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Guns, Youth Violence, and Social Identity in Inner Cities

ABSTRACT

While youth violence has always been a critical part of delinquency, the modern epidemic is marked by high rates of gun violence. Adolescents in cities possess and carry guns on a large scale, guns are often at the scene of youth violence, and guns often are used. Guns play a central role in initiating, sustaining, and elevating the epidemic of youth violence. The demand for guns among youth was fueled by an "ecology of danger," comprising street gangs, expanding drug markets with high intrinsic levels of violence, high rates of adult violence and fatalities, and cultural styles of gun possession and carrying. Guns became symbols of respect, power, identity, and manhood to a generation of youth, in addition to having strategic value for survival. The relationship between guns and youth violence is complex. The effects of guns are mediated by structural factors that increase the youth demand for guns, the available supply, and culture and scripts which teach kids lethal ways to use guns.

Adolescent violence has been part of the urban landscape in this country since its origins. From the colonial period (Sante 1991), to the waves of immigration in the early nineteenth century, to the formation of ethnic street gangs in the 1890s (O'Kane 1992), to the rise in delinquency and violence rates in the 1950s, fighting has been an integral part of adolescence. Beginning in the 1970s, rates of nonlethal adoles-

105

cent violence began slowly to rise. However, rates of lethal adolescent violence, primarily gun homicides, rose sharply through the 1970s, declined in the mid-1980s, and reached new highs in the early 1990s, before declining again (Cook and Laub, in this volume).

Today, guns are a central part of the changing character of youth violence, from being a minor concern prior to the 1970s to being a major youth violence problem in the past decade (see Blumstein 1995; Zimring and Hawkins 1997). Although always present in the background of urban delinquency, youth gun violence has become more prevalent and more concentrated spatially and socially in the past two decades. Virtually all increases in homicide rates from 1985 to 1990 among people ten to thirty-four years of age were attributable to deaths among African American males; most of the increase was in firearm homicides, and these were overwhelmingly concentrated demographically and spatially among African American males in urban areas (Fingerhut, Ingram, and Feldman 1992a, 1992b). Guns now play a significant role in shaping the developmental trajectories and behaviors of many inner-city youths. Estimates of gun carrying in school range from 5 percent (Vaughn et al. 1996) to 15 percent (LH Research 1993), providing minimal estimates of the overall frequency of gun carrying among adolescents. Gun violence also has become fuel for political and social mobilizations in the past decade, adding to recurring critiques of the juvenile justice system and inspiring communities to undertake a wide range of preventive and punitive measures.

The sharp increase in youth gun violence in the past decade, and its concentrated and severe consequences, suggests that it is an epidemic with moral, social, and health consequences. The health impacts are obvious and straightforward. For over a decade, fatality rates from nonfirearm intentional injuries have declined across all age groups (Fagan, Zimring, and Kim 1998). But from 1985 to 1991, firearm fatalities increased 127 percent among males fifteen to nineteen years of age, while declining by 1 percent for males twenty-five to twenty-nine years of age and 13 percent for males thirty to thirty-four years of age (Fingerhut 1993). Since 1991, while firearm fatality rates were declining generally, they have declined far more slowly for adolescents and young adults.

The concentration of adolescent gun violence among nonwhites in inner cities reveals the social effects of this epidemic. The increase in adolescent deaths from firearm injuries is disproportionately concentrated among nonwhites, and especially among African American teen-

agers and young adults. National death registry data show that from 1988 to 1992, for example, among African American teenage males fifteen to nineteen years old, 60 percent of deaths resulted from a firearm injury, compared to 23 percent for white teenage males. Among females fifteen to nineteen years of age, 22 percent of African American female deaths resulted from firearm injury, compared to 10 percent of deaths among white females (Fingerhut, Ingram, and Feldman 1992a).

In this period, young African American males were 4.7 times more likely to die from firearm injuries than from natural causes (Fingerhut 1993). In addition, there were 30 percent more deaths among ten- to fourteen-year-old African American males from firearms than from motor vehicle injuries, the second leading cause of death in this group. For teenagers (fifteen to nineteen) and young adults (twenty to twenty-four), there were three times as many deaths from firearms as from motor vehicle injuries (Fingerhut, Ingram, and Feldman 1992a).

How this epidemic came about is the focus of this essay. We show how guns have become an important part of the discourse of social interactions in modern urban life, with symbolic meaning (power and control), social meaning (status and identity), and strategic importance. Getting and using a gun against another person has become a rite of passage into manhood or at least into a respectable social identity within this context. Expressions of shortened life expectancies reflect processes of anticipatory socialization based on the perceived likelihood of victimization from lethal violence. Conversely and perversely, carrying firearms seems to enhance feelings of safety and personal efficacy among teenagers (LH Research 1993; Sheley and Wright 1995). The result is a developmental "ecology of violence," in which beliefs about guns and the dangers of everyday life may be internalized in early childhood and shape cognitive frameworks for interpreting events and actions during adolescence. In turn, this context of danger, built in part around a dominating cognitive schema of violence and firearms, creates, shapes, and highly values scripts skewed toward violence and underscores the central role of guns in achieving the instrumental goals of aggressive actions or defensive violence in specific social contexts. The processes of contagion, however, are little understood and are an important part of a future research agenda on this problem.

Section I of this essay begins with a review of the history and social epidemiology of adolescent gun carrying, use, victimization, and fatali-

ties. Delinquency research prior to the 1960s rarely mentioned guns. However, an abrupt change occurred in the 1970s, overlapping with structural changes in communities and neighborhoods and recurring drug epidemics. These changes reshaped both social controls and street networks that in the past regulated violent transactions. We briefly review these historical dynamics, including current epidemiological studies on the correlates of gun possession and gun violence.

In Section II, we assess contemporary theories and explanations of gun violence, leading to a framework that integrates motivations and explanations for gun violence. We use an event-based approach to understand the dynamics of adolescent gun violence. This approach does not deny the importance of the individual attributes that bring people to situations but recognizes that, once there, other processes shape the outcomes of these events. Instead, we view gun violence as "situated transactions," including rules that develop within specific contexts, the situations and contexts where weapons are used, the motivations for carrying and using weapons, and the personality "sets" of groups in which weapons are used. There are "rules" that govern how disputes are settled, when and where firearms are used, and the significance of firearms within a broader adolescent culture. Because violence generally is a highly contextualized event (Luckenbill and Doyle 1989; Fagan 1993a, 1993b; Tedeschi and Felson 1994), we focus on how specific contexts and situations shape decisions by adolescents to carry or use weapons.

In Section III we present a dynamic framework that contextualizes adolescent violence within individuals, situations, and neighborhoods and discusses how the presence of weapons creates additional contingencies that shape the outcomes of disputes and other transactions. Gun violence among adolescents requires several levels of analysis: the sources of weapons, the nature of everyday life that gives rise to conflicts that turn lethal, the "scripts" of adolescent life that lead to escalation (and the factors that underlie those scripts), the motivations for carrying/using weapons, and the role of weapons in the decision processes of adolescents when they engage in disputes or even predatory violence. The presence of firearms is not an outcome of other processes, but part of a dynamic and interactive social process in which the anticipation or reality of firearms alters the decisions leading to violence and the outcomes of violent events.

In Section IV, we analyze data from recent research on violence among adolescents to illustrate three dimensions of this framework:

how normative rules and regulatory processes within networks and neighborhoods shape decisions to engage in violence and shape the course of violent events, the motivations and sources of arousal that lead to disputes where violence is used strategically or defensively, and situational contexts that introduce additional contingencies that influence the occurrence and outcomes of violent and "near-violent" encounters. Specifically, we examine the "ecology of danger" in which violence and gun events unfold in two inner-city neighborhoods. Second, we explore the establishment and maintenance of social and situational identities among adolescent males. We also analyze the role of drugs and alcohol on violent events. In each of these sections, we examine the influence of guns on these dynamics.

Section V concludes with an agenda for research on the role of firearms in adolescent violence that focuses on the role of firearms in the socialization of adolescents in neighborhood contexts of danger, including both the development of social identity and "scripts" that are employed in situations of conflict and threat. Research on cognition and decision making that focus specifically on the roles of guns in childhood and adolescence can inform the design of prevention efforts.

I. Historical and Current Dimensions of Adolescent Gun Violence

Gun violence has been a recurring theme in the literature on youth violence, dating back to the colonial era. In the modern era, studies of adolescent violence show that teenage males, whether in schools, gangs, or correctional institutions, report "self-defense" as the most important reason for carrying guns (LH Research 1993; Sheley and Wright 1995). As Wright and Rossi (1986) note, "self-defense" has a number of different meanings, including defense against other youth in an increasingly hostile and unsafe environment as well as self-defense from law enforcement officials during the course of illegal activity. Fear is a recurring theme in juvenile gun acquisition, and the escalating adolescent "weapons" race can be traced in the literature to the 1970s. While gun homicides among adolescents increased rapidly following the onset of the crack crisis in the mid-1980s, it is unclear whether these homicides can be traced to business violence in the drug trade or to other situational and ecological forces during that time. In part, the infusion of guns and their diffusion to teenagers may have had broad impacts on fear (Kennedy, Piehl, and Braga 1996), motivating gun acquisition as a form of self-defense.

But, as we show later, there also were effects of the drug trade on developmental trajectories of teenage men and women whose socialization occurred in the wake of the increase in homicides, and the dominating effect of drug economies on social relations and social control. While traditional themes of toughness and identity continued to shape adolescent development in inner cities, these processes were also skewed by the diffusion of guns into the hands of adolescents who reached their teenage years in communities that increasingly were socially and economically isolated. The ways in which guns altered the processes of achieving masculine identities, in economic contexts with attenuated routes to adult roles, coupled with the perception of fear and hostile intent among their peers, contributed to a significant shift in the rules of fighting and the processual dynamics among adolescents.

A. Sources of Knowledge

Most studies of the recurring problems of adolescent violence have not focused on the use of firearms or even distinguished events where firearms are present. Much of what we know about teenagers and guns comes from two sources: ethnographic research on youth gangs and "near groups" and the homicide literature. But even among studies of adolescent homicide, homicide events involving guns account for fewer than two in three homicides and often were not distinguished analytically from nonfirearm homicides. Until the 1980s, firearms often were casual mentions in the depiction of the contexts of adolescent violence. Because the focus of this review is the person-context interaction where guns are present, we begin by reviewing the situations where guns were present in the unfolding of events of adolescent violence.

Remarkably, there has been very little research on gun carrying or gun use among adolescents; the few studies focusing on adolescent gun violence are limited in several ways. First, most studies fail to distinguish guns from other more commonly carried weapons, especially cutting instruments. With few exceptions (e.g., LH Research 1993; Sheley and Wright 1995), most studies have been broad surveys that gauge how often adolescents bring weapons to school and how their outlooks have been affected by the weapons that surround them.

Second, most studies do not distinguish carrying from using weapons, regardless of type (see, e.g., the analysis by DuRant et al. [1994] of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey).

Third, most of these studies suffer from selection biases by exclud-

ing dropouts and institutionalized youths with higher rates of violence and weapons use (Fagan, Piper, and Moore [1986] estimates the extent of the bias). The few studies that include incarcerated adolescents use self-selected or otherwise nonsystematic samples (see Sheley and Wright 1995).

Fourth, the low base rates of violence in most studies have led to artifactual and confusing results. For example, many studies confound violence generally (including physical and sexual assault or robbery) with violence involving guns or other weapons. These studies equate adolescents who are violent without weapons with adolescents who carry or use firearms. Other studies confound adolescent violence (gun or nongun) with poor developmental outcomes such as drug use, school dropout, or adolescent pregnancy (Elliott, Huizinga, and Menard 1989). However, there is no evidence that firearms use by adolescents is part of a generalized pattern of adolescent violence or a maladaptive developmental outcome.

Fifth, despite the distinction among strategies for weapons carrying or use among adolescents, there are no developmental or criminological theories that can adequately distinguish gun from nongun violence among adolescents. Current theories of adolescent violence generally do not offer strong predictions of violent behavior.

Sixth, some research has examined the various situations and contexts in which adolescent gun violence may occur, including gang conflicts (Bjerregaard and Lizotte 1995; Hagedorn, in this volume), drug markets (Fagan and Chin 1990; Bourgois 1995), or interpersonal disputes (E. Anderson, in this volume). These studies attribute shootings to the dynamics and contingencies in those contexts without addressing the self-selection of people into those events. Some recent efforts have analyzed firearm "events" as a function of transactional-processual dynamics, the characteristics of the individuals involved, and the person-weapon contingencies that either escalate or defuse these events (Wilkinson and Fagan 1996a, 1996b; Fagan and Wilkinson 1997). These efforts specifically look at gun use as part of the situational dynamics of violent events.

B. Guns and Delinquency

Despite the small body of empirical research, gun violence nevertheless has been a recurrent factor in youth violence in several ways. Sante (1991), for example, describes the sometimes deadly and oftentimes comical struggles between the early street gangs of New York City to

control territory and assert their authority. Although not involved in theft, robbery, or the "unsavory professions of gambling or tav- ernkeeping," these gangs warred regularly over territory with weapons including stones, hobnail boots (good for kicking), and early versions of the blackjack. Guns were rarely mentioned until the era following the Draft Riots of 1863, when gangs fought with every weapon then available, including pistols, muskets, and (rarely) cannons (Sante 1991, p. 201). As smaller and more portable guns were developed, they be- came an important part of the milieu of gangs and street groups over following decades. Portrayals of gang members in the 1940s through the 1970s included descriptions of both common and outrageous guns: Navy flare guns, zip guns, sawed-off shotguns, revolvers, and a few au- tomatic weapons (see, e.g., Keiser 1969). These have become more common now as design changes make them even smaller, lighter, and more easily concealed. Then as today, guns played a strategic role in settling conflicts and asserting dominance in matters of honor, terri- tory, and business (Strodtbeck and Short 1968).

Second, "toughness" has always been regarded as central to adoles- cent masculine identity and a source of considerable status among ado- lescents in a wide range of adolescent subcultures, from streetcorner groups to gangs (Whyte 1943). Physical prowess, emotional detach- ment, and the willingness to resort to violence to resolve interpersonal conflict are hallmarks of adolescent masculinity (Rodriguez 1993; An- derson 1994; Gibbs and Merighi 1994; Oliver 1994). Toughness re- quires young males to move beyond symbolic representation to physi- cal violence. Guns often are used to perpetuate and refine the aesthetic of "toughness" and to claim the identity of being among the toughest. Owning a gun can be a symbol of masculinity and carrying a gun a source of identity (Gibbs and Merighi 1994, pp. 78–79).

Third, guns often transform robbery into a lethal event. Among ad- olescents, however, robberies often are unplanned or hastily planned events, the result of the instantaneous confluence of motivation and opportunity (see, e.g., Cook 1980). Guns provide a tactical advantage in robberies, even beyond the advantage first created by the selection of time and circumstances that undermine the victim's expectations of safety. While guns may often be present during robberies, their use in the course of a robbery reflects other contingencies, or what Zimring and Zuehl (1986) called "recreational violence." There are predictable stages for the robbery event, and when responses fail to meet the rob-

ber's expectations, threatened violence may become actual to gain compliance or to get the event back on its planned course (Feeney 1986; Katz 1988). Force, including firing guns, often is not gratuitous in robberies, unless a robbery becomes a stage for acting out "toughness" or meanness. In that case, the presence of a firearm opens the way for a robbery to become a homicide (Cook 1980).

But adolescents are impaired decision makers, and their bad decisions may short-circuit the pathway from robbery to homicide. Adolescence is a developmental stage when abstract reasoning about the consequences of using guns and cognitive capacities to read social cues are incomplete (Kagan 1989; Gibbs and Merighi 1994; Steinberg and Cauffman 1996). During the course of a robbery, the teenager armed with a gun becomes an unstable actor in a scenario whose outcomes are dependent on an unpredictable set of interactions between the robber and his victim. It is when the initial definition of the situation strays from robbery to a threat, personal slight, or conflict (in the wake of resistance) that seemingly irrational violence occurs. When guns are present, the violence often results in death.

Fourth, interpersonal disputes are fertile ground for violence, and guns have become a tactical choice in settling scores (Polk 1994; Canada 1995). While some disputes reflect inevitable clashes in social settings that concentrate the ingredients for interpersonal conflicts, others are precipitated as a means to display "toughness" and gain status or to achieve the sensual rewards of domination (Katz 1988). Disputes may be real, perceived, or imagined. They may involve women or girlfriends, drug deals gone bad, verbal aggression ("playing the dozens") that spins out of control, verbal attacks on masculinity, economic jealousy, and a variety of assaults on "respect" (Campbell 1986; Anderson 1994; Oliver 1994; Wilkinson and Fagan 1996a). Because "disrespect" is linked to the possibility of physical danger, it often engenders a defensive aggressive reaction both to ward off threats and to recoup lost social standing among witnesses. When guns are thought to be present, these defensive reactions become preemptive: using guns is a means to avoid losing in a dispute where loss may mean injury or death. Thus what many decry as the abandonment of "fair fight" rules in favor of guns reflects the convergence of normative beliefs about who is carrying weapons, assessments of how likely they are to use them (very likely, unfortunately), and given contemporary firepower, knowledge of the (deadly) consequences of being shot first.

C. Firearms and Adolescent Violence: Historical Perspectives

Many of the correlates of violence and homicide in the postmodern United States were also present a century ago: rapid urbanization, population mobility, ethnic tensions, abuse of intoxicants, class conflicts, and the spread of cheap handguns (Lane 1979, 1989). Yet Gurr (1981) notes that for much of the nineteenth century, homicide rates were declining. With the advent of concealable handguns around 1850, homicide rates increased slightly but not enough to offset a long downward trend that had begun early in the nineteenth century (Gurr 1981). The declines were part of a 150-year historical trend where violence reached its ebb as the twentieth century began, the result of urbanization and modernization that offered new economic opportunities to both immigrants and in-migrants to the cities from rural areas. Thus social arrangements had changed in this era in ways that fostered social controls.

Nevertheless, youth crime was considered both distinct and serious enough in this era to give rise to the creation of juvenile courts throughout the United States (Schlossman 1977). However, the crimes that motivated these reforms rarely involved violence or guns. Guns (both automatic weapons and handguns) played a prominent role in the growth of organized crime groups beginning in the 1920s. Organized crime groups employed teenagers and street gangs in a variety of support roles, from running numbers to serving as lookouts for illegal gambling operations or liquor distribution points (Haller 1989). Bootlegging and gambling provided a career ladder for teenagers. Of seventy-two "important" bootleggers identified by law enforcement authorities in the 1920s, most were young men in the later teenage years or early twenties (Haller 1989, p. 148). Guns were a prominent part of the security system used to protect liquor shipments, and Haller quotes documents from bootleggers and smugglers that claimed there was more danger from "rum pirates" than from other bootleggers or the police. However, despite the involvement of adolescents in street gangs and emerging organized crime groups, there is little evidence that this led to the use of guns by teenagers.

Even in this era, when youth gangs were increasingly a part of the urban landscape, there was little mention of gun use by adolescents in homicides or robberies. Analyses of homicides in the United States from 1900 to the early 1960s (Zahn 1980), as well as local studies such as Bourdouris's (1970) analysis of homicides in Detroit from 1926 to 1968, do not mention adolescents. These studies portray homicides as

the product of quarrels between family members, lovers, or two males in disputes. Murders during robberies also were rare. None of these studies examined adolescent rates separately from adult rates. Either there were no noticeable differences between adolescents and adults or the base rates among adolescents were so small that they were not worth mentioning.

Nor were there were many mentions of guns in studies of delinquency from the Chicago School beginning in the 1920s. Beginning with Thrasher (1927) and continuing for nearly forty years, violence among youth gangs primarily involved fighting. Fighting was integral to the group identification of gangs and a central part of group interaction. Behavioral norms developed around fighting, and fighting had several meanings in gang life (Cohen 1955; Miller 1958; Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Yablonsky 1962). While both common and makeshift weapons were used strategically in gang fights, guns were not mentioned as part of the everyday life of gang members or other delinquent youths.

Guns often were carried for show, with little intention to use them. In "The Cherubs Are Rumbling," Walter Bernstein (1968) describes life in a gang of about thirty-five Italian-American teenagers in the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn. Eddie was the only one in the Cherubs to have a gun. His "zip gun" cost him three dollars. But salesmen of second-hand weapons periodically visited Eddie's neighborhood offering guns at varying prices. A "revolver" (presumably a .38) in good condition cost about $10, but handguns could be bought for considerably less if they were imperfect (p. 36). Guns, however, were used more often for impression management—that is, to convey to others that someone with a gun "means business" and is a person to be taken seriously. In Bernstein's account, guns were carried by only a very few members of the Cherubs and almost never used. People carrying guns or even threatening to use them could be easily dissuaded from shooting if face-saving alternatives were presented (p. 37).

By the 1960s, mentions of guns in the delinquency literature were more common, but still relatively infrequent. Although guns were part of the background of streetcorner life, there were distinct situations where they were used and rules governing their use. They had a symbolic meaning in addition to their instrumental value and generally represented a threshold of commitment to "street life." Guns were rarely used by adolescents outside these contexts. Several studies of "streetcorner" life casually mentioned the presence of guns and their

use in settling interpersonal disputes (Liebow 1967; Suttles 1968; Hannerz 1969; Anderson 1978). Keiser's (1969) portrait of the Vice Lords also showed that firearms were not central to gang life but were used selectively and strategically in conflicts with other gangs and in gang "business." Among both gangs and "near groups," guns were valued as defensive weapons but sometimes also for offensive purposes.

Gun use was confined to specific situations and contingencies. Strodtbeck and Short (1968) discussed an incident of gun use involving Duke, an important figure in the leadership clique of the Rattlers. Duke brandished a weapon to break up a fight among gang members and then shot three gang members when the incident unfolded in a way that challenged Duke's authority. Strodtbeck and Short characterized Duke's action as a complex decision reflecting elements of cognitive mediation of the risks and rewards of alternate outcomes, a function of a utility-risk paradigm where choices are contingent on in situ evaluations of the risks and rewards of actions given specific contingencies. These decisions involved a "two-person game" (p. 280), the actor against the environment, where alternative courses of action became narrower as the risks increased. What motivated Duke in this incident was the threat to his leadership status. Guns were a last resort option because of the risks of arrest, primarily, but the risks of not using the gun to his status in the Rattlers in the neighborhood were quite high.[1] The threat of retaliatory gun use was not evident in this incident. Duke never considered the possibility that the other Rattlers had guns or were willing to use them. In fact, the weapon was passed to Duke because of his leadership status, and "[o]nce it was in his hands, it seems likely that Duke's perception of the norms of the group, along with the exigencies of the violence he faced, strongly determined that he use the gun. In this sense, his actions arose 'in the line of duty,' as part of the leadership role" (p. 279).

The account of Duke's shooting of the three people captures several dimensions of the ecological dynamics of weapons use among adolescents in that era. Guns were a minor part of street scenes of delinquent

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[1] There was cultural value to Duke's actions, as well, that enhanced his status. Duke did not carry the weapon. In that incident, it was passed to him. The expectation of using guns was fairly high for specific types of conflicts. Beyond gangs and near groups, the fear of guns and community support for their use reflected what Strodtbeck and Short described as the widespread fear of sudden violence and the inability of police to stop it (1968, pp. 283–84). Guns were status conferring and a valuable asset in a context where disputes were common, where they tended to be settled by violence, and where demonstrations of "toughness" were appropriate.

youths and usually the province of the "toughest" youths or the leadership of delinquent groups. They were more often shown than used; their use was reserved for specific people. Gun use was contingent and episodic, and gun episodes primarily were defensive or status conferring. Motivations for carrying and using guns often revolved around status concerns, and only after alternate outcomes had narrowed were guns actually fired. Although the neighborhoods where Duke and Eddie lived were commonly viewed as "dangerous" places, the likelihood of young people carrying or using guns was quite low. This relatively low prevalence of gun possession was a factor in the decisions about whether and how guns were used, and about their use in very narrow circumstances.

Ethnographic studies in the 1970s confirm the abrupt increase in adolescent violence and gun homicides shown by Cook and Laub (in this volume). This literature is dominated by studies on gangs, and little is known about gun violence outside this particular context (see, e.g., Sullivan's [1989] study). Even with this caveat, there is a startling change in the frequency of gun violence among teenagers, especially gang members, reported in the literature beginning in the 1970s. During this time, gun violence became an important theme in street life among teenagers. For example, Moore (1978) describes how behavior patterns were accelerated by each successive generation of *klikas* (Chicano gangs or sets): "White Fence violated a gang code when they first used guns; by the mid-1970s, guns were normal, and a fair fight (one person on one person without weapons) was fairly unusual, although it was the norm of an earlier period. In the mid-1970s, violations of gang codes included firing into a household where there was a mother present" (p. 40).

In another ethnography of barrio life, Vigil (1988) quotes a young Cholo who describes how the tradition of fighting had changed over the past twenty-five years and how guns had become commonplace features in barrio life: "We were riding around and this dude . . . just came up to us and asked where we were from and we said Cucamonga. He just pulled out a gun and started firing. He shot up . . . my car with a .38" (p. 133).

Many of these gun assaults involved intergang conflicts. Gun violence was both strategic and preemptive, but also retaliatory. Reacting to the shooting described above, another young male described this shooting to Vigil: "We got together to talk about how we were going to plan it. . . . We had a .22 automatic rifle with 18 shots and one

4-10 shotgun with only two shots. . . . As soon as we made a left, a white '64 Chevy started chasing us. I still don't know who exactly fired the gun from the truck, I just kept going faster and I think about eleven or twelve shots were fired at the '64 Chevy" (1988, p. 135).

In addition to violence toward other gangs, Vigil describes incidents where gun violence was used to redress grievances against businesses and resolve personal disputes over women or drugs. The wide range of motivations and contexts in which guns were used suggests the incorporation of guns into the foreground of decision making regarding violence within gangs. Recent studies by Wilkinson and Fagan (1996a) suggest that the influence of guns on motivation and decision making, as well as behavioral norms, is as important in nongang social networks as was identified in these important gang studies.

Cook and Laub (in this volume) point out that the increase in violence among adolescents since the 1960s is greater for males than for females. Homicide victimization data confirm that gun homicides by female adolescents have remained stable from 1984 to 1994 (unpublished analysis by the authors). However, empirical research on girls' involvement in gun violence is quite limited and generally limited to the gang literature. Beginning in the 1970s, violence was quite common among both male and female gang members. However, Vigil's data show that gun violence within gangs was almost exclusively a male activity. For many years, women in gangs remained on the sidelines for most fights and other criminal activities. Women were seen as auxiliaries to men, carrying weapons (including guns) and otherwise assisting boys. However, Campbell's (1984) study of girls in New York City gangs shows that guns were a common feature of female gang life.

Other portrayals suggested that girls in gangs had become in recent years similar to males in their involvement in violence and use of guns (see, e.g., Taylor 1993). Neither of these stereotypes, of course, is accurate. Gun violence by girls, whether in gangs or not, remains relatively infrequent and, as a share of all gun violence, is declining.

D. Characteristics and Risk Factors for Adolescent Gun Possession and Homicide

Several recent studies have estimated the prevalence of gun ownership, gun carrying, and gun use among adolescents. They provide a wide range of prevalence estimates of these three behaviors, consistent with the range of their sampling and measurement strategies. We focus below on three studies that offer detailed data on gun behaviors and

show how guns have become a central feature of the context of adolescent life.

1. *The LH Survey.*   LH Research (1993) conducted a survey of 2,508 adolescents in ninety-six randomly selected elementary, middle, and senior high schools. The survey was a simple random sample of classrooms in public, private, non-Catholic, and Catholic schools. The self-administered anonymous questionnaires included questions on gun ownership, carrying firearms, using guns, injury, and perceptions of safety. The sample was divided among central city schools (30 percent), suburban schools (46 percent), and schools in small towns or rural communities (24 percent). The sample was predominantly white (70 percent), with 16 percent African American students, 15 percent Latino students, and 4 percent Asian or Native American students. Most students (87 percent) attended public schools, with small samples from private non-Catholic schools (8 percent) and Catholic schools (5 percent). The results showed that handguns were a significant part of the students' everyday lives and immediate social contexts. About one in seven (15 percent) reported carrying a handgun in the preceding thirty days, and 4 percent reported taking a handgun to school during the preceding year. Nine percent of the students reported shooting a gun at someone else, while 11 percent had been shot at by someone else during the past year. Thirty-nine percent of the youth reported that they personally knew someone who had been either killed or injured from gun fire. Twenty-two percent reported that carrying a handgun would make them feel safer if they were going to be in a physical fight. Over 50 percent of youth (59 percent) could get a handgun if they so desired, often within twenty-four hours (40 percent).

The presence of guns also affected their emotional well-being, including fear and shortened life expectancies. For example, 42 percent said they worry about "being wiped out from guns" before reaching adulthood. Not surprisingly, those who worry most and those who carry guns often are the same individuals. Guns also affected the routine activities of both gun-carrying and gun-avoiding students: 40 percent reported behavioral changes to cope with violence, including decisions on where they go, where they stop on the street, night time activities, what neighborhoods they walk in, and their choice of friends.

There are several important limitations of the study, however, and in the end it fails to address the disproportionate rates of gun fatalities among African American youths. The school-based sample underrepresents African American young males who are at the highest risk of

mortality from guns and have the highest concentration of risk factors. Dropouts, frequent absentees, and institutionalized youths also are excluded, a source of bias since these groups have higher rates of both violence and the risk factors for violence (Fagan, Piper, and Moore 1986). The analyses of gun possession and carrying by subgroups (area, gender, or ethnicity) were limited and selective, and the general population sample would likely yield cells too small for reliable comparisons when such controls are introduced. Nevertheless, the LH study suggests the pervasive influence of guns on the everyday decisions of young people in schools.

2. *The Sheley and Wright Survey.*   Some of the limitations in the LH survey were addressed in research by Sheley, Wright, and Smith (1993) and reanalyzed in Sheley and Wright (1995). They interviewed 835 male inmates in juvenile correctional institutions in three states, complemented by surveys of 758 male high school students from ten inner-city public schools in the largest cities in each state. Both student and inmate samples were voluntary, and nonincarcerated dropouts were not included. Most (84 percent) of the inmate sample reported that they had been threatened with a gun or shot at, and 83 percent owned a gun prior to incarceration. Over one in three inmates (38 percent) reported shooting a gun at someone. Over half owned three or more guns, and the age of first acquisition was fourteen years old. The preferred type of gun among respondents was a "well-made handgun" of large caliber (the 9 mm was the most popular).

Both the inmate and student samples described in more detail the ecology of guns within the social organization of their neighborhoods. They claimed that firearms were widely available at low cost in their neighborhoods. Distribution was informal, with guns bought and sold through family, friends, and street sources. Among incarcerated young males, 45 percent reported that they "had bought, sold, or traded 'lots' of guns." Stealing guns and using surrogate buyers in gun shops were common sources for obtaining guns. Motivation for owning and carrying guns was reported to be more for self-protection than for status. The drug business was a critical context for gun possession: 89 percent of inmate drug dealers and 75 percent of student dealers had carried guns. So too was gang membership: 68 percent of inmates and 22 percent of students were affiliated with a gang or quasi-gang, and 72 percent of inmates were involved in the instrumental use of guns.

Although the Sheley, Wright, and Smith (1993) study focused on inner cities, the voluntary samples raise concerns regarding selection

bias and other measurement error. The study sampled disproportionately from states and cities with concentrations of gang activity, perhaps overstating the importance of gangs as a context for gun use. Like the LH survey, this study did not focus on events where guns were used, only on individuals and their patterns of gun possession and gun use.

3. *The Rochester Youth Development Study.* Two studies from the Rochester Youth Development Study reported on gun possession among adolescents using a prospective longitudinal design. Samples were 987 students interviewed at six-month intervals for nine waves beginning when they were in grades seven and eight in the 1987–88 school year. Data also were collected from police, school, and other agency records, as well as parent or caretaker interviews. Lizotte et al. (1994) and Bjerregard and Lizotte (1995) report on data from waves 9 and 10, when respondents were aged fourteen or fifteen. However, data are reported only for boys since "girls rarely own guns, whether for sport or protection" (Bjerregard and Lizotte 1995, p. 43).

About 8 percent of the boys reported carrying a gun "regularly," and 4 percent reported using a gun in the past year (either wave 8 or wave 9). One in three respondents said that one of their peers "owned" a gun for protection, 10 percent said their parent(s) owned a gun for sport, and 6 percent said their parent(s) owned a gun for protection. Although gun ownership is illegal for juveniles, the motives for having a gun in the home can be attributed to the youth: children who report "owning a gun for sport" are extending their parents' ownership motives to themselves, and not unreasonably (Lizotte et al. 1994, p. 64). These motives turn out to be important: rates of gun crimes are nearly nine times higher for youths who "own" guns for protection, compared with sport gun owners. Rates of "street crimes" such as robbery are nearly four times higher for "protection" owners compared with sport owners, and five times higher compared with nongun owners. Crime rates for nongun owners are consistently lower than for "sport" gun owners, whose rates in turn are lower than "protection" gun owners. Extending this analysis to gang members, Bjerregard and Lizotte (1995) show that rates of "protection" gun ownership are far higher for gang members, but "sport ownership" is more common among nongang members.

Peers have a substantial impact on "protection" gun ownership among adolescents, especially among gang members, providing an example of the type of contagion model suggested by Wright and Rossi

(1986). Moreover, "protection" gun ownership often precedes gang involvement, suggesting processes of social or self-selection that anticipate higher rates of delinquency once in the gang (Thornberry et al. 1993). And, gangs appear to recruit those youths who already are involved in "protection" gun ownership. However, it is unclear whether this contagion is borne by fear or by simple peer pressure. Whatever the motive, the results suggest that guns spread quickly within specific social networks by age fifteen, contributing to the perception of danger in adolescents' social worlds.

4. *Other Adolescent Studies.*   Other studies have examined the prevalence of gun or weapon possession, but with little specificity. Inciardi, Horowitz, and Pottieger (1993) interviewed 611 youths in inner-city neighborhoods in Miami as part of a study of crack cocaine and "street crime." They report that 295 (48 percent) carried guns in the year preceding the interview. However, they do not report the percentage that used them or in what contexts (drug deals, robbery, or homicide). The National Youth Survey is generally silent on weapons (see, e.g., Elliott, Huizinga, and Menard 1989). Based on 1,203 student surveys and interviews with dropouts in three cities with high gang concentrations, Fagan (1990) reported that 42.5 percent of gang males and 17.6 percent of nongang males carried weapons. The findings made no distinction between guns and other weapons (e.g., knives).

Huff's research on fifty gang youths and matched samples of fifty "at risk" nongang youths in Cleveland (Ohio) show rates of gun "ownership" comparable to the Miami study. Among gang members, 40.4 percent reported carrying guns to school, compared with 10 percent of the "at risk" youths. Similar rates of participation in drive-by shootings were reported by gang members, compared with only 2 percent for the nongang youths. Collective gun carrying rates (among peers) were also far higher for gang youths (80.4 percent of peers carried guns in school) compared with nongang youths (34.7 percent).

5. *Gender, Firearms, and Youth Violence.*   The growing presence and influence of firearms has had minimal influences on female adolescents. Historically, female offenders have not used weapons, but girls may carry weapons for males (Moore 1978, 1991; Valentine 1978; Quicker 1983; Vigil 1988). Homicide data also show the rare involvement of both gang and nongang females in lethal violence (Maxson, Gordon, and Klein 1985; Sommers and Baskin 1992; Spergel 1995). Spergel (1995) reports that only one of 345 gang homicide offenders in Chicago between 1978 and 1981 was female; only six of 204 gang

homicide victims were female. Between 1988 and 1990, two of 286 gang homicide offenders were females; three of 233 gang homicide victims in this period were females. Spergel concludes that "the youth gang problem in its violent character is essentially a male problem" (p. 58). Uniform Crime Report data show that from 1976 to 1991, male homicide rates (involving both firearm and other weapons) among seventeen-year-olds were 11.5 times greater than female rates (Snyder and Sickmund 1995). Female adolescents accounted for a lower percentage of homicides in 1991 (6.0 percent) than in 1976 (12.1 percent); the decline reflected stable numbers of female homicide perpetrators compared with sharply rising numbers of male offenders (Blumstein 1995; Snyder and Sickmund 1995).

Survey data also indicate low rates of gun or other weapon use by teenage girls. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1993) reported that 8 percent of female high school students carried a (nonspecified) weapon to school in 1990. When firearms are referred to specifically, the rates drop to about 1 percent (Sadowski, Cairns, and Earp 1989; Callahan and Rivera 1992). Sheley, Wright, and Smith (1993) report that 9 percent of the female respondents reporting having owned a revolver at some time in their lives, 5 percent had owned an automatic or semiautomatic weapon, and fewer than 5 percent owned other types of firearms. Fewer than 3 percent carried weapons to school, and 8 percent carried them outside the home.

Finally, context is extremely important in determining comparative rates of weapons offenses by gender. For example, in a survey of 1,200 high school students and school dropouts from central city neighborhoods in three cities with lengthy gang histories, Fagan (1990) found that female gang members had significantly higher participation and offending rates for weapons offenses, including firearms, compared with nongang males or females. The Sheley, Wright, and Smith (1993) survey also reported strong links between gun possession and drug and gang involvement in both female and male respondents. The importance of context for both males and females is discussed in greater detail later on in this essay.

II. Explanations of Adolescent Gun Violence
Explanations for the increase in adolescent gun violence have emphasized a wide range of factors, generally at the macro-social or aggregate levels of explanation (Short 1997). In this section, we review these ex-

planations, criticizing them for their lack of specificity on gun violence. We offer, as an alternative, a framework for explaining adolescent gun violence that draws on recent research on the social processes of violent interactions. This social interactionist approach emphasizes the situational factors and dynamic processes within violent events. A situational framework depicts gun violence among adolescents as a situated, contextualized event that reflects the convergence of normative processes and expectancies, contingencies within the event itself, including the presence of guns, and decisions by actors that reflect simultaneously the codes that regulate street behavior and the functions or rewards of the specific event.

We offer a framework in which adolescent gun violence reflects the convergence of factors and processes within violent and "near violent" events. It does not deny the importance of the individual attributes that bring people to situations, such as "disputatiousness" (Luckenbill and Doyle 1989), but recognizes that once people are there other processes shape the outcomes of these events. Events are analyzed as "situated transactions," including rules that develop within specific sociocultural contexts, the situations and contexts where weapons are used, the motivations for carrying and using weapons, and the personality "sets" of groups where weapons are used. There are "rules" that govern how disputes are settled, when and where firearms are used or avoided, and the significance of firearms within a broader adolescent culture. Thus research must examine both the symbolic and instrumental meanings of firearms in the lives of young males.

Accordingly, gun "events" are analyzed as "situated transactions," including rules that develop within specific contexts, the situations and contexts where weapons are used, the motivations for carrying and using weapons, and the personality "sets" of groups in which weapons are used. There are "rules" that govern how disputes are settled, when and where firearms are used, and the significance of firearms within a broader adolescent culture. Violence "scripts," developed in a neighborhood context that values toughness and displays of violence, are invoked to achieve the goals of the event. Scripts also may limit the behavioral and strategic options for resolving disputes, and the presence of firearms may influence which scripts are invoked. Because violence generally is a highly contextualized event, specific contexts such as drug transactions shape decisions by adolescents to carry or use weapons, and which scripts are developed and shaped through diffusion within closed social groups.

A. Current Explanations of Gun Homicides Rates

No specific theories have been advanced to explain the sharp increase in adolescent gun violence in the past decade. Instead, theory and research have focused more generally on the increase in homicides and have centered on three domains: social structural factors and the concentration of poverty, the emergence of new street level drug markets that drew youths into drug selling and its attendant violence, and cultural developments that increase the salience of violence and justify its uses to achieve dominance and status. In addition, several epidemiological studies focus on the availability of guns as contributing to increased gun homicides, net of other factors. While each of these explanations contributes to our understanding of the epidemic of youth violence, they have limitations especially with regard to the role of firearms.

1. *Structural Explanations.* Structural explanations of homicide have generally ignored adolescents and rarely separate gun homicides from other types of homicide (see the review by Sampson and Lauritsen [1994]). For example, Land, McCall, and Cohen (1990) suggest that the correlates of homicide are stable across time and social areas but do not examine differences between adolescent and adult homicide rates or between gun and nongun homicides. Sampson (1987) cited the effects of family dissolution on social controls leading to violence generally, but not on homicide. These studies consistently point toward the concentration of poverty, or what Land et al. call *resource deprivation*, as ecological correlates of elevated homicide rates (see also Williams and Flewelling 1988). These correlates also are sources of social control within neighborhoods, including the presence of adults to supervise adolescents. The question whether weakening of social controls has contributed to elevated rates of adolescent homicides remains untested based on data for the past decade.

2. *Expanding Drug Markets.* Explanations focusing on the secondary effects of expanding drug markets rely on indirect measures and unfalsifiable assumptions but provide no direct evidence of a causal link between adolescent drug arrests and adolescent involvement in homicides (see, e.g., Blumstein 1995). One reason to doubt a direct causal link is that the precise relationship between drugs and guns is uncertain. Guns have been characterized as necessary tools of the drug trade to protect the money, protect dealers from assaults and robberies, to settle disputes over money or drugs, for instrumental displays of violence, to secure territory, and to preempt incursions (Goldstein et al.

1989; Fagan and Chin 1990; Sommers and Baskin 1993). However, the extent to which homicides by adolescents involve drug business remains unknown (see Hagedorn 1998, in this volume). Goldstein et al. (1989) showed that drug-related homicides remained a stable proportion of all homicides after the onset of the crack crisis in New York City, even as homicides increased. But that study did not report changes in the age distribution of homicides. Blumstein (1995) shows that the age distribution does reflect higher rates for adolescents in the early 1990s but fails to show a relationship of adolescent homicides to the drug business.

There is reason to consider the drug business a source of increasing adolescent homicide. Hamid (1994) suggests that young males may be more vulnerable to gun use and victimization in drug markets than are their older counterparts. They may lack experience or other skills to show the toughness necessary to survive. But homicides by and of young males continued to rise or remained stable even as drug markets began to contract after 1990 (Reiss and Roth 1993). Qualitative studies suggest that violence among adolescents in recent years seems to be unrelated or tangential to drugs, involving material goods or personal slights (Canada 1995; Wilkinson and Fagan 1996a; Anderson 1997). While the increase in homicides may have at one time reflected the expansion of drug markets, homicides in the late 1990s (nearly a decade after the emergence of crack markets) may reflect the residual effects of those markets. That is, guns that entered street networks during the expansion of drug markets remained part of the street ecology even as the drug economy subsided (Hamid 1994).

Drug markets are but one type of social context, and drug sellers are but one type of social network. Violence often is mediated by these contexts and networks, particularly with respect to drugs and alcohol (Fagan 1993a, 1993b). Several studies have controlled for social network and context in explaining situational factors that might motivate higher rates of homicide and gun carrying among adolescents. For example, both Sheley and Wright (1995) and the Rochester studies (Thornberry et al. 1993; Lizotte et al. 1994; Bjerregard and Lizotte 1995) focus on gangs as a context where gun possession and violence rates are high. However, neither of these studies focuses closely on adolescent gun use.

3. *Normative Social Processes.*   Sociocultural explanations of youth violence have appeared regularly in the delinquency literature for several decades. Several focused on gang life. Cohen's (1955) study of

gang boys showed the status value of toughness and fighting within gangs. Subcultural theories also were evident in studies such as Miller (1958) and Yablonsky (1962). More recently, Anderson (1994, 1997, in this volume) suggested a set of mediating constructs that provide a dynamic framework that views violence as a regulatory process designed to reinforce behavioral codes regarding identity and self-help (also see Black 1983, 1993). While previous cultural explanations focused on beliefs regarding violence, Anderson's framework suggests a more general code of social identity and normative behaviors that establish rules of conduct and "respect." Violations of these rules mandate several reactions, including a violent response. While not focused on guns or homicide, it provides an explanatory framework for violence as self-defense and functional violence designed to establish and maintain identity. We revisit these ideas below as a potentially important means of explaining gun violence.

4. *Specificity of Explanations of Gun Violence.* None of these explanations adequately addresses gun violence among adolescents. First, few studies have focused on gun violence among adolescents and, instead, include a wide range of violent or antisocial behaviors. Second, although gun carrying and gun ownership rates are high, gun violence remains a rare event and prediction and explanation of low base rate behaviors is difficult. Third, a corollary problem is the focus on characteristics of violent individuals generally, rather than on distinguishing individuals who carry, own, or use weapons compared with other forms of violence. With the exception of the Rochester studies, we know little about whether adolescents involved in gun violence differ from those committing other types of violence. Moreover, we do not know whether their involvement in gun violence is attributable to individual differences versus circumstantial or contextual factors.

Another set of concerns relates to explanations that differentiate gun carrying from gun use. Gun carrying and possession rates far exceed gun use rates. The fourth limitation then, is that we do not account for decisions to engage in gun violence. Fifth, and relative to this, we do not know if carrying guns influences either motivations or restraints on gun violence. That is, current theories, focused on individual propensities, do not account for the influence of violence *means* on arousal (motivations) or control (restraint). The absence of *agency* and decision making from explanations of gun violence reflects the deterministic nature of many theories that are focused on individual characteristics. Prior work on homicides as situated transactions (Luckenbill 1977;

Polk 1994) examines processual dynamics, but not the contingencies and evaluations that contribute to decisions to use guns. Nor are these studies focused on adolescents. In fact, few explanations of violence generally examine decision-making processes (but see Felson and Tedeschi [1995], whose notion of goal-oriented violence begins to build a contingent, decision-based framework).

Finally, current explanations do not account for individual differences across time and place, as well as the spatial concentration of gun use in specific social and physical locales. In other words, explanations of gun violence need to account for contextual influences, or person-place interactions. "Place," in this context, is a vector with several dimensions: behavioral norms that are attached to specific situations, such as displays of weapons or aggressive words; the aggressive features of a locale, such as the density of guns or drug-dealing activity; the composition and responses of the people present; and the social control attributes of the place, including both formal and informal controls. The interaction of these factors produces an ecological or situational dynamic that is likely to influence individual choices and behavior, including either defensive or offensive actions, as well as strategic decisions based on access to guns or other weapons.

B. An Explanatory Framework for Adolescent Gun Violence

Violence research has increasingly adopted a situational or transactional approach to explain violent transactions, including the use of firearms (Cook 1976, 1980, 1983; Luckenbill 1977; Felson and Steadman 1983; Katz 1988; Luckenbill and Doyle 1989; Cornish 1993a, 1993b, 1994; Felson 1993; Sommers and Baskin 1993; Oliver 1994). Situational approaches view violent events as interactions involving the confluence of motivations, perceptions, technology (in this case, weapons), the social control attributes of the immediate setting, and the ascribed meaning and status attached to the violent act. One advantage of this view is that it addresses both the motivations that bring individuals to situations where firearms are used and also the transactions and decisions that comprise the event. Individuals may employ "scripts" as part of a strategy of "impression management" to gain status and dominance in potentially violent transactions (Cornish 1994). These perspectives make possible explanations that sort out the proximal effects of the presence of firearms and other situational elements from the dis-

tal influences of social psychological factors.[2] Situational approaches are dynamic "theories of action" (Cornish 1993*a*, 1994) that take into account both motivations and decision making within events.

This seems to be an especially important perspective for understanding the dynamics of adolescent weapon use. Explanations of firearms use among adolescents require several levels of analysis: the motivations for carrying/using weapons, the nature of everyday life that gives rise to conflicts that turn lethal, the "scripts" of adolescent life that lead to escalation (and the factors that underlie those scripts), and the role of weapons in the decision-making processes of adolescents when they engage in disputes or even predatory violence. The presence of firearms is not an outcome of other processes, but part of a dynamic and interactive social process in which the anticipation or reality of firearms alters the decisions leading to violence and the outcomes of violent events.

However, few studies have examined the specific role of firearms in violent events.[3] The LH Research (1993) survey suggests that the number of events in which guns are used is a small fraction of the number of events in which guns are present. Although several studies attribute violence to the dynamics and contingencies in contexts such as gang conflicts, drug markets, domestic disputes, or robberies (Cook 1976; Fagan 1993), few have addressed the dynamics or antecedents of firearm use in inner cities among adolescents or young males, especially the mechanisms that escalate gun possession to gun use. That is, research on adolescent firearm use has not yet analyzed the interactions of the characteristics of the individuals involved, the interpersonal transactions and interactions between the parties, or how the presence of guns affects the outcomes of these interactions. And no studies have focused on specific social or neighborhood contexts that also shape the outcomes of putative violent events. Such an approach seems necessary to explain the increase in firearm fatalities among

[2] Proximal effects are those that are situated close to the event itself, in a temporal sequence of causal factors. Distal effects, conversely, are those that occur at a greater temporal distance from the observed event.

[3] These studies often confound firearms with other weapons, and confound weapons use generally with other forms of violence (see, e.g., Elliott, Huizinga, and Menard 1989). Moreover, the low base rates of violence in these studies limits efforts to explain the use of firearms or other weapons. Violence in these studies is more often concentrated in inner cities, leading to a potential confounding of individual characteristics with social area effects (Sampson and Wilson 1995).

young African Americans and to locate the problem in the specific contexts in which these events occur.

Violence researchers have come to understand dispute-related violent events as a process of social interactions with identifiable rules and contingencies. Numerous studies have applied this framework with respect to violence focusing on the interactional dynamics of situated transactions (Luckenbill 1977; Felson 1982; Felson and Steadman 1983; Campbell 1986; Luckenbill and Doyle 1989; Oliver 1994). The processual nature of violent interpersonal transactions is both rule-oriented and normative (Cornish 1993*b*). It is through these processes and contingencies that individual characteristics such as "disputatiousness" are channeled into violent events. Violent behavior can be viewed as a method of communicating social meanings within contexts where such action is either expected or at least tolerated.

The presence of firearms presents a unique contingency that shapes decision-making patterns of individuals. The presence of firearms influences decisions both in social interactions with the potential for becoming disputes and also within disputes that have already begun (see Wilkinson and Fagan 1996*a*). The influence on decision making is compounded by the social contexts where firearm injuries are concentrated: inner-city neighborhoods characterized by extensive "resource deprivation" (Land, McCall, and Cohen 1990; Sampson and Wilson 1995). We specify two socialization processes that have converged in these areas to create a unique influence of firearms: the emergence of a "street code" that shapes perceptions of grievances and norms on their resolution (see, e.g., Anderson 1994, 1997); and an "ecology of danger" where social interactions are perceived as threatening or lethal, and where individuals are normatively seen as harboring hostile intent and the willingness to inflict harm. The latter is the outcome of three successive generations in inner cities who grew up in epochs of high rates of homicide and firearm injuries. These concepts form the dimensions of an analytic framework that is specific to adolescent gun violence.

1. *Arousal and Aggression.*   First, an explanatory framework must account for the factors that channel arousal into aggression and violence. There are many sources of arousal in everyday inner-city life, including a wide range of annoyances, complications in institutional and domestic arrangements, noxious settings, and interpersonal conflicts (Anderson 1990; Canada 1995). But not all of them translate into anger

and aggression. Understanding gun violence requires that we can discern the processes that transform interpersonal conflicts into lethal aggression. One part of this process is the attachment of meaning to words, actions, and threats, and the processing of that information as threatening or malevolent (Dodge and Coie 1987; Coie and Dodge 1997).

2. *Decision Making.* Second, gun violence involves a series of decisions, and an explanatory framework must include a decision-making framework. Decisions to carry guns, to bring oneself to a setting where guns are likely to be present, to pursue a dispute that may turn deadly, to show a gun or make a threat with it, and ultimately to use the gun or to avoid its use, are decisions that reflect the outcomes of arousal and anger, as well as strategic decision making. Consistent with the rational choice perspective, Felson and Tedeschi (1995) argue that a violent action involves a sequence of decisions and that an actor evaluates alternatives before carrying out a violent action. Four elements of decisions were outlined: the value of the outcome, the expectations of success in reaching goals, the value of the costs, and the expectations of the costs. Costs and third parties can be inhibitors of violence. The actor makes a choice to engage in violent behavior because it seems to be the best alternative available in the situation. But adolescents are poor decision makers, with limited capacity to weigh consequences (Steinberg and Cauffman 1996). They also may lack the cognitive capital to understand the range of potential consequences or to fashion strategies that may exempt them from gun violence.

3. *Social Identity and Other Functions of Violence.* Third, the decision to engage in gun violence suggests that it serves specific social or psychological functions. Both Katz (1988) and Felson (1993) identified three main goals of aggressive actions: to compel and deter others, to achieve a favorable social identity, and to obtain justice. These functions, which provide the motivational component for violence, can be understood in the context of adolescent development (Fagan and Wilkinson 1997). Prior research helps us to understand the range of possible functions served by adolescent violence: social control (Black 1983), identity and reputation (Goffman 1983), material acquisition (Katz 1988), and domination and conquest (Katz 1988; Polk 1994). An explanatory framework for adolescent gun violence should include a recognition of gun violence as a strategic means, indeed a sure bet, to achieve these goals.

The development of identity is a central and perhaps overarching function of violence. Goffman (1959) claims that people give staged performances to different social audiences. Individual behavior is "scripted" to the extent that scripts are used to convey the kind of impression (or situational identity) an actor wanted others to perceive. He argues that different audiences may have different preconceptions of the actor and the actor may have varying degrees of experience projecting alternate impressions in new situations. The importance of status and reputation (impression *given off*) in this social context influences the scripts an individual may choose when confronted with a dispute on the streets. One could argue that based on whatever limited knowledge is available at the start of the event, an individual will choose a script which casts him or her in the best light.

Identity in turn serves critical functions: attaining social status and accruing "props" or respect, and warding off attacks from others seeking to improve their "reps" by conquering someone with a higher status. In a neighborhood with limited means to conventional success and an imbalance of deviant social roles, the formation of violent "identities" is enhanced by the various uses of guns: show, threat, and use.

4. *Processual Dynamics of Violent Events.* Fourth, social interactionist perspectives on violence suggest a focus on describing factors that produce conflict and those that inhibit it. This approach focuses on three central issues for understanding violence: the escalation of disputes, the role of social identities, and the role of third parties. Felson describes the stages of violent incidents, as do Luckenbill and Doyle (1989), calling the sequence of events a social control process. Violence is a function of events that occur during the incident and therefore is not predetermined by the initial goals of the actors (Felson and Steadman 1983).

Luckenbill and Doyle (1989) argue that dispute-related violence is the product of three successive events: "naming," "claiming," and "aggressing." At the naming stage, the first actor identifies a negative outcome as an injury which the second actor has caused (assigning blame). At the claiming stage, the injured party expresses his grievance and demands reparation from the adversary. The final stage determines whether the interaction is transformed into a dispute. The third event is the rejection of a claim (in whole or in part) by the harmdoer. According to Luckenbill and Doyle, "disputatiousness" is defined as the likelihood of naming and claiming, and aggressiveness is defined as the

willingness to preserve and use force to settle the dispute. They claim that violence is triggered by norms of the code of personal honor and that differential disputatiousness and aggressiveness would depend on the situation. This conceptualization closely resembles Goffman's "Character Contest" used by Luckenbill (1977) to examine violent transactions resulting in homicide.

This approach is concerned with the actor's point of view. It suggests a complex, contingent pathway from distal factors such as gaining access to guns, to the proximal factors that determine whether they are used. Within events, a series of decisions and contingencies mediates the outcomes of events. Violence in this setting is an interaction in which decisions and actions at one stage are contingent on what happened before and judgments about what is likely to happen next. Considerations of whether an opponent is armed, whether retaliation is likely, if there are police or other social control actors nearby, how bystanders will react, are all made in a compressed time frame and are interdependent. These interactions and transactions suggest a series of decisions, albeit decisions that may be rational but also constrained by circumstances, cognition, and available information.

Accordingly, an explanatory framework requires an understanding of the processual and contingent nature of these decisions, and the interaction of two or more actors to produce gun violence. The increased availability of guns, especially among adolescents, who are incomplete decision makers and potentially high risk takers, changes these processes in important ways that are not now fully understood. The stages of violent events may be altered by the presence, expectancies, and lethality of firearms in specific social contexts.

5. *Violence Scripts.* Fifth, contingent decision making by adolescents is not ad hoc for each event but reflects cumulative knowledge gained through participation in and observation of violent interactions. This involves socialization processes that begin prior to adolescence and are refined along the way through interaction and practice. They develop into "scripts" and provide a bounded set of choices to be invoked in situations in which conflict or aggression may bring guns into play. The script framework provides a useful way to understand the decision-making process, including calculation of risks, strategic decisions, and assessments of available choices.

Research on child and adolescent violence suggests several ways in which script theory can explain violent events: scripts are ways of or-

ganizing knowledge and behavioral choices (Abelson 1976); individuals learn behavioral repertoires for different situations (Schank and Abelson 1977; Abelson 1981; Huesmann 1988; Tedeschi and Felson 1994); these repertoires are stored in memory as scripts and are elicited when cues are sensed in the environment (Abelson 1981; Huesmann 1988; Dodge and Crick 1990; Tedeschi and Felson 1994); choice of scripts varies between individuals and some individuals will have limited choices (see Dodge and Crick 1990); individuals are more likely to repeat scripted behaviors when the previous experience was considered successful (Schank and Abelson 1977; Tedeschi and Felson 1994); and scripted behavior may become "automatic" without much thought or weighing of consequences (Abelson 1981; Tedeschi and Felson 1994).

The application of script theory to adolescent gun events as "situated transactions" may provide a level of understanding for a complex process that is not well understood. Adolescents are likely to look to the streets for lessons on the rules of gun fighting, learn from experience in conflict situations, and practice moves they have observed others performing in handling disputes on the street (Anderson 1994; Canada 1995). The processes of learning and diffusion of this sort of gun "knowledge" remain unstudied and unknown. But adolescents in conditions of economic deprivation may not develop as complete decision makers. There may be a number of social interactional, developmental, contextual, cultural, and socioeconomic factors which impinge on the decision-making processes of young males in violent conflicts.

6. *Street Codes, Expectancies, and Normative Behaviors.* Finally, the development of scripts, the processes of decision making, and the social definitions of conflict and other functions served by violence form in specific social contexts. These contexts shape normative definitions, imperatives or expected behaviors, costs and rewards of violence. Firearm violence represents an extreme of a continuum of violence in the dynamics of inner-city youths. Yet only a few studies have examined the current social worlds of young inner-city males in depth (see Sullivan 1989; Anderson 1990, 1994; Canada 1995; Wilkinson and Fagan 1996a, 1996b). Anderson's study of inner-city Philadelphia is perhaps the most detailed description of violence and inner-city life (Anderson 1994, 1997). According to Anderson the causes of inner-city violence are both social structurally and situationally determined: "The inclination to violence springs from the circumstances of life among the ghetto poor—the lack of jobs that pay a living wage, the stigma of race,

the fallout from rampant drug use and drug trafficking, and the resulting alienation and lack of hope for the future (1994, p. 81).

He proposes that there are two types of normative systems operating within the inner-city context: the "decent" (locked into middle-class values) families and the "street" (opposed to mainstream society) families. He argues that while the majority of inner-city residents are of the "decent" orientation, the street orientation has come to govern the normative system regarding human behavior in public spaces, especially among the young. Thus community norms on the street are regulated and enforced by the smaller minority who possess the street orientation.

Competition over limited resources, including social status, respect, and material goods, by physically aggressive and violent means is a central part of this system. Young children who spend time playing outside in the neighborhood are exposed to all types of interpersonal conflict, displays of physical domination, social approval for violent behavior, and limited definitions of respect. These messages are reinforced at home by adults and in school by peers. Anderson argues that children learn to fight through their play with others in the street. The code of the street largely determines the structural and procedural "scripts" children acquire for handling interpersonal conflicts and identity formation. Children who are of street orientation will invariably learn scripts that accord with the street code while "decent" youths may learn alternative scripts in addition to those in line with the code of the streets.

In this context, Anderson describes the necessity for adolescents, whether "decent" or "street," to understand and play out appropriate roles to accord with the code of the street while traveling through and interacting with others in public. Acquiring fighting skills is considered important as a means of survival in the inner city (also see Sullivan 1989, p. 113). The process of self-preservation through displays of toughness, nerve, or violent behavior is considered a necessary part of day-to-day life for inner-city adolescents, especially young males (also see Canada 1995).

Social identity and respect are the most important features of the street code. Within this context there are clear-cut rules for using violence to gain respect. The public nature of a person's image or status identity oftentimes requires open displays of "nerve," including attacks on others, getting revenge for previous situations with an opponent,

protecting members of one's social group, and having the right "props." There is only a limited amount of respect available, and the process of acquiring respect is highly competitive. Projecting the right image is everything in this context, and backing up the projection with violent behavior is expected.

According to Anderson, the street code provides rules for how individuals are to communicate with one another, how respect is to be earned, how and when respect is to be granted to another, and what should happen when someone disrespects or "disses" you. Violence and other types of domination are tools in promoting one's self-image; in other words, conquering others is one way to achieve higher levels of status. Developmentally as children begin to approach adolescence there is strong need for social approval and status. These needs may be even stronger in an inner-city context where fewer opportunities for receiving positive status are available to young adolescents.

The street code is a determining factor for proving one's manhood and knowing how to act accordingly when confronted with a variety of challenging situations. Anderson notes that the stakes are very high in this context because manhood is dependent upon being fearless and untouchable. He argues that decent youth can situationally act tough and macho but also maintain a more mainstream identity in other settings by being courteous and respectful when appropriate (Anderson 1994, p. 92). The street code has a functional purpose for the decent youth, while it is a defining characteristic of the street-oriented youth. The street-oriented youth is most likely blocked from other types of behavior. Again, the street code is useful for understanding the processes by which individuals internalize violent scripts. Anderson offers two ideal types of normative orientations of inner-city youths, hinting at a model for understanding the variations that exist within inner-city culture.

Anderson is mostly silent on the issue of lethal violence by firearms and the code of the streets. He states that possessing a willingness to "pull the trigger" is an important part of an individual's quest for respect; however, he does not analyze the implications of gun use on the code of the streets. The ready availability of guns in the inner city has undoubtedly raised the stakes of the code of the streets even higher. It seems that "nerve," "toughness," and being a "punk" would take on new meanings within a climate regulated by lethally armed actors. The increased availability of guns in our inner cities has been documented beginning in the late eighties. Sullivan (1989) reported that there were

more guns on the streets and that they were more frequently in the hands of younger offenders. Current research on gun violence presented below sheds new light on some of these important issues.

III. Dynamics of Adolescent Gun Violence: Examples from Three Domains

In this section, we use this framework to identify how the presence of guns among adolescents creates unique contingencies that shape the course of violent events, decisions within them, and their outcomes. We illustrate the social processes of gun violence among adolescent males in three areas: the development of norms and expectations for the use of lethal or gun violence, the role of guns in the development of "violent identities" and how this identity contributes to gun violence, and the impact of violent identities and guns on events involving drugs and alcohol. These illustrations come from analyses of data on violent events involving male adolescents in two inner-city neighborhoods in New York City (see Fagan and Wilkinson 1995; Wilkinson and Fagan 1996a; Wilkinson 1997a, 1997b). Interviews were conducted with 125 young men aged sixteen to twenty-four from the East New York and Mott Haven neighborhoods, areas with high concentrations of injury violence and homicide since 1990. Respondents were asked to provide background information on themselves, their family, their school, and their neighborhood in a narrative interview protocol. Respondents were then asked to reconstruct up to four events involving violent or near violent situations, including events where guns were present or absent. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed, and text analysis programs were used to identify recurring themes and domains (for details about the methods, see Wilkinson, McClain, and Fagan [1996]; Wilkinson [1997b]).

A. Normative Processes: Gun Violence and an Ecology of Danger

First, we examine normative social processes that influence cultural norms, the effects of omnipresent guns on these norms, and expectancies about one's own and others' behaviors. As illustrated by Anderson (1994, 1997), street codes have evolved in socially and economically isolated areas. These codes establish what is important in social relations among teenagers, and the methods for redressing grievances and disputes arising from violations of the code. The street code determines not only what is important but also appropriate means for resolving grievances and disputes. It also places values on "toughness"

and violent identities. In an ecology of "danger," where actors pre-
sume that guns are present, conflicts and disputes arising from street
codes may be potentially deadly. These beliefs have shaped the meth-
ods for resolving conflicts and have been conflated with the means for
self-preservation and maintaining identity.

1. *Dangerousness and Need for Guns.*   Young men often character-
ized their neighborhood as a "war zone." The street is described as
dangerous and unpredictable. Violence is expected and can erupt out
of a variety of situations. Public behavior on the streets is regulated by
a general knowledge that life could be taken away at any moment (by
guns, primarily).

Interviewer (DT):[4] "How would you describe your neighborhood in
terms of safety? Is it safe compared to other New York areas?"

Respondent (ENYN13): "It depends. Safe how? Your mother try to
make it safe for you or does the community?"

(DT): "Generally."

(ENYN13): "Nope. Anything could happen. That's what—that's
the thing that really gets people. Like, you come outside, you don't
know if you comin back in. You know, that could be your last day
walkin' or somethin', so I really can't say it's too safe, you know. It
depends you—if you goin' to school, you in school, that when they try
keep you safe there. But, once you outside . . ."

An almost daily exposure to injurious or lethal violence has had last-
ing effects on the young men in these areas. This stark reality shapes
attitudes, perceptions, behavior, and social identity. One respondent
had this to say about his South Bronx neighborhood:

Interviewer (JM): "Tell me a little bit about that. How was it up
there? Your experiences up there [referring to a block in the neighbor-
hood]?"

Respondent (SBN18): "Very rough. People stabbing you, shooting
at you. You can't trust nobody there. You get cut and stuff like that.
People always bothering you, you know. They don't fight one on one,
just straight up jump you. There is all drugs. People making money on
the drugs. Lot of fights. Sometimes, no heat, you gotta watch your
back. It is not a safe place to be."

(JM): "Was it rough for you, you couldn't handle it?"

(SBN18): "It was rough, I could handle it."

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[4] The initials in parentheses designate which interviewer conducted the interview.
Code numbers were assigned to respondents to protect personal identities.

(JM): "What was hardest for you?"

(SBN18): "Everything."

Interviewer (JM): "How would you describe your neighborhood in terms of safety? You know what's safe out there to be out there?"

Respondent (SBN26): "Safe? If you ain't in your house, you ain't safe. And even when you in your house you know, something could happen."

(JM): "Like what?"

(SBN26): "Like you be you could be in the living room watching T.V. and next thing you know, 'bow' 'bow,' gunshots through the windows. They might not be for you, but, you know. Bullets, bullets have no, you know, no names."

Guns play a big part in feelings of personal safety within this context. Another subject explained why he felt young males in his neighborhood had guns:

Interviewer (DT): "So who's carrying the guns out there? Like what age?"

Respondent (G-67): "You got you got you got everybody carrying guns. You got the girls carrying guns, you got the shortys (young teens)."

(DT): "You don't know what reason they carrying guns?"

(G-67): "They just want to be down with everybody else you know. And the one thing is another thing is a lot a people dropping in the hood you know."

(DT): "Yeah."

(G-67): "People dropping, so everybody walking around they ain't safe, they don't trust nobody you know that's why they got another reason for for a lot a homicides. The reason about trust you know trust, don't nobody trust nobody. Everybody growing up, everybody trying to get that money, everybody try to knock each off. So everybody say just ah fuck it . . . , everybody just grab the ghat (gun), you know, just be walking around. So it just be a jungle out there."

2. *Guns Dominate Social Interactions.*   Gun carrying in this group varied from daily carrying to carrying only when there was an ongoing "beef" or conflict with others. When a respondent knew he had a "beef" with someone, he tried to be prepared for the moment when this beef would heat up into gun violence. It was understood that using a gun to harm his opponent was the best way to handle the situation both in terms of what was expected on the street and what an individual had to do to maintain a "positive" (respected) identity. Most often,

respondents reported having a gun close by in case it would be needed during a spontaneous conflict or retaliatory situation. They described many instances where they had time to prepare for a potential attack by going inside their building to get their guns or by sending others to get them. Individuals actively involved in drug selling, for example, either carried a firearm or stashed it in the drug spot in case of possible robbery or territorial attack.

The ready availability of guns in the inner city has undoubtedly shaped and skewed street codes toward the expectation of lethal violence. It also sets the value of violent behaviors in the social currency of the neighborhood and, as in the past (e.g., Cohen 1955), is the principal source of social status. "Nerve," "toughness," and being a "punk" take on new meanings within a climate regulated by lethally armed actors. Openly displaying a "willingness" to take the life of another when the situation "calls for it" is part of this process.

The prevalence of guns, coupled with the rapid social diffusion of episodes of gun violence, helps shape these perceptions of danger. Respondents report that "most" young males (i.e., fourteen to thirty years old) can and do have guns in these inner-city neighborhoods. Guns are available on the street to just about anyone who has the means to purchase, share, borrow, or steal them. Even people with less powerful identities can get access to firearms through associates, family members, or local drug dealers.

Respondents reported that their own experiences with the world of guns began as early as eight and as late as sixteen and were central to their socialization. Having a powerful gun was and is valued both for intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. Guns may fulfill a variety of personal needs for adolescents, including power, status, protection, and recreation. These processes begin at a young age, often before adolescence, as boys are being socialized into gun use on the street. These younger gun users were described as ruthless, heartless, unpredictable actors who were attempting to make impressions on older, more powerful characters on the street.

The presence of guns also has shaped the rules of fighting among teenagers. Fair fights have been described repeatedly in tales of inner-city street corner life (see, e.g., Cohen 1955; Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Anderson 1978, 1990; Moore 1978). "Fair ones" are defined as physical fights involving two parties of nearly equivalent size and strength who would fight each other one-on-one using their fists (with no weapons or additional guys). Fair ones, according to our sample, are not now the

dominant type of violent events for young men aged sixteen to twenty-four. Examples of fair fights here included altercations between friends or associates over seemingly trivial disputes, fights with family members, fights by younger boys (six to eleven years old) and sometimes older men (thirty-five years and up), fights inside jail or prison, and fights on the block by people who are known to each other.

However, most respondents explained that "fair ones" no longer dominate conflict resolution in the inner-city neighborhood street life, especially in face-offs with strangers, whose willingness to abide by time-honored values is unproven. Many situations that start out as fair fights typically involve some type of "gun play" as the "beef" escalates over time. Thus the potential for an attack to involve guns is nearly certain for the young men in our sample. Guns raise the stakes in a variety of ways, and in many instances, firearms trump all other logic.

3. *Guns Change Decisions within Violent Events.*   Guns have symbolic as well as strategic meaning. Gibbs and Merighi (1994) suggest that guns are symbols of both masculinity and identity. Respondents in this study say that showing a gun (threatening someone) is a disrespect, a violation of one's social and physical space. Guns also change the calculus of a dispute, raising the stakes both in terms of status and strategy. Once a gun is introduced into a conflict situation, it is perceived as a life-or-death situation. Following this type of disrespect, the opponent is expected to retaliate by getting a gun and shooting the other person. In a gun face-off situation, the main strategic move reported was to take the first shot in anticipation of the opponent using his weapon first if given the opportunity.

Some respondents reported about gun events from both sides of an attack (events where they initiated an attack and events where others initiated attacks against them). From these descriptions we are able to piece together some of the contingencies which affect an actor's decision-making process when faced with a gun threat.

a. *Intensity of the Threat (Level of Arousal).*   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; if guns are available, guns are used in reply to a transgression. Actors within this context know when and where pulling out and using a gun is socially acceptable. Those who do not follow the code are either eliminated or extremely stigmatized. If either actor displays a gun in a conflict situation, the event is described as going to the next level (the gun level).

   b. Prior Relationship with/Knowledge of Opponent.   Prior knowledge and situational impressions of the opponent are important for shaping decisions about future action. Actors use this information. Gun threats by individuals with "large identities" are taken very seriously. Idle threats are not welcome and may result in serious violence. The idea of "fronting" or faking a threat is a big mistake. Therefore, in the neighborhood individuals who have and are carrying guns must be willing to use them if the situation calls for it.

   c. Perception of Risk and Cost.   Guns play an important part in actors' decisions about the risk and cost of violent actions. One of the first and most important decisions is the extent to which one's identity would be improved or damaged by engaging or avoiding gun violence. The actor's original social identity factors heavily into how the stages of a gun event would unfold. Some respondents have more to gain or lose than others. Most "lost" or unsuccessful gun events are considered damaging to the image and reputation of the loser, especially if that response involves retreat. A "successful" gun event is described as identity-enhancing. Inflicting harm on others or gaining total compliance over others are valued outcomes which are publicly reinforced through verbal and nonverbal displays of respect commonly referred to as "props."

   Retreat could also have positive ramifications for social identity if used strategically. In some situations, retreat is used as a strategic technique when a respondent is caught off-guard (without his gun or people). In certain situations, respondents describe using their communication skills to talk their way out of getting shot or employ some other neutralization strategy in order to buy some time to arm themselves and get their people for back up. Once the subjects are "on point," they frequently go looking for their opponent.

   d. Peer Influences: Co-offending, Instigation, and Torch Taking.   Gun use often involved multiple shooters on both sides of a conflict. Sixty-six percent of gun events involved cooffenders, compared with only 33 percent of nongun situations. Many of the gun events reflected ongoing "beefs" between groups or networks of young men, which oftentimes meant the shooting of numerous members of rival cliques over a single dispute. Often, the reason for the original dispute seemed minor; however, once gun play came into the situation future violence was motivated by revenge or getting justice. Avenging the shooting of one's close friends is considered honorable and necessary for future relations on the street. According to the code, the shooting of one of a

young man's street family becomes personal, it becomes a disrespect, even though it may have little or nothing to do with the respondent. These uses of violence suggest a self-help dimension that illustrates Black's (1983) "quantity of law" dynamic.

   e. *Perception of Event by Bystanders (The Status and Identity of Observers).*   The influence of third parties in violent conflicts has been well documented in the literature (see, e.g., Felson and Steadman 1983; Oliver 1994; and Decker 1995). The importance of observers is most critical during the period of adolescence where young males are developing and testing their personal and social identities (Kinney 1993; Eder 1995). Verbal and nonverbal expressions by others, as well as the respondent's internalized "other," will have a strong impact on his decision-making process. These cues help the actor decide how best to respond and what actions to anticipate from others. Others may play a central role in shaping the actor's definition of the situation and the outcome of events. The actor is concerned about how each situation will make him look to others. The "audience" as amplifier of the social identity won through violence helps to perpetuate the street code.

   f. *Absence of Social Controls.*   Many of the "squashed" (avoided) events resulted from interventions (real or anticipated) by parties not directly involved in the violent situation such as police, school officials, or other clique members. Some violent situations were dissolved simply because the risks of legal (and nonlegal) sanctions were too great. Interrupted conflicts could dissolve temporarily or permanently depending on the street identity of the mediator, intensity of the issue sparking the situation, future opportunities to continue or respark an event, or resolution of the conflict through alternative means.

   Overall, within these gun events the thought of dying is always present. However, this cost competes with other costs and returns from gun violence: achieving or maintaining social identity and status bounded in that situation or moment may hold more value than life itself. It appears that more thought is given to what others may think of the actor and the actor's attempt to match his behavior to his self-image (mythical or actual) than to the possibility of one's own death or serious injury. Losing respect can be damaging to one's personal safety, economic livelihood, and associations with peers (and sometimes family members). This is not simply bravado, since losing respect in one arena marks a person for future victimizations until he reestablishes his identity through a display of toughness or violence.

   4. *Guns and Gun Use Equal Respect.*   Respect is the social currency

by which one attains status and protection within the neighborhood. Guns play an important role in the quest for respect on the street. Most respondents sought a tough or untouchable self-image, an image with a very high social and strategic value. On the streets, guns enhance one's potential for being tough.

Interviewer (MP): "What makes somebody tough or a big man in your neighborhood?"

(G-56): "What make 'em tough?"

(MP): "Yeah."

(G-56): "When they got guns. When they got a whole lot of friends know the guys back. Of course, he gon say he the big man, nobody could touch him. He got props, he got juice."

Another respondent explained that "bust[ing] a gun" was a primary way of achieving respect, especially when there were few alternative models. He explained:

Interviewer (WW): "What makes someone tough or a big man in your 'hood?"

Respondent (ENYN16): "In the 'hood it's easy for anybody to be called a big man, because, you know, anybody could bust a gun, anybody could rob somebody. You know, it's like most niggers out here don't really got role models, so seeing somebody do that, automatically you gain respect, or they think that makes them a big man."

Gun use is equated with status and with a high level of respect. Involvement in gun violence is described in terms of developmental achievements. The example below shows how one respondent earned a "stripe" by committing a murder. For this respondent, being "trigger happy" gave him status but also brought him into many additional conflicts. Clearly, he viewed these features of his identity as positive and rewarding.

Respondent (G-61): "Yeah it might turn out tragic . . ."

Interviewer (RM): "So when you shot the guy you shot, when you shot him, or when you found out he was dead or something—how did that make you feel, did that give you, did that boost you up?"

(G-61): "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 gotta stripe, that's how that made me feel, I got a stripe."

(RM): "Did you get a reputation after that?"

(G-61): "Well, I kept a reputation but . . . ; 'cause I was into a lot of stuff . . . ; and thing I did came to where I was like one of the people, I was like one of the most people they would come and get when it

was time for conflict, then anybody . . . ; that I really be around, when there beef, when it's beef time they know who to come get and outta those people, I was one of the top ones they would come and get . . . ; 'cause they always known me . . . ; for being trigger happy and . . ."

The next example shows how lethal violence is necessary for building one's reputation on the street. This respondent thought about reputation in terms of how many "bodies one has under his belt."

Interviewer (WW): "How 'bout image and reputation? Describe how that's important in the projects or your neighborhood."

Respondent (G-81): "Shooting somebody, right there that's image and reputation. How many bodies you got under your belt, if you don't got more than three bodies under your belt. . . . If you ain't never killed nobody, you ain't nothing. . . . That's how niggers look at it though but . . . if it's . . if it's your people . . . they know . . . they knew you'll bust your gun but they know you never kilt nobody they'll show you some respect. . . . But other than that they come out slick out they mouth . . . Like if you get into an argument wit one of them, 'Nigger you ain't never bust your gun man. I got more bodies than you. You ain't really doin nothin. You ain't never kilt nobody. I kilt more niggers than you ever kilt.' You know what I'm saying. That's, that's, that's proving it right there."

B. Implementing the Street Code: Establishing and Maintaining Identity through Lethal Violence

Social interaction in public spaces is structurally organized in small groups or interpersonal affiliations. These groups are very significant in formation of personal and social identities in childhood and adolescence. According to Goffman (1963), group formation shores up personal and social identity. Social identity has a stronger influence because "individuals have little control over situations and especially going outside of the expected role for their particular social identity" (Goffman 1963, p. 128). Many of the vital functions of adolescent social life operate through these groupings whether they are loosely or tightly connected (e.g., social learning and mentoring, play, nurturing, social support, and economic opportunity). Goffman argues that the "norms regarding social identity pertain to kinds of role repertoires or profiles we feel it permissible for any given individual to sustain" (p. 63). The process of categorizing others (from one's own frame of reference) shapes human experience.

Goffman describes two types of honoring or (dishonoring) identi-

ties: prestige and stigma (1963, p. 59). We applied this notion in this research to the social identities of adolescent males in the inner city. The issue seems to be who gets "prestige" and who gets "stigma" and how do "mixed interactions" play out within this context. Clearly, the code of the streets calls for prestige to be granted to those who are tough, who have gained respect by proving their toughness, and who reenact their appropriate role in public. Someone who cannot or does not fit into a prestigious identity may be instead stigmatized. The "mixed contacts" between young males who are attempting to transcend a "punk" or "herb" (weaker individual or frequent victim) identity with those who "hold their own" or the "killers" are the primary sources of breaking down the stigmatization. "The very anticipation of such contacts can of course lead normals and the stigmatized to arrange life so as to avoid them. Presumably this will have larger consequences for the stigmatized, since more arranging will usually be necessary on their part" (Goffman 1963, p. 12).

The process of self-preservation through displays of toughness, nerve, or violent behavior is considered a necessary part of day-to-day life for inner-city adolescents, especially young males (Canada 1995). Acquiring fighting skills (and perhaps more importantly shooting experience) is considered important as a means of survival in the inner city (Sullivan 1989, p. 113). Teenagers with dual identities (i.e., street and "decent") may situationally engage in violent behavior to maintain a certain status within the broader social culture of the public community. Projecting the "right image" may have consequences for personal safety, social acceptance, and self-esteem. Individuals who attempt to "fit into" the street world walk a very dangerous line.

1. *Guns and Violent Identities.*   Within the isolated social world where street codes dominate, the threat of gun violence introduces new complexities for the development of social identity. Displays of toughness in the context of gun play may involve "crossing a line" that shifts one's view of oneself from "holding your own" to "wild or crazy" and may result in severe role conflict. Negotiating the street requires tests of character, knowledge of the rules of respect, and open displays of violence. The streetwise can spot a phony miles away. Young men who present themselves as tough had better be prepared to back their presentation up with action. Putting on a "front" can be extremely dangerous.

Interviewer (RM): "What about image or a reputation on the streets?"

Respondent (G-61): "Image? Well, a image is something, is a very, it's important on the streets . . . ; we just show how we come out and show themselves as somebody they not, then people, some people could look and see a fake person between a real person. A real person is the person that . . . ; I see is that don't take no shit, just do any thing that he wanna do or whatever or he gets down for whatever . . . ; A fake nigga is a nigga who talk about it but when its time to get down, he got excuses, he got to do this or come up with an excuse or all he do as politic about, talk about. They never really get in the mix . . . ; he just talk about it . . . ; it's just, you know, you gotta, you just like, you look at you people as your son, daughter, you got to look out for them, and they gotta do the same for you . . . ; That comes with my other thing, 'cause you gotta, if you gotta problem I'm there and if I got a problem you there . . . ; and another thing when, in the streets police is mostly hated . . . ; they are least involved with anything . . . ; they got, they familiar what's goes on, but people do not want them involved with them."

(RM): "Why?"

(G-61): "I don't know. They feel more safer without the police than with the police."

The next example, repeated by many respondents, explained how representations of the "decent" orientation, including doing well in school, staying out of trouble, going to college, or working a nine-to-five (legit) job were devalued on the street. Other respondents suggested that being "goody two shoes" somehow was a denial of one's black identity. As the illustration shows, "busting" a gun gains respect in the neighborhood while getting a degree does not.

Interviewer (WW): "Describe the importance of image and reputation on the street."

Respondent (ENYN16): "Everything goes by image and reputation, yo. Really there is no importance, I think. It's just a way of the street. You got to have respect out there. A nigger will quicker praise somebody for busting guns than praise somebody because they got a degree. You never hear somebody say, 'Oh, yeah, someone just graduated from high school and is in the second year of college, doing well.' But you'll hear somebody talk about, 'Yeah, I just saw ———, you know, push a nigger wig back.' And from there it comes, you know, like respect and all that where niggers will know you steal all that shit. You know, you get a reputation as a *man*."

The status and reputations earned through these means provide

street-oriented youth with positive feelings of self-worth and "large" identities. The street code is a determining factor proving one's manhood and knowing how to act accordingly when confronted with a variety of challenging situations.

Reputation is something that young inner-city males take seriously and put effort into building as a matter of survival. A young man may take up someone else's beef in order to make an impression on others or build up his reputation. A reputation can be won via several routes which are connected by the threat or use of violent force. One respondent explained how it works.

Interviewer (RM): "How you get a rep, you know? You know how some brothers, sometimes brothers just go out there looking to get a rep. Be the man."

Respondent (G-42): "Those are called like new comers. . . . Like a person that moves into a new community he's like, he's like damn you know 'nigga's out here is cool and they real I got to show these nigga's I ain't no punk yo.' So when he hangs out with them, he see any of them about to get into a 'scrobble' (fight) he be like 'yo step back money I'll handle this for you yo' . . . ; he's only doing it for a rep cause it's not like that's your brother and you like 'Nah, yo you ain't going to fight my brother. For that you fight me."

(RM): "Yeah?"

(G-42): "Nigga's is just doing it to get a name. Doing [it] so people could look at him and be like 'oh word that nigga bust that nigga's ass yo word.' I don't know that's the way I look at it."

The socialization process into the way of the streets is quite clear according to our respondents. The pressure to "be part of the scene" or to "fit in" is very great. Indeed, calculation about life and death is part of this pressure. The choices are limited.

Interviewer (DT): "So umm, why is it important to have a reputation?"

Respondent (G-58): "Cause if you ain't got no rep . . . ; it's gonna be like this, if you ain't got no rep, everybody is gonna pick on you . . . ; they gonna be like 'oh that nigga pussy, he don't do nothing,' they gonna try to pick you as a herb, you coming up the block niggas be trying to bump you, look at you, ice grill you, look at you up and down, you like . . . ; like you nobody."

(DT): "Yeah."

(G-58): "So that when you gotta go all out, man, you know?"

(DT): "What you mean by "go all out"?"

(G-58): "You gotta go all out, you go 'lace' (shoot) 'em . . . have a fight with duke or whatever, pull out a gun and blast 'em . . . you gotta be, niggas ain't gonna fuck with you if you shoot a nigga . . . ; just lace 'em, and niggas will say 'yo that nigga don't play,' he lace something in a heartbeat."

Another respondent describes why he got a gun, how it made him feel to have it, and how having a gun boosted his reputation.

Interviewer (DT): "When did you get your first gun you know? At what age?"

Respondent (G-51): "What age? I got my first gun at age of I think was sixteen."

(DT): "Why why'd you get it?"

(G-51): "Cause I wanted to be bad."

(DT): "You wanted to be bad, huh?"

(G-51): "I wanted to be like I had a reputation to keep so maybe with a gun, would have boost it up a little bit more."

2. *Three Social Identities: A Continuum.*   Teenagers may situationally engage in violent behavior to form or maintain certain social identities within the broader social context of the neighborhood. Projecting the "right image" may have consequences for personal safety, social acceptance, and self-esteem among individuals. Within the isolated social world where respect and valued social standing is limited, the threat of gun violence introduces new complexities for the development of social identity. The social identities described include being "crazy/wild" (frequent unstable fighter/shooter), "holding your own" (functional fighter/shooter), and being a punk or herb (frequent victim struggling for survival).[5] Social identities become more salient through repeated performance. The social meanings attached to each performance determine when and how an actor will be known to others in the neighborhood context, and in turn, subsequent interactions will be defined. Thus an individual's social identity can both prevent violence from coming (he won't get picked on) and promote additional violence (other young men will attempt to knock him off his elevated status). The individual who performs poorly becomes known and labeled as being a "punk" or "herb." The person who has a "successful" perfor-

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[5] The three types of social identities described in this essay were most prominent among our sample. Most of the interactions were defined in terms of avoiding being classified as a punk or herb. Respondents did describe other violence-related social identities including: "the avoider," "the nice guy," "the beef handler," "too cool" for violence, etc.

mance gains status and becomes known for "holding his own." The young man who gives an "extraordinary" performance is labeled as being "wild" or "crazy." These social identities may be temporary or permanent.

This section describes the characteristics of three ideal identity types. The majority of respondents would classify themselves as being someone who "holds his own" at the time of the interview. A small number would be described as fitting into the "crazy," "wild," or "killer" identity at the time of the interview. Few, if any, of the respondents would classify themselves as a punk or herb during the period of the interview. Looking back over their life histories however, most respondents, 78 percent of those queried (seventy-one of ninety-six respondents), reported experiencing one or more situations during childhood or adolescence of feeling like a punk or herb as direct result of violence perpetrated against them by older, more powerful males. All of the 125 respondents described the importance of using violence to gain social status and personal security.

   a. *Being Known as "Tough": Displays of Toughness.*   "Toughness" has been central to adolescent masculine identity in many social contexts of American life. Physical prowess, emotional attachment, and the willingness to resort to violence to resolve interpersonal conflicts are hallmarks of adolescent masculinity (Anderson 1994; Canada 1995). While these terms have been invoked recently to explain high rates of interpersonal violence among nonwhites in central cities, "toughness" has always been highly regarded and a source of considerable status among adolescents in a wide range of adolescent subcultures, from street corner groups to gangs (Whyte 1943; Goffman 1959, 1963, 1967; Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1982; Canada 1995). In some cases, displays of toughness are aesthetic: facial expression, symbols and clothing, physical posture and gestures, car styles, graffiti, and unique speech are all part of "street style" that may or may not be complemented by physical aggression. While changing over time with tastes, these efforts at "impression management" to convey a "deviant aesthetic" and "alien sensibility" have been evident across ethnicities and cultures (Katz 1988). Toughness requires young males to move beyond symbolic representation to physical violence. Firearms often are used to perpetuate and refine the aesthetic of "toughness" and to claim the identity of being among the toughest.

Respondents in this world believed quite strongly that "toughness"

and "being the man" were two central concepts that rang true universally, both within individuals and across events. The perpetuation of the sense of self and the image in the minds of others also is an instrumental goal of much weapon use. There is a very low threshold for the use of violence for these ends. Some subcultures or networks may also reflect norms in which excessive violence, including weapons use, is valued, gains social rewards, and gives great personal pleasure. For example, this is true in some gang contexts where "locura" (crazy) acts of violence establish one's status in the gang (Vigil 1988). It is senseless only in the fact that the violence is an end unto itself. The use of weapons, especially guns, has elevated the level of domination. Guns can be used tactically to disable an opponent or to humiliate an opponent by evoking fear (begging, tears, soiling his pants, etc.). Our data show that guns are an important part of these social processes.

The use of weapons may reflect a total identity that is geared to dominate if not humiliate adversaries. Some adversaries are created in order to express this dominance. These young men seemed willing and motivated to use violence to obtain anything they desired without much remorse or forethought. For them, violence is viewed as justified and necessary in the situation. Their identity is wrapped up in maintaining the image that they are the most violent or toughest head on the street.

At the top of the identity hierarchy of the street is the "crazy," "wild," or "killer" social identity. Individuals who perform extraordinary acts of violence are frequently feared and granted a level of respect that others cannot easily attain. A small number of respondents in our sample described themselves or others as being "wild," "crazy," or a "killer." Some took on this identity temporarily or situationally while others described themselves as always that way. The performances are often socially defined as shocking or judged to be beyond what was necessary to handle a situation. Once an individual gives an extraordinary performance he may notice changes in the way others relate to him. He may also start viewing himself differently. This status brings with it a certain level of power and personal fulfillment that may be reinforced by projecting this identity. Future violent performances would enable him to maintain the image of the most violent or toughest on the street.

Respondent (SBN37): "I seen him [top man in the neighborhood], one kid, everybody used to look up to, and he thought he was impossi-

ble, he thought nobody couldn't, he thought he was serious gangster. Couldn't be killed. . . . He was the big man, he used to walk up to spots and rob people."

Interviewer (RM): "What made him a big man?"

(SBN37): "I guess the way he presented his self. The way he went after people's spots, take their drugs, he didn't care. Like he was God or something, you know what I'm saying? He got shot maybe a couple of times and thought he couldn't die. So I guess that's what made him the big man or made him feel like he was the big man."

Respondent (ENYN15): "Well they get respect like that, they want respect. Now a days niggas bust their gun, they ain't got to be trying to shoot you, they just bust their gun at you, make them self look big, that's the only thing, that's how it go, then they get respect, everybody going to be thinking he's a killer, he know he ain't no killer, but everybody think he a killer, unless he [just] shine [front with] a gun."

Interviewer (JM): "So what you was saying when the beef was going down?"

Respondent (G-88): "Yo, when the beef, at that time kid yo, you mind blanks out. You just go crazy man. Especially me, I went crazy. I didn't give a fuck what was going to happen to me Bee. I just soon. . . . I just want to get the shit done you know I'm saying. To you it's all about respect. You gotta get your respect out here man. Gotta get your respect."

(JM): "True."

A person who has an identity as someone who is crazy, wild, or a killer gives off the impression that he has extreme heart, is untouchable, and does not care about what happens. He has the capability to use extreme violence and gets respect for dominating others. Others may want to associate with him to benefit from his high status on the street. The identity itself carries privileges, expectations, and obligations which may open the individual to additional opportunities for violence. The powerful identity may be forced downward by someone else's extraordinary performance.

  b. *Being Known as Holding Your Own.*   Many respondents described the process of "holding their own" in violent situations and how personal identities formed around displays of "doing what you got to do" are generally positive on the street. The majority of our respondents would be classified as "holding their own." Individuals who "hold their own" are respected on the street although they will eventually face challenges to their ability to do "what it takes" in heated situations and

in all likelihood faced numerous challenges on the way up to that status (Strauss 1996, p. 90). A person who has an identity as someone who holds his own, gives off the impression that he has the capability to use extreme violence but does so only when necessary. This person will face a challenge directly and is respected for that position. This identity allows an individual to be considered an "insider" with the street world; however, this status can be unstable and may require acts of violence when faced with public attacks on identity. Several respondents describe their social identities as holding his own.

Respondent (ENYN20): "[Someone] who can just handle their own, who's not no trouble maker, but who finishes trouble when it comes."

Respondent (G-09): "It's a lot a popularity, you know. Your image that you hold is your reputation. You need that on the streets cause without that then anybody . . . and everybody can do what they want to you. If . . . if you let them. But the rep. that you have shall keep . . . you know if it's a good rep, it will keep these people away from you, keep 'em on your good side. I mean most people who know of you and know how you get down for yours, they know you don't play, that they won't mess with you, because they don't wanna get hurt, because of the reputation that you had. Maybe they don't wanna start because they know you cool, whatever."

Respondent (ENYN05): "Yeah, you will go through people trying to get to know you. This of course is a problem because it starts when you younger by getting that reputation you know you not trying to be a killer or a thug, but you just want people to know yo who you is don't fuck with me I won't fuck with you. So you got to break up a few heads you got to do what ever to get that reputation."

Respondent (ENYN16): "I was always one holding my own. I always had people's behind me. I was always a fighter."

Respondent (ENYN13): "Somebody who doesn't fight over B.S."

Interviewer (DT): "Yeah."

(ENYN13): "Somebody who think, you know, who wants to shoot a fair one, it will be just a fight and he could hold his ground, hold his own. But it gotta be over somethin' important. It gotta be either somethin' personal between that nigga—you know, everybody ain't gonna get along, but if you have a fight you might as well fight and get it over with. One lost—one lost, you know. They don't always go down like that. That's why I hate that, too."

As illustrated by the above examples, an individual who "holds his own" has used violence as a resource for obtaining that status. These

young men face the same type of testing process as the punk or herb; however, it is expected that this class of men will handle their conflicts with violence and it will be effective. If violence was not effective, someone who is known to "hold his own" will be granted respect for putting up a good fight or taking a bullet "like a man." If this character is situationally "punked" or "herbed" by someone with a lower status, his identity could face a downward slide.

c. A Stigmatized Identity: Being a Punk or a "Herb."   At the bottom of the status hierarchy of the street is the punk or herb. Like, the school-based "nerd" or "dweeb," the "punk" or "herb" identity is assigned to those who do not fit into the deemed high status or tough identities (see Kinney 1993). In the inner city, those who cannot fight or prove their toughness may instead be stigmatized either temporarily or permanently. Other guys in the neighborhood will act upon that stigma. The process of punking or herbing someone, as respondents called it, closely resembled the process of "fool-making" described by Klapp (cited in Strauss 1996). Strauss writes:

> Orrin Klapp has suggested the different conditions that determine how a person can become a fool and remain one: Because fool-making is a collective imputation it is not necessary, however, that a person actually have the traits or perform the role of the fool. A person is a fool when he is socially defined. . . . What makes a fool role stick? Among the factors responsible for permanent characterization as a fool we may particularly note (1) repeated performances or obvious personal traits which continually suggest the role of a fool; (2) a striking, conclusive, or colorful single exhibition which convinces the public that the person is irremediably a fool; (3) a story or epithet so "good" that it is continually repeated and remembered, making up an imperishable legend; and (4) failure to contradict a fool role by roles or stories of a different category. [Klapp 1949, pp. 159–60, cited in Strauss 1996, pp. 80–81]

If someone has the punk or herb identity he is considered "fair game" for attacks and robberies. The attacks are motivated both by the need to restate the dominance hierarchy and as a sort of punishment for not living up to group norms. If a young man does not have a tough identity or at least have close associates or relatives who can protect him either by association or literally, he is a punk. Others in

the setting degrade, dominate, and victimize those individuals who have punk or herb characteristics. The degradation typically involves a direct or implicit emasculation of the "weaker" males. Punks and herbs are also called "soft," "suckers," "wimps," "pussy," "bitch," "ass," and "chumps." Given the intensified acceptance of hegemonic masculinity in the inner-city context, these messages would have a strong negative impact on a punk or herb's self-image. Most young men assume that "outsiders" in the neighborhood (and relevant social network) are punks or herbs and the presumed punk or herb must prove otherwise. Several respondents offered definitions of the punk or herb identity.

Respondent (SBN49): "The definition for a punk or a herb, well around my hood, [it] is like somebody that don't want to fight and shit. Like somebody would go up to them and push them or whatever and they won't fight back. So you know everybody call him a punk. And the definition for a herb is like say somebody who is being nice, or somebody who is scared of somebody, and they tell him 'yo go do that or go do this.' And you know he is just, he listens to whatever they say. [The guys] is just sunning him, he's herbing um."

Respondent (ENYN36): "Psss. That's easy yo. A punk or a herb is somebody who, it's somebody . . . who let . . . some next person . . . make the nigga do things or . . . Make him do shit, make him feel like a sucker. Like if somebody walk up on you . . . and start talking and start mushing you in your face or putting his fingers in your face . . . and you ain't constantly doing nothing about it or he's constantly mother fucking disrespecting you on the real that's a herb. When you let that nigga get away with it you [are] a herb."

Respondent (ENYN24): "A person who can't defend himself or scared to defend himself."

Respondent (ENYN56): "Punk or a herb, getting played and not doing nothing about it, you know."

Respondent (ENYN20): "A herb is a bad ass nigga, someone who's bad and who snitches. You know, [he] gets into a altercation and they loose or something and [then] snitch. . . ."

Interviewer (RM): "Can you remember a time when you felt like a punk or a herb?"

Respondent (ENYN17): "Yeah, when I was little."

(RM): "Was it?"

(ENYN17): "I was in a public school."

(RM): "What happened?"

(ENYN17): (laughter) "There was these guys that I used to hang with."

(RM): "Yeah."

(ENYN17): "But they was doing a lot, they was starting fights and everything and, but I wasn't with that, but I still wanted to be with these dudes."

(RM): "Yeah."

(ENYN17): "So they calling me a herb and punk and you know what I'm saying?"

(RM): "Cause, cause you ain't wanted to get with that?"

(ENYN17): "Cause I ain't want to get with them, I wanted to be with them, but I couldn't do what they was doing, you know what I'm saying?"

(RM): "How old was you?"

(ENYN17): "I was like nine."

(RM): "So what, what happened after that, did you like stop hanging with them or?"

(ENYN17): "Well they dropped out of school and I kept it moving."

Punks and herbs take all sorts of abuse in our inner-city neighborhoods. They get used by more powerful street guys to test their nerve. A young male who "holds his own" may face threats from punks who are attempting to transcend into a high social identity. A gun is useful in transcending identity:

Interviewer (WW): "Have you ever felt you needed to do something violent to amp up your own reputation?"

Respondent (ENYN16): "When I was young, yeah, I thought, you know. Being that I lived in a private house and the projects was right across the street. You know, project kids automatically assume that shit was sweet on a private house, so, you know . . ."

(WW): "So what did you do?"

(ENYN16): "So I like, one incidents, my man, I got chased from the park. If I'm young, you know, I always had a little joint or my pops always a ghat so, you know, kids just came over with no problem because they figured that many niggers on the block and obviously if we living in the private houses we must be rich. But being that I had a burner [gun], you know, as soon as they came with the shit, they came with bats and sticks, I already had a gun so I squeezed it off at them. Actually, I didn't really squeeze it off at them. I just pulled it out to let

them know, you know, that I wasn't afraid. You know, I pull it out to let them know that, you know, ain't nothing sweet over here, you know. And I wanted to squeeze after but, you know, back there and I still had some of my little teachings in me, so I didn't really do it. But I wanted to, just to let niggers know, you know, ain't nothing sweet over here. But they got the message by just seeing me pull out. They had sticks and bats and I had a gun."

(WW): "So did that help?"

(ENYN16): "Yeah, that helped. You know, no one really saw me as no punk or herb after that situation. You know, they'll bring the bull-shit to everybody else except me and my brother."

The dynamics of violent events reflect several interesting processes: achieving a highly valued social identity occurs through extreme displays of violence; achieving a "safe" social identity may also require the use of extreme forms of violence; the ready availability of guns clearly increases the stakes of how one achieves status; much behavior is motivated by avoiding being a punk or herb (sucker or weakling); identities can change from being a punk or herb into a more positive status such as "hold your own"; guns equalize the odds for some smaller young men through the process of "showing nerve"; and one can feel like a punk for a specific situation but not take on a punk identity. If the street orientation is dominant in public spaces and personal safety is attributed to adherence to the code as Anderson (1994) suggests, then those who do not conform will be victimized.

Impression management, reputation, and image are necessary to maintain an identity that assures daily survival (see Anderson 1994; Canada 1995; Sheley and Wright 1995). Impression management also seems to be an important aspect of negotiating the street world. The data presented below illustrate how this process unfolds. The data also suggest that guns play a significant role in forming and sustaining "positive" social identities within the neighborhoods.

3. *Identity Attacks: Dissing and Other Transgressions.* Social interaction is regulated through a strict adherence to a proscribed dominance hierarchy in which there are only a limited number of desirable identities to attain. Information and impression management are the most critical tools young men use to negotiate the street. There is competition for respect in the inner city, and the quantity of respect seems to establish one's place on a dominance hierarchy as well as one's social status. Knowledge of the "players" in the neighborhood is needed to determine what type of action is appropriate in a face-to-face encoun-

ter and how respect is to be apportioned. Displays of respect are expected by those who have higher levels of status on the street. Respect in this context may include stepping down from violence out of deference to the other person's status (almost respecting a loss before the battle). Displays of disrespect are also expected in situations where identity posturing is called for, for example, when confronted with someone who is being fake or fronting. However, shows of disrespect or "dissing" are often an intended or unintended attack on someone else's identity and must according to the "code of the street" be addressed aggressively. This negotiation or testing process is not very well understood. One respondent described how "testing" occurs.

Interviewer (DT): "So what usually happens when nigger gets like this with you in your face or somethin'?"

Respondent (ENYN13): "Oh, man, that's like testing your manhood. That's like anything you ever been taught since you was younger, what's gonna come out now."

(DT): "Yeah."

(ENYN13): "Should you wait now, do it now, or handle it? Do you try to talk? Usually that don't even work, cause nobody's talking to you, they either—the more and more you try to talk, the more and more they gonna disrespect you. That's how I feel."

(DT): "So, what happens if somebody, I mean disrespect somebody, what—what happens?"

(ENYN13): "They fight. I mean, they fight or they—or they threaten. They make threats to your mom, your—to mom, all types of threats, and you like—you can't let this dude come after your moms, you know."

(DT): "Yeah."

(ENYN13): "and they say, black-on-black crimes, this-on-this crime, but it really don't have nothin to do with it, it's between the individuals, because a lot of blacks will . . . don't even be fightin each other, they be teamed up, you know, they be tryin hype it up. There may be one—just two, three people and they—just buck wild over there. It didn't even be like that. And the more and more they hype it up, the more and more people read, damn, it's like? So, now they feels—that's how they see somebody doin that shit—he ain't fuckin with me. And it just keeps growin, keeps growin, almost nonsense."

(DT): "Yeah."

(ENYN13): "hate and that."

As shown above, violence is a central tool in gaining or losing re-

spect. Thus an individual's reputation can both prevent violence from coming (he won't get picked on) and promote additional violence (other young men will attempt to knock him off his elevated status).

Interviewer (DT): "Can you describe to me the importance of a reputation?"

(ENYN13): "A reputation is important in a way, because a lotta times it keeps you from gettin into a real problem."

(DT): "Yeah."

(ENYN13): "Somebody don't know you or know who you are, what you about, they all gonna test you, all are gonna try to see what you about. It goes both ways, too. Maybe somebody think you cool and wanna know who you are. They wanna know if you blood or a bad guy, want to know if you good."

(DT): "Yeah."

(ENYN13): "Some people like drug people, you know."

As another respondent explained, having a strong reputation can protect young men from attacks or robberies by others.

Respondent (G-44): "Yeah. You make money, if you make money it's just gonna come."

Interviewer (RM): "If you make, then you get your props?"

(G-44): "You'll get your respect then everybody gonna want to be down with you instead of robbing you . . . instead of robbing you everybody think 'yo why should I rob him . . . he show, if he could show me something, he could show me how to make mine."

(RM): "True."

(G-44): "They, while they robbing him they going home getting a certain amount of money, but he making more, he making the money that he lost. And everybody want that, everybody want to make the money that they lost and not stress. I'm saying he stole like five Gs from us already. Don't stress it I'm making more money, I'm make it again next week."

(RM): "True. That's true."

Within the context of status and identity posturing, ordinary conflicts that occur over personal slights, looks, insults, or playful threats may turn to murder in a matter of minutes. One respondent describes such a scene below.

Interviewer (RM): "Did you ever shoot anyone?"

Respondent (G-61): "Yeah."

(RM): "When? Before you got shot or after?"

(G-61): "After, after I got shot. I shot somebody, we had this con-

flict, this kid, I don't know him but we was just sitting next, and he exchanged words with my friend, so he told, he came to the kid, the kid came to my friend and my friend told him to move . . . ; so my man was like 'move, what you mean move, man, the word is excuse me,' he was like 'no move' . . . ; some rude boy. So he was like, I heard them, so I turned around and said 'yo what the fuck is going on, yo,' the kid talking about 'what you gonna do,' so I said 'what you mean what I'm gonna do,' so I shot 'em."

(RM): "Where you shoot 'em?"

(G-61): "I don't know where I shot 'em at, I shot 'em up in the face."

(RM): "What you just shot 'em and left. So umm, you left?"

(G-61): "Yeah."

(RM): "So what happened you ain't hear what happened?"

(G-61): "I heard he was dead."

(RM): "Oh, you heard he was dead?"

(G-61): "Mm-hum."

(RM): "Oh, so umm, how that made you feel?"

(G-61): "Fine. But then again it made me feel like, after that I felt like I was still on my mission, I was like fuck that. He ain't mean nothing to me . . . ; he wasn't nobody to me so, he ain't mean nothing to me."

(RM): "Did you feel like your life was threatened like?"

(G-61): "I ask myself that question all the time, I be saying to myself 'damn, did I make the right decision? Was that the right decision or not . . .; And I haven't come up with an answer yet."

Interviewer (RM): "So what usually happens like when a guy insult you to your face, like what happens to that person?"

(ENYN15): "Beef is next. (laughter). Beef is next, straight up, beef is next. If it ain't beef, it's going to take like at least two days or threes days maybe, or if he thinking like yeah, he's going to call me pussy, that's the only thing he have on his mind is he is going to call me pussy, he think I'm a fagot, he going to feel like you got plague if you don't nothing, so he going to learn to do something regardless, that's how shit is now a days."

(RM): "That true."

(ENYN15): "Nigger being about play, like if I go over to somebody's face and be like you fag ass nigger and just walk away, he know that I bust my gun, he won't think twice, he going to be like, alright, I'm going to get this mother fucker, he trying to play me, you know

what I'm saying? Cause if he don't do right, every time he smoke weed or whatever he do, he always going to have that on his mind, well why is he trying to play me, you're going to feel like you're a pussy, you're just going to keep thinking, so he going to learn to do something and make you, kick your chest."

Here a respondent describes the importance of getting dissed (disrespected).

Respondent (G-61): "Getting dissed?"

Interviewer (RM): "Is that deep or what?"

(G-61): "That's deep, according to the street that's really deep, 'cause if a nigga diss you, he feel you dissed everything, he just ran over you like a mop, just just walked over you like a mat. If somebody disrespect you everybody will, that's why there be a lot of killing in the neighborhoods today, niggas ain't trying to get disrespected."

(RM): "But why do words have to end in death?"

(G-61): "Just, it's not like it used to be, most of the time some people just talk it out, or fight it out."

(RM): "Yeah."

(G-61): "But now since there are so much guns, people ask 'why should I scuffle my knuckles out or bruise up my face when I can use some that will take care of the problem in less than five minutes?' most people just say fuck fighting."

(RM): "That's taking a life, man."

(G-61): "Most people don't look at it like that, they be like 'that's one less problem in life I got to worry about.'"

Respondents often talked about verbal attacks on one's mother and how that type of attack could not be tolerated. The consequences of this seemingly harmless insulting may turn deadly as one respondent described:

Interviewer (MP): "Why you fired, what was the situation?"

Respondent (G-56): "What was the situation?"

(MP): "Yeah."

(G-56): "Well somebody played themself in trying, try to disrespect my moms, so I had to handle my business. May he rest in peace black."

C. Situational Contexts: Drugs and Gun Violence

Violent events related to drugs and alcohol provide a rich illustration of the multiple meanings of context. The relationship between intoxication and aggression is highly contingent, mediated by the set (composition of persons), setting (social context), and substances that are

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

However, spatial and social control dimensions, such as the rules and mechanisms for distributing drugs or alcohol, are basic to other conceptions of context (Roncek and Maier 1991; Parker 1995). Specific contexts carry norms for violent behavior and intoxication that influence their interaction. Such norms may dictate which provocations merit a physical response (Felson 1993; Anderson 1994), the status accorded to violence (Schwendinger and Schwendinger 1985; Sullivan 1989), the types and quantities of alcohol to be consumed (Holyfield, Ducharme, and Martin 1995), and the social controls on drugs, alcohol, and violence in the immediate setting (Burns 1980; Buford 1991).

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

Drug selling also is a fertile context for violent events (Goldstein 1985, 1989; Fagan and Chin 1990; Fagan 1993a; Bourgois 1995; Sommers, Baskin, and Fagan, 1998). Disputes related to money or quality or quantity of drugs, robberies of money or drugs, disputes over selling

locations, disciplinary concerns within drug-selling organizations, and other routine business conflicts are often settled using violence and, again, often with guns. There also appears to be a consistent spatial and social overlap between drug selling, drug and alcohol use, and gun homicides (Chaiken and Chaiken 1990). Accordingly, we queried the data on adolescent gun violence to determine the extent and nature of drug and alcohol as a context for violence.

Drinking, drug use, and drug selling were one of the most commonly identified settings for violent events. Clearly, drugs are in both the *background* and the *foreground* of gun violence in the South Bronx and East New York. Background signifies the social context or cultural landscape which influences and shapes perceptions and experiences of inner-city residents. Foreground refers to the immediate influence of drug and alcohol use effects on the processes and outcomes of violent events. Together, drugs and alcohol are a pervasive influence on the daily lives of young people, fueling events in several ways. Rampant drug use and drug selling dwarf other activities as social contexts for interactions, conflicts, and public stages for status attainment in the social world in these neighborhoods. These events in turn contribute to and form the codes and expectancies that regulate street behaviors and the ecology of "danger."

1. *Drugs and Alcohol in the Background of Violent Events.*   Drug and alcohol use was cited as the most common type of social/recreational activity for young males. Respondents frequently reported being high or drunk on a very frequent, oftentimes daily, basis. Drug addiction was also widespread among respondents' family members, friends, and neighborhood associates. One respondent describes the relationship to drug selling in his South Bronx neighborhood. When asked if any of his friends sold drugs, he answered:

Respondent (SBN24): "All my fucking people I know in my building, my fucking neighborhood, they have done [it] in their life or they are still doing it [drug selling] right now."

Interviewer (JM): "How long have they been doing that for?"

(SBN24): "In my neighborhood, mostly, you know, [the] last six months. Then a new nigger comes in and he wants to take over your fucking spot."

(JM): "But is there anyone that ever lasted more than six months?"

(SBN24): "If I count the days, I don't know, but it's a short period of time."

(JM): "Is guns a part of that scene in your neighborhood?"

(SBN24): "Yes, it's part, you know what I am saying. When niggers try to front on you with the loot, and when niggers want to take over your fucking spot, or your property, they are going to pull out, so you got to be ready too."

(JM): "Do your friends drink or use drugs in your neighborhood?"

(SBN24): "That's the only thing to do, you know what I'm saying. I think it's part of depression. Niggers don't know what the fuck to do with their lives, so yeah, that's what we mostly do. We fucking drink and smoke."

(JM): "How often?"

(SBN24): "I would say fucking, it's like breakfast, lunch, and dinner, you know what I'm saying. Three course meal!" (Laughing).

The drug economy was described as the primary means of financial support for many of our respondents. Many are the second or third generation of drug dealers in their neighborhoods and were socialized into the drug trade by older family members. These respondents described being drawn into drug selling by the lure of "easy money" and having the means to acquire the "gear" (clothes, jewelry, sneakers, guns, and other accessories) needed for social acceptance and popularity on the street. They describe growing up seeing older guys getting "props" (rewards, respect) off the drug trade both in times of money and material possessions and interpersonal rewards.

Gun carrying and use are central features to the drug business. Access to guns is widespread and not simply limited to those involved in the drug trade. In our data, guns are still being used by drug dealers in the ways described by Goldstein (1985, 1989) over a decade ago. Recognition of the etiological relevance of drug trafficking to violence has resulted in more careful formulation of theories of the drug-violence relationship. There are several influences on violence that occurs in the context of street-level (seller-user) drug distribution. Violence may be used to enforce organizational discipline or resolve business disputes. Disputes over drugs and drug paraphernalia are commonplace among users and sellers. Territorial disputes are commonplace among drug sellers. Street-level sellers may skim profits from mid-level suppliers or crew bosses. In the absence of legal recourse for illegal activities, such disputes are likely to be settled either by economic reprisal or by violence. Violence in drug dealing can be viewed as an extension of behaviors that are associated with efficiency and success in legitimate businesses (Black 1983; Edelhertz, Cole, and Berk 1984).

The social milieu of drug selling/buying areas also is conducive to

robbery of sellers and users for either cash or drugs. One respondent described the risks involved in maintaining a drug spot and how a gun is a necessary tool of the trade.

Interviewer (DT): "Why did you have the gun on you that day when you was with your father?"

Respondent (ENYN05): "Cause I'm saying You know what I'm saying we was hustling yo, when you out there in the street, You know what I'm saying, the stick up man could come. And I'm not going to let nobody stick up me and my pops. Cause if a stick up man come and you got over 5 thousand dollars worth of drugs on you, you got money, he going to kill you, You know what I'm saying, so I just had to protect me and my family yo."

Another respondent described a gun incident where he felt he was enforcing street justice by shooting a drug addict who robbed his friend's drug spot. He explains:

Interviewer (JM): "All right, what happened? Describe, you know, it."

Respondent (SBN16): "I go—I was turning in my block and shit and I see this nigga and shit. So, BOOM. I was pitching—pitching, doing my thing, this kid came on and shit, my man shit, he came out, and I like, yeah, do this real quick, cop this bundle for me real quick. So, this dude was holding it down while I was gonna be back 'cause I gotta go to the store. So, I like I'm goin' to the store and shit, this other nigger from the other spot went to my spot and took the shit. So, my man came back, he was addict, they robbed me—they robbed me, motherfucking nigger from the other spot. I went over there nicely and said that was my shit, where my shit at? It was like, I don't know. The guy went upstairs, [I] got five of my niggers be, So we was ready to set it, first nigger, the nigger that got robbed, my—my man that got robbed, he had a—a nine, he just blast that nigger right in the face, POW. And from there it was just on. It was shooting. Caught a nigger in the leg—I caught a nigger in the leg and in the chest and in the stomach—caught a nigger in the stomach."

(JM): "What kind of gun you have?"

(SBN16): "I had a nine, too."

(JM): "What started it? They . . ."

(SBN16): "They robbed my man."

The spurious relationship of drug use and violence suggests that drug selling will be concentrated in social areas with concentrations of the social structural features of violent crime and victimization. The

reciprocal nature of the drug business and violence may influence the decision to participate in drug selling—individuals averse to violence may avoid street-level drug transactions, leaving only those willing to engage in violent behaviors as participants. Self-selection of violent individuals for participation in the drug business also may increase the likelihood of violence during drug transactions. For example, Fagan (1989) found that the drug selling–violence relationship among youth gangs was strongest for gangs most frequently involved in all types of violence.

A variety of drug-business-related gun events was described by our sample, including disputes over selling turf and customers, product price, quantity, and quality, shortages of drugs or money, retaliation for dishonest business practices, or protection from robberies during the course of drug selling. Some of the situations described included shootouts involving just two parties (both had firearms), two parties (only one had a firearm), multiple parties on one or both sides of the dispute (armed), multiple parties on one side but not the other (one side armed), drive-bys, sniper attacks from roof tops or other distant locations, and set ups. The worlds of drugs and guns are closely linked, although there is a considerable amount of gun use that has little or nothing to with the drug business. Below one respondent describes a gun event related to a business dispute over the crack spot.

Interviewer (DT): "How did it happen and what started it?"

Respondent (ENYN26): "Well what happened was this, on my block right the niggers crack spot. Now and let me tell ya, my man got killed and this is basically why—let me tell you how [he] got killed, but what led up to it was he had beef with the niggers from the crack spot and that's my man (we grew up together). And he fucked up the manager of the crack spot and he was like a monthly shit, he'll fuck him up and beat the shit out of him. So I guess the nigger from the crack spot was tired of getting his ass whooped so one day they pulled out on him. And he was telling him just kill me, you motherfucker, kill me. They didn't he shoot him. So, I—So he started, the day—thing is we could run to our roofs, and shoot at them from down you know like they won't know who the hell is shooting at them so my man did that, he went on his roof and he had a assault rifle M16 so he was pow, pow, pow, pow, letting loose from the top of the roof and niggers was scattering all over and they didn't know who did it, but I am sure they [the guys from the crack spot] knew it was him."

(ENYN26): "So then like about a week later, there is some new nig-

gers at the crack spot some young nigger, mad young, he like sixteen years old and he was up there with two other cats. It was me, my brother and my man, rest in peace, you know what I'm saying. He— we were walking to the corner because we were going to go to weed- gate (Drug spot) and get some weed and all of a sudden the nigger stepped to him, then I yell what's up man, you know, you diss nigger and I ain't mentioning no names, but you diss nigger and they were like, and he was like yeah why, he was like yo—that shit is over son that nigger got to chill with shit you know whatever. You know like telling us either dead it or you are dead. So my man says like what, what, stupid son this is my fucking block man. Those niggers don't own shit, this is my block so that money (guy) pulled out, he pulled out a two-five on my man and it jammed. He aimed that shit at me, my brother and him, it jammed and you know it didn't want to shoot. So my man snuffed him boom and he ran back up into the crack spot 'cause it was house so he ran up in there and then I thought the man was going to get his tech [semi-automatic gun], 'cause I know he got a (tech), so he ran back to the house and came down with nothing. He stepped to him again, this time that kid bust open the door and came out with a nine and starting shooting pow, pow, pow and my man ran around a Van. He caught him at the other side of the Van and lit six shots into him man and he died in my arms that day son. The man died in my arms man and to this day man, niggers still be shooting at the niggers, but the niggers—because they fucked with some Morello's [phonetic] from my block and the Morello's [phonetic] are crazy, buck- wild, those niggers live like five or six them heads in the last three months. 5-0 [police] always rolling around so those niggers broke up. So his man dead right now. They don't even know who was shooting at them from like that. Those are my peeps [close friends]. The Morel- lo's are my peeps, because we all grew up together—each other."

2. *Drugs and Alcohol in the Foreground of Violent Events.* We identi- fied a range of dynamic processes that show the interactions of intoxi- cation effects, situational contexts, and individual propensities to con- tribute to violence or its avoidance. Some involve affective states following intoxication, others involve events that occur in drinking or drug use locations, and still others involve problems in drug businesses that spill over into other areas of social life. Throughout all these, guns are present as a strategic factor and also as a threshold criterion in deci- sion making about violence.

Drug and alcohol affects are evident in decision making, cognition,

intensified emotional states, exaggerated affect, diminished capacity for self-regulation, deviance disavowal, and other cognitive processes. For example, respondents indicated that language when intoxicated was more provocative, and language often "amped up" otherwise minor disputes into violent encounters. Some said they tended to take by-standers' provocations to fight more seriously. More boastful language and exaggerated verbal displays of toughness and "nerve" were com-monplace during drinking events.

Interviewer (DT): "Do you know if he was high?"

Respondent (G-75): "Yeah he was drunk, high or drunk the niggar was fucked up man. I think that is why he thought he was superman for that night."

(DT): "Everybody drinking think they somebody."

(G-75): "That just goes to show that superman can't stop a bullet. Everybody got skin, this flesh under that is bone."

Interviewer (WW): "Do you know if the other guy had been drink-ing or using drugs before you guys started fighting?"

Respondent (G-02): "He looked pretty much out of it. So I guess yeah."

(WW): "Do you think the use of alcohol influenced the way he han-dled the situation between you and him?"

(G-02): "The way he spoke, yeah."

(WW): "How?"

(G-02): " 'Cause he just, you know, he said like a lot of dumb things that like, just really, like it heated up the moment more."

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

Respondent (G-78): "Yeah I think so yeah I know so matter of fact because if I wouldn't have been drinking I would have handled it in a more calm manner."

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

(G-78): "I was very much more aggressive."

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

Respondent (G-17): "Yes I did."

(RM): "What you, what that was about?"

(G-17): "Well, about me having a big mouth."

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

(G-17): "When I'm drunk, when I'm drinking and smoking weed, talking shit to people, you know what I mean, you talk to people. . . ."

(RM): "What happened with that?"

(G-17): "Well, I was smoking weed one day, alright, my man, I was smoking weed one day, drinking, getting fucked up, we got into a little technical difficulties, you know, we had a fight, I got my ass wiped."

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

(G-17): "Just bullshit, just talking, you know, talking out your ass, arguing back and forth, you know what I mean, so niggas said 'yo pipe that shit down, dead it,' nigga ain't pipe it down, I'm still talking out my mouth."

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

(G-17): "Yeah, one of my home boys, you know what I mean? Nigga said 'I ain't with that shit no more, you know,' and I'm still talking out my mouth, so you know, niggas told me it was a lesson to be learnt, so it happened it happened, you know, it happened to me like three times, you know, but you learn from that."

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

(G-17): "Yeah, but I wasn't trying to hear that."

(RM): "It wasn't working 'cause you up on the influence and shit."

(G-17): "I was in the influence of drinking and everything and like, 'fuck you, get the fuck outta here,' you know, 'let me do my thing, let me handle my business,' you know what I'm saying?"

Some people simply made bad decisions while high, leading to fights that might have been avoided in other circumstances.

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

Respondent (ENYN13): "Not at the moment no, I was tipsy, I was off focus."

These behaviors often increased the stakes in everyday interactions, transforming them from nonchallenging verbal interactions into the types of "character contests" whose resolution often involved violence. Alcohol exaggerated the sense of outrage over perceived transgressions of personal codes (respect, space, verbal challenges), resulting in violence to exert social control or retribution.

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

prepared to defend himself. In other cases, the risk of injury at parties deterred future attention and participation. One person, describing an event where he was hurt, said that:

Interviewer (RM): "You ever been shot?"
Respondent (G-17): "Nope, I been grazed."
(RM): "You been grazed, where?"
(G-17): "My back."
(RM): "Why, was they shooting at you deliberately?"
(G-17): "Nah it was a mistake. It was. . . ."
(RM): "What happened, tell me about that."
(G-17): "It was, it was, it was a whole bunch of things, it wasn't meant towards me, it was meant for somebody else, and I was just sitting on the corner drinking beer and it just happen. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. But I thank God that it didn't hit me, you know what I mean?"
(RM): "Yeah."

A wide range of drug effects was reported. Some "chilled" when smoking marijuana, others sought out victims to dominate or exploit, and a few reported becoming paranoid and avoiding any type of human interaction. But paranoia also contributed for some to hostile attributions that created an air of danger and threat, leading to defensive or preemptive violence.

Interviewer (CL): "I noticed you were drunk when all of this happened."
Respondent (G-05): "I wasn't really, I wasn't not really drunk I was just like 'nice.'"
(CL): "But the drug, did the liquor have anything to do with your actions?"
(G-05): "Nah, you crazy?"
(CL): "Huh, if you weren't drinking you wouldn't react the same way?"
(G-05): "It's worst, I feel I'm worst when I'm not drinking, not that, like when I smoke weed I turn soft, you know what I'm saying, like when I smoke weed, I get nice and shit I, I, you know what I'm saying, shit be having me nervous and shit, yeah."
(CL): "Paranoid?"
(G-05): "Yeah, that paranoid and shit."
(CL): "And you don't really wanna get into it?"
(G-05): "Nah, when I smoke weed, nah, sometimes I get paranoid, I don't like smoking weed."

Interviewer (RM): "Thinking back, why do you think you did what you did?"

Respondent (G-78): "In that instant, cause I was drinking and my state of thinking was altered to a more how would you say 'machismo.' When I had to prove that I guess at that moment feeling the way I was feeling buzzed up like that."

(RM): "You felt dissed . . . ?"

(G-78): "I felt disrespected and you gotta prove yourself."

Still others noted the human guidedness[6] of drinking behaviors, where drinking often was an intended behavior that created the emotional and affective conditions in which violence was likely. Consider the two opposite descriptions of marijuana effects:

Interviewer (WW): "Had you been drinking or doing drugs before that fight? Were you high?"

Respondent (G-32): "Smoke some weed."

(WW): "So you was high?"

(G-32): "Yeah I was kind of fucked up."

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

(G-32): "Nah. Marijuana keeps you fucking . . ., it keeps you down, it keeps you more or less in a mellow state. Alcohol will take you to that level you wanna fucking hurt someone. I wanted to chill and watch a basketball game. I didn't want to go out there and fight on no hot fucking summer day."

Interviewer (DT): "So do you think sometimes when you were high that shit amps you up more?"

Respondent (G-60): "Sometimes I think it depends on the smoke too, like some smoke."

(DT): "You be finding out you going to that store. Smoking the trees over there. I don't fuck around with weed personally, I used to fuck around. Like you said sometimes you do shit for fun, I do shit for fun, I smoke weed and go fuck somebody up for fun. That is why I don't even fuck around with that shit, that is why I leave that shit alone, I drink my little beer here and there, little 40 here and there but I don't get so drunk I hate throwing up son."

(G-60): "I hate that shit."

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[6] Human guidedness refers to the internalization of justifications or expectancies for one's behavior after consuming alcohol or getting high. Aggressive behavior is blamed on the substance use as a "guiding force" leading to such behavior. It is a complex social-psychological process (see Pernanen 1991).

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

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

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

Interviewer (MP): "You was high that day? Drunk, high, weed?"
Respondent (G-63): "No I wasn't high. I wasn't drunk."
(MP): "What about after that? After the fight?"
(G-63): "After the fight, when I got back around my way, I told my friends about it and we planned to go back."
(MP): "Y'all got high and started laughing after that?"
(G-63): "No we didn't. We got high, but we wasn't laughing."
(MP): "What kinda drug did y'all use to get high?"
(G-63): "Marijuana."
(MP): "And that's it?"
(G-63): "That's it."

Finally, one respondent told us how the complications from the drug business spill over into other social interactions, or themselves become challenges to codes involving family and respect, code violations that

mandate a violent response. Consider the following story that weaves together these themes.

Respondent (G-42): "And then like my cousin right I had a cousin. He was black too, and he was skinny you know he was a good kid and he was young. Then he started smoking, he got caught up in the game he started smoking. And you know the rest of his friends was looking down on him they was like 'yo what's wrong with you,' you know what I'm saying you supposed to be chilling with us, look at us we chilling, we fat what. You over here smoked out (from crack) why go there. They use to dis him and all that. They use to look out for him and all that, pay him, 'yo here go to the store for me yo here, here' look out for him. They always took care of him and all that but he never degraded himself where he was robbing people, snatching anybodies chain, robbing peoples moms of something like that. He never went low like that but he just liked to smoke he liked to get high. And umm. He was chilling with this other crack head that was the bad. He was the opposite of him. He would always be sticking nigga's moms up, sticken, he stick anybody up. Catch a little nigga for his work, take him, take his money take whatever. And he use to always rob this one guy constantly. And them two since they stood together you know a lot. And they like to get together because the nigga, he would rob mad people and he would have mad work and he would come and be 'yo what's up don come get high with me?' 'Alright, alright Fuck it yo.' So they kind of stood together and the other person saw that. He was like 'yo damn I want that nigga but I guess I'm gonna have to use him to get to him.' So they kind of made a set up one day. He tried to set him up in the building. You know what I'm saying? And my cousin he didn't know what time it was. He was like yo what's up come get high with me 'alright.' He was supposed to bring the other nigga, that's where they went wrong. Cause he told my cousin he was like yo 'come get high go tell Markie come' and the other guy Markie he was like 'Nah. Nah. I'm not trying to hear that yo you know what saying' so he tried to stay away from that. He was like Nah. He felt funny he was like 'Nah. I going with that I'm always sticking you up and you trying to light me up now' (support his habit). Nah. I aint fucking with you. So he got one. He got my cousin into the building and for one reason or another there was somebody waiting in the staircase with a 'shoty' (shotgun) but it was supposed to be for the other guy and it was a case of mistaken identity, and they shot my cousin in the face 'boom.' "

Interviewer (RM): "He killed him?"

(G-42): "Killed him."

(RM): "Pssst."

(G-42): "And that kind of, it didn't happen to me, it happen, it was my birthday that day. The last time I saw him was right there on the corner before I went upstairs. I had a little joint, I was puffing it and boom and he you know whenever I had 'blunts' I always smoked with him to you know what I'm saying? You know what I'm saying get high off of this leave that other shit alone that stuff ain't good for you."

(RM): "Yeah."

(G-42): So I was smoking my joint with him and before I went upstairs I gave it to him. I was like yo I'm out see you tomorrow and he was like 'ah-ight.' Usually sometimes and I was kind of close to him. In the mornings he use to come to my house, I use to cook a fat breakfast for both of us he use to always eat with me and we use to just kick it, chill, bugging watching TV and everything. Then it happen like three in the morning that night and I had went upstairs about twelve. That was the last time I ever saw him."

IV. Understanding the Epidemic of Youth Violence

The crisis of youth gun violence reflects broader trends in youth violence but also significant changes in material conditions and social controls in the communities where gun violence is most common. Understanding youth gun violence requires that we also understand the dynamic contexts of these neighborhoods, the influence of these social processes on socialization, social control, and behavior, and the role of guns in shaping norms and behaviors. Youth gun violence is central to the ecological background of many neighborhoods and also to the developmental landscape that shapes behavioral expectancies and scripts.

A. Guns as Cues of Danger

The development of an ecology of danger reflects the confluence and interaction of several sources of contagion. First is the contagion of fear. Weapons serve as an environmental cue that in turn may increase aggressiveness (Slaby and Roedell 1982). Adolescents presume that their counterparts are armed and, if not, could easily become armed. They also assume that other adolescents are willing to use guns, often at a low threshold of provocation.

Second is the contagion of gun behaviors themselves. The use of

guns has instrumental value that is communicated through urban "myths" and also through the incorporation of gun violence into the social discourse of everyday life among preadolescents and adolescents. Guns are widely available and frequently displayed. They are salient symbols of power and status, and strategic means of gaining status, domination, or material goods.

Third is the contagion of violent identities, and the eclipsing or devaluation of other identities in increasingly socially isolated neighborhoods. These identities reinforce the dominance hierarchy built on "toughness" and violence, and its salience devalues other identities. Those unwilling to adopt at least some dimensions of this identity are vulnerable to physical attack. Accordingly, violent identities are not simply affective styles and social choices, but strategic necessities to navigate through everyday dangers. The complexities of developing positive social and personal identities among inner-city minority males is both structurally and situationally determined. Our data and previous research suggests that for inner-city males, prestige is granted to those who are tough, who have gained respect by proving their toughness, and who reenact their appropriate role in public. Majors and Billson (1992) explain the structural difficulties young African American males encounter in identity development. They state: "Masculine attainment refers to the persistent quest for gender identity among all American males. Being a male means to be responsible and a good provider for self and family. For black males, this is not a straightforward achievement. Outlets for achieving masculine pride and identity, especially in political, economic, and educational systems, are more fully available to white males than to black males. . . . The black male's path toward manhood is lined with pitfalls of racism and discrimination, negative self-image, guilt, shame, and fear" (Majors and Billson 1992, p. 31).

One important development is a breakdown in the age grading of behaviors, where traditional segmentation of younger adolescents from older ones, and behavioral transitions from one developmental stage to the next, are short-circuited by the strategic presence of weapons.

The street environment provides the "classroom" for violent "schooling" and learning about manhood. Elsewhere we present a conceptual model for understanding the relationship between age and violence in this context (see Wilkinson 1997b). Mixed age interactions play an important role in this process. Older adolescents and young adults provide modeling influences as well as more direct effects. We

found that they exert downward pressure on others their own age and younger through identity challenges which, in part, shape the social identities for both parties. At younger ages, boys are pushing upward for status by challenging boys a few years older.

The social meanings of violent events reach a broader audience than those immediately present in a situation. Each violent event or potentially violent interaction provides a lesson for the participants, firsthand observers, vicarious observers, and others influenced by the communication of stories about the situation which may follow. Children learn from both personal experience and observing others using violence to "make" their social identity or "break" someone else's identity on the street. In addition, we have attempted to illustrate what happens when an identity challenge occurs for both primary actors in the situation. We describe three different types of performance that may be given in a violent event: poor, successful, and extraordinary performance. Again, guns define what constitutes each class of violent performance uniquely compared to a nongun performance (see Wilkinson 1997b).

Gun use may involve "crossing a line" or giving what we call an extraordinary performance that shifts one's view of oneself from a "punk" or even "cool/holding your own" to "crazy" or "wild." Guns were used by many as a resource for improving performance. We hypothesize that the abundance of guns in these neighborhoods have increased the severity for violent performances. For the majority of our sample, guns became relevant for conflict resolution around the age of fourteen.

B. The Complexities of Adolescent Identity Development

The maintenance and reinforcement of violent identities is made possible by an effective sociocultural dynamic that sets forth a code that includes both behaviors and the means of resolving violations of the code. The illustrations in this chapter show the strong influence of street code, similar to the codes identified by Anderson (1994, in this volume), over the behaviors of young children, adolescents, and young adults. Children growing up in this environment learn these codes, or behavioral-affective systems, by navigating their way through interpersonal situations which oftentimes involve violence encounters.

Delinquency research in earlier eras showed how conventional and deviant behaviors often lived side by side within groups and also within individuals (Cohen 1955; Cloward and Ohlin 1960). One effect of "danger" as a dominant ecological marker is the difficulty that adoles-

cents face in maintaining that duality of behavior and of orientation. The street code has a functional purpose for attaining status and avoiding danger, even for adolescents who harbor conventional attitudes and goals. Negotiating safety within this context is extremely difficult, especially when much of the social activity available to young men who have left school and are "hanging out" on the inner-city street corner involves expressing dominance over others. But the opportunities for dual identities are narrow. The social isolation of areas of concentrated poverty has given rise to oppositional cultures that devalue conventional success and even interpret conventional success as a sign of weakness. For adolescents who may want to have one foot in the conventional world and the other on the street, this balancing act has become not only difficult but also dangerous. The effects are a hardening of street codes and an eclipsing of other avenues for social status and respect.

C. Research and Intervention on Adolescent Gun Violence

These perspectives suggest specific directions for research and interventions. The development of scripts, the contingencies within scripts that lead to violence, the diffusion and contagion of lethal violence, and the role of violence in both scripts themselves and the contingencies that evoke them, should be specific foci of prevention and intervention efforts. Because gun events are different from other violent events (Fagan and Wilkinson 1997; Wilkinson 1997a, 1997b), these efforts should focus on guns.

Focusing on the role of guns within scripts assumes that guns may alter scripts in several ways. For example, guns may change the contingencies and reactions to provocations or threats, and change strategic thinking about the intentions and actions of the other person in the dispute. The presence of guns in social interactions may also produce "moral" judgments that justify aggressive, proactive actions. Accordingly, the development of interventions should be specific to the contexts and contingencies of *gun* events, rather than simply interpersonal conflicts or disputes.

For example, decisions involving firearms often are effected under conditions of angry arousal (i.e., "hot cognitions") and intensified emotional states. In many cases, firearms introduce complexity in decision making introduced by the actions of third parties or the longstanding nature of disputes that erupt periodically over many months. In other cases, firearms simply trump all other logic.

Preventive interventions should address the growing reality of fire-arms in the ecological contexts of development and the internalization of firearms in the development of behavioral norms. Firearms present a level of danger—or strategic uncertainty—that is unequaled in events involving other weapons or in "fair fights." In other words, guns trump other decision logics in the course of a dispute. These attributes of conflict, including the presence of guns and their effects on cogni-tion and decision making, should inform the design of preventive ef-forts and interventions. Contingencies in a variety of contexts should be included: schools, parties, street corner life, the workplace, and in dating situations.

Prevention and interventions should be specific to developmental stages. At early developmental stages, preventive efforts must recog-nize that for many youngsters with high exposure to lethal violence, the anticipation of lethal violence influences the formation of attitudes favorable to violence and scripts that explicitly incorporate lethal vio-lence. At later developmental stages, the incorporation of strategic vio-lence via firearms in the presentation of self can alter the course of disputes and narrow options for nonviolent behavioral choices or be-havioral choices that do not include firearms or other lethal weapons.

Prevention and intervention efforts should be built on a foundation of research that also specifically addresses gun violence. This research should address several concerns. First, comparison of gun and nongun events within persons can illustrate how guns shape decision making. Second, sampling plans should generate data across both social net-works and neighborhoods. If diffusion and contagion are central to the dynamics of gun violence, then research should address how these pro-cesses link across networks of adolescents and also how neighborhood contexts shape interactions within and across social networks where much violence unfolds.

The important role of age-grading also suggests longitudinal designs with both younger and older cohorts. If identity is a central focus of these dynamics, research with younger children is necessary to assess how behavioral progressions are tied to personality development and situational avoidance techniques. The interactions of adolescents across age cohorts also is an important point of diffusion of behavioral norms and identity development. The development of scripts at spe-cific age junctures also is important.

Other methods also can help understand processes of contagion and diffusion of "violent identities" and behavioral norms surrounding the

use of guns. For example, capture-recapture designs may inform us about the extent to which violence transgresses social networks, neighborhood boundaries, and age strata.

Finally, the development of prevention efforts should be based on "hot cognitions" that better typify the types of situations in which guns are used. Research on the avoidance of violence, even in the face of weapons and other strong cues and motivations, should be central to prevention theory.

D. Conclusion

While youth violence has always been with us, the modern version of it seems distinctly different: the epidemic of adolescent violence is more lethal, in large part due to the rise of gun violence by adolescents. In this essay, we provide perspective and data on the role of guns in shaping the current epidemic of youth violence. At the descriptive level, the answer is clear: Adolescents in cities are possessing and carrying guns on a large scale, guns often are at the scene of youth violence, and guns often are being used. This is historically unique in the United States, with significant impacts on an entire generation of adolescents. The impacts are most seriously felt among African American youths in the nation's inner cities.

It is logical and important to ask whether an exogenous increase in gun availability fueled the increase in youth violence. If this were true, then, regardless of its initial role in causing the epidemic, reducing the availability of guns to kids would in turn reduce the levels and seriousness of youth violence. However, we know little about changes in gun availability to adolescents; estimating supply-side effects is difficult. Ethnographic reports show a steadily increasing possession of guns by youths, but little insight into how guns were obtained.

Instead, we consider competing hypotheses that see a less central (but not insignificant) role of guns in initiating, sustaining, or elevating the epidemic of youth violence. These include the idea that the demand for guns among youth was driven up by the development of an "ecology of danger," with behavioral norms that reinforce if not call for violence, and in which popular styles of gun possession and carrying fuel beliefs that violence will be lethal. These shifts in demand, occurring in the context of widespread availability of weapons, led to increased possession, carrying, and use. Concurrently, guns became symbols of respect, power, and manhood in an emerging youth culture that sustained a continuing demand and supply side of weapons, recip-

rocally increasing the overall level of gun possession and the desire to use them.

This essay offers a framework to explain how the supply and demand for guns has had an impact on the overall level and seriousness of youth violence, presenting evidence both from existing literature and from original sources to help understand the complex relationship between guns and youth violence. Guns play an important role in the recent epidemic of lethal youth violence. However, the relationship is a complex one in which the effects of guns are mediated by structural factors that increase the youth demand for guns, the available supply, and culture and scripts which teach kids lethal ways to use guns. These effects appear to be large enough to justify intensive efforts to reduce availability, possession, and use of guns by American adolescents.

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