

Part 3

## **Dealing with Bodies**



## *'Hot' Homicides and the Role of Police-Suspect Interviews in the Investigation of Illegal Deaths*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

**T**HIS CHAPTER EXPLORES the contribution of police-suspect interviews to the investigation of homicide, and more broadly how such interactions shape the ways that incidents of illegal death are defined and understood. In so doing it is organised to pivot around three principal claims. First, the majority of criminal homicides are 'hot' rather than 'cold-blooded' infractions of the criminal law. This is largely attributable to the nature of fatal interactions and the presence of toxic rage in response to a perceived threat to the perpetrator's fragile (usually masculine) identity. Secondly, this modal nature of homicidal interactions influences the police 'process structures' used to organise and systematise their response. Major crime enquiries are typically either 'self-solving' or 'whodunnit' investigations, with the former being more numerous than the latter. Finally, given the 'hot' nature of these crimes, police interviews with prime suspects often afford perpetrators and police alike an important sense-making opportunity, where what happened can be retrospectively reconstructed, informed by evidence from a range of sources. Consequently, suspect interviews retain an important role in the investigative and detective work performed by police, despite significant advances in the processing and analysis of physical evidence. These interviews can best be understood as co-productive transactions where a narrative account is negotiated and actively constructed by the participants.

The chapter commences with a brief overview of the key patterns and trends in criminal homicide in England and Wales. This is used to develop an understanding of the social organisation of the police response to such incidents. As will be shown, the circumstances and settings in which criminal homicides tend to occur exert a key influence upon the processes and

systems that police enact. In examining the nature of the police work conducted, it is argued that establishing a conceptual distinction between how police ‘investigate’ a potential crime and how they ‘detect’ it may be useful. ‘Investigative work’ relates to those practices that police use to enquire into the circumstances of an incident in order to establish how it happened and whether it should be treated as a potential crime or not—what might be termed ‘the howdunnit’ question. In contrast, ‘detective work’ is more directly concerned with identifying a culpable prime suspect—the ‘whodunnit’ question—and assembling an evidenced case to prove that this person is responsible for causing the illegal death of another. Having developed this understanding of the form and functions of investigative and detective work, the chapter progresses to a more focused and detailed exploration of the role of police-suspect interviews. This is based upon an empirical case study of a suspect interview that highlights in particular the suspect’s agency and shows how the police approach is constrained and structured by external requirements deriving from the broader legal process in which their work is situated.

The particular case featured in this chapter is drawn from an ethnographic research project on murder investigations conducted in a police force in Southern England in the late 1990s (Innes, 2003). In this study, observational fieldwork was conducted on five homicide enquiries in progress. This was augmented by interviews with police detectives and documentary analysis of 20 complete police case files, encompassing a range of different homicide and investigation types.<sup>1</sup> In focusing upon police-suspect interview encounters in the present discussion, as considered in more detail in the next section, the aim is to act as a corrective to previous accounts of police interviews that have tended to under-emphasise the agency of suspects and over-emphasise that of police. In the conclusion, some broader reflections about the nature of social reactions to death in the contemporary age are presented, together with a consideration of what the police investigative response to illegal death reveals about these.

## II. DEATH AND CRIMINAL HOMICIDE

In 2005 there were 756 incidents classified as criminal homicides in England and Wales. It is now an orthodoxy of research on this topic that, in contrast to mass media depictions of fatal violence as taking place between strangers, the modal form of criminal homicide in England and Wales involves individuals known to each other in some way. It is also a crime with a certain masculine bias, in that males are over-represented as perpetrators, and,

<sup>1</sup> Readers seeking more background detail on the sample of cases and research design should consult the Methodological Appendix in Innes, 2003.

to a lesser extent, as victims (Polk, 1994; and Brookman, 2005). That there is not typically vast relational distance between participants in homicidal violence alerts us to the importance of the social and emotional dynamics routinely involved in fatal interactions. For, rather than such events taking place 'in cold blood', they are typically 'hot' impassioned acts, arising in emotionally charged circumstances.

Appreciating the significance of such emotional dynamics is vital to securing an understanding of some of the problems that police investigations have to resolve in manufacturing an authoritative account of who did what to whom and why. So, whereas mass media accounts of criminal homicide typically depict with clarity who is assigned to the victim role and who is cast as the perpetrator, the reality of criminal homicide is that such clear-cut assertions are artefacts of the work performed by police murder squad detectives. Some of these complexities inherent in homicide investigation work were alluded to by David Luckenbill in his classic study of homicide as a 'situated transaction' (Luckenbill, 1977). He showed how, in many of the cases in his sample, as the fatal interaction unfolded the roles played by the victims and killers in terms of who was the aggressor often reversed. In effect, the eventual victim often initiated the conflict that escalated to fatal violence. Developing this approach, J Katz found that the recourse to violence by one or other of the parties is frequently triggered not by some physical action, but rather a moral challenge or affront (Katz, 1988). The presence of this moral challenge is certainly a crucial ingredient in explaining the two main scenarios of criminal homicide in England and Wales: conflicts between young men in public settings; and violence enacted between domestic partners in the context of a deteriorating relationship (Brookman, 2005).

In his analysis of the role of masculinity in fatal violence, Polk identifies that one of the primary triggers for homicidal events is what he terms the 'defence of masculine honour' (Polk, 1994). This results from the need amongst young men to protect and defend their social identity and status when it is threatened, usually by other young males in public situations. The sequence of events in such incidents often involves one individual doing or saying something that can be read as a humiliating affront to the other. Not to respond to such a challenge would threaten the affronted male's sense of social and self-identity, and so in these incidents they invoke some form of response. If neither of the parties to the potential conflict backs down, then it can quickly move from a challenge and response, to a situation that increasingly locks the participants into a sequence of moves escalating to violence to resolve the conflict. From the police point of view, the sequence of moves and countermoves that occurs as the social interaction unfolds towards a tragic denouement means it is not certain who will end up dead, and notions of criminal intention are consequently rendered difficult to establish definitively.

The second key homicidal scenario relates to what, in police parlance, is referred to as ‘domestic homicide.’ Analysis of the recorded crime figures for homicide in England and Wales for the past decade reveals that approximately 45 per cent of all female victims and just under 10 per cent of male victims were killed by their present or former partner (Innes, 2003). As with the male-on-male interactions described above, in domestic homicides the implementation of violence can be understood as a form of social control, via which a destructive resolution to a humiliating situation is being sought. In such cases, there is often a sense of a deteriorating relationship, where one or other of the partners becomes consumed by what Websdale terms ‘morbid possessiveness’, coming to the conclusion that ‘if I can’t have you, then no-one can’. Fatal violence is thus enacted by the possessive partner as a ‘solution’ to what they perceive to be an unacceptable situation.

When defending ‘masculine honour’ the pivotal moment in such scenarios is, according to Katz, where humiliation transmogrifies into rage (Katz, 1988). This process of conversion does not happen all that frequently—people will often elect to bear the social stigma of humiliation—but when it does:

[P]ersons who become enraged must create the sensuality that makes them its vehicle ... assailants make themselves the object of forces beyond their control but retain the possibility of abandoning the process (Katz, 1988: 22).

In these types of fatal interaction, it is because the death of another may not initially have been the intended outcome, and because people act in an emotionally heightened state, that the interview in police custody is so important. As will be discussed in due course, it provides an occasion where the perpetrator of the fatal violence has to reconstruct his actions in order to account for what he has done. In so doing, he must try to make sense of a not very sensible line of action.

This sense-making function forms the core of the police role when responding to incidents of fatal violence. The ‘hot-blooded’ nature of the majority of such incidents introduces certain complexities and difficulties that have to be dealt with by police in terms of establishing who did what to whom and why. These complexities are of a different order to those involved in investigating more pre-meditated killings—where attention has to focus more upon identifying an unknown assailant. In the kinds of cases that are the explicit focus of this chapter, the identity of the assailant is often comparatively easily established by police. Indeed, in many such cases the killer self-incriminates (Innes, 2003). But what I have been trying to convey is that even where the killer’s identity is apparent, there can be considerable complexity involved in producing an authoritative account that explains precisely what has transpired, and doing so in a manner that accords with the requirements and specifications of the criminal law. In the next section, I develop these themes by showing how the nature of the

circumstances in which fatal violence tends to occur has a direct bearing upon how police organise their response to suspicious deaths.

### III. POLICE INVESTIGATIVE AND DETECTIVE WORK

Given the social situations in which fatal violence is typically performed, it is perhaps not surprising to learn that the police are comparatively successful in 'solving' such crimes. An analysis of 10 years of statistical data between 1988 and 1997 revealed that the detection rate for criminal homicide in the United Kingdom hovers around the 90 per cent mark. Of course, a 'detection' is not the same as a conviction. About 40 per cent of all suspects for criminal homicide offences are indicted for and convicted of murder. But in only about 5 per cent of criminal homicide cases where a prosecution is undertaken are all suspects acquitted (Innes, 2003).

The social dynamics involved in the commission of fatal violence are also important in terms of understanding how the police response to such incidents is organised. Owing to the fact that the victim will frequently know his or her assailant, there will be a history of enmity between them and/or there may be witnesses to the violence, and therefore the majority of homicide investigations in England and Wales can be categorised as 'self-solvers' (Innes, 2003). In such cases, police are rapidly able to establish the basic contours of what has happened and who is responsible. Consequently, much of their actual work is focused upon unravelling the sorts of complexities outlined in the previous section about precisely who did or said what to whom and when, in order to construct a strong and detailed case for the prosecution.

Self-solving police investigations are manifestly less complex than the 'whodunnit' investigations that are launched by police where the identity of a prime suspect is less immediately obvious to them. Typically, self-solving investigations are also resolved much faster and demand fewer resources to service them than is the case for whodunnits. Indeed, there is an axiom amongst murder squad detectives that if you haven't identified a 'good suspect' within the first 48 hours of an investigation 'then you are in for the long haul'. However, the fact that they are less complex than whodunnit investigations, does not mean that we should dismiss the importance of 'self-solving investigations'. Nor should we make the mistake of glossing over the levels of painstaking detail that are routinely involved in self-solving police investigations. As I described in the earlier sections of this chapter, such incidents often involve their own complexities in terms of untangling a complex web of social connections, actions and reactions, rumours and innuendos which must be investigated in order to assemble an authoritative account about who did what to whom. In both self-solving cases and whodunnit enquiries, police will draw upon and be informed by

information derived from a number of different sources, including ‘contact trace materials’, witness accounts, intelligence from police databases, and of course any suspect’s account. The difference between these is that in the latter, whodunnit, form, reliable evidence is frequently harder to obtain and to validate in terms of its contribution to understanding what has occurred.

Recently, much attention has focused upon how advances in forensic science technologies have reconfigured the ways in which major crimes are investigated (Cole and Lynch, 2006; and Williams and Johnson, to be published 2007). It is certainly the case that such developments—particularly in relation to the improving capacity to extract DNA profiles from minute traces of biological materials found at crime scenes, and the growth in the National DNA Database—have enabled police in the United Kingdom to solve some otherwise intractable crimes. Analysis of DNA has come to constitute an important method by which detectives can establish some form of connection between a suspect, a victim and a crime scene. However, it is important that we are not overly seduced by some of the more sensational claims made for such advances, and that we do not over-state the nature of the influence that such technologies have had upon investigative practice. Actually, in the majority of homicide cases in the United Kingdom, owing to the interactional circumstances in which they take place, DNA evidence does not play a pivotal role in the identification of suspects. Such materials may have a role in confirming aspects of the case for the prosecution that the police develop through other lines of enquiry. But in terms of the identification of a prime suspect, they are of significance for only a minority of the harder-to-solve ‘whodunnit’ homicide investigations. The reasons for this are quite simple. The collection and processing of samples from a crime scene that may contain DNA is a time-consuming business. Indeed, the full results of the analysis of physical materials from a scene can often take a number of weeks to become available to police. But as has already been discussed, because most homicides in the United Kingdom take place in public settings or involve participants who are intimately acquainted, in the majority of cases police tend to identify suspects and make sense of what happened much faster through the routine deployment of more established and traditional techniques. In the next section, the significance of one such technique that is highly valued by police themselves, the interview of a suspect in custody, is examined in some detail.

#### IV. THE ROLE OF SUSPECT INTERVIEWS: A CASE STUDY

In the following extracts—taken from the police transcript of an interview with a man who had repeatedly stabbed his wife to death during their Sunday dinner and then fled the scene—a number of the themes and issues outlined in the introduction to this chapter are elaborated. The suspect

starts with a rendition of the immediate context to the argument that arose between him and his wife and how he responded in a violent rage,<sup>2</sup>

S: [Victim name] told me dinner was in the kitchen, so I went and got it. We went and sat in the lounge. I tried making conversation with [victim name] but she wouldn't answer ... she said something I couldn't quite hear. She repeated it and I lost all control and I just stabbed her and I heard her say 'oh' and then we just attacked each other. I still had the knife in my hand and I keep repeatedly stabbing her and we tossed and turned and the next thing I know we're on the floor near the fire and then she said 'You're killing me' and then she said 'sorry' and I stopped after ... and I just couldn't, she held my arm and I was holding a knife toward her and I then just ran off ... She just made another snide comment ... I just ... had ... it was an unbelievable urge to hurt her.

It can be seen from this that the suspect has made a full and frank admission of responsibility to the police. Although it is difficult to establish how often suspects self-incriminate in this manner, there is substantial research evidence intimating that it may be a regular occurrence (Innes, 2003; Polk, 1994; and Brookman, 2005). This contrasts with a number of academic studies and the archetypal media representations of police interviewing, both of which have tended to gravitate around a notion that such interactions routinely involve skilled police questioning breaking down the resolve of a reluctant and recalcitrant suspect. But if the case study that is the focus of this chapter is representative of the majority of 'normal homicides'<sup>3</sup> that the police are called on to investigate, then there is a need to conceptualise their interviews with suspects in a different way: one that attends to the negotiated and collaborative ways in which police and their suspects co-produce an account of what has happened.

Furthermore, the extract above conveys a number of the key issues germane to understanding why people perform homicidal acts. From what the male suspect said, it is clear that he perceived a personal slight in his wife's actions and that he responded with an 'explosion' of frenzied violence. It is also interesting to note that he tried to invoke, albeit unsuccessfully, a notion of 'reasonableness' in his actions, even though what he did would be classed by most people as wholly unjustifiable. His first claim to this effect was that he was provoked when his wife would not respond to his attempts to initiate a conversation. Such a claim can be understood as attempting to mitigate guilt by establishing what Sykes and Matza famously termed a 'technique of neutralisation' (Sykes and Matza, 1957).

Although the suspect acknowledged that he initiated the violence, his statement 'we just attacked each other' seeks to convey to his interlocutors

<sup>2</sup> In the transcript: 'S' denotes suspect; 'P1' & 'P2' denote police interviewers; [xxx] is where the transcript has been edited to remove unique identifiers.

<sup>3</sup> This is a deliberate allusion to Sudnow's concept of a 'normal crime' (Sudnow, 1965). That is, one possessed of the qualities that are viewed as typical for an incident of this type.

that the violence was not his alone. By preceding his account of the sustained nature of the violence he performed with a claim that they ‘attacked each other’, the suspect aims to provide an implicit justification for his failure to de-escalate his violence. The third claim for reasonableness in the suspect’s initial account is where he describes the cessation of the assault when his wife cries that he is killing her. So, whilst he admits to being possessed of ‘an unbelievable urge to hurt her’, he also suggests that at the point where the gravity of his actions became evident, he responded in a reasonable manner.

What is not mentioned in this account, but had already been established by police through other lines of enquiry conducted with friends and relatives of the couple, was that there was a salient ‘back-history’ to the crime. Detectives working on the case had identified that the wife had been having an extra-marital affair and was in the process of leaving her husband. They had also been informed that the male partner had been violent towards his wife on several occasions. The detailed and extensive nature of the enquiries that police make when responding to suspicious deaths means that they frequently uncover ‘discreditable’ information of this kind about victims, their relations and witnesses. Sorting through such discreditable information can often be an important feature of interviews with suspects.

Having got the suspect to provide a brief account of what happened, the police officers conducting the interview prompted him to provide additional details about specific key points:

P1: I don’t wish to dwell on it but do you remember anything about the comments she made to you and why it made you so angry ...?

The police officer’s question here provides a good example of how in an interview they have to respond to information that may be partially revealed by the suspect. The suspect says that his wife ‘made another snide comment’ and the officer in his/her follow-up question has obviously identified this as important, as it is being suggested as the immediate provocation for the assault. Thus, in encouraging the suspect to develop his story around this particular point, the officer is seeking to anticipate an important decision in terms of constructing the prosecution case. He is trying to define the nature of the provocation, which in turn will influence how they define and classify the incident overall.

One of the principal concerns for all homicide investigations is seeking to establish whether these acts should be treated as murder or manslaughter. In law, in order for a case to be successfully prosecuted as murder, it must be demonstrated that not only did the named suspect cause the death of the victim, but that he intended and planned to do so. In the absence of *mens rea* or ‘malice aforethought’, the case will be one of manslaughter. Consequently, an important aspect of the homicide detective’s work is searching for ‘signifiers of intent’—specific actions performed by any

suspect prior to the commission of the fatal act that can be construed as indicators that it contained some element of planning. In this case, as a result of the information gleaned from their interview with the suspect, in conjunction with their 'reading' of the scene of the crime and the distribution of physical evidence therein, the detectives were satisfied that this was not a premeditated act. Accordingly, the husband was subsequently charged with and convicted of manslaughter.

The data extracts around the issue of provocation exemplify how the police's approach to the interview interaction is structured by external considerations derived from the broader legal process in which their work is located. In seeking to establish the degree of provocation, they are working to fulfil the requirements of the law's definitions of murder and manslaughter and test the extent to which the specifics of the case that they are dealing with meet the law's standards. How they actually do this by deploying the disclaimer 'I don't wish to dwell on it' is especially interesting, as it subtly seeks to down-play the apparent significance of the line of questioning, when it is obviously consequential to the construction of the police's legal case. The suspect's reply to the question was as follows:

S: The content wasn't important ... just the way she said it. I had the knife in my right hand and I just turned round and pushed it in her ... I was just out of control, I mean the next 30 seconds were just a mad ... I just went mad and we were just fighting ... I was just stabbing her repeatedly ... I remember stabbing her in the chest and back. She was fighting back, trying to protect herself ... blood everywhere.

In this passage, the suspect starts to provide a more 'thickly' descriptive account of the physical dynamics of the assault. He acknowledges that the provocation did not warrant the reaction he gave it and then describes a frenzied and violent attack. He conveys a sense of both performing the acts but also being 'out of control'. This is an important passage in a number of respects. Firstly, it is starting to layer in more detail about the actions and reactions that occurred during the assault. The suspect recalls repeated stabbing and that the wounds he inflicted were both to the front and back of the victim. There is also a repetition of the claim that the victim was using violence, but this time he seems more willing to acknowledge that this counter-violence was an attempt to establish some protection.

Having established a full, frank and detailed admission for the commission of the crime, the detective then introduces a specific question, the relevance of which is elaborated by the second interviewer:

P1: You had one knife. Did you at any time stab her with the knife she was using?

P2: There are indications that both knives were used in the fight. Can you recall how they were used?

Here we can see an example of how police draw upon other sources of evidence in managing the interview. They had recovered two knives from the crime scene both of which had significant traces of the victim's blood upon them. By introducing this question, they are in effect challenging the suspect to render his account in a way that accords with the physical evidence the police have recovered at the scene of the incident.

In noting that in the first interview the suspect claimed that a 'snide comment' was the immediate provocation for the violence that he unleashed, the police focused upon getting the suspect to detail the actual crime and provide his account of what happened. In a second interview, once they had gathered, and had time to sort through material about the couple's marriage, they concentrated more upon getting the suspect's account of the deteriorating relationship. The picture that they developed was of a marriage coming to an end where the female partner was in the process of leaving the male, and the ongoing 'chronic' humiliation he felt switched to 'acute' and intense rage.

P2: Why is your marriage breaking up?

S: She doesn't love me ... I'm just one of those wasters at the bar ... I didn't want it to end, she wanted to. There's been a lot of problems this year for me ... When we married I was the one who had to do all the changing.

P1: Was it your intention to kill her?

S: No, not to kill her. I didn't think she was dead when I left. I'm not making any excuses for what I did. There's no reason for it.

These final extracts from the interview are more personally oriented for the suspect than the previous ones, capturing how, in some circumstances and under certain conditions, the police interview is an opportunity to make sense of what has happened not just for the police, but for the perpetrator as well. There is a real sense in the above of an individual starting to piece together his act with its antecedent causes.

The reproduction of the interview transactions between the police and their suspect in this case is intended to illuminate two connected themes, both of which have tended to be glossed over in previous studies of police crime investigations and interview techniques. First, there is the extent to which the suspect is able to exert agency over how the interview interaction unfolds and how the account of the incident is constructed. This is not to deny the presence of an asymmetry in the power available to police interviewers when compared with that of their interviewees, for the former are undoubtedly in a dominant position. But rather, the point has been to clarify that the decisions taken by suspects about what to tell police (if anything) and when, do shape how the police's work is performed. As will be discussed in more detail below, there has been a tendency in some previous studies of the police's response to crime to over-state the power of the police (McConville and others, 1991). At the same time though, this empirical

case study also captures the extent to which the conduct of the police's work is structured by the external requirements of the legal process.

#### V. DISCUSSION: MAKING SENSE OF DEATH

Police accounts of their response to incidents where illegal death is suspected, at least in terms of how they are rendered in mass media reports, generally suggest that their investigative function is simply and unproblematically concerned with illuminating the 'facts' and 'truth' of what really happened. Such rhetorical constructions belie the epistemological complexities of detective work. For police do not just uncover facts; they are in a very literal sense involved in '*constructing* a case for the prosecution', wherein information gleaned from various sources is employed as knowledge and evidence of how a past event occurred (Innes, 2003; and McConville and others, 1991). Thus, what are routinely and pragmatically treated as 'the facts' of a case are actually artefacts of police investigative method. In essence, the police investigative process is focused upon the production of what sociologists term 'a definition of the situation.'

According to the dictates of detective culture, the interview with a suspect in police custody is a pivotal moment in the conduct of an investigation, for it is an opportunity for police to test the strength and robustness of the case they are building with the person(s) who is the subject of their suspicions. By gauging the reactions of suspects to their evidence and inferences, police contend they can either confirm aspects of their case narrative, or acquire more information to assist them in developing further lines of enquiry. This emphasis by the police on the importance of interviews has informed a number of academic investigations into how these interactions are (or at least should be) accomplished. However, the majority of these earlier studies have provided only limited insights into the reality of the role of interviews in crime management processes, owing to their tendency to isolate interviews from other facets of police systems and practices (Watson, 1997; and Leo, 1996). So interviews have frequently been treated as the sole object of analysis, rather than being situated within a wider process that is in turn shaped by the rules, procedures and requirements of an adversarial legal process. Consequently, whilst previous studies have examined a variety of technical procedures that might enhance the validity and reliability of the interview process (Gudjonsson, 1992; and Milne and Bull, 1999), only limited consideration has been given to why police interviewers pursue certain lines of questioning and the implications for the processes of investigation and detection of the answers that suspects provide to these.

In her analysis of police interviews in Australia, relating to more routine crimes than homicide, Heydon identifies similar verbal exchanges to those described in the previous sections as evidence that the police endeavour

to manipulate the suspect's account into one that accords with their own 'preferred' version of events (Heydon, 2005). But what her account lacks, focused as it is upon the application of formal conversational analysis techniques, is any consideration of how police influence may reflect the 'structured' relationship that exists between a police investigation and the wider legal process (Innes, 2003). It is a structured relationship inasmuch as the police investigation is responsible for producing the prosecutorial narrative and supporting evidence that constitute the focus for the legal decision-making that occurs at the judicial stage. At the same time, the law determines what counts as evidence for the police, how its validity and reliability is appraised, and, through the rules of evidence, regulates how such materials are to be gathered. Thus what Heydon's overly simplified conceptualisation fails to grasp is that an aspect of the police investigative function is formatting the available information and evidence in a way that coheres with the categories and requirements of the law's classificatory frameworks and procedures.

During the course of interview interactions conducted as part of their enquiries into suspected illegal deaths, police do seek to negotiate how a suspect accounts for his actions, but not for the reasons that Heydon implies (Heydon, 2005). Sometimes, police will directly challenge aspects of what a suspect says if these do not cohere with other evidence that police have available. On other occasions though, the nature of the influence that interviewing officers exert will be more subtle; concerned with formatting the suspect's account in a way that accords with the evidential requirements of the adversarial legal process.

Innes reports that in terms of the way in which they arrange the results of their lines of enquiry when investigating major crimes, police detectives draw upon specific narrative frames (Innes, 2003). These enable the evidence to be set out in a way that fulfils the requirements of an adversarial legal process and is persuasive to a jury. The narrative frames provide structured ways of telling the story of a crime that are based upon established conventions for crimes of a particular kind. These structured accounting frameworks are invoked because police have found that they are likely to fulfil the legally mandated requirements of the criminal justice process, whilst being persuasive to a jury to accept the police's version of events. These case narratives will obviously be moulded to reflect the situational specifics of individual incidents, but they tend to be underpinned by more basic and fundamental structures. So, for example, police case narratives about domestic homicides tend to be structured around fairly similar plots, motives, and sequences of events. These differ from the sorts of narrative employments that are used to describe and explain what happened in 'stranger murders', or other types of crime.

The concept of co-production is thus useful to this analysis in articulating how the accounts provided by suspects when being interviewed by police

are often consequential to the narratives that police construct. In contrast to many previous accounts of police-suspect interviews that have emphasised the power of the police to shape how the interaction unfolds, the conceptual positioning adopted herein is intended to create a space in which the agency of suspects can be better appreciated. For, whilst police undoubtedly have more influence over the conduct of interviews than suspects, this does not equate to the latter having no influence. Decisions taken by suspects about what information to give to the police when being interviewed do have a bearing upon the subsequent conduct of the police investigation and the case narrative that is constructed. The latter consideration is especially apposite for the more 'mundane' types of homicide that have been the focus of this chapter, where it is comparatively commonplace for assailants to provide detailed accounts concerning the fatality (see also Innes, 2003). What the concept of co-production keys us into, then, is that whilst the police are ultimately engaged in the production of a definition of the situation, their ability to establish a valid and reliable, legally acceptable definition of what happened is contingent upon a number of sources of information, one of which is the suspect's own account. At the same time their own investigative and detective work is influenced by the requirements of the adversarial legal process which determines what material will count as evidence, and what is required for it to be viewed as valid and reliable.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Rendering death meaningful seems to be one of the eternal preoccupations of the human condition. Police homicide investigations are one variant of how modern societies seek to explain the causes of unexplained deaths, where these are suspected to be attributable to the actions of another individual. As part of these enquiries, the interview with a prime suspect can contribute much to the police's understanding of what has transpired, and to their ability to develop an authoritative narrative setting out who did what to whom and why.

Due to the kinds of social situations in which fatal violence tends to occur, a significant proportion of all homicide suspects interviewed by the police make a full or partial admission. That suspects select this course of action has less to do with the persuasive powers of police interviewers than with the fact that the fatal assault was the outcome of an emotionally-driven explosion of violence. In fictional accounts of homicide, and the sorts of crimes that tend to be covered by journalists, the murder performed 'in cold blood' provides a useful dramatic device around which to construct a compelling story for an audience. However, the social reality of homicide and its investigation is in many respects not reflected in these dramatic accounts. The majority of homicides are more mundane and parochial, and

the nature of the police work that is performed has less to do with investigators developing startlingly intuitive insights, than their painstakingly systematic reconstruction of events, based upon information derived from multiple sources. It is in such a context that the suspect interview becomes so significant to police detectives.

Previous accounts of police-suspect interviews have tended to focus upon the power of the police to shape the outcome, but in so doing, they have also under-emphasised the agency of suspects and the potential for their moves and counter-moves to shape the wider police investigation. In contrast, as described in this chapter, the interviews conducted in the context of homicide investigations into 'hot crimes' are often usefully conceptualised as co-productions. The interview in custody provides a vital opportunity for police to test, develop and refine the case narrative detailing their beliefs about what happened. As such, it is intimately connected to the fundamental social function of a police enquiry—to assemble an authoritative narrative that, framed by the conventions of criminal law, determines how a death is to be classified and what its causes are to be attributed to.

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