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EVENT DYNAMICS AND THE ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES  
IN URBAN YOUTH VIOLENCE

Final Report

Prepared by

Deanna L. Wilkinson, Ph.D.

With assistance from Anita Parker, Ashley Hicks, Mark Davis, Patrick J. Carr, Brice Williams, Shelly Bloom, Marquette McBryde, Chauncey Beaty, Rachel Awkward, Gizem Erdem, Kerry Bell, Atika Khurana, Amanda Magora, Marie Garcia, Keith Gooch, Lorianna Brigli, Susan Rivera, Regina Lurry, E. Butch Hunyadi, and  
the OSU Youth Violence Prevention Advisory Board

The Ohio State University

Columbus, Ohio

Department of Human Development and Family Science

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### EVENT DYNAMICS AND THE ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES

### IN URBAN YOUTH VIOLENCE

This report describes the methodology, findings, and policy implications of a secondary analysis of qualitative data that were originally gathered from 1995-1998 as part of the New York City Youth Violence Study (NYCYVS). The sample consists of 416 young violent male offenders from the South Bronx and East New York, two of the most violent neighborhoods in the nation. These young men gave lengthy interviews to “peer interviewers” who were matched by age, gender, and race/ethnicity to enhance rapport with respondents. In the course of the interviews (which also included accounts of youths’ life histories and their experiences across various life domains), respondents were asked to reconstruct 3-4 violent events: one where guns were present and used, one where guns were present but not used, and one where guns were not present. They recounted a total of 780 violent and near-violent events—from the “spark” that initiated the transaction through the details of the encounter and its aftermath—often reconstructing them with incredible detail. These event narratives are the data that inform the analysis that is presented in this report. The executive summary highlights the key findings from an NIJ-funded basic research study on male urban youth violence.

The approach taken here is event driven. That is to say, rather than follow the more traditional criminological approach of asking what distinguishes violent from non-violent youth in an attempt to identify characteristics of youth who are “predisposed” to violence, the researcher team turns their attention to the social context in which violence occurs in an effort to shed light on situational factors and contingencies that facilitate violence. The assumption is that the course and outcome of an event are shaped both by structural factors and by micro-level situational and transactional factors. This report describes what occurs at the level of the transaction—between offenders, victims, and the social context. It explains what effects these factors have on *when*, *where*, and *how* urban youth violence takes place and how they contribute to the differential severity of violent outcomes. Based on the analysis, the researchers developed a situational and transactional theory of urban youth violence. We also describe a model of how violent events unfold which describes the complexity of the stages involved in some violent events. Although violent transactions vary from simple to exceedingly complex, they have a predictable sequential flow. Finally, we discuss the implications of the research for intervention and violence prevention. The insights gleaned from the large number of violent events reported by a high risk sample of violent youth provide empirical grounding which can be used to develop new reduction strategies or enhance existing approaches. The

study provides insight for the first time into the myriad of situational and transactional factors that converge with the larger sociogeographical context to produce urban male youth violence, and that help explain its outcomes.

### **SPECIFIC AIMS OF THE RESEARCH**

The study had five specific aims: (1) to develop a typology of youth violence situations; (2) to examine how conflict situations evolve from angry arousal to violence; (3) to examine the variety of roles that third parties play in violent events; (4) to assess the utility of the situational crime prevention approach to preventing youth violence; and (5) to widely disseminate the results of this research to practitioners and policy makers. The following situational factors were considered important for our analyses:

**Actors/Participants:** who initiated the event, the respondent's relationship to the opponent (social ties, prior history, and territoriality), violent situational identity or status, and the presence and active involvement of third parties in the event;

**Proximal arousal and mental state:** respondent's feeling at the start of the event, if the event was premeditated, if the respondent was high or drunk, and sizing-up the likelihood of out-performing the other side;

**Spark or reason for the conflict:** what sparked the conflict, if the spark was perceived as serious (and by whom), did they agree on seriousness, and how the spark was expressed;

**Contexts:** physical location, time of day, audience presence;

**Facilitators:** weapon type; type of drug/alcohol used;

**Actions:** opening moves, defining moment, ending moves, use of violence, use of weapons;

**Outcomes:** event severity in terms of injury/death, police awareness of event, police action, event closure status;

**Aftermaths:** if anyone was hospitalized, changed where they hung-out, felt the need for extra protection after event, anticipated a need to retaliate, anticipated that additional drama or conflict would follow, if there was gossip about the event, if respondent's reputation improved or people treated him differently after the event, if alcohol or drugs were used immediately after the event.

In order to develop a typology of event scripts (based on the sequences or stages) for youth violence, we placed particular emphasis on the opening interactions, interpretations of social cues, the relational distance between actors, and perceptions of the other participants' hostile intent from the respondent's point of view. By breaking down event narratives into a

sequence of social transactions, we were able to evaluate the micro-decisions actors make during the course of disputes. The analyses focused on the micro-actions by youth in different types of events and allowed for a thorough sorting of interactions across domains (e.g., sequence... by spark, by weapon type, by victim-offender relationship, by outcome). Prior research suggests that the interplay between the principal disputants and others in the immediate setting is important for understanding conflict escalation to violence (see Decker, 1995; Felson & Steadman, 1983; Luckenbill & Doyle, 1989; Oliver, 1998; Wilkinson & Fagan, 1996). The analyses attempted to identify the influence of the temporal antecedents in each of the events described. We further specify the emergent transactional model by focusing on the sequential stages of the event and the roles that actors play as the event “moves” through time.

To examine precisely how third parties shape violent and near violent events in youth violence we compared and contrasted events according to the presence or absence of third parties in order to develop additional perspectives on how principal actors’ definitions of event seriousness vary when conflict is observed by others.

To accomplish these goals and objectives we conducted qualitative data analysis using an abductive (moving back and forth from inductive to deductive logic) analytical strategy (Adler & Adler, 2008; Gilgun, 2005) and a modified event structure analysis (Heiss, 1979, 1997). The rich dataset was used to identify typologies of the structure, process, and contingent forms of violent situations focusing on understanding the variations across event domains. The overarching youth violence model that emerged from the qualitative analyses reflects the heterogeneity of violence among male adolescents and young adults. It also captures the varieties of event dynamics by identifying which of many situational factors are likely contingencies in the escalation of conflict to violence. We describe the situational features of the 780 near-violent and violent events coded on a variety of domains. The challenge in creating a typology of youth violence from event narratives is that there are numerous situational factors that are relevant to understanding the heterogeneity of youth violence. Most of the event descriptions were sufficiently detailed to permit us to move beyond the types of past analyses with incidents reported by a younger sample of violent men. The model captures emergent situational features of conflict events as well as the dynamic unfolding of events. We also explore how Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) strategies could be used to prevent youth violence. Offender perspectives provide valuable insights into why and how youth do what they do. We are largely “outsiders” to this destructive social world and the narrative data help us get a clearer sense of the situational determinants that shape involvement in urban male youth violence - particularly gun violence.

## **METHODS**

The original study from which this NYCYS project evolved was known as the Columbia University Gun Study. Dr. Jeffrey Fagan was the Principal Investigator and Deanna Wilkinson was the Project Director/Co-Investigator. The data were collected from 1995 to 1998.

Interviews were conducted with a targeted sample of 416 active violent offenders from two New York City neighborhoods. The primary field methods were in-depth interviews and biographical methods focusing on the social and symbolic construction of violent events (Cornish, 1993; 1994; Oliver, 1994). The interviews were quite detailed, and in addition to the violent events of primary interest, they covered a wide range of topics including neighborhood characteristics, family experiences, school, employment, friendships, youth and street culture, attitudes toward violence, criminal activity, perceptions of the criminal justice system, guns, drug use, and future goals. Respondents were asked to reconstruct 3-4 violent events: one where guns were present and used; one where guns were present and not used; and one where guns were not present. Data were collected on at least one violent event per person, with an average of 2.27 events per individual. Events included both completed and non-completed (near) violent situations; the latter group included events where violence was avoided in a variety of situational and social contexts. "Peer" interviewers were used to increase interviewer-respondent rapport and enhance data collection efforts. Proximate age, race/ethnicity, and gender matches between the interviewer and interviewee were deemed necessary for the study's success.

The NYCYS dataset is a great resource for gaining a deeper understanding of the social worlds of youth whose lives are enmeshed in violence. It was designed with great emphasis on trying to understand youths' experiences across life domains (family, neighborhood, peers, school, employment, relationships, and the criminal justice system) and developmental stages (reflections on childhood, adolescence and emerging adulthood). This executive summary provides an overview of our final report to the NIJ which will be released in 2009. The NYCYS dataset will be made available to scholars through the ICPRS national archive.

The sampling design targeted males between the ages of 16 and 24 from three pools of subjects:

- Individuals convicted of illegal handgun possession or a violent offense (the criminal justice sample, n= 150 or 36%),
- Individuals injured in a violent transaction (the hospital sample, n=62 or 15%), and
- Individuals identified by screening as having been actively involved in violence in the previous six months (the neighborhood samples, n= 204 or 49%).

Current or previous residency in one of the study neighborhoods was an eligibility criterion. The criminal justice sample includes recently released individuals (n=127) and incarcerated individuals (n=23). The young men in the jail sample were interviewed at Rikers Island in a private office ordinarily used for psychological counseling. Participants in the hospital sample were recruited at Lincoln hospital and Kings County hospital by researchers working with hospital staff to identify violently injured youth. Most hospitalized youth were interviewed in their hospital rooms or in private offices in the hospital. The neighborhood samples were

generated using chain referral or snowball sampling techniques. Study procedures were approved by institutional review boards at Rutgers, State University of New Jersey and Columbia University, and the data were protected by a Federal Certificate of Confidentiality issued by the National Institutes of Health. The full details of the original study methodology are described elsewhere (Wilkinson, 2003). The current secondary data analysis project was reviewed and approved by the IRB at The Ohio State University.

The study sample included an array of respondents and incidences that qualitatively reflect what are thought to be the characteristics of both violent offenders and violent events. The sample consists of individuals who have completed a period of criminal incarceration for a violence-related offense and those recruited from the study neighborhoods.

### KEY FINDINGS

From the event narratives, we are able to identify characteristics of violence as social interactions fits nicely into symbolic interactionists framework (Anderson, 1999; Felson, 1993; Goffman, 1963, 1967, 1983; Heise, 1991; Oliver, 1994; Strauss, 1958). Particularly, we can identify how actors move through settings and scenes, read contextual cues, develop action frames, evaluate the potential of other actors, and play roles across a broad range of youth violence incidents. The configurations across these event structures provide insights into the qualitative differences between violent situations of varying levels of seriousness and how actors respond to them. From these findings we have developed an emergent situational and transactional theory of urban youth violence. We hit the high points of that complex theory here but recommend that readers consult the full report for greater understanding of the study. The key findings of our study are summarized below:

- **The event sample includes a diverse set of violent and near-violent events that can help in understanding the differences across levels of severity of events.** The analysis revealed six categories of event outcome severity: near- violence, violence but no injury, violence with minor injuries, violence with missing information on injury status, violence with serious injuries, and violence that resulted in one or more deaths. Near-violent events in which there was conflict - but no escalation to physical violence or weapon use - are included to provide additional perspective on factors distinguishing one type from another.
- **Although there are numerous triggers or “sparks” to violent events among young urban males, by far the most common involve challenges to masculine identity or status.** We classified 26 event sparks or issues. The most common spark was an identity threat or challenge to one's personal status, masculinity or respect. What is deemed offensive behavior that is "worthy" of serious violence is determined partly by prior knowledge of similar situations. We have no specific way of proving that violent scripts exist other than looking at how actors react in similar situations. Considering the consistency with which we see youth in this study reacting to disrespectful behavior

with first a request for restoration and then an escalation in conflict, it is apparent that youth care more about being disrespected when others are watching. They consider whether their planned course of action will be successfully achieve their moment-specific goals. Young men also used violence when competing for females, as part of the drug business, in robbery situations, to exact revenge, in the defense of others, in cheating or unfair play situations, in self-defense, over money or unpaid debts, over neighborhood or nondrug-related territorial disputes, over misunderstandings, in response to gossip (he said, she said), out of jealousy, when rebuked for action, and a variety of other less frequent sparks. In the majority of events, youth point to a spark or reason for the conflict. Spark type is important, particularly as it relates to the perceived *seriousness* of the potential conflict. Seriousness relates to the amount of harm or damage the grievance represents to the actors. The issue that sparks a conflict can impact reputation/identity, group memberships, access to resources, health and safety for self and others, and territorial rights. The greater the likelihood of harm across these categories; the greater the need to use violence.

- **The use of violence in disputes between young urban males is often motivated by a desire for dominance, control, and personal safety in situations that are perceived as threatening.** We found that youth make a variety of presumptions about the hostile intentions of potential opponents they encounter as they go about their daily lives. Youth read unknown situations as extremely dangerous requiring the highest levels of vigilance and preemptive violence, if necessary. The young men in the study were very sensitive to overt and symbolic attacks on their social standing and identity. They often read cues in social situations in order to establish the credibility of potential threats as well as to figure out how to gain control (the upperhand) in the situation. They expected to be treated with respect despite disrespecting others. The youth in this study were primarily concerned about their safety and establishing/maintaining their social identities.
- **From youths' perspective, the status risks associated with backing down from a conflict frequently outweigh the physical risks to self associated with violent behavior.** Youth are particularly concerned about their reputation and status among peers, seeking justice, and the risks to their personal safety. Youth on both sides of the conflict process information on the spark characteristics combined with information on the identity/status of the actors involved in the conflict. Often the assessment of harm/risk is conducted in a split-second after the spark occurs. Their calculations about what observers will think of their response to a provocation toward violence rarely include any type of validation.
- **Youth exhibit evidence of territoriality concerns and classic "in-group" "out-group" conflict.** Youth move through neighborhood spaces with varying degrees of territorial claim and perceived safety. Physical location or context is most likely to spawn violence

when the routine activities of physical spaces promote the mixing of youth from different geographic areas and social networks, and when there is greater social distance between youth. Some type of social exchange is typically necessary for conflict to erupt to violence. In some cases one side can dominate while the other side remains relatively unengaged.

- **Young males who victimize others in violent conflict most often blame their opponents for the conflict and feel justified in their actions. Peers tend to reinforce this view.** Violent behaviors are typically justified by transferring blame or responsibility to the actions of the opponent. The retelling of the conflict story during the aftermath stages often includes conversation among peers in which others neutralize or glorify the violent actions responsible for a “win” for the in-group. This is particularly true in the events that sparked from the drug business where social order is regulated through violence. Markets are stable when one crew has dominance over a particular territory or drug. Trouble starts when the market pressures get tight and dealers have to compete for business with other nearby competitors. Interlopers and those groups who attempt to gain market share through violence often take up battle with competing drug dealers from adjacent or nearby housing locations.
- **The vast majority of violent and near-violent events are observed by third parties. The escalation or de-escalation of these events is influenced in critical ways by the presence, identity, and reactions of these observers/bystanders.** Third parties (of all types) were present during nearly 95% of the violent and near-violent events reported by the sample. Social ties between the sides influence the perceived opportunity for violence with close ties decreasing the likelihood of using serious violence; whereas, distant ties increase the likelihood of violence. The opposing sides come together in physical and relational space. The social relationships between actors or *social ties* are important for determining how conflict unfolds. Dimensions of social ties in this study include: the type of *relationships* between youth involved in conflict, knowledge or information about others, insider vs. outsider status, and any *prior history of conflict* between the specific sides. The social ties between third parties or bystanders who may witness the event with each of side of the conflict could also play a role in how the event unfolds. Most important among 3rd party characteristics is *partisanship*, *stake* in the conflict, *capability* (for violence), and *risk of harm* to self. The principal actors in the conflict size-up each other as well as the bystanders. This assessment happens rapidly as youth read social cues in the situation to determine what others are likely to do. Youths' perceptions of "the other(s)" and how their own behavior and status will be perceived by people in the scene are significant in shaping context-specific action.
- **In conflict situations, youths' perceptions of how observers will view their actions and status are significant in shaping their responses.** Across the large event sample, we identified key factors about the focal participants that were important in order to

develop a theory that fits the data. Specifically, *reputation* (with regard to violence), *group membership*, *presence*, and *involvement* at the scene of conflict, *capability* in terms of being armed with a weapon, weapon type, being experienced in violence, age, physical size and strength, and *arousal* (intoxication, premeditation, and emotional state). Youth on both sides of the conflict make assessments of the situation based on their own characteristics as well as those of their opponent(s). When group members or associates are present at the scene of conflicts, their violence potential or capability is factored into the youths' assessments about event's outcome.

- **The presence of weapons and/or alcohol or drugs significantly increases the outcome severity of violent encounters.** Youth reported extremely easy access to guns among their peers in the neighborhood. Assessing the weapon-related capability of an opponent was an important strategy for the young men in the study particularly when their perception was that anyone could get a gun but only some would have the nerve to use it. Having a gun in a moment of angry arousal increased the likelihood that a conflict would advance to some type of shooting. Drug and alcohol affects were evident in decision making, intensified emotional states, exaggerated affect, diminished capacity for self-regulation, deviance disavowal, and other cognitive processes. For example, respondents indicated that language was more provocative when actors were intoxicated and that language often “amped up” otherwise minor disputes into violent encounters. Some said they tended to take bystanders’ urgings to fight more seriously when under the influence. While cognitive impairment was evident for some, others noted that their decisions while drinking reflected complex strategic judgments about the interactions that often precede the decision to fight or withdraw.
- **Most violent events take place in public places that are poorly monitored by adults. In these settings, peer observers who have close ties to the opponent tend to escalate and even join in the fray.** Our analysis reveals that it is not only the *what* that matters but also the *how*, *who*, *when* and *where* that are important. How a grievance is expressed is vital. In many ways the *how* partially defines the *what* of conflict. The scenes/settings of youth violence can be divided along two major dimensions: (a) private vs. public and (b) controlled vs. uncontrolled spaces. The types of activities that define a physical space and the configurations of the people who frequent the location are also important. For example, the majority of these events occur in social venues which attract crowds and are difficult to monitor, regulate, and control. These venues are generally ambiguous in terms of territorial rights and may be illegal to start with, often facilitating other types of illegal activities such as underage drinking or illegal drug use/sale. The actors in these violent events include the antagonist, the protagonist, the co-offending antagonists, the co-offending protagonists, the allied audience, the neutral audience, the vicarious audience, and the agent(s) of social control. There are several facilitating “props” that are important in understanding how conflict unfolds such as the music genre, the presence of desired females, the reputation of the spot, use of

controlled substances, the presence of male and female audience members, available weapons, and other objects in the space.

- **Compared to violent events, near-violent events tend to be characterized by a provocation or “spark” that is perceived as relatively minor, by a respectful mode of expression, by close social ties between the combatants, by the lack of guns, and by the intervention of third party bystanders or observers.** Perhaps even more important than the *seriousness* is the *mode of expression* or the way in which youth confront each other with a grievance. Youth are also influenced by potential *alternative* explanations, redirection, and exits. Youth are much more likely to seek alternatives when the opponent is a friend or acquaintance rather than a stranger.
- **The decisions that actors make during the course of violent disputes are frequently numerous and complex, much more so than has been suggested by prior researchers.** The theoretical model gleaned from the event data illustrates that youth are making numerous decisions before, during, and after violent or near-violent events. Decision-making is both individualized and collective. Information is processed rapidly and youth ultimately make decisions based on incomplete, often inaccurate information. The calculus of costs and benefits includes factors beyond legal consequences, which are often only considered well after youth have engaged in violence. Because violence is a form of exchange between two or more parties, our model starts with the most critical characteristics of the identity/status of the major participants/actors. The conflict itself can be viewed as a form of communication and coercion. Actors project a certain image from the onset of conflict that includes rejecting stigma, disrespect, and other types of degrading action that may occur in the course of social interaction.
- **Youth are continuously integrating information about place, people, alliances and obligations, violence potential, harm potential, strategic movement to gain advantage, options for exit, and emotional arousal.** Youth make assessments of the costs/benefits/risk/harm from the social cues they read from actors at the scene. If youth find themselves at a capability disadvantage or they are disinterested in pursuing violence, they will attempt to create ways to avoid violence. Alternatively, youth will capitalize on situations in which their side is clearly advantaged by moving the conflict forward toward violence. This is not to say that all aspects of violent events are calculated or that youth are fully informed of the costs/benefits/harm/risks when conflicts escalate to violence. They are not.
- **The opening move of conflict is most often an action or inaction that sparks the two sides toward engagement in social interaction.** The interaction is defined as conflict particularly when one side makes demands, insults, threatens, accuses, or otherwise provokes a response from the other. The issue or spark may be minor or extremely

serious and the participants may agree on the definition of the spark's seriousness or they may disagree completely. Conflict can escalate to violence in either circumstance depending on how actors express their grievances, who is present, who might join the conflict if one of the main combatants starts to lose and a host of other contingencies. Contextual or situational cues include: verbal versus nonverbal cues, threat of physical harm (including concrete facts such as size differentials, being outnumbered, being off, being out armed), the lethality of the threat (gun vs. non-gun, knife vs. no weapon), the threat of reputational damage, threat of relationship status damage (fear of rejection by peer group, losing the girl), victim vulnerability and relative weakness, and victim blameworthiness.

- **Violent events unfold across a variety of stages and periods.** We have identified the following sequential stages: *anticipatory stage* (reading cues, interpreting action/non-action as problematic); *opening moves* (threats, attacks, accusations, insults, degrading behavior, inconsiderate behavior); *counter moves* (accounts, resistance, denial, attack, threat escalation, issuing warnings); *escalation/intensification stage*; *brewing period*; *casting stage*; *persistence stage*; *early violence stage* (actual violence); *stewing period* (if a pause in action); *intensified violence stage*; *closing moves* (resolution, disruption, stalling tactics, fleeing the scene, additional threats); *outcomes* (injury, injury treatment, arrest); *assessment stage* (harm done –physical, emotional, status, and material); *aftermaths* (fear, avoidance behaviors, acute stress response, enhanced self-protection, gossip, reputational status shifts, revenge planning, self-medication with drugs/alcohol, and celebration with drugs/alcohol); *retaliatory planning stage* (additional act of violence linked to a previous event); and *anticipatory stage*. The “full” sequential model represents how the most complex violence events unfold and over 100 events fit this complex type. Other events *move through an average of 4-5 of the stages*. What we captured here suggests that *the violence* process can vary along a continuum of complexity which depends partly on whether weapons *are used*, whether injuries are sustained, and the group nature of the event.
- **In many instances youth prefer self-help rather than going to the police in violent incidents.** Respondents indicate that self-help or self-reliance was preferred over bringing the criminal justice system into dispute resolution processes. There is a profound lack of faith in law enforcement or complete mistrust/disdain for police officers. The youth believe that the criminal justice system does not recognize their grievances, thus, if the criminal justice system is called, there is a significant likelihood that the facts of the case will not be investigated adequately and the wrong parties could be taken into custody. Additionally, many of the youth admit that their social status within their peer group may *be challenged if* they opted for calling the police rather than using self-help. We also find strong evidence for a lack of reliance on other authority figures to resolve disputes or other criminal acts (see Wilkinson, Beaty, & Lurry, 2009).

## EXAMINING YOUTH VIOLENCE FROM A SITUATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION PERSPECTIVE

The five domains of Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) must be considered in terms of what these categories would mean to youth at risk for violence. Removing access to weapons (particularly guns) would *increase the effort* required of youth to seriously harm their opponent. Similarly, controlling place entry and exits would also increase the effort required to commit violence. In terms of *increasing the risk* of committing violence, most of the SCP relates to the risks of getting caught rather than the risks of the event itself. The reality is that youth take numerous risks in order to engage in violence: including potential death, serious injury, exclusion from groups or places, reputational risk, social group member risks, arrest, and potentially incarceration. Increased surveillance capability would be useful but only effective if it lead to increased use of formal social control mechanisms or it translated into informal third party interventions that deescalated conflict and promoted peaceful resolutions. Tense relations between the police and residents in many urban communities make effective surveillance difficult, but improved police-community relations and increased community capacity to exert informal social control are critical elements in increasing the risks of committing youth violence. These strategies move beyond SCP but certainly are in line with the same goals.

The next category is *reducing the rewards* of committing the crime. The rewards of violence could include social standing or identity status, gaining material goods, gaining illicit market positioning, gaining relationship positioning, eliminating a rival, domination, biochemical arousal/pleasure reactions to the act of using violence, relieving fear of victimization, victory, and so on. Many of these issues are rewards that are experienced as internalized affective responses by the participants in violent events. Most of the rewards we have identified would be “distributed” by youths’ social group. The more isolated youth are from other potential reference groups the less likely it would be to reduce the rewards. In order to *reduce the provocations* for violence, we must pay attention to how youth make sense of the verbal and non-verbal actions of their opponent(s). Young marginalized urban minority males face increased stress and frustration as a result of the cumulative impact of family instability, joblessness, discrimination, substance abuse and other mental health problems, chronic poverty, disenfranchisement from institutions, mass incarceration, and other structural conditions (Anderson, 2008). In terms of provocation, it is important to consider what people bring to situations (cumulative disadvantage) and what transpires when people engage in social interaction that potentially leads to conflict. The examples provided by Clarke and Cornish (2003) under this category do not easily fit to urban youth violence events. We will come back to this point later in our discussion of what goals youth are pursuing when they use violence against each other. The final category of the SCP framework is to *remove excuses* for violence. Under this global category Clarke and Cornish (2003) suggest that rule setting, posting

instructions, alerting conscience, assisting compliance, and controlling drugs/alcohol would be important situational crime prevention techniques.

A focus on the “places” of youth violence is one obvious area in which situational crime prevention techniques will be relevant. Disputes erupt during the course of everyday activities and particular types of disputes (those that escalate, involve guns, involve multiple participants) are more likely to occur in largely unregulated public spaces. Although street corners, sidewalks, and stoops are generally open to the observation of many people in a densely populated urban neighborhood, they are also ambiguous spaces in terms of social control. Within schools, jails, parks, bars, apartment buildings, and other “closed” settings violence is likely to cluster in spaces with less surveillance, ambiguous definitions of who is in charge, and expectations about what types of behaviors would be tolerated in the space.

We identified seven central themes that are gleaned from an understanding of events as they unfold that complicate applying SCP to urban youth violence. They include:

- Co-offending –collective decision making
- Audience matters for calculation of costs & rewards (during and after the event)
- Prediction problems –configurations across situational factors may inform the constellation of “necessary” conditions for conflict to escalate to violence
- Population most in need of guardianship is least likely to get it
- Youth specifically avoid places with surveillance
- Assessing rewards and risk need to reflect adolescent thinking and (not thinking)
- Conflict moves across spaces

It is clear that in order to implement several of the SCP techniques the social order of violence-prone settings would also need to change. Part of that social order is the co-offending structure of conflict.

Adult withdrawal from public spaces makes those spaces more likely to attract crime and ultimately become youth-dominated spaces (Wilkinson, 2007). The question becomes what would it take for authorities or community residents to reclaim public spaces that have been ambiguous, neglected, or otherwise abandoned? Those places attract motivated offenders. Part of the reason there are hotspots of youth violence is that particular physical and social settings provide cues to youth who enter those settings that violence is common, perhaps necessary, and certainly expected in that setting. Setting rules and posting notices of those rules in unregulated places does not make a lot of sense unless those places will become regulated and rules will be enforced. In terms of alerting conscience it seems reasonable to educate youth that fighting and other forms of violence are criminal acts with real consequences. Whether posting such notices would have an impact on youth is an empirical question. Youth often reported feeling justified in their use of violence. They also provided a list of excuses for why handling conflict with violence was appropriate from their perspective. Our data suggests that youth are not

thinking about lower levels of violence and aggression as criminal behavior. Fighting is perceived as something males do.

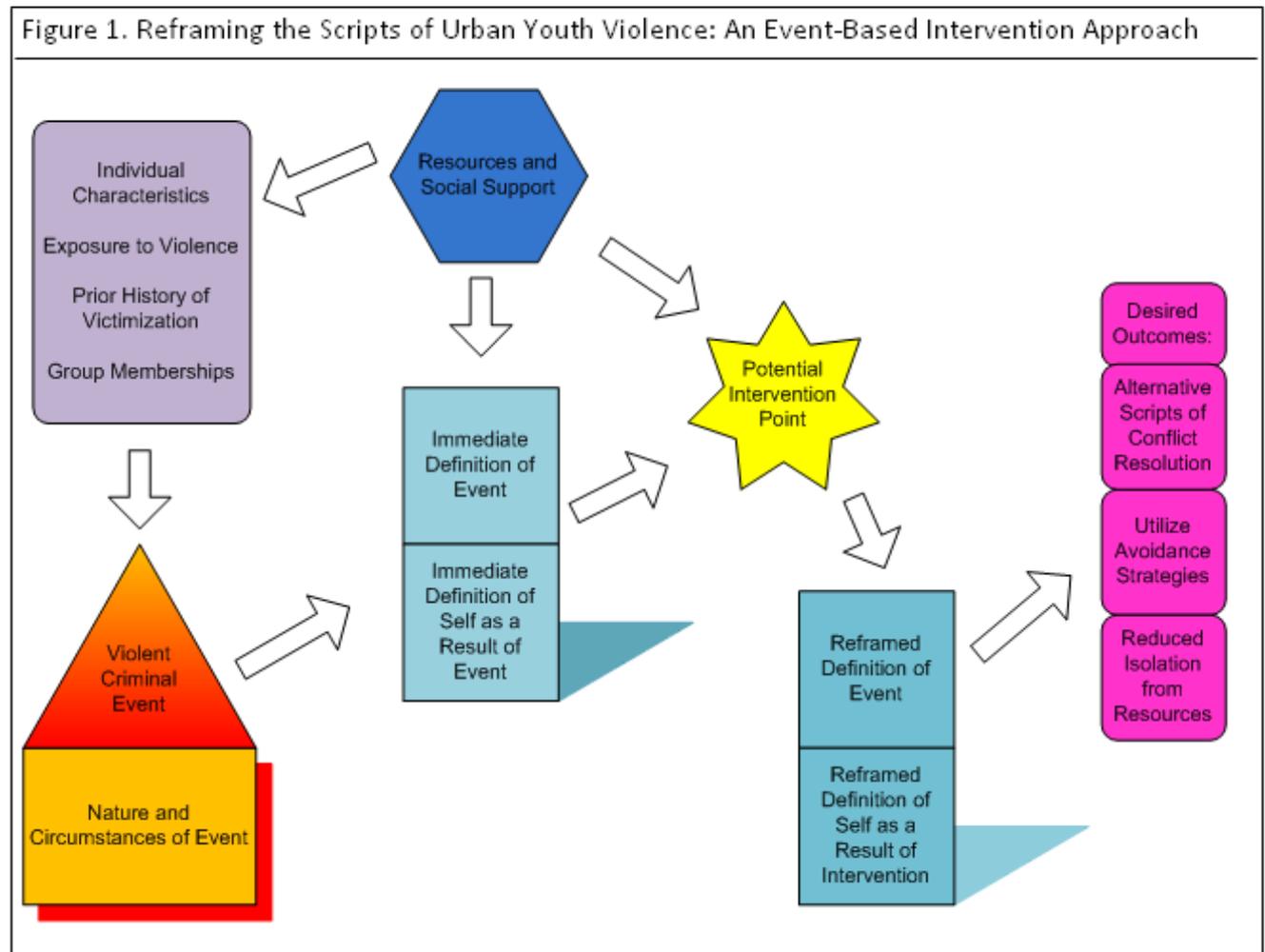
SCP calls for understanding the crime triangle and the perspectives of each potential participant in a crime event. Perhaps the most useful role of the NYCYS data is to provide insights into what offenders are thinking before, during, and after violent and near-violent events. The data also provide insights into what victims are thinking as respondents also reported events in which they were victimized. The rational choice model underlying SCP makes assumptions about how individuals evaluate costs and benefits. It assumes particular types of values/goals and time perspective that did not match up with what youth in our sample thought about costs and benefits at the time of the crime. Without making moral judgments on the perspectives of violent youth, we can better understand how violent youth come to justify their actions in the contexts in which violence unfolds. What did the young men in the NYCYS value? This question is extremely important in terms of figuring out how to reduce youth violence but it is not easily answered.

We were able to identify some of the key aspects of youths' goals/values including: self-worth, respect (worth or value within a social group), autonomy, freedom, acceptance, social standing, protection/security, economic viability, survival, excitement, and social relationships. None of the items on this list is outside the range of healthy adolescent development. The problematic part of achieving these goals is that most youth in our study did not have adequate family, community, or societal supports to reach some or all of the values/goals. Youth were challenged to overcome multiple layers of disadvantage in order to get their basic needs met. Youths' global values and goals may not necessarily match with the more proximal goals during potential conflict situations as their actions are more likely to reflect the immediate need for survival, preservation of social standing, preservation of rights, and avoiding consequences directly related to that moment in time. Values/goals are only a small part of the explanation of the social geometry of violence. Other aspects that are critically important are youth evaluations of the danger inherent in the environment and their expectations about how others will behave in that environment. The ways in which youths integrate a violent experience into their self-perception can only be understood within the context of knowing how others responded, how emotions were managed, and whether violence was condoned or condemned by members of the social network. Our theoretical model proposes that involvement in violent incidents can be a pivotal moment for youth if there are alternatives in place.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION**

In Figure 1, an event-based intervention heuristic model is presented. Research has found that people are more receptive to change in times of crisis or when life events somehow alter the potential future directions. Involvement in a violent dispute may be an opportunity for a

“teachable moment” in the youths’ life. The moment will be lost if youth are socially isolated from caring adults or others who could provide resources for transforming a difficult situation into a turning point. Youth may be relatively more reflective and malleable right after something dramatic happens to them --particularly in cases in which they or one of their friends is seriously injured or worse. It makes sense to think that a violent injury serious enough to require hospital care would cause an individual to pause and search for meaning. It also makes sense to think that an arrest and potential of serving time for a violent felony would similarly cause a person to pause. While these assumptions seem logical they are untested. We have described at least two barriers that complicate breaking the cycle of violence in disadvantaged high violence neighborhoods. First, supportive relationships between youth involved in violence and adults are rare. Second, youth seek and get violence-reinforcing messages and general social support from their near same-age peers.



A serious violent event affects many parts of the larger systems that organize society. The tasks associated with handling violent conflict are differentiated in such way that one part

may impede the ability of another to intervene effectively. For example, in most jurisdictions, legal statutes require that medical staff notify law enforcement in all case of firearm injury. Studies in Philadelphia found that compliance with the law was infrequent. The needs of the medical and justice system work at odds with each other. Because patient confidentiality and trust is important in providing quality medical care and in establishing creditability with patients in order to affect change, cooperating with police investigations may interfere with patient care. This same type of tension can exist between law enforcement, schools, community agencies, and parents who interact closely with young people.

There are currently no coordinated strategies across systems. The question becomes, what is the best way to "reach" a young person who has learned to resolve conflicts with violence? What is the best way to intervene to change the effects that high rates of exposure to violence in particular neighborhoods have on young people as they are growing? We know that adequate social supports are not available for many youth. We also know that individuals are resilient and develop coping strategies including using violence to deal with prior victimization experiences. One major way that youth without adequate support process their involvement in violent events is through repeated social interactions with the peer network. Coordinated efforts would make the most sense; the group process needs to be integrated into our strategies for addressing the urban youth violence problem across every system. Establishing protocols for information sharing, collective decision making, and getting the buy-in from agencies with diverse views of the problem and the offender will likely be a great challenge. We feel it is important to start with offenders' networks and use the information that is gathered during investigations, community responses, medical treatment, and court proceedings to prevent future violent crimes. In order to have an impact on violence reduction at the community level it is important to plot the social organization of delinquent youth groups across geographic space and to maintain data on which groups are aligned, at war or non-conflicting, and experiencing internal strife. When a violent incident happens between groups of youth it is important to understand the relationships between co-offenders and combatants. When charges are filed for a violent crime involving multiple co-offenders what happens to those records as they move through the juvenile or criminal justice system? For example, are co-offenders charged the same? Do they see the same judge? If they are sentenced to detention, do they go to the same facility? Are they assigned to the same probation or parole officer? If yes, is that working? If no, is information shared about what is learned from interactions with co-offenders that might be relevant for affecting change?

Violence, especially serious violence, is traumatic for all people who are present when it occurs. Youth who engage in violence are negatively affected by violence in a variety of ways even if there is no serious injury. As we described in Wilkinson and Carr (2008), over their limited life course, the youth in the NYCYS sample have been highly exposed to violent conflict. Despite documented high rates of community violence in many American cities, very few services are available to assess or treat associated mental health and social/emotional development problems among youth navigating those dangerous spaces. Second, even given

neighborhood conditions that foster violence, events often only occur or are prevented because of a confluence of circumstances, such as the role of peers and bystanders in isolation from effective social control. Increasing the opportunities for prosocial interactions or somehow underscoring the positive interventions of peers can be instrumental in reducing violent events. More specifically, since many conflicts resemble contests of character among primary actors, attention should be paid to identify ways to deescalate conflict in ways that allow both sides to save face.

At a community level, developing and testing informal mechanisms to mediate conflict and assist youth in making sense of the violent event is a worthwhile strategy. Variations of this approach have been tried in gang mediation programs and other community-based strategies that attempt to break into the isolated youth groups to negotiate peace no matter how short lived. These efforts are labor intensive and require the employment of powerful leaders who are respected by youth in the community. Evidence from the CeaseFire Chicago model validates these recommendations and provides a blueprint for the types of strategies identified here (Skogan, Harnett, Bump & DuBois, 2008; Slutkin, 2008). Prior to the initial writing of this report, we had not reviewed any empirical studies on the effectiveness of these strategies or the challenges to implementation. Our recommendations come from our findings. The Chicago model emphasizes the important role of credible messengers to reach high risk youth who are already involved in gun violence and gangs. The findings highlighted here provide powerful evidence of how violence spreads among youth who are highly exposed to violence and isolated away from mainstream activities.

We believe that caring adults who want to make a difference in breaking the cycle of violence among youth and young adults should read the interview data closely. In doing so they may find additional insights on how to best influence youth and promote healthy development. The event narratives illustrate how youth are caught up in a vicious cycle that perpetuates pain, suffering, and hopelessness. Youth and their families have to be a major part of the solution if we are going to end this cycle. In at least half of the violent events described in this study, there was prior conflict between youth and their opponent(s). Offender thinking about violence could be used to tailor prevention and intervention strategies. The situational patterns of violent events provide clues to law enforcement and service providers about how to improve security in the spaces youth occupy and often control.

Replication studies are needed to further validate the Chicago model and continue to experiment with a coordinated approach to addressing the urban youth violence problem. The efforts need to start in the community with parents, neighbors, community leaders, and agency professionals who interact routinely with neighborhood youth. Alternative conflict resolution strategies need to be developed and practiced consistently by adults as an important tool in teaching nonviolence. In our current approach, we teach youth to appeal to authority and the legal system for resolving conflict. Youth in the NYCYS do not have faith in the system to

handle their grievances so they use the tools they know—violence. *They need different tools!*  
Community leaders and justice practitioners need more effective tools too.

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## CHAPTER 1.

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Aggression by young people who are exposed to violence can be viewed as an adaptive strategy that seeks to order dangerous and unpredictable environments (Anderson, 1999; Latzman & Swisher, 2005; Ng-Mak, Salzinger, Feldman, & Stueve, 2002; Ng-Mak, Salzinger, Feldman, & Stueve, 2004). In this framework, adolescent violence is viewed as being protective within violent contexts and a way to survive in difficult environments, albeit with maladaptive consequences (Garbarino, 1999). Much of this work focuses on the positive emotional outcomes of adaptive violence such as the low rates of depression among self-professed violent youth (Latzman & Swisher, 2005; Ng-Mak et al., 2004). Other research posits that violence is often emergent from specific interactional situations wherein interpersonal dynamics provide the basis for violent confrontations (Athens, 1997; Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998; Felson, 1993; Hughes & Short, 2005; Katz, 1988; Luckenbill, 1977; Miethe & Meier, 1994; Oliver, 1998; Tedeschi & Felson, 1994; Wilkinson, 2003; 2007). In this latter work, youth violence is both adaptive for the individual and emergent from the situational context, what we would term transactional violence (also see Campbell & Gibbs, 1986). For youth who report extremely high levels of exposure to violence, the probability of confronting a situation in which violence is “called for” is also very high. Transactional violence can be used preemptively, strategically, and expressively by youth in high crime areas. Further, we expect that the emotional or psychic benefits or deficits obtained by individuals when engaging in transactional violence can be better understood by examining how actors explain violent events in the contexts of their life experiences.

Criminological literature has examined links between victimization, violent offending, and other outcomes from several interrelated perspectives, including lifestyle/routine activity theory, general strain theory, and differential association theory. For example, some research argues that exposure to community violence (victimization and vicarious victimization) is a major source of strain or stress on individuals, which is linked to future involvement in violent behavior (Agnew, 2002; Eitle & Turner, 2003; Kaufman, 2005). While criminologists have focused on disentangling the temporal order issues in terms of the relationship between victimization and violent behavior, they have focused less attention on the mechanisms involved in both types of experiences or the potential cumulative and reciprocal effects of victimization and offending on other outcomes such as mental health.

Criminologists have also examined the ways that violence is a goal-oriented behavior which can be thought of as purposeful and functional. Violence researchers have studied the factors that produce conflict and those that inhibit it with attention paid to the *occurrence* of violence rather than on individual propensity to aggression. Both Katz (1988) and Felson (1993) identified three primary goals of violent actions: to compel and deter others, to achieve favorable social identities, and to obtain justice. Given these goals, there are three factors that explain how violence occurs: (1) through the escalation of disputes over goods or status, (2) through competition for status and social identities, and (3) the role of

third parties. Felson (1993) describes the dynamics of violent incidents, much like Luckenbill and Doyle (1989), calling the sequence of events a “social control process” (see, also, Black, 1993; Philips, 2003). Fagan and Wilkinson (1998b) analyzed the functional aspects of violence for urban adolescents and described five goals important to adolescents that may result in violent acts: achieving and maintaining social status, acquisition of material goods, harnessing power, street justice and self-help, and defiance of authority. They concluded that “violence has become an important part of the discourse of social interactions, with both functional (status and identity), material, and symbolic meaning (power and control), as well as strategic importance in navigating everyday social dangers” (p. 88). Further, Wilkinson (2001) described the adaptive role of violence in building a tough identity in order to avoid stigma and future victimization. She described social hierarchy of violent identities that operate in dangerous neighborhoods and listed three ideal types of social identities that related to violent performance: the crazy killer/wild identity, the holding your own identity, and the punk or herb identity. She also demonstrated that early victimization experiences shape youths’ decisions to develop fighting skill, participate in violent encounters, align with tough (violent) peers, and acquire guns for self-protection (Wilkinson, 2001).

We note that research on adaptive violence has largely focused on outcomes, but much less is known about the process that leads to violence. For example, in the pathologic model and its tests, there is an absence of information about the levels of violence in the subjects’ neighborhoods or the etiology of violent events. Part of the reason for this is the research on youth violence as adaptation, which primarily uses survey variables that link levels of exposure to outcomes. Much less is known about the key processes of moral disengagement, how it happens, and in what measure. Building on our earlier suggestion that psychological and sociological insights be brought together, we would argue that one way to examine the adaptive or transactional nature of violence is to utilize an event perspective that examines how violence happens and what factors serve as processual (exposure to violence, moral disengagement/neutralization) and proximate (insults, retaliation, group dynamics) causes.

The examination of young people’s accounts of violent events allows us to consider a number of key processual and proximate conditions. For instance, we can examine the dynamic nature of interpersonal transactions between the participants in violent events, the role of dangerous environments in perpetuating violence, and how the presence of guns affects the outcomes of these interactions. Direct exposure to gun use and violent behaviors among similarly situated young men would likely increase the risk of future negative outcomes. Studying violence from an event perspective combines the study of offenders, victims, and social context to yield a more complete picture of its etiology (Meier, Kennedy, & Sacco, 2001; Miethe & Meier, 1994). The event perspective considers the co-production of conflict by examining the roles of victim(s), offender(s) and others in a violence experience. It emphasizes event precursors; the event as it unfolds; and the aftermaths including reporting, harm/injury, gossip, and redress. Most importantly, the event perspective integrates aspects of the physical and social setting in which violence enfolds. The social geometry of violent conflict provides clues to understanding what distinguishes one conflict situation from another, or more precisely, what distinguishes a nonviolent conflict from a violent conflict. Research conducted from an

event perspective shows that violent incidents can be explained by interactions between actors, situational context, and event facilitators (Felson, 1993; Luckenbill, 1977; Oliver, 1998; Wilkinson, 2003). Violence occurs under specific relational, social, and physical conditions (Anderson, 1990; 1999; Fagan & Chin, 1990; Miethe & Meier, 1994; Oliver, 1994; Wilkinson, 2003). These situational contexts offer some facilitating features that create an environment in which violence is tolerated, if not expected. Reducing opportunities and isolating the “situational precipitators” may be the key to violence prevention (Cornish & Clarke, 2003; Smith & Cornish, 2003; Wortley, 1997; 2001). Most of our knowledge on violent events comes from studies of official reports of homicide, assault, and robbery events perpetrated by adults.

Recognizing the need for studies geared toward understanding the situational factors of youth violence, Wilkinson and Fagan conducted a qualitative study of violent events reported by young males from two New York City neighborhoods in the mid 1990s (see Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998a, 1998b; Wilkinson & Fagan, 1996, 2001; Wilkinson, 2003). The New York City Youth Violence Study (NYCYVS) examined violent events as interactions involving the confluence of motivations, perceptions, technology (in this case, weapons), the social control attributes of the immediate setting, and the ascribed meaning and status attached to the violent act. Prior to the current NIJ-funded study, published research from the NYCYVS focused on patterns in gun versus non-gun events, the motivations and provocations for violence use, the convergence of situational factors such as event location and alcohol/drug consumption in violent outcomes, and the role of cultural and social contexts in youths’ decisions to engage in violence. The original study was the first to examine the situational aspects of violence among young urban males during a time when researchers and policy makers were struggling to understand the youth gun violence epidemic plaguing American’s urban communities. The early publications described important patterns and processes. These publications were incomplete in some ways, but instrumental in generating hypotheses for further exploration.

The analyses reported herein move beyond descriptive research to develop a youth-specific situational/transactional model of violence. In this report, we will articulate the complexities of our model and present the detailed descriptive patterns in the data. We put the findings in context of different aspects of the young men's social worlds that have been examined during the course of this project such as: how informal social control processes operate (Wilkinson, 2007), the youths' exposure to community violence (Wilkinson & Carr, 2008), the youths' perceptions of the efficacy of the criminal justice system in stopping violence (Wilkinson, Beaty, & Lurry, 2009), the effects of youths' embeddedness in peer networks of gun users (Wilkinson, McBryde, Williams, Bloom, & Bell, 2009), the experiences of young fathers who are crime-involved (Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, & Khurana, in press), and an intergenerational look at fathering (Wilkinson, Khurana & Magora, under review). Lastly, we focus our analytic attention on fitting the data to the situational crime prevention framework, making numerous recommendations for developing interventions and translating the findings to the practitioner audience. Journal articles produced as a direct result of this NIJ grant are provided in Appendix C.

An event framework is ideal for understanding the schemas or scripts that youth bring into, and modify within, violent contexts. Drawing from the work of several scholars (Abelson, 1981; Cornish, 1994; Nelson, 1986; 2007; Schank & Abelson, 1977; Tedeschi & Felson, 1994) we use the term *schema* to mean an organizing structure for procedural knowledge stored in memory that shapes behavioral repertoires when activated. Here we focus on a particular type of schema –namely a script, which is a cognitive framework that organizes a person’s understanding of typical situations when activated and allows the person to have expectations and to make conclusions about the potential result of a set of events (Abelson, 1981). Scripts allow the actor to integrate information about the sequencing of events as well as the scenes, contextual cues, frames, actors, and slots/roles (Nelson, 1986). Strong scripts provide specific expectations on sequential processes, while weak scripts do not.

Several questions stemming from the foregoing review remain unanswered. What schema do youth bring into violent contexts? How do they explain the precursors to violent acts they have perpetrated? Do they engage in violence because they are morally disengaged, or do situational characteristics matter more in the explanation of violent events? How do youth behave when they are from high-crime neighborhoods and actively involved in violent offending behavior? We would assume that if the adaptive/pathologic model is correct, such youth are the most morally disengaged. Do they engage in violence habitually? Or, are there circumstances where they eschew violent behavior? What can the experiences of a sample of active violent offenders tell us about the future directions for research and policy? What is the temporal order of exposure to violence, moral disengagement and the commission of violent acts? And finally, do the results provide insights into ways of augmenting the adaptive model with transactional explanations of youth violence?

## **A Brief Review of the Relevant Literature**

### **Event Studies**

Studies of situational factors generally fall into two categories: Studies that use qualitative data analysis to identify recurrent themes about event processes (Katz, 1988; Luckenbill, 1977; Luckenbill & Doyle, 1989; Oliver, 1998; Wilkinson, 2003) and studies that combine qualitative and quantitative analysis to test hypotheses about violent events (Felson & Steadman, 1983; Wells & Horney, 2002; Hughes & Short, 2005; Philips, 2003; Philips & Cooney, forthcoming). Many recent event-based studies have focused on the processes of violence, especially among adult male offenders (Oliver, 1998; Wells & Horney, 2002). Situational approaches are dynamic “theories of action” (Cornish, 1993, 1994) that take into account both motivations and decision making within events. These perspectives produce explanations that sort out the proximal affects of the presence of firearms and other situational elements from the distal influences of social psychological factors.

Situational factors include the proximal features of violent events including: event location, time of day, season of the year, weapon type, victim-offender relationship, provocative actions, 3<sup>rd</sup> party

presence and action, angry arousal, intoxication at the time of the event, injury seriousness, police presence and action, and post-violence aftermaths. Violence is a function of events that occur during the incident and therefore is not predetermined by the initial goals of the actors or offender propensities toward violence (Felson & Steadman, 1983).

Luckenbill employed a situational approach to the study of criminal homicide using data for the years 1963 through 1972 from one county in California. Continued analyses of these data by Luckenbill and Doyle led to the development of a conceptual framework of interpersonal disputes (Luckenbill & Doyle, 1989). The researchers argue that dispute-related homicide is the product of three successive events: “naming,” “claiming,” and “aggressing.” At the naming stage, the first actor identifies a negative outcome or an injury caused by the second actor (assigning blame). At the claiming stage, the injured party expresses his grievance and demands reparation from the adversary. The final stage determines whether or not the interaction is transformed into a violent dispute. The third step is the rejection of a claim (in whole or in part) by the harm doer. According to their analysis, “disputatiousness” is defined as the likelihood of naming and claiming, and aggressiveness is defined as the willingness to preserve and use force to settle the dispute (Luckenbill & Doyle, 1989). They argue that violence is triggered by norms of the code of personal honor and that differential disputatiousness and aggressiveness depend on the situation.

The relevance of “codes of honor” or similar concepts in explaining violent behavior dates back to a variety of early studies (see Anderson, 1976; Becker, 1973; Goffman, 1959, 1963; Gluckman, 1955; Hannerz, 1969; Horowitz, 1983; Miller, 1958; Shaw, 1966; Suttles, 1968; Toch, 1968; Whyte, 1943; Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967). These themes get ‘rediscovered’ and analyzed successively in the contemporary era (see, for example, Anderson, 1999; Bourgois, 1996; Jones, 2004; Miller, 2008; Oliver, 1998; Rios, 2008; Rodriguez, 1993; Wilkinson, 2003). Most of these studies utilized qualitative methods to uncover the complex social processes that frame social interactions among actors in urban settings. Indeed, our early work suggests that the internalizations of normative codes *in situ* by youth and their co-offending associates help to explain how seemingly petty issues – such as attacks on personal honor - can spark serious violence (Wilkinson, 2003). In many ways, what we discovered was that interactions have a social order. The particular nuances of that order for urban male youth are firmly grounded in a desire to be treated with respect, a resistance to repression, and the challenge of survival in a dangerous environment. The code of honor is important in understanding what actors bring to settings in which violence might erupt, but it is not deterministic nor does it provide a complete explanation for what happens in these situations.

Several investigators have found evidence that the interplay between primary actors partly determines the outcome. For example, Felson and Steadman (1983) found that violent incidents usually began with identity attacks, were followed by attempts and failures to influence the opponent, then included verbal threats, and finally ended in physical attack. In a study of ex-offenders, ex-mental patients, and a sample drawn from the general population, Felson (1982, 1984) found a similar pattern. Hughes and Short (2005) confirmed Felson’s earlier findings with a sample of gang-involved youth (with

data from the 1950s). Oliver (1998) used detailed narratives of violent confrontations between black males in bars and bar settings.<sup>1</sup> He examined violent behaviors to identify the “rules of engagement” and situational causes of violence in the bar setting. He observed a five-stage sequence of events similar to Felson and Steadman’s classification. Oliver’s important work added insights about violent events from a sample of African-American men, especially with regard to understanding event closure and the aftermath of violent events. In all of these studies, victim actions including retaliation, denial of claims, and aggressiveness were found to be important factors.

In summary, a focus on violent events demonstrates that most violence is a process of social interactions with identifiable rules and contingencies (Campbell, 1986; Felson, 1982; Felson & Steadman, 1983; Luckenbill, 1977; Luckenbill & Doyle, 1989; Oliver, 1994; Polk, 1994; Sommers & Baskin, 1993; Wilkinson, 2003). Contrary to common wisdom, violent acts can be understood as rational or purposive behavior. Most experts agree that rationality is “bounded,” that is, individuals rarely have all of the information necessary to make a truly “rational” decision. The likelihood of violence reflects the progression of decisions across a series of identifiable stages. Much of this research concludes that there are contingencies in each stage, shaped by external influences and social interactions of the actors. Yet the data generally have not been available to answer more useful questions such as what those contingencies are, how actors take them into account, and how they vary as an event progresses through these stages. Although prior studies provide generalized classifications of violent event stages, detailed event narratives provide an opportunity for a finer-tuned assessment of the actions and reactions of actors in violent encounter narratives. This assessment will shed new light on the micro-decisions and contextual influences across a range of types of violent encounters. Previous studies have generally ignored information about precipitating actions as well as the aftermath of violent events. The analysis of event stages must also take into account the heterogeneity of violent events by examining a wide range of violent acts.

### **Studies of Third Parties**

Third parties witness or somehow become involved in an estimated two-thirds of interpersonal violence in the United States (Planty, 2002). The percentage is even greater (approximately 73%) for violence among young people. Despite the common nature of third party presence, researchers know little about the specific contributions that third parties make in promoting or preventing the escalation of interpersonal conflict to violence. Previous research concludes that bystanders and third parties contribute significantly to the outcome of violent encounters (see Felson, 1982; Felson, Ribner, & Siegel,

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<sup>1</sup> Oliver employed both participant observation and interview methods over a five-year period (1983-1987) to “systematically examine the social functions of the black bar and how black males interacted with each other and with females in this setting” (Oliver, 1998, p. 44). The sample consisted of 41 black men 28 to 45 years old, that frequented the research locations (Oliver 1994).

1984; Decker, 1995; Black, 1993; Oliver, 1998; Cooney, 1998; Wilkinson, 2003; Phillips & Cooney, 2005). For example, Felson (1982) found that when a dispute occurred between parties of the same sex, the presence of third parties increased the likelihood that a verbal disagreement would turn into a physical fight. Third parties may be viewed both as part of the socio-cultural context and as participants in the co-production of violent events. Largely due to the work of Donald Black and his followers, theory in the area of third parties has evolved while empirical studies of third party roles in violence remain rare and unfocused within criminology.

Black's theoretical work on the social structure of conflict includes a typology of third parties with specification across two domains: the *nature* and *degree* of the intervention. He identified twelve third party roles, "including five support roles (informer, adviser, advocate, ally, and surrogate) and five settlement roles (friendly peacemaker, mediator, arbitrator, judge, and repressive peacemaker)." Two other roles that do not fit within either category are the "negotiator" whose partisanship cross-cuts both sides and the "healer." The types are rank ordered in terms of degree of intervention with supporting roles organized by the extent of partisanship and settlement roles by the authoritative status of the third parties. Settlement roles come into play when, according to Black, "third parties intervene without taking sides" (1993: 108).

As Black (1993) explains, the role of third parties often depends on personal allegiance (or lack of it) to the main actors. He argues that audience members allied with either the protagonist or the antagonist may contribute to the escalation or de-escalation of a dispute through verbal statements, body language, cheering, nonverbal social pressure, or physical acts of violence. *Partisanship* and *solidarity* are key features of Black's thesis. Cooney (1998) elaborated Black's theory to include variables on group membership status and articulated hypotheses for four configurations of third party social locations in determining their influence over the principals in a conflict situation. They specified the predictive power of third party with: close and distant ties to individuals, close and distant ties to groups, cross-cutting ties, and no ties. Using interviews with 100 incarcerated offenders of assault or homicide, Phillips and Cooney (2005) found moderate support these hypotheses in the first empirical test to date.

## Study Purpose

The primary goals of the current research project were to: advance the study of situational factors and micro-dynamics of violence among urban youth, identify the procedural scripts of youth violence, clarify existing perspectives on the roles of third parties in violence, identify potential crime prevention strategies by adapting Cornish and Clarke's framework for situational crime prevention (SCP) to violence, and disseminate the results to practitioners. The current project features the analysis of the situational and transactional aspects of narrative reconstructions of near-violent and violent events to gain insights into the sequential patterns of different types of violent situations, focusing especially on the initiating and culminating transactions, the role of third parties in shaping outcomes, and the

distinguishing characteristics in completed versus near-violent events. Our specific objectives from the original grant proposal were as follows:

*Objective 1. Identify a typology of events by classifying situational factors and intersections across categories.*

*Objective 2. Develop a typology of event scripts (based on the sequences or stages) for youth violence.*

*Objective 3. Provide insights into precisely how third parties shape violent and near-violent outcomes in youth violence.*

*Objective 4. Using the new knowledge generated in Objectives 1-3 and the principles of situational crime prevention and problem solving, we will develop specific strategies for violence prevention analogous to the 25 techniques Cornish and Clarke (2003) have articulated for property crime.*

*Objective 5. Disseminate the new knowledge gained in Objectives 1-4 and the situational crime prevention strategies for violence developed in Objective 4 to both researchers and practitioners.*

To accomplish these goals and objectives we conducted qualitative data analysis using an abductive (moving back and forth from inductive to deductive logic) analytical strategy (Adler & Adler, 2008; Gilgun, 2005) and a modified event structure analysis (Heise, 1993). The rich dataset was used to identify typologies of the structure, process, and contingent forms of violent situations focusing on understanding the variations across event domains. The overarching youth violence model that emerged from the qualitative analyses reflects the heterogeneity of violence among male adolescents and young adults. It also captures the varieties of event dynamics by identifying which of many situational factors are likely contingencies in the escalation of conflict to violence. We describe the situational features of the 780 near-violent and violent events coded on a variety of domains.

The challenge in creating a typology of youth violence from event narratives is that there are numerous situational factors that are relevant to understanding the heterogeneity of youth violence. Most of the event descriptions were sufficiently detailed to permit us to move beyond the types of past analyses with incidents reported by a younger sample of violent men. The model captures emergent situational features of conflict events as well as the dynamic unfolding of events. In the next chapter, we briefly describe the methodology of the study. In Chapter 3, we present the descriptive characteristics for the most central event features. Chapter 4 is devoted to describing our new emergent theory of urban male youth violence. Our model includes compositional aspects of events as well as an analysis of sequential unfolding of events. Figures 4-1 through 4-5 provide a visual representation of the overall emergent transactional model.

## CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH METHODS

The original study from which this project evolved was known as the Columbia University Gun Study. Dr. Jeffrey Fagan was the Principal Investigator and Deanna Wilkinson was the Project Director/Co-Investigator. The data were collected from 1995 to 1998. Interviews were conducted with a targeted sample of 416 active violent offenders from two New York City neighborhoods. The primary field methods were in-depth interviews and biographical methods focusing on the social and symbolic construction of violent events (Cornish, 1993, 1994). The interviews were quite detailed, and in addition to the violent events of primary interest, they covered a wide range of topics including neighborhood characteristics, family experiences, school, employment, friendships, youth and street culture, attitudes toward violence, criminal activity, perceptions of the criminal justice system, guns, drug use, and future goals. Respondents were asked to reconstruct 3-4 violent events: one where guns were present and used; one where guns were present and not used; and one where guns were not present. Data were collected on at least one violent event per person, with an average of 2.27 events per individual<sup>2</sup>. Events included both completed and non-completed (near) violent situations; the latter group included events where violence was avoided in a variety of situational and social contexts. “Peer” interviewers were used to increase interviewer-respondent rapport and enhance data collection efforts. Proximate age, race/ethnicity, and gender matches between the interviewer and interviewee were deemed necessary for success of the study.

The sampling design targeted males between the ages of 16 and 24 from three pools of subjects:

- Individuals convicted of illegal handgun possession or a violent offense (the criminal justice sample, n= 150 or 36%),
- Individuals injured in a violent transaction (the hospital sample, n=62 or 15%), and
- Individuals identified by screening as having been actively involved in violence in the previous six months (the neighborhood samples, n= 204 or 49%).

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<sup>2</sup> There were 72 respondents in the study who did not provide any detailed violent events in their interviews. One interviewer, in particular, did a poor job of eliciting violent events. We dropped sketchy, inconsistent, and overly brief events because the event narratives that they provided were insufficiently detailed to be useful for the purposes of our study.

Current or previous residency in one of the study neighborhoods was an eligibility criterion.<sup>3</sup> The criminal justice sample includes recently released individuals (n=127) and incarcerated individuals (n=23). The recently released sample consists of young men who were released from Rikers Island Academy<sup>4</sup> and who, upon release, entered a membership program called *Friends of Island Academy*, Guys Insight on Imprisonment for Teenagers (G.I.I.F.T.).<sup>5</sup> The jail sample consisted of young men who were interviewed at Rikers Island Academy. The young men in the jail sample were interviewed at Rikers Island in a private office ordinarily used for psychological counseling. Participants in the hospital sample were recruited at Lincoln Hospital and Kings County Hospital by researchers who worked with hospital staff that identified violently injured youth. Most hospitalized youth were interviewed in their hospital rooms or in private offices in the hospital. The neighborhood samples were generated using chain referral or snowball sampling techniques (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981; Watters & Biernacki 1989). Study procedures were approved by institutional review boards at Rutgers, State University of New Jersey and Columbia University; the data were protected by a Federal Certificate of Confidentiality issued by the National Institutes of Health. The full details of the original study methodology are described elsewhere (Wilkinson, 2003). The current secondary data analysis project was reviewed and approved by the IRB at The Ohio State University.

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<sup>3</sup> Several methods were used to determine potential subjects' residency status. First, we relied on self identification with a neighborhood. Previous research has noted that youth, especially criminally involved youth, are strongly invested in their neighborhood identities (Suttles, 1968; Zatz & Portillos, 2000). Second, we relied on the lay experts' knowledge of the neighborhoods and neighborhood hangout spots to disqualify individuals who did not meet the neighborhood residency requirement. Finally, throughout the course of the interview specific names of street locations, housing project complexes, and other related landmarks were reported by respondents. To protect respondents' confidentiality, these identifying data were changed to pseudonyms. Before changing the names, we coded data on residency status, length of residency, multiple residencies, and movement over the life course when such details were found in the interview record. In the full dataset of 416 individuals, 29 people lived in neighborhoods other than the study neighborhoods. Those individuals reportedly spent considerable time in one of the study neighborhoods and as a result were not excluded from the full dataset. None of those individuals are included in the current paper.

<sup>4</sup> The interviews were conducted from June 1995 through March 1998.

<sup>5</sup> *Friends of Island Academy* (Friends) is a non-profit organization founded in 1992. Friends provides educational, vocational, and mentoring services to young men and women who have left the educational academy (Island Academy- the alternative high school) at Rikers Island. Guys Insight on Imprisonment for Teenagers (G.I.I.F.T.) Pack is a program for youth run by the youth membership of Friends. The main approach is peer counseling and outreach where ex-offenders assist soon-to-be released offenders to make positive changes by learning from their mistakes. G.I.I.F.T. Pack members regularly engage in public speaking at Rikers Island Academy, New York City schools, community based organizations, and in local media outlets.

The study sample included an array of respondents and incidences that qualitatively reflect what are thought to be the characteristics of both violent offenders and violent events. The sample consists of individuals who have completed a period of criminal incarceration for a violence-related offense and those recruited from the study neighborhoods. In terms of demographic characteristics the sample was 48.5% African American, 39.3% Puerto Rican, and 12.2% Caribbean, Latin American, or multi-racial. The average age of respondents was 19.5, with 18.2% of respondents at the modal age of 18. The range was 14-27 years and the standard deviation was 2.69. Thirty-six percent of respondents were enrolled in school at the time of the interview, 20.7% had completed high school or a general equivalency degree (GED), and 43.1% had dropped out of school. Only 18.7% were raised in two-parent families and 37.8% were fathers. Of the sample, 19.8% were legally employed full- or part-time. Not surprisingly given the sampling plan, sample participants reported numerous risk factors and criminal justice experiences: 92.1% owned or had owned a gun, 85% had been or were involved in the drug business, 77% had committed a robbery, 75% reported in detail about his involvement in a gun event within the prior 2 years, and 85% had been or were incarcerated (see Table 2-1 for additional information on sample characteristics).

**Table 2-1. New York City Youth Violence Study Sample Characteristics**

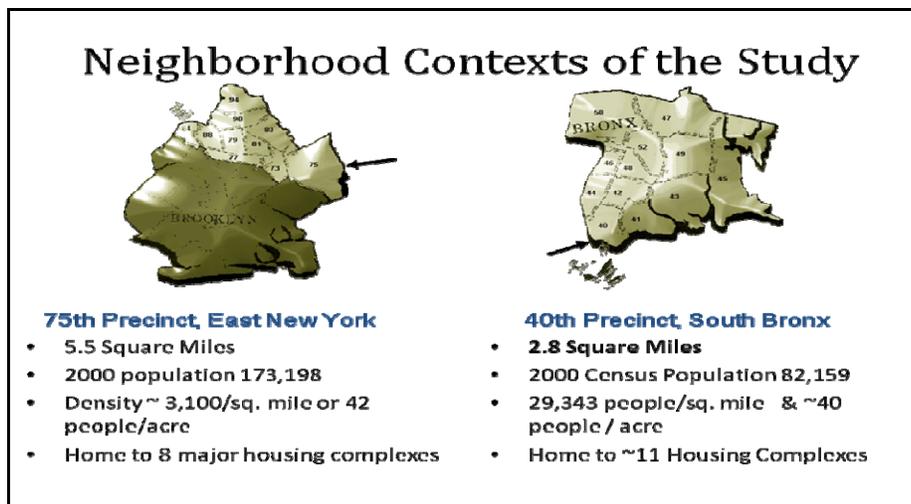
<u>Variable</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Valid n</u>	<u>%</u>
<b>Neighborhood</b>			
East New York	205	(416)	49.2
South Bronx	182	(416)	43.9
Other	29	(416)	7.0
<b>Sample Source</b>			
Neighborhood chain referral	204	(416)	49.0
Recently released from jail	127	(416)	30.5
Jail interview	23	(416)	5.5
Hospital interview	62	(416)	14.9
<b>Age, Range 14-27, SD =2.68</b>			
Mean 19.5 years		(416)	
Median 19 years		(416)	
Mode 18 years		(416)	18.3
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
African American	192	(398)	48.2
Puerto Rican	158	(398)	39.7
Other Caribbean or mixed ethnicity	48	(398)	12.1
<b>Structural Position</b>			
Education: Currently in school	138	(380)	36.3
Education: Dropped out	182	(366)	49.7
Education: High school graduate or higher	67	(333)	20.1
Education: Completed GED	22	(333)	6.6
Currently Employed (legitimate work)	99	(401)	24.7
Raised in 2 parent family	43	(247)	17.5
Respondent is a father or expectant	124	(330)	37.6
<b>Risk Factors/Violent Behaviors</b>			
Ever owned a gun	357	(388)	92.0
Mean Age of first gun ownership (14.4)	74	(303)	24.0
Reported a gun-related event	259	(344)	75.0
Ever involved in drug economy	318	(374)	85.0
Ever involved in robbery	241	(339)	71.1
Ever involved in assault	164	(295)	55.6
Ever involved in attempted murder	116	(301)	38.5
Ever incarcerated	290	(341)	85.0

The primary justification for including only active violent offenders in our sample was our interest in the social processes of violent events among individuals who had multiple events to report

(to overcome the base rate problem). Pseudonyms for persons and places are used to protect the identities of study participants. Interview excerpts include rough and potentially offensive language. We purposely have not substantially edited or cleaned up the interview excerpts (although in some instances words have been added in brackets to clarify a statement) because there is more to learn from hearing youths' authentic voices. In addition, censoring their words would have distorted the intended meanings of the discourse. Respondents frequently used the word "nigga" to refer to friends, enemies and themselves. Like it or not, the term is a prominent feature of inner city youth culture. While the results are not generalizable to the larger adolescent male population or even the studied neighborhoods, we learn about the cognitive landscapes of active violent offenders.

The neighborhoods selected for this study were among the most disadvantaged in New York City in terms of poverty and violent crime. We purposefully selected two high violence neighborhoods in an attempt to control for neighborhood variation in life experiences of our respondents. The study was designed to examine violent events and individuals as the primary units of analysis. The geographic boundaries of the neighborhoods corresponded with the police districts serving each neighborhood (the 75<sup>th</sup> precinct or community district 5 in Brooklyn and the 40<sup>th</sup> precinct or community district 1 in the Bronx, see maps below). Compared to New York City as a whole, East New York and the South Bronx had significantly higher rates of unemployment, fewer high school graduates, higher percentages of families below the poverty level, a larger proportion of the population under 25 years old, and larger minority populations. The homicide rate was 2.24 times greater in East New York and 3.41 times greater in the South Bronx than for New York City (see Table 2-2). Both neighborhoods also had significantly higher rates of robbery and assault than New York City.

**Map 2-1. Neighborhood Contexts of the Study**



**Table 2-2. Socio-Demographic and Crime Profiles of Target Neighborhoods Compared with New York City, 1990**

	East New York	South Bronx	New York City
Total Population	161,359	77,234	7,322,564
% males under 9	20.32	22.56	14.34
% males 10 to 14	9.93	10.34	6.62
% males 15 to 19	9.85	10.17	6.89
% males 20 to 24	9.01	9.97	8.15
% males 25 to 59	42.15	38.41	49.43
% males over 60	8.71	8.51	14.54
Ethnicity			
% non-Hispanic White	9.45	1.70	43.19
% non-Hispanic Black	47.94	30.51	25.22
% Hispanic	38.38	66.88	24.35
% non-Hispanic other	4.16	1.26	6.68
Employment			
Unemployment rate-males	15.00	19.90	9.30
Unemployment rate-females	13.40	18.40	8.70
Education			
% over 25 with less than high school educ.	46.70	62.60	31.70
% high school dropouts aged 16 to 19	16.50	22.90	13.50
Poverty			
% families below poverty level	29.00	49.40	16.30
% female headed families below poverty	45.60	63.70	35.30
% female headed w/children below poverty	54.50	71.60	48.10
Violent Crime*			
Murder rate per 100,000	64.25	97.97	28.70
Robbery rate per 100,000	2142.63	2676.28	1329.99
Assault rate per 100,000	1749.10	2112.20	940.80

\*These rates are based on a three-year average of 1989, 1990, and 1991 FBI Uniform Crime Report statistics. Sources: New York City Department of Planning, 1993. *Socioeconomic Profiles 1970-90*. New York: Dept. of City Planning. New York City FBI Index Crime Reports (Uniform Crime Report).

## Procedures

This study employed a number of exploratory methods and nonstandard features that allowed us to collect data that are unique and rich. A team research approach that included local experts was considered the best way to get close to the phenomenon of interest for this study. The process of developing a reciprocal relationship that featured two-way communication and respect between professional researchers and “lay experts” was essential for the study to succeed. We recruited our field research team based on their street smarts and network connections. The challenge for the researchers was to maximize the utility of this approach while navigating its limitations. Wilkinson alternately served as advisor, teacher, student, employer, friend, coach, and mentor to twenty potential peer interviewers, all of whom would have met the criteria to participate in the study. Her background of growing up in a dysfunctional family troubled with poverty, addiction, mental illness, violence, and joblessness helped an educated seemingly middle-class white woman bridge the social distance between her world and the worlds of the men she hoped to understand. Common experiences strengthened the team’s bonds. After establishing some level of trust, the group shared stories about meals of government cheese, waiting in long lines for immunizations, experiencing the degrading posture of welfare staff, chaotic home life, and similar stories of childhood abuse.

Lay members of the research team had personal experience with violent activities, including firearms offenses. To different degrees, team members worked to identify how our experiences could potentially bias the data we would collect or the ways in which the data were interpreted. Counseling and support groups were important aspects of the behind the scenes work during the early days of the study. Our team meetings were also very important in managing the toll that this intensive effort could exact on the group. During the process, we found out some of our interviewers could not read beyond a 4th grade level, yet they were able to essentially memorize the long and complex interview protocol. Most of these young men had gained powerful reputations on the streets (for past violent behavior and/or current anti-violence outreach work) and were granted respect and trust in their neighborhoods. Six of the young men were residents of the study neighborhoods. Their contributions to the study aided recruitment, protocol development, data collection and interpretation.

“Peer” interviewers conducted the in-depth, open-ended interviews.<sup>6</sup> To enhance rapport between interviewers and participants, we matched interviewers with participants on approximate age, race/ethnicity, gender, and life experiences and asked them to modify the wording of the questions to come across in a street-savvy way.<sup>7</sup> Participants were paid \$20 for their time. The primary goal of this

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<sup>6</sup> Peer interviewers or lay experts can enhance the quality of qualitative data collection by bridging the social distance between researchers and respondents, especially in studies of minority youth (see Walker & Lidz, 1977). For a detailed description of the methodology, see Wilkinson, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Despite the flexibility in our approach, there was almost no modification of the wording of the informal social control questions. In the few instances in which alterations were made, slang words were substituted/added for drug dealing (specifically pitching, throwing, hustling drugs, slinging, or pushing), destroying property or vandalism (e.g., tagging or busting up someone’s property), or for fighting (e.g., going to blows). In almost all cases, the

research was to capture rich descriptions of events to generate hypotheses and elaborate a theoretical framework for understanding violent events among adolescents. In-depth interviewing is the most appropriate method to record information about specific events and to allow respondents to reflect on those events.<sup>8</sup> The units of analysis for the study included both individuals and events. For interviews in which respondents described more than one event, each individual served as his own control, avoiding person-event confounding. Narrative interviews took one to two hours to complete. The confidential interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The audio taped interviews were transcribed into case-specific files that were cleaned and integrated into a highly complex relational database using QSR-NUD\*IST 4.0 originally, and then upgrading progressively to QSR N-VIVO 8.0.

## Measures

The in-depth interviews covered a range of topics including family experiences, school, employment, peer relationships, neighborhood processes, guns, drug use, violent events, criminal activity, perceptions of formal and informal social control, and future goals (see Appendix A for the full interview protocol). A biographical approach was used to capture information about life experiences, involvement with violence, and gun use in situated transactions. The event portion of the interviews consisted of conversations about events and their contexts, based on a semi-structured but open-ended and highly flexible interview protocol. The benefit of this approach is that it allows respondents to introduce new topics or issues not previously considered by the researcher in the initial design phase. The use of prompts or probes was highly dependent upon the level of specificity with which the respondent described the situated transaction. The interviewers prompted respondents to clarify points and elaborate on initial descriptions of their actions and perceptions. The interviewers were trained throughout the data collection period in techniques to elicit detailed information on respondents' life histories and violent events. Study procedures and techniques improved over time; therefore, many of the early problems were overcome during the data collection period.<sup>9</sup>

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interviewers used both the preset term and the slang term. Data quality does not appear to be compromised by the modifications. One other inconsistency across interviewers was whether or not they utilized the probes either before or after the respondent answered the questions. When probes were used effectively, they improved the 'thickness' of the data.

<sup>8</sup> There are generally three sources of data for event level research: (1) official case reports from police investigations and court proceedings, (2) survey-based measures of event activity, and (3) ethnographic or qualitative interviews. Interviews provide the richest data.

<sup>9</sup>The unevenness of data content and quality presented only minor problems for the study. For example, many of the early interviews did not include certain questions that we realized were relevant only after numerous interviews had been conducted. Those topics are simply missing for respondents interviewed using the earlier

Events are the main unit of analysis for the current study. As in other studies that have employed event analysis (e.g., Felson, 1982), respondents provided detailed descriptions of only certain types of events. Researchers used the following scripted introduction to elicit detailed event descriptions:

Okay, NOW let's go a little deeper into like three or four of those situations. Tell me about the gun event... Next, tell me about the knife event... Tell me about a fair one. Tell me about a beef that heated up but got squashed before violence started. *Note to Interviewer: Ask the respondent to pick which events he can remember most clearly. Try to get: a gun event (GET AT LEAST 1), a knife event, a fair one (no defined weapons), and argument with no violence.*

We did not further specify which types of events respondents would report; it was left up to them to identify those salient events that occurred in the two year window preceding the interview.

The event measurement protocol (the set of questions used to elicit the event narrative from respondents) included fourteen components or *multi-dimensional* blocks identified as important features of violent events based, in part, on previous research of situated transactions (Felson & Steadman, 1983; Luckenbill, 1977; Luckenbill & Doyle, 1989; Oliver, 2001; Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). The event question sequence included 95 primary questions with numerous probing or follow-up questions embedded in the event protocol. The event protocol included open-ended questions about emotional/behavioral context, the steps of the event, characteristics of opponents, information on third parties, the context of the event, the weapons used, the presence of alcohol and drugs, injuries, police activity, outcomes and the rationale given by respondents for their behavior. Respondents described violent events that they had engaged in within the previous two years. Their narratives offer an opportunity to explore the scripts that youth bring to conflict situations. The following situational factors were examined:

- Emotional/Behavioral Context: Feelings prior to event, activity just before event, whether the violence was preplanned or spontaneous, anticipation of gun involvement in event, reason for carrying weapon in that moment.
- Steps of the Event: What happened first, second, third, etc.; who started the action; how did it start; how many swings, blows, shots fired, etc.; counteractions and reactions by person; length of time of violent event; how it ended; and what happened after the event.
- Opponent Characteristics: Prior relationship, size and strength, age, race/ethnicity, neighborhood of residency, anticipation of weapons, opponent's weapon status.

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version of the protocol. While missing data are always problematic, they are less troublesome in qualitative studies such as this.

- Third Parties: Presence and involvement of third parties, including co-participants; number of observers; relationships between third parties and respondent/opponent; actions of third parties; third party weapon status; social standing of third parties relative to respondent; perceived effect of third party presence; and action on respondent.
- Event Context: Location, time of day, season of the year.
- Weapons: Type and use; reason for being armed at time of incident; action with weapon by sequential move of the event by all involved parties; number of times fired, sliced, or beat with weapon by all involved parties; if gun was present, how it was first introduced; feelings about gun use; concerns about weapon use.
- Alcohol and Drugs: Use before, during, and after violent event; who used; how much was consumed; type of drug/alcohol used; drunk or high at the time of violence; perceived effect of use on violent event.
- Injuries: If there were sustained, who was injured; how serious the injury was; if medical care was needed, sought, and by whom; if hospital care was needed, length of hospital stay.
- Police Activity: Presence at scene, police action as related to the violent event, arrests and questioning of suspects, what happened after the police left.
- Outcomes: Status of conflict resolution, retaliation, increased fear, extra self-protection; changes in hang out spot (avoidance of places); gossip; changes in people's treatment of youth as a result of event; impact on reputation; changes in relationship with opponent.
- Rationale for Respondent's Behavior: Reflections on why violence occurred, reflections on necessity of violence in situation, specifically when it was that respondent felt he needed to use violence, reflections on what respondent hoped to accomplish in the situation, reflections on respondent's assessment of his handling of the situation, whether this event was typical or atypical for the respondent.

## Analytical Procedures

The method of analysis in this study incorporated both induction and deduction -or as Adler and Adler (2008) term this process - *abduction*. The stages of data analysis included open coding (Strauss, 1987), sifting and sorting (Wolcott, 1994), categorizing, team-coding, checking for consistency, and examining interactions between and across categories and cases. Coders read the interviews, highlighted particular text excerpts, and assigned one or multiple topic codes to each excerpt categorizing the theme(s) being discussed. The analyst constructed a series of matrices that parsed the data into a variety of subtypes. For example, we were able to examine the event configurations across a variety of characteristics by running matrix queries in the N-VIVO software. Essentially, we ran run complex searches to find all of the cases that had common characteristics across multiple domains. This process is often referred to as

the *constant comparative method*. These efforts facilitated the coding and analysis of the data and permitted checks for consistency in classification among members of the research team. Each code was explicitly defined and multiple codes were applied as appropriate<sup>10</sup>. As described above, the data analysis was managed in QSR N-VIVO software (Version 8.0, Melbourne). To facilitate basic quantitative analysis, the coded data were exported into a statistical analysis program (SPSS 15.0, Chicago). Microsoft Word, Excel, and Visio were vital tools for this project as well.

The violent and near-violent events were coded across the following event level characteristics: weapon type, physical location, relationship to the opponent, presence of any third parties, presence of co-participants, actions of third parties, substance use, injury, police awareness and action, and event outcomes. To assess the reliability of the coding process, a research assistant independently coded a random sample of 80 events or approximately 10% of the total sample. For the reliability check event sample, respectable alpha coefficients were achieved for most of the variables with an average alpha coefficient of .828 across 29 major event domains (range = .482 – 1.0, see Table 2-3). Coding mismatches were identified and reviewed on a case by case basis. The lead investigator carefully scrutinized mismatches and applied the code that fit the data best after considering all relevant information. Given the huge number of coding categories that we generated through the years, it would have been cost prohibitive to independently code all variables and cases (the event coding schema is available in Appendix B). As papers have been produced from this dataset, the researchers have been careful to check for consistency in coding.

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<sup>10</sup> The researcher relied on the expertise of the peer interviewers in developing the initial event coding schema, identifying patterns, suggesting interpretations, and validating the investigator's initial interpretations.

**Table 2-3. Inter-rater Reliability of Event Characteristics (10% Random sample)**


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<u>Variable</u>	<u>Alpha</u>
Weapon type	0.992
Weapon use	0.958
Relationship to the opponent	0.861
Location	0.933
Spark: Drug Business	0.904
Spark: Girl	0.981
Spark: Robbery	0.654
Spark: Revenge	0.482
Spark: Defense of Others	0.711
Antecedent: Preplanned Conflict	0.768
Opening move	0.482
Presence of any third parties	1
Presence of respondent's boys	0.811
Presence of opponent's boys	0.907
Roles of respondent's boys	0.932
Roles of opponent's boys	0.907
Roles of third parties	0.972
Substance use prior to event (any)	0.953
Substance use after event	0.942
Injury	0.984
Who was injured	0.790
Police presence/awareness	1
Police action	0.772
Outcome	0.526
Outcome: resolution status	0.482
Aftermaths: gossip	0.702
Aftermaths: retaliatory intentions	0.482
Aftermaths: enhanced self-protection	0.934
Aftermaths: avoidance behaviors	0.913

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## About the Presentation of the Interview Data

The interview excerpts include rough and offensive language. In order to draw the youth out ex-offenders from the neighborhoods conducted the interviews. The language included is simply how youth talk. Our goal was to make them feel comfortable, to talk freely, and therefore, we hired people who could talk to them as equals in the

language they spoke. The best interviews of 416 included herein resemble listening in on private conversations between friends. This quality strengthens the study. We purposely decided not to substantially edit or clean up the interview excerpts because there is more to learn from hearing the voices of youth in their own words. In addition, censoring their words would have distorted the intended meanings of the discourse. For example, respondents used the word “nigga” or “nigger” frequently to refer to other people in their lives (both friend and enemy). Like it or not, this term is a prominent feature of inner city youth culture. In some cases words placed in parentheses have been added to clarify the meaning of a statement. Readers will probably need to flip to the end of the book where a reference dictionary of slang terms can be found starting on page 184.

### CHAPTER 3: UNDERSTANDING THE HETEROGENEITY OF YOUTH VIOLENCE: A DESCRIPTIVE LOOK

Our first research objective was to develop a typology of urban youth violence. In this chapter, we will provide a descriptive overview of the heterogeneity of urban male youth violence. The following situational factors were considered important for our analysis:

**actors:** who initiated the event, the respondent's relationship to the opponent (social ties, prior history, and territoriality), violent situational identity or status, the presence of third parties, and the active involvement of third parties in the event;

**proximal arousal and mental state:** respondent's feeling at the start of the event, was the event premeditated, was the respondent high or drunk, and sizing up or calculation of likelihood of out-performing the other side;

**spark or reason for the conflict:** what sparked the conflict, was the spark perceived as serious (and by whom), did they agree on seriousness, and how was spark expressed;

**contexts:** physical location, time of day, audience presence;

**facilitators:** weapon type, type of drug/alcohol used;

**actions:** opening moves, defining moment, ending moves, use of violence, use of weapons;

**outcomes:** event severity in terms of injury/death, police awareness of event, police action, event closure status;

**aftermaths:** hospitalized for injury, changed hang out spot, felt need for extra protection after event, anticipated a need to retaliate, anticipated that additional drama or conflict would follow, neighborhood gossip about the event, respondent's reputation improved as result of the event, people treated respondent differently after the event, respondent used alcohol or drug immediately after the event.

When possible, we focused on similarities and differences across aggregate categories. The most relevant situational factors for the entire event sample are presented in Figure 3-1. Rather than getting into the details of the data presented in the figure at this point we will begin with an examination of sparks and how they are interpreted; we will then discuss the spatial and normative features of the setting in which a spark is set; then move to contingencies in the actors' control that heighten the risk of injury such as (alcohol/drugs and weapons); then discuss the larger social context i.e., third parties (co-offenders, bystanders, and formal agents of social control) and their role in escalating and de-escalating violent events; and finally discuss the aftermaths of events. We were able

to distinguish six categories of event outcome severity: near violence, violence but no injury, violence with minor injuries, violence with missing information on injury status, violence with serious injuries, and violence that resulted in one or more deaths. The event sample includes a diverse set of violent and near-violent events that can help in understanding the differences across levels of severity of events. Near-violent events in which actors had conflict but the event did not escalate to physical violence or weapon use are included to provide additional perspective on factors that distinguish one type from another. Fifty-eight events (about 7%) fit the near-violent event classification. Four factors explain why these events were non-violent: social ties between combatants, 3<sup>rd</sup> party intervention, relatively minor event spark seriousness, and the lack of gun presence during these altercations. These events are discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Nearly 38% (278) of the events escalated to violence; with respondents reporting that no one was injured in the event. This category includes violent threats with weapons, non-targeted weapon discharge during the event, ineffective weapon use, and fights without weapons that did not result in wounding. Later in the presentation of findings, we will describe how these non-injury events fit patterns that distinguished them from other types of events. Respondents described 68 events in which one or more parties suffered minor injuries such as cuts and bruises.

The second most prevalent category was violence with an injury that was serious enough to require medical care. Specifically, respondents reported 265 events with serious injuries. These events vary considerably and require specific comparative analysis with other levels of severity. For example, in some events with near-lethal outcomes, the prior history between the combatants looks very similar to the homicide events. With the serious category there are also events which contradict this pattern, specifically in those events in which weapons were used. In this category there was variation in outcomes in terms of shooting at limbs, shooting at genitals, slicing faces, or attempting to cause disfigurement rather than lethal intentions.

Respondents also reported about 36 murder events which accounted for about 5% of the event sample.<sup>11</sup> Most of the murders included reports of a prior conflict (and usually prior violent events) with the opponent(s). The breakdown of murder victims included 15 events in which the opponent was killed, 5 events in which the opponent and bystanders were killed, 10 events in which one of the respondent's boys was killed, 1 event in which the respondent's boy and a bystander were killed, and 1 event in which the opponent and one of the respondent's boys were killed. A select few in the sample who had killed someone were qualitatively different than their non-murderous counterparts. For the most part, they reported feeling justified in their actions primarily by casting blame on the other side for the conflict. They also saw the world as kill or be killed and seemed to take pleasure from the power associated with violence. Most of the youth in the sample did not have the ruthless stance but rather described their participation in violence as being swept up in the situational context. Classifying event severity was an

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<sup>11</sup> Several cases included multiple homicide victims.

important step in developing our youth violence typology. We turn next to what is perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the event narratives --namely the spark or trigger of violent and near-violent events.

### **What's the Beef?: An Examination of Event Sparks**

There's plenty of evidence that the structural forces placed on marginalized inner city adolescent and young adult men result in greater exposure to life stress, violence, substance abuse, and contact with the criminal justice system (see Anderson, 2008; Wilkinson, 2003). Interpersonal conflict is a great source of stress for urban residents. Despite solid documentation of this fact, few studies document how conflicts get started, what factors matter most to marginalized males, and how those situations end. In this section, we will examine the sparks of conflict for our sample. Our analysis reveals that it is not only the *what* that matters but also the *how, who, when and where* that are important. How a grievance is expressed is vital. In many ways the *how* partially defines the *what* of conflict. We classified 26 event sparks or issues (the *what's the beef* part) by event severity. Beef is a slang term that refers to conflict or disagreement between parties which is now part of our common lexicon. We list the most common issues in the table and provide illustrative examples below for most types. Some events had multiple sparks. This is especially the case with "identity/respect," "girl," "revenge," "gossip/rumors," "territorial honor," and their respective subcategories. Many of the sparks related to sexual competition, for example, also involve challenges to masculine identity and status/respect.

The most frequent spark was an identity threat or challenge to one's personal status or respect. Young men also used violence when competing for females, as part of the drug business, in robbery situations, to exact revenge, in the defense of others, in cheating or unfair play situations, in self-defense, over money or unpaid debts, over neighborhood or nondrug-related territorial disputes, over misunderstandings, to address gossip (he said, she said), due to jealousy, when rebuked for action, and a variety of other less frequent sparks. Events could stem from multiple sparks and we coded them accordingly. There were 318 events sparked by identity or status issues; 158 sparked over a female (134 of those were sexual competition); 120 drug business events; 109 robbery events; 58 events sparked over revenge or retaliation; 54 events classified as defense of others; 51 classified as sparked by self-defense; 47 sparked by cheating or unfair play; 32 sparked by money, debt, or stolen goods; and 19 sparked by some type of misunderstanding (not shown in table form). Table 3-1 reports the results of the spark variables by the level of severity of events. The numbers in the table are slightly less than what is reported above in the text because of missing data on event severity variable for 43 cases.

**Table 3-1. Spark or Reason by Event Severity\***

Spark	Event Severity (n=737)													
	Near-Violent Event		Violence but No Injury		Minor injuries - cuts and bruises		Injury but seriousness was unreported		Serious enough to require medical attention		Death		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Identity/Respect	24	8%	123	41%	40	13%	10	3%	90	30%	10	3%	297	40%
Girl	14	9%	50	33%	14	9%	10	7%	58	38%	7	5%	153	21%
Drug Business	7	6%	41	36%	4	3%	4	3%	44	38%	15	13%	115	16%
Robbery	2	2%	46	45%	9	9%	5	5%	32	31%	9	9%	103	14%
Revenge	2	4%	16	29%	1	2%	5	9%	28	50%	4	7%	56	8%
Defense of others	2	4%	8	16%	6	12%	3	6%	29	58%	2	4%	50	7%
Cheating or unfair play	9	19%	14	30%	6	13%	1	2%	15	32%	2	4%	47	6%
Self-defense	2	5%	15	34%	9	20%	2	5%	14	32%	2	5%	44	6%
Money/Debt	0	0%	17	55%	1	3%	0	0%	12	39%	1	3%	31	4%
Neighborhood/Territory	1	4%	10	43%	1	4%	2	9%	8	35%	1	4%	23	3%
Misunderstanding	6	32%	5	26%	0	0%	0	0%	7	37%	1	5%	19	3%
Other	5	7%	29	40%	4	6%	4	6%	28	39%	2	3%	72	10%
	58		278		68		32		265		36		1010	
													737	

\*Events were coded by as many sparks as identified from the narratives. Event severity is the dependent variable and spark is the independent in this table. Most tables in the report follow this format as the independent variables often had numerous categories making presentation them on the column impossible.

### Challenges to Social Identity or Status<sup>12</sup>

This section comprises narrative reconstructions of violent events classified as erupting out of some type of challenge or test to one’s social identity or status. These events could be called ‘character contests,’ strategies of ‘impression management’ and/or ‘face saving’ situations. An event was coded as sparking out of identity or respect concerns if either the opponent or respondent felt ‘dissed,’ challenged, or ‘played.’ These situations typically involve the denial of personal status or identity manifested through insult, ridicule, bump, slight, ice grill (hard looks), lack of proper acknowledgment, cheating, deception, domination, cunning, unwarranted threats, or unprovoked physical attack. According to respondents,

<sup>12</sup> The descriptive data including examples of each spark type have not significantly changed from the initial analysis of the first 306 cases. Many of the examples provided here were published in Wilkinson (2003) pages 135-175.

318 situations (41% of the total) reflected identity or status concerns. We had complete data on the identity/status spark events and severity in 297 of those events. Of the 297, 121 were gun events, 105 were no weapon events, 63 were knife events, and 8 involved the use of some other weapon. In total, there were 90 events in which someone was seriously injured, 10 events in which someone was killed, 40 events with minor injuries, 123 in which no one was injured, and 24 that were resolved peacefully without violence (Table 3-1).

### ***Personal Attacks***

Respondents described a variety of situations in which non-verbal communication between two or more parties resulted in violent conflict. These situations most often involved a direct challenge to the rights of each individual over defining and controlling both situation and space. In some cases, the initial exchange was simply an attempt at defining a situation, what Luckenbill (1977) called the "naming" stage. As illustrated by the examples below, many factors affect situational definitions in potential conflict situations.

Several examples show how violent events can erupt out of what respondents call "ice grills," "icing," "grilling," "hard profiling," or "stare downs." This form of communication between strangers within certain age-demographic groups is common on the street. In some situations, a look may be targeted at an individual with the goal of discovering more about his intentions in the setting. In other cases, ice grills were aggressive attempts to defend against any potential threat anticipated by the presence of a stranger in the neighborhood. These gestures speak loudly in a variety of settings to ward off attacks and identify situations in which attacks may be successful.

In the first example, the opponent was ice grilling Jon, and he became angry to the point of thinking about getting his gun. Jon interprets the opponent's ice grill (hard stare) as an extremely hostile threat and anticipates the opponent's return to the scene with a gun. This conflict may have escalated further if a mutual friend had not intervened:

(INTERVIEWER): Tell me what happen.

(JON): We went to the spot to buy weed. So this dude came up start ice grilling me.

(INTERVIEWER): What caused the beef?

(JON): He was grilling [me]. Then he ran up straight to the block. He went for his gun and I was gonna go for mine but my man came over. My man right there, [we] use to go to school with each other. So we just dead that, squashed it.

(INTERVIEWER): What made you decide not to hurt your opponent?

(JON): 'Cause he my man's peoples.

Looking back on the situation, the respondent felt that "if I had a gun and was by myself I probably woulda shot him." The ice grill was perceived as a serious personal insult. Jon was only willing to drop his grievance with the opponent because of his relationship with the third party.

Taunting and ice grills between young men were common features of violent events. One such event occurred during a baseball game in jail. Rashard "iced" his opponent for making a "slick comment" and paid for his transgression against this powerful individual with a physical injury.

(RASHARD): The fight, the main fact I can remember is when I got jumped and I had to get 140 stitches across my eye. Right at the bottom. And the situation was... it started on a baseball field where someone said a slick comment towards me and I turned around and I iced him and that person was well known ...basically he ran [in] the building and he got all his peoples that was on my unit, my wing [in jail], to take care of his business, so when he was there, I was fighting at least eight people, guys who was doing 18 to life, lifers and there was not no skinny, you know, they wasn't no skinny puny people. They've been there, they've been working out... it was a rough battle.

(INTERVIEWER): How the fight had started?

(RASHARD): I already told you how it started, it started because...

(INTERVIEWER): I mean like in your unit, how did they approach you?

(RASHARD): They approach me, they approached the way, you know, handled their business, they just said, 'pardon me may I speak to you,' and once I came inside that room then, we got it on.

### ***Outsider Status and Identity Uncertainty***

One central theme in identity/status-related violent events is that identity challenges resulting in violent events were more often between strangers. The examples presented below illustrate how these conflicts unfold in a variety of situations. These events occurred in a setting where the act of bumping into someone represents a personal attack. One respondent, Antoine, reacted to a bump by swinging at his opponent. While this seemingly spontaneous conflict could have resulted in a physical fight without weapons, the opponent chose instead to get his gun. Antoine explained the situation:

(ANTOINE): I was walking through the projects one day. I was going to a party. It's not around my 'hood, [I] ain't know nobody around there. And this kid bumped me. And I swung at him. Then he ran to go get his people. And he came back and he shot at me twice.

(INTERVIEWER): Um, was there some type of argument before the gun got involved?

(ANTOINE): Nah just when he bumped me and I swung at him.

(INTERVIEWER): Why you swung at him for?

(ANTOINE): 'Cause he bump me and then he look back like he was going to do something. So I swung.

(INTERVIEWER): What he say?

(ANTOINE): 'What's the fuck wrong with you, man?'

(INTERVIEWER): What was it about this situation that made it necessary to handle it the way you did?

(ANTOINE): They way he talk to me. And he never knew me before.

(INTERVIEWER): Who made the first move toward violence?

(ANTOINE): Actually, I did.

(INTERVIEWER): You swung at him?

(ANTOINE): Yeah.

(INTERVIEWER): What did he do after that?

(ANTOINE): He ran to get his gun.

(INTERVIEWER): Was anybody else around?

(ANTOINE): His peoples.

(INTERVIEWER): What kind of stuff was they sayin’?

(ANTOINE): ‘Kill that nigga.’

(INTERVIEWER): How did you feel about what his friends was sayin? Were you afraid?

(ANTOINE): I was. Man with a gun, shooting.

The other individuals in the situation clearly supported Antoine’s opponent and encouraged his gun use. The event escalated to a gun incident quickly and Antoine fled the scene without injury. Two factors made the respondent’s presence in that neighborhood problematic: he was vulnerable to attack because of his outsider status and he did not have a gun.

In the example below, Chuckie was confronted by a member of a rival crew while walking with a female through a park. The unarmed opponent, known to Chuckie as “Big Willy,” lived in a nearby neighborhood. The opponent initiated the violence by hitting Chuckie and continued to attack him. Chuckie reacted by pulling out a gun from his pocket and shooting the opponent in the leg:

(CHUCKIE): Alright, in the park a crew named The Tuff Guys came. This kid smack me, he smack me in front of a female, and you know you can’t have things like that. I was about 17 at the time and I had a lil’ two-five in my pocket.

(INTERVIEWER): Alright, what happened next and how did it turn to a gun situation?

(CHUCKIE): Well, first of all, I knew it was on for the simple fact is, every time he got close I backed up, he got closer. Every time I backed off he came closer. I knew it was gonna turn into a gun situation for the simple fact I know what I had on me, and I kept sayin’, you know, the next time I back up, I’m not movin’ no more, and then he come messin’ me, whatever he do, if he don’t knock me out, I’ll shoot him. That was on my mind. You know and after he did it, I jumped back at him but I ain’t swing. My mind was tellin’ me ‘why swing when you can just hit this nigga off right there and get outta there,’ you know. So, I took a couple shots at him, hit him in the bottom of his legs...

In this description, Chuckie’s anticipation of the opponent’s actions influenced his own action. In the heat of the situation, he concluded that his opponent’s failure to disable him equaled an opportunity for a defensive move against the attacker. According to this account, Chuckie believed he had been pushed to a point where gun violence was necessary and easier. Another respondent became involved in a gun conflict when his opponent bumped him in a party. Scot was high and refused to accept the apology of the opponent. The event unfolded in the following way:

(SCOT): It’s like I said before, you know, just me and my man was just jiving and bugging out, dancing and shit, you know, drinking, smoking. Shit, some niggas just wanted to try to play you and shit, make us look stupid. So, you know, [they] pulled out the gun and started shooting in the fucking house and shit, everybody screaming and shit. Me and the niggas shot back at them. They shot my man twice. So then after that, like, everybody just started screaming and running, so we, like, just started shooting.

(INTERVIEWER): Was there some kind of argument before the guns was used?

(SCOT): Yeah, of course, you know.

(INTERVIEWER): So tell me, like, everything that was said.

(SCOT): All right, like me and my man, right, we was dancing and shit, smoking, all that, drunk like a motherfucker, you know? So like one punk, you know, like, bumped my man and shit, you know. So, you know, they came out arguing and shit, you know, pussy

and this and that, you know. So we was like, all right, so then I went up to my man, I was like 'what's the deal and shit,' he was like 'I don't know, somebody just trying to play you.' So I just started shooting at them, you know? Fuck it. We was high and shit, so I was like, 'I'ma shoot these motherfuckers; so that's that...

As the example below illustrates, individuals may react to bumps or "hard profiling" in a less confrontational way. In this case, the "bumpee" waited to attack the "bumper" when he least expected it. The respondent accepted this experience as punishment for his foolish behavior:

(JEROME): I got shot over here [showing interviewer the scar]... I got stabbed twice in my back, too.

(INTERVIEWER): For what?

(JEROME): Bullshitting. I got fucked up one day and I just when I first started out. I just thought I was the man.

(INTERVIEWER): How old were you?

(JEROME): Um. Fifteen. Um, yeah, about 15.

(INTERVIEWER): And you got stabbed twice in your back?

(JEROME): It's 'cause... we went to this party and sometimes I thought I was the man 'cause I smoked weed so I thought I was the man. So I used to act like a fool, profile, I use to profile hard. Going into parties, rock my shoulders, bumping people. And after the party was over I got jumped and I got stabbed twice.

(INTERVIEWER): You got stabbed twice?

(JEROME): Yeah. I don't even know who stabbed me. I just know I got jumped and somebody stabbed me.

(INTERVIEWER): You was leaving the party and some guy just ran up on you?

(JEROME): Yeah. I wasn't by myself, though. Everybody that was with me ran. Everybody that was with me ran.

(INTERVIEWER): What they stabbed you with, a knife?

(JEROME): Nah. I guess it was an ice pick.

In the next example, JP immediately sensed the opponent's hostile stance toward him as soon as he entered a party. Again, JP was an outsider to the neighborhood and put himself in a risky situation by attending the party. In this case, however, he brought his gun. He explained:

(INTERVIEWER): You wasn't scared or nothing?

(JP): Nah I wasn't scared I was thinking about murdering the nigga. Nigga came up to my face talking shit.

(INTERVIEWER): So that night, so, how did Y'all get into that beef?

(JP): We went in the party...we walked up in the party.

(INTERVIEWER): Who started it?

(JP): Ain't nobody really start it. As soon as I walked in the party niggas was looking at me hard.

(INTERVIEWER): True.

(JP): So I tried to ignore that... So I started with this chick in there, kid. Niggas was looking at me wrong from when I first stepped in the party. Niggas was playing themselves. Talking about 'look at the new faces up in here.' 'Cause I ain't from around there.

(INTERVIEWER): So what, true true. Who made first moves out there?

(JP): When we was in the party, I made the first move. I told Money 'let's go outside.' He came up to me, so I told him 'let's go outside.' It was in a small-ass little apartment. A little room. With the lights off. All his peoples were there. But I wasn't sweating it 'cause I had my gun on me.

(INTERVIEWER): True. You know if Money was strapped?

(JP): Nah, he wasn't strapped. 'Cause when he went outside, he went back... he ran back inside when I pulled out. He ran back inside.

(INTERVIEWER): You don't know if he had a joint in there?

(JP): Yeah. He musta have a joint inside there. Yeah. I'm saying. It was his party.

### ***Accusations: Attacks of Honor***

Many violent events result from situations in which one or more individuals make accusations or claims that allude to some perceived wrong that has been committed. The accused typically responds with a hostile reaction that almost always pushes the dispute toward violence. In the following example, the accusations angered David and his denial of the claim fueled a physical fight between the two parties, which is a middle event in a series of related exchanges that eventually results in several deaths. This illustrates the serious consequences of accusations:

(INTERVIEWER): What was y'all fighting for, y'all money? Drugs?

(DAVID): The nigga came home talking some bullshit, talking about this drug king and his girlfriend or whatever. He can't find his girlfriend or whatever. [That] we killed her or whatever, some bullshit. It was over bullshit.

(INTERVIEWER): It was... it was bullshit.

(DAVID): Yeah. It ain't nothing to die for.

(INTERVIEWER): I mean, when you think about it now.

(DAVID): Yeah. I think about it now and psss... It's like you saying, 'it was bullshit,' that ain't nothing to die for, man. Not for bullshit, man. Word up! I'd die for my moms, my kids, that's it. I ain't dying for no words, man.

Hostility was a common response to accusations of stealing or dishonesty. False accusations in front of others were often taken extremely personally and were usually denied. Being accused was typically perceived as a personal threat or attack on one's name or personal honor. Among our sample, accusations often instigated confrontations that eventually became violent.

(DEAN): I remember I got in a fight at school. 'Cause me and my man, we was cutting and shit. And somebody coat got stolen out they locker. The kid approached me and he was like 'I heard you got my coat.' I told him I didn't have it. So he started getting loud and shit. So I snuffed that nigga. So he went and told his peoples and then they came back and they tried to jump us. My man was there so we just was fighting. We got beat up and all, but we got him back.

(INTERVIEWER): Was there a specific point you realized you was going to have to get violent?

(DEAN): Yeah. 'Cause I was like 'I ain't got your coat' and he stood up in my face trying to yell and shit. So I was 'yo man back the fuck up,' you know, and the nigga was still

talking shit, so I was like, all right, we going to have to brawl. We going to have to do this shit.

Respondents explained that the way in which an individual makes a claim or accusation influences the response. Depending on the situation, there is a “right” way and a “wrong” way to express a grievance. Fighting or other violence was an important part of defining these contests.

### ***Material Attacks***

Identity attacks often include taking another’s possessions as a statement of dominance or control. Respondents described situations in which they had taken the possessions of others, or vice versa, and many described the battles that were waged to keep possessions. These material attacks reflected attempts to identify, maintain, or to degrade social identity. Three examples are provided below. In the first example, Clarence defended himself and his cousins against a personal and material attack that occurred as they sat on the stoop of a tattoo parlor in another neighborhood. In the following example, note how the introduction of a pistol dramatically changed the balance of power.

(INTERVIEWER): So tell me about the time you had to pistol-whip somebody?

(CLARENCE): ...We went downstairs. We was chilling in front of the place. It was kind of hot upstairs, we was getting bored. So we wanted to go outside. So we just stepped outside and sat right outside on the stoop. And, I don’t know, for one reason or another there was, like, four black kids walking on the block. We were talking amongst ourselves, we not paying attention to them. They a little older than us too, so we like, yo, they ain’t acknowledging us, we ain’t acknowledging them. We carrying on our conversation. And so me and my cousin in front of one stoop and about, like, two feet over there’s another stoop and my man was sitting there, and he had on a little New York Knickerbocker hat, a little phat [cool] hat that just came out. The first two set of kids walk by and they was just kind of looking, but I kind of ignored them ‘cause I was talking to my cousin. But my man, he’s a little guy too so he wasn’t looking for no trouble or nothing like that, but he ain’t going to let nobody disrespect him neither. So the first two walked by. They ain’t even look at nobody. The second two that’s walking behind them, they just looking and, you know, carrying they little conversation too. They walked by me and my cousin and as they passing my friend they just, one of them snatched his hat off his head, and put it on his head. He was like ‘what, Money, what you want to do for this?’ So my man kind of stepped up and he was like ‘yo, what’s up, man, I ain’t trying to have that,’ and kind of snatched it back, he got a chance to grab it back and my cousin had stepped up too. It was four of them and it was like three of us, so we was like ‘damn, whatever, whatever. They going to have to leave us here on the floor, leave all of us here. So they was like ‘what?’ and then the other two that was in the front turned around they was like, ‘oh, what’s up, man, y’all niggas want to do these niggas or what?’ They tried to treat us like we was herbs. So that’s kind of like, I kind of felt funny.

The respondent reported that “they tried to treat us like we was herbs;” he felt disrespected and became angry. As Clarence continued the story he described pulling a gun out to protect his friend from the opponents’ threats. The gun gave him the ability to counter-challenge his opponents’ personal and material attack.

(CLARENCE): For one reason or another, my aunt just happen to be coming down the steps and at that point, soon as she open the door I just grabbed straight for the purse and I pulled the joint out and I was like, 'yo, man, what y'all niggas want to do now?'

(INTERVIEWER): Umm.

(CLARENCE): And the first two, they was like 'yo,' and they started taking off, and the other two, they was like yo they didn't know whether to run or if I was going to bust or not. So I got kind of close to him where I could swing on him and I swung on him with the joint boom. And I hit him in his head and that was it. He had to step after that. Then after that I turned around and it was kind of like a cop car coming down the block, and I'm glad my aunt grab the joint again and she put it back in her purse and she went upstairs.

The next incident, which occurred in jail, was a common experience for an individual new to a facility. The young man explained what happened:

(WALT): Well, it was when I was in jail, in the sprung. And shit, as I went in my bucket and I was missing something I had in my bucket, you know, and I saw another kid with it on. So, you know, I went and I asked him if it was mine. He told me no. So then I didn't stress it for that day, but he kept going around telling everybody he had my shit. So then one of his boys told me, 'yo, my boy said if you wanted it back to go in the bathroom.' So I went in the bathroom.

(INTERVIEWER): Which sprung (a unit within the jail)?

(WALT): Sprung two. I went in the bathroom and there were mad heads there, so I thought I was going to get jumped. So the kid gave me the fair one. He rocked me and shit, but I got mines, 'cause I earned it back and shit. And that's it.

(INTERVIEWER): How did the situation end?

(WALT): Well, after the fight he came up to me and he told me that since I went out for mines that if I want my shit that I could have it, but that you just don't play him close and he won't play me close. And we just left it like that.

In the previous example, the act that "he kept going around telling everybody he had my shit," suggests the theft was motivated by an effort to establish dominance, or at least to test Walt's resolve, rather than a material acquisition.

In the subsequent example, a respondent ignored the risk of injury and fought an opponent who was armed with a knife. The respondent described his efforts to keep his bike:

(DANIEL): We was riding the bike and he wanted to fight so I was like, 'for what?' and he was like 'cause I wanted your bike and you didn't want to give it to me.' So I was like, 'nah, I couldn't give it to you. It's not yours.' So he started fighting me.

(INTERVIEWER): So how did the knife get involved?

(DANIEL): He pulled it out and I was like, 'you really want to kill me?' He was like, 'yeah, give me your bike.' So I was like, 'well then, let's throw the hands if, you know, you got the knife.' He was like 'nah, nah,' and so he started swinging with the knife and I picked up a bottle and we started fighting, and I hit with the bottle and he cut me and dropped the knife, and we started fighting with the hands.

(INTERVIEWER): So how did this situation end?

(DANIEL): We started fighting and he didn't get to take my bike and he left. It ended—he left. He was like, 'I'll catch you next time.'

(INTERVIEWER): He told you?

(DANIEL): Yeah. I was like, yeah whatever.

In the next example, DeShawn took ownership of his former friend's dog and refused to return the dog after keeping him for several weeks. The grievance stemmed in part from DeShawn's ability to claim rights to the dog. In the situation, the actors fought for the right of ownership over the dog:

(DeSHAWN): I had a fair one right across the street at my house. Last year. Are [you] talking about recently?

(INTERVIEWER): Last year, yeah, recently?

(DeSHAWN): Recently, um, this boy... I had a fight right in front of my building. 'Cause I had this... he had his dog. So he had no home, so I was like 'I'll take it.' The dog's name was Homicide. I trained that dog to be mean, to chase cats, fight when I wanted him to fight. Shit when I wanna make him shit. I did all that. I could put him on the corner and walk around the block or go to park somewhere, he'd be right there when I come home.

(INTERVIEWER): What you all had the fight for?

(DeSHAWN): Over that dog. He was like 'yo, why you took my dog?' I was like 'no I didn't take your dog. You gave your dog..' [I] took it and I trained it, and I ain't giving that shit back, 'cause I wasted like two-three hundred off that dog, for the shots, everything. Come on, I had that dog for everything.

(INTERVIEWER): Who made the first move towards violence?

(DeSHAWN): He did. He wanted to smack-box me, and I didn't want to just smack-box. And he swung on me, and I like... he smacked me, so I punched him in his jaw. Then ...I keep on punching him.

(INTERVIEWER): What was you trying to accomplish when you hit him?

(DeSHAWN): To stop playing with me. I wasn't playing with you, so don't play with me.

(INTERVIEWER): What was the outcome of the fight? After the fight did anything change about where you hung out at?

(DeSHAWN): I had to watch my back cause he come back for me.

(INTERVIEWER): After the fight did you do anything extra to protect yourself?

(DeSHAWN): Yeah.

(INTERVIEWER): What?

(DeSHAWN): Carry my gun.

(INTERVIEWER): What sort of relationship did you have with the guy after the fight?

(DeSHAWN): Me and him still ain't friends to this day.

### **Competing for Females by Violent Means**

There were a total of 153 events related to females with 134 specifically related to competition among males for romantic relations with females. Fifty-three events did not involve any type of weapon, 49 events involved guns, 33 events involved knives, and 6 involved some other type of weapon. In terms of the severity of the events that were sparked over competing for females 47, events ended with

someone being seriously injured and 7 ended in a fatality. Fourteen events were resolved peacefully without violence.

Competition over females by inner city urban adolescents and young adult men involves a number of interesting social processes reflecting both a normative system and patterns of consistent norm violation. This section examines how “the rules” of social interaction in the quest for female attention are stated, understood, and routinely violated by young men. According to respondents, the rules are known yet respondents described many scenarios in which rule violations resulted in violence. Among other strategies, violence was viewed as a reasonable response when a rule was violated. Notions of personal space, propriety, and respect were closely linked to the rules. Specifically other men were not to *look at, talk to, talk about, insult or disrespect, touch, dance with, have sex with, or attempt to have sex with another man’s woman*. Respondents reported 45 events that fit the *don’t talk to/look my girl* rule, 33 events classified as *all is fair* in getting the attention of unattached females, 30 events in which violating the *don’t touch or dance with my girl* rule occurred, 16 events classified as *don’t disrespect my girl* rule, 6 *don’t mess with our neighborhood females* events, and 3 *don’t cloak friendship to steal my girl* events<sup>13</sup>. Respondents described the rules of engagement in sexual competition conflict by articulating boundaries and objecting to violations in order to exert their position in the situation. The escalation of these situations seems to follow certain patterns, including the identification of an advance on one’s girl by another man, the lack of a respectful account to the boyfriend, and physical rebuttal without a verbal account by the opponent. The example below illustrated how violating the *don’t talk to my girl* rule can lead to gun violence; Aron explained:

(ARON): One time I was chillin’, we was chillin’, me and my companions on the fucking corner ...chillin’, talking to fucking girls. Next thing you know, nigga fucking roll up in a fucking Lexus, and niggas said ‘yo, you niggas talking to the fucking wrong bitches. These bitches are trouble, kid.’ So we ain’t pay no attention, we just keep on talking to bitches, them bitches looked good. We wanted to hit the bitches up.

(INTERVIEWER): True.

(ARON): So we keep on talking to them ...and their fucking men came... and them niggas just started fucking talking shit, kid. So we just pulled out, and they pulled out. Niggas started running and shit, so we just did some crazy shit. Shot and shit...and the cops came and we all broke out, man.

As demonstrated by the example above, heated verbal exchanges frequently precede physical violence. In another case, Quentin described the *don’t disrespect my girl* rule:

Well, this guy was talking shit to my wife in the store. ...So, I told the guy, yo, that’s my wife. I wouldn’t do that to your mother or your wife. Don’t disrespect me or my wife.

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<sup>13</sup> These results presented in the text only. They do not appear in a table.

He started, 'oh, fuck you. I'm gonna fuck you up. I told him, you want to fuck me up. I want to see you fuck me up, you know.' We started [fighting].

Quentin's remarks address his beliefs about appropriate social interaction with particular emphasis on how men should address women in public. From Quentin's perspective, his opponent was being disrespectful and when asked to provide an account, the opponent expanded his verbal attack to Quentin. The dynamics of this interaction led to a physical fight. Robyn got into a fair fight which eventually escalated to a group-on-group gun face-off as a consequence of *talking to another man's girlfriend*. Robyn explained:

We was all hanging out in front of the building and shit. There was these three girls walking by and I started to speak to one of them, but I didn't know the bitch was just coming to see her man. Man, she walking, you know I started kicking it to her and stuff. And I, some nigger just came running out the fucking building, you know, started flipping, for no reason, so boom, you know, the shit started off right there, swung deck that nigger in his shit. ...this nigga just came a charging me, he ain't even asked no questions.

After the initial fight Robyn continued to pursue the female until he was successful in developing a sexual relationship with her. Robyn was not deterred by the earlier fight; rather, he internalized the actions of his opponent as some type of challenge. Robyn was prepared to defend his perceived right to develop a relationship with the young woman his opponent claimed. In another situation, Timothy faced the reverse situation in which he responded with violence when another man was looking at his girlfriend. Timothy explained:

He was looking at my girl too much. So I approached him, tell me what he was looking at. He wanted to become disrespectful and he wanted to talk smart. Talk about she's a bitch, he wasn't looking at the bitch.

Notice that denial of the claim was used here. Denial and rejection of claims were common strategies used by youth on both sides of conflict. The more repugnant the response the more likely youth would make hostile attributions and become further emotionally aroused. Timothy and his opponent fought with their fists in front of an audience of onlookers. When Timothy reflected on why he had thrown the first punch to initiate the fight he said, "He disrespected my lady, you know. And he disrespected me at the same time."

Some violations were more anger provoking than others. The most serious violation was having sex with another man's girlfriend. Nikolas was hospitalized for injuries to his chest following a knife incident that was provoked by a sexual encounter with another man's girlfriend. Nikolas explained:

...I fuck his bitch the night before. I told my man... [He] told the nigga. So coming outside niggas like 'yo, explain yourself man.' I'm like 'word, I ain't got nothing to do with it.' That's her man. That's between her and him. If that was my girl that's a different story.

When he correcting his girl. Niggas like yeah 'she got fucked up.' And I knew what time it was.

The dialogue Nikolas recounted was from a conversation he had on the street with several associates who knew Nikolas and his opponent. Notice that Nikolas attributed blame for the infidelity on the woman and does not take responsibility for the accusation that he took advantage of an intoxicated female. Despite knowing that the boyfriend was extremely angry, Nikolas decided to walk up his block. As he did, he noticed that youth on the street are reacting to him strangely. It does not take long for violence to unfold. Nikolas described what happened:

So I'm like, all a sudden nigga snuff me from behind. I'm like, oh! Nigga snuff me, niggas like 'yo, you fuck with my girl.' 'I'm like yo, hold on, yo let's talk about it.' Those niggers is real up there. I know my boundaries and how to go about certain situations. I'm like 'yo chill, calm down.' Nigga like 'fuck that.' So nigga swung on me, and staggered and I snuffed the nigga. So we fighting and shit, brawling. Nigga grab me, nigga was gonna cut me in my face. But it's like his mind told him don't cut me in my face. Nigga slice me across my jacket. That was the end of it.

In this case and several others, violence was used as punishment.

Some youth defined the parameters of ownership and affiliation with females in possessive and territorial ways regardless of their *actual* status with a particular female. Many youth held other young men to higher standards of conduct than they upheld for themselves. In the next example, Lane was confronted by his opponent while in the middle of a sexually charged dance with a young woman he met at the party. Lane explained:

Boom, I was talking to her and shit. We danced; his girl was on my lap. We was inside a little closet ...And the nigga swung at me and some shit. Nigga just hit me, boom. I turned around stepped out the closet. Pulled out the razor and cut him.

(INTERVIEWER): What happened next after that?

(LANE): After that, his mans and them stepped [to me], so my mans and them stepped up behind me and shit. ...And my man called my brother he was like, 'son, son your brother had to cut somebody son. Them niggas came like 30 deep.' He [Lane's brother] was like, 'what's the deal with my brother?' A nigga like, 'He cut my man son, he should get fucked [up].' He [my brother] was like, 'if you think you can fuck my brother up, fuck him up.' The nigga was like, 'nah chill son.' Cause we was like 40 deep son, everybody had ghats [guns]. They was at they party, you know they think it's sweet, they ain't have ghats. So my brother said come on son. And all of us went home. Nothing [else] happened.

### ***Availability and Competition***

If a female is “available” or “unattached,” many respondents felt that *all is fair and it’s up to the better man* in terms of who will be successful in winning a woman’s attention. Ambiguity or conflicting definitions of a female’s availability often result in violent encounters among competitors. Although notions about rules and what behavior is “right” within the context of competing for heterosexual relationships, respondents provided ample evidence of blurred lines, multiple interpretations of situations, double standards, and emotionally charged decision making. The violent incidents described by study youth included both violating another man’s relationship and responding when someone else was attempting to poach his relationship. Although the young males in the sample understood these norms, they reported violating them frequently when the opportunity arose. Violations that occurred in view of an audience mattered most to young urban men and came to represent larger issues that were equated with normative expectations within the social group for a violent response. This quickly transformed the issue from sexual competition to larger masculine identity challenges. The resulting violent encounters were much more likely to escalate into serious violence (defined as injury producing) when an audience was present and the combatants involved were armed. Social settings in which the mating game was played provided the scenes for the sexual competition related violence script to unfold.

As illustrated by Mateo’s story below, the competition for females often reflects multiple definitions of a situation, including: those of a young man who perceives himself as having a particular girl, those of another young man who wants a particular girl, those of a female (who may or may not consider herself to be in a relationship with a particular male), and those of the observers who may make public judgments and pronouncements. Mateo described the dialogue he had with his opponent leading up to getting shot:

Alright we was in the club getting a party on or whatever. Got a little drunk and I was talking to this female. ...Me and this kid started arguing. She was like chill this and that. I just didn’t like him disrespecting me like that. And he tried to get her number or something. I’m like, ‘yo I’m sayin don’t come at me like I ain’t the one. This and that.’ He like, ‘what what?’ ...So I feel like he big man or something. So I am like ‘whatever.’ We were arguing, going at it. We [were] in the bathroom. I’m like, ‘yo whatever. Handle your business.’ Then the guy pushed me. ‘Chill I don’t need this I don’t need this.’ They was like, ‘you know what. This man is right. We don’t need to be fighting. We was fighting over a chick. This don’t make no sense.’ I’m saying, ‘forget everything’ I said it’s my bust. We all brothers up in here. We came to party.’ I’m sayin, ‘we came to do our thing.’ He was like, ‘nah nah nah.’ They [Mateo’s boys] was like, ‘come on B. It ain’t no need for that.’ [time passed]. Then before I left the club. Again I told him like, ‘yo, I meant what I said before, B. We don’t need this B. This is is not good.’ ...You want to get hurt or whatever but I’m sayin ‘it’s not good at all. We don’t need to be fighting. Cops is

right across the street. Let's patch this up. Let it be peace.' He was like, 'alright, no doubt, no doubt.'

We see in the example above that Mateo decided that he would rather stop pursuing the female than have additional trouble with his opponent. The opponent however continued to pursue violence. In the example above we get the perspective of a young man who was attempting to establish relations with a female that he assumed was unattached. Mateo explained:

The next thing I know. I'm leaving the club. We were standing out there for like a half hour. My man is like, 'yo there's two cats across the street.' I'm walking like in between the cars across from the street. I feel a loud... I feel a big gust of air. I look at my leg. I didn't see nothing on my leg. So I ran. I got across the street. I say I heard the gun shots when I was running. I was like, 'oh I'm hit I'm hit.' I just kept on running. ... I see this guy just standing it's like he's waiting for me to get there. And then I just threw myself in a car. He covered he just threw his body over me like, 'I got you don't worry about.' Then he held me down till the cops and the ambulance came.

It appeared that Mateo's opponent was less willing to make peace or let go of the infraction, but we do not have data on his side of the story. It is difficult to determine which issue(s) influenced his opponent's actions: Whether it was initial issue over the girl, the way in which Mateo handled himself in the situation, the unquieted emotional arousal of the opponent, the context of the crowd, intoxicated decision making, the availability of guns on the opponent's side or other factors. Each certainly played some role in the way in which this event unfolded. The next example illustrates the *don't touch* rule and further illustrates what happens when one party does not properly account for his actions. The respondent interpreted the touching of his girl as disrespect and asked the opponent for acknowledgment of his transgression. Instead he was challenged to step outside to fight for the girl, escalating the event into a shooting, as Clarence explained:

(INTERVIEWER): What, he was trying to dance with her?

(CLARENCE): Yeah, man, but she didn't wanna dance with him, and he was rubbing up. He was drunk and shit. *Boom*, I tell him, you know, how you be trying to avoid shit? I tell him 'you know, I'm with her, don't disrespect me like than, man,' and he was like 'what son, what what? Let's take this outside, son, what you want!' I'm like 'say no more, say no more.' Everybody go outside, and once I walk out. *Bong*, he snuffed me. He caught me. I wasn't really dazed. I was upset though. *Boom*, my man passes me the .380 and shit, the chrome. *Bong*, I hit him with the butt of it. I pistol-whipped him, right in his head. Then he snuffs (punches) me. So then, um, his man is going to get him something. I don't know what it was look like it was a revolver. His man hit him off (give him a gun), right when he hitting him off, bong. I blazed (shot) him, I hit him two times. I caught him right there, on his back, his stomach and his back, his stomach first. Then he turned around and I caught him in the back. Then I bounced. I got caught half an hour later.

***Male-Female Relations as Context: Defenders versus Intruders***

The males' position or status<sup>14</sup> vis-à-vis the female is a factor that influences the social order of interactions around competition for females. We hypothesized that the more involved and attached a male is to a female, the greater the chances are that he will exert his exclusive rights on her when other men attempt to intrude. When a young man has a *legitimate stake* in a relationship with a female, another man challenging to take her away commits a serious violation with high risks. We gleaned from study participants that with higher risks comes the perception of higher rewards as well. Fighting another young man for a "prized" female and winning is a certain way to improve one's social standing in the male peer group and eliminate the perception of weakness.

Sexual competition led to violence in at least two ways: defending existing relationships and challenging others for the right to new relationships with females. Once an individual had an established relationship or has made clear his intentions to pursue such a relationship, respondents described the need to defend that status as violently as needed. As demonstrated by the interview excerpts, the focus of much of the violence was on how breaking the rules of engagement around dating/mating situations quickly transforms into an offensive honor or respect attack that is perceived as a serious challenge to a young man's masculinity. Put differently, violence occurs over claiming rights toward the female as part of the male's interest. Respondents described situations in which either he or the opponent played the role of the defender or the intruder in every situation regardless of the male's degree of connectedness to the female they were fighting over. Jud reported a fight that unfolded specifically because the opponent did not acknowledge Jud's status. Jud explained: "I walked up to him and said, 'yo, why you talk to my girl?' He was like, 'yo that's anybody's girl.' When he said that, that ticked me off." He recalled that the audience played a role in keeping the fight fair. During the conflict Jud heard people say, "them two dudes they going to get at it, there's going to be a shootout, somebody going to get killed." The crowd included armed youth with affiliations on both sides. Jud speculated that the other side "...didn't move 'cause they knew my crew was there. They just let it happen; they knew it could have been a shootout." This event was disrupted when the police came to the scene. In many other cases, the male peer group's behavior also becomes relevant as affiliated observers frequently felt justified in joining violence that had started because a sexual competitor violated an unwritten rule of sexual competition.

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<sup>14</sup> Note that it was difficult to precisely define relationship status because the term is ambiguous in this context. We coded the data using a variety of information to distill how connected, involved, committed, and attached a young man was to the young woman who was the object of attention in the conflict situation. We felt confident classifying respondents into the following categories: 44% desired the attention of the female (no prior attachment), 23% perceived some advancement with the female, 19% involved in some type of relationship with the female, 5% previously involved (ex-girlfriend or lost relationship), and 7% a platonic relationship only with the female (denies romantic interest).

The sequential patterns of violent events related to sexual competition illustrate the inner workings of violence among urban minority males. Whether the youth is defending his “ownership” rights over “his” female or attempting to establish relations with a female who is defended by another young male, the action schema is similar. Verbal warnings are used to give the other male notice that he has or is about to commit a violation. The counteraction to such naming is to deny responsibility, deny knowledge of the status of the male-female relationship, or to reject the legitimacy of the pronouncement. Once the “intruder” male rejected the “defender” male’s definition of the situation, verbal warnings escalated to threats and eventually physical violence unless some third party intervened. The “intruder” was blamed for causing the “defender” to get angry enough to use violence to defend his status with the female. If the audience is comprised of either youth’s social network, the likelihood of peer involvement in the active violent action increased especially if one side appeared to be losing.

Public mingling settings are seen by many young men as ambiguous situations in which “ownership” is debatable. As Jordan explained, females at clubs and parties are “fair game”:

...the girl was in the party, ...so we was just dancing. He wanna act hard, come out his face, talking ‘bout that’s his girl. I’m saying straight up and down I don’t care if that’s your girl. She’s was in the party ...she looking good ...that’s about it.

Some disputes resulted from the ambiguity associated with determining exactly *when* and *how* a female became one man’s girl. Meanings attached to “dating” situations and female “commitment” to these males were typically defined by males who often internalized definitions of monogamous relations with females (regardless of females’ definitions of the relationship and often despite outward evidence to the contrary). Males who already had girlfriends perceived parties and social events as opportunities to show off their girls and have a good time; those without girlfriends perceived parties or clubs as locations for picking up or hitting on women. Another example can be found in an event reported by Julio. He nearly lost his life after giving his number to a young woman who was perceived to be a “free agent”:

I almost got killed ‘cause I was trying to kick it to this girl. ‘Cause I gave her my number. And he probably saw that. The chick was looking at me. She wanted to give me play, so I gave her play. I didn’t think it was gonna come to the point like that. Me being almost killed. See a lot of people dancing and shit. A lot of girls. Then I see this guy looking at me, mad hard. And my friend tells me, ‘yo this guy I think he got a problem with you.’ ...I think he waited for me to be by myself because when he finally saw me by myself he charged me. I was so drunk I was out of it. ...And when I tried to get up, they hit me with a bottle in my head. ...I sat down in a chair ‘cause I was out of it and I look at my chest and my clothes, I saw mad blood. ...I got stabbed.

Jealousy and possessiveness about ex-partners were used as a strong justification for attacking a new or potential boyfriend. The intense emotion demonstrated by the next example provides contrast to Anderson’s findings (Anderson, 1990, 1999). Anderson describes the sexual codes of inner city life in

terms of male disregard for emotional connectedness with females, avoidance of developing caring relationships with females but instead having strong preferences for seeing women as objects to be played (Anderson, 1990). The background on the event is that Mikki, a 16 year old male from the South Bronx, had previously been romantically involved with Trio. Mikki explained how he had a difficult time getting over the break up especially when he saw Trio with a new guy (Basal). He explained that "...in the beginning [Basal] started seeing her right whatever, so he started coming to my block and I didn't like that. In the beginning I was a little jealous 'cause I still cared about her." Mikki recounts several interactions with Basal including one that left him hospitalized with a stab wound. In the first confrontation, Mikki reported that he called Trio out of a parked car where she was sitting with Basal and told her that Basal "had two kids and was probably still with his wife." Mikki warned her to "think about what [she was] doing 'cause that guy got two kids." After Trio rejected Mikki's comments and recounted that Basal was not married, Mikki threatened Basal by insisting "I don't want to see you around the block no more"; Basal responded by pulling out a gun and demanding that Mikki back down. Mikki was unarmed, told Basal he did not want to take the conflict to the gun level, and left the scene. He went to talk with his boys about what had happened. One interpretation was that Mikki's boys were supportive of his concerns and his rights in seeking revenge against Basal. Although more than two months had passed, Mikki confronted Basal a second time as he walked up to Trio's apartment building. Mikki was armed with a steel pole and backed by his crew of associates. Mikki claimed that he only wanted to talk, but Basal defended himself by pulling out a knife from his back pocket. When Mikki attempted to smash the windshield of Basal's car, Basal stabbed him and then fled the scene in his car. As Mikki told this story from his hospital bed, he described feeling jealous, disrespected by the girl because they had supposedly "told each other that if [they] ever broke up, that [they] can't bring people to the block like until a little bit...once [they] broke up she was already seeing somebody," and violated by the new boyfriend because he pulled a gun instead of talking it out like "men." The jealousy-violence script affected not only Mikki's behavior, but also the behavior of his associates. The group reinforced his belief that he was doing the right thing and that he had the resources to succeed in attacking Basal.

### ***The Situational Characteristics of Sexual Competition Events***

Prior research on violent events has shown that violence reflects a variety of motivational and situational concerns (Felson, 1993; Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). Compared to other types of violent events reported by the NYCYS sample, events that erupted out of sexual competition had similar situational characteristics to the total sample of events (see Table 3-2). In the majority of situations (91%), the respondents were not planning or anticipating a conflict on the day that the sexual competition violent event happened. Most youth were engaged in leisure activities such as hanging out (chilling) with friends (31%), drinking alcohol or smoking marijuana (12%), talking with girls (22%), or in route to some location (12%) when he first met his opponent. In terms of weapon type, 49 (33%) of sexual competition events involved guns, 33 (25%) involved knives, 53 (40%) involved only fists and feet, and 6 (4%) involved other weapons.

Respondents described how public gatherings are integral to gaining and maintaining male-female relationships. As shown in Table 3-2 the physical and social locations in which social interactions take place have some features that facilitate sexual competition and related violence. These violent interactions occurred most frequently in outdoor public spaces such as street corners, sidewalks, and alleyways (36%). Night clubs, bars, and party houses are common places where members of the opposite sex intermingle and socialize which makes these places likely contexts for sexual competition violence. Alcohol and/or drug intoxication within the social context of a bar/club/party setting was the most important facilitating characteristic when the respondent became engaged in violent conflict while making advances toward a desired female (71% compared 51%). The young males in this study held very low tolerance for allowing other males to dance with “their” females. As described in previous publications, essential to self-protection and image management is the avoidance of being perceived as “soft” or as having let another male take something (someone) that is valued. (Wilkinson, 2001). Even in situations where a female is out in public completely on her own as a “free agent,” males who have interest in connecting with her may use violence against other men to advance and secure her attention.

Among adolescent males, the quest for the attention of females is emotionally charged and often occurs when youth are under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Others have argued that economic and social marginality further complicates the development of sexual identity among urban African American males and pushes them toward embracing the *player of women identity* (Anderson, 1990). The images of young men as *players of women* may not explain why or how violence erupts out of competition amongst men for women. There is, however, some evidence that young men are strongly invested in protecting themselves from intrusions and attacks on their established and potential heterosexual relationships as it relates to their effort to construct their masculine identities. This type of violence is commonly featured in literature, history, art, and entertainment, yet empirical researchers have generally ignored the issue. It appears that the *mating game*, as Anderson called it, is more complicated for inner city adolescent males.

Having a desirable girlfriend was valued. A willingness to use violence to defend or advance one’s standing in competing for girls was deeply entangled with masculinity issues and reflected culturally-accepted scripts. Many of these situations started with competition over a female and progressed to an identity challenge when the competitor did not respond in a manner deemed appropriate by the respondent. A young man’s status among his peer group is built when he fights other men and publicly displays his ability to defeat competitors. It also helps him avoid being labeled as a punk or herb, which is regarded as an extremely negative outcome to be actively avoided (see Wilkinson, 2001). This finding is consistent with the conclusions drawn by Benson and Archer (2002) in that impressing other males plays a major role in shaping these conflicts. It is also likely that females are impressed by young men who fit these culturally-accepted masculinity scripts. Conflicts that erupt out of

**Table 3-2. Situational Characteristics of Sexual Competition Events Compared to All Events**

Variable	Spark: Sexual Competition			Spark: All Others		
	<i>f</i>	valid n	%	<i>f</i>	valid n	%
Weapon Type: Gun	49	134	33%	301	641	47%
Weapon Type: Knife	33	134	25%	109	641	17%
Weapon Type: Hands/Feet (No Weapon)	53	134	40%	205	641	32%
Weapon Use: Fired Gun	37	49	76%	223	344	65%
Weapon Use: Cut, pierced, stabbed	23	33	70%	86	109	79%
Weapon Use: Threatened	5	49	1%	57	344	17%
Location: Street corner/Outside	48	133	36%	222	601	37%
Location: Party, Club, or Bar	28	133	21%	46	601	8%
Location: School	16	133	12%	47	601	8%
Relationship to Opponent: Friend	12	134	9%	76	612	12%
Relationship to Opponent: Acquaintance	44	134	33%	212	612	35%
Relationship to Opponent: Stranger	70	134	52%	211	612	35%
Respondent's side initiated the event	25	134	19%	124	619	20%
Planned on conflict that day	12	132	9%	86	600	14%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Parties: Any present	127	132	96%	561	590	95%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Parties: Respondent's assoc. present	89	129	69%	415	596	70%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Parties: Opponent's associates present	73	110	66%	363	538	68%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Parties: Bystanders present	106	121	88%	323	441	73%
Co-offending	60	101	59%	278	461	60%
Substance Use: By Respondent	68	111	61%	233	434	54%
Event Severity Level: Near-Violent	13	134	10%	64	644	10%
Event Severity Level: Violent but No Injury	41	134	31%	214	644	33%
Event Severity Level: Violent Minor Injuries	13	134	10%	57	644	9%
Event Severity Level: Injury Seriousness Unk	7	134	5%	23	644	3%
Event Severity Level: Serious Injury	47	134	35%	219	644	34%
Event Severity Level: Someone was Killed	7	134	5%	29	644	5%
Police Awareness	48	127	38%	252	537	47%
Police action: Someone was arrested	6	134	5%	73	617	12%
Outcome: Conflict Resolved	22	132	17%	95	604	16%
Outcome: On-going	41	132	31%	198	604	33%
Aftermath: Gossip	29	44	66%	149	205	73%
Aftermath: Self-protection strategies	23	54	43%	101	239	42%
Aftermath: Anticipate Retaliatory action	17	98	17%	94	405	25%

competition over females shift toward masculine identity challenges as they move from verbal arguments toward violence, especially if these contests are observed by others. Conflicts sparked by sexual competition provide insights into how and why a dynamic situational or event perspective, which

integrates the emotions and meanings that youths attach to the situations they encounter, increases our understanding of urban youth violence (Meier et al., 2001; Agnew, 2006).

### **Drug Business Violence**

An event was classified as a drug business transaction if it took place in a drug spot or area, occurred as a direct result of the buying or selling of drugs, or occurred between workers in the drug business. There were 120 violent events in the sample attributed to some aspect of the drug business. We had event severity information on 115 events. Of those, 84 or 73% were gun events. Guns were fired in 74 drug business violence events with 35 events resulting in someone being seriously injured and 15 events in which someone was killed. Guns were used to threaten someone in 9 cases, used to beat someone in 1 incident and present but not used in 2 events. Weapons were not part of 19 drug business related events and knives were used 8 drug business violent events.

A variety of drug business-related gun events were described including disputes over turf and customers, product price, quantity and quality, shortages of drugs or money, retaliation for dishonest business practices, or protection from robberies during the course of drug selling. The situations included shootouts involving two or more parties, drive-bys, sniper attacks from rooftops or other distant locations, and setups. Below, Ron described a gun event related to a business dispute over a crack-selling location:

(RON): Well, what happened was this. On my block, right, the nigga's crack spot. Now—and let me tell you, my man got killed and this is basically why—let me tell you how [he] got killed. But what led up to it was, he had beef with the niggas from the crack spot and that's my man. And he fucked up the manager of the crack spot and he was like a monthly shit, he'll fuck him up and beat the shit out of him. So I guess the nigga from the crack spot was tired of getting his ass whooped, so one day they pulled out on him. And he was telling him 'just kill me, you motherfucker, kill me.' They didn't shoot him. So, I—so he started, the day—thing is, we could run to our roofs and shoot at them from down, you know, like they won't know who the hell is shooting at them. So my man did that. He went on his roof and he had a assault rifle, M16, so he was *pow, pow, pow, pow*, letting loose from the top of the roof and niggas was scattering all over. And they didn't know who did it. But I am sure [the guys from the crack spot] knew it was him. So then, like, about a week later, there is some new niggas at the crack spot. Some young nigga, mad young, he like 16 years old and he was up there with two other cats. It was me, my brother and my man, rest in peace. He—we were walking to the corner because we were going to go to Weedgate and get some weed and all of a sudden the nigga stepped to him. Then I yell 'what's up man, you know, you dis nigga' and I ain't mentioning no names, but 'you dis nigga and they were like—and he was like, 'yeah why?' He was like, 'yo—that shit is over, son, that nigga got to chill with shit, you know, whatever.' You know, like telling us 'either dead it or you are dead,' you know what I am saying. So my man says like 'what, what, stupid, son, this is my fucking block, man. Those niggas don't own shit, this is my block.' So that moony pulled out, he pulled out a two-five on my man and it jammed. He aimed that shit at me, my brother, and him. It jammed and, you know, it didn't want to shoot. So my man snuffed him, boom, and he ran back up into the crack spot 'cause it was [a] house. So he ran up in there and

then I thought the man was going to get his TEC [handgun], 'cause I know he got a (TEC). So he ran back to the house and came down with nothing. He stepped to him again. This time that kid bust open the door and came out with a nine and starting shooting pow, pow, pow and my man ran around a van. He caught him at the other side of the van and lit six shots into him, man, and he died in my arms that day, son. The man died in my arms, man. And to this day, man, niggas still be shooting at the niggas, but the niggas—because they fucked with some Morezzos from my block, and the Morezzos are crazy, buckwild. Those niggas live, like, five or six them heads in the last three months. Five-O (police) always rolling around, so those niggas broke up. So his man dead right now. They don't even know who was shooting at them from like that. Those are my peeps. The Morezzos are my peeps, because we all grew up together.

In the next example, conflict stemmed from an attempted takeover of Patrick's drug spot while he was out of town. He described his feelings including his perceived need to retaliate for the transgression:

I got a little story. I got into some shit. I will run it to you real quick. When I had went away—my aunt was sick, I went down South with my cousin. God bless him, he dead right now. Me and him went down South to see my aunt. I came back—I had a spot. My spot was making two, three G's a day. Each spot. I came home, niggas was telling me all they sold was 100 dollars. I had been gone 10 days, I'm like, 'yo, what is going on?' Niggas was telling me these niggas was in the store, tell my worker that they can't be out there hustling. So I stepped to the niggas, and the nigga was like 'yeah.' The nigga grabbed me, and that is the worstest thing he could do. And I went and got my joint and I came back. I put the shit in his mouth but it wouldn't go off, right. So I was like all right, cool. Then he went and told the cops on me. He was hustling, too. The cops was looking for me. Boom, he tell my little sister 'tell your brother I'm going to kill him.' So I was like all right, it was snowing and I told my father I'm going to sit out there. I hope it snow, 'cause I'm going to lay in that snow and when they open that store I'm going to murder them. Whatever, whatever happen. The next day came, I went down there and I took care of what I had to. I did what I had to do and you know the rest.

(INTERVIEWER): Tell me about the guy that you did your thing with. Did you know him?

(PATRICK): I'm saying—yeah I knew him. I didn't know him personally but I knew him from the store. I knew the guy that owned the store. Me and him was raised together, he was my man. And I told him 'yo, that nigga can't disrespect me, son. Before you all, even you all, even moved around, I been around here hustling.

(INTERVIEWER): Were you concerned about whether you would kill him or something and get locked up?

(PATRICK): Nah, I wasn't thinking about that, I wasn't thinking about that because whatever happened cops didn't find out what I did. I wasn't never concerned, I wasn't afraid to kill, yo, because, you know why I wasn't afraid to kill? Because I'm saying I sat and analyzed killing. I know everybody done killed, from the smartest person in the world to the illiterate. Why? Because you done killed a roach or a bug. So everybody can kill.

(INTERVIEWER): Were you concerned whether he had a gun that day, when you pulled out a gun and it didn't go off?

(PATRICK): Yeah, I was concerned, actually, because I knew he did have guns, so I knew. That is why I want to take care of what I had to, because I knew you was going to try to smoke me.

## Robbery

The robbery category is fairly straightforward. An event was considered a robbery when violence or the threat of violence was used in order to get material goods from people. These situations have nothing to do with a conflict between the respondent and the victim. One hundred and nine violent events were classified as robberies. The majority of robberies (69 of 109 events) involved gun use; respondents were perpetrators in 51 robbery situations and robbery victims in 57 situations. Guns were used to threaten the victim in 23 events. Shots were fired in 40 gun robbery events and guns were used to hit or beat the victim in 5 events. Of the 69 gun robberies, 19 victims were seriously injured, 9 were killed (5 of these were drug business robberies), 3 others had less serious injuries, and 4 were missing.<sup>15</sup>

Several examples of robberies are presented below. In the first example, Bryce and several friends used a gun to hold up people attending a party. According to Bryce, this robbery was unplanned. Bryce described himself as being the leader of the robbery:

(BRYCE): Um. This happen a week ago at party. We was just there chillin', then I saw chains on people neck that I wanted, and I had a gun on me and I was with my friends, so we just crashed the whole party and I just robbed everybody, taking chains and stuff Money.

(INTERVIEWER): Just two of y'all?

(BRYCE): Nah, it was, like, bunch of us.

(INTERVIEWER): Word. Y'all had guns? How many of Y'all had guns?

(BRYCE): Nah. Only I just had a gun.

(INTERVIEWER): Oh, word. Anybody know it was you?

(BRYCE): Nah. I didn't know the kid.

(INTERVIEWER): Cops came or whatever?

(BRYCE): Everybody that was with me was beating up everybody in the street, people was getting robbed and I was just taking everything. No cops ain't come or nothing. I'm surprised.

In the next robbery situation, the offenders scouted out an appropriate target and then collaborated on the robbery, with each handling their respective jobs in the situation. The respondent directly confronted the victim and maintained control over his actions; the victim complied with Nick's demands. As Nick's companions turned out the victim's pockets, another individual watched for police or other people who may have interrupted the robbery.

(NICK): One incident that me and some group of kids, like three of us, we went up to that area and we was under the train and we started watching people get off the train and shit, that's how we did it. So one time this man walked out, right, and shit, and we decided we was going to take him out. So we followed him for a few blocks, to see

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<sup>15</sup> Again, the data are not displayed in a table format for this section.

where he was going. We was, like, across the street, opposite him, but, like, a block down. But we had him in view. So he didn't notice that we was there. But he started going down this dark alley and so when we seen that we started to run up on him. So I had the gun, I came right close behind him and—I pulled my gun out and I said, yo, I came out real corny. I said, 'yo, can you have the time?' So he turns around and sees this gun in his face. He sucked [his teeth], he don't say shit. I told him to shut the fuck up. I didn't have to say no more after that. You know, I said, 'put your hands up and shut the fuck up, I'll kill you.'

(INTERVIEWER): You took the money?

(NICK): Yeah. Then my man runs up behind him, rips his pockets out, takes his wallet. I had this other guy, he was, like, the lookout. He's watching for cops or anybody trying to get to be a hero and shit. So, after we shake him down and take his shit, I told him to get on the floor. So once he got on the floor I kick him in the head. And we jet. [laughs] I guess he don't remember faces, 'cause I kicked him hard.

In the next example, Joshua was one of a group of six who held up a jewelry store. The robbery was planned ahead of time and Joshua was asked to join in. According to the respondent, the robbery went off as planned:

(JOSHUA): Well, my man called me up in the morning. One morning. So, he ... he told me what was going down. So, he gave me the address to be there... In the morning. So I went there. He give me his gun. He give me a little thirty-eight. So, I went back home and stashed it. So he called me back through ... he gave me a time to be there. He gave me, like, to the nighttime, to the evening, when they closed down. So, we went. I waited 'til that hour. So, I took the train downtown to the address he gave me. ...So all right. So we waited 'til the people closed down. It was like six of us. So we all had guns. So ...we was waiting to them... when people closed down. We had the plan. So, we went in there. Just got like ...like a handful of jewelry.

(INTERVIEWER): So what y'all did to the man?

(JOSHUA): My man just yoked the man. Put a gun in his face. Just ...he just say, 'Give me the money. Everything you got in the counter. Everything.' So my man—and this lady that was in the store, too. She was just scared ...scared like a motherfucker. ...my man had a gun pointing to her face. And then... as I was, um, taking all the jewelry that was in the back, just packing them shits up. I just ran out. The next morning, we had everything.

(INTERVIEWER): So when y'all did this stickup, what y'all was telling the owner?

(JOSHUA): Just to shut up. To stay the fuck down. And just give me the loot that's in the counter. He was scared.

(INTERVIEWER): What was the guy telling y'all? What was he saying? The owner?

(JOSHUA): The owner? He just saying a lot of stuff. 'Why are we doing this?' You know, just talking nice shit. Cryin', too.

(INTERVIEWER): How about the lady? What was she saying?

(JOSHUA): She was screaming.

(INTERVIEWER): Y'all didn't hit her?

(JOSHUA): No, when she when she started screaming, we just had her up under... closed her mouth. She was biting my man. My man had his hand on her mouth. So, she was trying to fight him.

(INTERVIEWER): So how y'all split the money? How much you had?

(JOSHUA): I had \$800 to spend, and two to just.

(INTERVIEWER): Y'all wasn't worried about the cops or nothing?

(JOSHUA): Yeah, we was worried about the cops. But we just—You have people looking out too.

Robberies often involved groups of young men as co-offenders. One respondent described a robbery of a drug spot that did not unfold the way the group had planned—it became a robbery-turned-shootout. First, Travis described “the robbery plan,” then he described the actual encounter. Note the very detailed account of his thought processes during the event:

(TRAVIS): Well, somebody got shot and shit, the man and shit. We went up in there and shit and.... do you want to hear exactly what happened?

(INTERVIEWER): Yeah. Yeah.

(TRAVIS): Alright. I had the 'Bama. The shit was in Jersey. We went over there, we parked there. This kid was setting up the plan and shit, me and my man. My man had .45 and I had a .32 and shit. So the kid, he just told us the plan. 'You go in there, tell 'em Dan sent you, and tell 'em this and that' and shit. So me, as being Spanish, should have an advantage, for I could talk my Spanish and shit, boom boom bam. And since them being Spanish too and shit, know I could blend in and they give me a little more...

According to Travis, this was the first time he took a leading role in setting up an exchange with a victim. He described being nervous and worrying that an inadequate performance would affect his standing back in the neighborhood. Travis was reluctant to carry out his mission and described his behavior as procrastination. His actions were determined in part by cues he received during the event from his partner:

(TRAVIS): So I went up. We went up in there and shit. It was a record shop, a regular shop. Fat Colombia man in the front and shit, bitch in the back. So when we went up in there we like, 'yo what's up?' and shit, and I'm waiting for the people to leave and shit. So he like, 'what's up?' and shit, you know. That's when I stepped in and started kicking my Spanish, *yo quiero un viento cinco*, it's a one twenty-five, a hundred and twenty-five. So he was like, 'umm, alright, who sent you?' and shit, so I said 'Dan' and shit. So he started getting suspicious. So he was like 'all right put it right here.' So he went to the back, I guess he made a phone call. So he came back. And [my partner] was like, 'umm, man, damn, set it off. Set it off.' My man wanted me to set it off and shit [perform the criminal act] but I was procrastinating, so he waited...

(INTERVIEWER): You was nervous?

(TRAVIS): ...yeah I ain't gonna front. I was kinda nervous and shit. So we waited for a little second 'cause I wanted him to set if off, if he wouldn't have set it off no matter what, which I had to. That was the... it was the destiny I had to do it. I wasn't going back to the projects, 'ahh, he fronted!' so I had to do it. So I was just waiting for them and shit.

The respondent described waiting for the right moment, but being forced into action when someone else entered the room and his partner ordered him to act. At that point Travis took a more aggressive position:

(TRAVIS): So we waited... waited. All a sudden another man came. When the other man came my man was like, 'fuck, you gotta do it now and shit!' So another man came, my man pulled out click. When he pulls out I pulls out. Put the shit to the fat Columbian nigga head, so I searched him. Boom pulled out, he had a nine... nine-shot Taurus. [I] pulled it out put it in my, umm, pouch. I had a, umm, Columbia windbreaker type shit. So we backed him down and shit run him to the back. So when we brought him to the back my man was deep inside shit. So you know I'm like—look I could see the front door and shit from the back of the, umm, store. So my man backing him down. My man just start, 'fuck that, where the fucking money at?' shit like that. So, all of a sudden I just heard some motion-type shit. 'Oh shut up, 'this and that and shit.' So I hear shot, Bow, so I said 'ahh fuck it. I got to shoot somebody or shit.' So I shot the nigga. I had him down on the wall so I shot him, but I shot him in the leg though, bow, bow, twice and shit, and I ran. When I ran and shit I left, you know, I—mistakenly I left my man and shit. I should not did that, so I—when I was leaving the door and shit, I turn around, you know. My man call me, he's like 'yo son.' I turn around see my man get on the floor. This fat motherfucker shot him in the leg and shit. So I run back and shit. When I run back I shoot the nigga two times in the back ba bow. My man get up and shit, you know. A clip fell out the gun and shit, like, damn, so we running out the store and shit. We get in the car and jet. After that we was doing more shit though, man...

The respondent described this event as the beginning of a series of stick-ups of corner stores. This situation clearly was a learning experience for him. One of his primary concerns was how others, both at the scene and back in the neighborhood, would view him after this incident.

### **Revenge or Retaliation**

Events coded as being motivated by revenge or retaliation were precipitated by the outcome of a previous interaction with the opponent or his associates. These prior incidents were typically unsuccessful, incomplete, or unsatisfactory to the respondent, resulting in the "need" for additional violence. Respondents were often drawn into these situations as "torch-takers" or "avengers" seeking justice for wrongs committed against the individual and/or his group. Unlike events that were classified as self-defense, this subtype includes both parties' involvement in revenge. Issues of revenge or retaliation sparked 56 events. Gun events accounted for 33 of those revenge/retaliation events, leading to serious injuries in 15 and death in 4 (data not show in table form).

The first example shows how an individual may rally the support of a peer to increase the chances of successful retaliation. In this case, the initial transgression was theft:

(THEO): The last gun event—that was probably when I got robbed for my sneakers. I called my cousin and shit. And then he seen the kid again—he had the sneakers on. Me and my cousin just asked him 'what's the deal?' He went to reach [for a gun], and we shot him.

(INTERVIEWER): He went to get his gun?

(THEO): Yeah, and we shot him.

(INTERVIEWER): You don't know nothing about the guy you was fighting?

(THEO): Yeah. He lived in my cousin's projects.

(INTERVIEWER): Oh, you knew the dude, and he knew you when he robbed you?

(THEO): Yeah. He just played hisself, that's what he did right there. That's what the whole point was. He disrespected me.

In the next example, Alonzo participated in a gun event related to the drug business. The initial shooting was an attempted takeover of a drug spot. The respondent reported the day's events to his boss, who then got into his car and went looking for the opponents. Alonzo described the situation:

(ALONZO): It was a little beef had started. So, one day we went back. It was, like, all of us, so the boss gave us a gun so we can hold up the spot then. So, we went to hold it down. We was just walking, and one of our people came over there. They was working too. Everybody—he gave everybody a little position, so, we was like 'all right.' So, one day the guys came back. So, we saw the guys and one of my friends started shooting at the guys. The guys started shooting back. So, we all running, running frantic, everybody running and shooting. So, then, nobody got hit.

(INTERVIEWER): Was you shooting?

(ALONZO): Nah, I wasn't shooting, but, I was there. Then I got out, we all ran back to the—back to our complex, and we lounged there. Bought some beer, told the boss what happen. So, we told him what happen, so we came driving around, blah, blah, blah. He—he saw one of the kids and one of the kids that he was with they was walking in the store. So, and then he killed both of them.

(INTERVIEWER): Who, the boss?

(ALONZO): Yeah. He came around he's like 'yo I'm gonna take care some business.' Then he drove off, and then when he came back he asked us to go around there and check, see what was going on. 'Just go around the corner and check and see what's going on.' We went around there and seen two niggas laid out on the floor.

(INTERVIEWER): So, how that made you feel?

(ALONZO): Ahh, in a way I was, like, 'yo, man.' That's my first time I ever seeing somebody killed. And it was like, it was like, yo, my conscience—it didn't bother me 'cause I was like, yo, the way I seen it was the timing was for a good, 'cause they probably would have came back for us and did the same. There's no saying who would've been in the spot at the time, boy. They just had to go down that way, you know? It's like 'oh, whatever, whatever.' I could see I had that I-don't-care attitude. Now I'm developing that attitude, because of that attitude I don't care. Because I see that in order to be around these people you gotta be real, and in order to be real it's like being true to yourself, who you be with, and whatever goes on stays. Whatever goes on, what happens, it stays in, in, it stays where it's at. And you gotta keep it real with you people. Anything happens with you, you know, if you get knocked you gonna have to keep it to yourself. You can't snitch 'cause you be breaking the—you just be breaking the code.

(INTERVIEWER): What's the code?

(ALONZO): Like I'm saying, being real.

(INTERVIEWER): Being real? What's being real like?

(ALONZO): Like I was saying, you gotta be real. It's, like, a dedication. It's, like, you gotta dedicate yourself.

(INTERVIEWER): To your clique?

(ALONZO): Yeah, to your clique. You know, all the peoples you with, anything go down they gonna be there for you, which—anything I have been through they been there for me. And everything they went through, I was there with them. And that's how it was. We ain't never looked at ourselves as a clique or a posse, we looked at ourselves as a family, but we did dirt, fell. We did a little dirt and shit.

(INTERVIEWER): All right, so what happen after that?

(ALONZO): After that, they—they got killed.

### Defense of Others

Events in which the respondent believed he was drawn into a conflict to assist or defend others were classified as “defense of others” events. In these situations, respondents were uninvolved until stepping in to fight alongside or on behalf of a friend. In 50 situations, respondents came to the defense of others. Someone was injured in 80% of these events including 29 serious injuries and 2 deaths. Guns were used in 23 events, knives in 12, and fists/feet were used in 12<sup>16</sup>. The next story illustrates how individuals were drawn into conflicts to defend others. In this case, JOSÉ aided his drunken friend outside a house party in a nearby neighborhood. JOSÉ believed that his participation in the fight was necessary to protect a neighborhood associate:

(JOSÉ): Past 'bout two years? Yeah, I got—yeah, man, I've gotten into four fights... Plus some hectic shit, man. One time I had this fight, man, I was with my man, and shit, he was out of it, but I was still there. Some nigga try to come up and shit, try to smack him around and just tell him 'oh, you don't belong around here.' Yo, fuck that. I got to defend my peoples from my neighborhood. I fought this nigga. He cut me in my fucking arm and shit. I still got that fucking scar there [shows interviewer]. Every time I look at that shit I just wanna eat this nigga, Bee.

(INTERVIEWER): So what started it, a bump? A looks?

(JOSÉ): Nah. I'm saying it was with my man and shit. My man, I say, was drunk and shit. And he coming up to my man popping shit. Since I was there I gotta defend my man. He can't defend himself. So I took care of the shit. I just cuffed this motherfucker, B. And right there, you know I'm saying, just shot one on one right there.

(INTERVIEWER): ...tell me when it first started... Did it start with the hands?

(JOSÉ): Yeah, it was with the hands... First of all, he was trying to play my man, so I came up to him, I snuffed him in his fucking face. Cuffed him there. He flew back and shit and I was, like, oh, that shit—he threw the hands up. I, like—he didn't take shit out on me. He just baw baw... My man was too fucked up. ...I was like, 'yo this is for me.' Baw, we fighting and shit. The nigga... he struck me. Like I say, he gave me a black eye and shit. But I cuffed him a few times, I caught him. I did.

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<sup>16</sup> Data in text but not displayed in table format.

JOSÉ explained that even though he entered the fight to protect his friend, the event was ultimately about respect. His performance earned respect from his opponent and from other observers.

(JOSÉ): Yo, when the beef—at that time, kid, yo, you mind blanks out. You just go crazy, man. Especially me. I went crazy. I didn't give a fuck what was going to happen to me, B. I just want to get the shit done. To you it's all about respect. You gotta get your respect out here, man. Gotta get your respect. Is he gonna die, is he gonna say that shit? It's 'bout longevity, kid. How long you last. You know.

(INTERVIEWER): Y'all fought with the hands or y'all was blazing at each other?

(JOSÉ): Nah, we fought with the hands. That's why I like this shit, B. Fought with the hands, yeah with this motherfucking Dominican that we fought hands and shit. Cab money gave—he caught me a few times and shit. I ain't gonna front. He gave me a nice black eye and shit, but fuck it. That's battle, kid. I caught him a few times too.

(INTERVIEWER): Yeah.

(JOSÉ): He had his skills and shit like that, but I didn't go out like no pussy. Right now I look into his face, motherfucker got respect for me, I got respect for him. But if he ever try to play me again, yo, it's on again. Fuck it.

In the example below, Willie became actively involved in a fight to assist his brother. The argument preceding the fight involved both Willie and his brother against the opponent. When Willie went upstairs, the opponent and Willie's brother started fighting. When Willie returned, he joined the fight:

Alright. Boom, me and my brother was coming from my cousin crib. We entered the block, right, and there was this guy and this girl on my block, she had her boyfriend with her. So we walking and he looked at me, so I didn't pay it no mind. We walked, so I went in my house. I came back out, so I saw my brother try to fight him, so I told my brother to chill and I went to fight him. And it was over stupidness. It was over an argument with his girl.

### Self-Defense

An event was coded "self-defense" if the respondent reported that the main reason for using violence in the situation was to protect his own safety and health. Self-defense was cited as the main reason for respondents' involvement in 44 incidents—with 19 of those events involving guns. In the following example, Bryce was attacked and pistol-whipped by an older brother of an individual with whom he had problems with in the past; he attempted to defend himself but was beaten instead. As Bryce describes it, the impetus for the initial attack on the opponent's younger brother stemmed from an attack on Bryce's reputation:

(BRYCE): Riding to my girl house and these grown men from the back of the projects. I'm riding [a bicycle] and I see a car slowed up in front of me, so I didn't pay it no attention, and I just see a grown man jump out a car and cock back his gun. I tried to ride off. He chase me and just pulled me and just started pistol-whipping me in my face and I was all right and I went back through there.

(INTERVIEWER): Why, you got beef with them?

(BRYCE): I got beef with his little brother 'cause at a party, his little brother was shooting at us and I went back through there and was shooting at them and almost hit his aunt.

(INTERVIEWER): Over—what it was over?

(BRYCE): Beef. Dumb beef like I don't like that nigga, he think he get busy, or he a faggot, this and that.

(INTERVIEWER): But why y'all try to shoot each other over shit like that?

(BRYCE): 'Cause I felt disrespected. He going around telling everybody that I'm a faggot. ...Yeah. But I know I'm not, but I just ain't like it going around telling everybody.

(INTERVIEWER): So his older brother, he caught you?

(BRYCE): Yeah.

(INTERVIEWER): So now, so what you did after that?

(BRYCE): Well, I could keep going back through there but they don't never be out there.

### **Cheating or Unfair Play**

Respondents were involved in 47 events in which “unfair play” resulted in conflict. While 26 of these events involved no weapons, 13 involved guns, 2 involved knives, and 1 involved some other type of weapon. The majority of these situations occurred while the respondents were playing sports, shooting pool, or gambling. Cheating, unfair fouling, and rule violations typically resulted in fights. In most cases, the “cheater” denied the claim of cheating and reacted by counter-challenging the accuser until the situation escalated to a physical battle. In some “unfair play” situations, an actor left the scene, got a gun, and returned to express his grievance. Fifteen conflicts resulted from unfair play in either a gambling or sports situation. Fights erupting out of sports or gambling situations usually consisted of non-weapon situations, like the example presented below:

(DANIEL): Well, one time we were playing football and the kid, you know, played rough with me so I was and we were gonna fight. So then we kept playing. So, he made me fall so I got up and I just swung at him. We were fighting and fighting.

(INTERVIEWER): So you all went a fair one?

(DANIEL): Yeah, we went for a fair one. Nobody stopped us. We just kept fighting and fighting. It was like a year ago.

(INTERVIEWER): What happened? Who started what?

(DANIEL): He was the one that started it 'cause he was pushing me. I told him to stop pushing me. I did. I just hit him. I had enough of him. I hit him and we just started fighting and fell on the floor and...

(INTERVIEWER): What were you trying to accomplish when you was fighting with him?

(DANIEL): We was struggling and I hit him.

(INTERVIEWER): How did this situation end? What happened? How did it end?

(DANIEL): We left. I left.

(INTERVIEWER): But how you all broke up?

(DANIEL): Donnie, he's the bull, he broke it up. The dude was like, 'Yo, break it up, break it up.' The kid wanted to get me.

(INTERVIEWER): After the fight, did you all keep on playing? I mean what happened after that?

(DANIEL): Nah. We stop playing and we left. I left.

### **Gossip, Rumors, or "he said, she said" Situations**

Occasionally, rumors are the cause of violent events. Termed "he said, she said" situations by respondents, these cases involve either simply talking behind someone's back or spreading false information through gossip. Eighteen conflicts developed as a result of gossip or rumored gossip.

These situations often related to relationships with females. Gossip about who's seeing whom, who's talking to whom, and who's having sex with whom often creates problems for adolescents and leads to violence. Sometimes these situations were resolved with very little violence; in other cases the outcome was injury or death. Jeff described a situation in which violence was avoided:

When I was in high school I had it happen. Where, like, you know, there was, like, a lot of 'he said, she said' thing going around, you know. And, like, some guy had felt that he was disrespected 'cause his girl or whatever—he thought, like, his girl wanted to talk to me or something like that, you know. And he thought that I was disrespecting him. So I just, like, spoke with him about it, and... I was, like, there's plenty of women out there. There's plenty of women in the school. I don't need to stress you. Yours ain't really all that. You can keep her, I ain't already talking to your girl. We came to the point that we spoke about it and we said—we just left it at that.

In another incident, a young man named Tyrone found himself in a near-violent situation resulting from false information spread by his opponent's girlfriend, who happened to be a friend of Tyrone's girlfriend. The situation was heated, but ended peacefully as Tyrone walked away from his opponent:

(TYRONE): It was over a girl, telling my girl something about me. When it wasn't true. Her man got into it. So me and him are arguing. I'm telling him to mind his business. He telling me to shut up. 'My girl ain't say none of that.' I'm like, 'your girl did so, my girl told me.' So he arguing with me and then it almost lead—to a real—it was going to lead to something real big, man, but I just walked away.

(INTERVIEWER): You knew the kid?

(TYRONE): Nah, I ain't know him, I just knew his girl, and his girl was going with—his girl used to be [friends] with my girl.

(INTERVIEWER): Did they hang out?

(TYRONE): Yeah, they hang out together, but she told my girl something about me that wasn't even true.

(INTERVIEWER): Yeah. So 'he say, she say' shit?

(TYRONE): He say, she say. [laughs]

(INTERVIEWER): So what happened after that? Everything dead?

(TYRONE): Everything. I ain't never seen him no more.

### **Territory or Neighborhood Honor**

Some events were classified as erupting from territory or neighborhood honor issues that are not related to drug territories. In these events, the respondent or the opponent reported being in the “wrong neighborhood” as the reason for an attack. Violence could occur if an outsider was walking through an area that that “insiders” felt he did not belong. Twenty-five events were coded as having erupted out of non-drug-related territory or neighborhood honor issues. In the example presented below, Terry described an inter-project conflict that has continued across generations:

(TERRY): One time and shit, we had a little prob, problems with these guys and shit from their projects and shit. So, we used to constantly [get into] it, really. It started from the older dudes in our projects. They always had beef with the dudes in this next project. From us, whatever. It started from them. And it, like, it was passed down to our little generation or whatever. You know, we end up getting into beef with these heads.

(INTERVIEWER): What kind of beef was it though, like drug- or gang-related or projects?

(TERRY): Yeah, it was like a project thing. It was more—it was basically a project thing. We didn’t get along with them. They didn’t get along with us. We always consider them as pretty boys or whatever the case may be. They always thought of us as hard nigga dogs or whatever. But we always bumped heads and shit. I recall one time. It was like an ongoing thing. Every night we was getting it on with ‘em. One night they had called us on our pay phone. They—we beefing with ‘em on the pay phone and they’re like ‘yo, meet us at so-and-so and we going to settle this.’ Like we was going to end it that night or whatever. Whatever the beef was, whatever the case may be. So we goes up there and shit. They like, ‘no guns,’ whatever, shit like that. So we goes up there with bats and shit. But we got ‘em stashed or whatever the case may be. Some dudes got bottles and little, you know, razors or whatever. So we waited for them and shit. They took a little minute to show up and shit. So when they did show up, you know, we get up, start walking towards the street. And it’s only like three of them. So we know it’s like ‘yo, where is the fuck those bastard niggas at?’ So we, like, looking at the corner or whatever. So we walking over there or whatever. So while we walking over there the niggas just unzipper, man, like one of them gym bags and shit. So we looking, we walking or whatever. Some nigga just drew and shit, man, slow. It’s like he taking his time with a gun and shit. So we looking at the like hell this nigga got... By the time anybody could really realize what it was. Man, the nigga just started hitting off and shit. He had a HK. ...Nigga was hitting them shits was hitting garbage cans everything man. We took the fire whatever the case may be and shit.

### **Money, Debts or Stolen Property**

Some incidents were sparked by unpaid debts of money, including loan sharking and drug debts. Money or unpaid debt was given as the reason for 33 violent events and violence was used to force payment in most of these situations. One example of a gun event resulting from an unpaid debt is described below:

(INTERVIEWER): So how ‘bout when you shot that guy?

(DERRICK): My only mistake with doing that was that it was over a hundred dollars. I say he got the drop. I guess it was my time to float. But if he freeze and I could get away...

(INTERVIEWER): But at the time, what was you thinking?

(DERRICK): At that time I was thinking about he owed me money and he tried to play me. And he tried to play me bad. It's just that he tried to take something that that was mines and it was mines.

(INTERVIEWER): It was bothering you?

(DERRICK): It was bothering me. I felt that he tried to really play me. I was worrying 'bout me getting money.

The main feature that distinguished violent events across spark is the perceived seriousness of the spark. Across each spark type, there were examples of events across the continuum from *not serious enough for violence* to *serious enough to warrant the use of lethal force*. Knowing the event spark without other information about the configuration of actors' status, social ties, expression mode, and proximal contexts of the event scene would not be sufficient in separating injury outcomes. The focal issue or spark is important in determining how respondents make sense of the perceived harm caused by the opponent's side. Actions are typically justified by transferring blame to the actions of the opponent. This is particularly true in the events that sparked from the drug business. The social order of the drug business is regulated through violence. Markets are stable when one crew has dominance over a particular territory or drug. Trouble starts when the market pressures get tight and dealers have to compete for business with other nearby competitors. Interlopers and those groups who attempt to gain market share through violence often take up battle with competing drug dealers from adjacent or nearby housing locations.

## The Spatial and Normative Features of Settings

We generated working hypotheses from the prior analysis of the first 125 NYCYS cases. We were able to further explore these initial ideas with the full sample of 416 interviews. For example, the early study suggested that place matters as it relates to weapon type in events that unfold in particular physical locations. Our hypotheses were also informed by situational perspectives on crime prevention. We hypothesized specifically: *Hypothesis: The degree of surveillance of temporal and spatial contexts will be correlated with the likelihood of gun events.* *Hypothesis: Settings in which the rules are ambiguous or not enforced will be more likely to "facilitate" gun events.*

As shown in Table 3-3, events did vary in terms of level of severity by their location. The first obvious point is that closed public settings such as schools and jails are the least likely places for serious violence to happen. The event data provide robust support for the notion that surveillance reduces opportunity for violence, particularly when rules are clear and enforced.

The descriptive statistics give us an overall picture while the narratives provide richer details about how place matters in shaping youth violence. The social control of public and private spaces is not only the responsibility of formal authorities such as the police department, but also the responsibility of

the people who reside there. Street corners - particularly around public housing areas - were described by respondents as spaces where police officers were reluctant to spend a lot of time. Youth acknowledge pervasive gun use and its deadly consequences, yet they argue that police officers who are paid to “protect and serve” should do their job despite the dangers. DJ notes, “they are scared for themselves” and “scared to come around where guns are being fired cause they scared they [would] get shot.” Donnell feels that police officers in his neighborhood avoid showing a presence in the projects where their help is needed most: “They stand on the corner on the private house side instead of being in the projects. They’d rather fuck with somebody in the private housing than with somebody in the projects.” Deshawn believes that it comes down to a matter of trust: “Youth cannot trust the police to protect them and the police do not trust young people,” adding, “the police should be doing they job, they need to trust, if we could trust them to protect us [citizens would not need guns for self-protection].” He described a situation in which an “old lady” was robbed and fired a gun at the fleeing robber, which led Deshawn to conclude that even “old ladies” do not trust the police to protect them from criminals. In addition, informal social control or citizen surveillance was lacking in the street corner contexts (see Wilkinson, 2007). If people are watching, they are not necessarily willing to intervene to stop violence or disorder.

Some physical locations have relatively adequate place-control in terms of preventing gun violence from occurring there. When examining the seriousness of violence that unfolds in these settings, perhaps the most important feature is evident control over the availability of firearms. The fact that very few of the school events involved guns is an indication that controlling firearm access can reduce the severity of violence among youth. Schools were activity spaces for youth in the study, but little gun violence occurred in the school context. More commonly, the fights that started in school spilled out into the neighborhood. Since many serious violent events were preceded by an earlier less serious event, the movement of youth in conflict with one another cannot be overlooked. Indeed gun events almost never occurred in the two physical contexts that had high degrees of rules and formal surveillance --namely schools and jails/prison. Access to guns was restricted in these settings. In the case of jails, knives or knife-like items were commonly used by prisoners but other objects in the space, such as bars of soap, were also used. Rashard described such an incident. The practice of using a soap bar in a sock as a weapon was common according to our peer interviewers and several respondents. Rashard explained what he did to hurt this opponent after he felt humiliated over a basketball game:

Well another incident, was the incident I spoke about earlier with the basketball, you know, the basketball court and I felt herbed after that, like I said, but then after I felt herbed. I went out my minds, call all the kids, one by one, in the bathroom, while one kid was taking a shower, I rolled up in there, put my towel over my head and I put it over his and I hit with a bar of soap in a sock. Split, he had to get I think thirty six stitches across his left eye and I got extra time for that.

(INTERVIEWER): He snitched on you?

(RASHARD): Yeah.

**Table 3-3. Event Location by Event Severity**

Location	Event Severity													
	Near-Violent Event		Violence but No Injury		Minor injuries - cuts and bruises		Injury but seriousness was unreported		Serious enough to require medical attention		Death		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Jail	4	10%	12	30%	4	10%	4	10%	16	40%	0	0%	40	5%
Street/corner	18	6%	119	38%	25	8%	19	6%	112	36%	17	5%	310	43%
Party/club	5	7%	26	36%	3	4%	1	1%	29	40%	8	11%	72	10%
School or school grounds	11	16%	23	33%	11	16%	2	3%	22	32%	0	0%	69	9%
House/Apartment	2	4%	21	40%	5	9%	1	2%	21	40%	3	6%	53	7%
Drug market	3	6%	19	40%	0	0%	2	4%	18	38%	5	11%	47	6%
Park	3	9%	10	31%	5	16%	1	3%	12	5%	1	3%	32	4%
Train/train station	1	4%	12	44%	5	19%	1	4%	8	30%	0	0%	27	4%
Sports field or court	3	14%	9	41%	6	27%	0	0%	4	18%	0	0%	22	3%
Store	0	0%	9	53%	2	12%	0	0%	5	29%	1	6%	17	2%
Swimming pool/beach	0	0%	1	13%	1	13%	1	13%	5	63%	0	0%	8	1%
Gambling spot	3	43%	3	43%	0	0%	0	0%	1	14%	0	0%	7	1%
Other	0	0%	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%	1	50%	0	0%	2	0%
Missing/Unclear	5	22%	10	45%	1	5%	0	0%	7	30%	0	0%	23	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>		<b>275</b>		<b>68</b>		<b>32</b>		<b>261</b>		<b>35</b>		<b>729</b>	

In violent situations that could potentially end in lethal outcomes, unarmed youth picked up boards, bats, pipes, poles, glass bottles, and other objects to use as weapons against their opponent(s). Leo recounted an incident in which his opponent was looking at him hard and gesturing toward violence. Leo grabbed a baseball bat when the opponent moved toward him with a knife. Leo explained:

We was playing handball and he kept on looking at me and I went up to him and asked him why he looking at me. He said that I was selling to his friend a couple of years ago. And I like 'so what? that was your friend?' So he said, 'what you want to do?' So he went to take out a knife and since a, there was a bat right there, [I picked it up] I just started swinging the bat at him and he fell and he broke, I just started banging him on his legs and I wind up breaking his leg and I ran away and I never seen the guy again. I heard the cops came, but I wasn't interested in finding out.

Mikki recounted an incident in which he confronted an opponent who had been seeing Mikki's ex-girlfriend and who had threatened him with a gun two weeks prior. Mikki approached the opponent as he was getting to his car:

And I had picked up a steel pole, that like some steel poles that be in the projects. So I picked it up, and I called him, and I was like, 'yo come here.' So he's walking over here. And like, every time he sees me he gets like nervous, so he was like what? And then I was like, 'yo I want to speak to you.' I, that's what I really wanted to do, I really wanted to speak to him, you know. And, so he goes to his back pocket and I told him, 'what you going to do, you going to pull out on me again?' He was like, 'nah, I just gotta do, what I gotta do.' So I was like, 'nah, I just wanted to speak to you.' I told him 'drop the knife and I'll drop the pole.' He was like, 'nah you drop the pole.' So I started getting mad, and I started screaming at him, I was like, 'yo drop' [the knife]. So then, I started swinging, I started swinging the pole. Started missing. So um we had gotten up to his car, we was by the passenger side, and I swung and I like hit his hands. And then, so right there he was like quick, he fast. So he moved back. So I told him 'look, I got something for you,' and right there I was going to break his windshield to his car. So when I went to break it, he caught me right here on my elbow, that's when he stabbed me. And like, right, I didn't, I felt a little like, like a heatedness but I didn't know he cut me. But when I looked it, it was bleeding so I couldn't do nothing, so all I did I threw the pole at him, and caught him around his ribs and I left.

Mikki hadn't been prepared to have conflict with his opponent when he attacked him with the pole he found on the ground in the projects. Mikki claimed to want to talk to his foe, however, his aggressive stance with the pole and his verbal demands likely caused his opponent to become defensive.

Finally, we assumed that offenders would adjust their strategies to respond to social control efforts to remove access to weapons. *Hypothesis: Motivated offenders will adopt alternative strategies for weapon use when prohibitive measures are operating in locations where adversaries might converge (e.g., night clubs with search and removal policies are circumvented by hiding weapons in outdoor locations nearby).* There were numerous examples of youth smuggling guns and knives into clubs or house parties. Often they used their social ties to subvert the rules, passed guns to females prior to entry to avoid pat downs at the door, or phoned/paged other parties to bring guns to the scene in anticipation of conflict that may unfold outside of the controlled space.

A focus on the "places" of youth violence is one obvious area in which situational crime prevention techniques is relevant. Disputes erupt during the course of everyday activities as people travel through time and space. Particular types of disputes (those that escalate, involve guns, involve multiple participants) are more likely to occur in largely unregulated public spaces. The gradations between public and private spaces that are "populated" by youths become relevant in thinking about prevention and control of what happens in those places. Although street corners, sidewalks, and stoops are generally open to the observation of many people in a densely populated urban neighborhood, they are also ambiguous spaces in terms of social control (see Wilkinson, 2007). Within schools, jails, parks, bars, apartment buildings, and other "closed" settings, violence is likely to cluster in spaces with less surveillance, ambiguous definitions of who is in charge, and expectations about what types of behaviors

would be tolerated in the space. The interdependency between formal and informal social controls in distressed urban neighborhoods is also important. As adults withdraw from public spaces, youth enter and ultimately dominate those spaces. The social order of youth-dominated spaces may be regulated by the use of violence as social control (Wilkinson, Beaty, & Lurry, 2009). As is evident in our analysis, the control of gun availability within the location was the most critical feature in preventing shootings and other serious outcomes in those spaces in which place handlers were employed.

## **Contingencies in the Actors' Control that Heighten the Risk of Injury**

### **Weapon Type and Weapon Use in Events**

The ready availability of guns in the inner city has undoubtedly shaped and skewed youth perceptions of neighborhood dangerousness toward the expectation of lethal violence. The prevalence of guns, coupled with the rapid social diffusion of episodes of gun violence, helps shape these perceptions of danger. Respondents report that “most” young males (i.e., 14-30 years old) can and do have guns in these inner-city neighborhoods. Guns are available on the street to just about anyone who has the means to purchase, share, borrow, or steal them. Even people with less powerful identities can get access to firearms, either through associates, family members, or local drug dealers. Respondents reported that their own experiences with the world of guns began as early as eight and as late as sixteen, and were central to their socialization. Having a powerful gun was and is valued both for intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. Guns may fulfill a variety of personal needs for adolescents including: power, status, protection, and recreation. These processes begin at a young age, often before adolescence, as boys are being socialized into gun use on the street (also, see: Sullivan, 1989; Wilkinson, 2001; Anderson, 1999). These younger gun users were described as projecting images of being ruthless, heartless, unpredictable actors who were attempting to make impressions on older, more powerful characters on the street.

The presence of guns also has shaped the rules of fighting among teenagers. Fair fights have been described repeatedly in tales of inner city corner life (see, for example, Moore, 1978; Anderson, 1978, 1990; Cohen, 1955; Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). “Fair ones” are defined as physical fights involving two parties of nearly equivalent size and strength that would fight each other one-on-one using their fists (with no weapons or additional guys). Fair ones, according to our sample, no longer dominate conflict resolution in the inner city neighborhood street life, especially in face-offs with strangers, whose willingness to abide by time-honored values is unproven. Many situations that start out as fair fights typically involve some type of “gun play” as the “beef” escalates over time. Thus, the potential for an attack to involve guns is nearly certain for the young men in our sample. Guns raise the stakes in a variety of ways and in many instances; the lethal potential of firearm use simply trumps all other logic.

Our research measurement strategy directed respondents to recall a gun, a knife, a no-weapon, and non-violent or squashed event. The events described included all types. While weapon use plays a role in explaining the levels of severity of events, it is not always in the predicted manner. Of particular

note is the 144 gun events that were violent but resulted in no injuries. Of those gun events without injury, shots were fired in 76 events. Guns were used to threaten in 58 events, to pistol whip or beat someone in 3 events, and were present but not used in 2 events (not shown in table). Of the 36 homicides in the event sample, 94% were fatal shootings. Knife events often resulted in injury with 62% of events being serious enough to require medical attention. Events that did not involved weapons were much less likely to result in serious injury or death.

**Table 3-4. Event Severity by Weapon type**

Weapon Type	Event Severity													
	Near-Violent Event		Violence but No Injury		Minor Injuries - cuts and bruises		Injury but seriousness was unreported		Serious enough to require medical attention		Death		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
No Weapon	49	22%	99	44%	37	16%	11	5%	33	15%	0	0%	225	31%
Gun	4	1%	144	43%	12	4%	13	4%	130	39%	34	10%	337	46%
Knife/ Piercing Object	4	3%	25	18%	17	12%	5	4%	87	62%	2	1%	141	19%
Other Weapon	1	3%	10	32%	2	6%	3	10%	15	48%	0	0%	31	4%
Total	58	8%	278	38%	68	9%	32	4%	265	36%	36	5%	734	

The data in Table 3-4 show clearly that near-violent incidents happened almost exclusively when respondents or their opponents were unarmed (49 of 58 situations). In the remaining cases, weapons (either guns or knives) were present and available to actors on the scene but the event did not escalate to violence. We found that weapons were used to threaten someone in 77 reported violent events with no injury (see Table 3-5). These figures document that weapon availability alone does not equal shootings. For the near-violent events, we found that some arguments were disrupted by third parties, some were resolved peacefully, some did not escalate because one side was not willing to allow violence, some did not escalate to preserve existing relationships, or the situation was defined as non-serious thus not worth fighting over. Below we will examine several variations on these themes.

**Table 3-5. Event Severity by Weapon Type by How Weapon was used**

How was weapon used?	Near-Violent Event		Violence but No Injury		Minor Injuries - cuts and bruises		Injury but seriousness was unreported		Serious enough to require medical attention		Death		TOTAL	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>NO WEAPON</b>														
No Weapon	49	21%	99	43%	37	16%	11	5%	37	16%	0	0%	229	31%
<b>WEAPON, BUT NOT USED</b>														
Gun	3	27%	6	55%	2	18%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	11	1%
Knife/Other Sharp Weapon	4	22%	6	33%	7	39%	0	0%	1	6%	0	0%	18	2%
<b>USED TO THREATEN</b>														
Gun	0	0%	58	94%	2	3%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	62	8%
Knife/Other Sharp Weapon	0	0%	15	79%	1	1%	1	3%	2	1%	0	0%	19	3%
Other weapon	0	0%	4	80%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	5	1%
<b>HIT with, BEAT, or PISTOL-WHIPPED</b>														
Gun	0	0%	3	30%	3	30%	2	20%	2	20%	0	0%	10	1%
Knife/Other Sharp Weapon	0	0%	0	0%	3	75%	0	0%	1	25%	0	0%	4	1%
Other weapon	0	0%	5	28%	1	6%	2	11%	10	56%	0	0%	18	2%
<b>STABBED/CUT/SLICED</b>														
Knife/Other Sharp Weapon	0	0%	5	5%	6	6%	4	4%	85	86%	2	2%	99	13%
Other weapon	0	0%	0	0%	1	17%	0	0%	5	83%	0	0%	6	1%
<b>FIRED</b>														
Gun	1	0%	75	31%	5	2%	10	4%	119	49%	34	14%	243	33%
<b>TOTAL</b>	58		286		68		30		265		36		734	

### Alcohol and/or Drug Use in Violent Events

The relationship between intoxication and aggression is highly contingent, mediated by the set (composition of persons), setting (social context) and substances that are consumed. For example, drinking behavior and related consequences depend on the drinking context (Harford, 1983; Fagan, 1993a; Holyfield, Ducharme, & Martin, 1995; Taylor, 2007). The same individual, drinking or using drugs in similar patterns, is likely to behave differently in different social settings. This suggests that (a) settings may channel the arousal effects of intoxicants into aggression, and (b) specific drugs may moderate the arousal effects of specific contexts into varying behavior patterns (Fagan, 1993a, 1993b). Despite agreement on the importance of context, there has been no consensus on which elements of context influence violent outcomes of drinking events. For example, one view of context emphasizes situational factors in the physical setting where drinking takes place, including the occasion for drinking or using drugs, the number and relationship of companions and strangers in the setting, and the regulatory processes or permissiveness of the situation (Burns, 1980; Levinson, 1983a, 1983b).

However, spatial and social control dimensions, such as the rules and mechanisms for distributing drugs or alcohol are basic to other conceptions of context (Roncek & Maier, 1991; Parker, 1995). Specific contexts carry norms for violent behavior and intoxication that influence their interaction. Such norms may dictate which provocations merit a physical response (Felson, 1983; Anderson, 1999), the status accorded to violence (Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1985; Sullivan, 1989), the types and quantities of alcohol to be consumed (Holyfield et al., 1995), and the social controls on drugs, alcohol and violence in the immediate setting (Buford, 1991; Burns, 1980).

Research on alcohol use and aggression in laboratory studies suggests that provocation, threat, expectancies, availability of a non-aggressive response options, and the presence of others are important aspects of the situation which determine whether an aggressive response occurs (Graham et al., 1995; White, 1997; Bushman & Cooper, 1990). Accordingly, the immediate setting, the broader social and cultural environment supporting fighting, and beliefs about alcohol and other drugs (expected and experienced drinking outcomes) are important to the violence outcomes of events where adolescents gather together to get high (for greater detail see: Holyfield et al., 1995).

Drug selling also is a fertile context for violent events (Goldstein, 1985, 1989; Fagan, 1993a; Fagan & Chin, 1990; Bourgois, 1995; Sommers, Baskin, & Fagan, 1998). Disputes related to money or quality or quantity of drugs, robberies of money or drugs, disputes over selling locations, disciplinary concerns within drug selling organizations, and other routine business conflicts are often settled using violence, and again often with guns. There also appears to be a consistent spatial and social overlap between drug selling, drug and alcohol use, and gun homicides (Chaiken & Chaiken, 1990). Accordingly, we queried the data on adolescent gun violence to determine the extent and nature of drug and alcohol as a context for violence.

Drinking, drug use and drug selling were one of the most commonly identified settings for violent events. Clearly, drugs are in both the *background* and the *foreground* of gun violence in the South Bronx and East New York. Background signifies the social context or cultural landscape which

influences and shapes perceptions and experiences of inner-city residents. Foreground refers to the immediate influence of drug and alcohol use effects on the processes and outcomes of violent events. Together, drugs and alcohol are a pervasive influence on the daily lives of young people, fueling events in several ways. Rampant drug use and drug selling dwarf other activities as social contexts for interactions, conflicts, and public stages for status attainment in the social world in these neighborhoods. These events in turn contribute to and form the conflict management scripts that youth have learned about street behaviors and the ecology of “danger.”

We identified a range of dynamic processes that show the interactions of intoxication effects, situational contexts, and individual propensities to contribute to violence or its avoidance. Some involve affective states following intoxication, others involve events that occur in drinking or drug use locations, and still others involve problems in drug businesses that spill over into other areas of social life. Throughout all these, guns are present as a strategic factor and also as a threshold criterion in decision making about violence. Drug and alcohol affects are evident in decision making, intensified emotional states, exaggerated affect, diminished capacity for self-regulation, deviance disavowal, and other cognitive processes. For example, respondents indicated that language was more provocative when actors were intoxicated and that language often “amped up” otherwise minor disputes into violent encounters. Some said they tended to take bystanders’ provocations to fight more seriously when under the influence.

The research literature is rich with data on the prevalence of substances among perpetrators and victims of violence. Our hunch from the earlier analysis was that substance issues would be critical factor in sorting out types of violence. *Specifically, we hypothesized that using alcohol/drugs at the time of the event will increase the likelihood for disputes to escalate and for participants to be injured.* A look at the overall patterns of the data suggest that youth were equally likely to be involved in violent events that resulted in serious outcomes regardless if they were drunk or high. Unfortunately, many respondents were not asked the questions about alcohol/drug use, resulting in large numbers of missing data on that variable. One pattern that supports the notion that intoxication increases escalation is the finding that in all cases (n =5) when someone on the respondent's side was murdered, the respondent was high at the time. In the 10 events in which someone from the other side was murdered the respondent was high. Consistent with this pattern, we found that in 57% of the 92 available cases in which someone was injured on the respondent's side, the respondent was high/drunk. As shown in Table 3-6, marijuana was the most commonly used drug.

**Table 3-6. Alcohol and/or Drug Intoxication at the time of the Event by Event Severity**

Intoxication Status and Type of Substance	Event Severity													
	Near-Violent Event		Violence but No Injury		Minor Injuries - cuts and bruises		Injury but seriousness was unreported		Serious enough to require medical attention		Death		Total	
Use	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Use Status Unknown/Missing	21		74		19		16		82		14		261	
Not Using	15	6%	101	42%	31	13%	6	3%	88	37%	5	2%	240	46%
Using but Not High or Drunk	3	10%	10	34%	3	10%	0	0%	11	38%	2	7%	29	6%
High or Drunk	18	8%	86	38%	14	6%	7	3%	89	39%	15	7%	229	44%
Total	58		278		68		32		265		36		737	
Type														
Type: Marijuana (Weed)	8	7%	46	41%	12	11%	2	2%	37	33%	8	7%	113	47%
Type: Beer + Weed	1	3%	26	68%	1	3%	2	5%	25	66%	3	8%	38	16%
Type: Liquor + Weed	1	6%	6	33%	2	11%	0	0%	10	56%	0	0%	18	8%
Type: Beer	3	8%	11	30%	2	5%	2	5%	16	43%	3	8%	37	16%
Type: Liquor	2	10%	8	38%	3	14%	0	0%	7	33%	1	5%	21	9%
Type: Cocaine (Crack)	0	0%	1	25%	0	0%	0	0%	2	50%	1	6%	4	2%
Type: PCP	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	20%	3	60%	1	20%	5	2%
Type: Heroin	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	50%	0	0%	2	1%

**Table 3-7. Intoxication Status by Level of Severity by Injury**

WAS ANYONE INJURED? Injury:	Event Severity													
	Near-Violent Event		Violence but No Injury		Minor Injuries - cuts and bruises		Injury but seriousness was unreported		Serious enough to require medical attention		Death		Total	
NO	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
High: No	18	14%	110	86%									128	55%
High: Yes	18	17%	85	83%									103	45%
High: Missing	20		74										94	
Total Valid	36		195										231	
YES														
High: No					34	26%	5	4%	89	67%	5	4%	132	52%
High: Yes					14	11%	6	5%	89	72%	15	12%	124	48%
High: Missing					18		13		82		14		127	
Total Valid					48		11		178		20		256	

During drinking events, boastful language and exaggerated verbal displays of toughness and “nerve” were commonplace. Some people simply made bad decisions while high, leading to fights that might have been avoided in other circumstances:

(DAVID): Yeah he was drunk, high or drunk the nigga was fucked up man. I think that is why he thought he was superman for that night.

(INTERVIEWER): Everybody drinking think they somebody.

(DAVID): That just goes to show that superman can’t stop a bullet. Everybody got skin, this flesh under that is bone.

(INTERVIEWER): Do you think the use of alcohol influenced the way he handled the situation between you and him?

(MILES): The way he spoke, yeah.

(INTERVIEWER): How?

(MILES): ‘Cause he just, you know, he said like a lot of dumb things that like, just really, like it heated up the moment more.

(INTERVIEWER): Do you feel think that the situation was relating to you using, drinking?

(JOSÉ): Yeah I think so yeah I know so matter of fact because if I wouldn't have been drinking I would have handled in a more calm manner.

(INTERVIEWER): It was more impulsive because of the drinking?

(JOSÉ): I was very much more aggressive.

(INTERVIEWER): Umm, you ever have got into any beef or a fight while you was drunk?

(JOSIAH): Yes I did.

(INTERVIEWER): What you, what that was about?

(JOSIAH): Well, about me having a big mouth.

(INTERVIEWER): Oh, when you get drunk you start joking and shit.....

(JOSIAH): When I'm drunk, when I'm drinking and smoking weed, talking shit to people, you know what I mean, you talk to people.....

(INTERVIEWER): What happened with that?

(JOSIAH): Well, I was smoking weed one day, alright, my man, I was smoking weed one day, drinking, getting fucked up, we got into a little technical difficulties, you know, we had a fight, I got my ass wiped.

(INTERVIEWER): What y'all fought over, some bullshit?

(JOSIAH): Just bullshit, just talking, you know, talking out your ass, arguing back and forth, you know what I mean, so niggas said 'yo pipe that shit down, dead it,' nigga ain't pipe it down, I'm still talking out my mouth.

(INTERVIEWER): Who said "pipe it down, dead it", somebody else?

(JOSIAH): Yeah, one of my home boys, you know what I mean? Nigga said 'I ain't with that shit no more, you know,' and I'm still talking out my mouth, so you know, niggas told me it was a lesson to be learnt. So it happened you know, it happened to me like three times, you know, but you learn from that.

(INTERVIEWER): All three times was anybody trying to calm the situation down?

(JOSIAH): Yeah, but I wasn't trying to hear that.

(INTERVIEWER): Did you have any kind of strategy you were going to use to win this confrontation?

(MALIK): Not at the moment no, I was tipsy, I was off focus.

These behaviors often increased the stakes in everyday interactions, transforming them from non-challenging verbal interactions into the types of "character contests" which were often resolved only through violence. Alcohol exaggerated the sense of outrage over perceived transgressions of personal codes (respect, space, verbal challenges), resulting in violence to exert social control or retribution.

Respondents often indicated that drinking places themselves were especially prone to violent confrontations, often independent from the drinking patterns of the people present. Young men prepared for these potential dangers by carrying guns to parties or clubs in anticipation of violent events. In many cases, the potential danger of drinking places increased the appeal for attending with

groups of friends when one was prepared to defend himself. Josiah described an event where he was hurt:

(INTERVIEWER): Why, was they shooting at you deliberately?

(JOSIAH): Nah it was a mistake. It was.....

(INTERVIEWER): What happened, tell me about that.

(JOSIAH): It was, it was, it was a whole bunch of things, it wasn't meant towards me, it was meant for somebody else, and I was just sitting on the corner drinking beer and it just happen. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. But I thank God that it didn't hit me, you know what I mean?

A wide range of drug effects was reported. Some "chilled" when smoking marijuana, others sought out victims to dominate or exploit, and a few reported becoming paranoid and avoiding any type of human interaction. For some respondents, paranoia contributed to hostile attributions, created an air of danger and threat, and lead to defensive or pre-emptive violence:

(WILL): I wasn't really, I wasn't not really drunk I was just like "nice."

(INTERVIEWER): But the drug, did the liquor had anything to do with your actions?

(WILL): Nah, you crazy?

(INTERVIEWER): Huh, if you weren't drinking you wouldn't react the same way?

(WILL): It's worst, I feel I'm worst when I'm not drinking, not that, like when I smoke weed I turn soft, you know what I'm saying, like when I smoke weed, I get nice and shit I, I, you know what I'm saying, shit be having me nervous and shit, yeah.

(INTERVIEWER): Paranoid?

(WILL): Yeah, that paranoid and shit.

(INTERVIEWER): And you don't really wanna get into it?

(WILL): Nah, when I smoke weed, nah, sometimes I get paranoid, I don't like smoking weed.

(JOSÉ): In that instant, 'cause I was drinking and my state of thinking was altered to a more how would you say, *machismo*? When I had to prove that I guess at that moment feeling the way I was feeling buzzed up like that.

(INTERVIEWER): You felt dissed...?

(JOSÉ): I felt disrespected and you gotta to prove yourself.

Still others noted the human guidedness of drinking behaviors, where drinking often was an intended behavior that created the emotional and affective conditions where violence was likely:

(INTERVIEWER): So you was high?

(AKEEM): Yeah I was kind of fucked up.

(INTERVIEWER): Do you think alcohol or drugs influenced you the way you handle the situation?

(AKEEM): Nah. Marijuana keeps you fucking..., it keeps you down, it keeps you more or less in a mellow state. Alcohol will take you to that level you wanna fucking hurt someone. I wanted to chill and watch a basketball game. I didn't want to go out there and fight on no hot fucking summer day.

Several respondents reported that their decision making within violent events was compromised. Some felt invincible and instigated fights that they lost. Some made disproportionately aggressive responses that became instigations for fights, responses that in retrospect seemed unnecessary and stupid. Still, others said they were "too fuzzy" to make good decisions about whether or how to fight.

While cognitive impairment was evident for some, others noted that their decisions while drinking reflected complex strategic judgments about the interactions that often precede the decision to fight or withdraw. The decision to "squash" or to "dead" a fight involved complex perceptions and decisions as well as verbal skills. One respondent told how he and his friends decided to withdraw from a potential fight at a party after deciding that they could not win, that their opponents outnumbered them, and that even if a temporary peace could be negotiated, it would be fragile and short-lived. But their withdrawal required that they offer "accounts" that permitted both sides to maintain some "props" while not appearing to be weak. This required both mental and verbal agility, skills that had to be summoned despite a long night of drinking.

Intoxication also appears to have indirect influences on violence, or may even be an outcome of violence. Some respondents described violent events while intoxicated where their drinking or drug use was unrelated to the violence. Still others disavowed responsibility for their violence by blaming it entirely on being high. Others got high after violent events as a form of self-medication:

(JP): No I wasn't high. I wasn't drunk.

(INTERVIEWER): What about after that? After the fight?

(JP): After the fight, when I got back around my way, I told my friends about it and we planned to go back.

(INTERVIEWER): Y'all got high and started laughing after that?

(JP): No we didn't. We got high, but we wasn't laughing.

Finally, one respondent told us how the complications from the drug business spill over into other social interactions, or themselves become challenges to codes involving family and respect, code violations that mandate a violent response. Consider the following story that weaves together these themes:

(STEVE): And then like my cousin right? I had a cousin. He was black too, and he was skinny you know. He was a good kid and he was young. Then he started smoking, he got caught up in the game he started smoking. And you know the rest of his friends was looking down on him they was like, 'yo what's wrong with you? ...You supposed to be

chilling with us, look at us we chilling, we fat. What? You over here smoked out (from crack) why go there?' They use[d] to diss him and all that. They use[d] to look out for him and all that, pay him, 'yo here go to the store for me, yo, here, here' look out for him.' They always took care of him and all that but he never degraded himself where he was robbing people, snatching anybodies chain, robbing people's moms of something like that. He never went low like that but he just liked to smoke he liked to get high. And umm. He was chilling with this other crackhead that was the bad. He was the opposite of him. He would always be sticking nigga's moms up, stickin', he stick anybody up. And he use[d] to always rob this one guy constantly. And them two since they stood together you know a lot. So they kind of stood together and the other person saw that. He was like 'yo, damn I want that nigga... He tried to set him up in the building. ...And my cousin he didn't know what time it was. He got my cousin into the building and for one reason or another there was somebody waiting in the staircase with a shoty (shotgun) but it was supposed to be for the other guy. It was a case of mistaken identity, and they shot my cousin in the face *boom*.

(INTERVIEWER): He killed him?

(STEVE): Killed him.

(INTERVIEWER): Pssst.

(STEVE): And that kind of, it didn't happen to me, it happen, it was my birthday that day. The last time I saw him was right there on the corner before I went upstairs. I had a little joint, I was puffing it and *boom* and he, you know, whenever I had blunts I always smoked with him too. ...[Tell him] Get high off of this leave that other shit alone that stuff ain't good for you.

(INTERVIEWER): Yeah.

(STEVE): So I was smoking my joint with him and before I went upstairs I gave it to him. I was like, 'yo I'm out see you tomorrow' and he was like 'ah-ight.' Usually sometimes and I was kind of close to him. In the mornings he use to come to my house, I use to cook a fat breakfast for both of us he use to always eat with me and we use to just kick it, chill, bugging, watching TV and everything. Then it happen like three in the morning that night and I had went upstairs about twelve. That was the last time I ever saw him.

This section has described the heterogeneity of violent events with regard to the sparks of the conflict. Events can start with very minor triggers like a verbal insult or they might be initiated by something more serious such as a murder. The context(s) in which a spark escalates to violence is important for understanding the outcomes of conflict.

### **The Larger Social Context of Near Violent and Violent Events**

Despite much evidence on the group nature of violent delinquency, there is still a paucity of research on the group processes in violent offending. This study adds to the existent knowledge on the peer contexts of violent delinquency and offers insights to the study of co-offending, particularly with regard to gun

violence. The peer context, like the neighborhood environment, shapes the cognitive landscape of urban adolescents in particular ways. With cross-sectional data, we are unable to distinguish the direction of influence of peers on gun-related behaviors. We are clearly able to document the processes by which peers became engaged in violence as co-offenders in particular events. We found that guns were equated with self-protection and the most prevalent reason given for possession and carrying behaviors of peers. Belonging to a group of associates was also perceived to have protective value. Guns and armed peers played a role in heightened risk for lethal conflict. Peers are involved as co-offenders in the majority of gun events reported. We originally hypothesized that embeddedness in friendship clusters of youth who were comparatively more involved in gun-related behaviors would distinguish degrees of involvement in gun violence for respondents. Most of the sample reported multiple types of involvement in gun-related behaviors *and* they were deeply enmeshed in networks of peers, who from their perspective were also deeply involved in gun-related behaviors and other crimes. Co-offending in violent events appears to be situational as particular features of the situation are more likely to result in the co-participation of peers in violent events.

### **Third Party Roles: Co-offenders, Bystanders, and Beyond**

*Our third research objective was to provide insights into precisely how third parties shape violent and near-violent outcomes in youth violence.* The data analysis examined the relevance of previously articulated, but empirically untested hypotheses on third parties in violence (see Philips & Cooney, 2005 for an exception), including Black's (1990) proposition on partisanship and Cooney's proposition on third party social status. In addition to knowing who was present and what they did during the event, we explored how respondents felt about -and reacted to- the actions or non-actions of third parties. We compared and contrasted events according to the presence or absence of third parties in order to develop additional perspectives on how principal actors' definitions of event seriousness vary when conflict is observed by others. Philips and Cooney (2005) found that the relational ties of third parties were significant in distinguishing violent from non-violent disputes. Insights from the preliminary analysis and existing theory on third party roles provide suggestions about the appropriate hypotheses for this study. The study examined the following hypotheses related to third party structure and action:

*Hypothesis: Third party presence will increase the likelihood that the opening interactions between principals will have greater significance (be interpreted as hostile or threatening) and result in violence compared to similar interactions without observers.* There was little variation in terms of events without any 3rd party present (n=35). About half of these resulted in an injury and only one was a near-violent incident. Youth are generally in a public forum when engaging in conflict. The identity of the third party and their social ties to both the respondent and his opponent certainly made a difference in the level of seriousness of events. This was especially true as many of the third parties who were affiliated (had close ties) became actively involved in the incident as a co-offender (in most cases) or in an attempt to break up or squash conflict. There were some examples of third parties acting as settlement agents -those cases included authority figures, high status older youth, and individuals with ties to both sides of the conflict.

*Hypothesis: Specifically, close ties between the primary actors and third parties, the presence of third parties with cross-cutting ties, third parties who served as settlement agents, and open locations will prevent escalation.*

*Hypothesis: Third parties with greater status relative to principals exert more influence over conflict situations either in escalation or settlement roles.*

**Table 3-8. Presence of 3<sup>rd</sup> parties by Event Severity**

Presence by who	Event Severity														
	Not Present		Near-Violent Event		Violence but No Injury		Minor Injuries - cuts and bruises		Injury but seriousness was unreported		Serious enough to require medical attention		Death		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Any 3 <sup>rd</sup> party	35	5%	48	98%	251	94%	60	95%	27	93%	244	95%	35	100%	700
Respondent's boy(s)	215	31%	32	65%	176	69%	42	63%	21	70%	184	72%	31	91%	701
Opponent's boy(s)	210	33%	23	58%	157	65%	33	61%	13	50%	168	72%	25	78%	629
Bystander(s)	134	24%	31	84%	159	73%	38	75%	17	77%	158	78%	22	76%	559

As shown in Table 3-8, third parties of all types were present during nearly 95% of the violent and near-violent events reported by the sample. Starting with the least serious events, we find that at least one third party individual was present in 98% near-violent events, 94% violent events with no injury, 95% events in which actors suffered minor injuries, and 95% violent events that resulted in serious injury.<sup>17</sup> In events that resulted in death, 35 of 35 events were witnessed by a third party. In 31 out of 36 events, there was at least one co-offender on the respondent's side and 25 out of 36 included at least one co-offender on the opponent's side. Table 3-9 shows more detail about the specific actions of different types of third parties during the conflict.

<sup>17</sup> There are missing data for third party presence.

**Table 3-9. Actions of 3<sup>rd</sup> parties by Event Severity**

3rd Party action	Event Severity												
	Near-Violent Event		Violence but No Injury		Minor Injuries - cuts and bruises		Injury but seriousness was unreported		Serious enough to require medical attention		Death		Total
R.B. got involved/used violence	9	4%	83	34%	15	6%	11	5%	109	45%	21	9%	244
R.B. did nothing/watched	11	13%	28	34%	10	12%	1	1%	30	36%	3	4%	83
R.B. intervened to stop conflict	8	17%	24	51%	4	9%	2	4%	8	17%	1	2%	47
R.B. amped up or escalated	1	3%	16	48%	10	30%	0	0%	7	21%	0	0%	33
R.B. provided back up protection, if needed	4	16%	7	28%	3	12%	1	4%	9	36%	1	4%	25
O.B. got involved/used violence	2	1%	65	34%	10	5%	6	3%	94	48%	17	9%	194
O.B. did nothing/watched	9	12%	27	36%	8	11%	1	1%	28	37%	2	3%	75
O.B. intervened to stop conflict	7	27%	12	46%	3	12%	1	4%	4	15%	0	0%	26
O.B. amped up or escalated	3	7%	20	43%	7	15%	0	0%	15	33%	1	2%	46
O.B. provided back up protection, if needed	0	0%	13	68%	0	0%	1	5%	5	26%	0	0%	19
Bystanders got involved/used violence	0	0%	0	0%	1	33%	0	0%	1	33%	1	33%	3
Bystanders did nothing/watched	10	7%	41	28%	14	10%	4	3%	66	46%	9	6%	144
Bystanders intervened to stop conflict	10	11%	46	51%	13	14%	3	3%	20	22%	2	2%	90
Bystanders ran away	0	0%	11	27%	0	0%	0	0%	26	63%	5	12%	41
Bystanders called the police	1	14%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	6	86%	0	0%	7

\*R.B. is short for Respondent’s boy(s) and O.B. is short for Opponent’s boy(s)

**Broader Influence of Peers**

Elsewhere, we have described some of the qualitative characteristics of peer social relationships among the study youth including friendships, associates, affiliates, co-workers, and fictive kinship (Wilkinson, 2003). Of the 230 youths who were asked the question “do you have someone that you would consider your best friend?” nearly 54% indicated that they had a best friend. A large percentage reported having more than one close friend (170/252 or 68%). Over 84% of respondents reported belonging to a group that hung out together (n=256). Nearly 82% (out of 343 responding) reported that they were “pretty

tight” with their friends. Close to 76% (out of 332) of youth reported that their friends lived in the same neighborhood. Of the 145 who were asked about the age of the friends, 65% reported having friends that were the same age or close to it. Of the 158 who reported about the duration of their friendships, 77 (49%) reported since childhood, 33 (21%) reported more than 5 years but not since childhood, 46 (29%) reported friendship duration to be 1-5 years, and 2 (less than 1%) reported being friends for less than one year. Of the 131 respondents who were asked about the frequency of getting together with these friends, 71% reported everyday, 8% reported 3-4 times per week, 11% reported 1-2 times per week, and 11% reported less than once per week. When asked if youth thought their close friends were a good influence, nearly 59% of the 307 answered affirmatively<sup>18</sup>. Of the 252 who answered, 97% of youth reported that their close friends drink and/or smoke weed or use other drugs and 94% (of 170 asked) reported their friends were involved in the drug business (see Wilkinson, McBryde, Williams, Bloom, & Bell, 2009).

As shown in Table 3-10, 255 of the 345 gun events (74%) in the NYCYS event sample were classified as co-offending situations. In approximately 67% (157) of those gun events, the respondent engaged in violence in concert with his associates as co-offenders. Eighty-four or about 24% of gun events included group-on-group violence with co-offenders on both sides of the conflict. Seventy-eight or approximately 23% of gun events occurred while the respondent was alone and in 14 of those gun events, the respondent faced a group of opponents. The involvement of co-offenders played a significant role in the more serious outcomes including 23 reported deaths and 75 reported injuries serious enough to require medical care. Obscured in Table 3-10 are the vulnerabilities that respondents (and/or their opponents for that matter) faced when confronted by an armed attacker while unarmed. Group gun violence was very dangerous because of the increased number of potential shooters and potential targets that could be injured. We calculated correlations between respondent gun possession, peer gun possession and co-offending in gun events. The correlations were moderately statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

Finally, we examined the experiences of the 16 respondents who reported that none of their friends had guns to see if their involvement in serious gun violence differed in meaningful ways than the enmeshed counterparts. These cases are interesting in that only two reported a gun event in which his peers were involved as co-offenders. The 16 respondents reported a total of 21 violent and 5 near-violent events: seven involved no weapon, eight involved a knife or blade, and 11 involved a gun. Peers were present in 75% of these events and peers were actors in a variety of ways: participating in the violence, watching the respondents’ back, breaking up the dispute, verbally escalating the conflict, or running away for self-protection<sup>19</sup>. Most of the 16 reported that they were not part of a network of gun

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<sup>18</sup> Data not shown in table.

<sup>19</sup> Data not shown in table.

involved peers but had guns themselves, reported using guns in crime, and had been arrested for a gun-related offense.

**Table 3-10. Gun Events: Severity by Co-offending Status (n=255)**

<u>Event</u>	<u>Co-offending Events</u>		<u>Solo Events</u>	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Gun Present, Near-Violent	5	2.7	5	7.5
Gun Used to Threaten, not fired	20	10.6	11	16.4
Gun Used to Threaten, other violence, Minor Injuries	2	1.1	0	
Gun Used to Threat, other violence, Seriousness Unknown	1	0.5	0	
Gun Used as Blunt Object, No injury	2	1.1	1	1.5
Gun Used as Blunt Object, Minor Injury	2	1.1	1	1.5
Gun Used as Blunt Object, Serious Injury	2	1.1	0	
Gun Used as Blunt Object, Seriousness UNK	1	0.5	1	1.5
Gun Fired, No one injured	42	22.3	15	22.4
Gun Fired, Minor injuries	2	1.1	3	4.5
Gun Fired, Serious injuries	75	39.9	23	34.3
Gun Fired, Death	23	12.2	5	7.5
Gun Fired, Injury but seriousness unknown	3	1.6	2	3.0
Gun Fired, Injury status unknown	8	4.3	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>		<b>67</b>	

Beyond the numbers, we analyzed the narrative for insights into the nuances of how the peer context shapes violence. In the first example, both the respondent's friends and the opponent's friends played roles in the violence process. Individuals on both sides of the conflict promoted the use of violence. According to the respondent the crowd was "rowdy" and gave specific instructions to inflict harm on his opponent; these comments registered with the respondent. JP described how others were involved:

(INTERVIEWER): So umm, did any of your...did any of his people get involved with it as soon as he and you walked outside?

(JP): Yeah. All his... he was with all his boys. I was with a couple a niggas. That's why he was acting rowdy. 'Cause he was with his peoples.

(INTERVIEWER): So your peoples from your crew?...

(JP): Yeah, my boys was telling me 'shoot the nigga. Slice him, stab him.' Shit was running through my mind.

(INTERVIEWER): So how 'bout his peoples?

(JP): Yeah, you know, they were shouting shit out. 'Just shoot that cat.'

(INTERVIEWER): How you was feeling when your peoples was instigating?

(JP): I was gonna do it. Cops pulled up too quick.

When housing authority police officers disrupted the initial event, the combatants fled the scene to avoid arrest; when the conflict was later resumed, it was even more intensified. In the subsequent incident, previously uninvolved third parties become actively engaged as co-offenders in a "retaliatory" gun event.

(JP): We went back over there the next day. With a bigger crew. We just—we did what we had to do.

(INTERVIEWER): You went back with a stronger crew?

(JP): Yeah, we saw them out there. We rolled up on them. We just flipped on them. So everybody bugged the fuck out.

(INTERVIEWER): So everybody got violent?

(JP): Yeah. We pulled out on them. They pulled out too.

(INTERVIEWER): Oh, so y'all had a shootout? The next day?

(JP): Yeah.

(INTERVIEWER): So umm, this shootout—anybody got hurt?

(JP): Yeah. Yeah, the kid that I was fighting with; I'm saying he got shot in the chest.

### ***Retaliation by Co-Offending***

One common practice was *retaliation by co-offending*. Often fights that were initially one-on-one resulted in the loser of that fight retaliating with one or more co-offenders (also often with guns). Nick had a one-on-one fight over a girl that he lost. It later resulted in him and his brother retaliating by jumping the opponent. The opponent then returned to their block with two cars of his people, causing Nick's side to open fire on the opponents. The *instrumental perspective* states that co-offending is chosen when it is expected to be easier and more rewarding (Weerman, 2003). This was seen in the previous example. The respondent likely found it easier to retaliate with a co-offender than solo (even though the original fight was one-on-one). In other instances, like later on in Nick's story, the need for co-offenders seemed more justifiable. When the opponents came looking for his crew with a large group; the respondent admitted being scared. Nick said "I was scared to death; I was scared out of my socks." Co-offending seemed to make sense in the later case in that it was easier and safer.

Youth commonly get their associates to engage in gun violence to exact revenge. Bryce describes a shooting that he and his friends perpetrated in response to his friend's victimization in an armed robbery.

(INTERVIEWER): How many people you shot?

(BRYCE): Like five people.

(INTERVIEWER): For what? Did you seriously injure any of them?

(BRYCE): All this that I'm saying this happen recently.

(INTERVIEWER): Oh word.

(BRYCE): This... This happen they took my man Harv these guys from [another hood] they took him, his chain, backed him down (with guns). So five of us went up... Went up in [the other hood] we just saw them kids and they tried to run up the stairs and we all just hit them up *boom boom!* This kid fell on the floor and I was just hitting him in his chest. *Boom boom boom.*

(INTERVIEWER): So he ain't die?

(BRYCE): I don't know if he died but mad cops everything came and we just scattered and I came back over here.

(INTERVIEWER): Ain't nobody know it was ya'll?

(BRYCE): Nah.

(INTERVIEWER): What you shot him with?

(BRYCE): A nine Ruger.

In terms of retaliation and *social rewards* (Weerman, 2003) retaliation was carried out with a group and with a weapon. It is possible that respondents were attempting to save face or gain a certain reputation and saw co-offending with weapons as the best way to ensure their success and the subsequent social rewards of reputation and respect.

### ***Other "Hoods" and Co-offending***

Other examples in which respondents felt co-offending was necessary, if not mandatory, occurred when respondents traveled to other neighborhoods. Respondents often mentioned that they were carrying weapons and/or traveling in groups because they were traveling outside their own neighborhood. In one example, Norman was confronted by his opponent and verbally assaulted. Instead of reacting, he deflected the opponent's comments, left the scene, and arranged for the opponent to come to his neighborhood later where the fight escalated to a shoot-out between co-offenders on both sides. While co-offending might not have seemed mandatory initially, being in the opponent's neighborhood apparently gave the respondent reason to feel that if he was facing danger, he would be better off not facing alone.

### ***Social Exchange***

Aspects of co-offending as social exchange were also evident in the NYCYS data. In one case, Ben came across a man who had stolen his hat as a child and decided to rob him in retaliation. Although a portion of the gains were material, the majority were not. The respondent and his boys "roughed up" the opponent; they pistol whipped him and took his pants, making him run home in his underwear. This was clearly more about revenge and humiliation than it was about material rewards. Ben said: "I had nothing

to lose and I gained everything.” His friends’ co-involvement in the brutality of this event heightened Ben’s assessment that justice was restored.

### **Escalation and De-escalation of Conflict**

The first example of a near-violent event initially started in the classroom while Eduardo was doing his school work. The conflict later erupted in the gymnasium during an after school basketball program both Eduardo and his opponent attended. Eduardo recounted this conflict with a guy named Micah. The conflict started when Micah “said something I ain’t like so we just started arguing.” Eduardo explained the interaction with the following words: “...he came out the wrong way. I was trying to tell him, chill... what you doing?” When the interviewer asked Eduardo to recall what he was thinking at the time, Eduardo explained:

I had to prove myself to him. He disrespect me so I had to give it to him. ...Everything happened so quick. Nobody got punch[ed], we ain't fight-fight, you know what I'm saying? He just threw words and I just stood there.

The event occurred during basketball practice in the presence of the team and coach, who encouraged Eduardo to drop the dispute. Eduardo explained that he was informed of the consequences he would face if the argument went further. He recalled what he heard from the coach: “Pretty much the coach from the school [said] ...it would affect my work, my school attendance. They would have to suspend me. I'll be taken off the basketball team. So I just left it alone.” According to Eduardo, Micah was getting the same message. Eduardo explained that during the time of the argument he was: “thinking I ain't want to get hurt. Or don't want to get in trouble, it's not the place. There's another time for this.’ His decision to calm down was also made easier by the support he received from his teammates. He recalled: ‘They, they ain't want get me in trouble. They ain't want to see me off the team or get cut from school...’ This example among many others that benefited from authority figures playing effective social control roles, also had elements of a less serious spark, at least one side that was perceived to have a punk reputation, and same aged peers discouraging rather than encouraging violence. In our next example, Dion described a near-violent event he was involved in while gambling. Dion explained:

It was over [a] dice game you know what I'm saying. I was high and I lost count of my money. So you know what I'm saying. I was screaming on somebody, I was screaming on his kid, ‘cuz I thought he had owed me some money but my best friend, he was sober at the time, and he explained what happened before I went and got my tool [gun]. ...So it was dead [resolved] from there.

Dion felt the incident was directly related to his intoxicated state. He explained: “Yeah. Because it [the drugs] fucked up memory, and none of that shit would have started [if he wasn’t impaired so that he could have tracked the money better in the situation].”

Another example of a near-violent event was described by Robyn. This event also took place in school during physical education class. When asked what caused the beef, Robyn explained the situation in the following way:

Well this nigga, back then I wasn't in pool, I was just sitting by the side of the pool. And he splashed me with the water. And shit and, you know. I started riffing [talking shit]. You know, shit started, flying and shit [verbally]. And after that, he went and got his little boys, 'cause he was scared to fight me. So, you know, after school there was gonna be a big, big fight, but then he came to me before that. You know, we just talked about that shit.

Robyn explained why from his perspective splashing the water on him caused him to get angry by clarifying that "I was wearing my fresh gear [nice clothes], and this dude just splashed me. I wasn't in the water that day." Although Robyn was seriously annoyed by his opponent's actions, he reconsidered pursuing violence after the opponent approached him to make peace. Robyn explained how it was decided to squash the beef:

He came and spoke to me, you know, and, he was like, me fighting, you know, could end up in, you know, me really hurting somebody, just cause this dude splashed water on me, it wasn't worth it, you know. ...So we just squashed the beef.

In all three of the examples provided, the youth involved in conflict were acquaintances who because of their joint membership in the social setting (e.g. school, sports team, street corner dice game) would likely see each other again.

Violence is sometimes avoided because it will ruin the planned activities for the night. In the next example, Tavon and his boys were on the subway making their way to a club outside their neighborhood when they faced conflict with another group of young men. Tavon explains:

They look at us. We looked at them. We decided, hey, we're gonna fight each other. We're gonna get all messed up. And both of the sides decided, 'yo we all gonna to go we gonna get dirty, fight, fuck each other up.' So it's just go and see the girls. That's all we want to see, the girls and get drunker. So we just said 'alright go ahead man.' We started conversing like "real gentlemen," you know. ...It was like, you know, we didn't even have to get violent. ...My friend stepped up and said, 'hey what's the problem?'

(INTERVIEWER): Yeah.

(TAVON): They said, we said there is gonna to be a problem, you know. We don't want no problems. We don't want no problems either. We just come, you know, approach you man-to-man, speaking like a man. You know is there any problem? ...leave everyone alone. Whatever, whatever. ...Then they decided- hey, it's uncalled for.

The final example of a near-violent event was reported by Lamont. Lamont was out partying in a crowded nightclub when he accidentally stepped on a complete stranger's foot. Lamont explained the interaction that took place when the man followed him to the bathroom to demand an apology:

I said, 'man you out of your fucking mind.' Brought that nigga in the bathroom. He didn't know I was mucho deep, mucho when I say I was deep son I was mucho. We had that bathroom locked. Nigga's was on the sink, all that. You know how the bathrooms be—niggas leaning on the sink, on the fucking toilets, Dutch paper everywhere, niggas is Earling (smoking weed). And the nigga come in the bathroom to tell me I stepped on his foot! I said, 'yo, duke, man, come on get out my face.' I had a mad headache too. They was playing reggae all night. I was pissed. ...I was in a good mood until this cat just came out of nowhere.

(INTERVIEWER): Who decided to squash it?

(LAMONT): Um his, one of his people's was with my man and shit. So my man was like, 'chill, that's my man, you know what I'm saying? [it's] bullshit man, so that shit got deaded like that.

We cannot determine whether it was the intervention of third party with cross-cutting ties or the fact that the opponent was outnumbered that led him to abandon his pursuit of Lamont as both occurred simultaneously in this event. In some of the violent incidents that involved guns but did not end in injury, youth used guns to force others to give up something or back down. In the situation described by George, he and his opponent were rival drug sellers hustling in the same neighborhood (and living in the same projects). According to the respondent, they had had repeated episodes of shooting at each other without harming anyone. The conflict erupted initially over drug territory with the opponent asserting that George couldn't sell in a spot. George repeatedly ignored the opponent and continued to sell. George explained:

So, when -- one time he came through start shooting and he miss. I got away. Now it was on now. [the next time] ...I backed out on him, told him don't try to play me you know I mean?

(INTERVIEWER): What -- what happened?

(GEORGE): If you go out [there] with your gun there might be war.

(INTERVIEWER): What you pull the gun out on him for?

(GEORGE): I heard -- really, come down to me, so I [pulled] the gun on him try the squash beef. I told him don't be on no slick shit and go get your gun, come back, you know, after me and try to shoot at me. Cause if you miss, I see you again I'm a kill you.

George explained that although the combatants made serious threats and attempts to harm to each other, the social ties between them kept them from shooting to kill.

It is fortunate that most youth in the study were not good marksmen. The next example was disrupted by law enforcement. The co-offending youth and the opponent were arrested as a result of this incident that according to Gary, the respondent, concluded after more than 20 shots were fired. Gary explained what happened when they are trying to collect on a debt:

Kid lived out in Manhattan too, uptown. So we going uptown, so we riding and shit, we see this mother fucker. When he sees us, he starts running. As he's running he pulls, we in the middle of fucking the Avenue. He running down the block shooting at the car, bullets is hitting the fucking car window son. Bouncing inside, going past my mother fucking ear and the whole nine. We crashed. Boom, jumped out [of] the car, mother fucker still running, we chasing this motherfucker. We just busted, bah, bah, bah, he busts back. We could not hit this mother fucker. ...Yo, about 20 minutes later, we got to the corner, it was like a fork in the road I don't know where the fuck we was. As he got here, we was right here [gesturing with his hands]. Behind him fucking cops come this way, cops came this way, cops came this way. Hauled us all in.

(INTERVIEWER): Him too?

(GEORGE): Yeah, caught us all, caught him further up the block, caught me and my man right at the beginning of the block. So we had to stretch out cause they was going to shoot. They said, 'yo, put your mother fucking guns down, put your hands up and don't fucking move or I will blow your mother fucking heads off.' I was like, you got it. That was one time.

In this example, the police intervention effectively ended the mayhem and potential for homicide. Notice that George and his boys decided to surrender rather than shooting at the police. George realized that the police officers were serious. In the next example, Wade almost got injured when his friend decided to play Russian Roulette by pointing a .22 Ruger revolver at Wade's head and pulling the trigger. The interviewer asked Wade to paint a picture of the incident:

(WADE): My man had a gun. ...He put the shell in, one shell. It was in the wrong chamber and he put it to my face and blasted, it went off.

(INTERVIEWER): Why you don't got no marks?

(WADE): Cause it missed me.

(INTERVIEWER): He pulled out a gun on you and he put it to your face and he shot it and he missed?

(WADE): Yeah, it grazed me.

(INTERVIEWER): And what you did?

(WADE): Nothing.

(INTERVIEWER): Why?

(WADE): I was in shock man.

## Formal Social Control of Events

Relations with the police are constrained by a complex set of issues around the illegal economy and controlling violence. Youth acknowledged pervasive gun use and the deadly consequences of it, yet they argued that police officers who are paid to “protect and serve” should do the job despite the dangers. As DJ explained, “they are scared for themselves” and “scared to come around where gun are being fired cause they scared they get shot.” He claimed that the police did not protect citizens because “they think all Black people are criminals.” Donnell felt that police officers in his neighborhood avoided showing a presence in the projects where their help was needed most. He explained that “they stand on the corner on the private house side instead of being in the projects. They’d rather fuck with somebody in the private housing than with somebody in the projects.” Deshawn believed it came down to a matter of trust –youth cannot trust the police to protect them and the police do not trust young people. Deshawn said “the police should be doing they job, they need to trust, if we could trust them to protect us” [citizens would not need guns for self-protection]. He described a situation in which an old lady was robbed and fired a gun at the fleeing robber, which led Deshawn to conclude that even “old ladies” do not trust the police to protect them from criminals.

Some youth claimed that the police do not view them as equally valuable and therefore believed police show a lack of respect toward youth and often harassed them or worse (use violence against them). Ali explained:

it depends on what beliefs. You still got bad cops out here and then you got good cops.  
 ...If you stepping on me, grabbing on me, and pushing me cause you got the badge. No,  
 ...I’m human. First you got to talk to me like a man or whatever. You got to treat me  
 human first.

Respondents perceived that police officers do not value their lives because they are Black or Latino; George explained “they don’t care. Black people out there trying to kill each other.” Marshall claimed the police primarily harass youth. He described what they should be doing instead:

The police should be getting a little close to the community. They don’t have no  
 (respect). They getting smart with you [more] than the person you already fighting with.  
 What kind of shit is that? It makes you not want to cooperate. ...They can get real  
 involved in the community and show more respect.

Evidence from events provides additional insights into the tension relationship between crime-involved youth and the police in their neighborhoods. Jovan, an 18-year old drug seller described the way police officers handled a drug arrest could have lead to a serious conflict. Jovan explained:

...I was hustling and these cops was watching me from up the hill and I wasn’t seeing.  
 This guy had passed me some... So the cops come, pull us up against the wall and search  
 me, they find something on me. [They] ‘like he just handed this to you.’ And I was like

what you talking 'bout, ain't nobody hand me nothing. So he [officer] found it whatever. So he [police officer] snatched this guy that's right next to me. He wasn't the one that passed it to me. So they grab him, handcuff him, throw him in the ummm, in the police car. They got him in a different car and they got me in a different car. So once we hit the police station, uh, they got there. The guy they arrested ummm, he was like, 'yo why they taking me for?' And the cop was like uh, he was pointing at me, he was like, 'yeah, he snitched out. He said you was the one that passed him whatever, whatever.' And I seen the guy, we was in the bullpen, he was like, 'yo why you snitched on me?' I was like, 'what you talking about?' And, I was telling the cop 'he wasn't the one who passed me uh, whatever, whatever.' And whatever, the guy was upset, he wanted to start some beef with me whatever. So when we came out [from jail], uh, he had stepped to me, I was with my brother, and I let him know you know, that I wasn't snitching or whatever. And we just talked it out you know.

According to respondents, police officers were involved in controlling, mediating, and sanctioning participants in about 33% of violent events. The classification of police presence for this domain includes any mention of the actual or anticipated presence of police including sighting a car or officer, hearing sirens, directly interacting with a police officer, and any subsequent investigations. Using this conservative definition of police presence, respondents reported that police were present in 47% of the 638 valid cases. As shown in Table 3-11, in the majority of these situations, police arrived well after the actors had fled the scene of the violent incident.

Respondents rarely described using law enforcement or the justice system following criminal attacks or victimization. These adolescent males were generally heavily involved in the illegal economy, where few legal means of conflict resolution were available to them. Not only were they involved with criminal activity, but the prevailing normative system punished or sanctioned the use of police or other authority figures to resolve disputes. Respondents described their experiences with the police as hostile, abusive, and oppressive. Cooperation with the police was viewed as disloyalty to members of the community and could be punished.

Respondents generally described police as absent when needed and not at all helpful when present. Respondents complained that police officers were more concerned with gathering evidence and making arrests than trying to save the life of a gunshot victim. Despite frequent and heated expressions of dissatisfaction with the police, respondents described at least 50 violent events in which police officers played a significant role in stopping and/or preventing a situation that would have otherwise escalated. Events in which police intervened to make an arrest or break up a fight often reached closure more readily and the opportunity for retaliation was reduced at least temporarily. In addition, hearing police sirens during an event often resulted in the premature ending of a fight or shootout with combatants fleeing the scene before police arrived. The story of one respondent's drug-related gun event illustrated the most common scenario of police involvement:

(INTERVIEWER): Did the police come to the incident when you shot the guy?

(PATRICK): Yeah, they came, but I was gone already when... They was looking for me because they told them who I was. Police just coming through looking for me. Going in my grandmother crib. My pops, they walking up to my pops giving him cards, like ‘tell your son to come see me.’ I thought I was going to hit ‘America’s Most Wanted’ for a minute.

In this case, Patrick fled New York until he felt he could return without risk of arrest.

**Table 3-11. Police Awareness and Action at the time of the Event by Event Severity**

	Event Severity													
	Near-Violent Event		Violence but No Injury		Minor Injuries - cuts and bruises		Injury but seriousness was unreported		Serious enough to require medical attention		Death		Total	
Police Awareness	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Police Not Aware	37	11%	166	49%	37	11%	13	4%	79	23%	7	2%	339	43%
Police Aware	7	2%	91	30%	25	8%	10	3%	137	46%	22	7%	299	38%
Police Missing													142	18%
Police Action														
Police: Made an Arrest	4	6%	19	29%	5	8%	2	3%	30	45%	6	9%	66	22%
Police: Investigated	1	2%	13	30%	1	2%	2	5%	27	61%	1	2%	44	15%
Police: Questioned people	0	0%	11	29%	2	5%	0	0%	20	53%	5	13%	38	13%
Police: Dispersed scene	1	5%	7	33%	4	19%	0	0%	9	43%	0	0%	21	7%
Police: Chased people	0	0%	4	80%	0	0%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%	5	2%
Police: Broke up the fight	0	0%	5	42%	3	25%	2	17%	2	17%	0	0%	12	4%
Police: Prevented violence	0	0%	5	71%	1	14%	1	14%	0	0%	0	0%	7	2%
Police: Used force	0	0%	2	40%	0	0%	1	20%	2	40%	0	0%	5	2%
Police: No action	1	7%	4	27%	4	27%	0	0%	5	33%	1	7%	15	5%
Police: Action Unknown	1	1%	23	27%	7	8%	4	5%	42	49%	8	9%	85	28%

We proposed the following hypothesis with regard to police officer impact: *Hypothesis: Disputes that come to the attention of the police will be less likely to rekindle and more likely to end without further violence.* In most of the cases in which police officers made an arrest on the scene, the conflict de-escalated at least temporarily. Further comparisons are needed to fully understand the patterns and variations.

## Conclusion and Summary

As shown in Figure 3-1, there are numerous situational factors that can be reported about the violent events in our dataset. Our choices - in terms of which situational factors were most relevant to the typology - were determined by their frequency of occurrence. The descriptive data are presented with the following logic: We start with the panel on the left labeled **actors**. Actors include those present at the scene, who initiated the encounter, and who actively participated. The second panel lists indicators of **emotional arousal** including how the youth was feeling immediately before the incident, premeditation, intoxication at the time of the event, and the spark or issue that introduced the conflict. Next, we present the event **contexts and facilitators**, which include the physical location, weapon availability/type, and substance type. The fourth panel includes **actions** including the opening moves and weapon use. The fifth panel includes data on **outcomes** including injury severity, police awareness of the event, police action, arrests, and event closure status. The final panel reports data on the **aftermaths** of events including: hospitalization, getting high/drunk after the event, gossip about the event, carrying a weapon more often to increase self-protection, changing behavior to avoid violence by changing where and with whom youth socialize, do they have specific plans to retaliate, and do they anticipate additional drama as result of this event? Figure 3-1 is presented to summarize the event sample across these important situational factors. The tables displayed in this chapter presented the data in bivariate form specifically examining various independent and dependent variables in order to describe the heterogeneity of urban youth violence events. Several themes were gleaned from the chapter related specifically to the compositional or situational characteristics of violent events. The most important to take away from this chapter is that youth violence consists of a wide variety of circumstances and configurations of situational characteristics of conflicts that can best be understood in context. Our analysis focused on paying attention to the variety and identifying patterns that help to distinguish events with similar characteristics but divergent outcomes from each other. In the next chapter, we provide a heuristic model that attempts to capture the complexity of youth violence in a way that frames our understanding of the distinguishing features of conflict according to how the seriousness of events outcomes.

In sum, the event sample includes a diverse set of violent and near-violent events that, when examined closely, illustrate the nuances of urban youth violence from an event lens. The analysis revealed six categories of event outcome severity: near- violence, violence but no injury, violence with minor injuries, violence with missing information on injury status, violence with serious injuries, and violence that resulted in one or more deaths. Although there are numerous triggers or “sparks” to violent events among young urban males, by far the most common involve challenges to masculine

Figure 3-1. Summary of Youth Violence Event Characteristics

Actors	Arousal and Mental State	Contexts and Facilitators	Actions	Outcomes	Aftermaths
<p>Who initiated the event (n=721)</p> <p>58% Opponent side</p> <p>24% Respondent side</p> <p>22% Both sides</p> <p>1% 3rd party</p>	<p>Feeling at conflict start (n=458)</p> <p>29% Fine/good/happy</p> <p>36% Angry/mad/pissed off</p> <p>15% Drunk/high</p> <p>20% Other</p>	<p>Physical location (n=701)</p> <p>44% Street</p> <p>10% Party/club</p> <p>10% School</p> <p>7% Inside house/apt.</p> <p>7% Drug market</p> <p>6% Jail/prison</p> <p>16% Other</p>	<p>Opening move (n=701)</p> <p>29% Nonverbal symbolic threat</p> <p>9% Verbal threat</p> <p>7% Disrespect</p> <p>5% Demand or order</p> <p>6% Bump or push or grab</p> <p>20% Argued</p> <p>4% Slap or punch</p> <p>4% Fight</p>	<p>Injury severity (n=704)</p> <p>5% Death</p> <p>38% Serious injury</p> <p>10% Minor injury</p> <p>41% Violent but no injury</p> <p>7% Near violent</p>	<p>Hospitalized for injury (n=498)</p> <p>19% Yes</p> <p>81% No</p>
<p>Relationship to Opponent (n=754)</p> <p>35% Stranger</p> <p>34% Acquaintance</p> <p>31% Other</p>	<p>Premeditation (n=695)</p> <p>13% Planned conflict</p> <p>87% Did not plan conflict</p>		<p>1% Throw object</p> <p>1% Hit with object</p> <p>5% Threaten with weapon</p> <p>1% Stab/cut/slice</p> <p>1% Takes something from opp.</p> <p>1% Get weapon</p> <p>0% Fire gun in the air</p> <p>3% Fire gun at someone</p> <p>1% Search for opponent</p>	<p>Police aware (n=638)</p> <p>47% Yes</p> <p>53% No</p>	<p>Changed hangout spot (n=314)</p> <p>21% Yes</p> <p>79% no</p>
<p>3rd Party Presence</p> <p>Any 3rd party (n= 592)</p> <p>94% Present</p> <p>6% Not present</p>	<p>Intoxication (n=488)</p> <p>46% High</p> <p>54% Not high</p>	<p>Facilitators</p> <p>Weapon type (n=734)</p> <p>46% Gun</p> <p>19% Knife</p> <p>4% Other weapon</p> <p>31% No weapon</p>	<p>4% Fight</p> <p>5% Threaten with weapon</p> <p>1% Stab/cut/slice</p> <p>1% Takes something from opp.</p> <p>1% Get weapon</p> <p>0% Fire gun in the air</p> <p>3% Fire gun at someone</p> <p>1% Search for opponent</p>	<p>Police action (n=298)</p> <p>22% Police: Made an arrest</p> <p>15% Police: Investigated</p> <p>13% Police: Questioned people</p> <p>7% Police: Dispersed scene</p> <p>2% Police: Chased people</p> <p>4% Police: Broke up the fight</p> <p>2% Police: Prevented violence</p> <p>2% Police: Used force</p> <p>5% Police: No action</p> <p>29% Police: Action unknown</p>	<p>Feel need for extra protection after (n=287)</p> <p>42% Yes</p> <p>58% No</p>
<p>Respondent's boys (n=692)</p> <p>69% Present</p> <p>31% Not present</p>	<p>Sparks (n= 780)</p> <p>38% Identity challenge/respect</p> <p>19% Sexual competition</p> <p>15% Drug business</p> <p>13% Robbery</p> <p>7% Revenge</p> <p>6% Defense of others</p> <p>6% Cheating or unfair play</p> <p>6% Self-defense</p> <p>4% Money/debt</p> <p>3% Neighborhood/territory</p> <p>2% Misunderstandings</p> <p>9% Other</p>	<p>Substance used (n=258)</p> <p>44% Marijuana</p> <p>22% Marijuana &amp; beer</p> <p>7% Marijuana &amp; liquor</p> <p>14% Beer</p> <p>8% Liquor</p> <p>2% Cocaine (crack)</p> <p>2% PCP</p> <p>1% Heroin</p>	<p>Weapon use (n=500)</p> <p>6% Did not use</p> <p>17% Used to threaten</p> <p>6% Hit, beat or pistol whipped</p> <p>21% Stabbed/cut/ sliced</p> <p>49% Fired</p>	<p>Event closure (n=720)</p> <p>7% Squashed before</p> <p>11% Disrupted</p> <p>15% Squashed after minor violence</p> <p>Settled that day, dropped issue,</p> <p>10% no anticipation</p> <p>3% Compliance before</p> <p>21% Just ended, status unknown</p> <p>On-going, anticipate more</p> <p>33% violence</p>	<p>Anticipate a need to retaliate (n=483)</p> <p>24% Yes</p> <p>76% No</p>
<p>Opponent's boys (n=622)</p> <p>67% Present</p> <p>33% Not present</p>					<p>Anticipate future drama (n=308)</p> <p>38% Yes</p> <p>16% Maybe</p> <p>46% No</p>
<p>Bystanders (n=553)</p> <p>76% Present</p> <p>24% Not present</p>					<p>Gossip about event (n=241)</p> <p>71% Yes</p> <p>29% No</p>
<p>Co-offending</p> <p>Any (n=562)</p> <p>60% Yes</p> <p>40% No</p>					<p>Reputation improved (n=174)</p> <p>48% Yes</p> <p>25% No</p> <p>26% Stayed the same</p>
<p>Resp. boys (n=470)</p> <p>55% Yes</p> <p>45% No</p>					<p>People treated him differently after (n=191)</p> <p>42% Yes</p> <p>58% No</p>
<p>Opp. boys (n=385)</p> <p>53% Yes</p> <p>47% No</p>					<p>Used alcohol/drugs after event (n=233)</p> <p>44% Yes</p> <p>56% No</p>

identity or status. The use of violence in disputes between young urban males is often motivated by a desire for dominance, control, and personal safety in situations that are perceived as threatening. From youths' perspective, the status risks associated with backing down from a conflict frequently outweigh the physical risks to self associated with violent behavior. We found evidence of appeals to territoriality concerns and classic "in-group" "out-group" conflict. Youth move through neighborhood spaces with varying degrees of territorial claim and perceived safety. Young males who victimize others in violent conflict most often blame their opponents for the conflict and feel justified in their actions. Peers tend to reinforce this view. The vast majority of violent and near-violent events are observed by third parties. The escalation or de-escalation of these events is influenced in critical ways by the presence, identity, and reactions of these observers/bystanders. In conflict situations, youths' perceptions of how observers will view their actions and status are significant in shaping their responses. Most violent events take place in public places that are poorly monitored by adults. In these settings, peer observers who have close ties to the opponent tend to escalate and even join in the fray. The presence of weapons and/or intoxicated persons tends to appreciably increase the severity of the outcome of violent encounters. Compared to violent events, near-violent events tend to be characterized by a provocation or "spark" that is perceived as relatively minor, by a respectful mode of expression, by close social ties between the combatants, by the lack of guns, and by the intervention of third party bystanders or observers. Perhaps even more important than the seriousness is the *mode of expression* or the way in which youth' confront each other with a grievance. In many instances youth prefer self-help rather than going to the police in violent incidents.

## CHAPTER 4: AN EMERGENT SITUATIONAL AND TRANSACTIONAL THEORY OF URBAN YOUTH VIOLENCE

Recall that our first study objective was to identify a typology of events by classifying situational factors and intersections across situational categories of events. In chapter 3, we presented the descriptive data upon which we built our theoretical model or typology. In this chapter, we will present a theoretical model of the situational and transactional features of urban youth violence gleaned from our qualitative analyses of the data. The first part of the model includes the compositional aspects of the events. We select the most central situational characteristics and describe how those characteristics interact in the early stages of a conflict interaction.

Our second research objective was to develop a typology of event scripts (based on the sequences or stages) for youth violence. We placed particular emphasis on the opening interactions, interpretations of social cues, the relational distance between actors, and the respondents' perceptions of the hostile intent of others. By breaking down event narratives into a sequence of social transactions, we were able to evaluate the micro-decisions actors make during the course of disputes. The analyses focused on the micro-actions by youth in different types of events thus allowing for a thorough sorting of interactions across domains. Prior research suggests that the interplay between the principal disputants and others in the immediate setting is important for understanding conflict escalation to violence (see Felson & Steadman, 1983; Hughes & Short, 2005; Wilkinson & Fagan, 1996). The study attempted to identify the causal influence of the temporal antecedents in each of the events described. We further specify the emergent transactional model by focuses on the sequential stages of the event and the roles that actors play as the event "moves" through time.

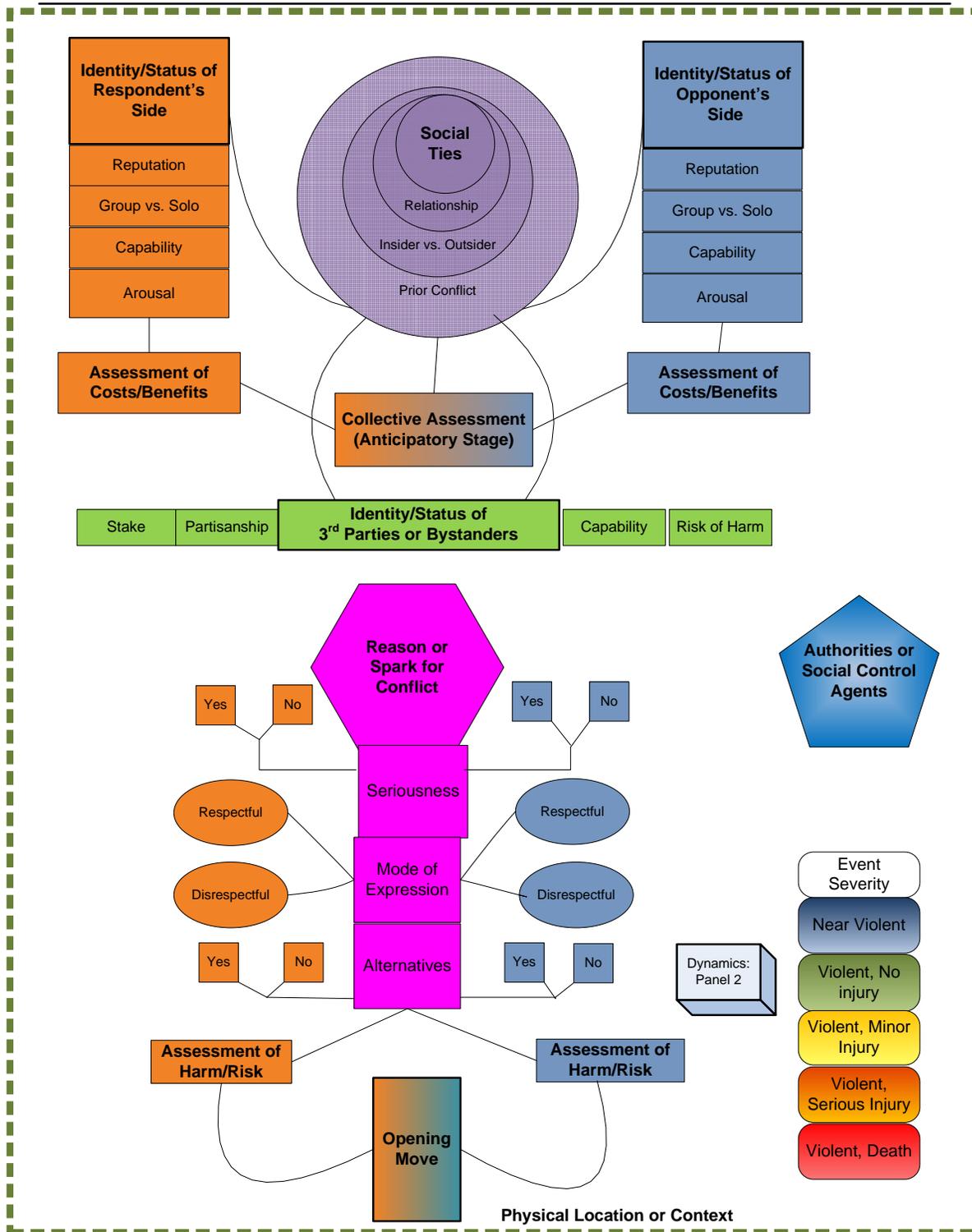
The model that fits the data best across a range of characteristics and levels of event severity is shown in Figures 4-1 and 4-2. The visual presentation is geared toward conveying the most important situational factors as the event emerges and then moves through a series of stages. The model describes the contingencies and decision points as a process. Readers should note that not all events have every component identified and not all events go through every stage described in Figure 4-2. In addition, we use case examples to illustrate the model (see Figures 4-3 and 4-4). Because violence is a form of exchange between two or more parties our model starts with critical characteristics of the identity and status of the major actors. We labeled the actors in terms of sides. The person telling the story is referred to as the respondent and the person(s) he is in conflict with as the opponent, regardless of whether the narrator is the antagonist or protagonist. Across the large event sample, we identified key factors about the focal participants, specifically: **reputation** (with regard to violence); **group membership, presence, and involvement** at the scene of conflict; **capability** in terms of being armed with a weapon, weapon type, being experienced in violence, age, physical size and strength; and **arousal** (intoxication, premeditation, and emotional state). As depicted in Figure 4-1, youth on both sides of the conflict make assessments of the situation based on their own and the opposing sides' characteristics. When group members or associates are present at the scene of conflicts, their violence potential or capability is factored into the youths' determinations about how the event will turn out.

The opposing sides come together in physical space and in relational space. The social relationships between actors or **social ties** are important for determining how conflict unfolds. Dimensions of social ties in this study include: the type of **relationships** between youth involved in conflict, knowledge or information about others; insider versus outsider status; and any **prior history of conflict** between the specific sides are particularly important. The social ties between third parties or bystanders who may witness the event with each of side of the conflict could also play a role in how the event unfolds. Most important among 3rd party characteristics is **partisanship, stakes** in the conflict, **capability** (for violence), and **risk of harm** to self. The principal actors in the conflict size up each other as well as the bystanders. This "sizing up" is done rapidly as youth read social cues in the situation to determine what others are likely to do. Youths' perceptions of "the other(s)" and how their own behavior and status will be perceived by people in the scene are significant in shaping context-specific action.

The conflict itself can be viewed as a form of communication and coercion. Actors project a certain image from the onset of conflict that includes rejecting stigma, disrespect, and other types of degrading action that may happen in the course of social interaction. Youth make an assessment of the costs/benefits/risk/harm from the social cues that they read about actors at the scene. Youth will attempt to create ways to avoid violence at a particular time and place if the youth finds himself at capability disadvantage or is otherwise uninterested in pursuing violence. Alternatively, youth will capitalize on situations in which their side is clearly advantaged by moving the conflict forward toward violence. Social ties between the sides influence the perceived opportunity for violence. Close ties increase the costs of using serious violence and generally result in low levels of violence.

Youth move through neighborhood spaces with varying degrees of territorial claim and perceived safety. Physical location or context is most likely to spawn violence when the routine activities of physical spaces promote the mixing of youth from different geographic areas, social networks, and greater social distance between youth. Some type of social exchange is typically necessary for conflict to erupt to violence, although in some cases one side can dominate the event while the other remains relatively unengaged. In the majority of events, youth point to a spark or reason for the conflict. Spark type is important particularly as it relates to the perceived **seriousness** of the potential conflict. Seriousness relates to the amount of harm or damage the grievance represents to the actors. The issue that sparks a conflict can impact reputation/identity, group memberships, access to resources, health and safety for self and others, and territorial rights. As youth assessed events the emergent pattern indicated that the greater the likelihood of harm across these categories, the greater the need to use violence. Perhaps even more important than the seriousness is the **mode of expression**; it is the way in which youths confront each other with a grievance. Although simplistic, mode of expression is classified as respectful, disrespectful, or neutral.

Figure 4-1. A Situational and Transactional Model of Urban Youth Violence



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In defining and interpreting the spark or reason of conflict youth are also influenced by potential **alternative** explanations, redirection, and exits. Youth on both sides of the conflict process information on the spark characteristics combined with the information on the identity/status of the actors involved in the conflict. Often the assessment of harm/risk is conducted in the split second after the spark occurs. Youth are particularly concerned about their reputation and status among peers, seeking justice, and the risks to their personal safety. From the youths' perspectives, there are safety risks associated with being violent and with others using violence against them but there are also status risks associated with backing down from a provocation.

To a lesser extent youth were concerned about whether there would be other negative consequences such as arrest, incarceration, school expulsion, or prohibitions on access to certain locations such as clubs, homes, or recreational spaces. The likelihood that law enforcement would become aware of violent events plays a role in where and how it unfolds. For example, if a young man and his friends were partying in an abandoned apartment building that was surrounded on by other empty buildings and they were attacked by a group of armed youth, a shootout could happen without anyone really noticing. Youth read cues about place in terms of developing their assessment about when, how, and what type of violence would be place appropriate. This is not to say that all aspects of violent events are calculated or that youth are fully informed of the costs/benefits/harm/risks when conflicts escalate to violence. They are not. Youth are continuously integrating information about place, people, alliances, obligations, and violence potential; harm potential, strategic movement to gain advantage, options for exit, and emotional arousal.

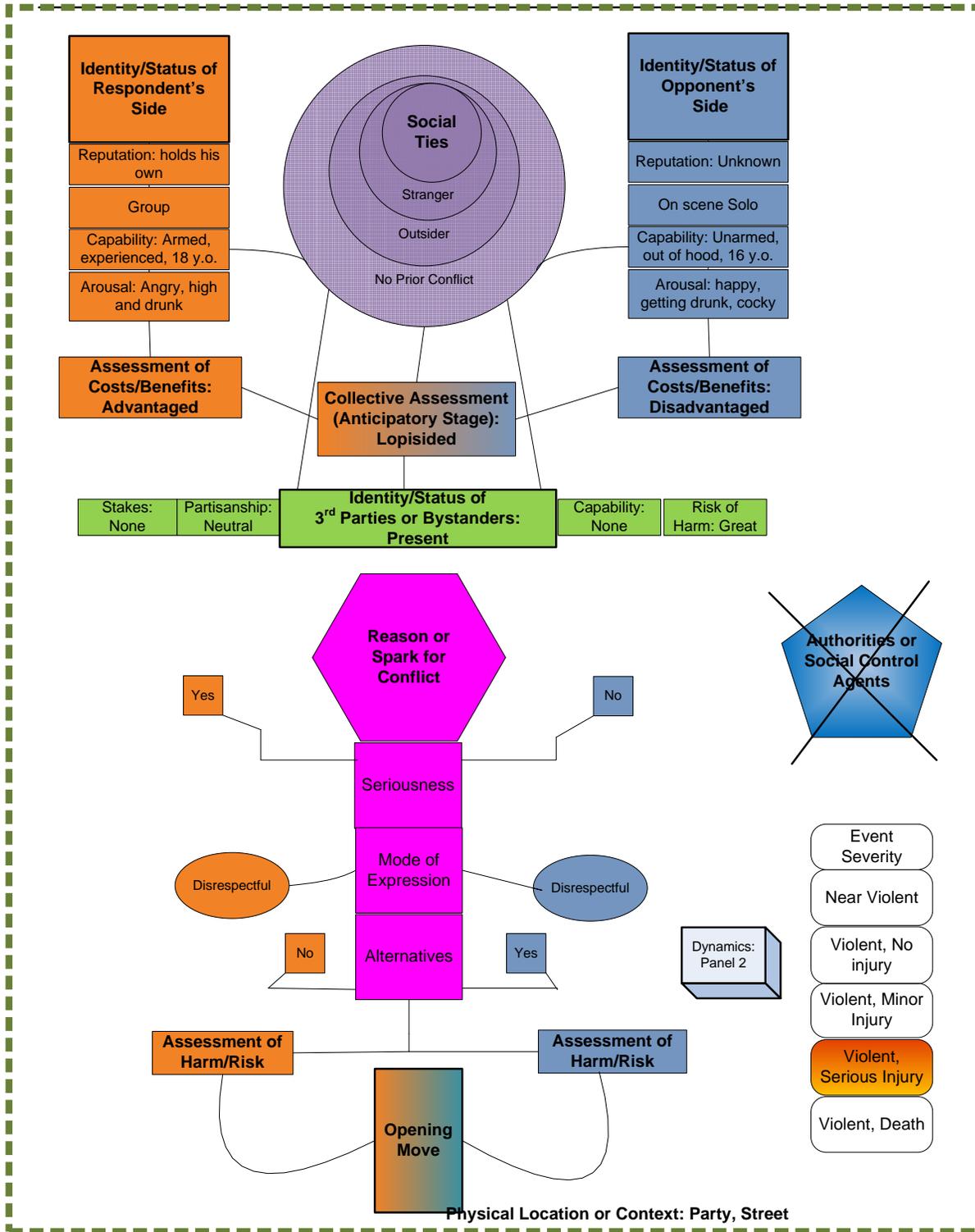
Most often the opening move of conflict is an action or inaction that sparks the two sides toward engagement in social interaction. The interaction is defined as conflict particularly when one side makes demands, insults, threats, accusations, or otherwise provokes a response from the other. The issue or spark may be minor or extremely serious. The participants may agree on the definition of the spark's seriousness or they may disagree completely. Conflict can escalate to violence in either circumstance depending on many contingencies, including how actors express their grievances, who is present, and who might join the conflict if one of the main combatants starts to lose.

We provide an example from the NYCYS to illustrate how this heuristic model would be applied. As displayed in Figure 4-2, the example had the following characteristics: the respondent who reported the event described himself as person who holds his own in terms of violence (he's not one to go looking for it but he will use violence to show he is tough enough), the respondent was out that night with his associates, they were at a house party, at the time of the incident they were high and drunk, and the respondent became angry when the opponent disrespected him in their first interaction. In terms of social ties between the respondent's side and his opponent: they were strangers, from different neighborhoods, and had no history of prior conflict. The opponent was by himself that night; the respondent had no knowledge of the opponent's reputation although he knew the boy was an outsider to the neighborhood. At the moment of the conflict, the opponent appeared to be drunk or high. According to the respondent he was very cocky, loud, and happy. The respondent estimated that his opponent was younger, about 16 years old, and he appeared to be unarmed and clearly disadvantaged in the situation in terms of capability and context. According to the respondent, the opponent made the first

move toward violence by ice grilling and then bumping into the respondent. The respondent felt that the opponent was being disrespectful and perceived this as a serious violation. He reacted to the insult aggressively by demanding that the opponent justify his behavior. The opponent took offense to the overly aggressive demands and felt the respondent was disrespecting him. According to the respondent, the opponent only started making excuses when he realized that the respondent had the potential for assistance from his group of 4 boys. The opponent offered an apology, blaming his disrespectful behavior on alcohol, and asking the respondent to let it go. The two separated without further conflict for about an hour. The respondent continued to watch the opponent and to feel angry about being disrespected. As the opponent was leaving the party, the respondent and his friends fired 5 or 6 shots toward the opponent as he ran away from the scene. The opponent was hit in the leg with a bullet and taken to the hospital by ambulance. The respondent was concerned about the possibility of a revenge attack following this incident but noted that he did not think the opponent knew where to find him. He also speculated that the opponent would be too scared to attack him because guns were involved. According to the respondent, the event did not come to the attention of the police department.

From the event narratives we are able to identify characteristics of violence as social interactions that fit nicely into symbolic interactionist language (Anderson, 1999; Goffman, 1963, 1967, 1974). Particularly, we can identify how actors move through settings and scenes, read contextual cues, develop action frames, evaluate the potential of other actors, and play roles across a broad range of youth violence incidents (see Figures 4-1 through 4-4). The configurations across these event structures provide insights into the qualitative differences between violent situations of varying levels of seriousness and the response of actors to them. The scenes/settings of youth violence can be divided along two major dimensions: (1) private versus public spaces and (2) controlled versus uncontrolled spaces. The types of activities that define a physical space and the configurations of the people who frequent the location are also important. For example, the majority of these events occur in social venues which may be illegal to start with. These venues attract crowds, facilitate other types of illegal activities such as underage drinking or illegal drug use/sale, are generally ambiguous in terms of territorial rights, and are difficult to monitor, regulate, and control. The actors in youth violence events include the antagonist, the protagonist, the co-offending antagonists, the co-offending protagonists, the allied audience, the neutral audience, the vicarious audience, and the agent of social control. There are several facilitating “props” that are important in understanding how conflict unfolds: the music genre, the presence of desired females, the reputation of the spot, use of controlled substances, the presence of male and female audience members, available weapons, and other objects in the space.

Figure 4-2. A Situational and Transactional Model of Urban Youth Violence -An Example



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Contextual or situational cues include: verbal versus nonverbal cues, threat of physical harm (including concrete facts such as size differentials, being outnumbered, being off, being out armed), the lethality of the threat (gun versus non-gun, knife versus no weapon), the threat of reputational damage, threat of relationship status damage (fear of rejection by peer group, losing the girl), victim vulnerability and relative weakness, and victim blameworthiness. Across the six event outcome severity types, we see some general patterns with regard to how events with varying outcomes unfold differently.

Luckenbill's early work on the disputatiousness of the victim as well as many other studies of victim behavior suggests that it is reasonable to expect that violent outcomes will be more likely in conflicts in which the opponents are provocative or disrespectful. The more aggressive the opponent the greater likelihood that actors would perceive the situation as serious and feel that violence is necessary. *Hypothesis: Aggressive actions by the "victim" will result in more aggressive actions by the "offender."* Further, we hypothesized that *giving accounts or acquiescence should prevent escalation if face is restored.* The descriptive data in Table 4-4 show that - from the respondent's perspective - the "other side" most often made the first move toward violence. Respondents described the point in the conflict in which they realized that violence would happen (see Table 4-17). As indicated in Tables 4-4 through 4-18, events that ended with serious outcomes often started in very similar ways as events that ended with less serious outcomes. What the tables do not show is that for many conflicts, the particular focal event is not the first conflict event between the sides. In the example reported by Robert, he gives vague reference to an existing beef with the opponent. The respondent explains that the opponent identified him. According to Robert the opponent approached him in the subway car in the following way: "he's like, I knew I see your punk ass again, such and such and such." Robert explained that he was talking with two girls as the guy approached. They began to argue. Robert recalled that the opponent threatened him by saying:

(ROBERT): 'I'll teach you a lesson about the...' and my boy was like, 'shut the fuck up, nigga' and my man [the opponent] was like, 'shut the fuck up nigga' and the nigga's like, 'I'll teach you the word, the lesson about the word nigga.' So then I was like, 'what you going to teach him about the word nigga?' And then the other dude that was with him, is like, he was right here and this man was right there and here's the man told me to 'mind your business.' I was like, what? 'you shut the fuck up, nobody talking to you,' because we was drunk, we was hyped, you know what I mean?

(INTERVIEWER): Yeah.

(ROBERT): And then he is like 'I'll spank all you little niggas' and that's when I got up. I got up and started looking at him like, you ain't gonna smack nobody and then he just pushed me on my face and I just pushed him back and snuffed him and everybody just started fighting, fucking both of them up. No, we didn't fuck that other nigga up. That big nigga he was getting his shit off kid word up. But this other man, fucking him up, he just acting like he's fighting and then I got up, I got up, right, boom and I go up, saw my peoples like moving back and I'm drunk and I'm like fuck that, boom, I shoot him fair one [have a one-on-one fight without using weapons], ...he kicked me in my nuts, but I ain't feeling it.

(ROBERT): I'm fighting him still and then he kicked me and after he kicked me in my nuts, I kicked him and then my fucking train stop, I got off the train and my nuts it started hurting then. I guess I was hyped and then I was walking down the block, my leg was hurting, I looked down at my shin, that nigga stabbed me with some shit and my peoples was like, they was telling me, but I didn't hear them, because I was hyped. They say he pulled out some shit, like a ball shaver, like man and caught me three times in my leg with one swing.

## The Dynamics of Gun Events

Respondents reported guns being present in 352 violent events. Violent events were described as public performances often with serious implications beyond the immediate interaction. Violent events where guns were involved included the active participation of “co-offenders” in 72.5% of the cases compared to only 27.5% of the non-gun events. The violent performances given by our respondents reflected concerns about gains or losses in individual and group status as one of many possible outcomes. The accounts of these events often focus on the potential gains or losses in terms of individual and/or group status that might result from the interaction. A violent event reported by 18-year old Nathan from East New York illustrates this process. The interviewer directly asked Nathan how his actions affected his reputation. His answer is telling:

(INTERVIEWER): So when you shot the guy you shot... or when you found out he was dead or something, how did that make you feel?

(NATHAN): It ain't hype me. It didn't make me feel like going out there and doing it again; it just made me feel like... I just got a stripe, that's how that made me feel. I got a stripe.

(INTERVIEWER): Did you get a reputation after that?

(NATHAN): Well, I kept a reputation but... 'cause I was into a lot of stuff, ...and thing(s) I did. Came to where I was like one of the people, I was like one of the most [violent] people they would come and get when it was time for conflict, than anybody. ...that I really be around when there [is] beef, when it's beef time they know who to come get. And out of those people, I was one of the top ones they would come and get... 'cause they always known me ...for being trigger happy and...

Nathan's assessment of his reputation for violence and description of how group members would recruit him when they anticipated conflict indicates that thinking about violence from a transactional perspective is useful.

Respondents were more likely to engage in gun violence with a stranger or rival rather than a friend, co-worker, or neighborhood acquaintance (41% versus 32%,  $\chi^2 = 7.25$ ,  $p=.007$ ). Rarely did study youth report gun use against someone with whom they had close social ties, even in cases in which the perceived violation was serious (in 16 of 88 events a gun was fired, a friend/opponent was injured in 3 of those incidents). Moses, an 18-year old from East New York, reported about a gun event that ended without shooting. The conflict started when Moses' white outfit was purposefully soiled by one of his boys, Keith. When Moses confronted Keith (now an opponent), Keith laughed. This angered Moses, who demanded that Keith fight to store the situation. Moses

and Keith fought while a crowd of their friends watched. Although he described feeling pressured to fight by the reactions of the crowd, people in the crowd broke up the fight three separate times before it ended. When asked why his friends let them fight, Moses responded: “Because the nigga violated me, if your man violated you, you got to shoot the five with him. Ain’t none of that hearing that, talking that shit about no guns and shit man leave the guns alone. Go in the elevator and take it 7 up and shoot the five [have a fair fight].”

The few cases in which guns were used in conflict within the social network, the situation typically included repeated violations over time without corrective action to restore the bonds between network members ( $n=3$ ). Gun events were more likely to occur on street corners (53% versus 47%,  $X^2 = 10.94$ ,  $p = .001$ ), in unregulated clubs or parties (61% versus 39%,  $X^2 = 8.795$ ,  $p = .003$ ), or other public spaces with limited social controls, and were less common in schools (11% versus 89%,  $X^2 = 30.98$ ,  $p = .000$ ) or jails (0% versus 47%,  $X^2 = 36.527$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Respondents frequently got involved with gun events while under the influence of alcohol or some type of drug (70% versus 30%,  $X^2 = 36.923$ ,  $p = .000$ ). As expected, serious injuries were more likely in situations with firearms compared to no weapons (81% versus 19%,  $X^2 = 39.424$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Gun events were less likely to reach resolution while fights without weapons were much more likely to achieve closure (60% versus 40%,  $X^2 = 33.704$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Colton, a 20-year old from East New York, described a gun event that was sparked over sexual competition and ended with him being shot in the leg. This excerpt illustrates how events with violent outcomes unfold across several interactions.

I was shot, I was, I had an altercation with a, somebody that live down the block from me, he don't live there no more, he just, he shot, and moved. We had a fight over a girl, 'cause it was a he say, she say thing. He seen me and I wasn't on point, I ain't see him, he come from behind, he was on some 'what now, what now?' [He was] trying to be big man in front of everybody, and I was shot. He was getting back at me from another day when I shot at him about this girl. He saw me shooting at him. He just, he was on some [pay back trip], I wasn't really paying attention to what he was saying, but he, I heard him say 'what now, what now?' he just was just saying, I wasn't really paying him no attention, I was scared, 'cause he had a gun, and I didn't have nothing to protect myself.

The next example was sparked initially by an identity challenge. The conflict develops gradually and results in several specific violent encounters between Luc, our respondent and Zach, his enemy. Luc, a 21-year old from the South Bronx, described what started a gun event when he ran into a long time enemy with whom he “never got along.”

(LUC): First thing that happened he eye balled me. I'm like what? What you going to do. He ain't say nothing. And I was tired of his mouth. We already fought before. He run his mouth too much anyway. So I just mushed him. I kind of like set it in a way. When I mushed him he pulled out a little 38 revolver. I'm like 'my man you better kill me. My man if you don't kill me it's on. Zach like you bitch nigga put that shit away man.' Put that shit away I got my kids here. I was like 'yo I am gonna murder this nigga Zach.' He don't know man. Nigga better kill me, he's meat loaf. Then I caught him a week later. Seen the nigga coming down my block, run up stairs came down. [With a gun pulled] I'm like 'yo you like pulling guns without using it.' That shit [Luc's gun] jammed, ...I pulled the joint

out the chamber, started bucking [shooting] again, jammed again, right there. I was shook. I was like, I already know these niggas might be strapped. So I like backed up a little bit. And I was like fuck it. I threw the next clip in and unjammed it. And I just chased the niggas down the block bucking at 'em.

These two examples represent a common set of issues that help shape the ways that violent youth think about - and react to - their everyday experiences.

We know from prior analysis of the social worlds of this sample, that guns play an important part in actors' decisions about the risk and cost of violent actions. One of the first and most important decisions is the extent to which one's identity would be improved or damaged by engaging or avoiding gun violence. The actors' original social identities factor heavily into how the stages of a gun event would unfold. Some respondents have more to gain or lose than others. Most "lost" or unsuccessful gun events are considered damaging to image and reputation of the loser especially if that response involves retreat. A "successful" gun event is described as identity enhancing. Inflicting harm on others or gaining total compliance over others are valued outcomes that are publicly reinforced through verbal and nonverbal displays of respect commonly referred to as "props." Gossip or after-the-fact storytelling usually amplified the "coverage" of an event beyond the immediate setting. These patterns will be examined in more detail for all actors in all gun events.

We will continue to explore how offenders use different strategies to optimize their success in violent encounters. Offenders weigh costs and benefits for issues like reputation, stigma, and group membership acceptance to greater degrees than they weigh other issues such as arrest, injury or in some cases even death. Retreat could also have positive ramifications for social identity if used strategically. In some situations, retreat is used as a strategic technique when a respondent is caught off-guard (without his gun or people). In certain situations, respondents describe using their communication skills to talk their way out of getting shot or employing some other neutralization strategy in order to buy some time to arm themselves and get their people for back up. Once the subjects were "on point," it was common for them to go looking for their opponent in order to initiate violence.

Guns and gun events shaped the behavioral repertoires of study youth; in fact 92% (357/388) of the sample had a gun at the time of the interview. Of those who answered the question about carrying a gun (n=209), about 30% of the sample reported carrying every day, another 25% or so carrying between sometimes and 3-5 times per week, 20% carrying situationally (at night, on weekends, when traveling outside of the neighborhood, when they have beef or anticipate trouble), 10%, rarely carry, 5% never carry, 9% never carry but keep a gun in close proximity for easy use.<sup>20</sup> Their reports of carrying patterns of their close friends are very similar. The four main reasons for carrying are general self-protection, self-protection because of a particular

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<sup>20</sup> Data not displayed in table form.

beef, use in crime (drug trade, robbery, extortion, assault, & murder), and projecting an image or status of a tough guy.

Guns are used in several ways by the youth in our study and we asked which types of guns they were using. The way in which a gun is used is determined at least in part by a calculation of how much force is necessary to achieve the desired goal in the conflict situation. To avoid confounding gun carrying with gun use, we classified each of the 352 gun events by different types of gun “use.” We found that guns were used to threaten in 18.2% of the cases (n=64), to physically beat someone 2.8% of the time (n=10), and to shoot or shoot at someone 72% (n=253) of the time (see Table 4-1). Further, we classified all violent events according to the issue or action that sparked the conflict. In Table 4-1, we present the cross tabulation of event spark by type of gun use. We also present data on non-gun events by event spark to provide a point of comparison.

**Table 4-1. Types of Gun Use in Violent Events Reported by NYCYS Participants**

SPARK		GUN STATUS				
Type <sup>1</sup>	Number of Non-Gun Events	Number of Gun Events	Present But Not Used	Used to Threatened but No Shooting	Used Gun as Blunt object to Beat or Hit	Gun Fired
Identity/Respect	190	128	6%	23%	4%	<b>68%</b>
Drug Business	32	85	4%	12%	1%	<b>83%</b>
Robbery	38	71	1%	31%	7%	<b>59%</b>
Girl	105	52	2%	10%	2%	<b>86%</b>
Revenge	23	35	0%	3%	3%	<b>94%</b>
Self-Defense	26	25	4%	25%	4%	<b>67%</b>
Defense of Others	30	24	0%	14%	0%	<b>86%</b>
<b>Total # of Events</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>265</b>

<sup>1</sup> Events were coded for multiple sparks. Total count does not add up to 100%

The sample of gun events respondents’ described had the following situational characteristics: they occurred most often in public areas of the street/outside (47%), involved violent behavior of more than two parties (72%), were observed by an audience (96%), happened when the respondent was under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs (70%), resulted in someone getting injured (55%), infrequently resulted in an arrest (28%), were followed by gossip about the event (74%), and ended without resolution which meant that the actual

conflict was likely to rekindle at another time (44%). Of these events, the respondents' side initiated the violence as often as they reacted to the provocations of others. Resorting to violence is a reaction – at least in part - to a perceived threat in an emergent situation. An event reported by Art, a 20-year old from East New York, illustrates this point. Art was threatened by his opponent on one occasion and became enraged after his associates informed him that the threat was potentially serious.

(ART): Boom the whole beef started was boom me and him was arguing and shit and then he pulled out this mother fucking burner [gun] and shit. So I'm used to seeing Slick with CO2 air guns and shit so I'm like 'yo get the fuck out of here with your little air gun and shit. Before I take the shit from you and fuck you up'. So boom nigga like 'yo, you think the shit ain't real I'll should bust you in your face with it right now' and nigga pointed it at me and started clicking it. It must have been empty. So boom I'm like cool go ahead on with yourself I don't even want to get involved in that shit [Slick was trying to recruit Art to be his co-offender in robbery], because niggas around there where he live at, niggas be calling police and shit like that. So I just, I'm trying to let shit slide and shit. Then when I get over by my boys house and shit, niggas telling me 'yo that was a real gun son, I'm like, 'yeah whatever you all niggas say.' Then the next day I go over there, my man G man, saying could have told me it was real, he was like he said 'look you think the shit ain't real.' He pulled out a clip and shit, and I'm looking at bullets. So I'm like oh shit this nigga really could have had bucked him if he wanted to. That shit got me heated and shit, that's when the beef started right there. ...So I start thinking to myself yo, shit is on now. When I see that nigga it's on, word. Then after that I left out of my man's crib [house] from getting blunted [high], walked home and shit. And the next day I went looking for the nigga and shit I went got the little four 5th and shit from my cousin. I went and knock on the nigga door and shit, ma dukes was like, 'nah he ain't here he somewhere.' And I didn't even see the nigga for like two three weeks after that and shit. And, boom, he saw me first, and yo the nigga started jetting. Boom when I finally got a chance to see him and shit I was about to pull out and start busting. ...Slick started running away. ...I just started licking at the nigga, I don't think I hit him.

This conflict situation flowed from one interaction, to gossip about that interaction, to searching for the opponent, and to finally shooting at the opponent. It was not necessary for Art to hit Slick with a bullet for the violent confrontation to end. Art was successfully able to convey a message to Slick by firing his gun at him as Slick ran away. He felt that this incident improved his status on the street. Art explained:

...yeah I gained some status, cause niggas that day after that niggas was like yo, you a wild nigga. Niggas was like 'yo I ain't going to front I thought you lost all that son.' Nigga was like 'yo I see you still be on the wild shit and all that.' And right about now niggas in my building and around my building they, I know they be talking about me and shit.

Pulling a gun automatically increases the intensity of the conflict and limits the number of choices available to all parties. Certain actions or words warrant a violent response and guns are used in response to a transgression

when available. According to respondents, actors within this context know when and where pulling out and using a gun is appropriate. Expectations about when gun use is deemed “necessary” reflect the cumulative knowledge of prior violent events among actors, and social reactions to gun users that follow prior use. If either actor displays a gun in a conflict situation, the event goes to the next level and the chance that alternative (nonviolent) strategies will be employed lessens considerably. Individuals also make assumptions about the likelihood that others will have and use guns in conflict situations. Calculations are based, in part, on perceived violent reputations, physical appearance, neighborhood affiliation, group affiliation, and prior violent experiences with specific actors.

Not all gun events resulted in gun fire and when guns were fired, the intent was not always to kill. Over 20 gun events were disrupted; in 10 events guns were present but not used. In another 63 events the most serious action was a gun threat. Pepe, an 18 year old from the South Bronx, described a gun face off event that started when Pepe and his associate were walking outside their neighborhood. Pepe’s opponent did not like the way that Pepe was looking at his girl as they passed casually on the street. When the opponent pulled out his 38 revolver and asked for an account, Pepe denied the opponent’s charge and drew his 25 automatic handgun in response. From Pepe’s description, it seemed that the female’s loud screaming and efforts to calm the situation were effective along with the intervention of a friend:

My friend Roland pushed me back. And told me, ‘chill, chill man. Chill out, Pepe.’ I was going wild. ‘Cause I wanted to...I was like [angry] ‘cause he was dogging [degrading] me. So I said, ‘man what’s up man? Let’s do this.’ So then he you know he the girl was screaming. So I let it go. I said, ‘oh that’s it forget it.’ I’m gonna just leave this guy alone man. So we just left it alone.

The third parties in this event provided a nonviolent way out of the situation by attempting to influence the actors’ definition of the situation. Pepe did not want to back down since he felt that he was wrongfully accused and the opponent had threatened him with a gun first. The initial spark was not a serious transgression; however the key factor in Pepe’s narrative is his response to a perceived challenge to his character.

According to our analysis of the data, the “options” available when armed with a gun included pulling out (to threaten), shooting in the air (to threaten), pistol whipping, shooting to injure, shooting to kill, attempting to shoot (failure), and drive-by shootings. The “options” available when confronted with an armed opponent included stalling or talking one’s way out of the situation (with no retaliation), stalling or talking one’s way out of the situation (with planned retaliation), negotiating another type of violence (disarming), pulling out a gun and facing off (no shooting), having a shootout, friends pulling out guns and forcing the opponent to back down (overpowering arms), and fleeing the situation to escape harm. Respondents decided which action to take based upon their prior knowledge of an opponent’s willingness or ability to use violence (or their on-the-spot impression of the opponent), the respondent’s assessment of his own ability to outperform the opponent, the likelihood that other parties would get involved to aid either party if needed, the level of anger/emotion during the event by both parties, and the respondent’s assessment of risks and benefits to his social identity by using or avoiding violence. The contingencies in gun events are illustrated in the narratives presented by Luc and others. What becomes clear is that exposure to community violence is highly bounded with attachment to network

peers, the existence of opposing groups, and repeated interactions among actors in a setting without adequate social controls. Motivations and momentum to use violence (and guns in particular) come from the dynamic contexts in which these youth are embedded. Guns clearly tip the scales of power in favor of the person who is armed. When there is time for strategic response to the threat of conflict escalating to gun violence, youth gather support from peers (especially armed peers), access enough guns, heighten their guardedness, gather intelligence on the movements in time and space of the opposing side, and assess the best approach/timing to preemptively strike (as illustrated by Luc's story).

An emergent factor that seems to have a direct influence on violent situations is the group nature of these events, which can take several forms. First, and most common, is when peers co-participate or co-offend. The decision to co-participate happens at any stage as violent conflicts unfold. Peer network members become actively involved in conflicts that lead to violence when: (1) their involvement in the violent event is strategic and anticipated from the outset, (2) they come to aid of an associate who is losing in the confrontation, (3) they are threatened/offended/disrespected at some point during the course of a dispute, (4) they use violence either in the moment or after the fact to get justice or right some wrong that was perpetrated against a group member, or (5) they are influenced by gossip about the performance and reputation of event participants and they take action to restore the reputation of other group members. Peer network members who are present during disputes that escalate into violence play different roles depending on the relationship between the combatants, weapon type, and injury outcomes. This point is illustrated by Austen, a 19-year old from the South Bronx who described how associates from both sides played a role in the event and promoted the use of violence:

(AUSTEN): ...he was with all his boys. ...I was with a couple a niggas. That's why he was acting rowdy. 'Cause he was with his peoples.

(INTERVIEWER): So your peoples from your crew...

(AUSTEN): Yeah my boys was telling me, 'shoot the nigga. Slice him, stab him.' I'm saying, [that] shit was running through my mind.

(INTERVIEWER): So how 'bout his peoples...

(AUSTEN): Yeah, you know, they were shouting shit out. 'Just shoot that cat.'

(INTERVIEWER): How you was feeling when your peoples was instigating?

(AUSTEN): I was gonna do it. Cops pulled up too quick.

The initial event was disrupted by housing authority police officers. The party broke up and the combatants fled the scene to avoid arrest. Later, the conflict continued and intensified into a shootout between the sides. In the subsequent incident, previously uninvolved third parties became actively engaged as co-offenders in the "retaliatory" gun event.

(AUSTEN): ...We went back over there the next day. With a bigger crew. We just, we did what we had to do.

(INTERVIEWER): ...and what y'all did? Y'all saw the people?

(AUSTEN): Yeah, we saw them out there. We rolled up on them. We just flipped on them. Say everybody bugged the fuck out.

(INTERVIEWER): So everybody got violent?

(AUSTEN): Yeah, we pulled out on them. They pulled out too.

(INTERVIEWER): Oh, so y'all had a shootout? So umm [during] this shootout, anybody got hurt?

(AUSTEN): Yeah, the kid that I was fighting with, I'm saying, he got shot in the chest.

To summarize, the data on violent events where guns were present show that there are several sparks that set off violent encounters, which range from pre-planned retaliations to violent acts that are committed in self-defense. Some types of violence such as the violence associated with the drug trade can be seen as being symptomatic of a moral disengagement, while other violence is predominantly reactive and emergent in nature, thus not adhering to the linear progression of the adaptive model. For instance, in situations where the presence of peers elevates a dispute into a violent gun event, it matters less that the offender has been exposed to violence and has morally disengaged, than that the offender is egged on or joined in violence by others. The converse, where others tamp down the potential for violent events, also exists. A final illustration shows how transactional features of conflict situations that have all of the emotional arousal, moral justification, weaponry, audience and the like can have nonviolent outcomes. Gary, a 24-year old from East New York, described a situation in which his opponent slapped and pushed Gary's 7-year old son. According to Gary, the opponent said:

'yo don't you know how to say excuse me or some shit.' So he [my son] came upstairs [told me the story] and I thought the man had did something to him. So I went across the street like 'yo which one of you mother fuckers put your hands on my son. I want to know who the fuck it was, bottom line. Yo, what the fuck are you touching my son for? If you got a problem with him, you know me bring him to me, don't put your hands on my son.' I said 'cause man, if you hurt my son, I'm going to do you right here, right now, simple.' I was real pissed. A grown up hitting my son you got a problem. ...I was going to shoot his ass, right there and then for putting his fucking hands on my child. I had a nine on me. My man stepped in and said, 'you all need to squash it.' He tried to explain to me 'yo he didn't hurt him or nothing like that. He just shook him a little bit that's all. You know he know Benny, he know you, he know he ain't going to do nothing to your son. So I said, 'for you I'll squash it.'

The transactional aspects of the last example provide a good illustration of how event sequencing and the particular actions by actors in context have momentum. Gary started out angry and primed to punish the man who had put his hands on his young son. The intervention by a respected and mutual associate of both parties enabled Gary to pause long enough to abandon the violent path he was on. The third party intervention challenged some aspects of Gary's process of moral disengagement to provide Gary with a face saving way to exit nonviolently.

### A Descriptive Look at Event Sequences

In this section, we present a series of tables with basic descriptive information on the coding of antecedents, opening moves, counter moves, intermediate steps, and outcomes. As noted in the methods chapter, the variables related to actions and outcomes were less likely to be coded the same way by independent coders. We present these results with a word of caution about the less-than-desirable consistency in the coding. We classified the first four major actions for each event however some events had twenty or more actions while others had fewer than four actions. We are still working on fine-tuning the analysis of a small sample of the detailed events. Here we report the coding for the majority of cases noting that the data should be used with caution. As we continue to move this analysis toward peer-reviewed publications, we will need to go back through those cases that lacked agreement to develop a system of reconciling differences. We were unable to complete this task in time for this report as it was beyond the scope of available resources. Our qualitative analysis successfully captures the dominant patterns in the sequential processes of violent events.

### Antecedents

The respondents who answered the question about how they were feeling in the moments before the conflict began most often reported experiencing angry arousal (n= 195). As described previously, event processes depend on whether the respondent was the protagonist or the antagonist. In situations in which the opponent attacked the respondent, the initial emotional arousal state played at least some role in how the opening move was interpreted.

**Table 4-2. Emotion or Feelings in the Moments before the Conflict**

	Event Severity													
	Near-Violent Event		Violence but No Injury		Minor Injuries - cuts and bruises		Injury but seriousness was unreported		Serious enough to require medical attention		Death		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Angry/Pissed off/Bad/Disrespected	13	7%	79	41%	16	8%	7	4%	72	37%	8	4%	195	44%
Fine/Happy/Good	15	11%	45	34%	18	14%	5	4%	46	35%	3	2%	132	30%
High/ Drunk	7	11%	24	37%	3	5%	3	5%	24	37%	4	2%	65	15%
Hyped/Bugged Out	0	0%	14	52%	1	4%	0	0%	11	41%	1	1%	27	6%
Nervous/Scared/Surprised	1	5%	5	23%	1	5%	3	14%	9	41%	3	2%	22	5%
Other	0	0%	3	75%	1	25%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	1%
Missing													335	

### The Unfolding of Near-Violent and Violent Events

In terms of the first move toward violence, eleven major categories emerged: nonverbal symbolic threat; argue; push/bump/slap/grab/scratch; punch/fight/group attack; make demand in robbery; threat with weapon; attempt to hit with weapon; fire gun at someone; did something specific to prepare for violence; stab/cut/slice;

and other. For the total sample of coded events, 33% of the opening actions were violent in some way: 28% started with a nonverbal symbolic threat; 20% with an argument; 9% with a verbal threat; 7% with a disrespect; 8% with a push/bump/grab/slap; 7% with a punch/fight/group attack; 5% with a demand in robbery; 5% threat with a weapon; 2% attempt to hit with a weapon; 3% fired a gun; 2% prepared for violence; and 1% with a stab/cut/slice. Some violent events started with low levels of violence and escalated to more serious violence, but others consisted only of low levels of violence (punching, kicking, pushing, etc.).

**Table 4-3. What was the first move of the event? (By severity level)**

	Event Severity													
	Near-Violent Event		Violence but No Injury		Minor Injuries - cuts and bruises		Injury but seriousness was unreported		Serious enough to require medical attention		Death		Total	
What was the first move of the event?	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Nonverbal symbolic threat	19	9%	87	42%	17	8%	10	5%	69	33%	4	0%	206	28%
Argued	17	12%	52	36%	14	10%	6	4%	50	35%	4	0%	143	20%
Verbal threat	4	6%	27	41%	8	12%	0	0%	26	39%	1	1%	66	9%
Disrespect	11	22%	19	39%	6	12%	1	2%	11	22%	1	0%	49	7%
Push/Bump/Slap/Grab/Scratch	2	3%	18	31%	8	14%	3	5%	23	40%	4	1%	58	8%
Punch/Physical Fight/Group Attack	2	4%	17	31%	8	15%	1	2%	21	39%	5	1%	54	7%
Made Demand in Robbery	1	3%	9	24%	2	5%	1	3%	21	57%	3	2%	37	5%
Threatened with a Weapon	0	0%	24	62%	1	3%	3	8%	8	21%	3	1%	39	5%
Attempt to Hit with Weapon	1	8%	3	25%	2	17%	1	8%	5	42%	0	3%	12	2%
Fired Gun at Someone	0	0%	4	16%	1	4%	3	12%	11	44%	6	2%	25	3%
Move to Prepare for Violence	0	0%	7	44%	0	0%	0	0%	7	44%	2	3%	16	2%
Stab or cut	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%	0	20%	5	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>		<b>274</b>		<b>67</b>		<b>30</b>		<b>263</b>		<b>36</b>		<b>728</b>	

According to respondents, the opponent initiated the conflict in the majority of situations (55%). Both sides simultaneously initiated conflict in 21% of cases while the respondent reported starting conflict in 23% of events. As shown in Table 4-4, third parties initiated conflict in only 1% of events.

**Table 4-4. Who made the first move toward violence?**

Who made the first move	Event Severity													
	Near-violent Event		Violence but No Injury		Minor Injuries - cuts and bruises		Injury but seriousness was unreported		Serious enough to require medical attention		Death		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Respondent's side	12	7%	65	39%	11	7%	10	6%	59	36%	8	5%	165	23%
Opponent's side	29	7%	150	38%	38	10%	12	3%	147	37%	22	6%	398	55%
Both sides	16	11%	56	37%	18	12%	6	4%	52	34%	4	3%	152	21%
3rd Party	1	17%	2	33%	0	0%	1	17%	2	33%	0	0%	6	1%
													721	

We noticed that respondents were likely to attribute the “blame” for the initiation of the conflict to the opponent particularly when the opponent made some type of threat toward the respondent. According to respondents, opponents also initiated conflict with overt violence as the opening move in numerous cases.

**Table 4-5. What was the First Move? (By who made the first move toward violence)**

What was the first move?	Who made the first move				Total
	Respondent's side	Opponent's side	Both sides	3rd party	
Nonverbal symbolic threat	62	153	1	1	217
Argued	6	4	138	0	148
Verbal Threat	10	41	1	0	52
Move to Prepare for Violence	8	7	1	0	16
Made Demand in Robbery	12	26	0	1	39
Threat with a Weapon	23	20	0	0	43
Attempt to Hit with Weapon	0	13	0	0	13
Push/Bump/Slap/Grab/Scratch	14	40	1	2	57
Punch/Physical Fight/Group Attack	10	31	18	0	59
Stab/Cut/Slice	3	2	0	0	5
Fire Gun at Someone	5	20	0	1	26
Other	4	12	0	1	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>692</b>

In Table 4-6, the coding of the second move in the event is presented. Note that nine events consisted of only one action. By the end of the second move, 57.4% of the actions involved violence of some type. Note the large increase in the number of events in which weapon threats happened (131 versus 39) and the number in which punching/fighting happened (179 versus 59).

**Table 4-6. What was the Second move? (by who made the second move)**

What was the second move	Who made the 2nd move					Total
	No one	Respondent's side	Opponent's side	Both sides	3rd Parties	
No 2 <sup>nd</sup> move	9	0	0	0	0	9
Nonverbal symbolic threat	0	29	39	0	2	70
Argued	0	0	0	50	0	50
Verbal Threat	0	49	28	0	1	78
Disrespect	0	0	4	0	0	4
Move to Prepare for Violence	0	17	6	11	0	34
Made Demand in Robbery	0	12	12	0	0	24
Threatened with a Weapon	0	72	56	2	1	131
Attempt to Hit with Weapon	0	7	4	0	0	11
Push/bump/slap/grab/scratch	0	10	14	0	0	24
Punch/Physical Fight/Group Attack	0	76	48	55	0	179
Pistol whip	0	2	2	0	0	4
Fired Gun at Someone	0	16	26	0	0	42
Stab/Cut/Slice	0	4	8	0	0	12
Called the cops/Cops at scene	0	0	1	0	0	1
Attempt to stop violence	0	13	3	5	2	23
Other	0	2	1	2	0	5
Flee scene	0	20	10	3	0	33
Total	9	329	262	128	6	734

When the second move is examined with regard to event outcome severity, we discover that near-violent events rarely include physical attack or even attempts. Near-violent events are also likely to include attempts to stop or deescalate the conflict (see Table 4-7). Both sides are involved in physical fighting at the second move in 55 events versus 19 at move one.

**Table 4-7. What was the second move of the event? (By severity level)**

What was the 2 <sup>nd</sup> move?	Event Severity						Total
	Near	Violence but No Injury	Minor Injuries - cuts and bruises	Injury Seriousness unkwn	Serious enough to require medical attention	Death	
Nonverbal symbolic threat	13	24	4	3	21	4	69
Argued	6	21	7	0	13	0	47
Verbal Threat	16	29	5	2	22	4	78
Disrespect	0	1	1	0	2	0	4
Move to Prepare for Violence	0	10	7	1	13	1	32
Made Demand in Robbery	0	12	0	3	6	1	22
Threatened with a Weapon	0	57	6	5	53	7	128
Attempt to Hit with Weapon	0	3	2	3	2	1	11
Push/Bump/Slap/Grab/Scratch	2	10	5	1	5	1	24
Punch/Physical Fight/Group Attack	2	71	22	8	59	1	163
Pistol whip	0	2	0	0	1	1	4
Stab/Cut/Slice	0	0	0	0	12	0	12
Fired Gun at Someone	0	9	0	1	20	9	39
Call the cops	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Attempt to stop violence	12	5	2	0	4	0	23
Other	1	0	1	0	2	0	4
Flee scene	3	10	2	1	12	3	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>692</b>

In Table 4-8, the coding of the third move in the event is presented. Note that 46 events consisted of only one action. By the end of the third move, 66.6% of the actions consisted of some type of violence. Note the changes in the number of events in which weapon threats happened (131 versus 118), in which gun were fired (42 versus 89), and the number in which punching/fighting happened (179 versus 207). The number of events in which both sides were engaged in fighting jumped from 55 at the second move to 109 by the third move. Near-violent events are also likely to include attempts to stop or deescalate the conflict or fleeing the scene altogether (see Table 4-9).

**Table 4-8. What was the Third move? (by who made the third move)**

What was the 3 <sup>rd</sup> move	Who made the 3rd move						Total
	No one	Respondent's side	Opponent's side	Both sides	3rd Parties	Police	
No 3 <sup>rd</sup> action	46	0	0	0	0	0	46
Nonverbal symbolic threat	0	4	9	0	0	0	13
Argued	0	0	0	11	0	0	11
Verbal Threat	0	8	1	3	0	0	12
Disrespect	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Move to Prepare for Violence	0	8	3	9	0	0	20
Made Demand in Robbery	0	12	3	0	0	0	15
Threatened with a Weapon	0	63	48	6	1	0	118
Attempt to Hit with Weapon	0	10	9	0	0	0	19
Push/bump/slap/grab/scratch	0	15	6	1	1	0	23
Punch/Physical Fight/Group Attack	0	69	29	109	0	0	207
Pistol whip	0	4	3	0	0	0	7
Fired Gun at Someone	0	44	38	6	0	1	89
Stab/Cut/Slice	0	15	15	0	0	0	30
Called the cops/Cops at scene	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
Attempt to stop violence	0	18	9	9	19	0	55
Other	0	5	3	0	0	0	8
Flee scene	0	41	18	4	0	0	63
Return to scene	0	8	5	0	0	0	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>752</b>

**Table 4-9. What was the third move of the event? (by severity level)**

3 <sup>rd</sup> move	Event Severity						Total
	Near Violent Event	Violence but No Injury	Minor Injuries -cuts and bruises	Injury serious-ness unreported	Serious enough to require medical attention	Death	
No 3 <sup>rd</sup> action	12	9	0	5	12	0	38
Nonverbal symbolic threat	2	2	2	0	6	1	13
Argued	5	2	1	0	2	1	11
Verbal Threat	5	3	2	0	2	0	12
Disrespect	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Move to Prepare for Violence	1	10	2	0	6	1	20
Made Demand in Robbery	1	9	0	1	4	0	15
Threatened with a Weapon	0	53	5	4	44	6	112
Attempt to Hit with Weapon	0	4	2	1	12	0	19
Push/Bump/Slap/Grab/Scratch	1	8	4	0	9	0	22
Punch/Physical Fight/Group Attack	3	80	39	8	65	2	197
Pistol whip	0	2	2	2	1	0	7
Fired Gun at Someone	0	25	1	1	41	17	85
Stab/Cut/Slice	0	0	3	1	25	1	30
Called the cops/Cops on scene	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Attempt to stop violence	21	20	2	1	8	0	52
Other	1	4	0	2	0	1	8
Flee scene	4	33	2	3	15	4	61
Return to scene	1	3	0	0	5	2	11
Total	57	270	67	29	257	36	716

As shown in Table 4-10, a fourth move was not included in 173 events. In 92 events, the fourth move was to flee the scene. Very few (only 9) of the actions at the fourth move were symbolic or verbal threats. The fourth move was coded as punching/fighting in 96 events, threatening with a weapon in 70 events, attempting to hit someone with a weapon in 18 events, firing a gun at someone in 106 events, and cutting/stabbing/slicing someone in 48 events. By the end of the fourth move, nearly 90% events had some type of violent action. Notice

that there were 103 attempts to stop violence with a nearly equal number of actions conducted by respondent and opponent).

**Table 4-10. What was the fourth move of the event? (by who made the fourth move)**

What was the 4 <sup>th</sup> move	Who made the 4th move					Total
	No one	Respondent's side	Opponent's side	Both sides	3rd Parties	
No 4 <sup>th</sup> action	173	0	0	0	0	173
Nonverbal symbolic threat	0	0	1	0	0	1
Argued	0	0	0	1	0	1
Verbal Threat	0	3	3	0	0	6
Disrespect	1	0	0	0	0	1
Move to Prepare for Violence	0	4	8	0	1	13
Made Demand in Robbery	0	6	2	0	0	8
Threatened with a Weapon	0	39	29	2	0	70
Attempt to Hit with Weapon	0	10	8	0	0	18
Push/bump/slap/grab/scratch	0	4	1	0	0	5
Punch/Physical Fight/Group Attack	0	25	19	50	2	96
Pistol whip	0	2	1	0	0	3
Fired Gun at Someone	0	56	42	7	1	106
Stab/Cut/Slice	0	20	28	0	0	48
Called the cops/cops at scene	0	1	0	0	2	3
Attempt to stop violence	0	24	22	16	41	103
Other	0	3	0	0	0	3
Flee scene	0	46	34	11	1	92
Hide Evidence (gun)	0	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>751</b>

**Table 4-11. What was the fourth move of the event? (by severity level)**

What was the 4 <sup>th</sup> move?	Event Severity						Total
	Near-violent Event	Violence but No Injury	Minor Injuries - cuts and bruises	Injury serious-ness unreported	Serious enough to require medical attention	Death	
No 4 <sup>th</sup> Action	35	48	14	12	42	7	158
Nonverbal symbolic threat	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Argued	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Verbal Threat	2	3	0	0	1	0	6
Disrespect	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Move to Prepare for Violence	0	9	1	1	2	0	13
Made Demand in Robbery	0	3	2	1	1	0	7
Threatened with a Weapon	0	31	5	1	27	4	68
Attempt to Hit with Weapon	0	5	2	0	11	1	19
Push/bump/slap/grab/scratch	1	2	0	0	2	0	5
Punch/Physical Fight/Group Attack	1	47	16	2	25	0	91
Pistol whip	0	0	1	0	2	0	3
Fired Gun at Someone	0	31	1	2	48	18	100
Stab/Cut/Slice	0	0	7	1	40	0	48
Call the Cops/Cops at scene	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Attempt to stop violence	17	51	14	4	13	0	99
Other	0	1	0	0	1	1	3
Flee scene	1	33	4	5	42	4	89
Hide Evidence (gun)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>716</b>

Next, we examine the action sequences by each type of event outcome severity in order to untangle the complications of conducting a sequential analysis. We start with near-violent events. As shown in Table 4-12, near-violent events consist of nonverbal and verbal threats and arguments. Typically, they also include attempts

to stop or intervene in the conflict. The majority of near-violent events deescalated quickly –twelve events were resolved by the second move and 35 events were resolved by the third move.

**Table 4-12. Actions in Events in Near-Violent Events**

Action	Moves or Steps in Near=Violent Events (n=58)				
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	[...]
Nonverbal symbolic threat	19	13	2	0	
Argued	17	6	5	0	
Verbal threat	4	16	5	2	
Disrespect	11	0	0	0	
Move to Prepare for Violence	0	0	1	0	
Made Demand in Robbery	1	0	1	0	
Threatened with a Weapon	0	0	0	0	
Attempt to Hit with Weapon	1	0	0	0	
Push/Bump/Slap/Grab/Scratch	2	2	1	1	
Punch/Physical Fight/Group Attack	2	2	3	1	
Pistol Whip	0	0	0	0	
Fired Gun at Someone	0	0	0	0	
Stab or cut	0	0	0	0	
Call the Cops	0	1	0	0	
Attempt to Stop Violence	0	12	21	17	
Other	0	1	1	0	
Flee Scene	0	3	4	1	
Return to Scene	0	0	1	0	
No Action	0	0	12	35	
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>57</b>	

As shown in Table 4-13, events in which violence erupted but did not escalate to the point that anyone was injured were most likely to start off as a verbal altercation and then escalate to physical violence without weapon use by the third move. The combatants were unarmed in most of these incidents. People attempted to stop violence in 5 events at the second move, in 20 events as the third move, and in 51 events as the fourth move. Recall from Table 3-4, that in 99 of these events classified as violent but no injuries, there were no weapons involved; 144 of these events were gun events; 25 were knife events; and 10 were other weapon events.

**Table 4-13. Actions in Events in which violence erupted but without injuries**

Actions	Step or Move in Violence but No Injury (n=274)				
	1st	2nd	3rd	4 <sup>th</sup>	[...]
Nonverbal symbolic threat	87	24	2	1	
Argued	52	21	2	0	
Verbal threat	27	29	3	3	
Disrespect	19	1	1	1	
Move to Prepare for Violence	7	10	10	9	
Made Demand in Robbery	9	12	9	3	
Threatened with a Weapon	24	57	53	31	
Attempt to Hit with Weapon	3	3	4	5	
Push/Bump/Slap/Grab/Scratch	18	10	8	2	
Punch/Physical Fight/Group Attack	17	71	80	47	
Pistol Whip	0	2	2	0	
Fired Gun at Someone	4	9	25	31	
Stab or cut	0	0	0	0	
Call the Cops	0	0	2	3	
Attempt to Stop Violence	0	5	20	51	
Other	7	10	8	6	
Flee Scene	0	10	33	33	
Return to Scene	0	0	3	0	
No Action	0	0	9	48	
Total	274	274	274	274	

Events in which violence resulted in minor injuries also started off with verbal and nonverbal threats but rarely included weapon use (see Table 4-14). Most of the action included fighting without weapons. Within this category of event severity threats with weapons were common. Also notice that in many cases threats were the highest level of escalation of weapon use. Put differently, threats did not always lead to weapon use. In some cases youth disarmed in order to fight without a weapon. Within this event category, if anyone was physically harmed in the incident, the injuries were minor in nature. Only a few of these events were disrupted by an intervention or effort to stop the violence during the opening stages of the event however by steps three and four there were a greater numbers of attempts to stop the violence.

**Table 4-14. Actions in Events in which there was violence with minor injuries**

Actions	Moves or Steps in Violence with Minor Injuries (n=67)				
	1st	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3rd	4th	[...]
Nonverbal symbolic threat	17	4	2	0	
Argued	14	7	1	0	
Verbal threat	8	5	2	0	
Disrespect	6	1	0	0	
Move to Prepare for Violence	0	7	2	1	
Made Demand in Robbery	2	0	0	2	
Threatened with a Weapon	1	6	5	5	
Attempt to Hit with Weapon	2	2	2	2	
Push/Bump/Slap/Grab/Scratch	8	5	4	0	
Punch/Physical Fight/Group Attack	8	22	39	16	
Pistol Whip	0	0	2	1	
Fired Gun at Someone	1	0	1	1	
Stab or cut	0	0	3	7	
Call the Cops	0	0	0	0	
Attempt to Stop Violence	0	2	2	14	
Other	0	4	0	0	
Flee Scene	0	2	2	4	
Return to Scene	0	0	0	0	
No Action	0	0	0	14	
Total	67	67	67	67	

As displayed in Table 4-15, approximately 61% (156 of 257) of opening moves in events that ended with someone being seriously injured were non-physical. By the second move only 29% (71 of 247) of event actions were non-physical. The third move included violence in 77% (191 of 257) of reported incidents. Nine events ended after only two moves while 48 events ended after three moves. There were very few attempts to stop violence in events that resulted in serious injury. Specifically, there were four events coded with the second move being an action to stop violence, eight events with the third move being an action to stop violence, and 13 actions at move four to stop violence. Twelve events ended after two moves and 42 ended after three moves.

**Table 4-15. Actions in Events in which violence resulted in serious injury**

Actions	Moves or Steps in Serious Injury Events (n=263)				
	1st	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3rd	4th	[...]
Nonverbal symbolic threat	69	21	6	0	
Argued	50	13	2	1	
Verbal threat	26	22	2	1	
Disrespect	11	2	0	0	
Move to Prepare for Violence	7	13	6	2	
Made Demand in Robbery	21	6	4	1	
Threatened with a Weapon	8	53	44	27	
Attempt to Hit with Weapon	5	2	12	11	
Push/Bump/Slap/Grab/Scratch	23	5	9	2	
Punch/Physical Fight/Group Attack	21	59	65	25	
Pistol Whip	0	1	1	2	
Fired Gun at Someone	11	20	41	48	
Stab or cut	5	12	25	40	
Call the Cops	0	0	0	0	
Attempt to Stop Violence	0	4	8	13	
Other	0	2	0	2	
Flee Scene	0	12	15	42	
Return to Scene	0	0	5	0	
No Action	0	0	12	42	
Total	257	247	257	259	

The murder events tended to be more physical and include gun use faster than the other types of outcomes described above. Recall also that events that resulted in a death were much more likely to be group on group conflicts. Guns were used in almost all of these events. After the second move there was only one case in which the action was nonviolent, while in the rest of the cases all of the action was violent. By the fourth move, all of the action was gun use. There was no attempt to stop the violence at any point in the event sequence for events that ended in death (see Table 4-16).

**Table 4-16. Actions in Events in which violence resulted in death**

Actions	Move or Step in Violent Events Resulting in Death (n=36)				
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	
Nonverbal symbolic threat	4	4	1	0	
Argued	4	0	1	0	
Verbal threat	1	4	0	0	
Disrespect	1	0	0	0	
Move to Prepare for Violence	2	1	1	0	
Made Demand in Robbery	3	1	0	0	
Threatened with a Weapon	3	7	6	4	
Attempt to Hit with Weapon	0	1	0	1	
Push/Bump/Slap/Grab/Scratch	4	1	0	0	
Punch/Physical Fight/Group Attack	5	1	2	0	
Pistol Whip	0	1	0	2	
Fired Gun at Someone	6	9	17	18	
Stab or cut	0	0	1	0	
Call the Cops	0	0	0	0	
Attempt to Stop Violence	0	0	0	0	
Other	3	3	1	1	
Flee Scene	0	3	4	4	
Return to Scene	0	0	2	0	
No Action	0	0	0	6	
Total	36	36	36	36	

We asked respondents to identify the point at which they realized that violence was inevitable. The answers to this question are presented in Table 4-17. Across the different types of event severity outcomes, 133 or 19% were preplanned. In those events, the respondent went into the interaction planning to use violence. In another 154 events or 22% of the total, respondents determined that violence was necessary after the first move. Respondents reported a realization that violence would happen after the second move in nearly 18% of events (n =125). Respondents reported that violence was necessary after the third move in 41 events. Some respondents reported particular actions rather than a numeric step. For instance, 28 respondents felt violence was necessary after the opponent disrespected the respondent during the interaction. In the sample, there were 72 events in which the respondent reported that he did not use violence at any point in the event (in 8 of those,

the respondent was present while one of his boys used violence). In another 32 events, weapons were used to threaten someone but beyond the threat - no actual violence transpired. Fifty-two events ended without even a minor act of violence.

**Table 4-17. Point you realized violence would happen (by event severity)**

The point you realized violence would happen	Event Severity						Total
	Near-violent Event	Violence but No Injury	Minor Injuries - cuts and bruises	Injury but seriousness was unreported	Serious enough to require medical attention	Death	
Went into planning to use violence	3	46	13	10	54	7	133
After the first move	3	72	16	7	47	9	154
After the 2nd move	1	56	18	4	42	4	125
After the 3rd move	0	14	6	2	16	3	41
When opponent threatened him	0	10	2	1	6	1	20
When opponent mouthed off to respondent	0	9	1	1	5	0	16
When opponent did something to his boys	0	1	0	0	10	1	12
When he first got dissed	0	11	7	0	9	1	28
Specific point not specified	0	2	2	0	7	1	12
Respondent's boys used violence but respondent did not	0	0	0	0	7	1	8
Respondent did not use violence	0	12	1	3	43	5	64
Weapon threat without use	0	31	1	0	0	0	32
Nonviolent Event	51	1	0	0	0	0	52
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>700</b>

The data displayed in Table 4-18, provide insight to the goals respondents had specific to the event. The most prominent answer was to “just let him know” or “send a message”. The situational interactionist perspective posits that violence can be a form of communication. The answers to this question certainly suggest that youths are attempting to communicate via violent means at least some of the time. They also clearly have goals: to scare the opponent (n=11), cause physical harm but not death (n=98), kill the opponent (n=37), gain respect (n=58), help a friend (n=17), make the other person back down or apologize (n=70), protect himself (n=44), to stop the conflict (n=33), and acquire something (n=58).

**Table 4-18. What were you trying to accomplish? (by event severity)**

What were you trying to accomplish?*	Event_ Severity						Total
	Near-violent Event	Violence but No Injury	Minor Injuries - cuts and bruises	Injury but seriousness was unreported	Serious enough to require medical attention	Death	
Not applicable	2	17	1	3	35	6	64
Nothing	0	1	3	0	6	0	10
Just let him know	16	79	22	7	52	4	180
Send a message: Don't fuck with my family	0	3	1	1	7	0	12
Scare him	0	4	1	1	5	0	11
Hurt the opponent	5	27	8	4	44	0	88
Knock him out	0	1	4	0	0	0	5
Whip his ass	0	0	4	0	1	0	5
Kill him	0	12	2	1	9	13	37
Gain respect	2	31	5	3	17	0	58
Help his boy	0	4	1	0	11	1	17
Make him back down	0	31	4	1	28	3	67
Make him apologize	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Squash it	20	9	1	0	3	0	33
Protect himself	1	16	4	2	19	2	44
Rob him	0	3	1	1	4	1	10
To get something	2	17	2	1	6	3	31
Secure territory	0	3	0	0	2	0	5
Shut him up	0	1	2	1	0	0	4
Make him pay up	2	5	1	0	4	0	12
Total	74	241	68	26	254	33	696

\*The categories were respondent-nominated.

## Scripts of Urban Male Youth Violence

An event framework is ideal for understanding the schemas or scripts that youth bring into and modify within violent contexts. Drawing from the work of several scholars (Abelson, 1981; Cornish, 1994; Nelson, 1986; Nelson, 2007; Schank & Abelson, 1977; and Tedeschi & Felson, 1994) we are using the term schemas to mean an organizing structure for procedural knowledge stored in memory that shapes behavioral repertoires when activated. Here we focus on a particular type of schema—namely a script. According to Abelson (1981), a script is a cognitive structure or framework that, when activated, organizes a person's understanding of typical situations, allowing the person to have expectations and to make conclusions about the potential result of a set of events. Scripts allow the actor to integrate information about the sequencing of events as well as the scenes, contextual cues or script headers, frames, actors, and slots/roles (Nelson, 1986). Strong scripts will include expectations of how events should unfold while weak scripts would not provide specific expectations on sequential processes.

From the event narratives, we are able to identify some of the characteristics of violence scripts in terms of scenes, contextual cues, action frames, actors, and roles across a broad range of youth violence incidents. These characteristics illustrate the qualitative differences between violent situations and how actors respond to them. As shown in Figure 4-3, the scenes of youth violence can be divided along two major dimensions: (1) private versus public and (2) controlled versus uncontrolled spaces. The types of activities that define a physical space and the kinds of people who frequent the location are also important. Contextual cues include: verbal versus nonverbal cues, threat of physical harm (including size differentials, being outnumbered, being off, being out armed), the lethality of the threat (gun versus non-gun, knife versus no weapon), threat of reputational damage, threat of relationship damage (fear of rejection by peer group), victim vulnerability and relative weakness, and victim blameworthiness. Violent event action frames include: (1) opening moves (threats, attacks, accusations, insults); (2) counter moves (accounts, resistance, denial, attack, threat escalation, warnings); (3) escalation/intensification stage; (4) closing moves (resolution, disruption, stalling tactics, fleeing the scene, additional threats, injury, injury treatment, arrest); (5) assessment stage; and (6) aftermaths (fear, avoidance behaviors, acute stress response, enhanced self-protection, gossip, reputational status shifts, revenge planning, self-medications or celebration with drugs/alcohol).

The actors in youth violence scripts include the antagonist, the protagonist, the co-offending antagonists and protagonists, the audience, and the agents of social control. In terms of roles, we identified a number of "typical" roles/situational identities in youth violence events including: crazy killer, tough guy, holding your own, punk/herb, point man, scout, lookout, strategizer, defender, avenger, enforcer, instigator, cheerleader, regulator, manipulator, peacemaker, gossip, and therapist. Our previous work examined how violence is instrumental in establishing identity with the social status hierarchy of the urban street (Wilkinson, 2001). We found that individuals who were categorized by their peers as "crazy killers" exhibited the most extreme uses of violence and were routinely feared by others which youth interpreted as a sign of respect. They were beyond tough. The tough guy and holding your own role was described as someone who could fight if he needed to but he was not known for going to extremes. He was tough when needed. He did not usually start violence but if it

came to him he would effectively use violence against his opponents. A punk or herb is someone who is stigmatized as weak or unable to stand up for himself. This person is perceived to be a good target for manipulative personal gain. A punk lets others take advantage of him. A punk is also a frequent victim of abusive youths' actions. Someone can be labeled a punk or herb after giving a poor performance in a violent event or showing fear in the face of a challenge (Wilkinson, 2001).

Several additional roles were identified in the current analysis and will be described briefly here. The point man is someone who calls the shots or disperses the individuals to fulfill particular tasks in a group conflict. The point man may also order the audience around. A scout is someone who actively pursues information relevant to conflict such as information about the actors' status, capabilities, and weaponry; networks and settings; and law enforcement presence. A lookout is someone who is not actively involved in the physical actions of a violent incident but looks out or watches for potential trouble and law enforcement at the scene. The strategizer is someone who plans a violent crime—usually in advance of the moment. This person typically leads others and plays the role of point man during actual event. A defender is someone who takes a stance to seek justice on behalf of himself, another person or the group. He ordinarily would think of himself as a hero in the violent situation. The avenger is someone who would interpret his use of violence as getting revenge or retribution. The avenger would be motivated by getting back at the other person, again to seek justice. The enforcer is someone who has an elevated status within the group primarily because he uses violence to evoke rule compliance both within the group and against the out-group. An instigator is someone who actively irritates and stirs up trouble in order to escalate conflict to full-blown violence. A person plays the role of cheerleader when he/she verbally or symbolically cheers on the combatants in a conflict situation. This is most clearly demonstrated in verbal comments such as “get him”, “kick him”, “shoot him”, or other chatter than promotes further use of violence.

The manipulator is someone who spreads lies, uses one person against another, arranges for youth who have problems to find themselves in the same place at the same time, and is able to get material goods away from people through deceptive means. A peacemaker type is someone who actively interrupts violence as it is happening or attempts to do so. This person physically separates youth during conflict, attempts to talk with youth about the situation in an effort to calm them down so that the conflict ends peacefully, and talks with youth after a dispute to prevent further escalation. The peacemaker often is known to the disputants and uses the relationship ties in order to influence the actors' decisions during the conflict. The gossip is someone who goes around the neighborhood or school talking about people and events spreading some truth, some exaggeration, and some lies. The gossip can be dangerous and influential in fueling conflict. The final role category is the therapist. The therapist listens to youths' problems and offers advice. It was common for youth to talk with their associates about a conflict and the details of violent events right after an event occurred. More serious and dramatic events were often talked about for months and even years after the fact. The therapist would provide some type of understanding of the youths' situation. He could talk youth into pursuing more violence or talk them down from heightened arousal.

Figure 4-3. Youth Violence Script Components

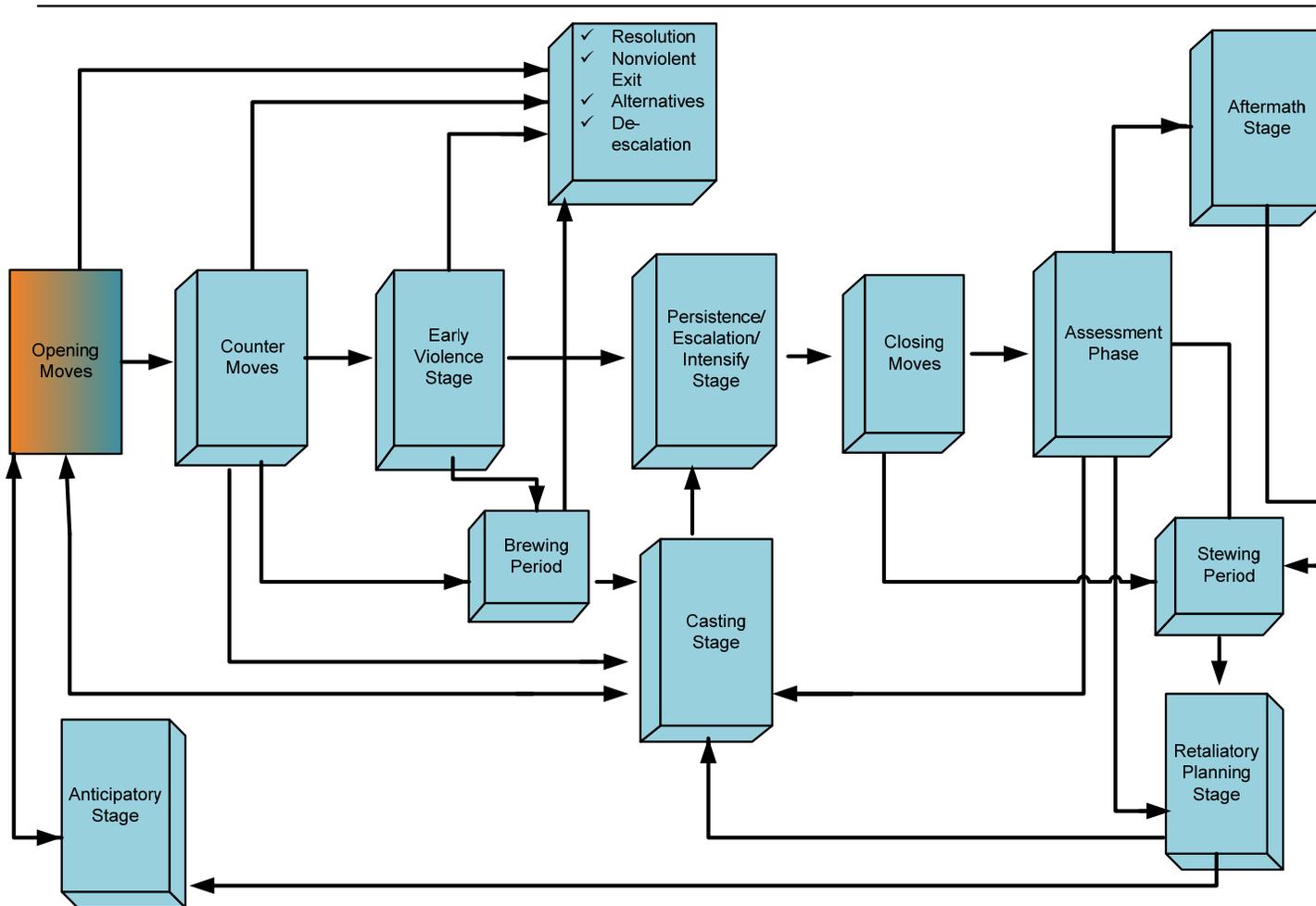
Script Components	Characteristics
<b>Scenes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public, absent social control</li> <li>• Public, present social control</li> <li>• Private, absent social control</li> <li>• Private, present social control</li> <li>• Physical Locations: Street Corner/Outside, Drug Markets, School, Clubs/Bars/House Parties, Jail, Sports/Recreation areas, Parks, Public Transportation, Inside Buildings/homes, Inside a store</li> <li>• Social Locations: Crowds, Intoxicated Crowds, Illegal Marketplaces (drugs, gambling, other hustles)</li> </ul>
<b>Contextual cues or script headers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal versus Nonverbal cues</li> <li>• Threat of physical harm (size differentials, being outnumbered, being “off” game)</li> <li>• Lethality of threat (gun v. non-gun, knife v. no weapon)</li> <li>• Threat of reputational damage</li> <li>• Threat of relationship damage</li> <li>• Victim Vulnerability or Assessment of Ability to Outperform opponent (s)</li> <li>• Blame worthiness of victim</li> </ul>
<b>Slots: Action Frames</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening Moves (Threats, Attacks, Accusations, Insults, Degrading Behavior, Reignite)</li> <li>• Counter Moves (Accounts, Resistance, Denial, Attack, Threat Escalation, etc.)</li> <li>• Escalation/Intensification Stage</li> <li>• Closing Moves (Resolution, Disruption, Injury, Injury Treatment, Fleeing Scene, Arrest, Additional Threats, Etc.)</li> <li>• Assessment Stage (What damage/harm was done)</li> <li>• Aftermaths (Fear, Avoidance Behaviors, Acute Stress Response, Enhanced self-protection, Gossip, Reputational status shifts, Revenge Planning, Self-medications with drugs/alcohol, Celebration with drugs/alcohol, Etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>Slots: Actors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The antagonist</li> <li>• The protagonist</li> <li>• The co-offending antagonists</li> <li>• The co-offending protagonists</li> <li>• Passive audience</li> <li>• Active audience</li> <li>• Social Control Agents</li> </ul>
<b>Slots: Roles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crazy killer, tough guy, holding his own cool guy, punk/herb, point man, strategizer, defender, avenger, enforcer, instigator, coach, scout, lookout, cheerleader, regulator, manipulator, peacemaker, gossipier, and the therapist</li> </ul>

The link between violence scripts and action hinges primarily on how actors read contextual cues related to the opponent, the interpretation of the harmfulness of the opponent's actions, and/or the assessment of the opponent's blameworthiness for the action. The most powerful transactional script for violence relates to how youth respond to insults, identity attacks, or issues of disrespect. Youth have internalized a set of beliefs that violence is necessary when someone attacks your identity without then apologizing in a way that restores status or offering a reasonable excuse for one's actions. What seems to matter most is what youth think others will think of them if they do not respond aggressively to an identity challenge or disrespect. Alternative conflict management strategies are applied, but typically only when the opponent is an associate or friend. These types of violations also seem to invoke anger responses. Identity challenge/disrespect violence scripts were reported in all type of events and include: disputes over girls, robbery situations, drug business disputes, and the defense of others.

As shown in Figure 4-4, violent events unfold across a variety of stages and periods including: **anticipatory stage** (reading cues, interpreting action/non-action as problematic); **opening moves** (threats, attacks, accusations, insults, degrading behavior, inconsiderate behavior); **counter moves** (accounts, resistance, denial, attack, threat escalation, issuing warnings); **escalation/ intensification stage**; **brewing period**; **casting stage**; **persistence stage**; **early violence stage** (actual violence); **stewing period** (if a pause in action); **intensified violence stage**; **closing moves** (resolution, disruption, stalling tactics, fleeing the scene, additional threats); **outcomes** (injury, injury treatment, or arrest); **assessment stage** (harm done –physical, emotional, status, and material); **aftermaths** (fear, avoidance behaviors, acute stress response, enhanced self-protection, gossip, reputational status shifts, self-medications with drugs/alcohol, and celebration with drugs/alcohol); **retaliatory planning stage** (additional act of violence linked to a previous event); and **anticipatory stage**.

This "full" sequential model represents how the most complex violent events unfold –over 100 events fit this complex type. There are ten common sequential configurations in the NYCYS event dataset. The full model is presented first as Figure 4-4. The case example narrative and the visual display shown in Figure 4-5 further illustrate the workings of the model. Some events are on the other end of the continuum –the opening move is a violent attack without any proximate interaction preceding the attack. In most cases, some prior conflict and typically an earlier violent event between the combatants was part of the backdrop of the violence. Other events move through an average 3-5 of the stages. Although narratives provide an opportunity to examine sequential unfolding of events, some respondents were more detailed in their accounts than others. What we captured here suggests that the violence process can vary along a continuum of complexity. The sequential analyses reported here are preliminary as additional analysis needs to be done in order to fully understand the unfolding of each sequence type.

Figure 4-4. Sequential Stages of Urban Youth Violence Events: Complex Model



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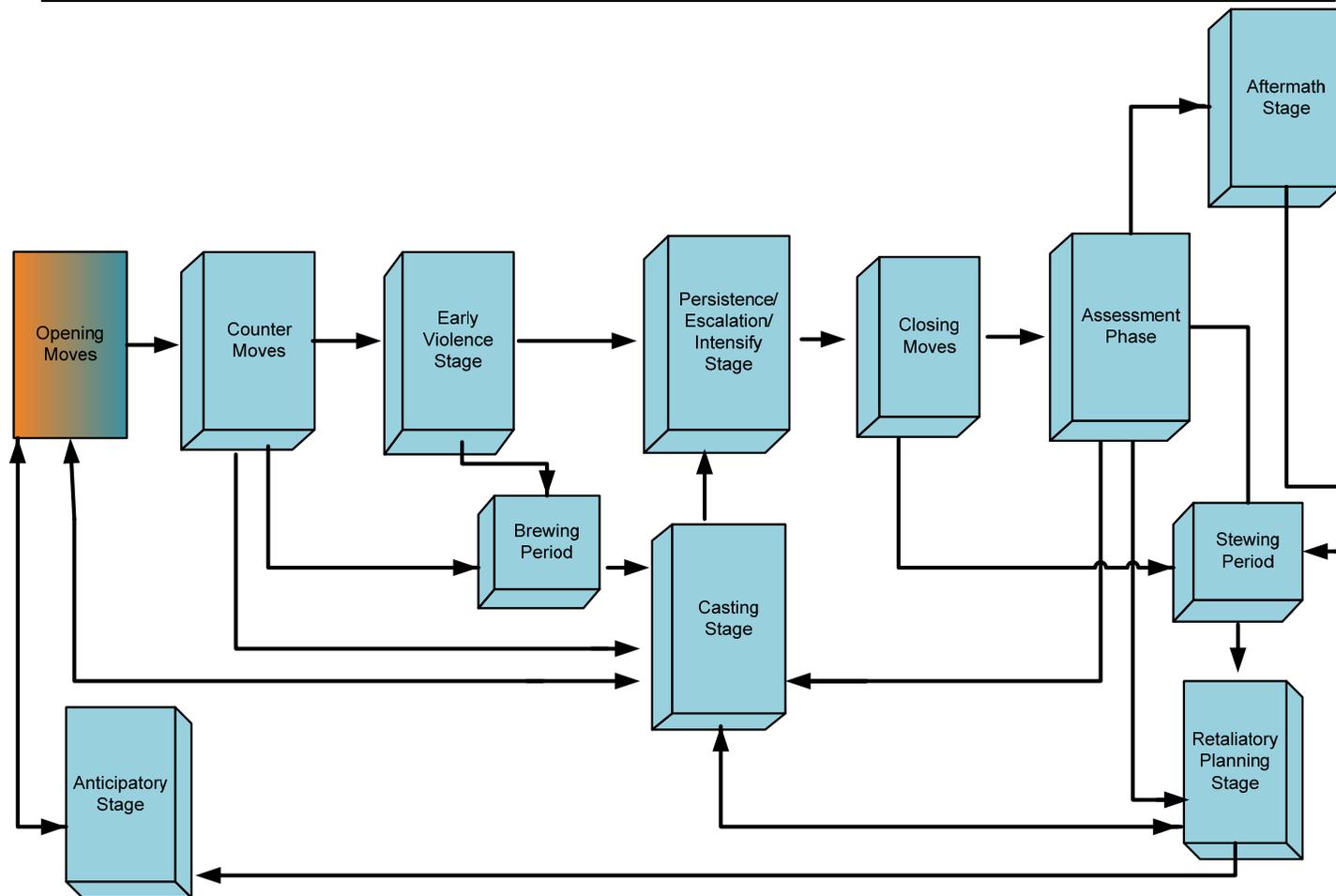
An illustration of how these stages can unfold is provided by an event that occurred in a club between Mike and his opponent Rich. Mike and four of his associates go to a club to party and socialize with females (*anticipatory stage*). Mike sees a young woman in the club that he has a casual relationship with (let's call her Becky). She went to the club with six of her girlfriends to dance and have fun. Rich sees Becky dancing and joins her. Rich rubs his body up against Becky (*anticipatory stage*). Mike observes the action directly and interprets it as a violation (*anticipatory stage*). Mike informs Rich of his wrongdoing and asks for an account (*opening moves*). Rich denies wrongdoing, stakes claim to girl, and places blame on Mike (*countermoves*). Mike pulls Becky away from Rich and returns to group (*countermoves*). Mike's boys comment on the violation (*brewing period*). Mike watches Rich and thinks about the violation and is angry (*brewing period*). Mike's boys report back information about Rich and his boys (*casting stage*). Mike returns to prior activity and Becky goes back to dancing where her friends compliment her on being desired by two guys. Mike perceives that Rich is talking with his buddies about the girl and Mike's capabilities (*casting stage*). Both parties wait to see what the other will do. After some time passes, Rich begins dancing provocatively with Mike's "girl" again (*escalation/intensification stage*). Mike isn't watching but hears from his man. Rich's friends watch to see if Rich gets the girl. Mike walks up to Rich and punches him in the face (*early violence stage*). Rich hits Mike back (*persistence stage*). Both sets of friends watch initially as Rich lands some good punches and then Mike's first friend jumps on Rich. Club security breaks up fight, issues warnings (*de-escalation, delay in action*). Youths go back to drinking and partying. Mike discusses ways of punishing Rich (*stewing period*). Both sides watch the other and the status of who "gets" Becky remains open. Both sides plan an attack at the end of the night (*anticipatory stage*). Mike believes that Rich has called some of his friends to act as reinforcements and to make sure there is a gun available for him when he exits the party. Mike and his boys essentially make the same type of preparations (*anticipatory and casting stage*).

After the delay, the incident rekindles as soon as Mike moves toward exiting the club while Rich's group is preparing for a gun battle. When Mike recounts the incident, he says his side had 3 guns which they retrieved from nearby stashes while it seemed like the other side had 5 or more guns. A shootout between Mike's group and Rich's group occurs outside of the club (*violence main event phase*). With more than 20 shots fired, injuries are sustained on both sides (*assessment stage*). Most of the participants flee the scene before the police arrive and no arrests are made (*closing*). The injured are transported to the hospital and one youth from Rich's side dies at the hospital as a result of this gun event (*assessment and aftermath*). Mike hears rumors that Rich had been seen with Becky following the shootout which fuels his anger and - in his mind- justifies his need for revenge on Rich (*aftermath and retaliatory planning*). One of Mike's boys suffers serious damage to his knee which angers Mike as well. Rumors of revenge for the death of Rich's associate are spreading around (*anticipatory stage*). Both sides are on guard and looking for strategic advantage for the next violent event. Mike anticipates that more violence will follow from this event (*anticipatory stage moving toward retaliatory stage*). This detailed example provides an excellent illustration of how minor rule violations in conflict situations can

escalate into lethal violence. It demonstrates how violence springing from sexual competition in a social situation has a somewhat predictable sequential flow.

The actions taken by the particular youth in this example illustrate how youth are reading social cues, responding to the reactions of others, and processing emotions in the context of routine activities (in this case partying at a club). What is deemed offensive behavior that is "worthy" of serious violence is determined partly on prior knowledge of similar situations. We have no specific way of proving that violent scripts exist other than looking at how actors react in similar situations. Consider the consistency with which youth in this study react to disrespectful behavior: first, they demand restoration and then they are likely to escalate the conflict. Youth care more about being disrespected when others are watching. They also consider whether their planned course of action will be successful in achieving the moment-specific goals. In Table 4-19, we list the actions of third parties (including those affiliated with the primary actors) at each of the stages of the battle between Mike and Rich described above. From the narrative, we can see that third parties played a major role in influencing what the respondent was thinking, how he reacted to the initial spark, how the conflict escalated, and if it persisted. The third parties who were affiliated with the main actors also become actively engaged in violence and are likely to be active in the retaliatory planning stages. The third parties who are only tangentially related (e.g., Becky's female friends) also play a role in increasing the potential aversive emotional response of the actors. In the example, Mike's anger is intensified when he overhears Becky's friends and watches her reaction. Other people in the crowd did not seem to participate in the action, but aspects of the physical context certainly played a role. The club managed access of firearms in the location through club security and body search strategies. Gun violence was delayed until the youth were outside of the club. In other examples, youth manage to sneak guns into clubs and, in those cases, shootings happen quicker in the sequence.

**Figure 4-5. Sequential Stages of Urban Youth Violence Events:  
Sexual Competition Example**



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**Table 4-19. An Example of 3rd Party Actions in a Complex Violent Event**

Stage	3rd Party Presence	Social Control	3rd Party Action
Anticipatory Stage	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Group out at club</li> <li>✓ Brought guns with them</li> <li>✓ Stashed guns outside of club</li> </ul>
Opening moves	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Observe</li> </ul>
Counter- moves & Brewing	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Take notice</li> <li>✓ Question</li> </ul>
Persistence	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Gossip, analyze</li> </ul>
Intensification	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Transmit information</li> <li>✓ Observe</li> </ul>
Early Violence	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Just Watch,</li> <li>✓ Use violence</li> </ul>
De-escalation	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Security broke up fist fight</li> </ul>
Stewing	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Rehash violation</li> <li>✓ Plan</li> </ul>
Main Event	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Arm,</li> <li>✓ position,</li> <li>✓ shoot guns</li> </ul>
Closing	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Flee scene</li> <li>✓ Treat injury</li> <li>✓ Regroup</li> </ul>
Assessment	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Observe</li> <li>✓ Avoid cops</li> <li>✓ Treat injury</li> <li>✓ Scout the other side</li> </ul>
Aftermaths	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Injury (multiple)</li> <li>✓ Gossip</li> </ul>
Retaliation planning	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Cultivate opportunity</li> <li>✓ Gossip</li> </ul>
Anticipatory Stage	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Group arousal around harm done</li> <li>✓ Preparation</li> <li>✓ Anticipation</li> </ul>

## Summary and Conclusions

The stages of youth violence events appear to be more complex than Luckenbill's famous naming, blaming, claiming and aggressing explanation for the violence process. In the violent events described, the volleying of blame and responsibility across actors requires a more refined examination of how events unfold. Naming, blaming, and claiming happened frequently but conflict interactions would not necessarily move to serious violence without stewing, brewing, casting, assessment, aftermaths, and planning for retaliation. We illustrated with case data how interactions move through these stages as was relevant for the variety of violent and near-violent events reported. The examination of urban male youth violence reveals that the stages of youth violence are perhaps more complex than the stages of violence among older adults (Felson, 1993; Luckenbill, 1977; Oliver, 1998). As reviewers have pointed out, we acknowledge that the sequential typology we have uncovered may reflect the differences in the level of detailed accounts available for analysis and our analytical strategy rather than more stages compared to prior studies. We were not able to compare our sample data to other samples in this study. The main situational factor that differs is the high prevalence for events to include multiple parties and take on a group-on-group nature. The combination of emergent masculinity, heightened concerns about impression management, immature decision making, peer support for violence, and being marginalized men who are at extreme structural disadvantage may explain, in part, why youth violence is so complex.

This study reaffirms the importance of the situational perspective for understanding violent behavior as a phenomenon. It suggests that Messerschmidt's *crime as structured action theory* and notions about crime as *doing gender* are not only relevant but could provide further understanding of disaggregate crime if we pay close attention to the ways that structural constraints relate to various proximal causes. This study has further specified how violent behavior may be scripted which suggests the need for a dynamic situational or event perspective (Meier, Kennedy, & Sacco, 2001). We have presented a theoretical model that fits the data best. Our thinking is influenced by concepts from symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1963), Rich Felson's situational interactionism, Miethe and Meier's event perspective, Clarke and Cornish's rational choice theory and situational crime prevention, Marcus Felson and Cohen's routine activity theory, and Paul and Patricia Brantingham's crime pattern theory. Our approach is both inductive and deductive, or as Adler and Adler (2008) have described, our analytic approach is *abductive*.

This study has implications for policy, practice, and prevention which start with a paradigm shift away from thinking about "violent youth" and propensities toward violence to focusing on situational, developmental, and structural processes that enable violence to become a resource for youth. Disaggregating youth violence into subtypes and paying careful attention to the nuances of the manner in particular types of violence unfold is critical as a first step toward changing youths' reading of social cues, development of alternative conflict resolution strategies, emotional control, and enhancing youths' ability to think about consequences in moments of angry arousal. The scenarios gleaned from the interviews may be useful in developing materials for violence prevention programs like those

developed by Daniel Webster at Johns Hopkins based on some of the earlier findings from the dataset (Webster, 2007, personal communication). Criminal justice professionals who encounter youth who are perpetrators or victims of violent events could play a vital role in rejecting the use of violence to achieve hegemonic masculinity or other goals. The event narratives reveal many important aspects about how youth are reading social cues, interpreting the behavior of their opponents and their associates, and third parties present at events. The narratives also reveal that conflict and violent behavior is socially isolated away from positive adult influences that could play a role in guiding youth to consider peaceful alternatives. For example, in many reported violent events that were less serious in terms of the event injuries, there was ample evidence to suggest that the participants were very likely to threaten, attack, shoot at, or otherwise harm the other side should the opportunity present itself. Following many violent events, youth continue to dwell on their anger toward their respective opponents. They typically discuss their anger with male peers who often reinforce the storyteller's feelings of mistreatment, injustice, and desire to seek revenge. In terms of scripts that are supportive of violence, the group process plays an incredibly important role before, during and after particular violent incidents. Minor and moderately serious events do matter in preventing violence to escalate and spawn new violence.

The examination of the situational characteristics and scripts of youth violence also provide insights into how investigators might incorporate knowledge about third parties and co-offending processes into their crime solving work. It is important for our crime data systems to systematically capture information that would enable researchers to get an estimate of how prevalent these types of violent events are and whether the elevated rates are adolescent-specific or concentrated among low-income men. We originally hypothesized that embeddedness in friendship clusters of youth who were comparatively more involved in gun-related behaviors would distinguish degrees of involvement in gun violence for respondents. Most of the sample reported multiple types of involvement in gun-related behaviors *and* the young men were deeply enmeshed in networks of peers, who from the respondents' perspectives were also deeply involved in gun-related behaviors and other crimes. Co-offending in violent events appears to be situational as particular features of the situation are more likely to result in the co-participation of peers in violent events.

This study adds to existent knowledge on the peer contexts of violent delinquency and offers insights to the study of co-offending, particularly with regard to gun violence. The peer context, like the neighborhood environment, shapes the cognitive landscape of urban adolescents in particular ways. With cross-sectional data, we are unable to distinguish the direction of influence of peers on gun-related behaviors, but we are clearly able to document the processes by which peers became engaged in violence as co-offenders in particular events. The original study was not on co-offending although it was concerned with understanding the roles of third parties in the situational dynamics of youth violence and how the peer context influenced study youth. This study adds to the growing literature on patterns of gun possession, carrying, and use among urban youth by focusing on the role of the peer context in shaping gun-related behaviors. Despite much evidence on the group nature of violent delinquency, there is still a paucity of research on the group processes in violent offending.

## CHAPTER 5.

### YOUTHS' PERSPECTIVES ON POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS (by Rachel Awkward and Deanna L. Wilkinson)

One final set of questions was considered relevant in identifying strategies for prevention/intervention from the NYCYS dataset. This brief chapter reports respondents' views on violence prevention and community revitalization. At the end of the interview we asked the following questions:

- How can fights on the streets be reduced? (PROBE: ask for strategies)
- What do you think should be done to protect young men like yourself, from violence?
- Is there anything that you think SOMEONE could do during a violent situation to squash it when two individuals are already heated up? What do you think could be done in that type of situation? Do you think it would work? How?
- Do you feel that community leaders in your neighborhood are doing their part to reduce the violence in your neighborhood? Why or why not? What should they be doing?
- Do you feel that young people in your neighborhood are doing their part to reduce the violence in your neighborhood? Why or why not? What should they be doing?
- Do you feel that religious leaders in your neighborhood are doing their part to reduce the violence in your neighborhood? Why or why not? What should they be doing?
- Is there anything that you think ANYONE could be doing to help stop the violence in your neighborhood? What would you suggest?

#### Insights on Solutions from the Respondents

As displayed in Table 5-1, about 21% of the responses to the question "How can fights on the streets be reduced?" and 13% of the responses to "What do you think should be done to protect young men like yourself, from violence?" indicate that avoidance of potentially violent situations and people was the best approach. Miles, Dexter, and Tyrone provide examples of this in the three comments below, suggesting that people need to find it within themselves to avoid violence and use common sense in avoiding people who are likely to engage in violence:

(MILES): Fights on the streets the only way they could be reduced it has to come from the person. [...] For you to get into, involved in a fight it should always be as a result of self-defense, it should be a last resort, it should never be the first option.

(DEXTER): Just stay the fuck away from that nigger. If you know he doin that, sellin drugs, even though he your man, you know what I mean, he could be—he could be your best friend sellin drugs, you know what I mean, you gotta stay away from that nigger, cause you don't know who gonna try kill this niggers, you know what I mean, cause he sell drugs such, and such, you know what I mean, shit like that.

(TYRONE) Well, for one thing... I don't like carrying guns, but that's all they doing now, guys my age, you know what I'm saying? To protect themselves, but to protect me, I'm just going to stay out of trouble really and stay away from people.

Our respondents suggest that –beyond simply avoiding people and places - youth need to use alternatives to fighting such as talking it out. In some of the violent events described in earlier chapters, youths were effective in talking out conflict when they had more information about the situation including knowledge about the people involved, the location, and likelihood that attempts at non-violence would be accepted. Some of their answers reflected the need for internal/individual change while others reflected suggestions for community level changes. Youth feel strongly that the way that they handle conflict is not effective in reducing violence and many believe that it will be nearly impossible to break the cycle.

The next most common solution was for the individual to know and use other alternatives to fighting. Common responses to the question “How can fights on the streets be reduced?” suggested that individuals should walk away from a conversation or argument when it was escalating to the point where violence was likely to transpire, or to respectfully talk out the problem instead of exchanging insults:

(ANDY): We all need to work together you know talk thing[s] out instead of always fighting over our differences.

(SHAQUILLE): Walkin away.

(AHMAD): Everybody just stopped fucking around with each other, you know, instead of you know, looking for the fights and shit, instead of you know, fighting, just talk about it and shit.

These responses reflect that many of these youth feel that talking out a conflict is an effective method for solving disputes, although it is rarely explored.

**Table 5-1. Respondents' Thoughts on How to Address the Violence Problem**

Response:	How can fights on the streets be reduced?		What do you think should be done to protect young men like yourself, from violence?	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Avoid violent people/situations	63	21%	29	13%
By knowing/using alternatives to fighting	54	18%	2	1%
It's out of our control	33	11%	28	12%
I don't know	27	9%	13	6%
Recreation/community centers	23	8%	21	5%
More police	19	6%	12	5%
Take away drugs/guns	18	4%	24	11%
A more cohesive community; better leadership	16	4%	4	2%
More jobs/opportunities, and education about them	12	4%	26	12%
Wear/carry protection (bullet proof vest, gun, knife)	-	-	10	4%
the individual has to change	9	3%	7	3%
Mentoring and support for youth	7	2%	7	3%
People should focus more on themselves than others	6	2%	5	2%
Move away (out of poverty)	-	-	6	3%
Respect each other	4	1%	2	1%
I don't need protection/ I'm the only one that can protect myself	-	-	4	2%
Better education	3	1%	10	4%
Stop trying to be hard	3	1%	-	-
Intervention (curfews, change in drug laws)	3	1%	1	.4%
Police officers need to do their jobs correctly (stop harassing people)	3	1%	1	.4%
Remain positive	1	.3%	6	3%
More programs (e.g. prison rehabilitation programs)	1	.3%	5	2%
Avoid the police	-	-	1	.4%
Fight the system	1	.3%	-	-
Better images of people of color in the media	-	-	1	.4%
I don't care	-	-	1	.4%
TOTAL	306	100%	226	100%

Another common response was less optimistic. Many youth in the sample describe a lack of hope for improving their communities. Unlike the previous responses that indicate at least some level of

individual control, these respondents believe that the violence in their communities is out of their control:

(JAKE): Well, it can't be. Right now the [...] crime rate in New York City, it [...] it's not gonna be reduced. Just because the death penalty or whatever, you get, fights are still gonna go on regardless. Arguments, fights, killing. It's gonna go on because violence is just in this community, that's it.

(CALVIN): Only God can stop the violence by taking it all the hell out of here, but we don't want it to come to that, because there would be nothing left to do.

Another solution offered by 12 respondents relates to community assets. These youth indicate that having more jobs and opportunities for the youth, and informing the youth of these opportunities is the best solution:

(HOWARD): They should have more programs and jobs.

(DJ): Get people jobs, have more job openings for people, the young environment and that would reduce the crime rate, many fights. [...] 'Cause they have nothing to do during the day, so they hand out on the street. [...] They drink, smoke, smoke weed, sell drugs, does everything.

(REGGIE): There should be more jobs out there. That's what I think. You know start giving young heads you know a chance to make legit money. Even if it's doing little bullshit, cleaning walls, maintenance, you know, we need more jobs that's why you have so much violence or whatever. 'Cause everybody on the street ain't working.

(NIKOLAS): You see the thing about this streets is that niggers doing crazy shit 'cause they don't [have] nothing to occupy themselves to do. Know I'm saying. When we have programs like that, that take they mind off a things, know I'm saying they could socialize. Be around other people they age. [...] But when niggers don't got nothing to do and niggers bored, niggers make up shit to fucking do. Shit that's fun. Beating niggers down be fun. Running from police be fun 'cause you don't got nothing else to fucking do.

These young men suggest that there should be more constructive things for them to do in their communities since idleness and the scarcity of jobs in their neighborhoods lead them to engage in activities that are counterproductive or deconstructive in order to occupy their time.

As previously mentioned, the respondents suggest that youth have the greatest impact on the decrease of violence in their neighborhoods. Ways in which youth can reduce the violence problem in their communities were explored through the responses to the following question: What do you think young people should be doing? The majority (56%) of the responses indicate that it is essential for youth to be doing something positive - like attending school for example - in order to decrease the frequency of violent events in their communities. If children regularly attend school, they are less likely to become

involved in activities that involve violence. Much like the responses to the first question, the respondents also suggest that the youth “chill” and stop being so quick to respond to insults in a violent manner.

(GEORGE): [Young people should] stop violence, but they can't do it [if] they got problems. They know such and such coming after them. They run into one of their enemies they know their enemies gonna try to do something bad to them, but that's why they always get them, before they get him.

(KHALID): They should be going to school and getting jobs.

Several respondents believe that some youth fight over issues that are not worthwhile. In the following example, Dan addresses one of these instances:

I think fights can be reduced—You know some of the fights wouldn't even be called for, you know what I am saying. You going to fight, fight for some shit that is worth fighting for. If you're gonna fight over a girl, I ain't fighting over no girl. If she wants you, you can have her. I ain't gonna fight 'cause if she don't want you know what I am saying. If you're gonna fight [over something] like territory that something to fight over, 'cause like if I'm selling right here and you selling over there you don't come over here trying to make money.

Although Dan justifies settling disputes with violence on occasion, he explains that it is unnecessary in trivial circumstances. Despite the heavy reliance on the police department and the criminal justice system, the ability to make choices as an individual is important in reducing violence in urban communities. Additional opinions are summarized in Table 5-2 below.

**Table 5-2. Respondents’ Thoughts on What Youth Should Do to Decrease Violence**

What do you think young people should be doing?	Frequency	Percent
Something positive (e.g. school, studying)	33	56%
Chillin’; stop being quick to respond to insults; stop the violence	15	26%
Listening to the adults that are trying to help them	4	7%
Learning skills to avoid a violent lifestyle	2	3%
Be role models to younger kids	2	3%
Gaining “knowledge of self”	1	2%
They have no control over the violence	1	2%
I don’t know	1	2%
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>100%</b>

The next set of questions relates to community and religious leaders in the neighborhoods and the responses are listed in Table 5-3. There is great similarity between responses for what can be done by community leaders and by religious leaders. The most common responses to the two questions are for the leaders to support, communicate with, and mentor the youth; to create and find funds for more programs/centers that help those in the community; and to be present and help unite the community.

(ANTONY): No I don’t [feel that community leaders in my neighborhood are doing their part to help reduce violence] cause I don’t see no community leaders.[...] They should be like I said more educational places and more recreational places in my neighborhood.

(WESLEY): [Religious leaders] should be fixin up shit, puttin up centers and stuff for kids to get off the streets.

(IVAN): [Community leaders should] just reach out and help kids do the right thing.

The respondents suggest that if community and religious leaders were more actively involved with youth, they would be more likely to get involved with positive people and engage in positive activities. Very few of our study participants were asked these questions so we will not make too much of them,

but the responses presented below do reinforce recommendations made above related to increasing social ties between violent youth and caring adults.

**Table 5-3. Respondents’ Thoughts on What Local Leaders Should Do to Decrease Violence**

What do you think _____ should do?	Community leaders		Religious leaders	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Support, communicate with, and/or mentor the youth	13	32%	11	39%
Create and find funds for more programs/centers that help those in the community	9	22%	5	18%
Be present and help unite the community	5	12%	4	14%
Stay out of people’s business	3	7%	2	7%
Call/ work with police; go to City Hall	3	7%	1	4%
Create a block watch program	3	7%	0	0
Be open to all groups and religions	0	0	2	7%
Do their job correctly	2	5%	1	4%
Create more jobs	2	5%	-	-
Take people to church	0	0	1	4%
I don’t know	1	2%	1	4%
TOTAL:	41	100%	28	100%

## **CHAPTER 6.**

### **TRANSLATING RESEARCH TO PRACTICE: REACHING THE PRACTITIONER AUDIENCE**

#### **Reflections on Assembling and Working with a Practitioner Advisory Board: What Academics Should Consider**

Assembling and working with a local community and justice practitioner advisory board was incredibly useful to the science of this project. At the urging of - and with federal funding support from - the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, I (as Principal Investigator of an NIJ-funded research project) was tasked with developing a particular type of researcher-practitioner partnership –an advisory board. I identified and partnered with key stakeholders in the Columbus area that became known as the Ohio State University Youth Violence Prevention Advisory Board (OSU YVPAB). The research study was originally proposed with an advisory board in Philadelphia, but prior to receiving the grant I changed jobs and moved to Columbus, Ohio. This section documents the process and work of the Advisory Board from my perspective. What makes this effort unique from many of the prior researcher-practitioner collaborative projects in the field of criminal justice is that the study data were not based in the jurisdiction of the practitioners and the design was basic research rather than applied or evaluation research. I faced challenges getting the group started initially because I was not familiar with the community, had no contacts in the community, and was unaware of how "researcher-friendly" the community leaders might be.

At the onset, I felt overwhelmed by the task of building new relationships from scratch. While my public persona may exude confidence, I can be extremely shy and anxious in unknown social situations. Ultimately, I started by writing a letter of invitation that explained the purpose of the project and outlined the specific function of the advisory board. In addition to sending the letters, I began to engage with members of the community by serving on the Board of a local non-profit and attending a few community meetings which provided me opportunities to introduce myself. Finally, I gave a luncheon keynote address at a fund-raiser for a local prevention provider. Several future board members attended the luncheon and expressed interest in collaboration following my remarks. Most of the people I invited to the initial Board meeting attended.

In the first meeting, I had prepared binders with basic educational materials on crime prevention, multi-agency problem solving, the causes and correlates of youth violence, and findings gleaned from the NYCYS dataset. The first meeting was intended to introduce the study, get to know the individuals who showed up, and to figure out the best way to get the most benefit out of the group. As I went through the process of orienting them to the project I discovered several key issues. First, many of the potential board members were highly skeptical of my motivations for requesting their

participation. It was obvious at the initial meeting they were highly devoted to their individual and professional missions related to the youth violence problem. The concept of researchers asking practitioners to be active participants in the examination of academic findings and to inform the move from research to practice was novel, to say the least. It was also evident that – at least in recent history - OSU researchers had not necessarily been actively engaged in community-based research partnerships. Some members were expecting me to take from them without giving anything in return.

I made a conscious decision upfront not to make too many promises but rather to stay focused on figuring out how to facilitate a mutually-beneficial learning process. I let them know at that first meeting that this was my first project of this nature and I encouraged them to help shape our agenda. I also had to overcome some people's initial reaction to me as a white person doing research on Black and Latino young men. Although I pride myself on being a rigorous social scientist, I also have strong inclinations and passion for doing research that is policy relevant in order to make a difference in the lives of young people who are placed at risk for violence. I believe it is my genuine passion to make a difference that motivated the potential board members to agree to participate in the 2-year project. The community leaders I recruited are highly devoted to making a difference and understand that collaboration is important. While I did not know at the outset how this component of the project would pan out, I was energized by the supportive network of people in my group. The format for the first meeting was a bit too much like an academic lecture since the volume of material left little time for discussion. Future meetings were designed to stimulate more dialogue.

The Advisory Board's mission incorporates the fostering of practical solutions from research and building bridges for collaborative change. The OSU YVPAB is comprised of recognized leaders and practitioners who work in areas that directly or indirectly impact at-risk youth in the Columbus area. Many of these community leaders were familiar with each other prior to joining the OSU YVPAB, working together on a range of initiatives in various capacities. The group operates as a think tank to provide feedback on presentations and interpretations of data, the relevance of theory, possible implications of findings, and audience appropriateness. Although it was not an original goal of the group, members became increasingly motivated to move from the level of interpreting research data and articles to active strategic planning for the future. To maximize the potential reach of the researcher-initiated collaborative board, I purposefully set out to recruit representatives from as many branches of the justice and prevention system as possible. Potential members were pulled from the ranks of front-line professionals as well as management. The resultant membership represents a diverse cross-section of non-profit, volunteer and government entities including: The Ohio State University (OSU), Columbus Police Department (CPD) robbery unit, CPD missing/exploited children unit, CPD Homicide/Assault Squad, CPD Crime Prevention Specialist, upper management OSU Police Department, Columbus Public Health Department, Ohio Department of Youth Services, CJ research consultant, Prosecutor Franklin County Courts, Franklin County Juvenile Court, Ohio Adult Parole Authority, Franklin County Courts, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, YWCA, Weinland Park Civic Association, Huckleberry House, Columbus Legal Aid Society, Communities in Schools, Africentric

Personal Development Shop, Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services, Grina Technologies, Community Properties of Ohio, Columbus Near East Pride Center, YMCA/PALS, I know I can, 4ASafeCommunity, and Strategies Against Violence Everywhere.

The agenda for the group's second meeting was to examine two case studies from the data. Board members were sent excerpts from two violent events and provided limited details about the respondents who reported the events. The group was directed to orient their thinking toward hearing their voices and using the interview data to peer in the window of youth violence. Most thought the task was interesting and it led to a few heated discussions based on the assumptions of members about youth involved in violent behavior. Most of the members had not previously thought much about how situational factors matter nor had they read research that directed them toward this perspective. I pushed the group to think about what could be learned about prevention/ intervention from the way study participants talk about the violence in which they are involved by asking them to consider:

- In the early moments of a violent incident, what social cues do they read? (which cues do they consider to be important)
- What concerns motivate them to act?
- Who do they rely on as they process their experiences?
- What needs do they have following a violent incident?
- How are those exposed to violent events (witnesses, bystanders, friends of kids involved in violent acts, etc.) processing what has happened?
- How do our systems & community institutions react to human beings who are involved in violent behavior?
- Understanding the web of potential influence: Who exists in the lives of the youth involved in and affected by particular violent incidents (Let's brainstorm a list)?
- Noticing the aftermath: What mechanisms are in place to define violence as problematic, traumatic, preventable, and not inevitable?
- Working toward changing the script: What are the scripts of youth violence?
- Situational Crime Prevention Strategies that might apply for youth violence.

We ran out of time before we could discuss all of these issues. Below is a summary of the main points of our discussion. Board members were surprised by the way youths' read cues in situations, particularly by how they attributed hostile intention to the acts of others. Members were also surprised by the frequency of seemingly petty concerns leading to very serious outcomes, including death. We had a discussion about the importance of identity/status issues in "sparking" much of the violence and members raised concerns about how to advance the development of secure identities. The discussion drifted toward developing programs to counteract this phenomenon. Many members were astonished by youths' attributions and justifications for aggressive and hurtful action as a conflict escalated toward violence. There was some discussion about how young people come to believe violence is appropriate or necessary. Similarly, group members were shocked by the evidence from the interviews that the young men are self-centered and display disregard for others in their social interactions. The group noted that youth in the sample cases did not appear to make connections between factors that clearly influenced the way conflict was handled and the outcomes that resulted. In particular youth did not seem to make the connection between drug use and provocative action against others. The narratives also made clear that youth are strongly influenced by what they think other young men are doing. Particularly, youth justify their gun use by describing the wide-spread use of guns by other males in their neighborhood.

Board members had varying frames of reference based upon how "in touch" they were with youth involved in violence. Looking at real cases from a different jurisdiction was useful in spurring discussion about how youth violence might be the same or different in Columbus some 12 years after the NYCYS data were collected. All participants felt that data remained relevant and that something could be learned from examining them. When the discussion drifted to the cumulative baggage that young urban males in these types of circumstances face, I pushed the group to focus on thinking about specific conflict events and the individuals who are affected by them rather than predispositions of the youth involved in violence. We discussed the limited resources urban communities have to assist young people in making sense of conflict, coping with violence, or avoiding violence altogether. Next we had a long discussion of comprehensive strategies and multiple facets of the youth violence problem. We identified the need to create structures for alternatives, opportunities, and meaningful connections with adults (mainstream) in order to reduce the isolation that allows violent conflict resolution to pervade. It was difficult for members to comprehend how SCP strategies would be effective for youth violence prevention. The major concern was that the youth violence problem is complex and as such requires a comprehensive approach. The group felt that SCP seemed reactive instead of proactive and would only be feasible in locations in which authorities were in control.

In between Board meetings, the research team was busy completing the data analysis and writing for the project. We solicited volunteers along the way to read various drafts of articles in progress. There were problems with this approach which related mostly to audience. The journal articles were written to an academic audience which prevented some of the Board members from providing adequate feedback. In retrospect it would have been helpful to either direct reviewers toward sections

of the articles or to provide them with a quick guide to translating and understanding the structure of academic articles. My work is qualitative and relies heavily on interview excerpts to illustrate and provide evidence of particular points. An unfamiliar reader may get confused with the extensive literature review and theoretical discussion that are typical of articles in the social sciences. The story is often complex and there are multiple ways in which it can be interpreted. On many occasions, I sent information out to the group without receiving any response. The members of this group are extremely busy people so they often skim or browse materials without providing detailed comments. The most common response I received from volunteers was "this is interesting" or "I learned something from this." What I was hoping to discover from their feedback was more about which parts were of interest, what specifically they had learned, and how they might use the information provided in their own work in the area of youth violence prevention and intervention. I received critical feedback from several members that some papers lacked sufficient attention to what the results might mean for practice. One reviewer wondered why – considering my extensive knowledge about the circumstances of the youths' lives - I did not offer more insights to what types of programs would be necessary to make a positive change. In most cases, all I could do was explain that the publication outlet did not expect or appreciate that type of information.

In reality, my grounded understanding of life experiences of the NYCYS could only get me part way to identifying potentially effective intervention and prevention strategies. In my orientation toward evidence-based practice, each recommendation would require a thorough and systematic review of what is known about the effectiveness of similar approaches. In the absence of resources required for a thorough review of existing knowledge and without the experience of successfully reaching the extremely high risk population I studied, I have preferred to be cautious in making concrete recommendations.

The dialogue with practitioners on the advisory board continued across a variety of other forums such as the Columbus 2012 Bicentennial Commission, the Neighborhood Safety Working Group Social Services Subcommittee, the United Way Community Impact ad hoc Result Committee, the Citizens Circle Bridges out of Poverty Initiative, and the Collective Action for Youth and Neighborhood Development Intervention Network meetings. I attended approximately 40 meetings of these various groups in 2007 and 2008. Interacting regularly with practitioners has provided me with the confidence to experiment with new strategies as I think about the linkage between what we have learned from the NYCYS data and what we have learned from listening to the concerns of practitioners working on the front lines with youth involved in and affected by violence. My research highlights the need to integrate an understanding of the interconnections between macro-structural factors and the micro-transactional aspects of violence in order to develop comprehensive strategies that can begin to break down the structural and situational conditions that facilitate violence. Bridging the gaps in translation between academics and practitioners has become a new area of research interest as a result of this project and I

believe that workable solutions must be co-produced with community practitioners if they are to be effective and long-lasting.

Through their involvement with the OSU YVPAB, the group has self-selected to be consumers of emergent findings on the dynamics of urban youth violence presented to them by a nationally-recognized scholar. The research team has prepared the first two issues of an eNewsletter- *From Research to Practice* that we have begun disseminating to a variety of practitioner audiences including professional counterparts of members of the OSU YVPAB. We have distributed drafts of this report to members of our advisory board and they are circulating the eNewsletter to even wider practitioner audiences. We are exploring other forums for dissemination including Google Groups, paper submissions to existing law enforcement trade journals, and direct mailings. Based on close working relationships with a relatively large practitioner group here in Columbus, we have learned the importance of soliciting feedback in order to assess audience uptake of the materials we distribute.

### **What we learned about Researcher-Practitioner Communication (with Anita Parker and E. Butch Hyundai)**

As mentioned, the OSU YVPAB is self-selected by virtue of their desire to belong to the group and they are eager consumers of emergent findings in the field of youth violence. As such, this group might not be the most ideal sample for studying the processes by which justice and youth-serving prevention/intervention agencies access and utilize academic knowledge. One objective of the NIJ-funded project was to disseminate the findings to the practitioner audience; the mode of delivery and reaching the audience became an obvious issue in the very first meeting of the OSU YVPAB. The research team continues to be challenged to do this task well. As an academic with limited practical field experience in the justice and community prevention/intervention world, the PI's knowledge base for translating research finding into practical strategies is limited. In reality, the investigator's practical knowledge comes more from life experience (particularly, growing up on welfare surrounded by violence and substance abuse in the home environment) than from academic credentials, knowledge of the research literature, or observations on the ground with various justice and community actors. Consequently, her research agenda has been shaped by a desire to gather the life experiences of youth most affected by poverty, violence, and other structural conditions that make transcending negative outcomes challenging.

The research findings and articles the investigator has presented to OSU YVPAB participants are drawn from the viewpoints of urban youth experiencing poverty and violence daily. There is an obvious disconnect between what scholars must write in academic journal articles which are geared toward academic audiences and what would be helpful to practitioners. This paper attempts to take a systemic approach at gathering insights from practitioners (albeit researcher-friendly practitioners) on how

academics can more effectively reach the practitioner audience. The information gained about those processes may be helpful in building a platform for translational research (moving research to action).

### **Methods**

Approximately 16-months into our partnership, members of OSU YVPAB answered a brief survey on their opinions about the usefulness of academic research and theory on urban youth violence to their everyday work. The questions were developed to gain firsthand knowledge of practitioners' experiences. They were asked to offer suggestions of how academic researchers could do a better job of engaging the policy and practitioner audience, and specifically, how research findings could be made more useful to them. We also asked about how they access academic research and how often they use research findings in making strategic decisions about youth violence prevention policy or practice. The final question was designed to gather information on publication outlets that are popular among practitioners. Our intention was to identify outlets that might be appropriate for disseminating the findings from the NIJ-funded study. Nineteen board members completed the survey (15 during a group meeting and 4 via one-on-one interviews).

### **Results**

Prior literature suggests that the gaps in knowledge between researchers (basic scientists) and practitioners are born in part from the distance between those worlds, yet there has been little research focused on the nature and extent of the knowledge gap or communication divide. The first questions asked how useful academic research on urban youth violence (for example) was to the practitioner in their everyday life/work. They were asked to list examples and offer suggestions about how research could be made more useful. One common theme in the answers was board members' reliance on research in order to perform their duties as professionals in the community, as first responders, community outreach workers, youth services professionals, housing management personnel, or college professors. All agreed that academic research was useful and four themes repeated in their responses: It is important in the understanding of youth and their needs, in predicting crime and understanding trends, in development of policy and procedure, and as a point-of-reference. Several members cautioned that research should be used with care. One member wrote, *"We have to be careful, flexible in our approach to interpreting the research gathered on youth violence. For example, academic research misinterpreted can lead to stereotyping segments of our urban population."* Another suggested that, *"Research needs to be timely in order to be useful for practice. Research needs to be accessible."* A third reflected on the amount of time it takes to study research findings carefully. He explained, *"Day-to-Day responsibilities make it difficult to take advantage of research, and it can be hard to decipher."* Another member stated, *"in terms of helpfulness--[it would be more helpful] if the information was illustrated through a practical application experience."*

Next, we asked about the usefulness of theories of youth violence. Again, most respondents felt that theory was important. Theory was useful in predicting and explaining youth behaviors to 45% of the

members; 18% reported that theory was important for developing and policy and procedure; 18% felt theory served as a benchmark which helped to balance expectations for programming; and 18% felt theory was helpful for their professional role, especially in teaching others.

Respondents provided multiple answers to the following question about how they access research. We asked: "What is the most common way you get information about the latest findings on urban youth violence produced by academic researchers?" There was a bit of variation among members with regard to their answers and many reported several sources for information. Involvement in the OSU YVPAB has provided unique opportunities for access to research materials. Thirty-three percent cited getting their information from the OSU YVPAB team. The most common information source (used by 42%) was mainstream media including radio, television, and the Internet. About a third of respondents attend workshops/conference/seminars or training that provided them with access to the latest research findings. About third are involved in some type of research, alone or with colleagues. Books and Journal Articles were a source for 33% of the respondents, and direct mailings and emails were also sources of information for some members of the group.

Next, we asked how frequently research reports and journal articles were used in program design. Some board members rely heavily on information provided by their agency while others actively seek out academic work. For those who answered the question, 27% reported using them very often, 46% reported using them often, and 27% reported using them not often at all. As one member stated, "Rarely can I implement all the strategies suggested in reports but I get new ideas and support for my current program designs."

Members readily provided suggestions for In terms of suggestions for improvement:

[PRACTITIONER1]: "Practitioners and researchers need to work together on a continuous and permanent basis--not just for a project."

[PRACTITIONER2]: "Expand the use of advisory boards like this one. Editorial pieces for major newspaper or task forces, etc. "

[PRACTITIONER3]: "Having us participate in a "simulation model" on training in specific skills related to the research finding. "

[PRACTITIONER4]: "1. Forums like this one--led by Dr. Wilkinson 2-Annual reports. 3. Close relationship w. local public and private schools."

[PRACTITIONER5]: "Do a better job communicating to the individuals, organizations who can affect the change or desired outcomes in reduction in crime, re-incidence, etc."

[PRACTITIONER6]: "Holding local seminars, providing websites with current research topics, coordinate with training programs of local agencies."

[PRACTITIONER7]: "This forum was great, but if it were 'more frequent' it would allow for greater productivity around addressing issues."

*[PRACTITIONER8]: "Not sure--it's sometimes difficult to reach these professional. We can attend conferences and planning meetings by policy makers and practitioners or invite them to a meeting. Reach out to them to see how they'd like to see the research and updates--use lobbyists."*

*[PRACTITIONER9]: "Engage them early in the planning process. Include them in the academic arena--classes, seminars, special lectures as presenters and attendees."*

Finally, we asked members to identify trade journals or outlets that they routinely read as possible places academics may want to place their work. Most people did not answer the question, but the most common response was that members were reading the newsletters of professional organizations such as ACA or APHA. Others listed reports generated by federal agencies such as DOJ, NCPD, and NIC. A few people identified materials distributed by non-profit organizations and potential funding agencies. Most admitted that they rarely have time to keep up on the latest research and do not feel equipped to sort through the vast research available on any topic. Many of the member stakeholders have access to or use limited research to stay informed of trends and possible programs that offer better ways of dealing with at-risk youth. What did not appear in the written survey results nor during the interview format was the frequency, ease of identifying research and being advised on the "how-to" of implementation. Many members expressed a desire for ready access to academic research that could be easily understood. Given the right blend of academic infusion along with coordinated efforts, many member agencies appeared willing to accept assistance from academia that would prove beneficial to reducing youth violence.

As an academic, I think the most important lesson I have gleaned from this process of engaging practitioners in dialogue about research is that my training, experience and professional reward structure do not adequately support these efforts. My expectations for how much influence research can have on practice were probably unrealistic and have evolved over time. I have learned to appreciate the time and resource constraints that are placed on professionals working in the youth violence and justice field with programs and policies already in place. Organizations have histories and those histories are affected by the social and political climate in which professionals are embedded. If it is not accepted as relevant, even the best research may not shift policy or practice. When the story is complicated and in many ways contrary to dominant thinking, it may be even harder to demonstrate the value of basic research. The way in which research is disseminated probably matters most. Traditional academic modes of dissemination are very unlikely to reach the practitioner audience unless those professionals are also pursuing degrees in their free time or involved in some way with university researchers. Given how the structure of jobs often limits opportunities for continuous learning and innovation through experimentation, it is not surprising that busy juvenile justice and community social service providers find it difficult to keep up with the latest research findings. A large part of my job as a researcher is keeping up on the advances in my field, but even I do not have enough time to stay current on everything. My search and retrieve process is episodic and dependent on the needs of projects I am

completing at the time. In this information era, the task of staying informed and integrating new knowledge into our understanding is daunting at best.

### Web-based Dissemination

In an effort to be responsive to some of the suggestions offered by board members who completed the knowledge source survey, we began experimenting with alternative ways of communicating with members and other practitioners. We have successfully created several email lists that we use to disseminate information to core OSU YVPAB members as well as ancillary groups similarly interested in youth violence prevention. We also created an online discussion group hosted at a website that allows for materials to be posted and discussions to be initiated and answered by all members. While we have posted some materials on the website that youth violence prevention practitioners may find useful, the initial response and participation has not been encouraging. As a result, we are exploring alternative ways of engaging practitioners in formal dialogue. We are also trying to figure if the lack of active participation is a function of the particular technical requirements of Google group or some other issue. We hesitate to put additional energy into this site without indications from practitioners that it will be used. The OSU Youth Violence Prevention Advisory Board Google group is located at: <http://groups.google.com/group/osu-youth-violence-prevention-advisory-board>.

The screenshot shows the Google Groups interface for the OSU Youth Violence Prevention Advisory Board. The page has a green header with the group name and a search bar. Below the header, there is a "Home" section with a welcome message and a group photo. The main content area contains a paragraph describing the group's purpose and a list of discussions. A sidebar on the right provides group information, including the number of members (20) and activity level (Low activity).

## CHAPTER 7.

### CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR PREVENTING URBAN YOUTH VIOLENCE

There are many lessons to glean from the current study. The study provides insight for the first time into the myriad of situational and transactional factors that converge with the larger sociogeopolitical context to produce urban male youth violence, and that help explain its outcomes. Through this study it becomes evident that an event approach to understanding the etiology of violence is valuable. The study calls into question efforts to understand the etiology of violence from the traditional criminological perspective of offender characteristics and offender pathology. The report presents a theoretical framework to understand how violent events among urban male youth unfold. The theoretical framework also includes an intervention frame that highlights the importance of developing active roles for practitioners in multiple fields including criminal justice, public health, education, social services, and community support in assisting young people in processing violent and near-violent experiences. These include ways to intervene to de-escalate conflicts that are brewing, as well as interventions aimed at the critical moments immediately after a serious injury or death has occurred, as this crisis period carries much potential for individual reflection and change. In the next section, we take up objective 3 in order to make suggestions regarding the institution of prevention efforts built around the expanded framework of Situational Crime Prevention presented by Cornish and Clarke (2003). The last section of the report raises difficult questions and offers suggestions for policy and practice (e.g., how to reclaim neighborhoods and spaces that have been abandoned by adults; how to deescalate conflict while allowing the opposing parties to save face). We believe if properly implemented and carefully evaluated, the suggestions offered here might inform the development of more effective youth policies of violence prevention and intervention. The question is whether we have the will to follow through on these suggestion to try to curb the cycle of serious urban male violence.

#### **How do the NYCYS data inform the application of Situational Crime Prevention to Violence?**

Rational choice, environmental criminology, and routine activity perspectives are the underlining criminological theories from which situational crime prevention (SCP) was developed. Thus, SCP attempts to reconfigure the opportunity and reward structure for crime. Considerable progress has been made in developing tangible strategies for reducing crime by focusing on ways to: reduce the opportunities for offenders to commit crime; change offenders' perceptions of the likelihood of getting away with crime; and make it seem harder, riskier, and less rewarding to commit crime (Cornish & Clarke, 2003). In 2001, Wortley criticized the SCP framework for ignoring the role of situational factors in shaping motivation (Wortley, 2002). Wortley introduced the concept of situational precipitators and offered an alternative classification schema. Cornish and Clarke responded to Wortley's critique of SCP

by rethinking the approach and making explicit direct links to the underlying rational choice theory. Cornish and Clarke (2003) offer three “ideal” types of offenders –the predatory offender, the mundane offender, and the provoked offender. For each ideal type, they specify their assumptions about crime and criminals, motivation, criminal decision making, situations, situational cues, and applications of situational techniques. SCP is designed to handle all types of crimes and the default type of offender is predatory. Their excellent restatement of the SCP framework reminds readers that crime involves a two-stage decision-making process –the involvement decision and the event decision.

Cornish and Clarke (2003) modified their previously published list to include the following 25 techniques organized by five domains: **increase the effort** (harden targets, control access to facilities, screen exits, deflect offenders, control tools/weapons); **increase the risks** (extend guardianship, assist natural surveillance, reduce anonymity, utilize place managers, strengthen formal surveillance); **reduce the rewards** (conceal targets, remove targets, identify property, disrupt markets, deny benefits); **reduce provocations** (reduce frustrations and stress, avoid disputes, reduce emotional arousal, neutralize peer pressure, discourage imitation); and finally, **remove excuses** (set rules, post instructions, alert conscience, assist compliance, and final control drugs and alcohol). The framework is reproduced here in Table 7-1.

**Table 7-1. Twenty-five Techniques of Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) Cornish & Clarke (2003)**

INCREASE THE EFFORT	INCREASE THE RISK	REDUCE THE REWARDS	REDUCE PROVOCATIONS	REMOVE EXCUSES
<p><b>1. Harden targets</b> immobilizers in cars anti-robbery screens</p>	<p><b>6. Extend guardianship</b> cocooning neighborhood watch</p>	<p><b>11. Conceal targets</b> gender-neutral phone directories off-street parking</p>	<p><b>16. Reduce frustration and stress</b> efficient queuing soothing lighting</p>	<p><b>21. Set rules</b> rental agreements hotel registration</p>
<p><b>2. Control access to facilities</b> alley-gating entry phones</p>	<p><b>7. Assist natural surveillance</b> improved street lighting neighborhood watch hotlines</p>	<p><b>12. Remove targets</b> removable car radios pre-paid public phone cards</p>	<p><b>17. Avoid disputes</b> fixed cab fares reduce crowding in pubs</p>	<p><b>22. Post instructions</b> 'No parking' 'Private property'</p>
<p><b>3. Screen exits</b> tickets needed electronic tags for libraries</p>	<p><b>8. Reduce anonymity</b> taxi driver ID's 'how's my driving?' signs</p>	<p><b>13. Identify property</b> property marking vehicle licensing</p>	<p><b>18. Reduce emotional arousal</b> controls on violent porn prohibit pedophiles working with children</p>	<p><b>23. Alert conscience</b> roadside speed display signs 'shoplifting is stealing'</p>
<p><b>4. Deflect offenders</b> street closures in red light district separate toilets for women</p>	<p><b>9. Utilize place managers</b> train employees to prevent crime support whistle blowers</p>	<p><b>14. Disrupt markets</b> checks on pawn brokers licensed street vendors</p>	<p><b>19. Neutralize peer pressure</b> 'idiots drink and drive' 'it's ok to say no'</p>	<p><b>24. Assist compliance</b> litter bins public lavatories</p>
<p><b>5. Control tools/weapons</b> toughened beer glasses photos on credit cards</p>	<p><b>10. Strengthen formal surveillance</b> speed cameras CCTV in town centers</p>	<p><b>15. Deny benefits</b> ink merchandise tags graffiti cleaning</p>	<p><b>20. Discourage imitation</b> rapid vandalism repair V-chips in TV's</p>	<p><b>25. Control drugs /alcohol</b> breathalyzers in pubs alcohol-free events</p>

Other scholars have argued that SCP is applicable to not only property crime but violent crime as well; arguing that violence is a goal-oriented behavior and it can meet a number of objectives/purposes (Wortley, 2002). Violence that occurs in well-defined and controllable public spaces such as bars, clubs, workplaces, and sports arenas has received the most attention from SCP researchers who are interested in violence (Block & Block, 1995; Felson, Berends, Richardson, & Veno, 1997; Pernanen, 1998; Scott, 2003; Wells, Graham, & West, 1998). Perhaps the most analogous example of situational crime prevention applied to violence is Wortley's studies of prison control (Wortley, 1997, 2001, 2002). Although it is a "capsule environment," the well-documented reliance on violence to achieve status within the prison environment mirrors what inner city young men tell us about their neighborhoods (Toch, 1968). If changes in the prison environment can mitigate the influences of learned scripts that justify the use of violence, perhaps similar approaches can be tailored for urban street corners. While mapping the SCP framework to youth violence is not a straightforward undertaking, the detailed narratives provided by violent youth allow for a unique window on their calculations of risks, rewards, and opportunities.

It is logical to discuss what each of these categories could mean to youth at risk for violence. In terms of thinking about strategies that would **increase the effort** for committing violence, removing access to weapons [#5 on the SCP list] (particularly guns) would increase the effort required of youth to successfully defeat their opponents. Similarly, controlling place entry [#2] and exits [#3] would also increase the effort required to commit violence. In terms of **increasing the risk** of committing violence, most of the SCP techniques relate to the risks of getting caught rather than the risks inherent in the event itself. The reality is that youth take numerous risks in order to engage in violence including: potential death, serious injury, exclusion from groups or places, reputational risk, social group member risks, arrest, and possible incarceration. While increased surveillance capability would be useful, it would only be effective if it lead to increased use of formal social control mechanisms or it translated into informal third party interventions that deescalated conflict and promoted peaceful resolutions. The data suggest that these processes work through the social ties and stature of those third parties. High levels of gun violence in a community and tense relations between the police and residents in many urban communities make it difficult to increase surveillance effectively. This aspect of the environmental context is not easily changed. Improved police-community relations and increased community capacity to exert informal social control are critical elements in increasing the risks of committing youth violence. These strategies move beyond SCP but share the same goals. In neighborhoods such as those we studied, fear and mistrust are common. It will take considerable effort to reinstate adult control over public spaces that are hotbeds of violence.

The next category is **reducing the rewards** of committing the crime. The rewards of violence could include social standing or identity status, gaining material goods, gaining illicit market positioning, gaining relationship positioning, eliminating a rival, domination, biochemical arousal/pleasure reactions to the act of using violence, relieving fear of victimization, victory, and so on. Many of these rewards are experienced as internalized affective responses by the participants in violent events. Since most of the

rewards we have identified are “distributed” by youths’ social group, the effectiveness of reducing rewards would be dependent upon the level of attachment youth have to their reference groups.

In order to **reduce provocations** for violence it would be important to focus on the ways in which youth decode the verbal and non-verbal actions of their opponents in events. Young marginalized urban minority males are at great risk of stress and frustration due to the cumulative impact of family instability, joblessness, discrimination, substance abuse and other mental health problems, chronic poverty, disenfranchisement from institutions, mass incarceration, and other structural conditions that bear down on them across generations (Anderson, 2008). When considering what provokes violence, it is important to consider what people bring to situations (cumulative disadvantage) and what transpires when people engage in social interaction that has the potential to lead to conflict. The examples provided by Clarke and Cornish (2003) under this category do not easily fit to urban youth violence events. We will come back to this point later in our decision of the goals youth are pursuing when they use violence against other young men.

The data presented in chapters 3-5 demonstrate that mapping Clarke and Cornish’s (2003) 25 techniques of Situational Crime Prevention to urban youth violence prevention is complicated. In order to implement several of the SCP techniques, the social order of violence-prone settings needs to change. There are seven central themes - gleaned from an understanding of events as they unfold - that complicate the application of SCP to urban youth violence:

- Co-offending: There is collective decision making among youth
- Audience: Those viewing the event matter for the calculation of costs & rewards (during and after)
- Prediction: Configurations across situational factors may inform the constellation of “necessary” conditions for conflict to escalate to violence
- Need: The population most in need of guardianship is least likely to get it
- Surveillance avoidance: Youth specifically avoid places with surveillance
- Assessment: These assessments of awards and risks need to reflect adolescent thinking and the reality that they often act without thinking
- Spatial Issues: Conflicts often move across spaces

The final category of the SCP framework is to **remove excuses** for violence. Youth of the NYCYSV often reported feeling justified in their use of violence and had excuses for why handling conflict with violence was appropriate from their perspective. Under this global category Clarke and Cornish (2003) suggest that rule setting; posting of instructions; alerting of conscience; assisting with compliance; and controlling drugs/alcohol are important situational crime prevention techniques.

A focus on the “places” of youth violence is one obvious area in which situational crime prevention techniques is relevant. Disputes erupt during the course of everyday activities as people travel through time and space. Particular types of disputes (those that escalate, involve guns, involve multiple participants) are more likely to occur in largely unregulated public spaces. The gradations between public and private spaces that are “populated” by youths become relevant in thinking about prevention and control of what happens in those places. Although street corners, sidewalks, and stoops are generally open to the observation of many people in a densely populated urban neighborhood, they are also ambiguous spaces in terms of social control (see Wilkinson, 2007). Within schools, jails, parks, bars, apartment buildings, and other “closed” settings, violence is likely to cluster in spaces with less surveillance, ambiguous definitions of who is in charge, and expectations about what types of behaviors would be tolerated in the space. The interdependency between formal and informal social controls in distressed urban neighborhoods is also important. As adults withdraw from public spaces, youth enter and ultimately dominate those spaces. The social order of youth-dominated spaces may be regulated by the use of violence as social control (Wilkinson, Beaty, & Lurry, 2009). As is evident in our analysis, the control of gun availability within the location was the most critical feature in preventing shootings and other serious outcomes in those spaces in which place handlers were employed.

The question becomes what would it take for authorities or community residents to reclaim public spaces that have been ambiguous, neglected, or otherwise abandoned? Those places attract motivated offenders. They also set the stage or provide a scene in which violence is used to exert power over others in order to reach goals. Part of the reason there are hotspots of youth violence is that particular physical and social settings provide cues to youth who enter those settings that violence is common - perhaps necessary - and certainly expected in that setting. Setting rules and posting notices of those rules in unregulated places do not make sense unless those places will become regulated. Rules are only useful if they are enforced. In terms of alerting conscience, it seems reasonable to educate youth that fighting and other forms of violence are criminal acts with real consequences. Whether posting such notices would have an impact on youth is an empirical question. Our data suggests that youth are not thinking about the potential consequences of lower levels of violence and aggression as criminal behavior. Fighting is perceived as something males do. The rules are somewhat ambiguous in terms of who starts the fight, who gets injured, and who is ultimately responsible for the conduct in the eyes of the law.

In chapter 3, we present several examples of how intoxication was used as an excuse for violence and other provocative behavior. The life history interviews provide evidence that youth are routinely under the influence of substances in their daily lives. Although many of them were younger than the legal drinking age in New York State, they had little to no trouble gaining access to alcohol and a variety of illicit drugs. Enforcement strategies to reduce the consumption and distribution of substances globally have not been effective despite the massive resources that have been devoted to them. From the SCP perspective, it would be logical to control alcohol and drug consumption by monitoring sobriety of patrons as a way of restricting access to physical locations. A public health

strategy would be to target social marketing toward youth people that challenges the pervasive belief that intoxication excuses violence.

The theoretical model presented in chapter 4 shows that youth are making numerous decisions before, during, and after violent or near-violent events. The timeframe of decision-making is relatively short in most cases and decision-making is both individualized and collective. Information is processed rapidly and youth ultimately make decisions based on incomplete and often inaccurate information. The calculus of costs and benefits includes factors beyond the legal consequences which are often considered only after youth have engaged in violence. While many youth described strategies to avoid legal consequences and some were effectively deterred from carrying guns because of the threat of arrest, they still reported risking arrest when they felt that violence was necessary in a situation.

SCP calls for understanding the crime triangle and the perspectives of each potential participant in a crime event. Perhaps the most useful role of the NYCYS data is to provide insights into what offenders are thinking before, during, and after violent and near-violent events. It also provides some insights into victims' thoughts as many respondents reported on events in which they were attacked by an opponent. The rational choice model underlying SCP makes certain assumptions about how individuals evaluate costs and benefits. It assumes particular types of values/goals and a time perspective that did not match up with the responses of many of our youth when reflecting on their thoughts about costs and benefits at the time of the crime. Without judging the perspective of violent youth we can better understand how they come to justify their actions in the contexts in which violence unfolds. The first question we might answer is what did the young men in the NYCYS value? This question is not easily answered but extremely important in terms of figuring out how to reduce youth violence. Values/goals are only a small part of the explanation of the social geometry of violence. Other aspects that are critically important are expectations about how others will behave and expectations about the dangerousness of the environment in which they inhabit.

## **Broader Conclusions on Youth Violence Prevention**

We are able to identify some of the key aspects of youths' goals/values including: self-worth, respect (which is defined as expression of worth or value within a social group), autonomy, freedom, acceptance, social standing, protection/security, economic viability, survival, excitement, and social relationships. None of the items on this list are outside the range of healthy adolescent development. The problematic part of achieving these goals is that most youth in our study do not have adequate family, community, or societal supports to reach some or all of the values/goals. Youth are challenged to overcome multiple layers of disadvantage in order to get their basic needs met. Youths' global values and goals may not necessarily match with the more proximal goals during potential conflict situations as they are more likely to reflect the immediate need for survival, preservation of social standing, preservation of rights, and avoiding consequences directly related to that moment in time. The ways in which youths integrate a violent experience into their self-perception can only be understood within the context of knowing how others responded, how emotions were managed, and whether violence was

condoned or condemned by members of the social network. Our theoretical model proposes that involvement in violent incidents can be a pivotal moment for youth if there are alternatives in place. What can we learn about prevention/intervention from the WAY study participants talk about the violence in which they are involved?

- In the early moments of a violent incident, what social cues do they read (which cues do they consider to be important)?
- What concerns motivate them to act?
- Who do they rely on as they process their experiences?
- What needs do they have following a violent incident?
- How are those exposed to violent events (witnesses, bystanders, friends of kids involved in violent acts, etc.) processing what has happened?
- How do our systems and community institutions react to human beings who are involved in violent behavior?
- In the weeks after a violent incident, what social cues do they read?

We have answered most of these questions in Chapters 3 and 4. To review, we find that youth make a variety of presumptions about the hostile intentions of potential opponents they encounter as they go about their daily lives. Youth read unknown situations as extremely dangerous and believe that they require the highest levels of vigilance and perhaps even preemptive violence. The young men in the study are very sensitive to overt and symbolic attacks on their social standing and identity. They expect to be treated with respect regardless of the disrespect they show others. They often read cues in social situations in order to establish the credibility of potential threats as well as to figure out how to gain control (the upperhand) in the situation. The youth in this study are primarily concerned about their safety and establishing and maintaining their social identities.

In most cases youth turn to their networks of friends and associates to process the events they experience. Many youth report covering up or downplaying the seriousness of violent events to their immediate family members, particularly mothers and girlfriends. Unfortunately, we did not ask respondents in the NYCYS sample directly about who they went to after the event. Study youth rarely cooperate with law enforcement despite their attempts to motivate youth to do so by emphasizing how the information would enable officers to get justice on their behalf. Since youth are not confident in law enforcement's ability to obtain justice, they prefer to handle their conflicts outside of the law. Depending on how serious the violent event was, youth experience a variety of aftermaths. For seriously injured youth, such as those who are paralyzed or deformed following a violent incident, physical recovery is likely the most difficult task at hand. The death or long-term incarceration of a friend, family member, or associate also takes a toll on youth in the study. The desire or perceived need to exact justice or seek revenge is on the minds of about a third of the sample. Some youth clearly need

psychological counseling to deal with the post-traumatic aftermath of the events, but the peer group is the primary source of resources and social support for study youth. Whatever thoughts or feelings they have about the situation are usually discussed with friends in the context of socializing --typically getting high or drunk.

Conflict attracts the attention of crowds despite the potential dangers. The event often becomes the talk of the streets for days and weeks after it occurs and its narrative often becomes distorted as it is retold. In some cases the rumors that ripple through the community after an incident spark the next violent encounter. Youth are typically the ones who spread these rumors and violence provides something dramatic to talk about beyond the mundane daily routine of poor urban communities. People express their feelings and sometimes outrage as they talk about events they have witnessed or heard about. Since gossip is one of the rewards of violence, strategies to eliminate or change the nature of gossip about youth violence should be implemented. Several school-based violence prevention programs have tried educational campaigns to make youth aware of how gossip about conflict can lead to violence. Without gossip, the status and excitement often associated with perpetration of violence can be diminished. Age-graded social isolation of public spaces makes it difficult for outsiders (adults and authorities) to strongly influence the spread of gossip about conflict and violence, so it is easier to manage gossip within the school context than in the neighborhood surrounding it. In the school context, studies have shown that peers can have a direct impact on tolerance for gossip but whether those strategies could be introduced on street corners remains questionable (Adler & Adler, 1998; Eder, 1995). Alternative dispute resolution strategies would be most useful in preventing violence if there was a way to influence leaders within the peer groups who would have the ability to calm group members when doing so would benefit the group.

In the weeks following a violent or even a near violent event, many youth report being "on guard" or "on point". Opposition groups attack each other when the perceived opportunity is available, so youth stay alert in anticipation of potential retaliation or other fall out from previous violent encounters. The presence of guns cannot be overlooked, and while efforts at gun control have largely failed to reduce the amount and use of firearms in many neighborhoods, more resources should be devoted to gun suppression. Some youth carry a weapon at all times while others make sure that a gun is readily available. Some youth avoid people and places to calm the conflict, while others actively seek out additional conflict without pause.

Violence, especially serious violence, is traumatic for all people who are present when it occurs. Youth who engage in violence are negatively affected by violence in a variety of ways, regardless of the level of injury. As described in Wilkinson and Carr (2008), over the young life course, the youth in the NYCYS sample have been highly exposed to violent conflict resolution. Despite high rates of documented community violence in many American cities, very few services are available to assess or treat associated mental health and social/emotional development problems among youth who navigate those dangerous spaces. Second, even given neighborhood conditions that foster violence, the

likelihood of a violent event being prevented or occurring is based on a confluence of circumstances, such as the role of peers and bystanders. Increasing the opportunities for prosocial interactions or underscoring the positive interventions of peers can help reduce violent events. More specifically, since many conflicts resemble contests of character among primary actors, attention should be focused on identifying ways to deescalate conflict without causing either side to lose face. At a community level, developing and testing informal mechanisms to mediate conflict and assist youth in understanding the violent event is a worthwhile strategy. Variations of this approach have been utilized in gang mediation programs and other community-based strategies that attempt to break into the isolated youth groups to negotiate peace, if only temporarily. These efforts are labor intensive and require the employment of powerful leaders who are respected by youth in the community. Since we have not reviewed any empirical studies on the effectiveness of these strategies or the challenges to their implementation, our recommendation comes from our findings. Caring adults who want to break the cycle of violence among youth and young adults should read the interview data closely as it provides additional insights on how to best influence youth and promote healthy development. The event narratives illustrate how youth are caught up in a vicious cycle that perpetrates pain, suffering, and hopelessness. Youths and their families must be a major part of the solution if we are going to end this cycle.

The choice to be violent in specific situations may not be a morally good decision, but it is a rational decision based on a calculus of the consequences of other behavioral choices. For adolescents in dangerous, potentially lethal contexts, threat trumps morality in an environment in which there is a reasonable expectation of lethal attack. The developmental context of (violent) inner cities shapes a decision-making heuristic among adolescents based on their best and immediate interests, rather than an abstract code of norms that exist only outside the immediate context. These youths perceive their environment as one that demands violence in order to ensure self-preservation. Adolescents face two developmental issues simultaneously – concerns for social status among peers and concerns for personal safety. These two developmental needs often go unmet in these contexts of danger. Legal compliance has doubtful value and low payoff for many of these adolescents.

In many ways Operation Ceasefire in Boston (circa 1994) was based on assumptions about group membership and third party action in conflict situations. Although the Boston strategy had many facets, one key component of the “pulling levers” approach was collective liability – namely holding all youth liable for the actions of a few. Ironically, according to Black’s ideas, collective liability is one of the driving forces behind vengeance violence. Perhaps the intervention message in the Boston project was delivered to youth in a language they understood. The strategy also emphasized that individuals and groups were making decisions when they engaged in violence and youth were made aware of the variety of consequences for those decisions. According to the description of the project, the Boston approach offered incentives for nonviolence which had the potential to alter youths’ perceptions of the opportunities available to them. Another part of the strategy was using information about opposition groups to subvert violence. In at least half of the violent events described in this study, youth had some type of prior conflict with the opponent(s) they battled with. The offender thinking about violence could

be used to tailor prevention and intervention strategies. The situational patterns of violent events provide clues to law enforcement and service providers about ways security can be improved in the spaces where youths spend time and often control.

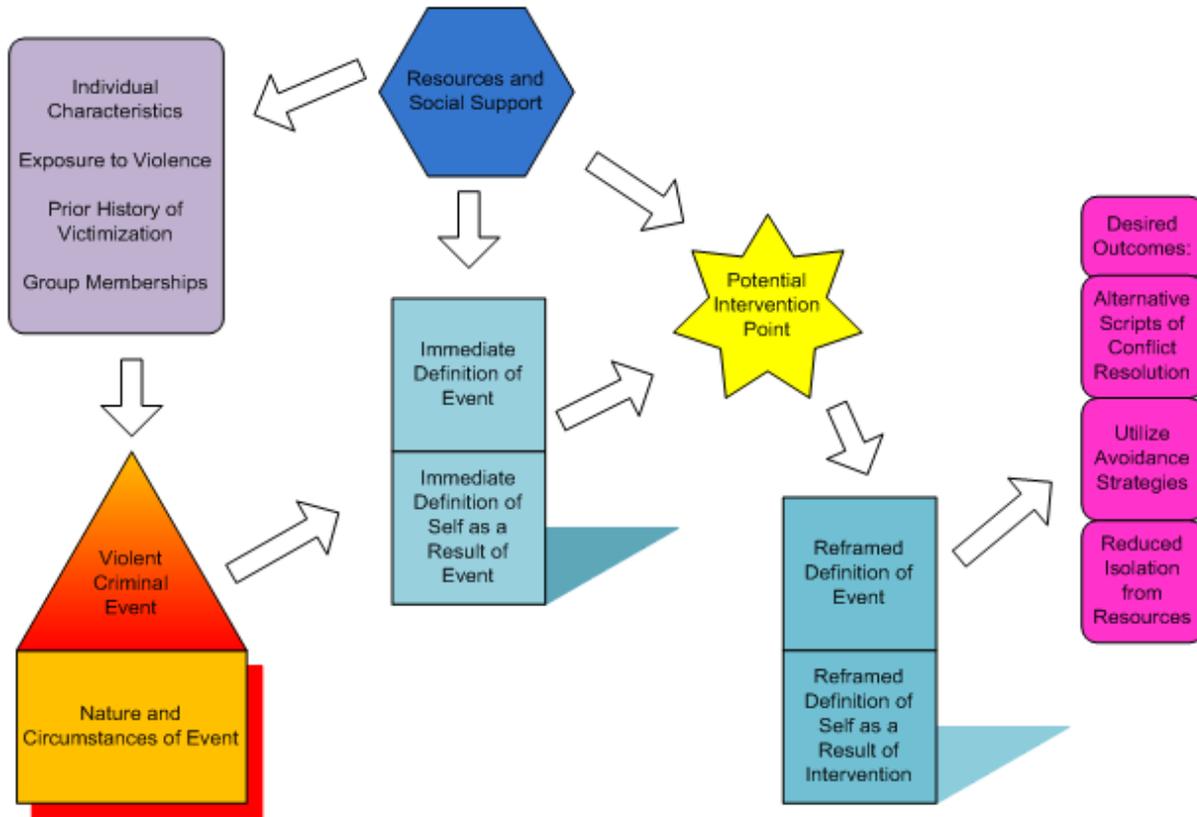
At a community level, developing and testing informal mechanisms to mediate conflict and assist youth in making sense of the violent event is a worthwhile strategy. Variations of this approach have been tried in gang mediation programs and other community-based strategies that attempt to break into the isolated youth groups to negotiate peace, no matter how short lived. These efforts are labor intensive and require the employment of powerful leaders who are respected by youth in the community. We have not reviewed any empirical studies on the effectiveness of these strategies or the challenges to implementation. Our recommendations come from our findings. We believe that caring adults who want to make a difference in breaking the cycle of violence among youth should be encouraged to confront their own fears about neighborhood youth in terms of how fear has led to adult withdrawal from collective responsibilities in nurturing children. By getting to know and connect with youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods community adults can assist in reducing the isolation young people experience from the older generations. Isolation away from positive caring adults is a key factor in the spread of violence and fear among youth. The event narratives illustrate how youth are caught up in a vicious cycle that perpetrates pain, suffering, and hopelessness. In at least half of the violent events described in this study youth had some type of prior conflict with the opponent(s) they battled with. Offender thinking about violence could be used to tailor prevention and intervention strategies. The situational patterns of violent events provide clues to law enforcement and service providers about how to improve security in the spaces where youths spend time and often control.

Educational programs geared toward deconstructing the group-think processes operating among youth, bystander attraction to violence as entertainment, and the influence of violent media in reinforcing violence as a problem solving tool can go a long way in challenge scripts that support violence. The perception (or reality) of bystander/third party reinforcement of violent actions in dispute situations can be altered in setting specific ways. For example, social norms across schools and even across groups of youth differ widely with regard to the acceptability of violence in conflict situations. Micro contexts such as neighborhood hang outs, drug markets, or night clubs also have context specific social norms. Often the differences across settings are subtle but important. Violent or peaceful behavior is shaped in part by perceptions of the acceptability of violence among those present in a setting. Recent advances in bystander educational training interventions have shown successful outcomes in reducing bullying behavior and sexual violence among youth (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante, 2007; Slaby, Wilson-Brewer, & Dashare, 1994; Stueve, Dash, O'Donnell, Tehranifar, Wilson-Simmons, Slaby, & Link, 2006). School-based curriculum focuses on enlightening youth about how third party action can make a difference in escalating or de-escalating conflict to violence. Some violence would be prevented simply by reducing the rewards youth experience as a result of audience response, gossip, or reputation gained from violence. Teaching youth to manage reactions to violence they may witness can make a difference. Third parties exposed to violence, regardless of their level of involvement in the incident, are learning scripts for violent conflict resolution. When possible, it would be better to eliminate exposure in the first place. When eliminating exposure is not possible, youth must be

prepared with the skills to process vicarious victimization in ways that do not promote feelings of group-think, violence inevitability, or powerlessness to avoid violence.

In Figure 7-1, an event-based intervention heuristic model is presented. Research has found that people are more receptive to change in times of crisis or when life events somehow alter their potential future directions. Involvement in a violent dispute may be an opportunity for a “teachable moment” in the youths’ lives. The moment will be lost if youth are socially isolated from caring adults or others who could provide resources for transforming a difficult situation into a turning point. Youth may be relatively more reflective and malleable right after something dramatic happens to them --particularly in cases in which they or one of their friends is seriously injured or worse. It makes sense to think that a violent injury serious enough to require hospital care would cause an individual to pause and search for meaning. It also makes sense to think that an arrest and potential of serving time for a violent felony would similarly cause a person to pause. While these assumptions seem logical they are untested and unproven. We have described at least two barriers that complicate breaking the cycle of violence in disadvantaged high violence neighborhoods. First, supportive relationships between youth involved in violence and adults are rare. Second, youth seek and get violence-reinforcing messages and general social support from their near same-age peers.

Figure 7-1. Reframing the Scripts of Urban Youth Violence: An Event-Based Intervention Approach



A serious violent event affects many parts of the larger systems that organize society. The tasks associated with handling violent conflict are differentiated in such a way that one part may impede the ability of another to intervene effectively. For example, in most jurisdictions, legal statutes require that medical staff notify law enforcement in any cases of firearm injury. Studies in Philadelphia found that compliance with the law was infrequent. The needs of the medical and justice system work at odds with each other. Patient confidentiality and trust is important in providing quality medical care and in establishing credibility with patients in order to affect change. The assumption is that cooperating with police investigations may interfere with patient care. This same type of tension can exist between law enforcement, schools, community agencies, and parents who work closely with young people.

There are currently no coordinated strategies across systems. The question becomes what is the best way to "reach" a young person who has learned to resolve conflicts with violence? What is the best way to intervene to change the effects that high rates of exposure to violence in particular

neighborhoods have on young people as they are growing? We know that adequate social supports are not available for many youth. We also know that individuals are resilient and develop coping strategies including using violence to cope with prior victimization experiences. One major way that youth without adequate support process their involvement in violent events is through repeated social interactions with the peer network. Coordinated efforts would make the most sense; the group process needs to be integrated into our strategies for addressing the urban youth violence problem across every system. Establishing protocols for information sharing, collective decision making, and getting the buy-in from agencies with diverse views of the problem and the offender will likely be a great challenge. We feel it is important to start with offenders' networks and use the information that is gathered during investigations, community responses, medical treatment, and court proceedings to prevent future violent crimes. In order to have an impact on violence reduction at the community level, it is important to plot the social organization of delinquent youth groups across geographic space and to keep data on which groups are aligned, at war, or non-conflicting in addition to where conflicts have erupted. When a violent incident happens between groups of youth, it will be important to understand the relationships between co-offenders and combatants. When charges are filed for a violent crime involving multiple co-offenders, what happens to those records as they move through the juvenile or criminal justice system? For example, are co-offenders charged the same? Do they see the same judge? If they are sentenced to detention, do they go to the same facility? Are they assigned to the same probation or parole officer? If yes, is that working? If no, is information shared about what is learned from interactions with co-offenders that might be relevant for affecting change? Are they getting a consistent message that affirms healthy lifestyle choices and rejects violence?

Pilot studies are needed to experiment with a coordinated approach to addressing the urban youth violence problem. The efforts need to start in the community with parents, neighbors, community leaders, and agency professionals who interact routinely with neighborhood youth. Alternative conflict resolution strategies need to be developed and practiced consistently by adults as an important tool in teaching nonviolence. In our current approach, we teach youth to appeal to authority and the legal system for resolving conflict. Youth in the NYCYS do not have faith in the system to handle their grievances so they use the tools they know—violence. **They need different tools!** They need to learn peaceful conflict resolution strategies developed through direct interaction with caring adults and youths modeling such behavior. Community leaders and justice practitioners need more effective tools, too. We would like to offer the results of this study as a potential resource for developing more effectiveness strategies for reaching high risk youth.

There are several limitations to the present study, which future research should seek to remedy. Respondents' accounts of their neighborhood and violent experiences are taken at face value. Although the validity of such interview data will always be open to criticism, we carefully scrutinized the data for internal consistency. For example, in the event narratives the presence and involvement of third parties is discovered in multiple ways, making cross-checking possible. The interviewers also challenged respondents during the interview when obvious inconsistencies emerged. The interviews included here

are the cases in which the narratives were deemed to be internally consistent, and those judged to be problematic were excluded (33 in all). Certain facts were checked during the flow of the interview. The precision of these narratives probably matter less than demonstrating a general consistency across multiple sections of the interview. The present study focused only on African-American, Puerto Rican, and multi-racial inner city males who were, or had been, violent offenders. The study results are not generalizable to other racial/ethnic groups nor are they necessarily representative of all youth in the study neighborhoods. The study was cross-sectional and did not follow-up with youth over a period of time. Future work should also examine the experiences of young women and youth generally who have not engaged in violent behavior; attention should be focused on those younger than sixteen.

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## REFERENCE DICTIONARY OF SLANG TERMS

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### Slang Term or Phrase: Meaning or Synonym

**Ambience:** ambulance

**Amp / Amped:** hype / instigate

**Ass out:** flip the script / do the opposite of what is normal

**Assed out:** beaten severely / dead / going hay-wire

**B., son, kid, man, boy:** a term of reference to a person like a buddy

**Back in the days:** a while ago

**Bama/Jam:** party

**Banger:** razor/box cutter

**Beat me in the head:** don't lie to me / or don't play me for a fool.

**Beef:** conflict, fight, shootout

**Bid:** jail or prison sentence

**Big Willy:** big time / tough guy / getting money /powerful figure on the street

**Blasted / barking / busting /bucking / spraying / wetting / letting off:** shot or shooting a firearm

**Blazzay-blazzay:** so on, so forth / etc. / whatever

**Blunts:** a cigarette of marijuana

**Boated / jettied:** to leave or flee/ run or running your fastest /fleeing

**Bodega:** corner store

**Boom:** a conjunction equivalent to: so, therefore, and or then.

**Boosting:** shoplifting

**Bounce:** leave the scene, motivate

**Bouncer:** bodyguards in clubs/bars

**Break it down:** explain something to a person, talking

**Buck /bust at /let off:** shoot at

**Bugged out:** confused / going crazy

**Busted:** caught / ugly

**Cat:** a guy / referring to a person

**Catch rec.:** To beat some people or someone up for fun.

**Check yourself:** stop and analyze yourself before going any further

**Cheese / cream / loot / Benjamins /cash / cheddar / beans /dough /greenbacks :** money

**Chicken head:** girl / bitch / low class female or male

**Chill / chilling:** cool down / hold your head / maintain / basically to stop / relaxing with the guys

**Chump/chumped:** Someone who has been taken advantaged of/ a fool /to be taken advantage of/ to be made a fool

**C-Low:** dice game

**Clique / crew / posse / homeboys/boys:** a group of guys that hang out together

**Clocking me / ice grill / icing / screwing you:** looking hard at a person / Hard stare/ poker face

**Cock-block:** cut throat

**Coke / yey-yo:** cocaine

**Coming off:** got through, a success

**Connect:** connection / networking /meet up

**Crib:** your house or place of residence

**Cut-throat:** kick dirt / destroy one's name or reputation

**Dead/Deaded:** resolved, squashed beef or conflict

**Deep (mucho deep):** traveling with a large group of people

**Desert / Q-Borough:** Queens

**D- L/on the down low:** to do something behind someone's back /down low / secretive

**Diss / Dissed / Disrespected:** lack of respect/ to put someone down/ to deny someone's status/ to make a fool of someone/ to show disregard / to embarrass/ treated badly / dishonored

**Doffing dopes:** to get rid of a person

**Dolo:** solo or alone

**Dope:** smack / boy /heroin

**Dough:** money

**Duece Duece:** twenty-two gun

**Dutch paper:** rolling paper for marijuana

**Drama / beef / trauma:** conflict / fight / shooting

**Earling:** to smoke the majority or all of a joint (marijuana cigarette)

**Fams:** friends or family

**Fell off / falling off:** someone who lost everything or is about to lose everything.

**Flake :** fake person

**4 Pound :** 45 Magnum gun

**Fronting / faking moves or jacks:** faking / pretending / simply just starting a fight / acting as if you are going to do or did something that one wouldn't even do

**Fucked up:** messed up/ unsuccessful action

**Fucked him up:** physically hurt someone badly / hurt someone's reputation badly

**Get down:** do things/ act

**Get fucked up:** heavy alcohol or drug use in an episode/ to get seriously injured in a violent event / suffering emotional pain

**Ghat / Gat / pistol /burner / steel / cronze / toolie / toast / heat / joint:** gun

**Ghost / Muerto / Elvis:** dead

**Gi'mme Feet:** give someone room or space

**Glock:** type of gun / popular brand of 9mm

**G.P.:** general purpose, general practice

**Grills/ ice grills :** hard stare with the impression of dislike

**Hard Profiling:** an attempt to look hard, tough

**A Head / Zombie:** crackhead

**Herb / Herbus Cannibus / Punk:** weak / soft / push over / sucker /victim

**Herbed:** to chicken out or back down/ to display cowardice, intimidation, or fear/to be manipulated or tricked into doing something for another person without awareness of being manipulated

**Homes or homie / homeboy:** friend

**Hood / N'hood / 'Round my way:** neighborhood or block

**Hooty:** an older model car / beat up / something that might get you to A or B.

**House:** a building in jail or prison

**It's all good? :** It's alright or okay / rationalization

**Jects / PJs:** the projects /public housing

**Joint:** jail / years / guns / a cigarette of marijuana/ in some cases refers to a gun

**Jump off / Set off:** make happen / happen suddenly / or develop suddenly

**Keep it real:** no playing games / being honest / truthful

**Kicking or kick it:** talking or flirting / politicking

**Lace:** put together or finesse with ease

**Legit:** legitimate

**Lingo:** conversation /language

**Mad:** crazy / a lot of something / a great deal

**Madina / Bucktown / Crooklyn / Brooknam:** Brooklyn

**Make a def.:** definite

**Mecca / City:** Manhattan

**Money / scrams:** referring to a person

**money/ cream/ lout /cash /dough /the Benjamins/getting paid:** refers to financial resources -money

**The Monster:** AIDS

**No doubt /no diggity:** agreeing with a statement (emphasizers)

**Off the hook:** Bugging out, out of hand

**Off point:** completely unaware of any situation at hand.

**On point:** aware at all times / prepared

**Parlay:** relaxing / steady in the situation

**Paranoid / p'noid:** scared / shook / nervous / fearful

**Peeps / boys / "Ace Boone Coon":** close friends / people in your crew or clique / immediate friends

**Pelong / Boogie down / BX:** Bronx

**Perpetrator:** phony / fake person

**Pet. / pettro:** short for petrified or scared

**Phat :** nice/ expensive / good / excellent

**Pistol whip / gun butt:** getting hit with a gun

**Played:** taken advantage of, made a fool of, chumped

**Playing someone:** treat you like a sucker

**Play him close:** keep a close watch on someone in order to be aware

**Po Po / 5-0 / Po-9 / c-cipher / Teddy /Bonton:** Police

**Posse:** friend /group /gang /crew

**Props:** getting attention / rewards / reinforcement / proper treatment / esteem / credit / points

**Punk/ punked:** a victim/ someone who has lost a fight badly/

**Rah rah:** talking trash or riffing

**Ranking:** jokes on each other / out joking

**Rap:** talk

**Rep:** reputation

**Re-up:** re-supplying drugs for a drug spot

**Ruger:** a gun (ranges from a 9 mm to a semi automatic)

**Scandal:** dirty information about a person

**Scrums boogie:** referring to a person /girl

**Sell me no dreams:** making up stories or fantasies / lying

**Sergeant :** police supervisor, sheriff.

**Shook:** scared / nervous / scaredy cat / pussy

**Shorty:** a female or a young kid

**Shotty:** type of gun

**Slick shit:** [used in reference to an action] something

**Sling / pitching / clocking dough:** sell drugs / making money

**Smoked:** shot at, killed or smoked / hit hard

**Snitch / pigeon / herb:** one who tells on another that doesn't last long at all / considered weak.

**Snuff/ Snuffed:** hitting a person unexpectedly "a cheap shot"

**Spilly:** the "spot"

**Squashed / deaded:** settled or stopped conflict

**Staredown:** grilling, staring intently at someone with dislike

**Stash:** drug

**Stomping grounds:** grounds that have already been pioneered / one's place of dwelling or business spot.

**Stunting:** showing off / fronting

**Suspect:** victim / fishy person

**Sweeting someone:** hounding someone, constantly annoying

**Take him out:** eliminate the person or their influence

**"The game":** selling drugs

**Thug:** murderer/ robber/criminal /tough guy

**Tool:** weapon

**Trees /weed / scammas / smoke:** Marijuana

**Trick:** a person who spends money for sex

**True that:** when agreeing with a statement

**Weeded / blunted / charged / blazed:** high on marijuana

**Weedgate:** weed spot

**Went low/ on the down low:** An expression of doing things under the surface or behind the scenes / doing things that violate the official rules such as hitting someone below the belt

**Word up?/ Word?:** used as a form of agreement or validation of a statement made by another person/ can also be used to question a statement in much the same way as the word really is used among middle class persons

**Wife or wifey:** steady girlfriend / could also refer to a female marriage partner when marriage has occurred

**Wilding/bugging:** doing something crazy or wild, going all out, doing something stupid, going to extremes in terms of using violence

**X:** unknown or dead person

**Zombie:** crack head / a person who is wasting away on drugs