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VIOLENT YOUTHS' RESPONSES TO HIGH LEVELS OF EXPOSURE TO COMMUNITY VIOLENCE: WHAT VIOLENT EVENTS REVEAL ABOUT YOUTH VIOLENCE

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Recent work on the relationship between adolescent violence and its outcomes has posited that aggression by adolescents who are exposed to violence can be viewed as an adaptive strategy that seeks to order dangerous and unpredictable environments. Using reports from 416 active violent youth, we analyze lifetime exposure to community violence and reported involvement in 780 violent events to investigate under what circumstances violence can be viewed as adaptive or transactional. The results show that among individuals with high levels of exposure to community violence, violent behavior is bound up and contingent upon the interactions between personal characteristics and situational factors in violent encounters. Using event narratives to identify the schemas that highly exposed youth bring to violent contexts we find that the link between violence scripts and moral disengagement hinges primarily how actors read contextual cues related to the opponent, interpret the harmfulness of the opponents actions, or the assess the opponents' blameworthiness. © 2008 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

INTRODUCTION

Recent work on the relationship between adolescent violence and its outcomes has posited that 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, 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, for example, the low rates of depression among self-professed violent youth (for example, Latzman & Swisher, 2005; Ng-Mak et al., 2004). However, other research posits that violence is often emergent from specific interactional situations where interpersonal dynamics provide the basis for violent confrontations (Athens, 1997; Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998; Felson, 1993; Hughes & Short, 2005; 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 emotional or psychic benefits or deficits the individual obtains from engaging in transactional violence can be better understood by examining how actors explain violent events in the contexts of their life experiences.

In this article, we use data from a study of 416 active violent offenders (aged 16–24) from two New York City neighborhoods. Specifically, we analyze their lifetime history of exposure to community violence (personal and vicarious victimization) and their descriptions of 780 violent events to investigate under what circumstances, if any; the violence described by the respondents can be viewed as adaptive or transactional. Additionally, we explore the rationale the young people give for the events they recount. We have chosen to analyze the most serious violent events (those involving guns) because earlier work has noted the ways that gun violence shapes an "ecology of danger," which, in turn, influences the developmental pathways of youth in high-crime neighborhoods (Bingenheimer, Brennan, & Earls, 2005; Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998a; Wilkinson, 2003). In our examination of 344 violent episodes that were classified as gun events—meaning a gun was present during the event—,we focus on youth already known to be violent and on the narratives that they assembled around serious violent events. We do this because we believe that much can be learned by concentrating on detailed accounts given by those experiencing high levels of exposure to violence and who are themselves seasoned practitioners of violence. Further, we will suggest some areas for future research and policy.

The adaptive model presupposes a temporal order where exposure to violence occurs before a process of desensitization or moral disengagement, which eventually leads to violence. Instead of a linear progression, the transactional approach conceptualizes the path to violence and its avoidance as being contingent on the interaction between a person's characteristics, internalizations of violence scripts and situational factors in potentially violent events. Though individuals in the transactional

model may very well be morally disengaged it is one of a range of factors that should be considered as shaping the violent event.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

There is a well-established literature on exposure to violence (for example, Buka, Stichick, Birdthistle, & Earls, 2001; Gorman-Smith, Henry, & Tolan, 2004; Martinez & Richters, 1993; Osofsky, 1995), which holds that exposure to high levels of community violence can lead to a range of negative outcomes for young people. For instance, several studies have found that youth who are exposed to violence in their communities show higher subsequent aggression (Cooley-Quille, Turner, & Beidel, 1995; Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1998), and other research has shown elevated levels of PTSD (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993), hopelessness (Bolland, Lian, & Formichella, 2005), and substance abuse (Kilpatrick et al., 2000). In addition, Bingenheimer et al. (2005) found that youth exposed to firearm violence experienced a two-fold increase in the probability of perpetrating serious violence compared to non-exposed youth.

Against this backdrop of negative outcomes of exposure to community violence, there are two broad approaches for explaining violence committed by youth from such circumstances. On the one hand, there is the framework that argues that youth violence is an adaptation to exposure to violence, which is informed by insights from social psychological approaches and where the predominant mode of research is to examine individual level differences in emotional and psychological outcomes. A second approach is nestled largely in sociologically oriented criminology and posits that youth violence should be conceptualized as an event, or set of interrelated events, that emerges from specific interactional contexts. The event approach focuses more on the characteristics of situations while taking into account the individual level differences in background factors or outcomes. Though these two approaches are attempting to explain the same phenomenon of high levels of violence among youth exposed to community violence, they seem to talk past one another. However, we believe that there is considerable potential for integrating these two approaches, and in our review below and subsequent analysis, we suggest potentially fruitful areas of cross-pollination.

The social psychological approach to youth violence argues that violence is adaptive and young people can and do adapt to high levels of community violence. Garbarino (1999) has argued that youth adapt to violence by becoming desensitized to it, which, in turn, increases the likelihood that they will engage in violent behavior themselves. Building on this work, Ng-Mak et al. (2002, 2004) outline what they term a pathologic model in which exposure to violence leads to moral disengagement, which, in turn, can lead to increased violence but decreased psychological distress. Here, outcomes can be adaptive as in low levels of depression but maladaptive in terms of the elevated levels of violence. The pathologic or adaptive model of violence conceives of a linear progression from background factors to outcomes. So a dangerous environment can lead to exposure to violence, which, in turn, promotes a moral disengagement. Moral disengagement then leads to actions, some of which can be iterations of adaptive violence.

Studies by Ng-Mak et al. (2004) and Latzman and Swisher (2005) have confirmed the central insight of the pathologic model: high levels of exposure to violence can result in youth adapting in some ways that are broadly adaptive but, in others, that are

clearly maladaptive. But what is the causal mechanism that gives rise to an increase in violence? And what can we learn from research from "inner-city areas where violence is more commonplace" (Ng-Mak et al. 2002, p. 98) and among those who engage in serious acts of violence?

In their early iteration of the pathologic model, but subsequently omitted in the empirical test (2004), Ng-Mak et al. (2002) argue that crucial intervening mechanism between exposure to violence and its affective and behavioral outcomes is moral disengagement, a concept that they borrowed from the work of Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, (1996). The exposure to violence leads to a normalization of violence through moral disengagement, which, in turn facilitates further violence. Ng-Mak et al. (2002, p. 96) label moral disengagement as a "cognitive coping mechanism that blunts the emotional impact of violence exposure," which, they argue, is similar to Sykes and Matza's (1957) theory of neutralization, which argues that individuals engage in techniques (for instance, denial of responsibility) that facilitate crime because they act as justifications before the act takes place, thus neutralizing the power of laws to control behavior. In this vein of research, Agnew (1994) finds, for example, that the acceptance of neutralizations by young people has a strong effect on the acceptance and use of violence.

It is the notion of moral disengagement that offers a potential bridge between the psychological and sociological literatures because it focuses attention on the antecedents of violent events while simultaneously conceptualizing individual level differences in psychological outcomes. Put simply, if youth engage in neutralizations, they are, in essence, morally disengaging, which, in turn, may normalize violent behavior and facilitate future violence. We will return to the potential for combining these approaches later. For now, it is sufficient to note that these disparate literatures have much in common.

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 to criminologists) is a major source of strain or stress on individuals, which is linked to future involvement in violent behavior (Agnew, 2002; Kaufman, 2005; Eitle & Turner, 2003). 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 goal-oriented behavior, and as such, it 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 a favorable social identity, and to obtain justice. Also, there are three factors that explain how violence occurs, given these goals: (a) through the escalation of disputes over goods or status, (b) through competition for status and social identities, and (c) the role of third parties. Felson (1993) describes the dynamics of violent incidents, much like Luckenbill and Doyle, calling the sequence of events a "social control process" (see also Black, 1993and

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. Wilkinson (2001) demonstrated that early victimization experiences shape in youths' decisions to develop fighting skill, participate in violent encounters, align with tough (violent) peers, and acquire guns for self-protection.

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. We are also told little about 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 about bringing together psychological and sociological insights, we would argue that one way to examine whether violence is adaptive or transactional is to utilize an event perspective that examines how violence happens and what factors serve as processual (exposure to violence, moral disengagement) and proximate (insults, retaliation, group dynamics) causes.

The examination of young people's accounts of violent events allows us to examine 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. And most important, 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 (see Phillips and Cooney, 2005).

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 use 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, which is a cognitive 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 (Abelson, 1981). 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.

There are several questions stemming from the forgoing review that remain unanswered. What schema do youth bring into violent contexts or 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 from high crime neighborhoods (high exposure to violence) who are actively involved in violent offending behave? We would assume if the adaptive/pathologic model is correct that 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?

METHODS

The data for this research come from a qualitative study of 416 active violent offenders from two New York City neighborhoods. The interview data were gathered over a 3-year period, from September 1995 through July 1998 (as described previously by Wilkinson 2003). The study neighborhoods had among the highest levels of poverty and violent crime in New York City. Current or previous residency in one of the study neighborhoods was an eligibility criterion. The sampling design targeted males between the ages of 16 and 24 from three pools of subjects: (a) individuals convicted of illegal handgun possession or a violent offense (the criminal justice sample, n = 150 or 36%); (b) individuals injured in a violent transaction (the hospital sample, n = 62 or 15%); and (c) individuals identified by screening as having been actively involved in violence in the previous six months (the neighborhood samples, n = 204 or 49%).

The young men in the jail sample (n = 23) were interviewed at Rikers Island in a private office ordinarily used for psychological counseling. Those youth who were recently released were recruited and interviewed in private offices at Friends of Island Academy, non-profit organization dedicated to assisting juveniles leaving Rikers Island (n = 127). Participants in the hospital sample were recruited at Lincoln and Kings County hospitals by researchers working with hospital staff to identify violently injured youth. Most hospitalized youths 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).

The in-depth, open-ended interviews took 1 to 2 hours to complete and were conducted by "peer" interviewers. 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). Peer interviewers were initially recruited through the first author's involvement with a local non-profit organization that provided reentry services to young offenders leaving Rikers Island. Interviewer training was an ongoing and elaborate process that focused on teaching peer interviewers about the purposes of the research, the procedures for protecting confidentiality, ways of being sensitive to respondents, interviewing techniques, the importance of developing a rapport, and communicating effectively with potential respondents. Training also included is as follows: role playing; mock interviewing; peer and researcher critiques of each interviewer's style; explanations of how to use probes, reference points, sequencing, memory aids, and cross checks to assist in the recall of information; identifying and screening potential subjects; a full review of the informed consent procedures; and transcription of taped interviews. The lead researcher conducted a reflective debriefing session with each interviewer for all early interviews and on an *ad hoc* basis throughout the data collection period. To enhance rapport with participants, we matched interviewers with participants on 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. Participants were paid $20 for their time. The confidential interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

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 75th precinct or community district 5 in Brooklyn and the 40th precinct or community district 1 in the Bronx). 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 Wilkinson, 2003especially Table 2–2, page 31). Both neighborhoods also had significantly higher rates of robbery and assault than New York City.

Study Participants

In terms of demographic characteristics, the sample was 48.5% African American, 39.3% Puerto Rican, and 12.2% Caribbean, Latin American, or mixed ethnicity. 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. We were not surprised to learn that 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, 62% reported an involvement in a gun event within the prior 2 years, and 85% had been or were incarcerated (Table available from authors upon request).

Measures

Subject interviews covered a range of topics including family experiences, school, employment, peer relationships, neighborhood processes, neighborhood violence, direct and vicarious victimization (exposure to community violence), guns, drug use, violent events, criminal activity, future goals, and perspectives on possible solutions to the youth violence problem. Events are the main unit of analysis for the current article.

In terms of exposure to community violence we used two types of data from the interviews to capture the prevalence of this phenomenon. We measured lifetime exposure to direct victimization as well as the incidence of personally witnessing particular serious violent events. The following specific questions were asked:

- Have you ever…   (yes or no?) what happened?
- Been Beaten up by family member   Seen someone get beaten badly
- Been Beaten up by someone in the Hood   Seen someone get knifed
- Been Knifed by someone   Seen someone get shot
- Been Shot by someone   Seen someone get killed

As in other studies that have employed event analysis (for example, Felson, 1982), respondents provided detailed description of only certain types of events. We used a 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 (defined as no weapons), and argument with no violence).

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, 1998; 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 (see Wilkinson, 2003).

This article examines respondents reports on 780 violent events especially those that were classified as gun events (n = 344 or 44%). Of the remainder of the sample of

violent events, 33% involved no weapon, 19% involved a knife/razor/piercing instrument, 4% some other weapon such as a pole or board. In terms of the 780 events, respondents described the following reasons or sparks for conflict: challenges to identity/status, jealousy/competition over females, self-defense, robbery, drug business transactions, revenge/retaliation, defense of others, rumors, territory/neighborhood honor, money/debts, unfair play (e.g., sports and gambling situations), misunderstandings, and fun or recreation. The interview excerpts provide a glimpse into the situational dynamics and contexts of these violent events.

Data Analysis

Respondents described violent events in which they had engaged within the previous 2-year period. Their narratives offer an opportunity to explore the scripts that youth bring to conflict situations. The method of analysis in this study incorporated both induction and deduction. The stages of data analysis included open coding (Strauss, 1987), sifting and sorting (Wolcott, 1994), categorizing, coding in teams and checking for consistency, and examining interactions between and across categories and cases. Coders read the interviews, identified excerpts and assigned one or multiple topic codes to each excerpt. In addition, particular domain characteristics, such as weapon type for example, were assigned to each event case file. 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. 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. 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 and a random sample of 50 individuals or approximately 12%. For the reliability check event sample, respectable alpha coefficients were achieved for most of the variables with an average alpha coefficient of .830 across 28 major event domains (range = 1.0–.482, Table available from the authors). For the exposure to community violence variables we achieved an average reliability coefficient of .956 across eight coded items (range = .983−.792). 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. The data analysis was managed in QSR N-VIVO software (Version 7.0, Melbourne). To facilitate basic quantitative analysis, the coded data were exported into a statistical analysis program (SPSS 14.0, Chicago).

Exposure to community violence was classified in a simple yes or no manner for each type of exposure. The violent events were examined for recurrent themes and patterns across the following event-level characteristics: antecedents leading up to conflict, spark or reason for conflict, 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, outcomes, and event aftermaths. Our presentation includes the dominant configurations of gun event types. Our interpretations and framings should focus only on a particular main point, however there are additional insights that can be gleaned from the exemplars we selected.

RESULTS

Extreme Lifetime Exposure to Community Violence

The level of exposure to community violence among this sample was extremely high with close to 100% of the sample reporting one or more experiences with direct and vicarious victimization. Specifically, 28% had been beaten up by a family member, 22% had been beaten up by a friend, 50% had been beaten up by someone in the neighborhood, 47% had been knifed or stabbed by someone, 51% had been shot, and 62% had reported the details of a gun event. In terms of directly witnessing violence, 93% had seen someone get beaten badly, 75% had seen someone get knifed, 92% had seen someone get shot, and 77% had someone get killed. In addition, 78% reported that they had lost a close friend due to violence and 85% reported losing someone they knew from the neighborhood to violence. We should note that the fact that some youth are exposed to violence—either as victims or witnesses—based on violence that they themselves may have started or may have been involved in as perpetrators or co-offenders.

In about 150 cases, respondents briefly described what happened in the (exposure to community violence) events summarized above. Of all event types, respondents seemed to be able to recall and describe the images (twisted and mangled bodies; bodies hitting physical surfaces such as the ground, fence posts, or walls; convulsions; pools of blood; bodily fluids pouring out; disfigurements, and more) and sounds of shootings most vividly. Rashard, a 16-year-old from East New York, provided a typical account. He recalled:

> We was in the projects. He had beef with some kids around the corner, another rival, over a drug spot and as we sat on the gates....them kids from around the corner came from both ways....you see, it's hard for me to talk about it [respondent is crying]. And.....they came from both ways and …they pulled out guns from every angle and they just let off and my friend got shot in the head with a .44, magnum.

> Interviewer: And what happened, how did you escape that situation?

> Rashard: I was on my side [and I] jumped off the gate....as they were shooting, I ducked, I ran for dear life, that's the only thing I could tell you. It happened so fast, it ain't like I could tell you no whole war story.

The overwhelming emotional response that the respondents shared about these experiences was sadness and grief especially when the person was a friend or associate. When the interviewer asked Clinton, 18 years old, how his friend's murder made him feel. Clinton responded in the following way:

> It made me feel like a part of me died too. It's like a part of me left too. I ain't gonna never...I remember how he…how he looked. But it's like I ain't gon never see him again. It's like he just went away on a trip. And I ain't gon never see him again.

Other responses included feeling shocked, disturbed, and scared and worried for their own safety/lives. Rodney, a 23-year-old, witnessed several gun murders. He recalled feeling particularly disturbed by a recent incident: "The way he died really messed with my head because they ganged him. They waited until he turned his head and shot the back of his head. It was a hit, they paid 7 Gs to kill him….shot right in his head." Mitch, a 24-year-old, explained: "…What broke my heart I seen a 16-year-old kid get shot by another fucking 16-year-old kid over some dumb shit. It was about 4 months ago and he got shot and he was just in the street bleeding."

The youth in this study have high levels of exposure to violence and they report a range of responses to these events. Of the 60 respondents who were asked directly about how witnessing the violent shooting affected them, the most common response was not wanting to talk about the loss because it was too upsetting (30%). Eight people reported that they felt "nervous," "on edge," "worried" or "panicky" after the incident. Respondents' reactions to the sudden and unexpected death of a friend, neighbor, acquaintance, or family member left many in a state of grief and disbelief. If they were present during the shooting or happened upon the situation immediately following the shooting, they often played a role in trying to get medical treatment as a life-saving measure. Darren, a 17-year-old from East New York, described how witnessing someone get shot made him feel. He explained: "it made me feel painful the way he was acting, the way he was screaming, the way he was moving like some other type of shit, I was like, oh shit." Another 24-year-old young man, Jamarcus, described being desensitized in the following way: "[I] seen it with my eyes, I was there and it just happened so fast, you know, what's to go, oh God let's take this guy to the hospital, that's it. It's a funny experience. It's…I don't know, it was, you know one day you're with that person, the next day you see him shot down or then the next day you see him in the funeral home. It's funny but you move on." Others, like Irving, described his reaction as "tough love, lucky it ain't happen to me."

In terms of the current examination of the adaptive or transactional explanations of youth violence, the baseline conditions certainly exist for the adaptive explanation. The youth in this study were exposed to extreme instances of violence, often as victims themselves, and they are as good a candidate as any for moral disengagement. To different degrees they have witnessed and activated violent scripts. Next, we illustrate the conditions that lead to gun events, and the rationales given by participants for these instances of violent behavior.

Violent Events: Sparks and Rationales

Violent events where guns were involved were described by our respondents as public performances that often had serious implications beyond the immediate interaction. The accounts of these events often focus on the potential gains or losses in terms of individual or group status that might result from the interaction. A violent event reported by Nathan, an 18-year-old 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 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%, $X^2 = 7.25$, 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' boy purposefully soiled his white outfit. Moses confronted the opponent who happened to be one his associates named Keith. Keith laughed at Moses which made him angry and demanding Keith to fight in order 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."

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 they 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. This excerpt illustrates how events with violent outcomes unfold across several interactions.

(Interviewer): Okay, you wanna tell me about that?
(Colton): 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.

(Interviewer): Okay so, where did you get shot?

(Colton): In the calf.

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 he was involved in. He explained that one day 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.

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 the sample who answered the question about carrying, (n = 209), about 30% reported carrying everyday, 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, and 9% never carry but keep gun in close proximity for easy use. Their reports of carrying patterns of their close friends are very similar. Carrying behaviors are a function of *police activity* more than necessarily a response to adaptations to a dangerous environment. The four main reasons for carrying are self-protection generally, self-protection because of a particular beef, use in crime (drug trade, robbery, extortion, assault, and murder), and projecting an image or status of a tough guy.

Guns are used in several ways by the youth in our study. The type of use is determined at least in part by a calculation about 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 344 gun events by different types of gun "use." We found that guns were used to threaten in 18.5% of the cases (n = 64), to physically beat someone 2.9% of the time (n = 10), and to shoot or shoot at someone 73% (n = 253) of the time (see Table 1). Further, we classified all violent events according to the issue or action that sparked the conflict. In Table 1, we present the crosstabulation of event spark by type of gun use. We also present data on nongun events by event spark to provide a point of comparison.

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%), was 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%), was 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 then is a reaction 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.

(Interviewer): What started the beef?

(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 CO_2 air guns and shit so I'm like "Yo get the fuck out of

Table 1. Types of Gun Use in Violent Events Reported by NYCYVS Participants

	SPARK		GUN STATUS			
Type[a]	Number of non-gun events	Number of gun events	Present but not used	Used to threaten but no shooting	Used gun as blunt object to beat or hit	Gun fired
Identity/respect	191	126	5.6%	23%	4%	67.5%
Drug business	35	83	3.6%	12%	1.2%	83.1%
Robbery	39	70	1.4%	31.4%	7.1%	58.6%
Girl	106	51	2%	9.8%	2.0%	86.3%
Revenge	24	33	0%	3%	3%	94%
Self-defense	27	24	4.2%	25%	4.2%	66.7%
Defense of others	32	22	0%	13.6%	0%	86.4%
Total # of events	454	344	10	63	10	253

[a]Events were coded for multiple sparks. Total count does not add up to 100%

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 boy's 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 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 if available, guns are used in reply to a transgression. 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 ended in gun fire, or when guns were fired, they were not always used in a lethal manner. Over 20 gun events were disrupted; in 10 events, guns were present but not used, and 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 through a different neighborhood. Pepe's opponent did not like the way that he was looking at his girl as they passed casually on the street and pulled his 38 revolver as he asked Pepe for an account. Pepe denied the opponent's charge but also 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. In addition, Pepe explained:

> 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 helped to provide a nonviolent way out of the situation by attempting the 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) comes 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 (a) their involvement in the violent event is strategic and anticipated from the outset; (b) they come to the aid of an associate who is losing in the confrontation; (c) they are threatened/offended/disrespected at some point during the course of a dispute; (d) when 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 (e) when 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. One situation that illustrates this point was described by Austen, a 19-year-old from the South Bronx. In this example, both associates from both sides played a role in the event. Individuals on both sides of the conflict promoted the use of violence. The respondent described how the crowd encouraged him to inflict harm on the opponent. Austen recalled:

(Interviewer): So did any of his people get involved with it?

(Austen): 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...

(Austen): Yeah my boys was telling me, shoot the nigga. Slice him, stab him. I'm saying, 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.

(Interviewer): So what happen when they [the cops] left? They broke out?

(Austen): Yeah, they broke out. We just...we broke out too. But we caught the niggas the next day.

(Interviewer): Hmm. Y'all caught them the next day. What you mean?

(Austen): Yeah, we caught 'em like I said. 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?

(Austin): Yeah. 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 shows 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, that is, it does not adhere to the linear progression of the adaptive model. For instance, in situations where the presence of peers elevates a dispute into a violent event where guns are used, it matters less that the offender has been exposed to violence and has morally disengaged than the fact that he is egged on or joined in violence by others. The converse, where others tamp down the potential for violent events, is also true. 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 little son. And 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 ways that particular actions by actors in context have momentum. Gary started out angry and primed to punish the man who slapped his 7-year-old son. The intervention by a respected and mutual associate to both parties enabled Gary to pause long enough to stop the violent path he was creating. 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.

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 1, the scenes of youth violence can be divided along two major dimensions: (a) private versus public and (c) 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. Contextual cues are as follows: 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); the threat of reputational damage, threat of relationship damage (fear of rejection by peer group); victim vulnerability and relative weakness;

Script Components	Characteristics
Scenes	Public, absent social control Public, present social control Private, absent social control Private, present social control 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 Social Locations: Crowds, Intoxicated Crowds, Illegal Marketplaces (drugs, gambling, other hustles)
Contextual cues or script headers	Verbal versus Nonverbal cues Threat of physical harm (size differentials, being outnumbered, being "off" game) Lethality of threat (gun v. non-gun, knife v. no weapon) Threat of reputational damage Threat of relationship damage Victim Vulnerability or Assessment of Ability to Outperform opponent (s) Blame worthiness of victim
Slots: Action Frames	Opening Moves (Threats, Attacks, Accusations, Insults, Degrading Behavior, Reignite) Counter Moves (Accounts, Resistance, Denial, Attack, Threat Escalation, etc.) Escalation/Intensification Stage Closing Moves (Resolution, Disruption, Injury, Injury Treatment, Fleeing Scene, Arrest, Additional Threats, Etc.) Assessment Stage 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.)
Slots: Actors	The antagonist The protagonist The co-offending antagonists The co-offending protagonists Passive audience Active audience Social Control Agents
Slots: Roles	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, gossiper, and the therapist

Figure 1. Youth violence script components.

and victim blameworthiness. Violent event actions frames are as follows: (a) opening moves (threats, attacks, accusations, insults); (b) counter moves (accounts, resistance, denial, attack, threat escalation, warnings); (c) escalation/intensification stage; (d) closing moves (resolution, disruption, stalling tactics, fleeing the scene, additional threats, injury, injury treatment, arrest); (e) assessment stage; and (f) 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 agents of social control. In terms of roles we identified a number of "typical" roles in youth violence events including: crazy killer, tough guy, punk/herb, point man, scout, lookout, strategizer, defender, avenger, enforcer, instigator, cheerleader, regulator, manipulator, peacemaker, gossiper, and the therapist. The link between violence scripts and moral disengagement hinges primarily on how actors read contextual cues related to the opponent, the interpretation of the harmfulness of the opponents actions, and/or the assessment of the opponents 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 and does not either apologize in a way that restores status or offer a reasonable excuse for his 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 too but typically only when the opponent is an associate or friend. These types of violations also seem to invoke anger responses. These identity challenge/disrespect violence scripts were reported in all type of events (for example over girls, robbery situations, drug business disputes, defense of others, and etc.).

DISCUSSION

Adaptive framework assumes a temporal ordering from exposure through moral disengagement, and then to violence. Instead of a linear progression, moral disengagement is certainly present in some instances, while in others, it seems bound up and contingent upon the interaction between personal characteristics and situational factors in potentially violent events. These factors may include one or more of the following: the absence of informal social control, the presence of lethal weapons, the involvement of multiple parties, the ties between combatants, alcohol/drug use, the lack of law enforcement response, the role that event performance plays in shaping violent reputations, group solidarity and loyalties, and lack of resolution to violent conflict among opposing sides. Our event level analysis shows that the link between exposure to community violence and violent behavior is much more complex than that the adaptive model suggests. For example, we could have included over 100 quotes that described ways how respondents were emotionally affected by the direct and vicarious victimization they experienced. We did show the potential confounding of these exposures to community violence data with violent behavior. The qualitative differences in type and nature of exposure are important as they set the backdrop for violent behavior and help to formulate violence scripts.

Individuals who are "primed" for violence by high levels of prior exposure, and who have internalized beliefs that violent behavior is normal will not respond violently in every situation in which violence may be "called for" or expected. Some of the youths' narratives about violent events show evidence of moral disengagement or neutralization, yet those processes are not sufficient conditions for angry arousal to lead to violent behavior. The most telling evidence comes from the non-events, that is, conflicts that had all of the "necessary" sparks and situational factors to lead to conflict but where there was no escalation. Even though moral disengagement is certainly part of the story, the data reveal that aspects of contingencies and configurations of situational and interpersonal factors play a powerful role in violent behavior.

In our revised theoretical model as shown in Figure 2, we argue that exposure to community violence familiarizes young people to violence scripts, which, in turn, can occasion moral disengagement. Knowledge about how to react to threatening situational or contextual cues is one outcome of exposure. An individual living in a neighborhood with high rates of violence is likely to have repeated direct and vicarious experience with threatening situations. Involvement in violent behavior shapes self-images and perceived status among peers in ways that further promote violent action. When actors confront situations in which their knowledge of how to react is based on what information is perceived from the cues in the situation or context their behavior is likely to follow an existing script or a modified version of one. The complexities of conflict situations ensure that there are several different violence scripts—not all conflicts will be handled in the same way. The new violent experience will then modify an existing script especially if the current event is more or less complex, serious, and resulted in positive outcomes. Ultimately, each violent event can influence levels of moral disengagement which we argue are operationalized for individuals at the situational level (in events).

We feel that the earlier work on adaptive, maladaptive, and pathological models can be enhanced by considering the micro transactional level of violence as a way of understanding the links between exposure to community violence, engaging in violent behavior, and mental health outcomes. When violence is viewed at the event level its functional or purposive aspects are revealed. Knowledge about what scripts youth bring to and take from violent contexts need to take into account multiple levels of explanation including individual and group characteristics, neighborhood contexts, and conflict situations. We hope this article sparks a cross-disciplinary dialogue
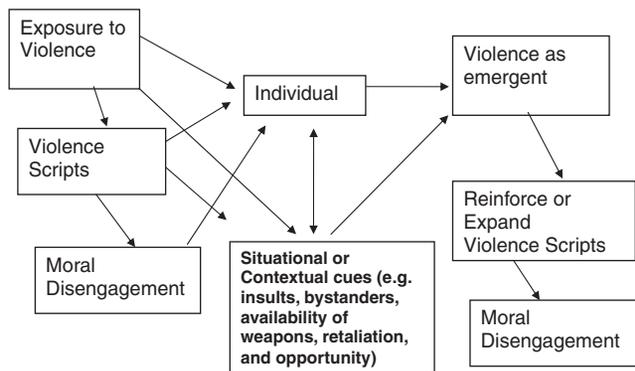

Figure 2. Emergent model of violence .

between psychologists and sociological criminologists that can inform future studies that can build on these two parallel but often isolated bodies of knowledge.

There are several limitations to the present study, which future research should seek to improve upon. 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 mixed racial/ethnic minority 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 who have generally not engaged in violent behavior, and attention should be focused on those younger than sixteen. The life history interviews did not include measures of depression or other specific information on psychological distress. Further, we would suggest that event analysis of violence seeks ways to better specify moral disengagement on the part of offenders as we did not explicitly code for moral disengagement, but we inferred it from the data instead. Last, there is the question as to whether our findings would hold true for white youth from high-crime neighborhoods. While we are mindful of the argument (see Sampson and Wilson, 1995) that one of the reasons black and white crime rates differ is because of the different ecological contexts in which blacks and whites reside, in keeping with this logic we would suggest that where the ecological context is similar, the outcomes and processes will be more alike than different between white and minority youth.

Finally, there are some policy implications of the present study. First, though it is hardly groundbreaking, some neighborhoods have extremely high rates of exposure to violence, and the mere concentration effects suggest that approaches to reduce exposure should be based at the neighborhood level. 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 occur only or are prevented because of a confluence of circumstances, such as the role of peers and bystanders. Increasing the opportunities for prosocial interactions or somehow underscoring the positive interventions of peers can also go some way toward reducing violent events. More specifically, because 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. Finally, 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.

In conclusion, we have shown that in our study of violent events that there is support for an explanation of violence as emergent from situational contexts regardless of whether or not violence is adaptive. While a certain portion of violence can be explained by the linear progression of exposure to violence leading to desensitization/moral disengagement and thereby to violence, much violence actually occurs as part of an emergent situation that is fluid and dynamic. The event level data have shown that youth bring a variety of scripts to conflict situations such as behavioral expectancies, lethal presumptions about others' intent, intolerances for personal attacks, fear of victimization, prior knowledge about actors and settings, strategic knowledge, moral justifications, grief, a limited repertoire for non-violent conflict resolution, and more. We had space to examine only some of these issues in this article.

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