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## The social origin of violent behavior

Todd Arthur Mensink

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THE SOCIAL ORIGIN OF VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Todd Arthur Mensink  
University of Northern Iowa  
July, 2011

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the social origins of extremely violent behavior. Numerous explanations of violent offenders have focused on biological, psychological, environmental or a combination of these factors to explain violence. Most explanations of violent behavior fail to take a holistic approach to understand the cause of violent behavior. This study is an analysis of the applicability of the violentization theory. Data was obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews from six violent offenders in a residential treatment facility in the Midwest. Findings indicate that for most offenders, the violentization theory is consistent with their social experiences. However, two exceptions pertained to the violentization process where the individuals stopped their journey along this socialization of violence. Further analysis revealed that the violentization process often starts within the home due to the violent subjugation by family members. The further along some are in the violentization process, the more consistent and violent their crimes are. This study finds that the violentization theory can be used to develop public policy programs aimed at stopping individuals from progressing through these stages.

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A Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Todd Arthur Mensink

University of Northern Iowa

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## DEDICATION

There are numerous people I would like to thank for their support and encouragement throughout the entire graduate school program. Due to space, I cannot list them all. I would like to thank my mother, Beth Mensink, for her support throughout this experience. She is an inspiration to all our family. I would like to thank my brother, Tom Mensink, for his encouragement, support and for the many late night conversations regarding basic versus applied criminology. I would like to thank my sister, Tracey Janssen, for her continued support and encouragement. I would like to thank my father, Alan Mensink, for his encouragement, support and steadfast belief in me. I would also like to thank the rest of my family and friends for their encouragement and support during this entire process. I would like to thank Al Dohlman for his support and encouragement of this study and the entire graduate school experience. Finally, I would like to thank my cohort. The numerous phone calls, late nights and spontaneous work sessions have paid off.

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, various law enforcement experts, psychologists and the mainstream media have advanced the notion that extreme criminal violence generally is the product of individual defects. For example, television programs such as "The Profiler" and "Criminal Minds" frequently present fictional accounts of killers whose psychological or biological deficiencies are the sole explanation for their homicidal acts. Although extremely violent acts are frequently committed by psychological and/or biologically abnormal people, focusing on this level of analysis gives insufficient attention to the sociological origins of extreme violence.

Several competing models of violent behavior emphasize psychological and biological factors. For instance, psychoanalytic arguments of the "criminal mind" contend that unconscious feelings and fantasy lie beneath many criminal acts (Hyatt 1998). Other psychological models focus on anti-social personality disorder (Andrews and Bonta 1994, Simourd 1997) and borderline personality disorder (Cloninger, Bohman and Sigvardsson 1981, Swanson 1994).

The biological perspective regards violent behavior as the product of physiological and chemical abnormalities within the body. This view can be further divided into three types of explanations. The first of these deals primarily with brain damage and specifically frontal lobe damage (Grafman et al. 1996). The second biological explanation focuses on neurotransmitters and specifically the role serotonin plays in controlling impulsive aggression (Coccaro et al. 1998). The third biological

explanation focuses on heredity and specifically the influence of genetic factors on aggressive behavior (Cocarro et al. 1998, Bergeman and Serocaynski 1998).

Biological and psychological explanations of violent behavior are prominent within the mainstream media. For example, former FBI profiler, John Douglas, devotes an entire website and several popular books to promote the idea of a "criminal mind." This explanation has had a strong influence on the popular media portrayals of violent offenders. Numerous television programs, movies, books and websites have further reinforced the notion of the "criminal mind." For example, movies such as "Seven" and the "Hannibal Lector" series depict violent criminals as psychologically abnormal yet diabolically clever killers. These portrayals contribute to a conventional wisdom that serious and persistent violent criminals are the product of psychological pathologies.

Previous researchers have argued that psychological defects may be a byproduct of social defects (Swanson 1994, Cloninger et al. 1981). In other words, psychological abnormalities matter but these abnormalities may be secondary to sociological origins of serious and persistent violent behavior.

In contrast to explanations of violent behavior that are rooted in psychological and biological perspectives, this study focuses on the social experiences that contribute to violent crime. Using Lonnie Athens's violentization theory, I will evaluate the proposition that social experiences are at the origins of violent behavior. Violentization theory asserts that specific social experiences are at the origins of violent crime (Athens 1997). The theory does not entirely negate psychological and biological factors of such behavior but instead argues that these are secondary to sociological influences.

This study is important for two reasons. First, a great deal of scholarly research related to the psychology and biology of violent behavior has lent support to a contemporary resurgence of the notion of the "criminal mind." This view has been reinforced by celebrity law enforcement experts such as John Douglas. In the absence of research that focuses on the social origins of extremely violent behavior, academic research may be contributing to a new mythology of the "born criminal." Therefore, my analysis seeks to explore the social causes of violent behavior. Second, in order to reduce violent behavior, we must strive to improve our understanding of its origins.

## CHAPTER 1

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Psychological Defects

One set of explanations of extremely violent behavior derives from the psychoanalytic perspective. Hyatt-Williams (1998) argued that an unconscious combination of feelings and fantasies are at the root of many violent acts and these violent acts are triggered by a specific situation. The author suggested this may be why most violent acts are committed against people who are known to the aggressor. Hyatt (1998) believes that all people are inherently inclined towards violence and destruction as well as love and kindness.

Many researchers believe that personality disorders are highly predictive of violent behavior (Andrews and Bonta 1994, Simourd 1997, Cloninger et al. 1981, Swanson 1994). For instance, antisocial personality disorder is characterized by a lack of regard for the rules of society and the rights of others. According to Simourd (1997), antisocial behavior can lead to criminogenic attitudes. Antisocial personality disorder has been shown to have a strong correlation with lower-class origins, educational achievement, parental and family issues, personal distress, and temperament and self control (Andrews and Bonta 1994, Simourd 1997). These factors are strong predictors of criminal behavior (Andrews and Bonta 1994, Simourd 1997, Cloninger et al. 1981, Swanson 1994).

Cloninger et al. (1981) suggests that psychological problems such as antisocial disorder and borderline personality disorder are frequently intensified by alcohol and drugs and this often leads to violence. According to Cloninger et al. (1981) there are two types of alcoholics with type two alcoholics frequently fighting and often showing characteristics of antisocial and borderline personality disorder while intoxicated. Approximately 37% to 59% of males arrested for violent crimes within the United States test positive for alcohol and/or drugs (Swanson 1994).

Previous research suggests that the majority of individuals with antisocial disorder display recognizable behaviors before the age of 15 (Andrews and Bonta 1994, Simourd 1997, Cloninger et al. 1981, Swanson 1994). The behaviors include fire setting, cruelty to animals, difficulties with authority, legal issues, and disregard for the rights of others. Often, individuals with antisocial disorder have numerous legal issues due to their failure to conform to societal norms. Other symptoms include impulsiveness, irritability, angry outbursts and a failure to rationalize the consequences of their behavior. Antisocial disorder is characterized by irresponsible behavior and a lack of remorse. (Andrews and Bonta 1994, Simourd 1997, Cloninger et al. 1981, Swanson 1994).

Borderline personality disorder, like antisocial disorder, is characterized by an inability to control one's emotions. Individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder frequently display inappropriate intense anger. They engage in self-destructive behavior, such as self-mutilation or suicidal threats, and in impulsive behaviors such as alcohol and drug abuse, risky sexual behavior, gambling, compulsive spending and shoplifting. Other symptoms of borderline personality disorder include unstable but

intense relationships, chronic feelings of boredom and emptiness and issues with self-identity (Andrews and Bonta 1994, Simourd 1997, Cloninger et al. 1981, Swanson 1994). Herman, Perry and Van Der Kolk (1989) contend that borderline personality disorder and a history of childhood abuse have a strong association. In their study, borderline personality subjects reported more physical abuse, sexual abuse, and witnessing serious domestic violence than subjects with no borderline personality diagnosis. Borderline personality subjects reported these traumas 81% more often than subjects with no borderline personality diagnosis (Herman et al. 1989).

### Rational Choice Explanation

In contrast to irrational psychological defects, researchers argue that violent behavior is a deliberate decision made by rational individuals (Scully and Marolla 1998, Wright and Decker 2002, Hickey 2002). This model suggests that some violent behavior can be explained by regarding violent offenders as rational decision makers. Rational choice theory argues that individuals make a conscious decision before committing a crime in which they weigh the perceived benefits of the crime against its known risks or consequences (Scully and Marolla 1998). Therefore, the rational choice model is a psychological process but this process is not psychological defect.

For instance, Wright and Decker (2002) suggest that violence is often used as a tool for gaining compliance. Their research involved in-depth interviews with 52 violent offenders who discussed their methods for engaging in violence. Several of the interviewees discussed violence as a risk reduction tool. For example, if they were robbing someone who was bigger than themselves they would hit the victim with the



handle of the gun in order to show the victim that the offender was serious about dispensing violence (Wright and Decker 2002).

Scully and Marolla's (1998) research revealed that certain rapists also used violence for instrumental purposes. Rapists, who participated in in-depth interviews, stated that their use of violence was proportionate to overcoming the victim's resistance. Scully and Marolla (1998) found that rapists often planned on using a certain amount of violence and calculated on how that violence would be used to complete their crime. Many of the rapists told the researchers that they would strike the victim immediately in order to assure the victim that the rapist would use more severe violence if needed. Almost all rapists used justification techniques to rationalize their behavior (Sykes and Matza 1957). For example, one rapist concluded that his actions were not bad because he never raped "good girls." All his victims were patrons of a drinking establishment at closing time. He argued that "good girls" would not be in this type of establishment (Scully and Marolla 1998).

### Neurological Defects

Various researchers have found that brain injuries affecting the frontal or temporal lobes are often associated with violent behavior (Raine et al. 2000, Grafman et al. 1996). Studies since the 1800's have examined the association between frontal lobe damage, violence and impulse control (Raine et al. 2000). Most of these studies used small sample sizes drawn from mental institutions and prisons (Grafman et al. 1996). Raine et al. (2000) found that individuals with antisocial personality disorder had an 11% reduction of prefrontal grey matter than did non-antisocial personality disorder

individuals. From this, the authors concluded that “the prefrontal structural deficit may underlie the low arousal, poor fear conditioning, lack of conscience, and decision-making deficits that have been found to characterize antisocial, psychopathic behavior” (Raine et al. 2000:119). Findings of this type suggest that any disorder or disease of the brain may influence violent behavior and a failure of inhibitory control (Grafman et al. 1996).

In a 1997 study, Raine, Buchsbaum and LaCasse compared 41 murderers who had plead guilty by reason of insanity (NGRI) to a control group that matched for age, sex and mental illness by examining at electroencephalographic (EEG) brain images. In the former group, the researchers found reduced glucose metabolism in the bilateral prefrontal cortex, the posterior parietal cortex and the corpus callosum. In addition, they found abnormal brain activity in the subject group where the left hemisphere of the brain was lower in activity than the right hemisphere. Bilateral prefrontal abnormalities often result in impulsiveness, low self control, inability to modify behavior and immaturity which can all lead to aggressive behavior (Raine et al. 1997). The posterior parietal cortex controls the ability to use abstract concepts which may lead to occupational and educational failures as well misinterpreting socially relevant information. The researchers were unable to image the septum and the hypothalamus which other researchers have argued are relevant to aggression. Raine et al. (1997) argued that their findings need to be taken cautiously and not be over generalized. The findings can only be applied to a select group of violent offenders (murderers who plead NGRI) and not to violence as a whole. Also, this study does not take into account the social, cultural and situational factors that influence violence. While this study does indicate brain

abnormalities in a specific subgroup of violent offenders, it does not account for various external causes (environmental or genetic) of the brain abnormality (Raine et al. 1997).

Researchers have also examined the extent to which neurotransmitters and hormones such as steroids, vasopressin, serotonin and catecholamines are involved in aggressive behavior. Current research literature includes evidence of the influence of serotonin on impulse control (Coccaro et al. 1998). Serotonin was first suggested as a controlling agent of aggression in the mid 1970's. During this time, researchers found low levels of serotonin while conducting postmortem tests on suicide victims. More recent findings suggest that low serotonin might predispose one to alcoholism as well as aggression (Higley and Bennett 1999). Pihl, Petersen and Lau (1993) argue that serotonin changes a person's response to threat. Their research suggests that people with low levels of serotonin experience reduced ability to experience anxiety (the emotional response to a threat) as an inhibitor to aggression. Thus, they are more apt to respond to aggression in a socially unacceptable manner. Individuals with low levels of serotonin often "appear depressed and aggressive, more driven by appetites (such as food, water, sex, and drugs of abuse), and more impulsive in the face of threat" (Pihl et al. 1993). Such people may be less influenced by social control agents. Alcohol further lowers serotonin levels which makes it even harder to stop drinking and may lead to violent behavior (Pihl et al. 1993). According to Pihl et al., "The combination of impulsivity [due to low serotonin] with alcohol-induced fearlessness and hyperactivity appears prone to produce aggressive acts or to culminate in victimization" (Pihl et al. 1993:137).

## Hereditary Defects

Researchers have also investigated the influence of genetics on a wide range of behaviors including violent behavior. Early research in this area focused on the XYY chromosome that was found among some violent offenders and aggressive persons (Allanson and Graham 2002). However, prisoners who had the extra chromosome were no more violent than their prisoners who did not have this extra chromosome. This research has largely been discredited due to the fact the members of the general public who also have the XYY chromosome were not more violent than their counterparts (Allanson and Graham 2002).

In 1993, researchers in Denmark thought they had isolated a gene that was associated with violence. This gene produced a protein called monoamine oxidize A or MAOA. MAOA helps with the metabolism of serotonin which in turn helps produce impulse control. Many researchers criticized the Denmark findings because the importance of serotonin on aggression and more specifically on impulse control was already widely known and accepted (Wasserman 2004).

In 2002, Caspi et al. found that high and low activity levels of MAOA influenced behavior in maltreated children. The researchers conducted their study on 1037 children at ages 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 and 18. Children between the ages of 3 and 11 experienced varying degrees of maltreatment. Approximately 8% suffered severe maltreatment, 28% experienced probable maltreatment and 64% had no maltreatment at all. Based on their longitudinal study, the researchers found that maltreated and non-maltreated children with high activity of MAOA displayed the same amount of violence. Maltreated children

with low activity levels of MAOA accounted for only 12% of their sample but accounted for 44% of all violent individuals who had criminal convictions within their population. Maltreated children with low activity levels of MAOA scored higher on all scores of violence. MAOA activity, both high and low, was constant for both maltreated and non-maltreated children. The researchers argued that the role of MAOA in violence was indirect in that high activity of MAOA enabled the metabolism of serotonin which insulated maltreated children from acting out violently (Caspi et al. 2002).

### Sociological Explanations

Biological factors may influence a male's greater propensity for violence, but research has suggested that male childhood socialization experiences, entrenched in traditional masculine roles, may be a risk factor for violence (Pollack 1998, Kindlon and Thompson 1999). Dean, Levent and Feder (2007) contend that the socialization of boys into traditional masculine traits such as toughness, dominance over others and emotional restriction may increase the likelihood of violence among males. The socialization occurs by discouraging and possibly even punishing boys' sense of vulnerability. In contrast, females have been encouraged to express their feelings while males "have been left in a box" (Froschl and Sprung 2005:7). Males are often encouraged to create a "tyranny of toughness" (Kindlon and Thompson 1999:54) which further enhances the probability of violent behavior.

According to Kindlon and Thompson (1999), American culture trains boys to become emotionally void and to adopt a masculine role that emphasizes toughness, depersonalization and dominance over others. The authors argued that this attitude

towards manliness often leaves males unable to handle the complexities of their own lives. This may also lead to social, academic and other hardships. For example, boys have higher rates of learning disorders and behavioral problems (Kindlon and Thompson 1999). Pollack (1998) coined the term "boy code" to refer to the emotional suppression that our culture places on boys. Boys regard this emotional suffocation as an ideal which is never fully reached. The failure causes boys to suffer and may lead to violence (Pollack 1998).

Numerous studies have been conducted over the past several decades that argue that violence in the media is a significant factor in violent behavior (Anderson and Bushman 2001). According to Anderson and Bushman (2001), people who regularly watch violent acts on television have been shown to be at a much greater risk of aggression and violent behavior. Studies have also shown that U. S. children aged 8 to 18 will spend more than 40 hours per week engaged in some form of media (Rideout, Foehr, Roberts and Brodie, as cited in Anderson and Bushman 2001). Toomey (1991) argued that the average American will see over 200,000 violent television acts by the age of 16. More recent research has focused on the effects of "new media" in regards to violent behavior. New media includes video games, the Internet and music videos (Davey and Wilgoren 2005). For example, the perpetrators of the Columbine shootings had developed a version of a violent video game that forewarned the events that were about to unfold (Anderson and Bushman 2001). Although the exact effects of violent media images is largely unknown, it is widely accepted that exposure to violent acts increases the risk for violent behavior. Anderson et al. (2001) suggested that "the

scientific debate over whether media violence increases aggression and violence is essentially over” (p. 81). The debate on how to effectively control exposure to violent media still continues (Anderson et al. 2001).

Another contributing factor to violence is the family. Steinberg (2000) argued, “I doubt there is an influence in the development of antisocial behavior among young people that is stronger than that of the family” (p. 31). Parental influence on children is both direct, such as harsh discipline and positive attitudes towards aggression, and indirect, such as the school a child attends and where a child lives. Violence among youths has been linked to favorable attitudes towards aggression within the home, harsh parental discipline styles and aggression within the home (Margolin, Youga and Ballou 2002). Pollack (1998) found that parental connection, genuine parental involvement and emotional care, are linked to nonviolent behavior. Margolin et al. (2002) conducted qualitative studies that conclude that youths are influenced by violent tendencies observed within the household.

Sociological analyses of violence also focus on community conditions. Wolfgang and Ferracuti (Rhodes 1999) argue that where a subculture of violence persists the “typical” homicide is a result of cultural values and norms that regard violence as appropriate or even required based upon a provocation or insult. These subcultures are predominately found among young adults and often clustered together in poor communities. Young adults learn the subculture violence through socialization. Wolfgang and Ferracuti (Rhodes 1999) use Sutherland’s differential association theory to explain how the subculture of violence is learned. They argue that individuals who

completely assimilate the values of the subculture are more likely to violently react to a minor insult compared to someone who has not completely assimilated those values. The authors argue that not every aspect of the subculture is different from the dominant culture but only in relation to violence. Not every member of the subculture supports violence and the subculture of violence does not support violence in every situation (Rhodes 1999).

### Violentization Theory

Lonnie Athens (1992) argued that many theories that attempt to explain violent criminal acts are generally divided into bio-physiology theories and social environment theories. He contends that a dichotomous separation of the organic body and the environment is not possible. Athens view on this issue is not unique. Thirty years ago, Shah and Roth (1979) argued that "modern geneticists have pointed out that a nature-nurture dichotomy is clearly untenable, incorrect, and meaningless. The subject has to be discussed in terms of the continuous and complex interactions between an organism and its environment, and the relevant contributions of both sets of variables in determining the behavior of the organism" (p. 104-105). Athens (1992) agrees that the interactions between individual and social factors are continuous and complex and that the respective contributions of each factor on violent behavior cannot be separated or measured. Therefore, any theory which rests on the assumption that human behavior can be neatly divided into bio-physiological and the social environment is false (Athens 1992, Athens 1997). More recent theoretical contributions to criminology have taken a dualistic approach and incorporated both bio-physiological and social environment factors.



Athens (1992) argued that a dualistic approach is just as problematic as using a one-sided theory. Both one-sided and two-sided theories operate on the misconception that the factors which bring about violent criminal behavior come from two separate sources, the organic body and the social environment. According to Athens (1992), the key to discovering how people become serious violent offenders is to develop a theory that integrates bio-physiological factors and social environment factors. Shah and Roth (1979) recommended a multidisciplinary approach in order to resolve this issue. Athens (1992) argued that a multidisciplinary approach may do more harm than good because it would lead to the bio-physiological factors and the social environment being dissected into infinitely more parts with each new expert being added. His remedy was to use a holistic approach that would not separate the organic bodies from the social environment (Athens 1992).

Athens (1992) suggested that the notion of social experience would satisfy this demand. John Dewey (1929) stated that social experiences are a result of an interaction that takes place between the organic body and the social environment. This occurs as humans interact with one another and it generates both emotions and thoughts. Dewey (1929) argued that "living as an empirical affair is not something which goes on below the skin-surface of the organism: it is an inclusive affair involving connection, interaction of what is within the organic body and what lies outside in space and time and with higher organisms far outside" (Dewey 1929: 203). Athens (1992) argued that the organic body and the social environment are united into an indivisible whole. He believed that

the key to understanding violent behavior is to develop theories from studies that examine the social experiences of violent offenders (Athens 1992, Athens 1997).

Athens (1992) used the social experiences of violent offenders to formulate his own theory on the cause of violent behavior. He believed that extremely violent behavior is caused by a process he termed violentization. The violentization process is analogous to socialization in that people become extremely violent as a result of their unique social experiences. Athens (1997) suggested that this process does not occur in a single occurrence but gradually over a long period of time. According to Athens (1997), violentization consists of four stages (Rhodes 1999).

The first stage is called brutalization and is characterized by a trilogy of elemental experiences. The first of these is violent subjugation. Violent subjugation occurs when an authority figure, real or imagined, uses violence to force the subject to submit to their authority (Athens 1992, Athens 1997). Violent subjugation is practiced through coercion and retaliation. Coercive subjugation occurs when an authority figure uses violence or the threat of violence to force compliance from the subject. This may include demanding respect. The battery, physical or verbal, continues until the subject submits. At first, the submission brings relief but soon humiliation follows. The subject's feelings of humiliation quickly subside and are replaced by feelings of vengeance. Often, the subject will fantasize about beating, torturing or killing his subjugator (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999). Retaliatory subjugation occurs when an authority figure uses violence as punishment for past disobedience or present disrespect. The subject may have disobeyed a past command. Often, the disobedience is

compounded with additional disrespect when the authority figure interrogates the subject. In retaliatory subjugation, the assault continues until the subject is beaten into a frenzied state or the subjugator becomes exhausted. This is different than coercive subjugation because the assault does not stop when the subject submits. Once the subject realizes their submission will not stop the beating, their feelings of terror are replaced by resignation. Often, time slows and the subject becomes numb from the pain of the numerous blows. The subject will become passive and will not resist the subjugator. As the subject awakens out of their stupor, he is overcome with humiliation which quickly subsides and feelings of anger and vengeance dominate their mind. The subject will fantasize about beating, torturing or killing their subjugator (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

Regardless of the type of subjugation, the subject is taken to their breaking point where they ask themselves one question. How much more of this can I take? Once the answer is no more, the only thing they can do is submit. The goal of coercive subjugation is to gain momentary submission and compliance with some current command. In comparison, the goal of retaliatory subjugation is to instill a permanent state of submission to ensure future submission and respect (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999). There are occurrences within both retaliatory and coercive subjugation in which the process is not fully completed. This could be due to the subject's escape, third party intervention or the authority figure's realization that the use of subjugation is futile and may have a reverse effect than what was intended. Also, the subject may retaliate, which would change the subjugation into a violent

personal revolt which will be discussed later (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

The second process within the brutalization stage is called personal horrification. Within this process, the subject witnesses the violent subjugation of a member of their primary group such as a family member or close friend. The experience of personal horrification is personal because of the relationship between the subject and the victim (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999). The subject develops a sense of apprehension as he/she realizes an altercation between an intimate person and an authority figure is likely to occur. The subject begins to worry about the physical well-being of the victim. As the subject becomes aware that the authority figure is assaulting the intimate, the feelings of apprehension change into anger. The subject asks themselves; how much more can I let the victim endure? Soon, the answer is no more. The subject wants to strike out at the authority figure and has fantasies of beating, torturing or killing the subjugator. However, the reality of attacking the authority figure sets in as the subject weighs the likelihood of prevailing in a physical altercation with the subjugator. The fear for their own personal safety overrides the fear for the personal safety of the member of their primary group. The subject realizes that they cannot stop the violent assault. Their personal feelings of anger are transformed into feelings of hopelessness and uselessness. The subject will become angry with themselves for being unable or unwilling to intervene. The subject believes it was not the subjugator's evilness that caused the assault but their own impotence which creates an intense feeling of shame. Personal horrification is less traumatizing physically than violent subjugation

but it is not less traumatizing psychologically (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

The last process within the brutalization stage is violent coaching. During this process, the subject takes the role of the novice and an older person takes the role as coach. This is an informal and implicit relationship. The coach is always someone from the subject's primary group and is an authority figure that has credibility, real or imagined, relating to the use of violence. Many people, particularly men, make comments that indicate that they are much more violent than they really are. The novices must believe that their coaches will or have used physical violence in order to establish credibility (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999). The coach teaches the novice to not ignore provocation but to handle it with enough force to ensure victory regardless of the harm it may cause. Violent coaching is based on the belief that the world is full of mean people and the novice must be able to handle that. Coaches always teach novices that it is their personal responsibility to engage in violence against all provocations regardless of age, sex or size. However, coaches seldom teach novices how to attack someone (Athens 1989, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

According to Athens (1992), there are five techniques used by coaches. The first technique is vainglorification. During vainglorification, coaches portray violent actions against protagonists as glorious acts. The coach implies that those who lash out at protagonists are viewed as heroes by telling stories about their own, a relative and/or friend's violent acts against an evil person. The second technique employed through

violent coaching is ridicule. The coach belittles or threatens to belittle the novice for not physically attacking the provoker. The coach attempts to make the novice feel not as worthy as the coach or some other respected third party. Coercion is another techniques used by coaches where the coach will threaten the novice with physical violence if the novice does not attack the provoker. The novice has to choose between sure physical harm from the coach or possible physical harm from protagonist. The fourth technique used by coaches is haranguing. The coach repeatedly rants and raves to the novice about causing physical harm to others without belittling the novice. After hearing the repeated stories of violent acts and the satisfaction that the coach takes in telling these stories, the novice cannot help but to believe that there is some pleasure in hurting others. The last technique used by coaches is besiegement. This is a combination of all techniques besides haranguing. The coaches use different social penalties and rewards to achieve their goal which is to get the novice to act out violently.

Novices may experience different violent coaching techniques throughout their life. Violent coaches may change possibly through divorce or death. For example, a novice's violent coach may begin as his/her father but change to an older brother if the father is removed from the novice's life. It may change again to a stepfather if the mother remarries. The coach may change techniques if what they are using is not working. Also, a novice may have multiple violent coaches. Regardless of type and number of coaching technique used, the coaching experience alone is not enough for someone to complete the brutalization stage (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

These three experiences are different from one another but there is a unity among them all (Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008). Violent subjugation, personal horriification and violent coaching may occur at different times in a subject's life. However, it is possible that violent subjugation and personal horriification could occur simultaneously. Violent coaching could occur before or after these other experiences but rarely would it occur simultaneously. The amount of time necessary to complete these stages varies but the majority of people, especially males, have completed this process by adolescence. Many females lack violent coaching because violent coaches are subject to the same gender bias that the rest of the society has. Violent coaches find it more acceptable for females to play a subordinate role than for males (Athens and Ulmer 2008). The subject must undergo all three experiences before the brutalization stage is complete. Violent subjugation, personal horriification and violent coaching create a total experience that involves cruel treatment by others that has a lasting and often dramatic impact upon their lives (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

The second stage of the violentization process is the defiance stage. It is during this stage that the subject wants to resolve the crisis that their brutalization has caused. Subjects agonize over why they are or have been brutalized and what they can do about it. They relive the brutalization stage experiences which make them hostile towards themselves and towards others. The subject realizes that the violent coach may have been right. The only way to stop the brutalization is to become violent (Athens and Ulmer 2008). The subject makes a decision to seriously harm or kill anyone who

violently subjugates them. This realization moves them into the next stage and marks the beginning of a dangerous and violent person (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

The third stage of the violentization process is the violent dominance stage.

During this stage, subjects move from thinking about violence to actually using violence.

Athens (1997) argued that it takes more than just thoughts to be violent and actual violence is frightening and often dehumanizing. It is during this stage that subjects begin to build confidence in their own violent performance. Subjects want to ensure that they are capable of engaging in violent acts and ensure that there is some probability of success in the outcome (Rhodes 1999). In order for subjects to initially act out, Athens (1997) argued that provocation must occur in one of two manners. Athens argued that "the actions that purposely and cruelly antagonize the subject to the point of tormenting him or actions that place the subject or someone about whom [he] cares in imminent danger" (Rhodes 1999:128) are necessary for a subject to act violently towards a subjugator. The subject's actions are in direct opposition to an oppressor. The subject realizes that if he loses, his subjugation may be more severe. For this reason, many people are discouraged at this point and stop from continuing on the path of violentization. Athens (1997) argued that any notable violent event will not, in and of itself, have a significant or lasting impact on the subject. In order to have a lasting impact, the subject must fully understand to importance of his success. The job of impressing the subject with what they have done is usually done by someone else who



knows the victim or the offender. Often, the offender begins to develop a reputation as being dangerous (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

Dominance engagements occur when arguments arise over dominance. Athens (2008) argued that dominance engagements occur over three steps. First, someone takes the role of the super-ordinate and subjects someone else to the role of subordinate. The super-ordinate can make three grades of dominance innuendos in order to achieve the goal of being a super-ordinate. Grade one dominance gestures includes insulting or commanding someone in order to ensure dominance over that subject. Grade two dominance gestures consist of commanding and insulting the subject at the same time. The main point here is to convey the message of overwhelming superiority and dominance. The highest grade dominance gesture is when a would-be super-ordinate attacks or threatens to attack a subordinate. The super-ordinate is sending the message that they are of a higher strata in life than the subordinate and they deserve this position (Athens and Ulmer 2008).

The second step within dominant engagements is that a would-be subordinate must challenge the subordinate role. The subordinate does this by making their own dominance claiming gestures. This could include any of the above three grades of dominance gestures (Athens and Ulmer 2008).

The last process within dominance engagement is when one or both of the would-be super-ordinates decide to overcome the perceived or actual resistance to their super-ordinate position. Often, super-ordinates have already planned on what they would do if someone challenges them. While this resistance may take a violent turn, it does not

necessarily have to be. Regardless of whether the resistance is violent or non-violent, the goal of this stage remains the same; who will play the role of super-ordinate and who will play the role of subordinate (Athens and Ulmer 2008).

The outcome of a violent dominance engagement is just as important as the circumstances that surround it. Athens (2008) argues that there are five possible outcomes: a major defeat, a major victory, a draw, a minor defeat and a minor victory. A major victory is characterized as causing serious bodily harm to an opponent, while a major defeat is the opposite. Minor defeats and victories are the same as major defeats and victories but without any substantial bodily harm. A draw is where no winner or loser can be distinguished. The most common outcomes are minor victories and minor defeats. However, before a subject can move to the last stage of the violentization process they must have at least one major victory and often multiple major victories (Athens and Ulmer 2008).

The last stage of the violentization process is virulency. It is during this stage that an offender develops a readiness to use extreme violence on another person with little or no provocation. The virulency stage, like the brutalization stage, contains three elemental experiences. The first elemental experience is violent notoriety which refers to the reputation that one time subordinates gain in their major victory over a violent subjugator through a dominance engagement. The subject's reputation changes from being a person who is incapable or highly unlikely of violence to someone who is very capable and proficient at it (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

The second elemental experience within the virulency stage is social trepidation. Social trepidation refers to how people act in his/her presence. Unlike when the subject was a subordinate, people now act cautiously towards the subject. Many people will take precautions not to offend or challenge the subject because they are afraid of the possibility of a violent dominance engagement that they would probably lose (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

The final elemental experience only occurs if the subject embraces the violent notoriety and social trepidation. It is called malevolency. Subjects become overly impressed with their rise from subordinate to super ordinate. The resolution of using violence against subjugators who threaten themselves or members of their primary group subsides into a resolution to gravely hurt or kill anyone for any provocation regardless of the intensity. Offenders in this stage often believe that since they performed these other violent acts that they are now invincible (Rhodes 1999). The malevolency experience is not only the completion of the virulency stage but the entire violentization process (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

Once an offender completes the virulency stage and the entire process of violentization, they will engage in extremely violent behavior (Athens 1997). Violent offenders will also find a "cure" for their earlier personal disorganization. These ultra-violent offenders will attack at little or no provocation and will engage in sadistic and torturous behaviors. They will live by the motto, "do unto others as they have done unto you, but do it first" (Athens and Ulmer 2008:18). This is regardless of education, race, income, sex and intelligence as long as they are physically and mentally able to perform a

violent act (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999). "Not poverty or genetic inheritance or psychopathology but violentization is the cause of criminal behavior (Athens 1997:112).

### Assessments of Violentization Theory

There have been a few studies that have attempted to assess violentization theory. Overall, these studies do provide support for Athens' theory.

Jarjoura and Triplet (2003) conducted life-history interviews of 18 18-year-olds who were in custody at a juvenile detention center in a Midwestern state. Interviewees were encouraged to talk about their family, neighborhood, peer and school experiences. Increased attention was given to those experiences that held significant meaning for each offender. The researchers went through the narratives looking for incidents that matched Athens' theory because if an offender went through all four stages of the violentization process than the offender should be a violent offender. They found that all 12 (67%) of the subjects who completed the violentization process had at least one substantial violent act. Only one of the remaining six interviewees who had not completed the violentization process had a substantial violent act. The subjects who had completed the violentization process had a recidivism rate of 17% within one year compared to 0% for those who did not complete the violentization process. Overall, the researchers found support for violentization theory (Jarjoura and Triplet 2003).

Rhodes (1999) brought national attention upon Athens' violentization theory in his award winning book. Rhodes (1999) used secondary analysis to examine the lives of

5 infamous people including Cheryl Crane, Alex Kelly, Mike Tyson, Perry Smith and Lee Harvey Oswald. The researcher matched personal accounts with the violentization theory. He argued that all five individuals had completed the violentization process and that these violent social experiences had led to their famous violent acts (Rhodes 1999).

Past research on Athens' violentization theory is marginal. Jarjoura and Tripplet (2003) research was focused on assessing the rationality of juvenile justice polices and not primarily focused on assessing the violentization process. Also, their research took place at a juvenile detention facility and did not include those youths who had been transferred to adult prison. Those youths may have been the most violent of all the youths. Since Rhodes (1999) used secondary analysis, he was unable to interview the subjects. He could not use follow up questions to understand what the subject was thinking and feeling during the violent episodes.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

Consistent with Jarjoura and Triplet (2003) this research is a case study utilizing narrative analysis in order to examine the social experiences of violent offenders.

Narratives or stories allow the subject to disclose what important events occurred in his/her life as the subject views them (Waletzky and Labov 1997). Broad questions were used in order to start the story such as, tell me about the first time you experienced violence (see Appendix A). Follow up questions were based upon the story that is being told. Common follow up questions included; how old were you when this occurred and how did this event make you feel? These questions allowed the researcher to gain clarity as well as develop a time line of significant social experiences. Through these stories, I am attempting to understand the subject's world and viewpoint especially in regards to the origins of the interviewees' violent behavior (Waletzky and Labov 1997).

This study consisted of six semi structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and each subject was interviewed twice. I examined all available criminal records of each interviewee. These records were used to corroborate each participant's interviews. The criminal records also gave me insight into the longevity and seriousness of their violence. All the interviews were done at a residential treatment facility in the Midwest.

Each interview lasted approximately sixty minutes and each participant was interviewed twice or possibly three times. Only the participant and I were present during

these interviews. All interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants. All interviews were transcribed verbatim using a transcription machine. In order to ensure confidentiality, all tapes and other interview material were kept in a separate locked file cabinet. In addition, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and all identifying information was removed from the transcription. All tapes were destroyed upon completion of the research project. Along with conducting interviews, I examined criminal records and parole records of each offender. These records ensured the accuracy of the given information.

The interviews took place in a residential treatment facility in the Midwest. Steps were taken to ensure the confidentiality of the subjects from all employees within the residential treatment facility. However, confidentiality could not be guaranteed due to employees discussing the nature of my visits to the residential treatment facility.

Convenience sampling procedures were used to find participants. This study used a three tier system in selecting subjects. First, a supervisor at the facility initiated contact with the potential participant and asked that individual to meet with me. Second, I described the nature of the study and informed potential participants that they are free to withdraw from participation at any time or not to participate at all, and by doing so, they would not be penalized. Participants would not receive any direct benefits as a result of their participation. Third, after examining their case files and the initial interview, subsequent interviews were arranged if they meet the criteria for a violent offender. Each selected participant was interviewed twice.

The data from the interviews were analyzed through an in-depth coding process. I began by examining the data for recurring themes, especially as they are related to my research question. This required sorting and compiling data according to the themes that have emerged. The next process entailed focused coding. Once themes began to emerge, every transcription was reviewed in order to highlight those themes. This enabled new themes to be found and recurrent themes to be re-examined. Subjects' social experiences were then analyzed in order to see if they could be categorized into the violentization theory.



## CHAPTER 3

### FINDINGS

In the following section, there are six interviews with offenders who to varying degrees were socialized into violence. Some of the offenders fit into the violentization theory while others seem to only partially fit. I will provide a brief background of each interviewee, with an overview of their criminal history and the social experiences that fit with elements of the violentization theory proposed by Lonnie Athens.

#### Biographical and Criminal Background

The following section gives a brief overview of each subject's biographical information as well as their criminal background.

#### Brad Barnes

Brad Barnes is a 40 year old African-American who is married with two children aged 15 and 13. Barnes was born and raised in a midsized Midwestern city that had a relatively large percentage of minorities and people living in poverty. Brad's life was difficult from the start. His mother was 15 at the time he was born. She was raised by her grandparents after she had been abandoned by her mother. Barnes did not know his father until the age of 24 but he did have a close relationship with an uncle.

Barnes has a long and violent criminal history. At the age of 12, he was arrested for assault, resisting arrest, theft in the 5th degree and a disturbing the peace charge that involved getting into a fight with a neighborhood boy. Less than a year later, he was

arrested again for assault and disorderly conduct for an incident at his school. Barnes was only 15 years old when he was sent to a juvenile facility for boys for criminal mischief in the 2nd degree, a felony, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest. He was released from the juvenile facility in February of 1986. That same year, he was sent back to the juvenile facility for robbery in the 1st degree, assault, disturbing the peace, resisting arrest and sexual assault in the 3rd degree for an attempted armed robbery of a convenience store. He was released from the juvenile facility when he turned 18. Six months after he was released from the juvenile facility, in December of 1988, Barnes was sent to prison on charges of burglary in the second, carrying weapons and interference with police acts for breaking into vehicles. He was released from prison in 1994. That same year he was convicted of assault with intent to cause injury after an incident at a local bar.

In 1995, Barnes pled guilty to charges of domestic abuse. In 1996, at the age of 26, Brad was sent back to prison after being found guilty of assault, domestic abuse, robbery in the 2nd, assault while participating in a felony, interference with official acts and criminal mischief in the 4<sup>th</sup> for another armed robbery of a convenience store. He was released from prison in May of 2005. In 2006, Barnes pled guilty to driving while his license was suspended and failure to appear. In 2007, he was sent to a residential treatment facility after he pled guilty to domestic assault, two counts of child endangerment and violation of a no contact order after he assaulted his son for stealing at a local sporting goods store. Currently, Barnes is residing in a residential treatment facility.

John Porter

John Porter is a 33 year old Caucasian male. He is single and has one child.

Porter's early life was very transient as he was raised in the Midwest and the West. He was primarily raised by a single mother who has a long history of drug abuse. His father was sent to prison, for armed robbery, when John was only three years old. Porter has one brother who is one year younger than him. Porter's childhood was not stable as he has lived in 27 houses that he can remember. He recalls many times having to move in the middle of the night as to avoid the landlord.

Porter has a history of violent crime. In 1989, at the age of 12, John was convicted of aggravated assault after he and his brother and beat a schoolmate. In 1994, at the age of 18, he received probation for the charges of domestic assault, violation of a protective order, theft in the 5th degree, burglary in the 2nd degree and public intoxication. These charges stem from an incident that occurred after he went to his former girlfriend's house to pick up his daughter and engaged in a violent encounter with her new boyfriend. In 1996, Porter violated his probation and was sentenced to five years in prison. He was discharged from prison in March of 2001. In August of 2001, he pled guilty to public intoxication and domestic assault. In January of 2002, at the age of 26, Porter was sent to prison for 2 years after being convicted of operating while intoxicated, driving while license suspended, aggravated domestic assault, child endangerment and willful injury for driving intoxicated with his child in the car. John was paroled in May of 2003. In November of 2003, Porter was sentenced to 25 years in prison after he pled guilty to burglary in the 1<sup>st</sup> degree. This crime included Porter and his brother beating the

homeowner with a wooden baseball bat over his head until the bat broke. He claims that his brother was actually the one who committed the crime but that his brother could not handle incarceration so he took the blame.

### William Connors

William Connors is a 47 year old African American male. He has two young children and is not married. William was born in a large southern city and moved to a large west coast city when he was 6. Connors has had a difficult life from the start. His mother abandoned him and his sisters at a young age and his father was very abusive toward Connors and his siblings. Due to the abuse, Connors and his sisters moved from their father's care to foster care and back to their father's care numerous times. The abuse was so bad that Connors and all of his siblings ran away from home and never returned.

Connors has lengthy and violent criminal record. It should be noted that Connors criminal history record begins in 1988 but his criminal activity started before that time. I could not obtain his earlier out-of-state criminal records. In 1988, William was sentenced to six years in prison after being convicted of 1st degree robbery and possession of a controlled substance for robbing a local gas station. He was paroled in October of 1992. In May, 1993, his parole was revoked and he was sent back to prison after he pled guilty to public intoxication and assault after an incident outside a bar. William was released from prison in July, 1994. In May, 1995, he was convicted of domestic assault on his girlfriend and interference with official acts. In December of that same year, Connors was convicted of public intoxication after he passed out in his front lawn. William plead

guilty to operating while intoxicated in February, 1997. In April, May, and June of that same year, he was convicted of separate public intoxication charges. In August, 1997, he pled guilty to public intoxication and possession of a controlled substance after causing a scene at a convenience store. In June of 1998, Connors was convicted of public intoxication and carrying weapons. He bent a fork around his fist so the prongs stuck out. That same year, he was convicted of criminal mischief in the 4th degree. In November of 1998, William was sent to prison for 2 years after being convicted of public intoxication and carrying weapons. This time he had a knife on him but he claims it was for work. He was released in December of 2000. He was convicted of public intoxication in August of 2001 and May of 2002. In February of 2004, he was sentenced to a residential treatment facility for one year after he pled guilty to possession of crack cocaine and public intoxication after passing out at a bar. In March, 2006, Connors was found guilty of possession of marijuana. In December of that same year, he was convicted of public intoxication. In March of 2007, William was sent to prison for 4 years after being convicted of public intoxication and possession of marijuana. Currently, he is in a residential treatment facility.

#### Lawrence Grant

Lawrence Grant is a married, 31 year old, African American who has two children ages 11 and 7. Lawrence grew up in a midsized Midwestern city. Grant was born to a troubled family as his father was only 14 and his mother was 16. He was raised by his grandmother until he was 13 years old when she passed away. He was then sent to live with his uncle. His dad died when Lawrence was only 7 years old from trying to hop

a train. Grant never had a relationship with his father and characterizes his relationship with his mother as more like that of a sister than a mother. He was raised with his younger sister and three male cousins. Lawrence considers his cousins to be his brothers. Currently, his sister and all three cousins are in prison. According to Grant, all their offenses are drug related.

Lawrence has a long and violent criminal history. At the age of 12, he was convicted of burglary in the 2nd degree for kicking in a neighbor's door. One year later, he pled guilty to assault. Grant was again found guilty of assault at the age of 14 for an altercation at his middle school. At the age of 15, he was convicted of theft in the 5th degree. At the age of 17, Lawrence was charged and convicted of burglary in the 3rd, aggravated assault, riot, interference with official acts, failure to disperse and theft in the 5th degree for his involvement in a robbery of a local business and subsequent refusal to comply with officers demands. In August of 1997 and January of 1999, he was convicted of possession of marijuana. In May, 1999, Grant was sentenced to 2 years in prison after he pled guilty to assault with intent to do great bodily harm for an incident outside a bar. In March, 2001, he was convicted of possession of marijuana, possession of crack cocaine, domestic abuse with injury, violation of a no contact order and a probation violation after a dispute with his estranged wife while he had drugs on him. In May of that same year, Grant was sent to prison for 5 years after he was convicted of domestic assault with injury, child endangerment, probation violation, possession of cocaine with intent to deliver, possession of marijuana and interference with official acts after he assaulted his wife at her home.

In February of 2003, Lawrence received parole. In January, 2004, his parole was revoked after he was convicted for domestic abuse after an incident with his wife. In March, 2006, Grant was again paroled but in November of that same year, he was convicted of possession of a controlled substance and operating while under the influence. He was sent back to prison and paroled to a residential treatment facility in the Midwest.

### Juan Hernandez

Juan Hernandez is a 33 year old Hispanic male who is single with no children. Juan was born in the United States in a Mexican border town. He spent much of his childhood in both the United States and Mexico. Hernandez has two older brothers, one older sister and a younger sister. All but the youngest sibling have been in prison. His parents were drug dealers who made a substantial amount of money in the drug trade. Often, Juan and his family left the United States when warrants were issued and hid in Mexico in one of the many towns that his mom had donated money to. Juan's childhood was a very violent and unstable experience.

Because many of Hernandez's criminal records were out of state, criminal records prior to 1995 when Juan turned 18 years old, were unavailable. In September of 1995, he was convicted of credit card abuse. In 1997, Hernandez pled guilty to felony embezzlement and assault. In September of 1998, he was sent to prison after being convicted for possession of marijuana over 50 pounds. Juan was transporting marijuana from Texas to Michigan. He was paroled in 2001. In August of 2002, Juan was convicted of possession of marijuana. In November of 2003 and November of 2004 he

was found guilty of enhanced assault for a bar fight. Hernandez pled guilty to domestic assault in June of 2005. In March, 2006, he was sent back to prison after being convicted of assault, interference with official acts, domestic abuse and assault with serious injury. Hernandez assaulted the new boyfriend of his ex-girlfriend and his former girlfriend. He was paroled in June of 2007. In October of that same year, he was convicted of burglary in the 2nd degree, aggravated assault with injury and theft in the 2nd degree after he attempted to get payment on a drug deal by breaking into a house and beating the owner. He was sent back to prison for these crimes. Currently, Juan is in a residential treatment facility in the Midwest.

#### Mark Johnson

Mark Johnson was born and raised in a mid-sized Midwestern city. Mark is a white male, 32 years old, single and has no children. He has been in and out of correctional facilities since the age of 15. He is the middle child of 5 siblings. According to Mark, none of his other siblings have a criminal history. He has a history of severe and chronic violence.

In May of 1993, Mark was convicted of theft in the 5th degree. In June of that same year, he pled guilty to theft in the 4th degree and assault. Mark claims that he was jumped by neighborhood boys and was only protecting himself. He was sent to a juvenile facility for these crimes. In November, 1996, Mark stabbed a man to death. Although he was charged with 1st degree murder, he pled guilty to voluntary manslaughter and willful injury for which he was sentenced to 10 years in prison. He was paroled from prison in October of 2001. In July, 2002, Johnson was found guilty of



domestic assault and interference with official acts for beating his girlfriend. Mark was convicted of assault on a police officer, violation of a no contact order and interference with official acts in November of 2002 after he forced his way into his ex-girlfriend's house and forced her to hang up the phone when she dialed 911. This event led to his parole revocation and he was sent back to prison. While in prison, in May of 2003, he was convicted of assaulting a peace officer (a correctional guard) who Mark says was disrespecting him. Mark was paroled from prison in October, 2003. In September, 2004, Johnson pleaded guilty to assault from an incident with a friend of the guy who Mark had stabbed to death. In January of 2005, he was found guilty of violating a no contact order against his girlfriend. He was convicted of burglary in the 1st degree, violation of a no contact order and domestic abuse in August of 2006 for breaking into his girlfriend's house and threatening to stab her if she called the police. Currently, Johnson is in a residential treatment facility in the Midwest.

### Brutalization Stage

The first stage of the violentization theory, brutalization, is characterized by a trilogy of elemental experiences, violent subjugation, personal horrification and violent coaching. The following section discusses the extent to which the backgrounds and violence revealed by the interviews fit with Athens's violentization theory. Each stage of the theory is summarized and the interview data is examined in terms of whether it supports or refutes the theory.

## Violent Subjugation

Violent subjugation occurs when an authority figure, real or imagined, uses violence to force the subject to submit to their authority (Athens 1992, Athens 1997).

All six of the interviewees experienced violent subjugation.

Barnes experienced violent subjugation at the hands of his mother. He believed that most of the beatings he received were due to a misunderstanding that his mother had of boys and perceived transgressions that may or may not have been real. The goal of the beatings was to make Brad submit to his mother's wishes.

I did get a whupping about everyday from about 9 to 14. The whippings were for about everything but basically being a boy and supposedly dissing her (showing disrespect). Doing whatever the hell I wanted to. You know, my mother was a single mother and I don't think she knew ... Women they have that natural motherly instinct but I think you need a man there to. Boys will be boys. If I want to go in a damn creek and catch some frogs I am going to go in a creek and catch some frogs, you know. I don't think the whippings were her fault I just don't think women can understand what a boy goes through.

Porter's violent subjugation started when he was only three years old. He suggests that he does not remember the subjugation.

Well she (his mother) was with my dad until he went to prison. She left him cause he beat her but I don't remember that. She then moved in with a guy and he was our babysitter. He ended up sexually abusing me and one of his older kids would hold me up by the legs and punch me in the stomach. I don't really remember a lot of this but I was told it happened. I was only about 3 years old. She ended up leaving him after the abuse.

His subjugation by this abuser would only temporarily subside. Porter and his family moved in with the same guy when they went on the run from law enforcement.

We moved out to San Francisco when me and my brother got into trouble. My mom and her boyfriend were writing term papers for college students and they were using Meth to stay awake. Their relationship was also very rocky. She was having nervous breakdowns due to all the stress. The cops called my mom and told her that they knew that me and my brother stole a car but they could not prove it yet. The cops told her it was just a matter of time. I think they were just fishing. They told her they were going to come and see her as soon as charges are filed. My mom decided that my kids are not going to go to jail so we left to San Francisco. We moved in with the guy who had molested me. Now, he tried to rub my feet and stuff and at that point I was 14. By that point, I knew what he had done. We only stayed there for a little awhile cause he wanted to be our dad. He wanted to be in control. I was 14 my brother was 13 and we ran our own life. Our mother didn't tell (us) what to do so why should he. You know, we were like screw you. My mom was like screw you I guess, you can't control their life. We moved out of there into a homeless shelter for awhile and then got an apartment.

Family violence and physical abuse was a prominent part of Connors' childhood.

The interview data revealed that Connors's violent subjugation came at the hands of his father.

My dad was very violent towards us (Connors and his siblings). He would starve us for 2 or 3 days as punishment. He would tie us up and gag us and beat us. Growing up, you know what I mean, I left home very young cause I couldn't stand it. Violence was always around me.

Lawrence Grant experienced violent subjugation from his grandmother and her boyfriend. The level and intensity of his violent subjugation increased as he got older.

My grandmother whopped me almost every day (for breaking real or imagined rules). She never had any boys and I don't think she knew how

to raise boys. I wasn't a completely innocent boy but I wasn't the devil either.

I would guess about 8 or so my grandmother stopped whupping me and had her boyfriend do it. The only problem was that he didn't whup me like an 8 year old, he whupped me like a grown man, closed fist and all.

Juan's main subjugator was his father. His father was a violent and abusive person who used his violence to gain control over his entire family.

My dad would beat me if I dared disobey him. I didn't do that often. He was a very violent person. Someone you didn't want to cross. At least I was so young that he never came at me with a weapon like he did my older brothers.

According to Mark, his subjugation did not begin until he was in the juvenile justice system.

In those places (juvenile correctional facilities), people will take things from you if they want them. You either fight or let them take it. I tried to fight back but I was new and had no friends there. One time, a guy took some notebooks from me. I tried to keep him from taking them but next thing I knew, I was being beat by 4 guys. That beating was bad but not nearly as bad as when I told on them. You learn how things go. You learn real quick that you have to stick up for yourself or you're an easy mark.

### Personal Horrification

The second process within the brutalization stage is personal horrification.

Within this process, the subject witnesses the violent subjugation of a member of their primary group such as a family member or close friend. The experience of personal

horrification is personal because of the relationship between the subject and the victim (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999). All six of the interviewees experienced personal horrorification. Personal horrorification inflicts less traumatizing physical trauma than violent subjugation. Instead, it is primarily an experience of psychological trauma (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

Barnes experienced personal horrorification numerous times during his life.

I remember an uncle when I was about 4 and it was the first time I saw violence. My uncle and his girl were arguing real bad and she threw a glass at him. I was close to her, you know, and I didn't want her to get hurt. I walked over there to see what happened and I cut my foot. My uncle snapped and I mean snapped, it was crazy, very crazy. This was the first violence I ever saw. My uncle was beating her real, real bad. They took me to the hospital and my uncle kept beating her all the way. It was weird. I was scared but I couldn't take my eyes off it, like it was a movie.

Another social experience that obviously impacted Mr. Barnes occurred inside of his home. Barnes was surprised by the actions of his family members during this event.

I saw my mom get hit once. A dude slapped my mom and she shot him in the arm. The dude jumped out the window in our second story apartment. I couldn't believe that my mom shot the guy. No one in my family seemed surprised but to me it was a major event. How could you just shoot someone?

Porter's personal horrorification occurred when he witnessed his mother being beat by her boyfriend.

There was this guy from my mom's past who came out to San Francisco to visit. We all did acid and he asked if we could get Meth. We said we could and we all did Meth together, me, my brother, my mom and her boyfriend. He was really a really paranoid meth user. He would accuse her of all sort of stuff and he would beat her. I also got into a few fights with him when I tried to stick up for her. I tried to stop him but what could I do. I was about 16 or 17 at the time. I weighed 130 pounds and he was 250 or so. He was a fighter and always tried to get us to fight. He had just got out of prison but he ran protection scams in prison and didn't try to make himself better. He would tell other inmates that someone was after them and for money he would make sure nothing happened to them. They were together for about a year. I still see him from time to time. We stay away from the past and don't talk about it.

In William's case, personal horriification came from witnessing the violent subjugation of his sisters.

All my siblings got beatings. I have three sisters and I am the youngest of them all. My oldest sister tried to stick up for me but that got her in more trouble than anything. She couldn't stand up against him. Nobody could stand up against him. You know what I mean. For awhile there, I thought he was the toughest guy in the world but he wasn't.

I had three sisters and yeah, they got it bad too. My dad beat my sister one time naked. Yeah, my dad hit my older sister in the head with a 2x4 cause she burnt her shirt. Her shirt caught on fire accidently. That's why she got the whupping. And yeah, it was a mess, it was a mess. She left home before everyone else did. She couldn't take it. She couldn't put up with it. She left home than she came back home. Then she left home again.

Connors also witnessed the violent subjugation of his mother at his father's hands.

This violent subjugation haunts Connors to this day.

My dad used to beat up on my mom a whole bunch. I remember one time when, you know what I mean, even though it sounds like it can't be done but my dad beat my Mom with a crowbar 3 or 4 times. He said yeah you

better play dead. She ran away and he said that you better run. She left him eventually. He threatened to kill her if she ever came back.

I was probably like 4 or 5. My dad was very violent. I remember my Mom coughed one day and a bunch of blood came out. My Dad told her to take care of it. I didn't know what it meant back then but I do now. I have had a recurring dream since I was little and it was like I was in trouble and everyone was staying away from me and saying ohhhh you're in trouble, you're gonna get it. I was terrified of my Dad.

Grant's personal horrification experience involved local neighborhood gangs that he was involved with at a young age.

Well, my neighborhood is –there are a lot of gangs in my neighborhood, and so I heard it all, seen it all, pretty much. A lot of my close friends were beat by these gang members. They never messed with me, probably because I was big for my age.

Grant's experiences with gang violence made him believe that he needed to part of a gang or group in order to have protection from other factions.

Yeah, when I was 12, I joined a gang and was –this little neighborhood gang. Me and a bunch – I wouldn't even call it a gang, really. Me and a bunch of my friends –I mean we would fight other people, rival factions or whatever, and that was from the time I was 12 to maybe 15.

Juan experienced the personal horrification of seeing both his mother and his older brother being beat.

I remember once, my mom – it was a two-bedroom house. My two older brothers and then my sister – I slept in one room. And right next to that room was my mom and dad's room. And I slept in the living room with my little sister. And one of those times, you could hear my mother and

father fighting in the room. And it started getting louder. It came toward the door. I laid on the floor with my little sister in my arm. And I'm looking across and just waiting. I know he's gonna bust the door down here pretty soon – ya know – with them fighting. And I seen my older brother coming down the hall – “What's going on?” And by that time, my mom jerks the door open. And here she comes.

Her eye and face is swelled up. By the time you knew it; they were goin' at it. So I grabbed my little sister. And I ran across the street. We lived on a gravel road. And there was a cornfield. There was a cotton field and then a cornfield. I grabbed my little sister and started running toward the cotton field there and hidden. And like I said, I ran all the way up to the cornfield and started hiding behind the corn. And I could see down, across the cotton field to my house. And the door was open. I could see my dad and brother fighting. I seen them start swinging bats and stuff at each other. Man, this is really bad. My mom was layin' on the floor outside the house – when she was tryin' to get away. My dad just knocked her over.

Then one occasion, I seen – our kitchen was – the door to the front of the house, you could see straight into the kitchen and bedroom to the left. So I'm lookin' from the cornfield. And I can see my dad bending my brother – holds him like this and throws him on the couch. You could hear just the squealin'. My brother was still young. He was probably 17 or 18 years old – at the most 18. And my dad was a big guy. So you could hear them. And this is quite a ways from the house. And I could still hear them. Like, man, I feel bad for him.

Johnson's personal horrification also occurred within the juvenile correctional system.

You know, after awhile you begin to make friends. You stick up for your friends and they stick up for you. One of my friends got jumped by three guys over something he supposedly said. I was close to being released and didn't want another report so I didn't do anything. I watched as they beat on him. I still regret that.



## Violent Coaching

The last process within the brutalization stage is violent coaching. During this process, the subject takes the role of the novice and an older person takes the role as coach. This is an informal and implicit relationship. The coach is always someone from the subject's primary group and is an authority figure who has credibility, real or imagined, relating to the use of violence (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999). The coach teaches the novice to not ignore provocation but to handle it with enough force to ensure victory regardless of the harm it may cause.

Violent coaching is based on the belief that the world is full of mean people and the novice must be able to be violent. Coaches always teach novices that it is their personal responsibility to engage in violence against all provocations regardless of age, sex or size.

Barnes's uncle served as his violent coach.

I had an uncle who had a spread and he used to sell weed back in the day. He stayed with my mom's older sister but he worked his whole life (manufacturing jobs). He did hustle on the side. One day these boys were messing with me but I wouldn't fight them because they were my cousins on my dad's side. He called me into the house and told me that I don't want to ever see you let anybody do anything to you. I didn't explain to him why (I did not want to fight). I was about 8 or 9. But he told me that out here, you will always be the aggressor and field anything, you have to be strong. He told me not to be a punk or I would have to deal with him. He made me go out there and fight them. It made me ashamed and mad but I knew I was no punk. It hurt me because, you know, he was the only uncle who on birthdays, Christmas would buy me stuff. He bought me my first bicycle. I wanted him to be proud of me. He was my only (male) role model.

Barnes's uncle used the coaching technique of coercion. With this technique, the novice is threatened with physical violence if he does not attack their provoker (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999). The novice has to choose between sure physical harm from the coach or possible physical harm from their antagonist.

Porter's uncle served as his coach. Stories about the use of violence were a frequent part of Porter's childhood. These stories portrayed his family members as violent, but always justified in their actions.

My mom's brother was president of an outlaw biker gang, like in the 70's and 80's. He was pretty violent at times but I didn't witness that. He was around frequently. He would take us out on bike rides and stuff. When I moved back from California, I spent a lot of time with him. Him and his wife smoked a lot of pot, so I would smoke pot with him and hang out. A lot of the older people in Sons of Silence were originally with him in the 70's and 80's. There was a lot of violence with these guys. I never saw any violence but I heard a lot of stories. By the time I was around he had retired from work and retired from the gang. Even though I did not see a lot of violence, it was really accepted. It was a way of life. They were robbing drug stores, they were outlaws. We all knew it. The lifestyle I grew up in was unpredictable and always in turmoil. No one wanted to go to jail so they would do what they had to do (to avoid incarceration).

I had my Dad and two uncles in prison for armed robbery and another two uncles in prison for murder. Two on one side of the family and three on the other side. They all ran around with one another. They were all 70's kids, so there was and then there was the big hippie you know they spent a lot of time doing drugs. But they had no problem sticking a gun in someone's face and taking what they wanted. The murders were not malicious. I don't think my uncle realized they were bullets in the gun. He was strung out. He said all he remembers is seeing the guy slump down the wall. He won't ever get out of prison.

The coaching technique used by Porter's uncle and his family is consistent with Athens's discussion of vainglorification. The coach implies that those who lash out at antagonists are viewed as heroes. By telling stories about their own, a relative and/or friend's violent acts against an evil person, the story teller reinforces the notion that violence was a necessary and glorified act in many circumstances (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

Connor's violent coach was his father. Unlike most violent coaches, his father did teach him how to fight.

My experience taught me not to back down. My dad taught me how to fight, how to block and how to punch. He always told me that if I got my butt whipped than I was going to get a beating from him when I got home. The second beating is going to be from him. None of us wanted that. My sister got into a fight and then she got whipped because my Dad seen her face all swollen.

William's father used the coaching technique of coercion. Connors had to choose between sure physical harm from a grandparent or possible physical harm from neighborhood antagonists.

Grant's violent coach was his grandmother who also used coercion as her main coaching technique.

My grandmother, she always told – she's from Mississippi, and she always me to stick up for myself, always. It wasn't a question of, "I'm going to let these people" – her mother was a slave, so we were always taught that we have to stick to our own kind and fucking just protect ourselves.

I can remember one time – my grandmother – these guys, these boys chased me home one day, and they wanted to fight me, and I didn't want to fight them. So I Guess this is where I learned to fight from. She actually made go outside and fight each and every one of those guys, because, where she's from, if you run, then you'll be running for the rest of your life.

My grandmother would have whopped me if I didn't go out there and stand up for myself. She told me a lot to never back down from a fight but don't be starting any either.

Juan's violent coach was his father. Juan's father also used the coaching technique of coercion.

That's for sure. I came home once with a black eye. And my dad was there – “And what happened? What did ya do?” “Well, nothin'.” Put me in the car. We went over to the kid's house. My dad and the other kid's dad were talkin'. And they'd say, “You guys go in the yard and handle this now.” That's the way it was.

You're gonna fight. You've got your dad there and the other guy. And you know. You're dad's givin' you the eye – like, you better fight. It was entertainment for them after awhile. They'd get drunk. And my son can whup your son and this and that. And oh, no, he can't. Well, come here. We're gonna find out. We ended up getting the cops back then – ya know – and the roosters. We're gonna fight. We're barbequin'. And they're drinkin'. I've already got ya in my sights. I know this is gonna happen. Ya know what I mean?

You have to fight, there is no question about it. If you don't, oh, you're gonna get whopped at home. You got it. Don't come here cryin'. Even your mom will tell you. Don't come here crying. Go back out there and you hit that kid – get him back.

Johnson's violent coach was his fellow inmates and his step-dad. Athens designates the technique used by Johnson's violent coaches as haranguing. The use of haranguing emphasizes repeated rants and raves to the novice about causing physical

harm to others without belittling the novice. After hearing the repeated stories of violent acts and the satisfaction that the coach takes in telling these stories, the novice cannot help but to believe that there is some pleasure in hurting others.

He just – he just used to tell me that I need to fight back because a lot of kids used to pick on me when I was little. When I asked him, basically, he didn't really say too much because usually he was working most of the time. He did tell me about a few times that he got into a fight. I didn't have a lot of time with him, but he's just tell me to stick up for myself and not let people push me around.

They (inmates at the county jail before Mark was sent to prison) just tell you – they – they told me that if I didn't stand up for myself, ev – everybody would – would mess with me and try to cause problems for me and think they just – they could just walk all over me. So I mean, they just told me about playing cards and stuff like that. I mean, people if they dont want to fight. It's the easy way to get into a fight or have a problem. If someone confronted you, then you had to handle it. They told me about times that they had fight.

All six of the subjects experienced violent coaching and completed the first phase of the violentization theory. The most common violent coaching technique was coercion.

### Defiance Stage

The second stage of the violentization process is the defiance stage. It is during this stage that the subject seeks to resolve the crisis during the brutalization stage. Subjects agonize over why they are or have been brutalized and what they can do about it (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999). They relive the brutalization stage experiences which make them hostile toward themselves and others. The subject realizes that the violent coach may have been right. The only way to stop the brutalization is to be violent (Athens and Ulmer 2008).

Barnes realized this at a very young age by witnessing a murder from his bedroom window.

I saw a guy murdered when I was about 7, right outside my bedroom window. He was a close friend to all of us. He lived with my cousin who stayed in the building. He would mess with my cousins' mother's roommate and he would mess with her while they were going out. I guess she went somewhere else and was crying to some other guy and the dude blew his head off. They dragged his body into like a sewer. It was like man this is crazy. I knew right then and there that people don't care too much about other people. You know? Lots of people don't value human life. It was after this that I realized I needed to be strong. I started taking boxing classes and started fighting with other kids. I learned to hurt them real quick before they can hurt me. It changed me and made me realize that life is violent.

While it does not seem that this single event transformed Barnes into believing that he must be violent in order to survive in his violent world, it may have been the beginning of the defiance stage.

Not standing up for myself makes me feel like shit. I think that is why I am the way I am. I am violent when I feel disrespected and I don't even have to know you. Like I said, I try to be positive and open minded but if I feel like I am the butt of your jokes my demeanor changes. My girlfriend calls it the devil. You know, like my eyes change and it gets crazy.

This statement makes it clear that Barnes made the realization that the only way to stop the brutalization is to be violent yourself (Athens and Ulmer 2008). According to the violentization theory, this realization helps move the brutalized person into the next stage and marks the beginning of a violent way of life (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

It appears that Porter never completed the defiance stage of the violentization process. This is probably due to the fact that he used drugs as a way to resolve his brutalization. He was never in a clear state of mind where he would have contemplated his ordeal. His primary group, his mother and his brother, supported his belief that using drugs was an acceptable alternative to resolving his issues.

My mom and her boyfriend were writing term papers for college students and they were using meth to stay awake.

We all did acid and he asked if we could get meth. We said we could and we all did meth together, me, my brother, my mom and her boyfriend.

I was not really raised around a lot of violence, it was mainly drugs. I was raised in a culture that promoted and accepted violence. I did not see a lot of fights nor did I have to fight that much. Most of my violence came when I was under the influence of meth. Normally I was up for 3-4 days on a meth high.

It was like 3 months and I got arrested. I was taken up to San Francisco for stuff I did when I was 16. All drug charges. I did 6 months there (California) and another 6 months here (Midwest).

All of Porter's violent episodes have been under the influence of drugs and are directly linked to his drug use. It is not clear if John used drugs as a means to cope with the subjugation he suffered or if his drug use was primarily a cause of the influence of his primary group. Either way, it is here that Porter's violentization process comes to an end. He never completes the last three stages. However, he may continue to complete the process in the future. It is not surprising that a person would come to the attention of law enforcement before they have completed the violentization process.

Connors dealt with his father's violence by removing himself from the situation.

Similar to Hernandez, there was no single event that marked this stage but it is clear that Johnson proceeded through this stage.

In prison, you have no real choice. Either fight or be a bitch, a punk. You know, a nothing. People will take advantage of you if they think they can. The only way to keep people away and respecting you is to show them that you are willing to stand up for yourself no matter what.

Yeah, if you – when – when some – they know you're gonna stick up for yourself, a lot of times people won't bother you because they know there's gonna be a fight, there's gonna be an instance, something's gonna happen.

The interview data shows that 5 of the 6 subjects did proceed through the defiance stage of the violentization process.

### Violence Dominance Stage

The third stage of the violentization process is the violent dominance stage. During this stage, subjects move from thinking about violence to actually using violence. In order for subjects to initially act out, Athens (1997) argued that provocation must occur in one of two manners. Athens argued that “the actions that purposely and cruelly antagonize the subject to the point of tormenting him or actions that place the subject or someone about whom [he] cares in imminent danger” (Rhodes 1999:128) are necessary for a subject to act violently towards a subjugator. The subject's actions are in direct opposition to an oppressor.

Barnes's main oppressor was his mother. As stated earlier, Barnes received almost daily beatings from his mother for real or imagined transgressions. Barnes attempted to stop the brutalization of a younger brother by standing up to his mother.



My brother had a big mouth. He wanted to be a comedian so you can just imagine how many people wanted to beat him up so there are plenty of times I took ass whippings cause of him. If he took an ass whupping it was both us at the same time. The only person who beat his ass and I didn't do anything was by my mom. And it was bad. He could never be still you know. If he was watching TV his leg would be shaking. He would never listen to me. You know, ever since he has been out of the womb he has never stopped moving. I tried to stop mom from whupping my brother. Most times when I did, I would end up getting beat. You know my mother is a small women but I think she has the strength of Mother Mary. She slapped me once when I was 13 maybe even 14 and I saw stars. I didn't fall; I wasn't going to fall but good Lord. Like I said, I don't think she understood us. It made me mad cause my youngest brother never got touched but the other two of us did.

While this may have been his main oppressor, it was not his only antagonist.

Barnes grew up in a culture of violence where fighting was encouraged and expected.

His neighborhood was inhabited by many families who were related by blood or marriage. This created many conflicts that would develop into family versus family issues.

I had to protect them (his brothers) from neighborhood boys but it was mainly families. The neighborhood families stuck together. One family had about 16 boy cousins. Fight one; fight all. For many years, it seemed like I was fighting everyday and I never really knew why. I became good at it and got a rep (reputation) as someone not to mess with. You know, that was the way it was with our family. Boys get to a certain age and they're that close together there is a lot of male bonding. Families are supposed to stick together.

Connors has numerous experiences standing up to oppressors throughout his experiences on the street and in prison.

One time a guy tried to rape me. I got drunk and he tried to rape me. But I wasn't that drunk when I realized what was going on and I fought away from him and I got stabbed. I don't know what it was from; if he tried to hit me with a knife or what, but it cut me. He brought me to the woods and it was dark, he couldn't see me. He left me out there in the hills and I hitchhiked back to town. I never told the police about it. I got away from him and whipped him and that was good enough for me.

Connors understood and relished the fame that was given to him due to his violent outbursts.

I felt good when I won a fight. It made me feel proud that I could handle my own. No one wanted to mess with me. It is one of a few times that I felt good about myself. People notice me and respect me.

Lawrence's background is filled with violent dominate experiences. From an early age, he used violence within his domestic sphere.

My first experience with violence was, I want to say – I was probably 8 years old, and my mother's boyfriend tried to whup me, and, well, I punched him in his face, repeatedly. So that was my first brush with violence, if that's what you wanna call it.

The next incident involved an afterhour's bar fight in the middle of a busy street.

Grant speaks of this encounter with prideful enthusiasm.

But, long story short, they just – they came up to me and wanted to talk shit to me, and I let it go and at the end of the bar they all started waiting on me, at the end of the night. And so, the first guy ran up on me, and I knocked him out. It took me five punches to knock out five different guys. I went to prison for that one.

Grant's friends completed the task of informing him of the grandiose nature of his fighting abilities.

I was looked at kind of like a symbol (a fighter), like "Okay, he'd do whatever. He'll whoop their ass if I (his friends) won't." So, I've been in plenty of bar fights and shit like that.

There are numerous experiences that demonstrate that Juan has progressed through this stage of the violentization process. In one incident, Hernandez confronted his stepfather over a provocation regarding his younger sister.

My sister would stay in her room most the time. One time she stayed in her room. And she was tellin' me that my stepdad was spankin' her if she was in trouble or something. And I'd jump in or whatever. And he's like, "You're not the man around here." And he punches me. And he punched me. And I just looked at this guy. I'm like, "You're not gonna do this." I know what happens. I've seen this before. We're supposed to fight now. So we started goin' at it. I don't know. He hit me. And I know what happens. I seen my brothers and dad fight. Like, okay, this is our turn now. I just jumped and started fighting. I can't explain it.

Similarly, Johnson has numerous events that fit into this social process. Many of his social experiences were when he was in the correctional system.

I got in another fight. And in prison when you call somebody a bitch or a punk that's a big – big disrespect. So he decided to call me a bitch, and – and that's why we got into it. So we ended up fighting out in the day room.

As previously stated, Johnson was sent to prison for stabbing someone to death.

Johnson describes the incident which coincides with the dominance engagement stage of the violentization process.

Yeah, basically, I was jumped by, like, four people; and I ended up killing one of them. And I was charged with first degree murder for, like, over a year; and then I finally pled out to willful injury – willful injury and manslaughter. I didn't trust my lawyer. I mean, to me it was self-defense. They jumped me. I – well, I tried to run from them, and they stabbed – they cut my wrist with a razor. And I stabbed him, and he died the next day.

Johnson knows that he has a reputation as someone who will fight back.

They'd just say – I don't know, that you did a good job or whatever standing up for yourself, that it's a good thing that you don't let anybody mess with you.

Athens (1997) argued that any notable violent event will not, in and of itself, have a significant or lasting impact on the subject. In order to have a lasting impact, the subject must fully understand the importance of his or her success. The job of impressing the subject with what the significance of successful violence is usually done by someone else who knows the victim or the offender. Often, the offender begins to develop a reputation as being dangerous (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999). Most of the subjects were glorified by friends and family for engaging in violent acts and protecting their and/or their family's reputation. All five of the remaining subjects proceeded through the third stage of the violentization process.

## Virulency

Athens designates the final stage of the violentization process as virulency. During this stage the offender develops their readiness to use extreme violence against others with little or no provocation. The virulency stage, like the brutalization stage, contains three elemental experiences.

## Notoriety

The first elemental experience is violent notoriety. During this period the individual acquires reputational rewards for their ability to dominate others through violence. The subject's reputation changes from being a person who is incapable or highly unlikely to use violence, to someone who is very capable and proficient at doing so (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

Barnes has developed notoriety from his ability to use violence which he is adamantly proud of.

I think my rep came from my fighting skills. I will not back down from anyone and people know that. They don't want to mess with someone who is going to kick their ass or at least hurt them.

Connors discussed numerous instances related to his reputation as a violent individual.

I experienced a lot of violence back at Berkley and growing up. It made me hard and violent. I won't back down from a fight ever. If people respect or fear me they will not even attempt to bother with me.

In prison, people wouldn't bother me because they knew I would fight. People who won't fight are the ones that get bothered.

Grant is unsure exactly when his reputation as a violent individual started but it is obvious that he does indeed have a violent reputation.

Yeah, and I did that. I had this reputation of not taking no shit.

And, so, from there, I just had a reputation: just don't mess with me, because I really don't like to be bothered at all. I hate when people bother me, because I don't go out of my way to bother people, so I expect people to give me the same respect. It's kind of like a "You respect me; I'll respect you" type of deal.

Juan gained a reputation as being someone who will seriously hurt anyone who opposes him.

I'm gonna get up and still gonna go. How's it feel to walk in a room and know that you're the best in there and nobody can stop you. I felt that way – calm, no shakin', no nothing. I'm like, man, all this went away. I remember a time when I thought oh, man, I've gotta do this. I lost that years ago, years ago. There's nothing you could possibly say or do right now that – people know that. My older friends come visit. And back home – drug dealing. Hey, you gonna pay me. It's me. You're gonna pay me. They know that. That's all ya gotta say.

Mark believes that a violent reputation is not only needed but is necessary in order to survive in prison.

In prison, reputation and respect means everything. You- you get a reputation from fighting. I had to show that I was willing to fight and I did. That reputation makes people respect you.

## Social Trepidation

The second elemental experience within the virulency stage is social trepidation.

Social trepidation refers to the fearlessness of others. Unlike when the subject was a subordinate, people now act cautiously towards the subject. Many people will take precautions not to offend or challenge the subject because they are afraid of the possibility of a violent dominance engagement that they would probably lose (Athens 1992, Athens 1997, Athens and Ulmer 2008, Rhodes 1999).

Barnes describes in detail the social trepidation that another person showed towards him.

This happened when I first got out of prison. I didn't know at the time but this boy kept fighting my son like 6 or 7 times. So my son and my other son told me that ah the same boy was picking on him. I bought him this Jay-Z cap that was like 90-100 bucks and the boy took it from him. The boy has been bullying other kids. My kid's mom went up there and talked to him and he cussed her out. She calls me and I was all fucked up... been drinking all day. I talk to the boy on the phone and he cusses at me. He tells me that I will be right here motherfucker. I tell him to tell my wife to come and get me. So when I get there, he is just a little scrawny boy. He is talking shit but I don't say anything. I use violence as a tool. I just slapped the hat off him. I tell him I am here what you going to do. He clams up but then his girlfriend starts running her mouth. I whisper in her ear, you have one more time to say anything and I am going to slap the shit out of you. That shut her up real quick. She said I'm calling 911. I said you better hurry up and call. She said not another motherfucking word to me. I just grabbed my son's hat and as I was leaving I was like leave my son alone. You do not want to see me again.

While this person did originally challenge Barnes, he quickly changed his mind after seeing him in person. Barnes stated many times that he uses violence as tool to get

what he wants. People comply with his wishes because they are afraid that a violent encounter and injury is likely to occur if they object.

It is during this stage that Connors seems to exit the violentization process. He has attempted to get people to act cautiously towards him and to do what he wants them to do but it has only occurred with mixed results. William seems to have only targeted individuals who will not stand up for themselves. Many people do not act cautiously in his presence but instead Connors seems to be a predator looking for an easy victim.

Yeah. There was this one guy in jail. I used to take his food, beat him up because he wouldn't fight back. He wouldn't fight back, just a little punk. Then I seen him on the streets and he fought back when he was on the streets. He said his brother taught him how to fight then, but I used to take his food from him. And this other guy in jail wouldn't do nothing so I ran over him, took his food and different things like that.

It should be noted that Connors has been diagnosed with mental illnesses.

According to his prison records, previous records conflict whether his primary diagnosis is schizoaffective disorder, psychoses or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The PTSD being the result of the severe abuse he suffered from his father. William claims to hear voices in his head that tell him to do things. Connors denied these diagnoses and claimed that he had bipolar disorder and was diagnosed with such in California. Regardless of the diagnosis, the vast majority of Connor's charges were related to his ongoing substance abuse and mental disorders. The substance abuse issues and the mental disorders have contributed to his lengthy and violent criminal record, including five terms of imprisonment.



Grant's violent notoriety lead to social trepidation from most people who were acquainted with him.

I was always the person that – I didn't have to worry about who I would be around because I had this natural – I always had a bunch of friends with me, so it was like people never fucked with me, no matter what. Even to this day, people just don't mess with me like that. You say my name, and people are like, "Oh, don't mess with that guy," like that. I guess, when I was 19, I went to prison for aggravated assault, and I beat up five guys. People are careful what they say and what they (do) around me.

Hernandez obviously believes that people fear him. He blatantly uses his reputation for his own personal gain.

There was nobody or nothing. I could walk into a room where I stand and rule. There is nothing that would scare me. There's nothing you could possibly do to me that I've not seen or felt before. I was calm, always calm. Whatever I gotta do, I feel great. There's no fear. You're gonna do what I'm gonna tell you. And that's gonna be it. Or you're going into a wall. That's what it is. I've whooped bigger guys than you. You're not gonna be the first (that) I get a black eye (from).

Johnson went to violent lengths in order to establish social trepidation from his fellow inmates.

I am not sure if anyone is afraid of me but people will think twice before messing with me. I won't back down from anyone, inmates or CO's (correctional officers).

### Malevolency

The final elemental experience, malevolency, only occurs if the subject embraces the violent notoriety and social trepidation. Subjects become overly impressed with their rise from subordinate to superordinate. The resolution of using violence against

subjugators who threaten them or members of their primary group subsides into a resolution to gravely hurt or kill anyone for any provocation. Offenders in this stage often believe that since they performed these other violent acts that they are now invincible (Rhodes 1999). It is clear that Barnes embraces his violent notoriety and social trepidation.

Man, I use violence as a tool to get what I want. It works, so why not use it. I am good at it. People will do what I say or what I want because they know I mean business.

My rep makes it so most will just do what I say. When they don't, I end up here (incarcerated).

Barnes's does not make the claim that he is invincible but he does relish in the fact that most people will do what he wants because they are afraid of him. Barnes boasted of his many physical altercations and the violent subjugation of anyone close to him.

Grant also embraces his violent notoriety and social trepidation. He believes that he is invincible.

Oh, any confrontation I always felt like I had the upper hand. I always knew I had the upper hand because, if I'm gonna fight you, I'm not gonna lose. That's the attitude that I carry, and, just like with anything else, I'm gonna attack first. I'm not gonna argue with you or anything like that.

I'm gonna hurt you before you hurt me, and that was the attitude that I had with any fight, and the first time I actually used that attitude was when those guys jumped me that I spoke of earlier. Him and his brother, they jumped me, and, when they jumped me, I didn't lose. I whooped him. They didn't whoop me.

Consistent with the violentization theory, Lawrence Grant appears to have completed the violentization process and subsequently has become a violent individual who will attack at little or no provocation.

Juan clearly has completed the malevolency experience. He revels in the belief that he can and will fight anyone regardless of the provocation.

For me, fear is better than friendship. Ya know what I mean? They could look at me the wrong way one day. And we're gonna fight. I'd snatch money out of people's hand at the bar. And his friends would come outside and take it from me. You're not gonna beat me. In my head, there is nothing that you can do. You can bring all your buddies out. You're not gonna beat me. There's nothing you can do. You don't scare me. Just like that with my girlfriend right next to me, say, honey, just wait right here. I'll be right back. Women love you for – I thought to myself. And I've known this. But I dated women for five years – the whole time. They knew each other.

Beautiful women – a nurse, a pastor's daughter, and a country girl – anywhere I went for years – it's my way. That's it. I know it was put it in my head and watching my father. He was a man. What he said – he said it. That's what it is. That's that. In my mind, there was nothing you could do. My family didn't always do me. I guess the devil's gonna be here. You're gonna compete. That's what it is. I guess they raised me the right way. Maybe they thought what life was gonna be like. And that's what their expectation was.

Johnson embraces his violent notoriety and the social trepidation that the notoriety fosters.

I will always do what I have to do (fighting). I won't back down. In- in every situation, I have always fought bigger and badder. Why should I be scared now? I won't be. There is not much that could surprise me at this point.

The interview data indicates that Johnson believes he is invincible. Mark has completed the violentization process.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

Previous research into violent behavior has emphasized factors that enhance and predict the risk of violence. However, many of these analyses have failed to identify the persistent violent offenders who engage in the vast majority of serious violent crime. Athens' violentization model provides a means of examining the differential social experiences of violent offenders and how these experiences might influence their violent behavior. The findings presented in Chapter 3 of this study tend to support Athens theory about the social processes that cause people to become extremely violent.

The interview data was generally consistent with Athens violentization theory and his research. All the interviewees had committed various types of physical violence and were incarcerated in part or entirely because of those criminal acts. All six subjects experienced at least some of the social stages as described by Athens. One subject, Porter, completed the brutalization stage through the violent subjugation by his babysitter, the personal horrification he witnessed of his mother being beaten and the violent coaching he received from his uncle. He stopped his progress through the violentization theory within the defiance stage. It is unknown if this is due to his drug abuse, family support of the drug culture and/or his inability to truly rationalize his prior subjugation.

William Connors completed the brutalization stage through the violent subjugation by his father, the personal horrification of witnessing his mother being beaten

and the violent coaching he received from his father. He completed the defiance stage by realizing that he had to be violent on the streets in order to survive. Connors completed the violent dominance engagement stage by violently engaging in an encounter with a would be oppressor. He did complete the first elemental experience, notoriety, of the virulency stage by developing a reputation as a violent individual. He terminated his violentization process by not acquiring the social trepidation that was necessary to move to the last elemental experiences within the last stage. This subject is a predatory offender who only targets victims based on their ability to protect themselves. The vast majority of people did not fear him because he only targeted weaker individuals. However, this subject has developed a reputation as an individual who will use violence if someone attempts to subjugate him.

Barnes completed the brutalization stage through the violent subjugation by his mother, the personal horriification witnessed of his uncle beating a girlfriend and the violent coaching he received from his uncle. He proceeded through the defiance stage by realizing that the only way to stop the brutalization was to become violent. Barnes completed the violent dominance stage by engaging in a violent encounter with neighborhood boys. He completed the virulency stage and the entire violentization process by developing a violent notoriety from his violent actions, developing social trepidation from others due to his violent notoriety and by fully embracing both the notoriety and the social trepidation. Consistent with the violentization theory, Barnes would be considered an ultraviolent individual.

Grant completed the brutalization stage through the violent subjugation by his grandmother and her boyfriend, the personal horrification of witnessing close friends being beat by gang members and the violent coaching he received from his grandmother. Grant completed the defiance stage at approximately the age of 10 when he realized that the only way to not be beat was to be violent. He completed the violent dominance stage when he attacked his mother's boyfriend after he tried to beat him. He completed the virulency stage and the entire violentization process by developing a violent notoriety, developing social trepidation from others due to his violent notoriety and by fully embracing both the notoriety and the social trepidation. Consistent with the violentization theory, Grant would be considered an ultraviolent individual.

Hernandez completed the brutalization stage through the violent subjugation by his father, the personal horrification he witnessed of his mother and older brother being beat by his father and the violent coaching he received from his father. He completed the defiance stage by realizing that the only way to stop the brutalization was to become violent. Juan proceeded through the violent dominance stage after he attacked his stepfather for spanking his younger sister. He completed the virulency stage and the entire violentization process by developing a violent notoriety, developing social trepidation from others due to his violent notoriety and by fully embracing both the notoriety and the social trepidation. Consistent with the violentization theory, Hernandez would be considered an ultraviolent individual.

Johnson completed the brutalization stage through the violent subjugation by his fellow inmates, the personal horrification of witnessing his friends being beat in prison

and the violent coaching he received from his father and other inmates. He completed the defiance stage by realizing that the only way to stop the brutalization was to become violent. Johnson proceeded through the violent dominance stage when he stabbed a man to death over a stolen radio after the man attempted to confront him about it. He completed the virulency stage and the entire violentization process by developing a violent notoriety, developing social trepidation from others due to his violent notoriety and by fully embracing both the notoriety and the social trepidation. Consistent with the violentization theory, Johnson would be considered an ultraviolent individual.

Barnes, Grant, Hernandez and Johnson all fully embrace their violent tendencies and make grandiose statements regarding their invincibility. For example, Barnes referred to using violence as a tool to manipulate people into doing his bidding. Grant stated that he cannot lose a violent encounter and as such he can do whatever he wants to do without fear of being beat. Hernandez said that he will never back down or lose a fight. He believes that there is not a single person who could stand up to him. Also, he believes that all "real" men should act in the same manner. Johnson stated that he will never back down from a fight because there is no fear of being beat due to his past experiences. He believes that in whatever violent situation he may find himself in, he has always had violent encounters with bigger and meaner individuals. All four of these individuals are violent offenders who will attack at little or no provocation.

As each subject moved through the violentization process, they became more consistently violent. Table 1 lists all six subjects and the extent to which they have completed the violentization process.

Table 1 Violentization Theory by Subject

Subject Name	Brutalization		Defiance V.C.	Violent Dominance	Virulency		
	V.S.	P.H.			No.	S.T.	Ma.
Brad Barnes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
John Porter	X	X	X				
William Connors	X	X	X	X	X		
Lawrence Grant	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Juan Hernandez	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mark Johnson	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

The findings from this analysis suggest two important factors, power and respect, in the lives of persistently violent people. Many of the interviewees reveled in the power they enjoyed through their use of violence. For example, Hernandez believed that through his violence he achieved great power.

There was nobody or nothing. I could walk into a room where I stand and rule. There is nothing that would scare me. There's nothing you could



possibly do to me that I've not seen or felt before. I was calm, always calm. Whatever I gotta do, I feel great. There's no fear. You're gonna do what I'm gonna tell you. And that's gonna be it. Or you're going into a wall.

Similarly, Barnes suggested that through his violence he achieved power over others.

Man, I use violence as a tool to get what I want. It works, so why not use it. I am good at it. People will do what I say or what I want because they know I mean business.

Respect was the last factor that emerged out of the interview data. Respect refers to attitudes of high regard from others. Many of the interviewees cited the need for respect as to the underlying cause of their violent behaviors. Similar to power, respect was experienced as trepidation, fear or caution on the part of people with whom the interviewees interacted. For example, Barnes feels that violence is a necessary component of gaining respect.

I am violent when I feel disrespected and I don't even have to know you. Like I said, I try to be positive and open minded but if I feel like I am the butt of your jokes my demeanor changes.

Similar to Barnes, Johnson suggests that violence is a necessary aspect of gaining respect.

People will take advantage of you if they think they can. The only way to keep people away and respecting you is to show them that you are willing to stand up for yourself no matter what.

Several theoretical explanations of criminal behavior are consistent with violentization theory. For example, differential association and social learning theories state that through social interaction people learn values, norms and beliefs. Likewise, the violentization theory argues that individuals such as the interviewees in this study learn their violent behavior through socialization with others. Kaplan et al. (1986) research on self-esteem suggests that a negative self concept combined with home, community and/or school failure creates an inclination towards deviant acts and these deviant acts may increase self-esteem. Positive self evaluation is normally derived through traditional successes such as academic, work, artistic endeavors and volunteerism. As previously stated, the interviewees are being rewarded for their delinquent behaviors through notoriety and social trepidation. The notoriety that one gains would also fit labeling theory because the interviewee must now live up to the expectations that their reputation has given them. This may increase the persistency and severity of the violent behavior.

It should be noted that the violentization process is not based on age or any other concrete measure so the time that it takes someone to move from one stage to the next is completely dependent upon that individuals social experiences. Each individual progresses or stalls throughout the stages at their own pace. Thus, the age at which an offender reaches does not influence the stage that an individual occupies. However, there

has not been a longitudinal study conducted in order to test if aging out can be applied to this theory.

Athens's violentization theory only addresses violent crime and specific violent offenders. The focus of this theory is on the persistent violent offenders but not on the occasional violent actor. For example, this process does not explain why a husband with no history of violence kills his wife after he finds her cheating on him, why an otherwise nonviolent mother would drown her children in a bathtub, or why a law abiding college professor would kill his entire family before killing himself. In all three instances, none of the violent actors had a violent background nor would they have fit into the violentization theory.

Another critique of this theory is that Athens (1992, 1997) suggests that offenders who complete the violentization theory are presumably incapable of rehabilitation. Yet, three of the offenders in this study went three or more years between violent acts. It is unknown if this time break is a form of rehabilitation, aging out or a lack of being caught engaging in violent acts. Future research needs to address this concern.

The notion that people are incapable of rehabilitation refutes the basic sociological concept of the self. The self is a dynamic force such that most individuals are not inclined to keep their orientation towards life that they view as negative. Even if a violent actor embraces his notoriety and social trepidation (the last stage of the violentization theory), it should not be concluded that they will maintain their violent attitudes and behaviors. However, Athens (1992, 1997) seems to imply that we are

prisoners of our violent socialization if we have completed the violentization process which ignores the fact that all people are capable of change.

The researcher contacted Lonnie Athens about this question. I asked Dr. Athens if individuals who have completed the process later decide that they do not want to engage in violence or are they the products of their socialization? In other words, is the self dynamic enough that individuals who complete this process can change their orientations toward life and become a productive and nonviolent member of society? Athens responded by saying, "people who have become virulent, and thereby, ultra-or dangerous violent criminals can later become violent and then marginally violent people. It definitely happens, but never a sure thing that happens instantaneously to people. Remember, people must want to change-- you can't impose it on them against their will" (Athens 2011). If it is possible to deescalate after completing the violentization process, researchers should attempt to identify what mitigating factors influence that change.

Another critique is inherent with all stage theories. Stage theories attempt to seek a universal or general picture which means the theory can often over-reach. While some universality of development may emerge within the study of violent behavior, human emotion and behavior is seldom that simple. Human processes are frequently characterized by variability and flux. However, the fact that violentization theory is a stage theory is not a fatal flaw. Despite the weaknesses inherent in all stage theories, violentization theory still provides a theoretical framework for analysis.

### Policy Implications

Since violentization is produced through socialization, it is preventable and treatable. Public policy measures can and should be directed at each stage of the process. Most of the offenders in this study progressed through the violentization process with the help of their family. Therefore, family interventions should be a crucial component of any policy implications based on the violentization theory.

During the first stage, brutalization, policy should be directed at ensuring that each of the three elemental experiences are not completed. The first elemental experience within the brutalization stage, violent subjugation, could be curtailed with a vast array of social programs such as an awareness campaign of bullying in schools and family violence. Since most of the violent subjugation appears to come from the home, which is consistent with Athens research, public service announcements about the dangers and the importance of stopping family violence may greatly reduce the number of people who complete this stage. These public policies may also help control the personal horrification that many of the offenders have suffered. As Athens argues, personal horrification must come from a member of the primary group. As such, having our focus on an individual's primary group, family, is where we should place the majority of our attention. Also, focusing on the family may help dissolve the third elemental experience within the brutalization stage, violent coaching, by attempting to change the prevalent attitudes towards fighting and violence in general.

By having public policy focusing on stopping family violence, we may begin to identify those victims of family violence. The identification of victims is necessary in

order to prevent the completion of the second stage of the violentization theory, defiance. During this stage, public policy should be focused on providing acceptable outlets for the victims to express their anger and frustration over their brutalization. Victims should also be taught proper, socially acceptable coping mechanisms.

The third stage of the violentization theory, violent dominance stage, is where public policy should be focused on the resocialization of the offender. The offender has transitioned from a victim of violence into a person who will use violence. Policies should focus on establishing new values and norms within the individual. This may be achieved by showing the offender the ramifications of using violence such as through a scared straight program. At the same time, the offender should be commended for displaying more socially acceptable behavior such as verbalizing the discontent and anger caused by the brutalization.

Resocialization should also be the focus of public policy in the fourth stage of the violentization theory, virulency. Offenders must be given a new set of values and norms that are socially acceptable. The first elemental experience within the virulency stage, notoriety, could be diminished by focusing on what the offender has gained from their current reputation. Public policy could create programs that would teach the offender that a reputation for being a violent person is not an acceptable or desirable trait by showing and highlighting contemporary, local people who have the desirable reputation. These individuals could talk to the offenders on how to establish a positive reputation. Social trepidation, the second elemental experience within the virulency stage, could be addressed through public policy by stressing the importance between fear and respect.

Offenders need to realize that just because an individual fears him/her does not mean that they respect him/her.

Finally, we must realize that not all offenders are going to be able to be rehabilitated from the violentization process. Public policy needs to address this concern through the incapacitation of these offenders. They have shown a complete disregard for other peoples' well-being and if they are unwilling or unable to change, we must protect the general public by separating these ultraviolent offenders from society. The only way to do that is through incarceration.

### Limitations

This study does have certain limitations. The need to use holistic in-depth interviews to get at the meaning of various social experiences requires a great deal of time which in turn leads to small sample sizes. While the case study method may provide rich details into our understanding of violent behavior we need to be careful about our application of our findings to all cases. This may lead to areas of concern about the generalizability of the results found in case studies. However, replication of the study will help to relieve some of that concern.

The subjects of this study came from a residential treatment facility which creates its own unique limitations. Participants are often very close to release and thus, are likely to have not engaged in more serious forms of violence. Since this study found support for the violentization process, it can be assumed that individuals may be within the criminal justice system at various points throughout the violentization process. It would

have been ideal to have subjects who displayed more violent tendencies to fully analyze the virulency stage of the violentization process. In this study, only one of the six offenders had killed someone.

This study could not examine if offenders are capable of aging out of the violentization process. It does seem that as offenders' age, they become less violent. Ideally, this study could be turned into a longitudinal study to address this limitation.

### Future Research

Future studies could focus on the replication of this study. Due to the in-depth nature of a holistic interview approach, sample sizes will be often kept to a small number. Researches should be focused on the social experiences of consistently violent offenders to see if they match the violentization theory. Since this theory is relatively new, future research could focus on the replication of previously completed studies to ensure the reliability and validity of those studies.

Another area of future research would be to see if offenders who complete the violentization process can age out of their violent tendencies. Researchers could use a longitudinal study to examine if aging out occurs within the violentization process. Of specific interest, researchers could focus on the social experiences that may have facilitated this aging out process. Since age is a relatively arbitrary concept, some social experience may occur to facilitate the aging out process.

Lastly, research could focus on those offenders who have completed the violentization process to see if those offenders are capable of change. Again, if an



offender has changed his orientation towards life and becomes a nonviolent member of society, what social experiences may have facilitated that change in behavior? Since the creation of violent offenders may be from the violent socialization of the same offenders, the de-escalation of the violentization process may have the same or similar social experiences at the heart of that change.

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APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

- 1) Could you tell me about your family? When you were growing up?
- 2) Could you tell me about your childhood memories?
- 3) Could you tell me about the occasion when you first witnessed a violent encounter?
- 4) Could you tell me about your school experiences?
- 5) Could you tell about your neighborhood where you grew up? Your friends?
- 6) Could you tell me about your home life?
- 7) Could you tell me about your work?
- 8) Could you tell me about your crimes?
- 9) Could you tell me about violence you witnessed?
- 10) Could you tell me about violence where you were a participant?

APPENDIX B  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA  
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW-INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: The Origins of Violent Behavior

Name of Investigator(s): Todd Mensink

You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. In order to participate in this study, the University of Northern Iowa requires you to give your signed consent. The primary purpose of this study is to examine the origins of violent behavior. As a participant, you will be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes. In general, the interview will focus on your childhood, teenage and young adult years. I will also access your criminal records and parolee reports.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized. You will not receive any direct benefits as a result of your participation including no additional consideration for early release. In fact, neither your treatment supervisor nor other employees will be told that you have participated. However, your participation will help us to better understand the origins of violent behavior. Risks are minimal and are no greater than one should expect to encounter in everyday life.

Information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept confidential. Audio tape will be used to record the interview. The audio tapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet and the primary researcher will be the only person who has a key. All audio tapes will be transcribed with codes and the audio tapes will be destroyed. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference. All data will be destroyed upon completion of the research. All efforts will be made to ensure that the treatment supervisor and other employees will not be informed of who participates. I will sign in at the control desk as a visitor, and those employees will not be told that I am here to do research. However, I can make no guarantee that people within the facility will not discuss the study which may lead to people discovering that you have participated.

If you have questions about the study you may contact Todd Mensink at [tmensink@uni.edu](mailto:tmensink@uni.edu) or the research advisor, Dr. Joe Gorton, at the University of Northern Iowa 319-273-3007. You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

**Agreement: I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of participant) (Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Printed Signature) (Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of investigator) (Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of instructor/advisor) (Date)