THE VIOLENCE OF ADOLESCENT LIFE: *Experiencing and Managing Everyday Threats*

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This article examines the experiences of 43 adolescents living in Denver, Colorado, from 1994 to 1996—the 2-year period following the peak of the youth violence epidemic. Where the dominant theories explaining inner-city violence tend to focus on disadvantaged communities, this study sampled youths from 5 neighborhoods with varying crime, poverty, family stability, and resident mobility rates. The findings demonstrate that, although most teens worried about the seemingly pervasive violence surrounding them, adolescents' experiences with and attempts to manage violence differed dramatically. By identifying a range of violence management strategies used by individuals living in resource-poor and resource-rich neighborhoods, this study examines the way that everyday interactions within and across a variety of contexts may theoretically increase violence rates. The implications of these findings for violence research and prevention are also discussed.

Keywords: youth violence; neighborhood; interaction patterns

By the mid-1990s, the grim statistics regarding adolescent violence gained national attention. At the same time that the United States witnessed relatively stable crime rates, the juvenile arrest rates for violent

offenses exploded between the early 1980s and mid-1990s, leading some to call this era the "epidemic of youth violence" (Cook & Laub, 1998). Among the more shocking statistics were the tripling of homicide-victimization rates for Black youths between the ages of 13 and 17 years (Cook & Laub, 1998), an approximately 70% increase in youth arrest rates for violent offenses, and a nearly 300% growth in youth homicide arrest rates from 1983 to 1994 (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). Although some researchers painted a stark picture of the early 2000s should these rates have continued (see Snyder, Sickmund, & Poe-Yamagata, 1996), arrest statistics revealed a significant waning in violence rates by 1999 (see Blumstein & Wallman, 2000). Thus, the dramatic increase in youth violence looked more like a momentary escalation than the establishment of a new, more violent type of adolescence in America.

This article examines the violence epidemic from the perspective of youths living in five different Denver, Colorado, neighborhoods from 1994 to 1996. During a qualitative study of 43 youths, the statistics regarding the violence epidemic seemed to emerge as a palpable threat as the majority of youths interviewed expressed concerns about and attempted to manage pervasive violence. More interesting, although concerns about violence were common, adolescents' accounts suggested that individuals had different experiences with violence. Corresponding with differences in violent experiences, youths also used different management strategies, which, in some cases, potentially increased the violence problem for themselves and others. As an exploration of inner-city youths' experiences with violence during the 2 years preceding the peak in the violence epidemic, this article attempts to bridge the gap between the statistics and theories regarding youth violence, and the reality of violence for a range of youths. In fact, as an examination of youths' everyday experiences with and attempts to manage violence, this article offers an interactional perspective of youth violence that builds on and expands some of the dominant theories used to explain youth violence in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Two perspectives of the violence epidemic prevailed in the late 1990s and early 2000s, including the illicit economy explanation (Blumstein, 1995; Blumstein & Cork, 1996; Blumstein & Wallman, 2000) and street culture explanations (Anderson, 1999; Bourgois,

1995, 1996). The illicit economy perspective suggests that the introduction of crack markets in inner cities encouraged a dramatic increase in youth homicide rates in many urban centers in the 1980s and early 1990s. As the escalating juvenile drug arrest rates from 1985 to 1992 indicate (Blumstein, 1995; Blumstein & Cork, 1996), juveniles served as "front-line" drug dealers in these new crack markets. To regulate this unstable industry, young drug dealers increasingly used guns to resolve disputes and protect themselves. The deadly use of guns, according to Blumstein (1995), was diffused from young drug dealers to their non-drug-dealing friends rather quickly because juveniles are "tightly networked with other young people in their neighborhoods" and with whom they "attend the same schools or . . . walk the same streets" (p. 30). Thus, we see that gun-related violence, and concomitant increase in gun-related homicides, began within the drug trade and was diffused to other youths living in the same neighborhoods or attending the same schools (see also, Blumstein & Cork, 1996).

The street culture perspective departs from the illicit economic explanation provided by Blumstein by locating violence within poor, inner-city, neighborhood cultures (rather than within underground economies). Several structural conditions (joblessness, rampant drug sales and use, lack of public services, global economic shifts, and racism) plagued poor inner-city neighborhoods and denied individuals, usually men of color, legitimate means to achieve positive identities. As particular populations became more estranged from legitimate resources—as some have argued was the case in the 1980s and early 1990s (Wilson, 1996)—men were caught in a bind. They were culturally expected to take on traditional masculine roles but had no resources to adopt legitimate male identities (Anderson, 1999; Bourgois, 1995). The solution came by creating and participating in an alternative and violent street culture—a system of values and norms that Anderson (1999) called "the code of the streets." The street culture offered men the chance to establish dominance, power, respect, and status through the use or threat of violence (see Decker & Van Winkle, 1996) against other men and often against women in the form of partner abuse and rape (Bourgois, 1996).

These analyses paint a particular image of the context of violence. By focusing almost exclusively on poor neighborhoods that are (for

one reason or another) prone to drug use, drug sales, and oppositional street cultures, these perspectives suggest that poor or "disadvantaged communities" play an important role in the violence epidemic—perhaps an even more important role than resource-rich communities. Within the illicit economy perspective, we see that neighborhoods have two functions in the youth violence epidemic. First, poor neighborhoods are places where crack markets are likely to flourish. Second, neighborhoods are locations where young drug dealers "diffuse" such violent norms as gun use.

What is missing in these analyses are explanations of the experiences of juveniles across a range of neighborhoods and contexts. Working with Blumstein's diffusion hypothesis (Blumstein, 1995; Blumstein & Cork, 1996), youths interact within tightly woven networks. As Warr (2002) noted, adolescent peer groups comprise moral universes that are created through interaction in multiple locations, such as schools, parks, recreation centers, and popular "hangouts." Little is known, however, about the role of these contexts and violence. Therefore, explanations of youth violence have focused rather exclusively on disadvantaged communities and ignored the ways that violent norms can become diffused across multiple neighborhoods and social contexts.

This article fills this gap in our understanding of juvenile violence by examining the everyday experiences of juveniles living in neighborhoods ranging in disadvantage, violent crime, and poverty rates. The youths in the current study not only lived in different neighborhoods but also attended different schools, belonged to different peer groups, confronted different violent "risk factors" (see Hawkins et al., 1998; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998), and had different violent experiences. By examining the dimensions of youths' experiences and attempts to cope with the threat of violence, this article highlights the ways that youths interact within and across different contexts. It demonstrates how Denver adolescents' social networks and contexts predict their everyday experiences of violence. In addition, the current study closely examines the ways that proviolence norms can become diffused across multiple contexts and, thus, add more detail to the image of youth violence provided by the illicit market and street culture perspectives.

To examine how adolescents experienced and managed violence in their everyday lives, this article first discusses how the current study was designed, adolescents were selected, and violence was measured. Next, a typology is employed to describe the different dimensions of teens' experiences with, fears of, and attempts to manage violence. Because not all teens in the current study experienced violence similarly, three groups are identified: a high-risk group, whose members confronted violence regularly; a moderate-risk group, whose members confronted violence occasionally; and a low-risk group, whose members never reported experiencing violence. In addition to noting the differences among these groups in terms of their direct experiences with violence, this article outlines the types of violence prevention strategies used by adolescents. The discussion of this article examines how these different experiences with and attempts to manage violence may theoretically increase opportunities for violence. Specifically, it is argued that the threat of violence was diffused across multiple contexts and encouraged protective interaction patterns among youths. Building on the illicit economy and street culture perspectives, a hypothesis is offered that these protective interaction patterns not only place some individuals at greater risk for violence but also help sustain violence rates. The article concludes by outlining a new agenda for violence research and prevention that targets exclusionary interaction patterns leaving some youths with very few choices but to become violent.

METHOD

STUDY DESIGN AND NEIGHBORHOOD SELECTION

These data presented here are derived from a 2-year qualitative study of adolescents and parents living in five Denver neighborhoods. From 1994 to 1996, a team of University of Colorado researchers conducted face-to-face, in-depth interviews with 43 adolescents (ages ranging from 10 to 20 years) and 42 parents to assess individuals' perceptions regarding the role of neighborhood, family, peers, and school in adolescent development. The original design of the current study

was to examine the way that neighborhood contexts influenced adolescents' transition into adulthood.[1]

At the onset, the current study was designed to focus on the experiences of families in different types of neighborhoods. The five neighborhoods in the current study ranged in disadvantage measures—measures used to indicate the ability of neighborhoods to control criminal, delinquent, and problem behavior (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Sampson, 1985; Simcha-Fagan & Schwartz, 1986). Theoretically, neighborhoods with greater cohesion would have lower crime, high-school dropout, teen pregnancy, drug use, and violence rates and, thus, would present fewer contextual challenges to adolescent development. Components of the disadvantage measures were compiled from the 1990 census and included poverty (percentage of neighborhood families living in poverty), mobility (percentage of neighborhood families living in a different location in 1985), household structure (percentage of single-parent households), and racial mix. These measures were combined into a variable called neighborhood disadvantage, in which a high disadvantage score indicated that the neighborhood had high poverty, resident turnover, single-parent household, and racial/ethnic heterogeneity rates. After this statistic was compiled for several neighborhoods in Denver, a collection of high-, medium-, and low-disadvantage neighborhoods were selected to be included in the current study.

Two neighborhoods in the current study, South Creston and Westside, represented advantaged neighborhoods (low resident turnover, single-parent household, poverty, and heterogeneity rates).[2] These neighborhoods were predominantly White, middle-class communities in which residents shared a common sense of community pride. According to the neighborhood effects literature, such characteristics predict that neighbors will be able to exert informal social control over the neighborhood that, in turn, reduces the delinquency rates among neighborhood adolescents. Northside and Martin Park were the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in the current study (high resident turnover, single-parent household, poverty, and heterogeneity rates). Northside was a middle-class neighborhood containing a densely populated, racially diverse, and low-income housing development called Allenspark. During the current study, it became clear that Allenspark represented a highly disadvantaged neighbor-

hood within a larger advantaged to moderately advantaged neighbor-hood. One neighborhood, Parkview, represented a moderately disad-vantaged neighborhood and had medium poverty, mobility, and single-parent household rates. Parkview was, however, racially and ethnically heterogeneous.

INTERVIEWS

To recruit interviewees, researchers contacted neighborhood boards, attended neighborhood meetings, and went door-to-door to describe the research and inquire whether parents or adolescents were interested in participating in the current study. Researchers also em-ployed snowball sampling techniques (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) by asking participants to refer other neighborhood youths and parents to the current study. Interviews were tape-recorded and conducted in participants' homes or in local coffee shops and restaurants and lasted anywhere from 1 to 2 hr. During the interviews, researchers asked ad-olescents and parents to describe how neighborhoods, schools, fami-lies, and peer groups can help or get in the way of adolescents' "chances for success" (i.e., chances for successful transition into adulthood). In addition, researchers also used open-ended interview guides that directed interviewers through a list of subjects to discuss with interviewees and included such topics as definitions of and expe-riences within neighborhoods, school experiences, family contexts and parenting practices, and adolescents' career and family aspirations.

ANALYSIS

Once tape-recorded interviews were transcribed, researchers coded the interviews for common themes. During the coding of initial interviews, researchers noted that violence was mentioned during many adolescent interviews, even though the original design of the current study was not to investigate neighborhood violence. Because the topic emerged early in the current study, violence was added to the list of codes and probed for during later interviews. This emergent analysis method closely resembled the constant comparative analysis techniques articulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

The groups discussed in this article (high, medium, and low risk for violence) reflect adolescents' reports regarding their violent experiences. Individuals described being victims and perpetrators of violence. In addition, a number of youths in the current study described witnessing violence. Thus, the term *violent experiences* is used to represent perpetration, victimization, as well as witnessing violence. Because parents were often unaware of their children's exposure to violence, the 42 parent interviews were analyzed to provide more information about the adolescents' family and neighborhood contexts.[3]

EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE

The most common forms of violence that individuals mentioned were fistfights, fights or threats with weapons (guns, knives, or bats), and drive-by shootings. Analysis of the adolescent interviews revealed that most youths in the current study feared these sorts of conflicts. Despite this pervasive fear, adolescents had vastly different violent experiences. Some individuals worried about local news stories of violence (see Barzagan, 1994; Chiricos, Eschholz, & Gertz, 1997; Chiricos, Padgett, & Gertz, 2000; O'Keefe & Reid-Nash, 1987) and secondhand stories of victimization (see Lavrakas, 1982) but reported facing very little violence in their own lives. Other adolescents described experiencing violence regularly and worried that they, similar to their friends and siblings, might be hit, shot, or stabbed while walking in their neighborhoods or spending time with friends at local hangouts.

To capture the range of these adolescents' experiences, the current study explored the accounts of individuals in three different groups: high, medium, and low risk. The high-risk group comprised adolescents who noted experiencing violence regularly (an average of twice a month), and the moderate-risk group included youths who reported experiencing violence occasionally (a few times a year). The low-risk group was made up of individuals who did not mention experiencing violence.

HIGH-RISK GROUP

Approximately one fourth of the adolescents interviewed ($n = 11$) reported confronting violence regularly. While going to school, walking in their neighborhoods, and hanging out with friends, they expected to confront violence. Their expectations often came to brutal fruition, forcing them to negotiate frequent conflicts. Benny, a 14-year-old Latino living in Allenspark, illustrates the experiences within this group.

Benny's family moved into Allenspark 2 years before the interview. According to Benny, the move was bittersweet. Benny and his older brother were initially happy to live in a neighborhood that housed a collection of teens. In fact, the two boys quickly found themselves in the center of a large group of friends who attended the same school. Benny soon grew leery of his new lifestyle. He complained that there was much more violence among youths in his new neighborhood and, although he did not mind the fistfights occurring in Allenspark (usually fights between Latino and Vietnamese American youths), he feared occasions when outsiders entered the neighborhood carrying weapons. He described this type of violence:

> The kids are the worst. There's gangs, like the NSMs [North Side Mafia] and the Untouchables and stuff. The westsiders [teens from the west side of Denver] will come over here and they'd start shooting. They just start shooting at each other. And we have to hear it all the time—all the gunshots and everything. . . . One week it'll just be crazy and the next week it'll be calm. Sometimes there'll be good times where everybody just has a good time without anything happening. But then there's other times. It's mostly people that come from out of Allenspark that start the trouble. When they start shooting you have to run.

Such incidents as shootings and fights with weapons, according to Benny, were rare. The everyday kinds of violence, such as fistfights with peers in school or the neighborhood, tended to be less extreme. Benny, like most individuals in this group, described fistfights as unavoidable, and in fact, some teens boasted that fighting was an important part of maintaining status. For example, Benny explained,

"There's a lot of Vietnamese that live here. And then they'll start talking stuff to everybody. They'll start talking stuff. You have to fight 'em. But after you knock a couple of them out, then they leave you alone."

Benny's story illustrates the experiences of individuals living in high-violence neighborhoods. Some adolescents who lived in more advantaged, less-violent neighborhoods also reported experiencing violence regularly. Many of these youths described their neighborhoods as quiet, peaceful areas of the city. They also noted that they did not spend much time in their own community. Instead, they usually hung out with friends in public parks and parking lots of stores and restaurants. It was in these venues that they were most likely to experience violence.

Hector, a 16-year-old Latino living in Parkview, reported experiencing very little violence in his neighborhood, however he often confronted violence while spending time with school friends. He described how fights were likely to start:

> Right there by Fatso's [a local fast-food restaurant] that's where, oh, I can't even explain how many fights happen there. I've gotten in fights at those places, different places. Well, I'm not the kind that just fights over a word. But, it's that they keep on saying stuff, and I'll tell 'em "Shut up," and whatever. But, it's like I won't up there and hit them. Once they hit me, THAT's when I'll fight.

Hector noted that these fights often included weapons. He explained, "When we start fighting, then his friends want to jump in, then it turns into a battle. That's when they start whipping out bats and knives and all that." Although not afraid of knives and bats, Hector expressed concern about guns. Not only he been grazed by a stray bullet on one occasion but also he witnessed a fatal shooting a year before the interview. He described the event:

> We were just standing against the wall and some guys, they just drove up and shot some dude. I was right there on his side. It happened over there by High Park. There's like this park and there's this wall. We were just kicking it right there on that wall. And all you heard is just a loud bang and the guy hit the wall and came back forward.

While boasting that he would not avoid bats or knives, Hector claimed that he would run if a gun were brandished, even if it meant leaving a friend to fight alone. He explained that "well, it's better if one goes down than both of us."

As Benny's and Hector's narratives suggest, teens in this group were surrounded by violence. They were usually enmeshed in a group of peers who engaged in and were targets of regular fistfights. Occasionally, they experienced more serious conflicts, such as drive-by shootings or fights with weapons. Some teens were introduced to these violent social networks in their neighborhoods. Other individuals who lived in peaceful communities, such as Hector, were introduced to violence while hanging out with school friends.

MODERATE-RISK TEENS

One third ($n = 15$) of the adolescents in the current study reported confronting violence a few times a year. Similar to high-risk youths, individuals in the moderate-risk group experienced fistfights as well as fights with weapons. Some adolescents in this group lived in peaceful communities but faced numerous conflicts at school. Other youths told us that they liked the quiet atmosphere at school but worried about being hassled, threatened, or challenged to fight while walking in their neighborhoods.

Eduardo, a 16-year-old Latino, provides an example of individuals in this group. Eduardo lived in a less densely populated section of Northside located several blocks from the Allenspark apartment complex. In the following, Eduardo compared his section of Northside to Allenspark:

> Well this part of the neighborhood here, it's pretty decent—it's a nice area to grow up in. The houses are really nice. In this part of the town, there's not really too much violence, whereas you get closer to Allen Lane and down in that area, that's where you kind of run into some problems. But here, in this area, it's more calm, and kind of relaxed, and not too much violence goes on around here. I think maybe just living in that part of town would cause a little more fear in a person. There's always the possibility of getting in a fight because you don't know if some people are crazy. You can get hurt whether it be in a fight or whether somebody be drunk and slam into you. I know a lot of peo-

ple who that has happened to, and I just don't want that to happen to me.

Although living in a peaceful section of Northside, Eduardo attended the same school as Benny and other Allenspark teens. At school, Eduardo befriended several teens who fought regularly. After school, Eduardo participated in youth group activities organized through his parents' church or played basketball with his next-door neighbor. When spending time with his neighbor or members of his church group, Eduardo rarely confronted violence. When hanging out with his school friends, he occasionally witnessed fistfights.

Other youths in the moderate-risk group described their neighborhoods as places riddled with violence. Phan, a 16-year-old Vietnamese American living a few apartments away from Benny, corroborated accounts of violence in Allenspark, especially between Asian and Latino teens. Despite his efforts to avoid teens who fought regularly, he was occasionally targeted. He described his first fight:

> I sit there with my friend. I look at [this person from the neighborhood] and I think he's drunk or something. And he go by me and he saw his brother over there and [his brother] just tell him to hit me. After that, his brother came by and he knock me down. This is my first time fighting. I never fight. When he knocked me down, they say something to me and let me go.

After this incident, Phan spent as little time as possible in Allenspark. This was not a hardship for Phan or his best friend, who lived nearby. They walked to and from school, attended classes, and met for lunch to study together every day. In the evening, after finishing their homework and household chores, they played basketball at a local recreation center. A recreation coordinator supervised the activities in the center and strictly forbade fighting. This safe routine was occasionally disrupted, however, when they or their friends were targeted and threatened in the neighborhood.

As these narratives illustrate, the teens in the moderate-risk group managed to dodge regular violent confrontations one way or another. For some youths, such as Phan, sidestepping neighborhood antagonisms required constant vigilance and careful orchestration. These

data also demonstrate that the neighborhood was not the only force introducing violence to adolescents' lives. Teens such as Eduardo, who reported living in tranquil communities, should—according to common wisdom—have been able to avoid violence. Eduardo, who attended school with a number of violent teens, illustrated how school and peer factors can overcome the advantages of growing up in a peaceful community.

LOW-RISK GROUP

Approximately 40% ($n = 17$) of the adolescent sample reported experiencing no violence. The vast majority of these individuals lived in South Creston and Westside, the two advantaged communities in the current study. Despite their lack of experience with violence, most individuals worried about gangs, weapons, and kidnappings. In many cases, their fears stemmed from a few highly publicized, yet isolated, events near their neighborhoods and schools.

Cory, a 12-year-old White South Creston resident, exemplifies the experiences of many individuals in this group. Although describing his neighborhood and school as "safe" places, he had heard stories about dangerous schoolmates and neighbors that worried him. He described the source of his school concerns by saying "There's one kid that used to go to our school who was in a gang. He was expelled for bringing a gun to school or something, a weapon—some sort of weapon. It was last year. It's like the first time it's ever happened at our school." Later in the interview, Cory noted that he feared students wearing gang colors. When we asked Cory what he would say to individuals moving into South Creston, he touched on his neighborhood anxieties:

> The kids around the neighborhood are nice. I'd just tell them to look out for the bad people. I'd just tell them how nice the neighborhood is and that they made a good decision to move into the house. There's a lot of things to do. It's fun to live here. Well, I don't feel comfortable in the dark. Some people have been kidnapped, and I don't want to be either.

Although never directly experiencing violence, Cory acknowledged that his neighborhood and school were not immune to weapons,

gangs, and kidnappings. Regarding school violence, most members of the low-risk group were similar to Cory. They could recount occasions when fights occurred or weapons were brought to school. Individuals' knowledge of these events, however, was gleaned from secondhand stories. Evan, a 17-year-old White teen living in Westside, described why he was unlikely to witness school violence:

> All my classes since my freshman year have been accelerated classes. So in the accelerated classes, it is not the type of kids that would be carrying weapons. So you don't really see or talk to those type of kids. I know that a kid—a gun dropped out of his pocket in some class. You just hear about stuff like that.

Another source of information, and consequently worries, about violence for members of this group was the media. In 1993, 1 year before the current study, Denver experienced "the summer of violence," which was, according to local news reporters, a wave of gang and youth violence that swept through the city. Some of the publicized incidents occurred in North Creston, a predominantly African American, low-income neighborhood abutting South Creston. Stories about gang-related shootings and kidnappings received sensational attention and became part of a common lore about neighborhood violence. Sophia, a White 16-year-old living in South Creston, described the coverage of one incident: "So a drug dealer was killed there. The shooting went on like way out in North Creston, and there's a lot of stuff in the newspaper about how awful Creston is and everything, but everything happened down past Division Street, which is technically not our neighborhood."

Although most South Creston residents interviewed noted that the violence occurred outside of their community, most individuals felt that these incidents encroached on their sense of safety.

Cory's and Evan's narratives highlight some of the reasons that adolescents were protected from violence. Low-risk individuals lived in peaceful neighborhoods segregated from more violent areas of the city. These youths were also separated from violence in school through a sort of "tracking" process (Kelly, 1974; Oakes, 1985) whereby delinquent or at-risk students tend to be enrolled in the less-advanced and noncollege track classes. This suggests that although

low-risk youths often attended the same schools as teens from more dangerous areas of the city, they were unlikely to interact with violent youths in their classes.

MANAGING VIOLENCE

Although juveniles in the current study had different experiences with violence, most worried about and attempted to manage violence. Adolescents' violence prevention strategies differed. For example, members of the high-risk group were not necessarily attempting to avoid violence. As Benny and Hector explained, the willingness and ability to fight were considered necessary tools for maintaining respect. Fights with guns, however, were problematic and became the focus of their violence prevention strategies. Teens in the moderate-risk category, in contrast, usually avoided fisticuffs as well as fights with weapons. Low-risk youths held more vague and abstract concerns and were not necessarily focused on one type of violence over another. Therefore, kidnappers, gun-toting schoolmates, and strangers in the neighborhood garnered similar responses from members of this group.

In general, individuals described three types of management strategies: turning to friends, avoiding places, and avoiding people. Although these strategies are described as being distinct, individuals combined different approaches at different times in their everyday lives. In addition, individuals in the varying risk groups relied on and employed these strategies in different ways.

TURNING TO FRIENDS

Most individuals in the moderate and high-risk groups turned to friends to manage violence. In fact, no adolescent in the low-risk group discussed friends as a source of violence prevention. For individuals in the high- and moderate-risk groups, peers (especially older teens and gang members) were viewed as street-savvy individuals who knew when conflicts were likely to occur and who could identify dangerous individuals. They also possessed valuable information about how to talk, act, and dress to avoid inviting trouble.

For example, most adolescents in the current study noted that there were historic rivalries among Denver youth groups. As Benny described, some of these schisms were race based (Vietnamese American vs. Latino youths, for example). Other conflicts were geographic. Latino and Latina youths living on the west side of Denver, called "westsiders," disliked Latinos and Latinas from north Denver, called "northsiders." As in many other U.S. cities, animosities also existed among urban gangs. Managing violence, and especially avoiding deadly encounters, for members of high- and moderate-risk groups meant understanding these historic antagonisms. Most felt that this information allowed them to predict, prepare for, or avoid dangerous confrontations.

In addition to providing useful information, friendships with violent youths helped individuals to construct themselves as friendly agents in their communities and schools. Anna, a 13-year-old Latina living in Allenspark, discussed the importance of amicability when interacting with peers:

> Like, if you were to wear a northside shirt and go to the westside, some people who think that they're all bad would start stuff. But, really, if you're cool with everybody, then they're cool with you. I have friends that are eastsiders. I do know westsiders. But, I hang around with the northsiders. . . . If you're cool with everybody you get respect.

High-risk adolescents relied on friends in a different way than members of the moderate-risk group. For example, moderate-risk adolescents attempted to "be cool" with everyone. High-risk teens wanted to do more than be cool: They wanted to use their friendships for protection. Members of the high-risk group reported that it was important to have friends who were willing to fight with or for them. This became one motivation to join gangs. For some youths, joining a gang meant having partners who "watched their backs" and looked out for them. For example, Linda, a 16-year-old Parkview Latina, explained how she confided in a gang member when someone at school threatened to kill her:

> I got so scared. I didn't know what to do. I ran in the house and called my friend Daryl and I was really crying and [said] "I don't know what

to do." And Daryl's all, "What's his number? What's his number?" And I gave it to him. Since that day, that same guy will leave me alone because Daryl went up to him and told him he better leave me alone or else something is going to happen to him and his family.

This strategy produced mixed results. Finding friends who were willing to fight for them obligated individuals to return the favor and, thus, ensured that they would confront future violence. Hector recounted his experience as an unwilling participant in a fight:

They'll come [and] they will be wearing a westside hat, and [my friends] will say, "what's that all about?" They will just start fighting, over just a HAT. Well, actually, I have gotten into a fight because of a hat. Because my partner, he started fighting with them, and then more people jumped in, and you have to get his back. Just don't run away.

Anderson (1999) and Bourgois (1995) argued that, in neighborhoods plagued by social problems (i.e., joblessness, racism, drug dealing and use), individuals often earn and maintain status by fighting. As we see here, youths using friends for protection were unwittingly drawn into their friends' contests for respect and quickly found themselves fighting regularly.

AVOIDING PLACES

Similar to geographic restrictive practices outlined by Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, and Sameroff (1999), many youths in the current study avoided locations where violence was likely to occur (see also, Ferraro, 1995; Liska, Sanchirico, & Reed, 1988; Pain, 1997). Members of all groups used this strategy, however because individuals had different violent experiences, the consequences of this strategy varied. For example, youths in the high-risk group reported pervasive violence. Therefore, avoiding violent places dramatically changed their interactions in the world, and for some youths, it meant rarely leaving their homes.

Anita, a 16-year-old Latina from Parkview who reported confronting violence regularly, stopped attending school, hanging out in her neighborhood, and spending time with friends. She initiated this strat-

egy after two events: the birth of her daughter and witnessing the nearly fatal shooting of her boyfriend. She reported, "We mostly stay home because of what happened. We don't go anywhere no more." Anita explained that her old life was too risky for her and her newborn and said, "I don't really do things that much, because I have a baby. And they [her friends] think of me like I'm tied down and that I can't do things with them. But, it's just that I don't want to."

Where Anita became housebound, other adolescents noted less dramatic uses of this strategy. For example, Benny remained in his apartment when violence was likely to occur and explained, "Some of my friends that are in gangs, they tell me to stay inside or don't leave. If something is going to happen, they will let us know." Individuals in the moderate-risk group steered clear of the dangerous areas in their neighborhoods or schools. Avoiding unsafe areas, however, did not mean staying in the house. Like Phan, many teens living in violent communities found safe places to spend time, such as recreation centers.

Members of the low-risk group also avoided places. This strategy, however, was not a hardship for them. Low-risk youths were likely to see particular neighborhoods, areas of their schools, or teen hangouts as dangerous places. Instead of venturing into these locations, they usually stayed in their own resource-rich communities. South Creston adolescents noted that they rarely journeyed into nearby North Creston. Similarly, one Westside teen reported walking several blocks out of his way to school to avoid traveling through a dangerous neighborhood. As parents and youths from South Creston and Westside reported, these advantaged communities contained ample recreational opportunities for local youths. Therefore, being bound to the neighborhood did not limit their activities or their ability to access the many nearby resources.

AVOIDING PEOPLE

Where some individuals, usually from the high- and moderate-risk groups, befriended violence-savvy youths, other adolescents avoided potentially violent people. This was the most common strategy reported by low-risk adolescents. Perceiving that they could encounter violent individuals almost anywhere, these juveniles carefully looked

for threatening signs among adolescents at school and in their neighborhoods. As no one in the low-risk group experienced violence, their perceptions of threatening characters evolved from stereotypes, hearsay, and media stories. The most common construction of a dangerous teen was a Latino or African American gang member from a lower class neighborhood. Thomas, a 16-year-old White Westside resident, described his feelings about African American students and school violence:

> The students are kind of a problem. If you are walking through the hall and bump into somebody, totally accidental, the hall is crowded. "Oops." And all of a sudden the guy turns around [and says], "What the hell do you think you're doing?" "Sorry man." "Man, if you ever hit me like that again, I swear to God I'm going to kill you." I don't mean to sound mean to anybody, but it tends to be more in the Black community. They all want equal rights and all this other stuff. But, all of a sudden they turn around, like pushing people around, and threatening people, and stuff like that.

Holly, a 17-year-old White Westside resident, also believed that African American students were potentially violent. In fact, she noted that violence segregated particular peer groups at school. She said:

> There's a lot of racial segregation. The ones that hang out with us, they don't care. Their mind is more free and they don't really care if you're a different color. But, if we were to walk into a Black person's party, they would have a fit! They would probably give you crap. And you would leave because you don't want to be around people like that, because they have guns. You don't know who has guns. I'm sure a lot of them have guns, and it is easy for them to get guns.

Although having no firsthand knowledge of weapon distribution among students, Holly guessed that African Americans had access to guns. Thomas attributed contests of respect common within disadvantaged neighborhoods to undesirable behaviors among Black students. Low-risk teens' accounts might be considered misinterpretations of a different peer-based moral universe (Warr, 2002). Although a seemingly innocent problem, the implications are that low-risk teens avoided and negatively labeled (Becker, 1963) other students.

In addition to identifying and avoiding potentially violent students, several individuals scanned their neighborhoods for troublemakers. Perceptions of dangerous individuals in the neighborhood approximated the stereotypes circulating within school. For example, Westside teens reported that the neighborhood seemed safer in the summer. When asked why, one youth told us that during the summer there were fewer "minority" kids walking through the neighborhood on their way to school. Charles, a 15-year-old White Westside resident, stated:

> It's a real nice neighborhood over here. But, they bus those kids from the bad neighborhoods over. They just kind of like make it real bad. If they miss the bus, they stick around for awhile. I usually know the kids that live around here by the way they act. Kids around here are really nice. [The other kids] are usually Hispanic or Black. My friend who moved away said that a lot of them carry big screwdrivers and stuff, like weapons.

Where low-risk youths avoided dangerous students, they called the police on suspicious characters in the neighborhood. The well-publicized shootings in North Creston inspired the formation of a South Creston neighborhood watch group made up of residents who patrolled the streets watching out for trouble. Terry, a 17-year-old White South Creston resident, described the neighborhood watch group's activities:

> At the end of last summer, it was really active because that was the "summer of violence" and crime. I haven't heard much about it lately, though, except that they supposedly have a group that walks around every night with flashlights and phones, and, if anything goes on, they call the police.

Two South Creston adults stated that they closely monitored strangers in the neighborhood. When asked who was most likely to start trouble in the neighborhood, these parents noted watching out for Black youths from North Creston during their neighborhood walks. Therefore, in school potential troublemakers were informally shut out of nonviolent groups. In neighborhoods, however, labeling was more

formal and potentially resulted in questioning by the police and removal from the neighborhood.

DISCUSSION

As hundreds of violence prevention programs are designed and implemented throughout the nation, we see that youths were busy designing and using their own strategies to cope with violence. The types of everyday management strategies varied according to the amount of violence that youths reported experiencing. The individuals in the low-risk group might be viewed as being "protected" from violence in that they lived in resource-rich, low-crime communities in which neighbors effectively organized themselves against outside threats to their safety. The narratives of these youths also suggested that they were unlikely to confront violence at school as they usually attended "accelerated" classes—courses that tended to exclude teens who regularly experienced violence. Youths in the low-risk group attempted to maintain their safety by avoiding unsafe areas, including other, less-peaceful communities. Their fears of violence also encouraged them to informally or formally exclude potential troublemakers from their peer groups and their neighborhoods. Thus, the image of protected, low-risk teens emerges within the current study as individuals who were raised with several advantages and who maintained these privileges by keeping away from risky places and keeping risky people out of their social circles.

The current study also reveals the experiences of teens who were not necessarily raised in advantaged communities and who—through a network of peer, school, and neighborhood influences—found themselves confronting violence occasionally or regularly. In contrast to low-risk and protected teens, most individuals in this group managed violence by forging ties with other teens: usually the individuals classified as "troublemakers" by the low-risk teens. By becoming friendly with more violence-savvy youths, individuals in the high- and moderate-risk groups initiated their own collection of "protective factors," including learning when and where violence was likely to occur, who was likely to be violent, and how to avoid being targeted by other teens. Some youths felt that the best form of protection against

deadly conflicts was to join a social group whose members would fight with and for them (i.e., gangs or other violent peer groups).

These everyday violence management strategies employed by Denver teens are problematic in at least two ways. First, these data suggest that these management strategies may be adversely affecting individuals in the current study. In particular, individuals who join violent groups for protection might increase their chances of meeting a violent demise. For instance, having delinquent friends is one of the strongest predictors of juvenile delinquency, including violence (Elliott, 1994; Elliott, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985; Matsueda & Heimer, 1987; Tittle, Burke, & Jackson, 1986; Warr & Stafford, 1991). Although there is little data available regarding acquaintanceships (as opposed to friendships) among peers (see Warr, 1996), delinquent opportunity theory (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960) suggests that being acquainted with violent individuals, as opposed to being a member of a violent peer group, might increase juveniles' chances of experiencing violence. In this way, turning to friends who are enmeshed in violence might be putting individuals at risk for experiencing violence themselves.

Second, these management strategies may adversely influence violence rates. More specifically, these findings highlight the way that violence rates can escalate to epidemic proportions. Combining the illicit economy and street culture explanations (Anderson, 1999; Blumstein, 1995; Blumstein & Cork, 1996; Bourgois, 1995), we see how economic and cultural forces increased violence rates during the 1980s and early 1990s. According to the illicit economy perspective, the structural changes in underground economies (i.e., introduction of new crack markets) influenced a spike in violence rates. The spike occurred when young crack dealers eventually diffused the reliance on guns to their school and neighborhood friends. The street culture perspective indirectly suggests that youths entrenched in a violent street ethos were happy to pick up on gun use to establish strong identities—something that they could not obtain through legitimate means. Thus, we see that particular structural conditions can encourage violence rate increases in drug markets. These violence rates are then sustained through cultural norms and diffusion.

The data presented in this article add to the illicit economy and cultural explanations by offering another hypothesis regarding the way

that violence rates can be sustained. More specifically, these findings demonstrate how initial violence peaks within disadvantaged communities can instigate a pattern of interactions across multiple contexts. These "across-context" interaction patterns may theoretically sustain violence rates. The process generally begins as a response to increasing threats of violence and ends with a set of violence management techniques that leave many youths with few choices but to become violent.

The findings from the fear-of-crime literature suggests that individuals routinely respond to fears of victimization by employing different management techniques, such as carrying weapons (Arria, Wood, & Anthony, 1995; Bankston & Thompson, 1989) and avoiding dangerous situations or locations (Ferraro, 1995; Liska et al., 1988; Pain, 1997). Thus, given the increasing threat of violence, real or perceived, individuals will respond to manage violence in everyday contexts. The general increase in violence rates in the early 1990s (the years just before the current study), suggest that the threat of violence was fairly intense for youths.

As rates of violence increase, these threats are also likely to increase. These violent threats, in turn, encourage a pattern of informal protective interactions across several groups, institutions, and contexts. These protective interactions can potentially encourage violence in two ways. First, these interactions may motivate some youths to become violent. As a case in point, low-risk teens' favorite responses to secondary threats were avoiding risky places and people. Those who lived in nonviolent communities vigilantly patrolled their neighborhoods and avoided potential troublemakers. This predicts that if an individual confronting many violent risk factors were to enter nonviolent neighborhoods they will be shunned and reminded that they "do not belong." Certainly this informal and formal chiding provide additional motivations to put on the tough and threatening personas that Anderson (1999) and Bourgois (1995) described. Therefore, individuals living in or near areas where "street ethics" reign had few choices but to join in or isolate themselves.

Second, these interaction patterns may strengthen violence-prone social networks. As Warr (2002) argued, "The fact that adolescents often face the threat of violence at school and elsewhere suggests a mechanism that may encourage group formation in daily life" (p. 83).

Youths in the high-risk group were likely to find protection in violent social networks and unlikely to join nonviolent groups whose members offered them no protection against the acrimonious world they regularly confronted. Thus, as Warr (2002) predicted, threats are likely to ensure that individuals confronting multiple violence risks will learn the proviolence norms circulating in the most vicious social circles.

When the threat of violence reaches a particular level, the interaction patterns initiated across multiple contexts can increase the numbers of individuals who are likely to become violent. Thus, through a collection of structural (drug market), cultural (street culture), and interaction patterns (everyday threats) we see how initial violence peaks inside illicit markets can set off cultural and interaction patterns that lock individuals into a cycle of violence.

More than offering a vision of the way that structural, cultural, and interaction patterns combine to increase violence rates, these data point to a new violence research and prevention agenda. Specifically, the current study suggests that exclusionary interaction patterns across multiple contexts may leave many youths with few opportunities but to become violent. Thus, a new agenda for researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders is to address the patterns of exclusion cutting across multiple contexts. Because gangs are often viewed as a particularly violent type of peer group, gang research provides a concrete example of the way that a multiple context research agenda might be employed. To date, most gang research has been comparative, meaning that researchers have tended to consider two or more gangs from different neighborhoods and, in some cases, different cities. The approach advocated here would not only compare gangs in one context to gangs in another but would delineate the way that gangs (or other violent youth groups) form within a larger peer context. The central goal of this research, therefore, will be to examine the way that systems of exclusion segregate peer groups based on race, ethnicity, area of residence, and socioeconomic status. Without addressing these across-context exclusionary mechanisms research will, at best, fail to show the way that multiple social groups are complicit in social problems and, at worst, continue the perception that violence is a problem isolated to one type of social group (i.e., poor gang members of color living in disadvantaged communities).

Because the current study focused on the connections among different social contexts, it also sheds light on current trends in the field of violence prevention and intervention. In contrast to the "nothing works" era in criminal justice programs during the 1970s and 1980s (Martinson, 1974; Regnery, 1985; Sechrest, White, & Brown, 1979), in the 1990s several researchers argued that some programs work to reduce violence (Gendreau & Ross, 1980; Hawkins et al., 1995; Lipsey & Wilson, 1997; Sherman et al., 1997). The preferred or model programs identified in this literature have been proven effective in reducing violent behavior or the behaviors correlated with violence during research trials. The findings from the current study suggest that not all preferred programs may, in fact, reduce violence rates. The vast majority of outcome evaluation studies has measured success by examining whether the individuals exposed to these programs are less violent than individuals who do not receive the programs. Although some studies have determined whether programs reduce violence rates in one city or neighborhood (Jones & Offord, 1989; Schinke, Orlandi, & Cole, 1992), these large-scale evaluations tend to be extremely costly and, consequently, rare.

Because this research examines the across-context interaction patterns, it suggests that creating changes within individuals may not be enough to stem escalations in violence rates. For example, the question remains whether decreasing violence in one neighborhood may inadvertently lead to an explosion of deadly conflicts in another. Similarly, it is unknown whether steering one adolescent away from a delinquent pathway may propel several youths down a violent road. Therefore, the measure of success for policy makers and practitioners would be to decrease social exclusion and marginalization of youths confronting the brunt of large-scale social problems (joblessness, rampant drug sales and use, lack of public services, global economic shifts, and racism).

Working with this premise, the most promising programs for stemming violence rates might be those that specifically target fear-based segregation among groups. This calls for a shift in violence prevention programming from targeting one group of youths, such as those considered at risk for violence, to targeting a large cross-section of youths. It also calls for a shift in ways of measuring program effectiveness from locating changes within individuals to changes within a

larger social system. The ultimate goal of system changes is to open avenues for meaningful participation in legitimate society for excluded youths.

NOTES

1. This qualitative study is a smaller part of the MacArthur Research Program on Successful Adolescent Development in which a collection of urban neighborhoods are quantitatively and qualitatively assessed to determine the role of neighborhood in adolescent development (see Elliott et al., 1996). Although a team of researchers collected this data, the sole author analyzed and wrote up the findings. Thus, the methods section discusses the efforts of the research team, while the remainder of the paper discusses the analysis and hypotheses of the sole author.

2. To preserve the confidentiality of study participants, the names of people, neighborhoods, streets, parks, and businesses are pseudonyms.

3. Because the original design of the research was not to investigate violence in the lives of Denver adolescents, the current study confronts some limitations. First, the types of violence mentioned by adolescents are limited. Researchers never asked about sexual, family, or dating violence, and, given their personal nature, these topics were unlikely to be mentioned by interviewees. Thus, the current study is limited to analyzing the types of violence that adolescents were most willing to describe. Second, because questions about violent experiences were not asked during every interview, violence might be under reported. In fact, if individuals did not mention violence during their interviews, researchers occasionally failed to bring it up. The timing of the interviews presents another study limitation. Conducted soon after the summer dubbed by the media as the "summer of violence," individuals' concerns tended to reflect the media's reports of gang shootings, deadly fights with weapons, and, to a lesser extent, kidnappings. Had the interviews been conducted after the 1999 Columbine High School shootings, the types of violence mentioned during interviews might have differed dramatically.

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