present” that both allude to the idea that they might talk in the future or under other circumstances. Snarky comments in the form of jokes or nonchalant half answers can also appear but to a lesser extent.

I: A visit log via Safari to the website mrkoll.se that has information regarding Sarah Shoso has been saved by the system 2022-12-28 at 23:32:47. Why did you look this up?

S: I have searched on Pornhub as well.

I: It was not Pornhub I asked about, I asked regarding the search on mrkoll.

S: Then it’s no comment.

(B 1451-23, p. 253)

I: Is this you?

S: Looks like me.

I: Mm. And this jacket... what do you say about it?

S: I have no comment.

I: No. Where is this jacket now?

S: I don’t know. But I got one hell of a beating.

(...)

I: What did you say? They were...

S: They were nice, your colleagues, I said.

(B 10217-21, p. 157-158)

It is also important to note that “no comment” is not always used by itself through the interrogations. Oftentimes the appearance of “no comment” is based on the question that is

being asked. Whether or not the suspect answers the question can also be quite individual. For example, while some suspects were okay with talking about themselves, they would immediately turn around and say “no comment” to questions about other people, mainly other fellow gang members. It was not too uncommon for these suspects to say “I only want to talk about myself” or “Everyone can answer for themselves”. During one interrogation the suspect expressed this desire in a quite polite way, saying “...with all due respect, I only want to talk about myself”. Some suspects would also say “no comment” to questions that they themselves deemed too personal and/or irrelevant and would only answer questions regarding the crime they were suspected of. However, there were some who would do the exact opposite, answering all questions, personal or not, except for the ones that revolved around any kind of criminal activity. Hence, there is great variety in how “no comment” responses are being used and when depending on the individual.

5.1.1 Overwhelming evidence

Evidence are fundamental parts of police investigative work and oftentimes having just a tiny bit of evidence can determine the outcome of a future court trial, making it crucial for the police to gather as much evidence as possible. Interrogations partly function as opportunities for the police to gain more information and evidence straight from the source which can often be quite tricky due to gang criminals lack of desire to helping the police, which will be explored further later. However, when looking at the 102 preliminary police investigation documents you would think that current day Swedish interrogations function more as thorough reviews of every illegal act and deviant behaviour that the gang suspect has ever committed. To put it in simple terms, the amount of evidence that is being presented in all 102 preliminary police investigation documents is more than sufficient. This would naturally put the gang suspect at a major disadvantage and, according to the earlier mentioned rational doctrine, result in the gang suspect no longer having any reason to not cooperate or even lie and ultimately admit in hopes of finding ways to lessen the sentence. However, this is not what seems to be happening.

I: In the gate there is debris that has been put into it to stop the door from locking. Your DNA is on the debris, explain? Scale +4.

S: No comment.

(...)

I: In the cellar under your house, in a storage room you can reach via your stairwell, the weapon in question was found. Your fingerprints are on the bag around the gun and your DNA, scale +4, exists on multiple parts of the gun.

Explain?

S: No comment.

(...)

I: Was the weapon loaded when you got it?

S: No comment.

(...)

I: You and Ibrahim call each other a total of 14 calls between 10:23 25/1 and 12:33 25/1. This is in connection with the time the crime occurred. What are the calls about?

S: No comment.

I: Why have you erased all these conversations from the log?

S: No comment.

I: ...In Ibrahim's messages you can read that in 25/1 he wonders where you have "put it" and that you should wait from now on. Put what?

S: No comment.

(B 1097-23, p. 520-521)

Apart from "no comment", the phrases "I don't know" and "I don't remember" are the most prominent types of "no comment" responses when being presented evidence. The "I don't remember" response is particularly interesting since it is usually followed up by them explaining that their lack of memory stems from regular cannabis smoking, thereby admitting to a crime (possession of narcotics) whilst trying not to admit to another.

S: Like, don't remember. (Inaudible) I have a bad memory.

I: You have a bad.

S: Smoked too much weed.

(...)

I: No. How can you not remember it if it happened in your apartment?

S: I smoke a lot of weed.

(B 10217-21, p. 34 and 44)

In fact, their unwillingness to explain themselves even when evidence is too great to disregard might point to there being underlying motives that outweigh trying to reduce the sentence by admitting and talking. Thereby making the old ways of looking at interrogations, namely through the lens of rationality, somewhat insufficient for understanding why gang suspects prioritize using “no comment” responses no matter the evidence. Them being willing to admit to other crimes such as cannabis possession further proves this point since it would not be considered “rational” to expose yourself with having committed other crimes when there is a possibility of your sentence being lessened if you were to talk. From a subcultural perspective, this mentality can be connected to one of the main aspects of Andersson’s (1999) code of the street, namely that the norm among criminals is that you should never talk or engage with the police or any other kind of authority. It would therefore not matter what is being presented during the interrogations or what the interrogators say because the gang suspect has long before the interrogation started made up their mind that staying true to one’s subculture and following the code of the street is of greater importance.

5.2. Being street smart

In my analysis of the preliminary police investigation documents, a thought started to dawn on me, namely that gang suspects may be making increasing use of their subculture and experience being “street” to navigate the interrogation space. The “no comment” responses, in this light, are common ways for them to manifest this while also using them as tools for following the key foundations of the code of the street. Even though it can differ from individual to individual how and when “no comment” responses are used, they all share the same purpose of helping the gang suspect in adhering to the code of the street. This is not

always apparent when looking at these interrogations on a surface level though. If a person were to read one of these interrogations and conclude that the suspects responses are textbook responses to what is being said to them and only serve as defensive manoeuvres, most people would probably agree. However, from a subcultural perspective the “no comment” responses follow in line with the aforementioned code of the street, as discussed by Andersson (1999), that in turn stems from an ingrained habitus where not talking or admitting during interrogations is the norm. By applying the works of Bourdieu (1996), this reluctance to talk can be explained by gang criminals having fully dedicated themselves towards their subculture which has resulted in the alienation of those who would oppose them, in this case the police. This animosity that their habitus has created is strongly tied to why one of the biggest aspects of code of the street is a lack of trust in authority, because the code of the street itself has originated from an already established habitus. This in turn has created a culture where solving disputes without authority interference is expected (Andersson, 1999). Animosity towards authority was especially apparent in the analysed interrogation transcripts and was usually manifested through the suspects snarky and nonchalant answers as well as their general lack of motivation to cooperate with the interrogators, which can be seen through the extensive use of “no comment” responses. Not wanting to be a “snitch”, a prevalent mentality within the code of the street and gang life in general (Andersson, 1999 and Whitman & Davis, 2007) that the gangs enforce upon their members and people connected to them (Brå, 2019 and Clayman & Skinns, 2012), is also strongly connected to this animosity. The following examples are of two interrogations with different individuals but are both connected to the same preliminary police investigation.

I: When you answer no comment, explain why you do it.

S: I have been arrested, I don't want to snitch on anyone else and put shit on them. If I get arrested I will not snitch, it's a kind of scummy.

(B 8362-24, p.959)

I: Because you also explained before, that you do not answer our questions because we do not have enough evidence.

S: Mm. No, that's not because, I also don't want to snitch so much, don't want to say much more. Mm.

(...)

P: And who is it that is carrying the weapon?

S: No comment. I told you I don't want to snitch.

(B 8362-24, p.1062 and 1064-1065)

Here we see how not “snitching” seems to be highly valued within the gangs and something that the gang suspect feels strongly towards, implying that it is something that they thoroughly believe in and has adopted as a moral rule. In this way they show off their dedication to not only the gang but also the code of the street in general. As presented earlier, there are those who do show some levels of respect towards the interrogators by being polite, but despite that the goal remained the same as the rest – follow the code by not talking to the police given that he still refused to talk. This mentality is also shown through most of the suspects reluctance to talk about their gangs in any way while being okay with talking about themselves on a personal level. Not only do they follow the “handle things our own way” mentality this way, but they also try to keep the police at arms distance from the gangs and prevent them from learning more about them and ultimately interfere. However, what the more polite suspects did show was that the animosity towards the police was not a constant factor throughout all interrogation transcripts. This could be explained by the fact that it is not always necessary to adopt all aspects of the code of the street in order to remain silent, but it could just as easily be as simple as these gang suspects not being as invested in the gang subculture as the rest.

5.2.1. Being in control

Now, while it might be seen as obvious that criminals want to prevent the police from gaining information about their organization, what the analysed interrogations point to is that the suspects might not always do this to protect themselves and their fellow gang members, but rather, one may say, to protect their way of living and their values. So, by maintaining the code of the street they also uphold the habitus that the gang members live within which is reminiscent of the findings that Brå (2018 & 2019) found regarding how gangs, through their subculture and aggressive methods, take control of marginalized areas they reside within in order for their subculture to remain relevant and dominant. This control is dependent on a

lack of trust and influence from authorities such as the police which the code of the street, and in turn the gang habitus, help maintain. This means that for the gangs to maintain their influence and control, they need to make sure that authorities do not get a chance to intervene which is manifested as “no comment” responses during interrogations, thereby protecting their values and way of life. It could also be argued that due to how important it is for gangs and their members to maintain a sense of control over their surroundings (Brå, 2018 & 2019), using “no comment” responses could be their way of maintaining that control during interrogations where they otherwise would be stripped of that control. From this viewpoint “no comment” responses can function as “street” methods that gang suspects can use to latch on to what little control they still have over the interrogation.

5.2.2. You just don’t talk

Important to note is the fact that it is rare for gang suspects to openly explain why they make use of “no comment” responses during the interrogations. In fact, the analysed material has shown that gang criminals in general do not seem to have any well-thought-out explanations as for why they use “no comment” responses. What makes this interesting is that due to Bourdieu (1996) defining habitus as an invisible framework that most people are not actively conscious of, it means that this upholding and protection of the gang habitus would be something that they do subconsciously. While this does seem farfetched it would explain why most suspects cannot give adequate answers for why they do not want to comment, because the answer lies within the underlying social aspects of their psyche which they themselves might not reflect upon. If we were to put it in more simple terms, it is rare for a person to question the norms they follow, they just follow them. Oftentimes people do not even think of what they are doing and saying as a product of cultural norms. This is the case for all cultures, including gang subculture. Not talking to the police is something you just do not do if you are a gang criminal and avid follower of the code of the street.

While little can be found in the material that show any kind of explanation, there are cases that show how they are willing to go far and beyond to encourage each other to say “no comment” during interrogations which could not only point to it being beneficial for them, but also that it is a highly valued act. Preliminary police investigation B 228-23 include multiple pictures of pages from a book that a suspect had borrowed while he was in custody.

In all the photographed pages someone had written “No comment all the way”, “Fuck aina”, “They have nothing”, “Do not trust them they are only lying to you”. Specifically, “No comment all the way” had repeatedly been written on multiple pages. These messages show how someone used the book the suspect had borrowed as a form of communication by writing on the pages, showing the almost creative lengths these individuals are willing to go in order to preach the rhetoric of saying “no comment” during interrogations. Now, it could be true that the police did in fact “have nothing” which would make the “no comment” strategy an effective one if they wished to not give out any information. However, these writings also highlight the animosity towards the police that is synonymous with the code of the street, with the police being ridiculed and portrayed as liars. On top of this, given the fact that the preliminary police investigation documents regarding this case also contained proof that the police did in fact have more than enough evidence, proves that the gang affiliate who wrote the messages lied. Because of this, the gang affiliate most likely did it only to encourage the suspect to follow the status quo; following the code of the street by saying “no comment” while maintaining the established animosity towards the police. But what would be the benefits of this? Given how these interrogations always can be traced back to a desire to follow the code of the street, it would be safe to assume that it is not a matter of benefitting from it, but it being a norm they do not want to break given how fundamental it is for the gang habitus.

5.3. Being proactively street smart

Apart from just being a way for them to uphold the code of the street and their habitus that they live within; there could also be more proactive reasons that motivate them to use “no comment” responses. Gang suspects could use the interrogations as spaces in which to perform their criminality and prove that they are “street”. In this way the interrogation space becomes not just a place to reenact ones already installed street habitus but also a scene in which gang suspects may further perform and strengthen their subcultural street ethos and code – a place of not just reaction but action. This means that it is not a matter of defending yourself from allegations or hiding information but rather making use of the interrogations as spaces in which they can not only apply the code of the street but also prove that they are “of the street”, as Andersson (1999) would have put it. Thus, proving in their own eyes and more importantly in the eyes of their fellow gang members, that they are “street”. This

reproduction of their own criminality could therefore function as ways for them to use interrogations as spaces for the reproduction of their criminality which could bring them long-term benefits within their social circles outside of the interrogation room.

5.3.1. Fear and wanting to prove yourself

One of the most prominent themes throughout the interrogations that also pointed to there being more proactive motivations for using “no comment” responses was a fear of retaliation. This fear would also be shown in different ways from interrogation to interrogation. Oftentimes it would manifest in the form of somewhat cryptic answers to why they say “no comment” or why they do not want to talk about other people, such as “I don’t think he would appreciate it”. However, there were those who would be a lot more open regarding this fear of retaliation. The first example shows how the suspect not only has been threatened into following the gangs' orders, but he has also been warned about what would have happened if he tried to get help from the police. Similarly to how Beare and Hogg’s (2013) tape recorded gang conversations that showed how gangs openly used a rhetoric that encouraged the punishment of those who talk to authority, this shows how the gangs can actively threaten other gang members which forces them to play by the gangs' rules. Thereby enforcing the code of the street upon those who might not have chosen to fully abide by it initially. This gang suspect’s use of “no comment” responses therefore carry more proactive motives, functioning as a way for them to prevent future victimization.

I: How were you told?

S: I was supposed to do it to get rid of a debt and so that they wouldn’t kidnap my family.

(...)

I: What instructions did you get?

S: ...I walked in and then I walked out again and then he threatened me via telephone and screamed so then I turned around and shot. Like, I don’t want my son and mom to be kidnapped.

(...)

I: When you realized that it was a gun, did you think of calling the police?

S: I never thought about it, because... They had threatened me and they threatened my family.

(B 1207-24, p. 286, 290 and 293)

This example both defies and builds upon the findings of Zulwaski and Wicklander (2002) by showing how fear of retaliation against oneself or one's family does not always have to result in the suspect keeping silent. Instead, fear of retaliation seems to function as an effective motivation for doing as the gang says and therefore indirectly abiding by the code of the street. The next example is from an interrogation with a suspect who has been caught with possession of narcotics and weapons connected to gang crime. He claims that he has never been threatened and is not in any conflict with anyone. However, during a previous interrogation with his mother, they found out that he in fact had been threatened and was in a conflict with someone. This person had threatened not only him, but also his girlfriend and her family.

I: Are you in a conflict with someone?

S: Absolutely not.

I: Are you afraid of anyone?

S: No.

I: Do you experience that you are threatened by someone?

S: Absolutely not.

(B 1019-24, p. 164)

This is very similar to the previous example where threatening the suspect has resulted in them being forced to abide by the code of the street. In the latter case however, the suspect seems a lot more willing to follow the code by not telling the police anything despite it contradicting what the witness (his mother) had told them. This is where another major theme and proactive motivation come into play that oftentimes could be connected to the fear of

retaliation, namely the idea of wanting to prove yourself to the gang. In this latter case the suspect proved to himself as well as the gang that he is willing to live by the code of the street and has adapted to their subculture by not talking, compared to the previous example where the suspect without hesitation told the interrogators about how he had been threatened and that he had been in contact with gang criminals.

These examples show how the fear of retaliation seem to stem from the idea that if one were to break the code and talk to the police or admit to the police that they are in need of help in any way, it is seen as a breaking of the code of the street and deserving of punishment. They also tell a completely different story compared to Zulwaski and Wicklander's (2002) findings. These findings show that willingly choosing to talk would not be an effective way to brag and prove yourself since it would instead give the gang reasons to retaliate against you, similar to the mentality shown in both Andersson's (1999) and Whitman and Davis's (2007) works that present an anti-authoritarian mentality where "snitches get stiches". Furthermore, these findings are very much akin to those of Brå (2019) that also found that remaining silent towards authority is valued highly and is considered an effective way of proving yourself to the gang. In fact, this study's findings have quite a lot in common with Brå's (2019) study and share similar elements with what they found regarding how gangs spread and enforce a subculture where solving things out your own way is encouraged which has resulted in the creation of a culture of silence towards speaking with authority by using threats of retaliation. This correlation between the findings within this thesis and Brå's (2019) study and how they both can be connected to the fundamental aspects of the code of the street further highlight how prominent this has become among Swedish gangs. In addition, these interrogation transcripts build upon this by showcasing how these threats result in the suspect, whether it be willingly or not, choosing to follow in line with the code of the street in order to remain silent and satisfy the gang. From this viewpoint, just like how understanding and abiding by the code of the street is considered necessary if one wishes to survive in these areas (Andersson, 1999), utilizing "no comment" responses would simply be a matter of survival for these gang suspects. But it is this survival that further strengthens the code of the street and in turn the gang subculture. It is equally a survival tool as it is a tool for subcultural affirmation. "No comment" responses can in this way also function as ways for gang suspects to prove themselves as loyal members of the gang which in turn can reduce victimization and solidify their position within the gang.

What I ultimately argue for is that regardless of what motivations the gang suspects might have for why they make use of “no comment” responses during interrogations, it can arguably always be traced back to the idea of upholding and even bolstering the code of the street. As seen above, this can be quite involuntary at times, with some gang suspects doing it mainly to reduce victimization. However, despite their reasons and motivations, them abiding by and embracing the code of the street can result in long term benefits for the gangs since it can strengthen their subculture as well as expand it to more people. This could mean that gangs also slowly but surely are taking more control over the interrogation space due to how interrogations this way have become spaces in which gang suspects can perform their subculture. This could also have become possible for them due to the open access nature of Swedish preliminary police investigation documents, resulting in the possibility that other gang criminals might find out how the gang suspects acted during the interrogations. Because of this, interrogations, one might say, suffer the same fate as the marginalized areas in Sweden that the gangs who live there have taken control of (Brå, 2018 & 2019). Not only can this strengthen the gang subculture in general, but it can also help maintain and reaffirm their habitus by creating a social environment where being part of it is encouraged and straying from it is punished. As one gang suspect, who will be more thoroughly explored later, expressed in an unclear yet clear way, showcasing the power of the “do not talk to the police” mentality within the code of the street;

I: But if you have threats coming at you, have you reported it to the police?

S: Yea but that is not the smartest thing you can do.

(B 5471-24, p. 187)

5.3.2. Subcultural symbol

The idea that gang suspects make use of “no comment” responses to prove that they are “street” shows signs of more subcultural reactive motivations. That using “no comment” responses is a matter of showing off your criminality, your subculture. It would therefore be more accurate to view “no comment” responses as subcultural symbols rather than just defensive interrogation strategies. This does not mean that “no comment” responses do not

carry any kind of strategic meaning. As mentioned by Andersson (1999) and Benett and Brookman (2011), in the eye of the gang member, being able to show self-reliance during disputes, which in this case would be making use of “no comment” responses during interrogations or not admitting that you have been threatened, would be more long-term strategic manoeuvres since it reduces the risk of physical retaliation and/or their social standing being damaged. This was also showcased by the examples above regarding fears of retaliation and wanting to prove yourself. To the gang suspect, upholding a “street” persona during the interrogation would therefore be of a higher priority than for example trying to get a lighter sentence by talking or admitting. This could be further explained by the habitus that these individuals live within due to how the gang habitus already on a fundamental level antagonize those who are not part of it or oppose it (Bourdieu, 1996), which becomes especially prominent due to the anti-authoritarian nature of the code of the street (Andersson, 1999). From a subcultural perspective, the gang suspect therefore has very little reason to respect and talk to the police. This also results in any kind of bargaining from the police being insufficient due to how the hope of a lighter sentence seemingly does not matter to the gang suspect. Using “no comment” responses thereby become a way for them to stay true to the ideals and values that they have dedicated themselves to on top of being more socially valued and profitable in the long run. It is this motivation that “no comment” responses represent, they symbolize something that is deeply rooted into the psyche of the gang criminal, their habitus, their way of life. Unlike the previous literature that only saw the suspect as an actor that only reacts and responds accordingly to what is said and done in the interrogation room (see Lebaron & Streeck, 1997, Leo, 1996 and Shuy, 1998), applying a more subcultural perspective has shown that “no comment” responses function as effective ways for the gang suspect to reproduce their criminal identity which carries proactive benefits outside of the interrogation room.

5.3.3. The performance

By viewing “no comment” responses as subcultural symbols used by gang suspects to prove themselves as “street” and reenact their criminality, it could be argued that the gang suspects interrogations have become more about putting on a performance where they reproduce their criminality by acting and answering in a way that goes in line with the code of the street. Mainly, the performance functions as a kind of impression management where gang suspects act in a way that portrays the image of them as “street”, most often through the use of “no

comment” responses. This form of impression management differ slightly from Goffman’s (2014) definition since this performance is not necessary directed towards specific individuals or groups, it can be, which will be explored later, but not always. Instead, this form of impression management is directed to the gang suspect themselves so as to reaffirm their own criminality, their own identity. In other words, making use of “no comment” responses during interrogations becomes their way of performing their own culture and norms. By this explanation “no comment” responses function as phrases that help them manifest and present their “street” performance on top of being a subcultural staple. This also strengthens the argument that “no comment” responses are not just a way for them to protect their subculture and way of life; it is also a way for them to produce and reproduce it.

To some people, this kind of priority might seem unusual and ineffective within the context of police interrogations. It is therefore important to understand that, for them, performing their criminality and subculture is an important aspect of gang life and a necessary one at that if one wishes to prove and make a name for themselves as previous examples have shown. Viewing it as some kind of rational activity would therefore be incorrect. Even though it might seem inefficient and pointless from the lens of rationality and the confines of the interrogation room, we only need to look at ourselves and our society to understand why this is so important to them. The concept of people prioritizing their values and ideology is something that most people do at some point in time. It is so common in fact that people go to war for their shared values and ideals. The cases where the gang suspect claim to not remember anything due to high cannabis consumption are worth mentioning here since they show how some are willing to admit to an oftentimes “lesser” crime to justify and/or strengthen their “no comment” response. They are in other words willing to sacrifice their innocence in favour of maintaining their role in the subculture since their innocence does not overweigh their subculture. Another example is when gang criminals retaliate against someone who talks to the police, since it is not just seen as a betrayal, but also as an act that risks hurt and/or threaten the subculture’s existence. Performing one's criminality during interrogations thereby becomes crucial for the survival of not only the individuals social standing, but also the subculture as a whole. Not talking during interrogations therefore becomes fundamental for the existence of the gang habitus.

5.3.4. The violent ruse

Investigating the preliminary police investigation documents has also shown that the reproduction of one's criminality using this performance might not just happen during interrogations. Rather, it is a constant factor within the lives of gang criminals, especially within their digital lives. It is not enough to not talk during interrogations to prove that you are of the street. You also need to prove that you have some kind of street capital since upholding a violent image is key if one wishes to gain respect and reduce future victimization (Andersson, 1999 and Sandberg 2008 & 2016). The photographed evidence from chat logs and photo albums from their phones show how these gang suspects flaunt their street capital by sending threatening pictures and videos of them carrying guns and generally presenting themselves as prone to violence. As presented previously, they also tend to threaten people into submission with violence and/or kidnapping as their main form of punishment. Thereby following in line with Sandberg's (2008) argument that street capital is gained by proving that you are prone to violence of any kind and not afraid of scrapping with other people. However, among the interrogated gang suspects within the material, there were some who openly expressed that the street capital they showed off was nothing but a ruse.

I: We have acquired pictures from your phone (the suspect is presented pictures of him posing with a handgun).

S: This one is fake, it's not even a real one.

(...)

I: We also found this picture in your phone (the suspect is presented a picture a rifle).

S: This one is fake it's not real.

(B 1036-23, p. 358-359)

(The suspicions are being expressed to the suspect)

S: I want to say that I have never wanted to kill anyone. I have had threats directed towards me, that is why I have played along in the chats too keep people satisfied. This gun that is photographed is fake...

(...)

I: But if you talk about the weapon and what you know about this weapon?

S: It is a fake gun. Everything is fake. It is a facade.

(...)

I: What is the purpose of having a fake gun?

S: To trick people.

(...)

I: What did you do there then?

S: Same thing. It's just a game to keep people satisfied because of the threats.

(...)

I: You are discussing in this chat about being a goare (Swedish gang slang to describe a person who helps someone localize, spy on and bait a victim to a location) and how you can reach Marcus. This Head hunter has contact with the goare and will personally murder Marcus when opportunity arises.

S: It's just loose chats and bullshit. Like, a regular day in the suburb.

(B 5470-24, p. 161, 166, 168 and 183)

Here we see how gang criminals intentionally create and present a violent facade which garners street capital while never actually intending to manifest it physically. Additionally, the second example show how some gang criminals only act accordingly with and follow the other gang members instructions to avoid victimization. This is of course reminiscent of Sandberg's (2008 & 2016) explanation of how carrying street capital is an important factor in reducing victimization as well as Andersson's (1999) findings that presenting oneself as violent is needed to navigate criminal spaces. This second example also shows how Sandberg's (2008 & 2016) idea of street capital is ingrained into the gang habitus so much so that it will become difficult to navigate gang spaces without embracing it. However, it only seems to matter that you perform your criminality in a way that is in accordance with the habitus, you do not actually need to carry "real" street capital as presented in preliminary police investigation B 5470-24. In other words, you do not need to be violent, it is enough to

perform in a way that gives off that image. It becomes a form of impression management where the gang criminal in question presents themselves as having street capital in order to be portrayed as such by those around them. One of the most effective ways gang criminals make use of impression management to be portrayed as someone with street capital, as shown in the examples above, is to take pictures of oneself carrying a weapon. Now, while the pictures in these cases were not posted on social media and were instead sent to specific individuals and groups via text message, the overall pattern for how these individuals present themselves as people with street capital does still fall in line with Stuart's (2020) idea of "parallelism". These individuals perform their criminality and present their street capital digitally, which in turn affects how they are being perceived in real life. In other words, they build up a street capital based on lies and perception which in the second example seemed to have been enough for the suspect to free himself from victimization while also garnering respect from other gang criminals. Given that these images are being shown during the interrogations as well as in the preliminary police investigations documents, they could also be seen as props for the gang suspects performance during the interrogation. Further helping them in presenting and reproducing their criminal identity.

What all of this might point to is that gang criminals who threaten others so that they do not talk during interrogations can do so without the need for "real" street capital, they simply need to act the role in order to make the interrogated individual act accordingly. A more meta explanation would be that they put on a performance that help maintain another. This maintaining of "no comment" responses during interrogations could also be further reinforced by the public access nature of these documents. Due to how easy it is for anyone to gain access to these documents in Sweden while it is also true that gang criminals in Sweden to some extent read not only the interrogation transcripts, but the preliminary police investigations as a whole (Wolf-Watz, 2019), this could motivate gang suspects further to maintain this performance. However, there was no mention of this within the 102 documents used for this study. Because of this, it could be that it is irrelevant whether the gangs read the interrogations or not. As long as the suspect knows that others can read them, the fear of the mere possibility can be enough to make them abide by the code during interrogations. It becomes a kind of panopticon where the open access nature of these documents has resulted in the suspects being unwilling to talk due to the risk of them being caught "snitching" always being a looming factor. So, it is not a matter of whether the gangs actually read the

interrogation transcripts, but that they can read them. This does not only have to increase fear among the suspects, but it could also further encourage them to prove themselves as followers of the code of the street, in hopes of their fellow gang members bearing witness to it when reading the documents, thereby increasing the proactive motivations and benefits to using “no comment” responses. At the end of the day, this panopticism that has been created, much like the threats gang members make towards others, seems to just be a ruse to make people abide by the gang’s own rules and norms due to the uncertainty of whether or not the gangs actually read the preliminary police interrogations. These factors have created a situation where false threats are being strengthened by other false threats which in turn helps maintain the gang suspects “no comment” performance during interrogations. A fragile and elaborate ruse that could easily be exposed and broken born out of Sweden’s public access laws, yet it functions and produces effective results.

5.3.5. A performance requires an audience

When investigating why gang suspects put on this “no comment” performance it seems to be other gang members who are the reasons for why they maintain this performance. In other words, other gang criminals are the targeted audience for this performance. This can be seen especially in the chat logs and pictures sent to other gang criminals as well as the example regarding the gang suspect who wanted to be perceived as “street” by not admitting to having been threatened. However, much like how the non-criminal people within the area Andersson (1999) investigated still became affected by the influence of criminals and the street culture, which helped strengthen this culture, there could still be benefits to being perceived as “street” by non-criminals as well since it can help build one’s reputation and increase street capital. It would therefore not matter who reads these interrogation transcripts. As long as someone does, words can be spread and reputations can be built, as seen in the work of Hannerz, et.al (2023) regarding how people in online forums openly discuss and spread information about suspects mentioned in the preliminary police investigations. This means that making use of “no comment” responses during interrogations is just a matter of acting in a way that makes the audience think that you are a dedicated gang criminal with strong ties to the subculture. This in turn can help in creating a strong reputation as well as garner respect. Although, it should be noted that it is not common for your average person to read preliminary police investigations nor is it common for those who do read them, such as police officers and lawyers, to go around talking about how the gang suspects acted during the interrogations.

What is important to remember here is that as stated, for these gang criminals the plausibility of someone reading the documents is irrelevant. As long as there is a chance that there is an audience they can perform their criminality to, then it is always worth it. Especially if you factor in the idea that they also do not want to risk being “caught lacking” which would have an opposite effect - damaging their reputation and street capital greatly (Stuart, 2020). As long as there is an audience, “no comment” responses will always be effective performative tools. Because of this, the scale of this audience is seemingly unlimited, since there are benefits to being seen as “street” by anyone as long as they bear witness to it and/or help in reproducing that image. Maybe that witness even decides to write a thesis on this performance. It would therefore be reasonable to assume that it would not matter who the audience is. This further proves that the end goal for gang suspects does not lie in defending themselves or coming out of the interrogation as an innocent man. It lies in using interrogations as conduits for the performance in hopes of reaching a potential audience.

5.4. Private spaces becoming frontstage

Interrogation spaces are not by any means completely private for the suspect being interrogated since the space also consists of interrogators as well as a transcriber and/or tape recorder. They should however function as a space that is as close to a backstage for the suspect as possible. The idea that you are talking to interrogators who will keep what you say between you and the police further gives off the illusion of interrogations being conducted within a backstage where the suspect can be themselves and tell the truth. Obviously, this illusion is not perfect and can oftentimes be quite lacking, especially regarding gang criminals who as established have embraced a subculture where animosity towards the police is prevalent and where involving the police in one's affairs is forbidden. However, the analysed material has shown that even a small sense of secrecy can result in the suspect being more open and even partly letting go of their performance, thereby proving that interrogation spaces operate at least to some degree within the backstage. Perfect examples of this would be the gang suspect who openly talked about having been threatened and the suspect who willingly exposed their violent behaviour for being nothing but a performative facade. But why are interrogations not fully backstage?

Apart from the simple fact that gang criminals have built a culture of animosity towards the police and will therefore not feel safe or open around them, there seems to be other, more structural reasons for this as well. As has been touched upon above, one of the biggest reasons for why gang suspect cannot let go of their “street” performance even within interrogation spaces could be because it is possible for anyone to gain access to and read preliminary police investigations in Sweden. This means that the interrogation space becomes frontstage due to the gang suspect’s fear that someone might find out what they said during the interrogations, thereby resulting in them sticking to “no comment” responses. Now, it should be mentioned that the idea of other people, especially gang members, reading the interrogation transcripts is not particularly solid due to the analysed interrogations lacking any mentions of this. However, this is where it is important to remember the previously mentioned panopticism that gang criminals seem to experience while being interrogated due to the open access nature of the documents. So, when considering that in the modern world frontstages do not only have to be direct and physical (see Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013) combined with the notion that it is enough for the gang suspect to think that there might be an audience that is reading the interrogation transcripts, all of a sudden we have a situation where even interrogations have become frontstages which prompts gang suspects to use “no comment” responses.

Continuing the topic of the perceived possibility that gang criminals might read interrogations, since this is something that seems to affect the gang suspects behaviour during interrogations, it is of importance to discuss how this possibility affects the interrogation space and the gang suspects (un)willingness to talk. By making the preliminary police investigations public access, a type of “lateral surveillance” has been created where Swedish gangs have the possibility to not only infiltrate the interrogation space, but also gain information from it, simply by reading the interrogation transcripts. Specifically, they can acquire knowledge about the people being interrogated and potentially use the interrogated individuals' answers and behaviours as evidence to “call their bluff”, see if they can be “caught lacking” and to see whether or not they talked. This turns interrogations into situations that would otherwise be at least somewhat backstage into fully frontstage spaces since the audience outside are people whom the gang suspect needs to put on a performance and do impression management for. Gangs benefit from this kind of “lateral surveillance” since it further hardens their grasp on their members without needing to be physically

present, but for the gang suspects being interrogated it further increases the perceived panopticism which creates a situation where they have no other choice but to be thrown out onto the frontstage. Resulting in them putting on a “street” performance which in turn result in “no comment” responses being implemented.

5.4.1. A new perspective on interrogations

What this development points to is that interrogations no longer are spaces where the gang suspect would want to tell the truth or clear their name. Instead, they have been transformed by the gangs into scenes in which to perform one's criminality. In the words of Bourdieu (1996), the gang habitus has manipulated the interrogation space by helping gang suspects navigate it by reproducing their own subculture and social structure. Very much akin to how the gangs in the areas Brå (2018 & 2019) studied took control of the culture and people within these areas. They are trying to force interrogations into becoming spaces where they are given the upper hand. Resulting in a situation where simply being called into interrogations and performing within them is seen as a part of gang life and gang subculture. “No comment” responses together with the “street” performance have been effective performative tools that they have utilized to gain control over the interrogations. Or rather, they might have implemented these tools so that the gang suspects actually have something to gain from the interrogations instead of only benefitting the police. Whether it be to protect themselves from victimization or to prove themselves as “street”, these motivations oftentimes bleed into each other and can result in different kinds of improvements to their social life and standings within the gang they belong to. This is how modern interrogations should be observed if we are to learn more about them from the gang suspects point of view and what motivations they have for answering the questions in the ways that they do.

Apart from seeing “no comment” responses as performative tools, it would also be wise to see them as signs that gangs and gang subculture has managed to break into Swedish interrogations since “no comment” responses might not be primarily meant for the police, but also for the outside audience that can read the interrogation transcripts. Because of this, on top of everything else that points to interrogations being frontstage, calling Swedish interrogations private would therefore be an inaccurate description. As a matter of fact, what the emergence of “no comment” responses have pointed to is that Swedish interrogations

might never have been fully private in the first place given the open access nature of the preliminary police investigations. It is just now in modern times that gangs have managed to find ways to utilize preliminary police investigations in ways that were previously not thought possible, further highlighting the importance of researching the subcultural and social motivations within gang suspects rather than the pragmatic aspects of interrogations fuelled by the confines of rationality.

To circumvent this, one solution could be to turn the clock backwards and have interrogations fall back into the backstage where the gang suspect feels less need to perform and can feel comfortable talking. Unfortunately, this could be rather difficult to do within a Swedish context without risking breaking apart fundamental constitutional laws such as “offentlighetsprincipen” and “tryckfrihetsförordningen” since it is these laws that gangs have managed to utilize as sources that help them strengthen and broaden their own subculture, norms and values. The second major problem when trying to create a more backstage interrogation space is the simple fact that the police is present during the interrogations. Trying to make gang criminals feel more comfortable and safer when interacting with the police is something that some might even consider to be impossible given the natural animosity that exists between criminals and authority, especially when criminals create subcultures where this animosity serves as a fundamental element. The question then is no longer what can be done to create a more backstage interrogation space so that gang criminals might want to talk, but rather can interrogations become backstage at all? As has been previously mentioned, there have always been elements present within interrogations that prevent them from becoming fully backstage and this development within the gang subculture that this study highlight has only made it more difficult. It might therefore be more effective to move away from the interrogations and gain more knowledge about gang subculture in general to fill the previously mentioned “gap” regarding the understanding of subcultural motivations among gang criminals.

5.4.2. Full-time criminal

The idea that criminals can turn “on” and “off” their “street” performance has, as Sausdal and Hannerz (2025, p. 84) mentioned, become more difficult in the modern digital age. What the analysed preliminary police investigation documents have pointed to is that these private

spaces are becoming fewer for gang criminals. It is not just a matter of interrogations becoming more frontstage, their entire lives are as well due to how they perform their criminality digitally to be seen as “street” while also seeing interrogations as opportunities to both produce and reproduce their criminality as well as reduce victimization. Any space where there could potentially be an audience is an opportunity for them, potentially resulting in an even more cemented criminal lifestyle where there is never truly an optimal time and place to turn “off” the performance. Because of this, gang life has become akin to a never-ending full-time job where they must always act the part, not unlike a politician who uploads pictures of themselves living a “normal life” to appeal to working class voters. In fact, this development of gang members constantly living frontstage lives can also be contributed to the development of society. The modern world has brought upon a lifestyle where most people have some kind of presence online, whether it be on social media, a forum, a school learning platform, an online video game, etc. Everyone within these platforms perform some kind of impression management, no matter how small. Because of this, context collapses have become prominent in everyday life with some people even failing to get jobs or losing the jobs they already have because of an inappropriate comment they posted online in their teens. By combining the work of Sausdal and Hannerz (2025) and Stuart (2020), this is very much akin to how gang criminals always must be wary of being “caught lacking” since other gang criminals might use things they have done or posted as ways to create a context collapse to “call their bluff”. These similarities could show that gang members performances and motivations for not talking during interrogations are merely reflections of society’s development. They are utilizing the same methods that the rest of society does, the only difference being that they do it within the framework of their own subculture. It would therefore be fruitful to investigate the developments in society and how this has changed people's ways of living, how they communicate and navigate social life before starting to investigate gang subculture as a separate entity. The answers are closer than we think and might even reside within ourselves in how we choose to navigate modern society.

However, this is where the aspect of trying to apply countermeasures against gang subculture becomes difficult because it means that we would need to change not just the subculture, but modern society as a whole given how intertwined gang subculture and conventional society are, no matter how much some might want to deny it. These changes imply that society would have to become more backstage again by increasing the number of backstage spaces in

everyday life, both physically and digitally. However, this could be seen as a step back by some people who might argue that digital society as we know it today would not be able to exist without the increase in frontstage spaces, especially when talking about modern forms of communication. So, what can society do? How can we motivate gang suspects to talk during interrogations? The simple answer is that these questions cannot be answered in this thesis that merely seeks to highlight the emergence of “no comment” responses and what they represent on both a micro and macro level. What can be said however is that society is moving towards a future where backstages are become fewer and context collapses more abundant which naturally encourage individuals to follow suit by always putting on a performative facade in order to appeal to their perceived audience. Gang subculture is simply an extension of this development whose members also seek to reap the benefits of this frontstage society in their own way by following their own norms and values in the name of the code of the street. This thesis therefore further challenges Serpa and Ferreira’s (2018) idea that “performance is merely a representation of reality, not reality itself”. It would be more accurate to say that performance has become reality.

5.5. The future of “no comment”

What this analysis has shown is that the “no comment” response phenomenon is something that has been going on for at least more than 5 years with these responses having been just as prevalent in 2019 as they were in 2024. When looking at the 102 preliminary police investigation documents the interrogators responses and handlings of gang suspects who make use of “no comment” responses do not seem to have changed during these years. Legally this is not all that surprising since everyone has the right to remain silent during interrogations, but it is still quite remarkable that there does not seem to have been any changes in how the interrogators tackle these responses. Now, it is important to mention that this thesis has not analysed the strategies that interrogators use during interrogations nor has this study focused on how interrogations are being handled. I am therefore not in a position where I can criticize how the analysed interrogations have been handled nor can I criticise the strategies the interrogators employ. What this study does do however is present arguments for how interrogations have started to be used in the gang suspects favour (although not in a judicial sense, further highlighting the paradoxical nature of their behaviour) due to interrogations being optimal spaces for them to perform their criminality reactively as well as

proactively. What is important to note however, as this analysis has shown, is that “no comment” responses seem to stem from fundamental communicative developments that have affected society as a whole, not just gangs. Because of this, it may be wise to heed Andersson’s (1999) and Bennett and Brookman (2011) advice and focus more on innovative social and cultural approaches regarding crime prevention instead of limiting ourselves to the traditional notions of crime prevention.

5.5.1. The street gone global

Sweden is far from the only country faced with gang suspects using “no comment” responses during interrogations and neither is Sweden alone when it comes to the reasons for why the gang suspects put on this “street” performance. In fact, this is something that seems to be happening on an international scale. Depending on the country, Sweden has comparatively been rather late in this development with countries like USA having been exposed to the code of the street for decades now as seen in Andersson’s (1999) work. While their study did not focus specifically on gang criminals, but on street offenders in the UK, Bennett and Brookman’s (2011) work is still worth mentioning here since the street offenders also followed in the footsteps of the code of the street by valuing self-reliance during disputes, expression of violence and punishing disrespect. Thereby further proving that the aspect of criminals putting on a “street” performance is something that has happened in other parts of the world for quite a long time now. Andersson’s (1999) idea that the code of the street grows within disadvantaged inner-city areas mainly consisting of marginalized groups also mean that the code of the street is not something that is limited to specific countries and cultures and can appear wherever this divide between the marginalized and the mainstream exists. In a similar fashion, the fundamental aspects that make up the code of the street, which have been born from an already existing habitus, such as animosity towards actors who oppose the habitus, are also not bound by any geographical restrictions. This stems from the geographic limitlessness of habitus, which is bound by an individual’s or groups social environment and experiences rather than location (Bourdieu, 1996). Since this implies that the creation and existence of social groups is not geographically limited, it means that the factors that make up the foundations of gang subculture can manifest anywhere where deviance and animosity towards the mainstream way of living is present. This together with the notion that Goffman’s (2014) framework regarding communication and interaction also can take shape in the digital world and develop within any modern country or culture shows that the “no

comment” response phenomenon is something that can occur almost anywhere in the modern world. With the constant rise in gang activity online having given gangs the ability to spread their habitus digitally all over the world, thereby increasing the scale for where gang subculture can manifest and take root, they have broken the old notion of gangs only existing in street corners and marginalized areas. The digital and frontstage world has helped in the globalization of gang subculture.

6. Concluding discussion

In summary, this study has examined and interpreted why and how “no comment” responses are used by gang criminals during interrogations to perform gang culture through a document analysis of 102 preliminary police investigation documents. The findings build on subcultural and dramaturgical theories as well as previous research regarding interrogations by criticizing the pragmatic and rational understanding of suspects and encourage a more subcultural approach that stretches outside of the interrogation space, specifically regarding gang suspects.

By applying subcultural theories and literature as well as Goffman’s (2014) dramaturgical perspective, this study has filled the newly created “gap” most previous literature has failed to fill by showing that gang suspects do not just react to what is being said or shown during interrogations. Their answers seem to be connected to something deeper that stretches outside of the interrogation room. Due to a gang habitus that is strongly tied to the fundamental aspects of the code of the street, the idea of maintaining animosity towards the police by not talking to them has become second nature to gang members. This has resulted in a situation where using “no comment” responses during interrogations have become the norm, with most gang suspects seemingly not reflecting upon why this is the case. The habitus has made it so that they do not have to. You just do not talk to the police. There are however underlying benefits for gang suspects to make use of “no comment” responses that affect their life and social standings outside of the interrogation room. “No comment” responses can function as effective ways for gang suspects to proactively perform their criminality, thereby turning the “no comment” responses into subcultural symbols that function as tools for both producing and reproducing one’s criminal identity. There are many benefits to this performance since it

can function as an effective way to prove your dedication to the criminal subculture which in turn can garner respect. Furthermore, by looking at the pictures and chat logs shown during the interrogations, upholding a violent persona can also be beneficial since it can reduce the risk of victimization while also garnering even more respect from fellow gang criminals. Furthermore, the open access nature of Swedish preliminary police investigations has seemingly made it relevant for gang suspects to put on the “street” performance during interrogations since it has resulted in a situation where the suspects cannot be sure whether someone might be reading them afterwards. All of this has resulted in interrogations having become increasingly more frontstage where the gang suspect performs their criminality not just as a way to stay loyal to the habitus, but because they must satisfy a panoptic audience who's mere possibility of existing is enough for the gang suspect to feel pressured into following in line with the code of the street. “No comment” therefore becomes a big comment that can have major effects on a gang criminals' life and social standing. How gang suspects make use of “no comment” responses during interrogations can therefore be seen as catalysts as well as the result of an ever-increasing frontstage world fraught with context collapses which forces people to carry on their performance anywhere at any time. These findings should encourage us to evolve our understanding of interrogation spaces, gang subculture and how they affect one another.

Among the theories that were applied in this study, Goffman's (2014) dramaturgical perspective is the one that has been criticised the most regarding whether it is still applicable in modern times, especially regarding the emergence of digital spaces (see Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). By applying his framework this study has shown that the dramaturgical perspective is still applicable and relevant within modern society given how frontstages have gotten more common while backstages are being continually threatened, resulting in the need for people to constantly carry social masks while performing for an ever-present audience. This study has also followed in the footsteps of Stuart (2020), showcasing how the dramaturgical perspective can still be applicable within a digital context, both within the context of deviant subcultures but also society in general. The way gang criminals make use of different forms of indirect communications and interactions while using the interrogation space as a kind of hub for this has challenged the criticism that Goffman's (2014) dramaturgical perspective should be locked behind the confines of physical face-to-face interactions. Instead, this study has shown that human interaction and communication can

take many shapes as long as there is some form of communicative connection between individuals. Consequently, this study has further built upon the Goffmanian framework by finding that it is not necessary for an audience to be present nor guaranteed to exist for people to feel the need to put on a performance and for spaces to become frontstage. It is enough for people to think that someone is listening or watching for a communicative connection to be made, resulting in the individual putting on a performance. The potential for an audience is enough to warrant humans to perform. The findings of this thesis thereby prove, to a certain extent, Miller's (1995) argument that digital communication is simply a natural extension to what Goffman posited. This study therefore argues that it is important for scholars within the criminological and sociological field to become more knowledgeable about the modern and digital application of the dramaturgical framework and continue to develop it.

Now, one of the bigger limitations of this study is the lack of information coming from primary sources, that being gang criminals themselves in the form of interviews. While gaining access to these individuals would be difficult, it could bring about more detailed explanations and descriptions of gang life, the subculture and their own personal view on these topics. Given how this study has shown that most information within the documents used is hidden within the subtext and that gang criminals oftentimes do not reflect on the subcultural reasons for why they use "no comment" responses, it could be that interviews would not have given sufficient answers and explanations anyway. However, it would still give more genuine and personal material to work with based on their experiences and overall thoughts. It would therefore be ideal for future research to conduct interviews in order to gain such information while also combining it with a document analysis to fulfil a triangulation which would bring about more fruitful material and increase the generality of the findings (Bowen, 2009).

This study encouraged us to quite literally look outside the box – outside of the interrogation room if we wish to learn more about how gang subculture affects gang suspects behaviour during interrogations. It would be beneficial to heed the advice of previous scholars within the subcultural field by focusing more on finding innovative social and cultural approaches regarding crime prevention instead of falling back on the traditional notions of gang crime and crime prevention. Furthermore, what this study has shown is that there is great need for

future studies to look further into whether it is possible to break down the gang subculture long before it gets the chance to reach the interrogation room. Given the strong correlation between the communicative and interactive changes that have occurred in modern digital society and gang members need to always be “street”, this could be difficult to attain without having to fundamentally change society at its core or halt development. It would therefore be of interest to focus on building long-term strategies that focus on preventing gang subculture, which oftentimes stem from marginalization, animosity towards authority, etc, from taking root in the first place. This is obviously easier said than done but the first step in making this possible is to gather more knowledge about gang subculture and how it shapes the criminal lifestyle, which this study has sought out to do.

In conclusion, the “no comment” response phenomenon and what it represents calls for a change in understanding of Swedish gang crime and the subculture they live in. It is the start of a new era where interrogations have become more than just reactive interactions for the gang suspect. It is now a proactive space in which gang criminals can reproduce their criminal identity by performing in a way that abides by their subculture. “No comment” responses have shown that being a gang criminal is no longer just an unconventional career; it is an entire identity that is being put into play not just in street corners and marginalized areas, but in interrogation rooms due to the idea of being “street” having seeped into almost every aspect of gang life. They are no longer able to let go of this performance, not even within the confines of interrogations and when evidence against them is too great to disregard. This could offer further explanation for the spread of gangs and gang violence since, for them, there is no escape. No longer are there any spaces in which they can fall back into the backstage and let go of their performance. They are caught in their own prison where they are forced (or feel compelled to) constantly perform. A perpetual theatre act where the curtain never closes.

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