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USING VIOLENCE AS SOCIAL CONTROL: APPLYING A THEORY OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TO JUVENILE DISPUTES

Marian J. Borg*

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I. INTRODUCTION

American youth are increasingly involved in criminal violence, both as offenders and victims. Between 1987 and 1996, juvenile arrests increased 60% for violent crime and 70% for weapons violations.¹ Particularly alarming have been trends in adolescent homicide. While homicide arrests of adults declined during the mid-1980s and early 1990s,² juvenile homicide arrests increased by 51%,³ and the number of juvenile murder victims

* Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Florida. The data utilized in this research were made available, in part, by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. The data for *Violent Incidents Among Selected Public School Students in Two Large Cities of the South and the Southern Midwest, 1995* were originally collected by Daniel Lockwood, the principal investigator of the study. Neither the original sources, the collectors, nor the distributor of the data bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here. My thanks to Anthony LaGreca for his valuable comments and suggestions on earlier drafts and to Barbara Zsembik and Chuck Peek for their suggestions regarding the statistical analysis.

1. See FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE, CRIME IN THE UNITED STATES 1996: UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS 218 (1997) [hereinafter 1996 UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS].

2. See *id.*

3. See *id.*

increased by approximately 66%.⁴

Social scientists who have investigated these patterns find that many violent encounters, among both juveniles and adults, originate in relatively minor disagreements, especially over issues involving honor, character, and respect.⁵ In the absence of economic indicators of prestige, social status among the young, in particular, rests primarily on more abstract notions of respect and the willingness to aggressively defend one's reputation and possessions.⁶ As a result, trivial circumstances — certain looks, postures, or comments interpreted as disrespectful — often lead to violent outcomes.⁷

Police homicide data support these conclusions. In 1996, for example, 43% of all homicides in which the circumstances were known began as arguments, many involving money, property, or romantic entanglements.⁸ In comparison, 14% were committed during the course of a robbery or burglary, and less than 10% were drug-related.⁹ These patterns suggest that while the public may view violent juveniles as criminal predators, a great deal of teenage violence can be understood more accurately as a form of conflict management.¹⁰ That is, juveniles often use violent confrontation as a means of redressing a grievance.¹¹ While society defines the violent responses of juveniles as criminal, from the offenders' viewpoint, their actions are justified given the "wrong" committed against them.¹²

This interpretation of the research has prompted some to suggest that conflict-related violence, or "moralistic violence," is distinct from violence committed in the course of criminal activity, such as robbery or burglary, where the motives have less to do with pursuing justice and more to do with monetary gain.¹³ If so, traditional theories of criminal behavior, with their

4. See MELISSA SICKMUND ET AL., U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE, JUVENILE OFFENDERS AND VICTIMS: 1997 UPDATE ON VIOLENCE 1 (1997).

5. See MARK COONEY, WARRIORS AND PEACEMAKERS: HOW THIRD PARTIES SHAPE VIOLENCE 117-19 (1998); DANIEL LOCKWOOD, U.S. DEP'T. OF JUSTICE, VIOLENCE AMONG MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION 1-2 (1997); KENNETH POLK, WHEN MEN KILL: SCENARIOS OF MASCULINE VIOLENCE 59 (1994); Elijah Anderson, *The Code of the Streets*, ATLANTIC MONTHLY, May 1994, at 81, 86; David F. Luckenbill, *Criminal Homicide as a Situated Transaction*, 25 SOC. PROBS. 176, 177 (1977).

6. See Anderson, *supra* note 5, at 88.

7. See *id.*

8. See 1996 UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS, *supra* note 1, at 19.

9. See *id.*

10. See Donald Black, *Crime as Social Control*, in 2 TOWARD A GENERAL THEORY OF SOCIAL CONTROL 1, 1, 5-8 (Donald Black ed., 1984) (discussing violence as a form of conflict management) [hereinafter SOCIAL CONTROL].

11. See *id.*

12. See *id.* at 2.

13. See Mark Cooney, *The Decline of Elite Homicide*, 35 CRIMINOLOGY 381, 399-400 (1997).

focus on factors such as declining economic opportunity and the adverse influence of criminal subcultures, might be inadequate for understanding the conditions leading to conflict-related violence.¹⁴ Instead, sociological theories of conflict management might hold valuable insights for explaining the conditions associated with a significant amount of violence involving juveniles.¹⁵

One such theory proposed by sociologist Donald Black defines "conflict management" as the process of responding to grievances.¹⁶ Avoiding, negotiating with, or tolerating an adversary; relying on third parties for assistance; and aggressively confronting an antagonist each embody alternative conflict management techniques.¹⁷ Black argues that the use of one of these alternatives instead of another depends partly on the social characteristics that define the dispute, such as the economic and cultural relationship between the antagonists and the presence or absence of bystanders during a conflict situation.¹⁸ Social scientists have applied Black's theory to a variety of settings, including suburbia, the courtroom, prisons, and formal organizations, and found limited support for his arguments.¹⁹ To the extent that juveniles often use aggressive confrontation to respond to conflict, Black's ideas might be useful in explaining the conditions most often associated with conflict-related juvenile violence.

This article, then, seeks to contribute both to the empirical evaluations of Black's theory and to the literature on adolescent violence. It bridges these two areas by examining the utility of Black's theory of conflict management for explaining the use of violence in conflict situations between juveniles, an

14. *See id.* at 398.

15. *See* LOCKWOOD, *supra* note 5, at 2-3.

16. *See* DONALD BLACK, *THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF RIGHT AND WRONG* 74 (rev. ed. 1998).

17. *See id.* at 74-92.

18. *See id.* at 91-92.

19. *See* M.P. BAUMGARTNER, *THE MORAL ORDER OF A SUBURB* (1988) (analyzing how people in an American suburb manage their conflicts); ALLAN V. HORWITZ, *THE LOGIC OF SOCIAL CONTROL* (1990) (using sociological, anthropological, and historical data to develop generalizations about the behavior of social control in social space); Marian J. Borg, *The Effect of Vicarious Homicide Victimization on Support for Capital Punishment: A Test of Black's Theory of Law*, 36 *CRIMINOLOGY* 537, 537 (1998) (using Black's theory to develop hypotheses about the relationship between social intimacy, cultural status, and the use of law in response to conflict); Daniel P. Doyle & David F. Luckenbill, *Mobilizing Law in Response to Collective Problems: A Test of Black's Theory of Law*, 25 *LAW & SOC. REV.* 103, 103 (1991) (using survey data to test the effect of stratification, morphology, culture, organization, and social control on the willingness of people to mobilize law); Calvin Morrill et al., *It's Not What You Do, but Who You Are: Informal Social Control, Social Status, and Normative Seriousness in Organizations*, 12 *SOC. FORUM* 519, 519 (1997) (applying Black's theory to managerial acts in organizational contexts); Jeffrey Mullis, *Medical Malpractice, Social-Structure, and Social Control*, 10 *SOC. FORUM* 135, 135 (1995) (applying Black's theory to malpractice litigation in the United States).

area in which Black's propositions have not yet been systematically evaluated.²⁰ The analysis focuses only on violence used in response to a conflict. It does not purport to explain violence used to further a robbery, theft, or other predatory crime. Black's theory is used as a basis for identifying social variables that increase the likelihood of using violence as a conflict management technique. A 1995 data set consisting of 220 violent encounters that developed from disagreements involving at least one juvenile is analyzed. The core of the article evaluates Black's propositions regarding the increasing likelihood and severity of violence in adolescent disputes involving status-equal and socially distant antagonists, the presence of partisan third parties, the absence of alternative means of conflict management, and the antagonists' inability to physically remove themselves from the immediate conflict situation.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In his theory outlining the "elementary forms of conflict management," Black identifies five strategies that individuals might use in response to conflict: avoidance, toleration, negotiation, third-party settlement (that is, mediation or arbitration), and "self-help."²¹ "Self-help is the handling of a grievance by unilateral aggression."²² Examples of self-help range from minor frowns of disapproval to heated arguments to extreme forms of confrontation such as blood feuds, gang wars, and homicide.²³ Aggressive and confrontational acts between juveniles involved in disagreements provide another example of self-help behavior.²⁴

When do disputants use self-help rather than another form of conflict management, such as mediation or avoidance? And when self-help is used, what predicts how extreme the confrontation will be? While most theories look for answers to these questions in the characteristics of *disputants*, such as their personality traits or educational level, Black's perspective broadens the focus.²⁵ According to Black, the likelihood and severity of self-help can be explained by characteristics of the entire *conflict situation*.²⁶ In particular, the relationship between the disputants, the degree of mobility that defines the situation, the disputants' relationship to any third parties who

20. *But compare* M.P. Baumgartner, *War and Peace in Early Childhood*, 1 VA. REV. SOC. 1, 1 (1992) (describing an observational analysis of conflict management among one- to five-year-olds in a day care center).

21. BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 74.

22. *Id.*

23. *See id.*

24. *See id.*

25. *See id.* at 41-42.

26. *See id.* at 74-79.

might be present, and the availability of alternative conflict management strategies all help to predict when and to what extent self-help will be used to handle a grievance.²⁷

A. *Self-Help and the Relationship Between Disputants: Equality, Social and Cultural Distance, Interdependence, and Immobility*

Black argues that the likelihood and severity of self-help in response to conflict increases with the degree of equality between disputants.²⁸ To understand this relationship fully requires an appreciation of how perceptions of honor affect the evolution of conflicts.²⁹ Historical and cross-cultural research indicate that violence associated with disputes primarily involves issues of honor, reputation, and respect.³⁰ Cooney argues that the meaning of honor varies across cultures, in some it connotes honesty or altruism, and in others, boldness and bravery.³¹ Groups can be characterized in terms of the extent to which honor plays a central role in organizing relationships.³² Where honor is significant, it typically “manifests itself in a strong concern with maintaining a reputation for courage and aggressiveness.”³³ Cooney describes “honor cultures” as those whose guiding principle is “resist — with force if necessary — any attempt to disrespect or dominate you.”³⁴ In an honor culture, “[a]n honorable person . . . responds aggressively to insult, is willing to defend his or her property, and is sure to exact vengeance for certain kinds of offenses”³⁵

Dueling aristocrats of the antebellum South are an example of an honor culture where the use of violence in response to insult or disrespect was commonplace and expected.³⁶ Relationships among inner-city adolescents, particularly lower-status males, provide a contemporary example.³⁷ In his ethnographic studies of inner-city African American males, Anderson describes the “code of the streets” as involving the willingness to die to defend one’s honor and reputation.³⁸ “Displaying nerve” not only helps to protect one’s tangible possessions, but also is critical for maintaining one’s

27. *See id.*

28. *See id.* at 76.

29. *See supra* text accompanying notes 5-7.

30. *See* COONEY, *supra* note 5, at 108-32; Jonathan Rieder, *The Social Organization of Vengeance*, in 1 SOCIAL CONTROL, *supra* note 10, at 131, 132.

31. *See* COONEY, *supra* note 5, at 108-09.

32. *See id.* at 109-10.

33. *Id.* at 110.

34. *Id.* at 109.

35. *Id.*

36. *See id.* at 109-10; JACK K. WILLIAMS, *DUELING IN THE OLD SOUTH: VIGNETTES OF SOCIAL HISTORY* 8-11 (1980).

37. *See* POLK, *supra* note 5, at 90-92; Anderson, *supra* note 5, at 82.

38. Anderson, *supra* note 5, at 82.

status and dignity: “‘Don’t punk out.’ ‘If somebody messes with you, you got to pay them back.’ ‘If someone disses you, you got to straighten them out.’”³⁹ Cooney’s work on homicide offenders in Virginia describes similar notions among the young men in his sample: “‘Don’t be pushed around; if somebody insults, or hits you, or steals your property, don’t go to the police, get even. Hit back.’”⁴⁰

An important feature of “codes of honor” is the recognition that an individual’s ability to insult someone depends on his or her relative status.⁴¹ In fact, responding to the challenge of an inferior incurs a degree of dishonor.⁴² As Pitt-Rivers observes in her study of Mediterranean societies: “‘An inferior is not deemed to possess sufficient honor to resent the affront of a superior. A superior can ignore the affront of an inferior [and] . . . is answerable for his honor only to his social equals’”⁴³ Indeed, the willingness to use violence to defend one’s dignity is a way of achieving and maintaining status, just as the reluctance to be aggressive is a sign of weakness.⁴⁴ “In honor cultures, people are shunned and criticized not for exacting vengeance but for failing to do so. . . . People who retaliate, by contrast, acquire prestige.”⁴⁵ To the extent that violence is a mechanism for maintaining status in the face of disrespect, and insofar as the ability to offend someone is predicated on one’s relative position, Black argues that the likelihood and severity of self-help increase as conflicts involve disputants of increasingly equal status.⁴⁶

Another factor that increases the likelihood and severity of violent responses to conflict is the degree of social distance between disputants.⁴⁷ Social distance refers to the extent of involvement individuals have in one another’s lives.⁴⁸ Relatives, friends, acquaintances, and strangers each occupy different positions on a scale of social distance.⁴⁹ Black argues that self-help is more likely and more severe among individuals who are socially

39. *Id.* at 86.

40. COONEY, *supra* note 5, at 115.

41. BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 76; see PETER L. BERGER ET AL., *THE HOMELESS MIND: MODERNIZATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS* 86 (1973).

42. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Sentiment of Honor in Kabyle Society*, in *HONOUR AND SHAME: THE VALUES OF MEDITERRANEAN SOCIETY* 191, 199 (J.G. Peristiany ed., 1966) [hereinafter *HONOUR AND SHAME*].

43. BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 76 (quoting Julian Pitt-Rivers, *Honour and Social Status*, in *HONOUR AND SHAME*, *supra* note 42, at 31).

44. See Rieder, *supra* note 30, at 139.

45. COONEY, *supra* note 5, at 110-11.

46. See BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 76.

47. See *id.*

48. See *id.* at 76-77.

49. See *id.*

removed compared to individuals who are socially intimate.⁵⁰ Black cites historical and anthropological evidence describing how intermarriage, symbolic "blood brotherhoods," and other sorts of crosscutting ties effectively reduce violence, particularly long-standing feuding between groups.⁵¹ Others have noted the common use of peaceful conflict management strategies, such as mediation, among feuding relatives and friends, whereas similar conflicts among nonintimates often lead to violent and prolonged confrontation.⁵² Black summarizes as follows: "Vengeance [a form of self-help] develops most fully with horizontal segmentation, when people are separated by chasms in relational space"⁵³

Black's hypothesis might initially appear contrary to the popular notion that most homicides occur between intimates. In fact, homicide data from the United States are consistent with his argument. Although 31% of 1996 homicides in which the relationship was known occurred between family members or friends, 69% occurred between individuals who were strangers or mere acquaintances.⁵⁴ Furthermore, to properly evaluate Black's argument, we must consider the frequency with which conflicts occur between intimates versus their frequency between nonintimates. That is, while a substantial *proportion of homicides* might occur between people who know one another, Black's hypothesis pertains to the *proportion of all conflicts* that lead to self-help, depending on the victim's and offender's level of intimacy. Hence, appropriately evaluating his hypothesis requires comparing the proportion of all conflicts between intimates that end in homicide versus the proportion of all conflicts between nonintimates that end in homicide. If Black's hypothesis is valid, then the proportion of nonintimate conflicts ending in violence should be greater than the proportion of intimate conflicts ending in violence.

In addition to equality and social distance, cultural distance between antagonists increases the likelihood and severity of self-help.⁵⁵ When individuals speak different languages, observe different traditions, and hold different values and beliefs, the likelihood of their using violence when a

50. *See id.*

51. *Id.* at 77; *see* CHRISTOPHER BOEHM, BLOOD REVENGE: THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF FEUDING IN MONTENEGRO AND OTHER TRIBAL SOCIETIES 136-37 (1984) (describing pacification rituals used to end feuds); RENATO ROSALDO, ILONGOT HEADHUNTING 1883-1974: A STUDY IN SOCIETY AND HISTORY 65-66 (1980) (describing the Ilongot practice of intermarriage to avoid feuds).

52. *See* Sally Engle Merry, *Mediation in Nonindustrial Societies*, in *MEDIATION RESEARCH: THE PROCESS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THIRD-PARTY INTERVENTION* 68, 82 (Kenneth Kressel et al. eds., 1989) (discussing the impact of the relationship between disputants on mediation in nonindustrial societies).

53. BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 77.

54. *See* 1996 UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS, *supra* note 1, at 19.

55. *See* BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 77.

conflict erupts increases.⁵⁶ This pattern is most emphatically illustrated by the extreme forms of violence found between clans, tribes, and nations.⁵⁷ In contrast, a shared language, religion, and normative system enable individuals to communicate effectively and provide a basis for compromise and negotiation.⁵⁸ Hence, while cultural similarity encourages more peaceful means of conflict management, cultural distance increases the likelihood and severity of self-help.⁵⁹

Next, the extent of interdependence between disputants affects self-help.⁶⁰ Interdependence describes the extent to which people's lives are intertwined or the degree to which people rely on one another for their well-being.⁶¹ Black asserts that aggressive responses to conflict increase in likelihood and severity as the degree of interdependence between the disputing parties decreases.⁶² Very simply, Black argues that "[p]eople more readily kill those they can do without."⁶³ In her discussion of peaceful forms of conflict management, Baumgartner argues similarly that strategies such as mediation and negotiation are more likely among individuals whose present and future interests intertwine.⁶⁴ Not only are the principals in a conflict more likely to settle peacefully, but others who share in the interdependent relationships with the principals are more willing to become involved in the disagreement and help the parties work towards a nonviolent resolution.⁶⁵

Immobility, or the physical inability to remove oneself from a conflict situation, is another factor associated with self-help responses to conflict.⁶⁶ Black suggests that antagonists who are unable to physically escape a conflict situation and who are apt to interact in the future will be more likely to use aggression in response to conflict compared to those who are more mobile.⁶⁷ For example, "[t]he amount of violence in tribal societies . . . varies inversely with the amount of spatial movement in their ways of life."⁶⁸ Prisons are a modern-day example of a social setting inhabited by static populations

56. See *id.* at 92 n.8.

57. See *id.* at 77.

58. See Calvin Morrill, *Vengeance Among Executives*, 1 VA. REV. SOC. 51, 70-73 (1992).

59. See BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 77.

60. See *id.*

61. See *id.*

62. See *id.*

63. *Id.*

64. See Baumgartner, *supra* note 20, at 26.

65. See *id.* at 27.

66. See BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 76-77.

67. See *id.* at 77.

68. *Id.*

whose members are prone to violent conflict management.⁶⁹ Conflict management between suburbanites, in contrast, is notable for its relative passivity.⁷⁰ Baumgartner argues that one factor contributing to the tendency of suburban dwellers to avoid or tolerate their enemies is the likelihood that neither will be living in the neighborhood for an extended period of time.⁷¹ Finally, to the extent that juveniles' living arrangements are substantially controlled by adults and their daily activities follow a predictable, routine pattern, the level of mobility juveniles enjoy is relatively low. Following Black's argument, then, the tendency among juveniles in general to use confrontation when conflicts occur should be high.

B. *Self-Help and Third Parties: Partisan Ties and the Availability of Alternative Conflict Management Strategies*

Black's theory argues that the type of conflict management used in response to grievances is affected by third parties who may be present during a conflict.⁷² The presence of partisans and the absence of authoritative figures who might provide an alternative mechanism for managing a conflict help to predict the likelihood and severity of a self-help response to a grievance.⁷³ Each of these variables seems particularly relevant for explaining conflict-related violence among juveniles.

Black defines partisanship as "a joint function of social closeness to one side and social remoteness from the other."⁷⁴ With respect to third parties, the closer one is to one of the adversaries and the farther one is from the other, "the stronger partisanship will be and the more rapidly it will appear."⁷⁵ Black describes different scenarios of partisanship and suggests that each has a different likelihood of encouraging self-help behavior.⁷⁶ At one extreme is "strong partisanship," which occurs when third parties are at once closely aligned with one antagonist and distantly removed from the other.⁷⁷ At the opposite extreme is "cold nonpartisanship," which involves third parties who are socially remote from both sides in a conflict.⁷⁸ Black argues that situations involving strong partisans are most conducive to violent

69. *See id.*; Matthew Silberman, *Violence as Social Control in Prison*, 1 VA. REV. SOC. 77, 99 (1992).

70. *See* BAUMGARTNER, *supra* note 19, at 3 (describing the peaceful way of life in the suburbs).

71. *See id.* at 92.

72. *See* BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 95-97.

73. *See id.* at 125.

74. *Id.* at 126.

75. *Id.*

76. *See id.* at 131-35.

77. *Id.* at 131-32.

78. *Id.* at 134.

conflict management.⁷⁹ Individuals are less likely to back down or lose face in their friends' presence, and friends are more likely to aggressively defend others with whom they are significantly close.⁸⁰ For both these reasons, conflicts in the presence of strong partisanship can escalate quickly and become more protracted and severe.⁸¹

Researchers of violence have long noted the important role third parties can play in the escalation or waning of a conflict. In Luckenbill's seminal analysis of conflict-initiated homicide, for example, about forty percent of the cases took place in front of people who had actively encouraged one or the other antagonist to fight.⁸² Others have found that conflicts in front of people who are strangers to both antagonists and who are reluctant to intervene involve less confrontation. Likewise, disputes in the presence of people who have ties to both antagonists and who willingly get involved to encourage compromise end in less aggression.⁸³ Baumgartner's study of conflict management in suburbia supports these arguments. She notes that weak ties in conflict situations tend to produce avoidance or toleration in the face of conflict, while strong crosscutting ties facilitate mediation and other forms of third-party settlement.⁸⁴ But where partisan ties exist, individuals tend to choose sides, a demeanor that encourages more direct and open conflict between antagonists.⁸⁵

In sum, Black's theory and empirical research suggest that self-help in response to conflict will be more likely and more severe in the presence of partisan ties and less likely in their absence.⁸⁶ This proposition seems particularly relevant to juveniles, given the amount of time they spend together and the extent to which the status of juveniles is predicated on their peers' opinion of them. Insofar as status is defined by the willingness to physically defend one's reputation, the presence of partisan friends during a conflict should have a significant influence on the likelihood of disputing juveniles responding aggressively to grievances.

Finally, Black argues that self-help will be more likely and more severe in the absence of alternative forms of conflict management.⁸⁷ More

79. *See id.* at 131-32.

80. *See id.*

81. *See id.*

82. *See* Luckenbill, *supra* note 5, at 183-84.

83. *See* BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 134 (describing "cold nonpartisanship" and "warm nonpartisanship").

84. *See* BAUMGARTNER, *supra* note 19, at 97-100.

85. *See id.* at 98.

86. *See* BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 76-77.

87. *See* Black, *supra* note 10, at 17-19; *see also* Cooney, *supra* note 13, at 393-97 (noting the importance of legal access on rates of violence among socio-economic groups); Silberman, *supra* note 69, at 89-94 (noting the positive effect of alternative methods of conflict management on prison violence).

specifically, where a strong state or other authoritarian apparatus is unavailable or inaccessible, confrontation in the face of conflict becomes more likely.⁸⁸ As Koch comments, "the cross-cultural ethnographic record shows that societies with little or no government tend to rely on self-help or, at best, informal mediation as their dominant mode of conflict management."⁸⁹ Even in societies with developed systems of state intervention, such as the modern United States, numerous situations exist in which the law is *effectively* unavailable to disputants.⁹⁰ For individuals involved in prostitution, organized crime, and drug trafficking, for example, calling the police is not a viable alternative when disputes arise.⁹¹ Not unexpectedly, as Black's theory suggests, these are also domains associated with high levels and extremes of violence. Similarly, researchers have argued that police reluctance to become involved in the disagreements of intimates contributes to domestic violence.⁹² And others have suggested that the lack of trust and respect between lower-status groups and the criminal justice system prevents these groups from relying on the police in troublesome situations.⁹³ Consequently violent confrontation among disputing inner-city residents,⁹⁴ ethnic minorities,⁹⁵ and working class individuals⁹⁶ is not uncommon.

The link between conflict management, the unavailability of law, and juvenile violence in particular is reflected in the findings of a task force commissioned by Attorney General Janet Reno in 1994.⁹⁷ Consistent with other social science research, the task force concluded that a significant proportion of the increase in juvenile homicide during the mid-1980s and early 1990s was attributable, either directly or indirectly, to the emergence of crack cocaine markets and the proliferation of guns among the young people recruited to sell the drugs:

- Since they could not easily ask the police for protection, the

88. See Black, *supra* note 10, at 17-18.

89. Klaus-Friedrich Koch, *Liability and Social Structure*, in 1 SOCIAL CONTROL, *supra* note 10, at 95, 96.

90. See Black, *supra* note 10, at 18-19, 40; Cooney, *supra* note 13, at 393-97.

91. See Black, *supra* note 10, at 40; Cooney, *supra* note 13, at 397.

92. See James J. Fyfe et al., *Differential Police Treatment of Male-on-Female Spousal Violence*, 35 CRIMINOLOGY 455, 456-58, 467 (1997) (discussing research on the incidence of arrest in cases of domestic assault).

93. See Cooney, *supra* note 13, at 394-95.

94. See Anderson, *supra* note 5, at 81.

95. See JONATHAN RIEDER, CANARSIE: THE JEWS AND ITALIANS OF BROOKLYN AGAINST LIBERALISM 171-202 (1985).

96. See GERALD D. SUTTLES, THE SOCIAL ORDER OF THE SLUM: ETHNICITY AND TERRITORY IN THE INNER CITY 209-10 (1968).

97. See American Society of Criminology, *Critical Criminal Justice Issues: Task Force Reports from the ASC to Attorney General Janet Reno*, CRIMINOLOGIST, Nov./Dec. 1995, at 7.

new recruits needed guns to protect themselves and their valuable wares.

- Their tight networking through schools and the streets led to a broader diffusion of guns in the larger community, primarily for self defense, but also, perhaps, for status.
- Because of the presence of guns, fights that routinely occur among youths can rapidly turn from fist fights to shootings.

The report proposes a “diffusion hypothesis” to explain the growth in juvenile homicides, arguing that the tendency of those involved in the drug industry to arm themselves and to use guns to handle conflicts eventually spread to the wider community.⁹⁸ Hence, the involvement of juveniles in an illegal enterprise eliminated one possible source of conflict management (that is, calling the police) when disputes arose among them.⁹⁹ The use of violent strategies to fill the void had consequences not only for them, but for young people not directly involved in the drug markets as well.¹⁰⁰

Black argues that even if juveniles are not involved in illegal activities, the likelihood of violence increases in the absence of authoritative figures to whom disputants might turn for assistance in managing a grievance.¹⁰¹ Settings lacking a third party who is higher in status compared to the antagonists seem more prone to violence when conflicts develop.¹⁰² Respected figures who are slightly elevated in status provide the coercive element necessary to nudge adversaries toward a compromise or to convince them that toleration or avoidance, compared to continued and escalated antagonism, is the better strategy.¹⁰³ In sum, when legal or other authoritative third parties are absent or impractical, it is more likely that disputants will handle conflicts violently.¹⁰⁴

As the discussion thus far suggests, the unique aspect of Black’s theory is its focus on the conflict as the unit of analysis, and in particular, his argument that the use of self-help (aggression) to manage a grievance is largely a function of the “social structure” of the conflict itself.¹⁰⁵ Rather than asking what characteristics of a person make him or her more prone to violence, Black’s theory raises the question, “what characteristics of a conflict make it more likely to be handled violently?” Refocusing the issue in this way implies that even individuals prone to aggression do not resolve

98. *Id.*

99. *See id.*

100. *See id.*

101. *See* BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 95-124.

102. *See id.*

103. *See* BAUMGARTNER, *supra* note 19, at 67-71; BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 95-124; Merry, *supra* note 52, at 74-75, 80-81.

104. *See* BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 95-124.

105. *See id.* at 95.

all of their conflicts violently. This insight suggests that while individual characteristics of antagonists are no doubt important, the adversaries' *relationship to one another*¹⁰⁶ and beyond that, *their relationship to any third parties* who may intervene in a conflict as partisans or settlement agents are key to determining whether an individual will resort to self-help. In addition, the *degree of mobility* allowed by the situation itself is another important variable influencing self-help behavior.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the use of aggression to manage conflict is not simply a function of one participant's attributes, but rather a product of the larger social context in which the dispute occurs.

III. DATA AND METHODS

Data for this analysis are from a 1995 study of violent incidents reported by juveniles, ages 11 to 19, enrolled in two schools, a middle school in a large southern city and a high school in the Midwest.¹⁰⁸ The middle school was located in "an economically disadvantaged African-American section" of the city and had one of the highest rates of violence in the country.¹⁰⁹ The high school enrolled students with prior records of delinquency, including illegal drug use, possession of handguns, and school-related fighting.¹¹⁰ Many of the students lived in high-crime areas that encompassed public housing communities.¹¹¹

In open-ended interviews, the juveniles described their involvement in any violent incidents that had taken place at school, home, or in their neighborhood.¹¹² The narratives from seventy boys and forty girls resulted in 250 violent events, almost all of which (90%) had occurred within one year of the interviews.¹¹³ The data include information on the characteristics of and the relationship between the antagonists, the circumstances that provoked the violence, the presence or absence of bystanders during the event, the location of the encounter, and the frequency and severity of the violence involved.¹¹⁴ This contextual information provides the basis for the analysis here.

106. *See id.*

107. *See id.* at 76-77.

108. *See* LOCKWOOD, *supra* note 5, at 2; DANIEL LOCKWOOD, VIOLENT INCIDENTS AMONG SELECTED PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS IN TWO LARGE CITIES OF THE SOUTH AND THE SOUTHERN MIDWEST, 1995: [UNITED STATES] 4-5, 15 (ICPSR 2027, National Institute of Justice 1998) [hereinafter CODEBOOK].

109. LOCKWOOD, *supra* note 5, at 2.

110. *See id.*

111. *See id.*

112. *See id.*

113. *See id.* at 3.

114. *See id.* at 3-4.

Both the high incidence of violence reported by these juveniles and the unusually extensive amount of detailed information regarding the evolution of each conflict situation make these data particularly valuable for evaluating Black's theory.¹¹⁵ Typical juvenile self-report surveys concentrate on measuring individual-level traits and behaviors: sociodemographic and personality characteristics, family backgrounds, peer relationships, and involvement in deviant activities. Hence, while information regarding a juvenile's participation in or exposure to violence is often available, the data describing the entire context and evolution of the violent encounters themselves are rarely accessible. In this vein, this data set offers the unique opportunity to focus on the entire context of the conflict, rather than solely on characteristics of one participant (the survey respondent). Furthermore, the detailed information makes it possible to distinguish between violence associated with conflict and violence occurring in another context, for example, during a robbery or burglary. Since a theory of conflict management would only be applicable to incidents that occur in the context of a dispute, these data allow for a particularly appropriate evaluation of Black's theoretical arguments.

Importantly, the data indicate variation in the use and severity of violence across the reported incidents.¹¹⁶ Hence, even among individuals who might be predisposed to aggression, their tendency to use violence in response to disputes varied. Some incidents involved one or two acts of relatively minor aggression, for example, a push; others involved more extensive hitting; and a few very serious cases involved weapons.¹¹⁷ This pattern supports Black's perspective and suggests the importance of examining factors beyond the respondents' characteristics to explain the use of violence as a conflict management technique, and the degree of severity of the violence.

Despite their utility, the data do not provide a representative sample of American juveniles. In fact, 78% of respondents (86 of 110) are African American, and hence a disproportionate number of conflicts in the data set involve Black juveniles.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, although the large number of violent incidents reported by the juveniles facilitates this analysis, the number of incidents is no doubt higher than incidents experienced by the average juvenile in the United States. Nonetheless, the information provides an excellent setting in which to evaluate Black's propositions and to assess the merits of pursuing this line of inquiry in the future.

115. *See id.*

116. *See id.* at 4.

117. *See id.*

118. *See id.*; CODEBOOK, *supra* note 108, at 1-2, 4-5.

A. *Dependent Variables*

In the interview study, violence was defined as “an act carried out with the intention, or perceived intention, of physically injuring another person.”¹¹⁹ Responses were operationalized using Straus and Gelles’ widely used Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS).¹²⁰ The study used ten violent acts derived from the violence items of the CTS: throwing something; pushing, grabbing, or shoving; slapping; kicking, biting, or hitting with a fist; hitting with an object; beating up; threatening with a knife; threatening with a gun; using a knife; and using a gun.¹²¹ For each incident reported, respondents indicated how often each of these ten acts had occurred, up to a maximum of seven.¹²² I used the CTS data to calculate the “severity weighted scale” as suggested by Straus and Gelles for analyses in which the goal is to examine both the frequency (that is, likelihood) and the degree of severity of violence.¹²³ This scale multiplies the frequency of each violent act by weights indicative of each one’s injury producing potential.¹²⁴ Given the focus on conflict-related violence (that is, self-help), I excluded from the analysis those events in which the respondent was a victim, offender, or bystander in a robbery, theft, or other type of crime. This resulted in 220 cases for the analysis.

The available data allow a test of all but two of Black’s theoretical propositions: the effects of cultural distance and interdependence could not be directly evaluated. However, the nature of the sample and the available information regarding the context of the conflicts suggest that the study might indirectly control for the influence of these variables. First, since a majority of incidents took place between juveniles,¹²⁵ the interdependence characteristic of the disputants’ relationship across conflicts is probably uniformly low. Second, a majority (78%) of the study participants are African American and live in neighborhoods that are disproportionately populated by African Americans.¹²⁶ Since the violent incidents either took place at home, in school, or in the participant’s neighborhood,¹²⁷ the conflicts likely involved individuals of similar racial status. Future studies should pay particular attention to assessing the effects of both of these

119. LOCKWOOD, *supra* note 5, at 2.

120. *See id.*; *see also* MURRAY A. STRAUS & RICHARD J. GELLES, *PHYSICAL VIOLENCE IN AMERICAN FAMILIES* 6, 32-45 (Christine Smith ed., 1990) (listing nine “Violence items”).

121. *See* LOCKWOOD, *supra* note 5, at 4.

122. *See* CODEBOOK, *supra* note 108, at 19-20.

123. STRAUS & GELLES, *supra* note 120, at 542-43.

124. *See id.* at 542.

125. *See* LOCKWOOD, *supra* note 5, at 3.

126. *See id.*

127. *See id.* at 4.

variables on the likelihood and severity of self-help.

B. *Empirical Hypotheses and Independent Variables*

As suggested by the preceding discussion, this analysis evaluates five hypotheses regarding the likelihood and severity of self-help in response to conflict. The first three pertain to the relationship between the antagonists and the remaining two concern the influence of third parties present during the conflict.

H₁: As equality between disputants increases, the likelihood and severity of violence in response to conflict will increase.

H₂: As social distance between disputants increases, the likelihood and severity of violence in response to conflict will increase.

H₃: As the ability of disputants to remove themselves from the conflict situation decreases, the likelihood and severity of violence in response to conflict will increase.

H₄: Conflicts occurring in the presence of partisan third parties will be more violent compared to those which do not involve partisans.

H₅: Conflict occurring in the absence of authoritative third parties will be more violent compared to those occurring in the presence of authoritative figures.

Equality is operationalized with two variables, one measuring gender equality between disputants and the other measuring age similarity. To indicate gender equality, conflicts involving respondents and antagonists of the same gender (coded 1) were compared to those involving male and female disputants (coded 0). Age equality was constructed on the basis of the respondent's reported age and the respondent's estimation of the antagonist's age. Since the antagonists' ages were recorded in categories, I recoded the respondents' ages into equivalent age groupings. Then I constructed a variable to differentiate between conflicts involving adversaries whose ages fell in the same category (coded 1) compared to those whose ages fell in different categories (coded 0).

Social distance is based on the respondents' reported relationship to their antagonists as either a stranger, acquaintance, friend, or relative. Based on this information, I created four dichotomous variables: "stranger," "acquaintance," "friend," and "relative." I compared conflicts involving stranger relationships (the deleted variable in the regression equations) to those involving acquaintances, friends, or relatives. Given Black's theoretical arguments, the conflicts between strangers should involve increasingly higher levels of violence compared to those involving acquaintances, friends, and relatives. Hence, the acquaintance, friend, and relative variables should all have negative coefficients in the regression equation.

The third hypothesis pertains to the effect of mobility, or the physical

ability to remove oneself from the conflict situation. Respondents were asked to identify the location of the events initiating the violence.¹²⁸ The sites varied between enclosed areas, such as inside school classrooms, locker rooms, on the school bus, or inside the home, to those that occurred in open spaces, for example on the sidewalk or outside the mall.¹²⁹ Based on the logic that the physical ability to escape a confrontation is enhanced if it begins in an open rather than enclosed space, I operationalized mobility according to whether the opening move of the conflict had occurred inside (less mobility, coded 0) or outside (more mobility, coded 1) an enclosed area. Given Black's theoretical arguments, there should be an inverse relationship between the mobility measure and violence; that is, the conflicts occurring outside an enclosed area (more mobility) should be less violent compared to those occurring inside an enclosed area.

The fourth hypothesis predicts that the presence of partisan third parties during a conflict will increase the likelihood and severity of violent self-help. Recall that Black defines "strong partisans" as those with ties to one side in a dispute, but not the other.¹³⁰ Respondents were asked whether relatives or friends were present, other than as antagonists, during the incidents.¹³¹ Based on this information, as well as the data indicating whether the antagonists themselves were strangers, acquaintances, friends, or relatives, I constructed two variables measuring partisanship. The first, *partisan friends*, was coded 1 if the respondent's friends were present during the event *and* the respondent and disputant were not friends (that is, the disputants were family members, acquaintances, or strangers). I based this coding scheme on the assumption that if the disputants themselves were friends and one of them (the respondent) reports that other friends were also present, then all of those present during the conflict were likely to be friends. Conflicts involving partisan friends were compared to all other conflicts (coded 0). The second variable, *partisan relatives*, was coded 1 if the respondent's relatives were present during the event *and* the respondent and disputant were not relatives (that is, the disputants were friends, acquaintances, or strangers). Again, the assumption is that if the respondent and the other disputant themselves were relatives, then any other relatives of the respondent who were present would also be related to the other disputant. Conflicts involving partisan relatives were compared to all other conflict situations (coded 0). Given Black's arguments regarding partisanship and violence, the incidents involving either partisan friends or partisan relatives should be more violent compared to those absent these ties.

128. *See id.*

129. *See id.* at 6.

130. *See* BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 131.

131. *See* LOCKWOOD, *supra* note 5, at 4.

The fifth hypothesis evaluates whether the presence of an authoritarian figure affects the likelihood and severity of self-help in response to conflict. The data contain information regarding the presence of teachers or security guards during the event.¹³² I constructed a variable, *authority*, to distinguish between those conflicts in which either a teacher or security guard was present (coded 1) and those in which neither was present (coded 0). Given Black's argument, conflicts in which an authority figure is present should involve less violence compared to those where one is not present. Thus, the regression coefficients for this variable should be negative.

IV. RESULTS

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics for all variables in the analysis. Most of the disputes took place between antagonists of the same gender (79%) and approximately equal age (63%). About two-thirds involved antagonists who were acquaintances or strangers, and the remaining third involved disputing friends (16%) or relatives (17%). Although partisan friends were more likely than partisan relatives to be present during the conflicts (30% of the conflicts occurred in the presence of partisan friends compared to 18% in the presence of partisan relatives), a majority of the disputes took place in the absence of both. Most of the disputes occurred within an enclosed area (60%), and most (60%) occurred away from authority figures who might have intervened or provided an alternative conflict management strategy. Across the 220 events, the average level of violence, based on the severity weighted scale, was 11.3. The cases included a few incidents involving extreme violence (scale scores over 30), but most of the incidents (75%) involved violence scores of 16 or below.

The first hypothesis predicted that increasing equality between antagonists would increase the likelihood and severity of self-help in response to conflict. For example, disputes occurring between antagonists of the same gender and approximately equal age would be more violent compared to those occurring between male and female antagonists and individuals in different age categories. The results in Table 2 support this hypothesis. Both the age and gender variables have significant effects on the level of violence across incidents. Compared to conflicts involving males and females, those occurring between males *or* between females scored an average of three points higher on the severity weighted scale. The age variable had a similar effect. Disputes between antagonists of approximately equal age scored about two points higher on the severity weighted scale.

132. *See id.*

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Dependent and Independent Variables		
Variables	Var. Mean/ % Distribution	Standard Deviation
<i>Dependent</i>		
Level of Violence (severity weighted scale)	11.3	9.09
<i>Independent</i>		
<i>Equality</i>		.47
Age Equality		
disputants are different age category (0)	37.4	
disputants are same age category (1)	62.6	
Gender Equality		.41
disputants are different gender (0)	21.0	
disputants are same gender (1)	79.0	
<i>Social Distance</i>		
Disputants are . . .		
relatives	17.0	.38
friends	16.1	.37
acquaintances	61.0	.49
strangers	5.9	.24
<i>Mobility</i>		
Dispute occurred49
inside (low mobility, scored 0)	59.3	
outside (high mobility, scored 1)	40.7	
<i>Partisanship</i>		
Partisan friends46
absent during conflict (0)	69.8	
present during conflict (1)	30.2	
Partisan relatives38
absent during conflict (0)	82.5	
present during conflict (1)	17.5	
<i>Availability of Alternative Social Control</i>		
Authority Figure49
absent during conflict (0)	60.3	
present during conflict (1)	39.7	

The second hypothesis predicted that as social distance between antagonists increases, the likelihood and severity of violence in response to conflict would increase as well. The data support this hypothesis. The incidents involving juveniles who did not know their antagonists were more violent compared to those involving acquaintances, friends, or relatives. On average, conflicts involving nonstrangers scored six to seven points lower on the severity weighted scale compared to those involving strangers. The differences in the level of violence in stranger conflicts compared to conflicts

involving acquaintances or those involving relatives were significant at the $p=.05$ level; the differences in the level of violence in stranger conflicts compared to conflicts between friends approached significance at $p=.056$.

Table 2 Level of Violence Regressed on Equality, Social Distance, Mobility, Partisanship, and Alternative Social Control Measures (n=220 incidents)			
Variables	b	Beta	S.E.
<i>Equality</i>			
Age Equality (same age disputants=1)	2.22	.12*	1.25
Gender Equality (same gender disputants=1)	2.72	.12*	1.43
<i>Social Distance</i>			
Disputants are . . .			
relatives (1=yes)	-5.66	-.23*	3.12
friends (1=yes)	-4.73	-.19**	2.96
acquaintances (1=yes) (strangers=reference category)	-6.99	-.37*	2.58
<i>Mobility</i>			
Dispute occurred in an outside area (outside=high mobility=1)	1.22	.07	1.33
<i>Partisanship</i>			
Partisan friends present during conflict	5.57	.28*	1.44
Partisan relatives present during conflict	-0.10	.00	1.58
<i>Availability of Alternative Social Control</i>			
Authority figure present during conflict	-2.39	-.13*	1.35
Intercept	12.54		3.11
Adjusted R ² = .163			
* p<.05; ** p<.10 one-tailed significance tests			

The third hypothesis predicted that mobility would decrease the likelihood and severity of using violence in response to conflict. As operationalized in these data, the conflicts that occurred outside of an enclosed area indicated a greater ability to escape, and hence more mobility, compared to those occurring within an enclosed area. The results in Table 2 do not support the third hypothesis. The location of disputes did not have a significant effect on the level of violence associated with them. Unfortunately, the information provided in these data allows for only a partial operationalization of Black's concept of mobility. Recall Black's argument that the physical ability to remove oneself from a conflict situation is one

important indicator of mobility with regard to conflict management.¹³³ Another important indicator is the ability of antagonists to avoid one another in the future.¹³⁴ Future analyses should include a measure of this dimension of mobility in order to provide a more thorough and accurate assessment of Black's theoretical arguments.

Hypothesis four predicted that conflicts occurring in the presence of partisan friends or partisan relatives would be more violent compared to those occurring in the absence of partisans. This hypothesis is partially supported by the data. Conflicts that took place in the presence of the respondents' friends were significantly more violent compared to conflicts occurring in their absence. Disputes involving the presence of partisan friends scored an average of almost six points higher on the severity weighted scale compared to other disputes.

Although the data support the hypothesized relationship between *partisan friends* and the level of violence associated with disputes, the data do not support the hypothesized relationship between *partisan relatives* and the level of violence. That is, the difference in the level of violence between disputes occurring in the presence of relatives compared to disputes occurring in their absence was not substantial enough to be considered statistically significant. Hence, as far as these data are concerned, the relationship between the two variables is essentially zero: the presence of partisan relatives had no effect on the level of violence associated with the reported disputes. There are at least two interpretations of this conclusion. One is that Black's theoretical proposition regarding partisanship and self-help is inaccurate. Clearly, this verdict would be premature without additional analyses. The second explanation is that the "presence of relatives" variable is not a valid indicator of the underlying concept (partisanship) it is intended to measure. This alternative warrants closer inspection. Indeed, since these disputes involved juveniles, the presence of a relative might be more indicative of authority than of partisanship. This reasoning would suggest that conflicts involving the presence of relatives, partisan or mutual, should be less violent compared to those that occur in the absence of relatives. To test this idea, I computed a variable to measure the presence or absence of relatives (regardless of partisanship) during a conflict and calculated another regression model. The results for the new variable were not statistically significant either.

Future studies should continue to investigate this relationship. Additional analyses with a larger number of cases and a more representative sample might be better suited to probe the nature of the relationship between a relative's presence and the level of violence evolving from conflict situations

133. See BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 76-77.

134. See *id.* at 77.

between juveniles. In particular, investigating whether relatives play an authoritarian role or a partisan role is important, especially given the opposite effects each is hypothesized to have on the escalation of violent conflict management. It may be that a relative's role varies depending on gender, age, or relationship to the antagonists, for example, cousin, aunt, or uncle. In some cases, a relative might provide an authoritarian figure and hence discourage violence. In others a relative might supply partisan support and thus encourage violence. Clearly, more specific data are necessary to thoroughly investigate these potential differences before a definitive evaluation of Black's arguments is possible.

The last hypothesis, which concerns the impact of authority figures (other than relatives) during a conflict, predicted that the presence of an authority figure would decrease the likelihood and severity of violence. The data support this hypothesis. Conflicts occurring in the presence of teachers or security guards were significantly less violent compared to those occurring in their absence. The variable had a moderate effect; conflicts in which teachers or security guards were present scored almost 2.5 points lower on the severity weighted scale compared to conflicts which occurred in their absence. Here, the availability of an authority figure seemed to decrease the likelihood and severity of violence, suggesting the important role that teachers, security guards, and other respected figures may play in deescalating or preventing violence between disputing juveniles.

V. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Black and other sociologists have drawn attention to the relevance of studying confrontation, or "self-help," as a form of conflict management. They have argued that self-help and other conflict management strategies are patterned responses influenced by characteristics of the situations in which disagreements occur. This article has explored Black's theory in relation to juveniles, arguing that his ideas are especially applicable given the degree that adolescent relationships resemble those in honor cultures where slights, insults, and disagreements are often responded to with aggression. The empirical results indicate that juveniles are indeed more likely to use violence and more severe violence in certain types of conflict situations. Consistent with Black's theory, self-help is most likely to occur in disagreements between disputants who are status equals and socially unacquainted, that evolve in the presence of partisan friends, and that occur when authority figures who might provide an alternative conflict management strategy are unavailable. By suggesting the relevance of features beyond the personality or background characteristics of individual disputants, the perspective widens the scope of possible strategies for reducing rates of violence among juveniles. Some of these strategies focus directly on changing the nature of

the situation in which juvenile conflicts occur. Others focus more on changing attitudes and beliefs among juveniles, particularly the extent to which they equate honor with aggression and honorable responses to conflict with aggressive responses.

The analysis found support for Black's argument that increasing equality between disputants is associated with higher levels of violence and more severe violence.¹³⁵ Recall that equality is an important variable in Black's theory to the extent that honor plays a central role in organizing relationships among people.¹³⁶ In cultures where dignity is equated with the willingness to aggressively defend one's reputation, and the ability to insult someone is predicated on one's own status, disagreements between status equals are more likely to lead to violence.¹³⁷ While reducing equality between juveniles is not a particularly viable strategy, redefining the meaning of honor is. Indeed, these results suggest the importance of encouraging a culture where honor is less tied to notions of violent and aggressive behavior. Admittedly, changing the belief structure among juveniles is a daunting challenge, particularly when elements of our larger culture often support the use of violence in response to conflict. Nonetheless, several strategies may prove beneficial.

First, offering kids alternative, and more productive, ways of defining themselves as honorable people seems critical. Equally important is communicating to them that their accomplishments are valued and admired. Whether through scholastic channels, athletic outlets, altruistic activities, or other endeavors, providing juveniles with access to varied opportunities for success, and consequently, dignity and prestige, might decrease their inclination to seek status through harmful behavior. This point is consistent with social science research that has argued that a great deal of inner-city violence has evolved from the lack of legitimate opportunities for juveniles to achieve success and the intense feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness that result.¹³⁸ When the ability to achieve status through conventional means is blocked, teens are more likely to seek honor through involvement in illegal activities, which often include the use of aggression and violent confrontation to manage conflicts.

Not only is redefining the meaning of honor important, but redefining the meaning of an *honorable response* to conflict seems just as critical. As research has long noted, juveniles learn appropriate behavior from role models around them, and hence their aggressive responses to conflict should not be expected to change until adults move away from vengeful conflict

135. See *id.* at 76.

136. See *id.*

137. See *id.*

138. See Anderson, *supra* note 5, at 81.

management strategies in their own relationships.¹³⁹ Clearly, this suggests a fundamental reexamination of American norms regarding justice and retribution, a topic worthy of discussion but well beyond the scope of this article. The ideas here do, however, suggest more immediate tactics that should be focused on juveniles. For example, some social scientists have suggested implementing programs that teach social interaction and conflict management skills in school curricula.¹⁴⁰ Lockwood argues for an expansion of school curricula to include "a civic values approach . . . [which establishes and highlights] rules against retributive punishment of students by students. Small-group interactive sessions could also role play the destructive consequences of personal retributive justice."¹⁴¹ Making explicit these normative expectations and teaching juveniles particular skills might provide them with the conceptual and linguistic tools necessary to actually implement nonaggressive conflict management behavior in their lives.

Research has found support for these types of strategies, particularly when they are initiated among very young children.¹⁴² For example, a twelve-year program implemented during the late 1980s in some Seattle schools has shown promising results.¹⁴³ The participating schools were located in an area historically prone to high levels of violence.¹⁴⁴ As early as the first grade, children were taught how to interact socially and how to solve interpersonal problems.¹⁴⁵ By the age of eighteen, children who had received intervention were nineteen percent less likely to have committed violent acts than those who had not participated in the elementary intervention program.¹⁴⁶ Clearly, taking steps to encourage positive social interaction among young children and working to communicate the idea that retribution is destructive and *dishonorable* might pay significant dividends as juveniles mature through adolescence and into adulthood.

In addition to strategies aimed at changing the value structure among young people, the analysis here suggests that taking steps to change the structure of their relationships with each other might also yield benefits. The empirical analysis indicated that the use of violence in conflict situations was greatest first, when the conflict involved socially distant antagonists and second, when the conflict took place in the presence of partisan peers. Taken

139. See LOCKWOOD, *supra* note 5, at 8.

140. See *id.*

141. *Id.*

142. See Jane E. Brody, *Earlier Work with Children Steers Them from Crime*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 15, 1999, at A16 (reporting on a study published in ARCHIVES OF PEDIATRICS & ADOLESCENT MED., Mar. 1999).

143. See *id.*

144. See *id.*

145. See *id.*

146. See *id.*

together, these results suggest the importance of promoting crosscutting social ties between and among juveniles. Individuals who know one another are less likely to resolve their conflicts violently, and bystanders who have ties to both sides in a dispute, rather than just one, seem more likely to discourage confrontation rather than to encourage it. To the extent that many juvenile disputes take place at school, programs that encourage interaction among students might prove useful in promoting crosscutting ties and consequently fewer incidents of violence. Although schools cannot control social relationships between juveniles, they do have considerable control over student interactions in the classroom. This control could be used to implement strategies such as group projects that involve students in prolonged and intensive work sessions, small discussion sections that encourage intimate communication, or study groups that facilitate learning as well as helping skills. Strategies such as these would encourage more intimate ties among juveniles, making them less likely to use confrontation when conflicts occur between them. Further, these strategies might increase the likelihood that any audience to a conflict would have ties to both antagonists, a situation that seems more likely to encourage nonviolent conflict management outcomes. Indeed, the Seattle study mentioned previously found that "foster[ing] cooperative learning among students, so that each child is rewarded for having contributed to the achievements of the group" was another aspect of the intervention program that seemed to deter violent encounters among students.¹⁴⁷ If Black's theory is accurate, the crosscutting relationships forged by such cooperative learning programs might indeed have played a role in helping to reduce confrontation between juveniles when disputes arose among them. These types of programs not only foster crosscutting social ties, but also increase the level of interdependence among juveniles by making their success contingent on each other. Although interdependence was not examined in this data analysis, Black argues that confrontational styles of conflict management will be less common among individuals who rely on one another for their own well-being.¹⁴⁸

Although increasing interaction among juveniles might promote ties that decrease the likelihood of aggressive responses to conflict, greater interaction also might increase the likelihood of conflict. This possibility suggests the importance of the last variable examined in this analysis: the availability of alternative conflict management strategies, particularly in the form of an authority figure. Indeed, one of the strongest predictors of the level of violence among the cases examined was the availability of either a teacher

147. *Id.*

148. See BLACK, *supra* note 16, at 77.

or security guard during the conflict event. Where one of these authority figures was available, lower levels of violence ensued. Clearly, this result suggests the important role that authority figures play in reducing the likelihood of violent outcomes in conflict situations.

Importantly, Black's theory suggests that the physical availability of authority figures might not be enough to prevent self-help behavior.¹⁴⁹ Recall Black's argument that alternative conflict management strategies must be *effectively* available to disputants if these strategies are to reduce the likelihood of self-help.¹⁵⁰ Even if teachers, security guards, the police, or parents are physically available, if children do not perceive these individuals as respected, trusted, or otherwise appropriate figures to turn to in times of conflict, they will not be utilized. Hence, forging emotional ties between authority figures and juveniles is critical. Indeed, social science literature has often stressed the importance of emotional availability between teachers, parents, and juveniles.¹⁵¹ Do students perceive teachers or parents as caring enough to get involved in student disputes, to act as mediators, or to offer advice or consolation? To the extent that children feel connected to the authority figures in their lives, children will be more likely to turn to authority figures for help in resolving conflicts and less likely to use confrontation.

Finally, beyond making authority figures more available, expanding the pool of alternative conflict management strategies in other ways also might be useful. In this regard, programs such as peer mediation that offer juveniles an additional concrete alternative to resolving their disputes seem promising. These programs might be particularly useful for juveniles who are drawn to violent conflict management because they associate confrontation with independence. Because one of the principles of mediation is to encourage disputants to resolve their conflicts independently, such programs would be particularly attractive to youth who want to maintain control over how their grievance is handled, but wish to do so in a nonviolent manner.

In sum, this article argues that juvenile violence can often be understood as conflict management behavior, and as such, sociological theories of conflict management hold valuable insights for explaining such violence. Importantly, the theory suggests that to thoroughly understand why juveniles use confrontation in response to conflict, we must look beyond their

149. See Black, *supra* note 10, at 17-18.

150. See *id.*

151. See TRAVIS HIRSCHI, CAUSES OF DELINQUENCY (1969); Joseph H. Rankin & L. Edward Wells, *The Effect of Parental Attachments and Direct Controls on Delinquency*, 27 J. RES. IN CRIME & DELINQ. 140, 140-65 (1990); Michael D. Resnick et al., *Protecting Adolescents from Harm: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health*, 278 JAMA 823, 830-31 (1997).

individual characteristics to the entire context within which their conflicts occur. This perspective suggests the relevance of encouraging juveniles to develop notions of prestige, status, and dignity that are not tied to aggression. It also demonstrates the importance of fostering cooperative and communitarian ties among juveniles and the significance of making alternative means of resolving disputes available to juveniles. These strategies and others may have a positive impact on reducing at least some forms of juvenile violence in our society.

