

**Road Hustler: Grifting, Magic and the Thief Subculture.** Expanded Edition  
 Robert C. Prus and C.R.D. Sharper  
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In this expanded edition of a work previously published in 1977, Robert Prus and his key informant, Sharper, provide an interactionist analysis of the world of professional road hustlers and compare them to magicians. Hustlers are involved in "systematic cheating" in card and dice gambling. Whereas "rough hustlers" are amateur gamblers, "professional hustlers" are completely immersed in hustling as a deviant career. They use impression management in controlling gambling encounters ensuring that their definition of reality is accepted by the "suckers."

However, this deception is contingent upon a division of labour within a small group called "the crew." The "mechanic" specializes in handling the equipment. The "shoot-up" man is the expert social chameleon. He convinces "suckers" to engage in gambling and "cools out" or calms down those taken. The "muscle man" protects crew members in those rare situations when other gamblers suspect cheating. Finally, there are the "boss" and the "contacts man." The latter is responsible for finding outlets for gambling business. He contacts "sponsors," or legitimate business people in various towns and cities, to gain invitations to annual events, conventions and stags. Despite this division of labour, most hustlers are able to adequately occupy multiple roles.

Like hustlers, magicians must successfully manage the art of deception to an audience. Craft magicians (who use few devices) are most comparable to hustlers. Both relate to small audiences and constantly strive to ensure their definition of reality is accepted. The audience is critical because the accomplishment of magic is an inter-subjective process. Craft magicians and hustlers acquire skills through interacting with other magicians and hustlers. They rely on a subcultural context to successfully engage in the social construction of deception.

Prus and Sharper use the social construction of deception in deviant (hustlers) and non-deviant (magicians) contexts to develop a microsociological theory of generic social processes. This emphasizes the relevance of the human experience, self-reflection, intersubjectivity, the negotiation of reality and the reflexive relation of researcher and respondents in understanding the transsituational and transcontextual quality of social life.

Through the use of comparative ethnographic materials, Prus and Sharper make a valuable contribution to microsociological theory. However, their dismissal of all "positivist" research (and inattention to other macrostructural accounts) is the short-coming of this work. Macrostructural research points to the relevance of social organization in providing the context for subcultural processes. Deception cannot be reduced to a variety of micro-contexts. It is informed by a broader ideological and cultural discourse which permeates life in capitalist and other industrial contexts. Prus and Sharper are correct in that "... once one permeates the deviant mystique, it becomes apparent that one does not need one social psychology for the deviants and one for the normals" (p. 168). However, we need to pay attention to broader social constraints which provide the context for all social interaction.