Social Contagion and Group Dynamics in Contagion: Lessons from the NYCYVS

April 30, 2012

A Presentation to the Forum on Global Violence Prevention, National Academy of Science Institute of Medicine Washington D.C.

By Deanna L. Wilkinson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, HDFS
The Ohio State University
Background

- About 2/3\textsuperscript{rd} of youth violence is group behavior (Decker, 1996; Hughes and Short, 2005; Klein & Maxson, 2006; McCord & Conway, 2005; Warr, 2002; Wilkinson, 2003; Wolfgang, 1958)
- Group or gang membership increases victimization, exposure to violence, and criminal behavior.
- An ecology of danger makes group affiliation more necessary and powerful.
- Violence is public behavior.
- Identity or reputational concerns become more salient when violence is “observed” by others.
Group Dynamics and Violence

• Youth violence happens in public
• Co-offending is common
• Peer reference group as an important contextual factor for learning attitudes, emotions, norms, roles, and behavior
• An age-graded Status hierarchy operates
• Violence is rewarded
• Expectancies about what other think I should do
• Collective liability
• Diffusion of responsibility
• Isolation & Marginalization
Framework

• We can best understand the role of group dynamics in spreading violence by focusing on events.

• An event perspective considers the co-production of conflict by examining the roles of victim(s), offender(s) and others in a violence experience.

• It emphasizes event precursors; the event as it unfolds; and the aftermaths including reporting, harm/injury, gossip, and redress.

• We analyzed 780 violent or near violent events including 344 gun events to develop a refined theory of urban youth violence.
Research Methods

- Society
- Neighborhood
- Peer Group
- School/Labor Force
- Family
- Individual
- Violent Event

416 16-24 year old males

Ethnographic Life history Interviews

Event histories

Content Analysis – Using a Comparative Case/Grounded Theory Approach
### TABLE 3. Situational Characteristics of Reported Gun Events (n=344)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>valid n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Event Location: Street corner/Outside</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent’s side initiated the event</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combatants were strangers</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>43.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned on conflict that day</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any 3(^{rd}) party present</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>96.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent’s associates present</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>77.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opponent’s associates present</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bystanders present</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates on either side got involved in violence</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>72.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent used Alcohol or drugs prior to event</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone was Injured</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>55.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event came to the attention of police</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>56.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone was arrested</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome-Ongoing beef</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aftermath –Gossip</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>74.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aftermath –Anticipate Retaliatory action</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who else was present?
(n=780 events)
Peer Group Involvement

(1) involvement is strategic and anticipated from the outset;

(2) come to aid of an associate who is losing in the confrontation;

(3) Peer is threatened/offended/disrespected at some point during the course of a dispute,
(4) they use violence either in the moment or after the fact to get justice or right some wrong that was perpetrated against a group member; or

(5) they are influenced by gossip about the performance and reputation of event participants and they take action to restore the reputation of other group members.
The Scene: Outside a Club: 2:40 AM
Figure 4-4. Sequential Stages of Urban Youth Violence Events: Complex Model

- Opening Moves
- Counter Moves
- Early Violence Stage
- Brewing Period
- Casting Stage
- Persistence/Escalation/Intensify Stage
- Closing Moves
- Assessment Phase
- Stewing Period
- Retaliatory Planning Stage

- Aftermath Stage

- Resolution
- Nonviolent Exit
- Alternatives
- Desescalation

Developed by Deanna L. Wilkinson, Ph.D. The Ohio State University, Copyright © 2008
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Presence</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>3rd party Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening moves</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓Observe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter- moves &amp; Brewing</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓Take notice, Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistance</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓Gossip, analyze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensification</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓Transmit info.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Violence</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓Just Watch, Use violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewing</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓Rehash violation, plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Event</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓Arm, position, shoot guns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓Observe, avoid cops, treat injury, scout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retaliation planning</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓Cultivate opportunity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Codes and Scripts

- Street Justice or Self-Help is best
- Disrespect is not to be tolerated
- Showing weakness or backing down is bad
- Violence = power
- Anticipate punishment
- Punish others for violations
- Manhood requires violence

- Align with a group for protection
- Violence is a group sport
- Get a gun and know how to use it
- Make sure someone has your back
- Defend your honor
- Defend your hood
- Defend your family
- Don’t snitch
What we learned...

- Violence is a social PUBLIC activity.
- Youth learn to react to threatening situational or contextual cues through exposure.
- Youth feed off of each other in reacting. It’s group behavior.
- Youth react out of fear, reflex.
- In-group vs. out-group conflict
What we learned...

• Perceptions of and expectations for behavior get shaped by the range (from violent to nonviolent) and intensity of experiences.

• Violence is emergent from situations regardless of whether it is adaptive. (new theory see Wilkinson, 2011)

• There are multiple intervention points along the pathway to a violent event
Dr. Deanna Wilkinson
Associate Professor
Department of Human Development and Family Science
College of Education and Human Ecology
The Ohio State University
1787 Neil Ave., CM 135
Columbus, Ohio 43210
Email: wilkinson.110@osu.edu
Phone: (614) 247-4004