

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

Final Report

Prepared by

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the OSU Youth Violence Prevention Advisory Board

The Ohio State University

Columbus, Ohio

Department of Human Development and Family Science

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Submitted to the National Institute of Justice

December 22, 2008

Revised May 30, 2009

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Executive Summary Report

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Submitted to the National Institute of Justice

December 22, 2008

Revised May 29, 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
EVENT DYNAMICS AND THE ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES
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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.

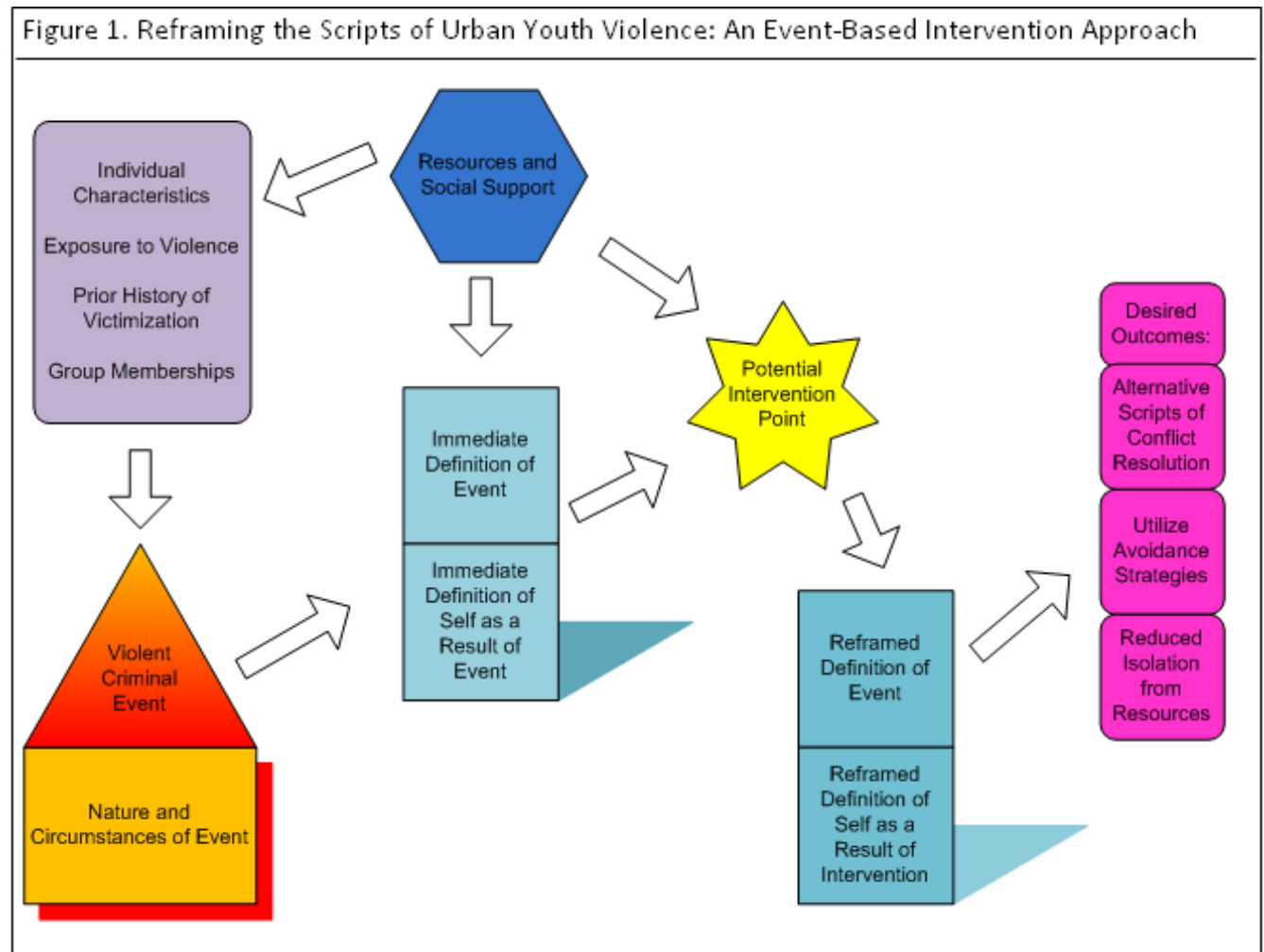
SCP calls for understanding the crime triangle and the perspectives of each potential participant in a crime event. Perhaps the most useful role of the NYCYS data is to provide insights into what offenders are thinking before, during, and after violent and near-violent events. The data also provide insights 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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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	%
NO WEAPON														
No Weapon	49	21%	99	43%	37	16%	11	5%	37	16%	0	0%	229	31%
WEAPON, BUT NOT USED														
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%
USED TO THREATEN														
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%
HIT with, BEAT, or PISTOL-WHIPPED														
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%
STABBED/CUT/SLICED														
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%
FIRED														
Gun	1	0%	75	31%	5	2%	10	4%	119	49%	34	14%	243	33%
TOTAL	58		286		68		30		265		36		734	

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%

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 & beer</p> <p>7% Marijuana & 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.

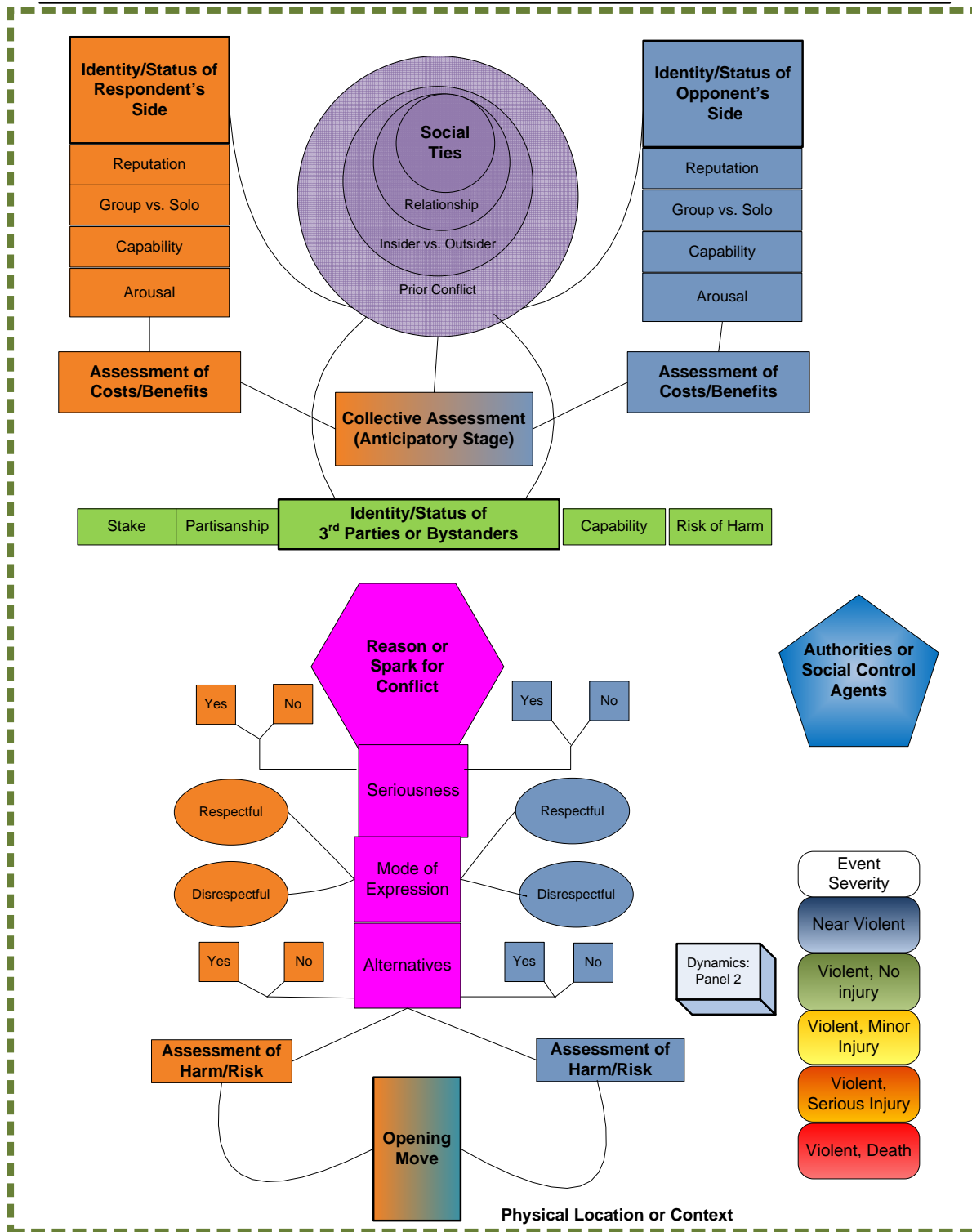
The model that fits the data best across a range of characteristics and levels of event severity is shown in Figures 4-1 and 4-2. The visual presentation is geared toward conveying the most important situational factors as the event emerges and then moves through a series of stages. The model describes 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.

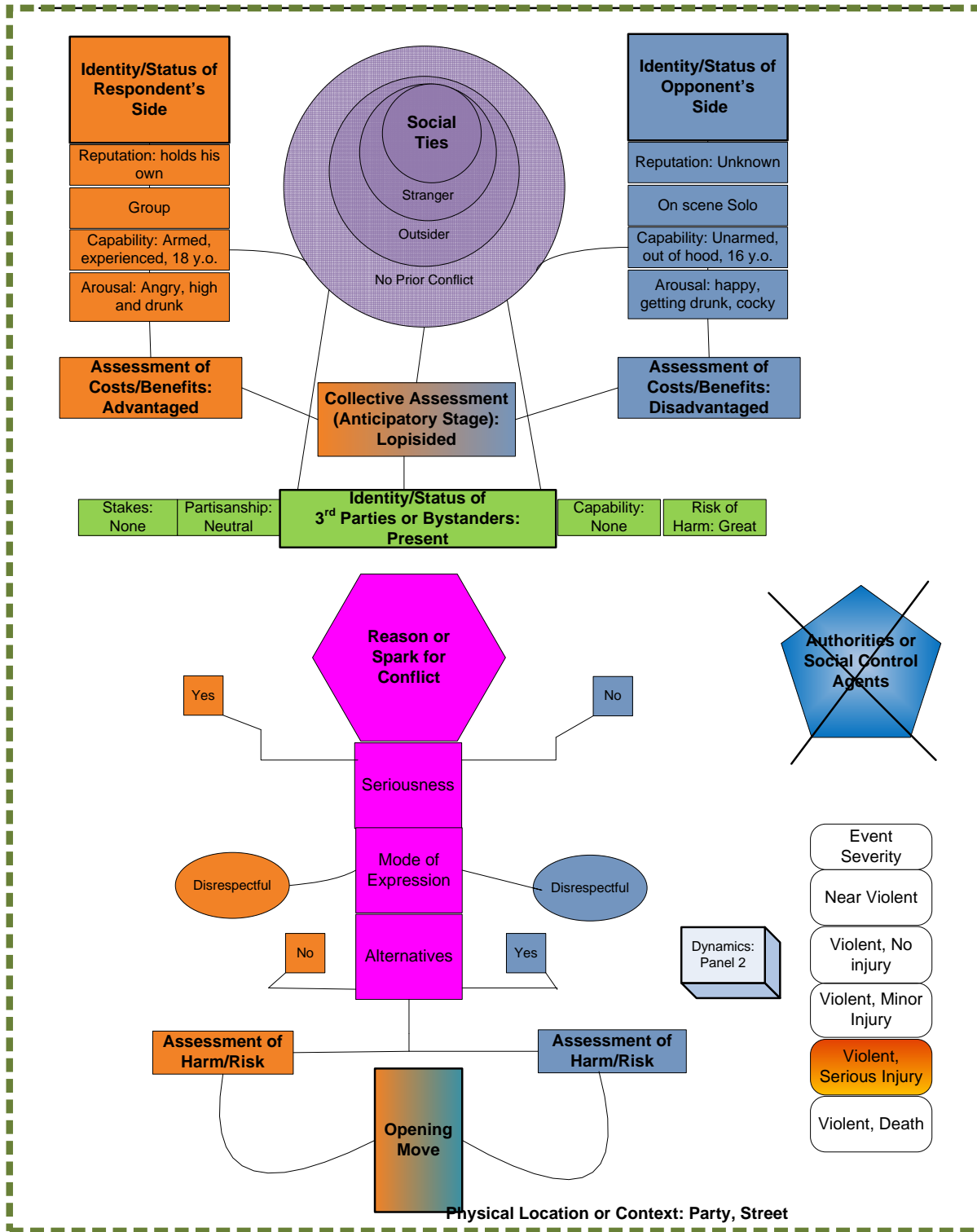
Most often the opening move of conflict is an action or inaction that sparks the two sides toward engagement in social interaction. The interaction is defined as conflict particularly when one side makes demands, insults, threats, accusations, or otherwise provokes a response from the other. The issue 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

