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# WHAT HAPPENS ON THE DIGITAL STREET, STAYS ON THE DIGITAL STREET? AN EXAMINATION OF PROVOCATIONS, THREATS, AND BEEFS IN THE ONLINE DRILL CULTURE IN ROTTERDAM

*Robert A. Roks and Jeroen van den Broek*

## Introduction

In *The Digital Street*, Jeffrey Lane (2019, p. ix) documents how street life has “decoupled from its geographic location to split along the physical street and the digital street”. Nowadays, experiences of youngsters get filtered through digital technology, resulting in the co-creation of the street code in physical and digital spaces. To date, studies have examined the integration of the internet and social media into street gang life (for a review, see Pyrooz & Moule, 2019; Moore & Stuart, 2022), concluding that for street-oriented persons, the digital street may now be “as meaningful and consequential as the physical street” (Lauger & Densley, 2018, p. 817). Lane (2019), for instance, describes how youngsters nowadays navigate both the physical and digital street which affects and sometimes alters the enactment of gender roles, code-switching, and the ways formal and informal control impact the (digital) lives of youngsters.

Urban violence is also one of the issues that is impacted by the rise of digital technologies, resulting in what Lane (2019) has called the digitization of the ‘code of the street’ (Anderson, 1999) or, in the words of Forrest Stuart (2020b) the “code of the Tweet”. Although the relationship between urban violence and social media has gained increased scholarly attention (for an overview see Moore & Stuart, 2022), the research to date has been “surprisingly slow to disentangle the empirical relationship between violence and social media” (Lane & Stuart, 2022, p. 2). According to Lane and Stuart (2022, p. 2), the available studies seem to concur that “social media provide new and additional avenues for challenging rivals, displaying toughness, and building street cred”. The debate, however, centers on the

question to what extent these acts of violence of the digital street spill onto physical streets and result in real life violence. Some scholars suggest “that social media play a causal role in exacerbating violence”, whereas others are more skeptical about the role of social media in amplifying physical violence (Lane & Stuart, 2022, p. 2).

The issue of the relationship between social media usage and urban violence is at the heart of current public concerns about drill music, a subgenre of gangsta rap known for its hyperbolic communication of violence in music videos and other social media uploads (Stuart, 2020a, 2020b). Since its origin on the streets of Chicago (Stuart, 2020a, 2020b), drill music has spread to the UK (Fatsis, 2019; Ilan, 2020) and the European continent (Roks & Van den Broek, 2020). Since 2019, two violent incidents in the Netherlands—the death of 18-year-old Jay-Ronne Grootfaam, who was killed in the South-East of Amsterdam in September 2019, and 19-year-old Cennethson Janga from Rotterdam, who was stabbed to death in August 2020 on the pier of Scheveningen—have stirred up public concerns about the relationship between the growing popularity of drill music and youth violence, epitomized by headlines like “*Is drill music behind the recent wave of youth violence?*” (Bahara, 2019) and “*Whoever kills, scores in drill music*” (Bos & Van der Poel, 2020).

In this chapter, we aim to add to the academic debate on the relationship between urban violence and social media by drawing on a netnographic study into the online drill culture in Rotterdam. The term netnography was introduced to capture the application of the central principle of ethnographic research of *being there* to the study of digital data shared on the internet (Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets, 2015, p. 79; Costello et al., 2017). Using what Urbanik and Roks (2020, pp. 218–220) call the one-way-mirror approach (2020, pp. 218–220), we observed the digital content produced or shared by over 100 drillers from Rotterdam. We started our netnographic study by searching for drill music from Rotterdam on YouTube, Instagram, Telegram and Snapchat. In addition to watching video clips and other online content about drill in Rotterdam, we made an overview of Rotterdam drillers who were active on social media. In March 2020, we created the @Crimin010gen account on Instagram and Snapchat. In the bios of these accounts, we shared information about who we were, where we work and what our research was about. With these accounts we started following various drillers from Rotterdam, first by using our overview of drillers from Rotterdam and later by using search terms like ‘drill’ combined with ‘Rotterdam’. Finally, we also added drillers we frequently encountered on the accounts we already followed.

In this way, we followed a total of 137 accounts on Instagram and 28 via Snapchat. Moreover, we participated in seven Telegram groups relevant to our research and manually checked several dozen YouTube channels. Twice a day—once at the beginning of the morning and once at the end of the evening—we made a digital tour of all the digital respondents and groups. We reviewed all the new online content and took screenshots of the posts that were relevant to our investigation; for instance, posts about music, drillers’ involvement in phishing or narcotics sales via social media and conflicts between (rival) drillers. By immersing ourselves in the digital world of drill in Rotterdam twice a day, we gradually got to know and understand this online culture better. In total, we carried out netnographic fieldwork for seven months (between March and September 2020) and during that period we collected approximately 2,600 screenshots and videos that document the online behavior of Rotterdam drillers on social media (Roks & Van den Broek, 2020, pp. 154–160). Most of the empirical material presented in this chapter is based on the social media posts of a dozen drillers from Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

We begin this chapter with an overview of literature on the relationship between urban violence and social media. In the remainder of this chapter, we provide a thick description of the online drill rap culture in Rotterdam, an in-depth and detailed delineation of this context (Geertz, 1973). In our conclusion, we reflect on the meaning of our results in respect to the (changing) dynamics of violence by young people who navigate online and offline spaces.

### **Urban violence and social media**

A growing body of literature examines the relationship between social media and violence (for an overview see Peterson & Densley, 2017; Irwin-Rogers et al., 2018; Moore & Stuart, 2022). The term cyber-violence—one of Wall’s (2001) cybercrime typologies—is used to capture the ways individuals can cause harm in real or virtual environments, whereas street cultural acts of online violence have been colloquially coined “cyberbanging” (Haut, 2014) or “internet banging” (Patton et al., 2013). Because “cyber violence can lead to similar levels of fear and distress as real-world violence” (Peterson & Densley, 2017, p. 194), social media appears to be an effective tool for street-oriented people. To date, studies have documented how gang members use social media to challenge rival groups to violent confrontations, but also to harass and threaten others (Deuchar & Holligan, 2010; Pyrooz et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016; Patton et al., 2017).

Some of the functionalities of social media facilitate traditional street cultural practices. Since posts on social media do not automatically include locations, individual users can decide whether and how they want to share information about their whereabouts. With the act of “spatial referencing” Patton et al. (2017, p. 1011) note how “gang-involved youth often referenced their location in home territory as a boast and/or challenge to rivals”, but “they also stated opponents’ geographic locations and disdain for those areas”. Furthermore, symbolic acts like “incursion into rival territory” (Moule et al., 2017, p. 53) have an online equivalent in “spatial referencing”. On blogs, Van Hellemont (2012) found “momentary captures of real life events” (Van Hellemont, 2012, p. 177), as youth uploaded pictures of themselves with the name sign of subway stations that were claimed by rival crews (Van Hellemont, 2012, pp. 175–176). Similarly, Patton et al. (2016, p. 594) note how “with social media platforms, youth can enter into rival gang territory and disrespect rivals’ gang symbols without being witnessed—but still advertise this action as a threat” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 594). Nowadays, gang members can also post pictures on social media (pretending) to be hanging out on rival turf, including either real geotags or referencing fake locations (Stuart, 2020a, 2020b). Social media thus offers opportunities to threaten and challenge rivals without the immediate threat of violent retaliation such as during physical threats (Patton et al., 2017, p. 1012).

However, some aspects of internet banging move beyond merely challenging rivals on social media. For instance, Johnson and Schell-Busey (2016, p. 73) illustrate that for gang members, rap music and social media functions as “a new bottle for old messages”: it is used to exchange threats with rival gangs, often resulting in increasingly violent back-and-forth retaliations. During threats of violence, or proactive acts of violence (Patton et al., 2017, p. 1007), gang members tend to reference the use of firearms to demonstrate a certain willingness to defend oneself or the group at all costs against outside attacks (Patton et al., 2017, p. 1008). Furthermore, gang members also utilize thoughtfully used emoji to imply a

threat: “a gun pointed at an angry face, which could be interpreted as a murder; and a car and a bag of money, which may also suggest how and why this murder will occur” (Patton et al., 2017, p. 1008). However, threats also appear more subtle and may not be readily decipherable to outsiders, for example because gang members use deliberate emojis to communicate a threat (Patton et al., 2017, p. 1008).

Parallel to the street cultural acts of impression management online, some elements of internet banging remain analogous to violent acts on the physical streets (Haut, 2014; Lane, 2019), but there are some consequential differences. Social media platforms might provide ways to threaten or challenge rivals “without the immediate threat of violent retribution (e.g. shooting, stabbing, physical fighting) present in face-to-face neighborhood challenges” (Patton et al., 2017, p. 1012). Violent acts that do occur on the physical streets might also end up on the digital street. For instance, Irwin-Rogers et al. (2018, p. 404) state that videos and photographs of real-life incidents of serious violence are recorded and broadcasted online, “often involving additional acts of humiliation, for example, stripping the victim of their clothes or coercing them into denouncing their own gang”. The potential virality of this digital or digitized violent content, where “people can be called out in front of thousands of far-flung audience members” (Urbanik & Haggerty, 2018, p. 1356), increases the rewards for posting, but also “can impose further social pressure on the gang member(s) being victimised or targeted to retaliate” (Irwin-Rogers et al., 2018, p. 406). Consecutive proactive and reactive acts of violence (Patton et al., 2017, p. 1007) lead to “vicious online-offline violence” (Irwin-Rogers et al., 2018, p. 404). However, these changing dynamics between violence on the physical and digital street might not just accelerate the process of conflicts; it can also result in an amplification of violence (Lane, 2019, p. xi).

Much of the available research identifies social media as a catalyst, vector or trigger for physical violence (Patton et al., 2013; Lauger & Densley, 2018; Moule et al., 2017; Irwin-Rogers et al., 2018; Urbanik & Haggerty, 2018). In these studies, the emphasis seems to be on the difference between so-called networked publics—a term referring to the ways (young) people’s peer worlds are embedded in social media (boyd, 2014, pp. 11–14)—and traditional physical public spaces. Four affordances tend to shape the mediated environments created by social media: digital content is more persistent, visible to a larger audience, easily spreadable and searchable. Online violent displays, therefore, have the potential to reach a large audience of friends, rivals and outsiders, and thereby potentially impact real-world violent outcomes, but also dynamics of violence. In this line of thought, Stuart (2020b) signals a theoretical perspective of parallelism. By conceptualizing social media as a new or additional staging areas for (group) rivalries (Anderson, 1999, p. 77), the expectation is that online expressions of violence will amplify violence. However, studies note that social media might provide new opportunities for de-escalating or avoiding offline violence (Urbanik & Haggerty, 2018, Lane, 2019; Stuart, 2020a, 2020b; Lane & Stuart, 2022).

Stuart (2020a, 2020b) is the first scholar to date to shed light on the empirical reality of violence in the digital era. Based on ethnographic research, Stuart documents how young people use social media and how this impacts the origin and development of conflicts. His work highlights how young people who navigate both the physical and the digital street are increasingly aware of the performativity of online behavior. This specifically becomes apparent in young people’s attempts to create “context collapse” (boyd, 2014): “to disrupt the key impression management practices associated with the ‘code of the street’” (Stuart, 2020b, p. 192). Stuart (2020b, p. 192) discerns three strategies used by young people to “publicly invalidate the authenticity of their rivals’ performances of toughness, strength,

and street masculinity”. “Cross referencing”—the first and easiest and most prevalent strategy—refers to “the process whereby challengers scrutinize and contradict their targets’ online claims of violence by calling audience attention to past online content or private information that might otherwise go unnoticed” (Stuart, 2020b, p. 198). The second strategy—“calling bluffs”—sees young people openly challenging or daring their rivals “to act in accordance with their online claims of violence” (Stuart, 2020b, p. 198). “‘Catching lacking’ represents the last strategy employed by young people to exploit context collapse. This strategy entails confronting someone in non-gang-related social contexts (e.g., at work, at school, running errands with family), engaged in non-gang-related social roles and behaviors” (Stuart, 2020b, p. 199).

Each strategy differs in its likelihood to result in real life violence, with “catching lacking” running the highest risk of a violent conflict because of the possibility of a physical confrontation between rivals. However, as Stuart (2020b, p. 204) and Ilan (2020) stress, social media content makes it impossible to infer whether physical violence is imminent, because outsiders often lack the “street literacy” (Ilan, 2020) necessary to understand and interpret digital street content. Contrary to popular belief, the work of Stuart (2020a, 2020b) concludes that the majority of social media challenges remain confined to online spaces. In the majority of cases, online provocations are restored in non-violent ways. In a recent article, Lane and Stuart (2022) also stress the way social media offers new possibilities to de-escalate or avoid violent challenges.

### **Drill, violence and social media in Rotterdam**

In the remainder of this chapter, we zoom in on the online drill culture in Rotterdam. First, we illustrate how the drillers in our study use social media and rap music videos on YouTube and Instagram to insult, challenge and threaten their rivals (or “opps”). Secondly, we zoom in on the ways the Rotterdam drillers actively contest each other’s credibility as drillers, for instance by sharing compromising information about their rivals on social media. Thirdly, we provide an overview of the different types of beefs and provocations we came across in our research, with a specific focus on the online-offline dynamics in these group conflicts. It should be noted that the number of beefs that result in physical violence in our study is limited to a few cases, with the deadly stabbing incident on the pier of Scheveningen in August 2020 as the most striking example.

#### ***Digital provocations***

Studies have illustrated how gang members use social media to provoke rival groups into violent confrontations (Deuchar & Holligan, 2010; Pyrooz et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2016, 2017; Lynes et al., 2020). Our empirical material also includes several examples where social media is used to challenge rivals. One example sees drillers photographing or filming themselves or their friends while they are on the territory of a rival group, a practice referred to as “opp block” in the drill culture, reflecting the postal code wars described in UK drill (Ilan, 2020, p. 12). For this practice, drillers use the same social media functionalities to signal that they are on their own “block” or in their own neighborhood, including the use of geotags to pinpoint their location or the use of specific filters.

Although these examples are meant as provocations, we found various examples that showcase that the presence of rivals on drillers turf is not always perceived as serious or

threatening. For example, a driller from Amsterdam stated he was in Rotterdam by sending a direct message with photos from the local neighborhood to a rival driller from Rotterdam. On the shared screenshot, the driller from Rotterdam—who posted the screenshot on Instagram—added the comment: “*Yes, everyone is posted on the block at 6 o’clock in the morning*”, indicating that he did not take the presence of a rival driller on his block in the early hours of the day that seriously.

In line with documenting being present *opp block* at times of day when rivals are unlikely to be nearby, we see other examples that highlight the symbolic nature of these digital provocations. For instance, we came across drillers who filmed or photographed themselves—sometimes while wearing a hoodie—in a moving car, while driving through rival territory, also limiting the chance of an actual violent confrontation. This is also apparent in a practice called “*Snap and go*”, where young people give the impression that they have been on their rival’s turf, but only for a very short period to take a photo. Afterwards, and often at a safe distance, they posted on social media that they were *opp block*.

In response to these symbolic provocations, our empirical data also contains a few examples where drillers call out their rivals to meet them in their neighborhood at a specific moment, like the following message on social media from a driller from Rotterdam: “*Come and get me at [street name], you know where I am*”. We also came across posts on social media that are a lot more specific than the aforementioned examples. For instance, a driller from Amsterdam shared a private conversation on Snapchat with a rival from Rotterdam. The latter had sent him the following message: “*Don’t chat much, come!*”, mirroring the calling bluff strategy documented by Stuart (2020b, p. 198). However, the Amsterdam driller did not respond to this invitation by going to Rotterdam; instead, he shared his own whereabouts on social media, including his house number and zip code, and added the message: “*I am standing right here, don’t chat much!! Call when you get here!!*”

During our digital fieldwork, we found one example of a driller responding to digital provocation. During a conflict with a rapper from the south of the country, the bluff of the driller from Rotterdam was called as he was challenged to meet up with his rival in his hometown. The driller from Rotterdam placed a series of videos online, documenting the search for his rival. In the first video, he sits in the passenger seat of a car and states, while filming his whereabouts:

Look, you are not even here bro, you are not here! Back the car up a bit, back it up, back it up, back it up. This fucking son of a bitch has to see that I’m here at this gas station mattie [Dutch street slang for friend]. Look man, I’m here bro, where are you? Huh? Where are you? Back the car up more, drive back so more. Fucking son of a bitch.

Soon after, the driller from Rotterdam shared a second video from a different location and states: “*Let’s see if he is here*”. Still seated in the passenger seat of the car, he summoned the driver to move in the direction of several cars in a parking lot. Because he also does not seem to be at the second location, the driller from Rotterdam decided to call his rival. In the last video, you can hear him shouting at his phone: “*Pussy boy! You wanted to meet me in the city, you’re a pussy boy, you’re a pussy!*” followed by a mention of his rival’s name and the city he resides in. The driller from Rotterdam continues by saying:

You send me three different locations, and I came to all three, but you are not there, you’re a pussy! Bro, if I catch you in the city mattie, fucking son of a bitch, your

fucking mothers, your fucking children, your fucking son, fucking Zionist. Fucking punk, what's good bro?

At that moment, his rival hung up the phone and the camera of the driller from Rotterdam was directed at his stomach. Briefly, a gun behind his waistband could be made out. However, the digital provocations between these rivals did not result in a physical confrontation.

### *Online threats*

In the material we collected on social media, we also saw digital content that went beyond publicly taunting or challenging rivals. For instance, a driller from Rotterdam posted an image of a young man on Snapchat with the following caption:

[Name boy] from [name school and location] (. . .)

500 euros who beats his up and films it

This is what happens when fans of KSB [drill group from Amsterdam] make fake accounts and talk about my child

Then I'm doing research on you and I put a price on your head no matter how old you are

*(June 2020, Snapchat)*

In this message, the driller from Rotterdam offers a reward for whoever beats up the young man mentioned by name in the post. During our research, the same drillers made several of these threats. In addition to beating up specific individuals, he offered a reward for stabbing someone: “*Whoever stabs that [name] in front of me gets 1k [thousand euros]. He doesn't have to die but just cheff [stab] that man haha*”, followed by a smiling emoji.

We also came across examples of online threats that went a step further still. In various groups about drill in the Netherlands on Telegram Messenger, a death list was distributed, listing various drillers from Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague. During our research, it was not possible to determine who posted the list and to what extent this death list should be taken seriously. However, one of the drillers in our research did post various messages on Snapchat to find out who distributed the death list that bore his name. For example, he posted a photo of a specific location with the caption “*Who wants to find out if [name] lives here!!! You get paid to find out if he lives there!!!*” In a subsequent message, he even offered a reward for the person who finds and kills the alleged maker of the death list: “*7000,- [name] If you kill him you will get 5 thousand a month for 5 months.*” Similarly, we found a post about an amount of money that was offered to whoever stabs or lets two individuals run, followed by the caption: “*NO CAP YOU REALLY GET THE REWARD*”. With the statement “no cap”—which is also written online as “no 🤪” or “✖🤪”—the driller wants to indicate that he is not lying and that there actually is a monetary reward.

However, the (online) conflicts that we encountered during our research are not limited to those directly involved in beefs between drillers. In addition to several drillers promising amounts of money to make *opps* run, beat up or stab *opps*, we also encountered three different examples of threats against drillers' girlfriends. These posts contain a photo of the woman, an explanation that this was the girlfriend of a specific driller, and in one case the location where this girlfriend lived. In all cases, various amounts of money were made available to assault, stab, rape and in one case even kill these drillers' girlfriends.



### *Exposing drillers*

In the examples of the symbolic practices of entering *opp block* and provoking rivals, we can recognize strategies directed at contesting the violent poses of the drillers and to inform the outside world about the performative nature of their online behavior. Our empirical material also contains examples that showcase how the drillers in our study attempt to create context collapse (boyd, 2014; Stuart, 2020a, 2020b) by exposing each other on social media, especially by sharing past social media posts, private information or information that not all the online followers of the drillers are privy to.

In September 2019, a driller from the city of Rotterdam posted the following message on his Instagram account: “*I am fed up with all that sneak dissing and gangster rap acting. You’re only scary with a mask up, so don’t let me expose these young niggas with their first names and faces*”. In this post, sneak dissing refers to insulting other (drillers) without mentioning their name, even though it is clear from the context of the diss that this is aimed at a specific individual. In the last sentence of his post on Instagram, the driller from Rotterdam calls on his rivals from Amsterdam to be more specific with their insults or provocations, either by inviting him to a session of Instagram Live (“*Next time you diss me on Insta Live, invite me*”) or by tagging him in the post (“*Or @ me*”).

The second issue the driller from Rotterdam takes offense to is the “*gangster rap acting*”, signaling that the persona his rivals proclaim is an act and not authentic. Exposing his rivals from Amsterdam—whose identity was unclear for a long time because they wore masks in their videos and posts on social media—would provide insight into the performativity of these drillers. Not long after his initial post, the driller from Rotterdam shared a series of photographs using the Story function on Instagram. Each individual photo is meant to expose the various members of the drill group from Amsterdam, among other things by sharing their first and last names and information about the school one of the drillers attends.

During our digital fieldwork, we found other examples of private information about the aforementioned members of this drill group from Amsterdam that was made public on social media, as the following information on Snapchat illustrates:

Yoo

You have beef with [name of Amsterdam driller], right?

You shouldn’t take this man seriously, he has no money. He’s nothing. Supposedly robbing people, all he takes is a broken iPhone 5. He asks girls for money. Because he has no money. Not even €20 for groceries.

(August 2020, Snapchat)

The sender explains that she was in a relationship with the Amsterdam driller for some time and therefore knows firsthand that the rapper should not be taken seriously because, in the words of the sender of the message, “*he is yusu [seriously] pathetic*”. The response of the recipient of this message is: “*hhhhhhhhh you’re awesome I swear*”, followed by a smiling emoji and two red hearts.

Other information that is difficult to reconcile with drillers’ violent poses is also shared online, as we can see in Figures 27.1 and 27.2—photos that seem to be taken from police files. In the first photo, we see a driller from Amsterdam running because he is being chased with a knife, something that according to the driller who posted the image is seen as particularly laughable and not in accordance with the way this driller presents himself in his

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Figure 27.1 Snapchat



Figure 27.2 Snapchat

music and on social media. Figure 27.2 shows how a driller from Amsterdam is chased by three young men and is thrown onto the track of the metro with a machete in his hand. Here too we see that the pose of the driller is openly questioned, as witnessed by the caption: “*you had your machete in your hand you were thrown onto the railway and your knife was taken away what a driller ?? ?? ??*”

These examples show that the drillers in our study have information and photos from (ongoing) police investigations. For instance, a driller from Rotterdam shared a photo from a police file, highlighting a specific passage from an interrogation, with the caption: “*Okay, okay, I’ll stop the beef I don’t want beef anymore. Boys its resolved, can’t beef no rats*”. In his post, the driller makes clear that he wholeheartedly disapproves with the statement made during the police interrogation, but also that he distances himself from the conflict with the young man. Despite the fact that this is not made explicit, he seems to allude to the likelihood that in the event of an escalation of the beef, this young man will once again violate the street code by snitching, with potentially adverse consequences for the Rotterdam driller.

Snitching—or talking to the police in general—is a practice that is condemned on the street (Rosenfeld et al., 2003). Because rumors about snitching can be disastrous for someone’s reputation on both the physical and digital streets, young people—including drillers (Ilan, 2020, p. 9)—are very keen to quickly contradict such allegations. Social media provides a platform to communicate this high standard of silence and to indicate that someone has not snitched, for example by sharing excerpts from the interrogation (Roks, 2015, p. 423). We see this reflected in the following post by the aforementioned driller from Rotterdam, who himself shares the following fragment of part of his conversation with the local police officer via Snapchat:

There are rumors that I made a statement about that time when I had to come to the police office but didn’t want to make a statement and my mother went to talk. What’s up with that? Because as far as I know, I said I didn’t want anything to do with talking about the case. Exactly for these reasons.

*(April 2020, Snapchat)*

In this case, the Rotterdam driller shares information to prove that he has not snitched. However, his approach does not have the desired effect. A driller from Amsterdam responded to his post:

Woow you have police officer saved in your phone you are an ORIGINAL SNITCH!!!  
But you’re a driller?  
WTF is this

*(April 2020, Snapchat)*

Moreover, he adds to his post that the driller from Rotterdam is “*worse than a rat*”, because he publicly blames his mother for the course of events. In turn, these Amsterdam drillers are called “*snitch gang*” by a different drillers from Rotterdam in a comment on a photo of a passage from an interrogation in which they were involved.

### *Beefs between drillers*

Thus far, we have presented several examples that provide insight into violent conflicts between drillers on social media. In the remainder of this chapter, we zoom in on three

beefs between the different drillers in our research. Two of these conflicts took place in the summer of 2020, during our digital fieldwork. One of these beefs dates from the period 2018–2019, but was referenced frequently by the drillers in our study. Based on the nature of our netnographic research, it is not always possible to determine the exact cause of these conflicts. Therefore, in our description, we mainly focus on explaining the development of these beefs between drillers, with specific attention to the online and offline dynamics of the conflicts.

### *“Fuck your dead homie”*

The first example centers around a driller from Rotterdam and Amsterdam. A screenshot of a DM of the driller from Rotterdam indicates that the drillers have been in contact since 2018. In fact, the screenshot reveals that the driller from Amsterdam sent several positive reactions to an earlier post on the driller from Rotterdam’s Instagram. Therefore, during the early moments of the beef the driller from Rotterdam stated: *“Men were fans in the past, you better chill”*, followed by three smiling emojis. At some point, a beef between the drillers seemed to have started, something that based on his reaction *“But what is the deal? Beef or what?”* did not seem to be clear to the driller from Amsterdam at first.

Although the origin of the conflict remains unclear, the development of the beef is broadcast online in detail, with various recordings on YouTube of digital interactions between the drillers. In one of these videos, he interacts with the driller from Amsterdam on Instagram Live. This functionality of Instagram allows followers to watch a digital interaction between people in a split screen. At the start of the recording, more than 350 people see the driller from Rotterdam showing a gun. The driller from Amsterdam, visible on the split screen, does not seem to be impressed and responds with laughter and the statement: *“Such a sweet little pistol”*. As the driller from Rotterdam walks through his living room with the gun, he asks: *“Ai no, where were you yesterday, G? Where were you yesterday?”* and he accused the other driller of hiding. Again, the driller from Amsterdam laughs. After mocking the first name of the driller from Rotterdam, he contests that the driller was in his neighborhood yesterday. Then, the drillers start talking over each other, specifically trading back-to-back accusations of not being “real” and being broke.

At that moment, more than 500 people are watching this session on Instagram Live. The interaction takes a turn when the driller from Amsterdam says: *“Fuck your dead mattie [Dutch slang for friend]”*, a direct insult to the Rotterdam-based driller who recently lost a close friend. *“Good for you”*, the Amsterdam driller repeats a number of times. With the number of viewers surpassing 650, the driller from Rotterdam seems to get more and more angry, saying: *“You are not a goon mattie, if I catch you mattie, if I catch you it’s over.”* Quite abruptly, the live sessions ends. In another session on Instagram live between the two drillers, the deceased friend of the driller from Rotterdam is referenced again. Sitting in a car and repeatedly pointing his camera at his firearm, the Rotterdam driller says: *“Ey brother, DM, DM me that address, I’m coming G, I’m coming G, you’re going to die brother for that disrespect to my homie”*, and then, with more than 250 people watching live, the session ends again.

In addition to insulting the deceased friend of the Rotterdam driller in the earlier live sessions, the Amsterdam driller also posts a video on Snapchat in which he says: *“Fucking*

[name of Rotterdam driller], with your dead friend, do something about it buddy.” Based on various images and videos on social media, the driller from Rotterdam seems to travel to various locations in the Rotterdam area where the driller from Amsterdam would supposedly hang out. However, the latter does not show up and the Rotterdam driller shares various posts on social media as proof that he tried to call the driller from Amsterdam while he was at the agreed locations, but that he did not answer. Despite the heated discussions and a number of musical and digital provocations and threats back and forth, however, this did not result in a physical confrontation between these two drillers.

***“Honestly, I can’t give you a fist bump”***

The second example concerns a short-lived beef that took place in the summer of 2020 and illustrates how violence that occurs on the physical street can end up on the digital street; for example, by posting photos and videos of violent incidents (cf. Irwin-Rogers et al., 2018, p. 404). In August 2020, images appear on various social media accounts of a fight between a driller from The Hague and various young people who claim to be part of a drill group from Rotterdam. Unlike the first example, it is possible to reconstruct how this conflict started, specifically because parts of the incident were filmed by several people and posted on social media. A Rotterdam driller directly involved in this beef shares various videos of the incident via Instagram Story. In a shot where he films himself, he heralds the sequence of posts:

Those people come up to me, they just come up to me. I’m just with a few friends. Boy, I give those people a fist bump, I want to dab these people up. They don’t want to give a fist bump, they just want to link with those people from [name of Amsterdam drill group] blablabla. I don’t care, because I’m not doing, nothing, I’m just an artist, those people come to me.

*(August 2020, Instagram)*

After this brief introduction, he posts the recording of the interaction he just described on Instagram. The video shows that the driller from Rotterdam wants to give a person, whose face is outside the frame of video but who is a driller from the city of The Hague, a fist bump. You can hear the driller from The Hague responding with: *“Honestly, I can’t give you a fist bump. I’m really with boys, you know right? From the other side”*.

The next story of the driller from Rotterdam is a selfie with the caption *“3 minutes later . . .”* What follows is a video with shaky footage in which the driller from The Hague is held down and beaten by several people. A text has been added to the video: *“Do not link with [name of Amsterdam drill group] and [name of Amsterdam driller] I repeat, do not link with them”*. With this caption, the driller from Rotterdam explains that the driller from The Hague was beat up because he chose a side in a beef that has existed for some time between drillers from Amsterdam and Rotterdam. The recording clearly shows that the driller from The Hague is hit on the head by two different young men and the driller from Rotterdam who posted the videos can be heard shouting: *“We are [name Rotterdam drill group], we are [name Rotterdam drill group]. Don’t bullshit, go to Damsco [street slang for Amsterdam]. Ey boys, beat that man to pieces”*. The video ends when the driller from The Hague stumbles away.

A few hours after the fight, the driller from The Hague posts an image of himself on Instagram with the following caption:

Just got jumped in Scheveningen [city nearby The Hague] by 15 men was fucking drunk a nigga pulled both my chains, I grabbed back my chains and pulled his, they start to jump me I was with 5 men but I had to fight alone. Had to give up fighting because they jumped me get from all sides. I came home with my LV [Louis Vuitton] bag on me with my iphone 11 my necklaces and that guy's. Everything has stayed on me. God is great #OneManArmy

(August 2020, Snapchat)

Later on, the driller from The Hague also posted photos online of the chains he had taken from his attackers. In another video he even professionally checks for how many carats of gold the chains are with the help of a specific liquid. In addition, he places a call on social media that he will take one of his followers to dinner with the proceeds from the sale of the chains.

The recording of the driller from The Hague being beaten by multiple people could be found on various social media accounts we followed during the course of our digital fieldwork. The result of posting this beef online for those directly involved—in this case the driller from The Hague—is that the (online) peer pressure may become so great, partly because the online audience on the digital street is many times larger and more anonymous than offline (Urbanik & Haggerty, 2018, p. 1356), that those involved feel compelled to respond with violence (Irwin-Rogers et al., 2018, p. 406). In this beef, however, that is not the case. In fact, the driller from The Hague posts the following message on his story on Instagram: “*Got a lot of love but The Hague stay calm I’m a man and make my own choices x ♥*”. Despite the fact that this beef was widely reported on social media, the driller from The Hague did not respond with violence.

*“Tomorrow I’m at Skiffa my location stays on nobody wacks me”*

The third and last beef we will discuss does have a violent outcome, with a young man dying after a stabbing incident. This violent encounter was preceded by a beef between rival drill groups from Amsterdam and Rotterdam. How the beef started could not be established based on the information on social media, and even one of the involved drillers from Rotterdam noted on social media that he was unclear on the origin of the conflict. The beef developed over the course of a few months on social media and saw a number of musical insults, but mostly digital provocations and online threats—some of which we discussed earlier in this chapter.

Most of the interactions between these rival drillers had a performative character and were aimed at establishing and reaffirming one’s own authenticity as a driller and deconstructing the poses of the other drillers. However, in the days leading up to the lethal incident, a driller from Rotterdam posted the following message on social media:

[Name Dutch drill groups], and everyone who links with them are fucking fag they are scared to do anything to me and my members. Only tough thing these guys do is threaten my girlfriend and expose our families. But we want to off them not their girls (two laughing emojis).

You are their fans, right. You tell them to meet somewhere in the middle of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, then we will fix that beef there at once.

I [name of Rotterdam driller] repeat I want to meet them all at once somewhere then we will fix it right there (wink emoji)

I know they don't want to do this and continue bullying my girlfriend [name of Rotterdam driller] bullying his girlfriend SAY THOSE MEN COME MEET ME

Today today we will fix it

*(August 2020, Snapchat)*

On the same day, an Amsterdam driller posts the following message on Snapchat: “*Tomorrow I'll be at Skiffa and my loca stays on nobody will wack me*”, indicating that he will go to Scheveningen (“*Skiffa*”) *the next day* and will keep his location function on his social media accounts on so that others can see where he is (“*my loca stays on*”), concluded by stating that no one will be able to harm him (“*nobody will wack me*”).

Towards the end of the next day, messages appear on various social media accounts about an incident that took place in Scheveningen. Not much later, someone posts a video of part of the incident. On the video you can see and hear that panic breaks out on the pier in Scheveningen. Boys and girls push each other aside, scream and try to run away. A person with a firearm runs through the video and gunshots can be heard in the background. Photos of a young man lying on the ground fighting for his life are posted as well. On August 10, 2020, 19-year-old Cennethson Janga—who was also known as “Chuchu”—lost his life on the pier of Scheveningen.

On social media, the death of this young man was celebrated by people who sided with the drillers from Amsterdam. Moreover, in the days and weeks following this incident, drillers from Amsterdam seemed to try to stir up the beef some more. Various messages appear on social media in which they ridicule the victim. At the end of October 2020, the drillers from Amsterdam even publish a song about that fatal day on the pier of Scheveningen in August 2020. In the song, which is called “The Pier”, one of the drillers from Rotterdam is ridiculed for abandoning his friend. They also proclaim that it was a pity that another driller from Rotterdam was not the fatal victim. Overall, as one of the drillers from Amsterdam raps, “*Looking back, yes I am proud*”.

## Conclusion

Drill music, notoriously infamous for its references to violent criminality, is a musical genre that has gained popularity across the globe. In the Netherlands, drill has been explicitly linked to the recent rise of violent crimes among young people (Bahara, 2019, 2020). In this chapter, our focus was on the social media usage of drillers from an exploratory study into the drill culture in Rotterdam (Roks & Van den Broek, 2020). Based on the online content uploaded by the drillers from our research, we described the insults, challenges, threats and conflicts that could be observed in the social media posts of the drillers in our study. Our results, in line with previous studies on drill in the United States (Stuart, 2020a, 2020b) and the United Kingdom (Ilan, 2020), show that violence in drill is not limited to the music, but is embedded in a broader digital street culture on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat. This digitization—or hybridization (Roks et al., 2021)—of street culture is increasingly studied, with an emphasis on the expressive practices on social media by street-oriented individuals and groups (see, among others, Lane, 2019; Moule et al., 2014;



Patton et al., 2017; Storrod & Densley, 2017; Stuart, 2020a, 2020b; Urbanik & Haggerty, 2018; Van Hellemont, 2012).

Where some such studies from the United States and the United Kingdom suggest that social media can act as a trigger or catalyst for physical, offline violence (Patton et al., 2013, 2017; Pyrooz et al., 2015; Moule et al., 2017; Irwin-Rogers et al., 2018; Irwin-Rogers & Pinkney, 2018; Lauger & Densley, 2018; Urbanik & Haggerty, 2018), some recent studies argue that social media also offers new opportunities and possibilities for de-escalating conflict and avoiding offline violence (Lane, 2019; Stuart, 2020a, 2020b; Lane & Stuart, 2022). What stands out in the examples in this chapter is the symbolic communication of violence. Even though the drillers in our study frequently post violent and provocative content online and allude to the ways in which they will act on these digital words and claims, the number of physical violence incidents as a result of these online expressions is limited. Much of the violence expressed by drillers on the social media platforms in this study can be seen as performative: geared toward communicating a dangerous and violent image more so than an actual willingness to commit physical violence (cf. Stuart, 2020a, 2020b). This is a first tentative indication that by no means does all the violence communicated online actually result in violent incidents, but also that young people use social media to settle online conflicts in a non-violent way (cf. Lane, 2019; Stuart, 2020b; Lane & Stuart, 2022).

Even though more violence is communicated in the online drill culture than actually takes place on the street, the course of the beefs that we have discussed in this chapter also makes clear that there is a certain risk associated with the online performance of violence. Communicating violence, certainly when it comes to specific provocations or threats, can result in physical violence. In fact, Stuart (2020a, p. 12) states that in Chicago “participation in drill and its related digital content greatly increases a young’s risk of exposure to violence”. This risk is increased when the authenticity of drillers is publicly questioned, but especially when rivals meet in real life (Stuart, 2020a, p. 7)—something that can be observed in the violent incident on the Pier of Scheveningen in August 2020.

Moreover, our research indicates that violence on the digital street, also symbolic acts of violence, have the potential to reach a large audience of friends, rivals, and other involved parties and, in this way, to influence the origin and developments of conflicts. Whereas in this chapter the focus has been on the digital interaction between drillers, expressions of violence and (group) conflicts on social media are not limited to those directly involved. After all, this digital content is visible online, is shared and thus reaches a much larger audience of fans and other consumers (of drill) who watch online (cf. boyd, 2014). How drillers, and young people in general, deal with this (online) pressure, however, needs to be examined in more detail in future research.

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