Local Social Ties and Willingness to Intervene: Textured Views Among Violent Urban Youth of Neighborhood Social Control Dynamics and Situations

Deanna L. Wilkinson

Social control in urban neighborhoods has been studied for over a century in America, yet our understanding of the dynamic nature of social relations for exerting informal social control remains limited. The present study uses detailed reports from those most likely to be the target of local control efforts—violent youth in extremely disadvantaged urban locations—to re-examine two features of this work: variations across different hypothetical scenarios widely used in this research, and connections between local ties and intervention type and likelihood in actual events. In-depth qualitative interviews from 159 violent males aged 16-24 from two distressed New York City neighborhoods identify ways in which responses to commonly used scenarios of informal social control are age- and space-graded. Reports on the transactional nature of social control in violent events show how local ties may undermine, rather than support, social control processes. It would appear that we need to consider more carefully general suggestions about local ties encouraging more informal social control, move to a more textured, multithreaded view of these connections, and incorporate age- and space-graded dynamics into future studies of social control.

Keywords   intervention; local social ties; neighborhood social control; textured views; violent urban youth
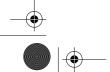
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Introduction

Contemporary research on communities and crime has made some progress toward understanding the link between community life and crime control. Bursik and Grasmick (1993) argue that the capacity of neighborhoods to regulate activities within their boundaries "is determined by the extensiveness and density of the formal and informal networks … that bind the residents together as a social community" (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993, p. 5). Although collective efficacy contains several threads, and varying components are operationalized in different study instruments, a core theme is residents' perceived willingness to intervene in situations where serious crimes or misdemeanors are happening (Taylor, 2002). Survey-based studies generally connect – with a few exceptions – stronger local social ties and lower crime or victimization or fear (Rountree & Warner, 1999; Bellair, 1997; Bellair, 2000; Warner & Rountree, 1997; Elliott et al., 1996; Markowitz, Bellair, Liska, & Liu, 2001). This literature further suggests that residents' willingness to intervene mediate the relationship between social ties and crime. Often, as not, these mediating processes are documented through use of respondents' reports of coresidents' willingness to intervene in a set of hypothetical scenarios (Morenoff, Sampson, & Raudenbush, 2001; Sampson, 1997a, 1997b; Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

Even with the seeming solidity of the connections between safer local settings and the collective efficacy generated in part by local social ties emerging from this survey-based work, at this juncture we only have a rough sketch of the relevant dynamics. Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley (2002) rightly point out that "although much effort has been put into understanding the structural backdrop to neighborhood social organization, we need a deeper focus on cultural, normative, and collective-action perspectives that attach meaning to how residents frame their commitment to places" (Sampson et al., 2002, pp. 472–473).
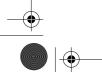
Studies that move us toward a deeper focus, however, sometimes call into question or qualify the seemingly solid connections suggested by the survey-based work. Recent qualitative work as well as more dated studies show how social ties operate in different milieus, and how various specific processes and features of locales support or inhibit willingness to intervene to maintain or improve neighborhood life (Shaw, 1930; Whyte, 1943; Suttles, 1968; Venkatesh, 1997, 2000; Anderson, 1999; Pattillo, 1998; Duneier, 1999; Williams, 1989; Wilkinson, 2003; Carr, 2003). The story that emerges from this body of work is that interpersonal, situational, and contextual factors are variously relevant and impinging on local control dynamics. Importantly, the work suggests that social order is dynamic, and as such, negotiated by actors in context who are constrained by external (structural) forces. Research on community social control processes from a symbolic interactionist perspective would move beyond treating these processes as static.

Modern systemic/collective efficacy studies have attempted to understand the ability of community residents to regulate the behavior of children and

youth have almost exclusively explored the perspective of the regulators. Recent, as well more dated, studies of the transactional nature of social control include studies of offenders' perspectives and provide some insight into their perceptions and responses to attempts to exert formal and informal control (see Shaw, 1930; Whyte, 1943; Sullivan, 1989; Anderson, 1999; Zatz & Portillos, 2000; Wright & Decker, 1994, 1997; Jacobs, 1999; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Miller, 2001). Many of these studies examine how social context and dynamics enter into offender decision-making about specific crime targets (e.g., burglars and armed robbers- Wright & Decker, 1994, 1997).

Despite this growing body of research, we know little about how the population *to be controlled* perceives neighborhood adult roles and social control actions in specific situations. By querying violent youth, this study provides insight into the intervening behaviors of adults on three issues used in survey-based scenarios: property destruction or vandalism, open air drug selling, and fighting on the street. The participants in this study are an appropriate group to tell researchers about how adults act and the effect of these actions because they are the individuals against whom adults' informal social control efforts are most likely to be directed.

In addition to the unique focus on the perceptions of youths; this study explores informal social control processes with two complementary approaches –reactions to hypothetical situations and reports on actual events. First, as in other studies of social controls (see, for example, Morenoff et al., 2001; Sampson et al., 1997, 1999; Skogan, 1990), respondents were asked to comment on the actions of potential agents of social control in hypothetical scenarios including vandalism, drug selling, and fighting. Second, by analyzing detailed narratives that describe the actions of the same respondents in violent and potentially violent situations, this study examines the role of social control in modulating their actions. The data on the hypothetical situations help to describe what people do and do not do to regulate behavior in their neighborhood, and the narratives help to explain why people will do something about neighborhood-based problems (or not). By focusing on the transactional nature of informal social control, this study should shed light on why informal social control is not working in neighborhoods with concentrated rates of homicide and other violence.

The youths who participated in this study varied in how they perceived informal social control and how they reacted to it. Their perceptions of adult behavior in three different types of situations where social control may come into play shed light on three key issues related to informal social control: age-grading, space-grading, and the role of social ties. These features are illustrated with the narrative data and discussed in light of the communities and crime literature.

Informal Social Control Dynamics in High-Crime Neighborhoods

Inner city neighborhoods historically have been described as generally lacking the necessary ingredients to maintain social order and control over youth and
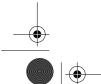
adult criminality (but see Anderson, 1990; Carr, 2003). Participation in order maintenance is generally the lowest in neighborhoods that need crime/drug prevention the most. Residents of low-income, high crime, heterogeneous communities are the least likely to become involved (Greenberg, Rohe, & Williams, 1985).

High crime is believed to disrupt the capacity for social control by causing people to withdraw from participation in the community and from their sense of responsibility for maintaining the neighborhood's quality of life. These effects, in turn, may reinforce the processes that gave rise to the crime. Weak informal social control also is associated with increased levels of disorder and fear of crime in the community (Taylor, Gottfredson, & Brower, 1984; Greenberg et al., 1985; Skogan, 1990; Markowitz et al., 2001; Gibson, Zhao, Lovrich, & Gaffney, 2002). Sampson and colleagues (1999) found that if adults reported high levels of perceived violence in their neighborhoods; they reported lower expectations of child-centered social controls (Sampson et al., 1999). Morenoff and colleagues (2001, p. 518) agree with Wilson's (1987, 1996) argument that in disadvantaged neighborhoods, close intraneighborhood social ties, combined with isolation from mainstream society, may actually interfere with the ability to exert social control over disorderly behavior and, in particular, with the ability to control negative influences on the children (Morenoff et al., 2001, p. 519). For instance, several researchers have documented how gang- or criminally involved youths appear to have control over public spaces in high-crime urban neighborhoods (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Bourgois, 1995; Wilkinson, 2003; Venkatesh, 1997; Anderson, 1990; Suttles, 1968).

Studies on the microecology of order vs. disorder in urban residential contexts have underscored the centrality of spatially organized expectations of informal local control (Suttles, 1968; Taylor, 1997: Taylor & Brower, 1985). The findings presented here provide further support and are consistent with the earlier work on the microecology of urban communities. As with their adult counterparts, youth interpret local threats or nuisances not only through a "where" lens but also through a "who" lens. Work on defended neighborhoods (Suttles, 1968; Bursik & Grasmick, 1993) has highlighted the centrality of neighborhood- or block-based in- vs. out-group statuses, with this sometimes trumping class-based (Pattillo, 1998) or criminal history considerations (Taylor, 2001: 286–287). Loyalty to place and the degree to which agents translate allegiances into action (in this case informal social control) needs to be studied as a dynamic process.

Youth and Offenders' Perceptions of Social Control Dynamics

As mentioned above, there is a growing body of research on offenders' perspectives of crime and community dynamics. Researchers have primarily studied youth gangs and the roles they play in shaping community processes

(see for example, Venkatesh, 1997; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Curry & Decker, 1998; Sullivan, 1989; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Zatz & Portillos, 2000; Jacobs, 1999). A full review of the offender perspective literature is beyond the scope of this paper. However, in general, these studies highlight the tensions that exist between youthful offenders and the communities where they reside. The most consistent finding, perhaps, is that in addition to being a source of frustration for community residents, delinquent groups provide varying types of resources to their communities such as protection against outsiders (Venkatesh, 1997; Fagan, 1993; Sullivan, 1989; Carr, 2003; Taylor, 2001).

Most relevant to the current inquiry is Zatz and Portillos' (2000) study of 33 youth Chicano/a gang members and, 20 adult neighborhood leaders in the southwest. They found a complex relationship between gang youth, family members, and community leaders which they interpret as stemming from economic and political dislocations as a primary inhibitor of private, parochial, and public levels of social control. Youth complained about formal social control agents such as teachers and the police. Youth were not explicitly asked to discuss the everyday informal social control activities of adults nor did they report on specific situations in which adult neighbors enacted social control roles. Gathering more specific information about youths' perceptions of adults social control actions would aid in our understanding of youths' perceptions of collective efficacy and adults willingness to intervene.

Also, relevant is a special issue on "Youth perspectives on violence and injustice" in the Journal of Social Issues in March of, 2003. The issue includes ten articles that approach the issue of social justice from the standpoint of youth. For example, Fine et al. (2003) conducted a street survey of a race/ethnically diverse stratified sample of over 900 NYC youth to explore their perspectives on social justice and the surveillance of public spaces by authority figures such as police officers, teachers, parents, security guards, and social workers. While the study did not focus on nonparental neighborhood adults or the specific social control exchanges between community youth and adults, the findings indicated that urban youth experience many adverse interactions with adults in authority roles. Furthermore, youth feel alienation from adults and lack confidence that adults will act in supportive ways toward young people. African American and Latino youth reported the highest levels of mistrust and at the same time felt the least safe in the city. Minority males were significantly more likely than other groups to worry about being arrested and harassed by police. In contrast to the current study, the sample for this study had relatively little criminal justice system experience –16 percent had been arrested but 52 percent had been stopped by police in the previous year. Among youth placed-at risk – those growing up in politically and economically isolated neighbors –the tensions between adolescents and adults are likely to be even more compromised.

In a study that takes a look at variation across neighborhoods in adult and adolescent perceptions of youths' role in their communities, Zeldin and Topitzes (2002) found that beliefs about adolescents are more positive among adults and youth who live in safe and resource rich communities. The authors speculate that in communities characterized by disorder and violence percep-tions of adolescents are more likely to be based on negative stereotypes rather than direct experience. Zeldin (2004) argues further that adult gate-keeping and internalization of generalized images of youth as troubled fuels the divide between neighborhood youth and adult regardless of whether or not youth are engaged in antisocial behaviors.

Age and Neighborhood-Based Informal Social Controls

The relationship between age and community informal social controls needs to be understood from a developmental perspective. The resources of a particular community are utilized and harnessed by adults differently for infants, young children, early adolescents, late adolescents, and young adults making the transitions to adulthood. Neighboring behaviors, including willingness to intervene, may also vary with the age and perhaps gender of the youth. From an ecological perspective, the social worlds of adolescents may diversify across geographic space as social networks grow and activity space spreads out. During adolescence, youths are spending more time out in the community trying out roles, exploring new contexts, and establishing identities for themselves (Strauss, 1997; Erikson, 1968; Feldman & Elliott, 1990).
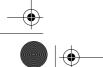
Researchers have characterized this tumultuous trial-and-error period (also known as adolescence) as being unpredictable, anxiety provoking, and threatening from the perspective of adults. It appears as if there may be a process of withdrawing from adolescents that is invoked at least in part by the transitions that youths are experiencing. The degree of perceived connectedness young people might feel toward their community may be cast in part by the absence of positive intergenerational relationships. Questions linger about whether this process is gradual, abrupt, event-specific, or some combination.

The question of how communities raise adolescents may be better answered in terms of what they do *not* do (Reiss, 1997). The transition from childhood to adulthood is perceived by many societies as a period of antisocial behavior during which the individual poses a threat to the group. Most non-Western societies mark the transition to adulthood by rites of passage that clearly define what the community expects of the youth when the transition is complete. In Western societies, the transition tends to be more extended and society's expectations less well-defined (Reiss, 1997). Reiss notes "a deep cultural ambivalence about whether persons of adolescent age are children or adults," and "few institutionalized expectations of how one is to behave as an

adolescent in the sense that achieving those status expectations is a positive transitional link to adult status. This failure to deal with the transitions to and from the adolescent years appears to account for certain patterns of delinquency and antisocial behavior that we associate with these years and that have profound effects for communities in which adolescents spend most of their time." (Reiss, 1997, p. 313).

Reiss points out that, whereas young children spend much of their time within the family, in small play groups, or in a school environment (which does not necessarily represent a single community), "adolescents are profoundly creatures of their residential community made up largely of their community organizations, their peer networks, and their schools" (Reiss, 1997, p. 313). Thus, adolescent socialization takes place increasingly within the community and adolescents are increasingly involved in whatever opportunities the community affords. In poor, inner city neighborhoods, which tend to be characterized by low social capital and isolation from mainstream norms and values, those opportunities may be principally negative.

To some extend, the informal social control literature bears this phenomenon out. Researchers have found community members' willingness to monitor and intervene with their neighbors' children to be greatly reduced or end entirely at adolescence, precisely the time when they are most susceptible to criminogenic influences (Sampson & Laub, 1993; see also Carr, 2003; De Li, 1999). Beyond these few studies, research has generally overlooked the importance of age in studies of informal social control processes. There are a number of empirical questions that have yet to be examined in this regard. For example, how might race/ethnicity, gender, status transitions, physical build, peer group choice, parents' involvement with the adolescent, or involvement in risky or criminal behavior condition the response that adult neighbors have of youth. How do these processes vary by neighborhood characteristics?

Methods

The data for this study come from a larger qualitative study of 418 active violent offenders from two New York City neighborhoods. Symbolic interactionist perspective provided the guiding theoretical framework for the life history interviews. The sampling design targeted males between the ages of 16 and 24 from three pools of subjects:

- individuals convicted of illegal handgun possession or a violent offense (the criminal justice sample, n = 54 or 34 percent),
- individuals injured in a violent transaction (the hospital sample, n = 26 or 16 percent), and
- individuals identified by screening as having been actively involved in violence in the previous six months (the neighborhood samples, n = 79 or 50 percent).

Current or previous residency in one of the study neighborhoods was an eligibility criterion.[1] The young men in the jail sample were interviewed at Rikers Island in a private office ordinarily used for psychological counseling. Participants in the hospital sample were recruited at Lincoln and Kings County hospitals by researchers working with hospital staff to identify violently injured youth. Most hospitalized youth were interviewed in their hospital rooms or in private offices in the hospital. The neighborhood samples were generated using chain referral or snowball sampling techniques (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Watters & Biernacki, 1989). Study procedures were approved by institutional review boards at Rutgers State University of New Jersey and Columbia University and the data were protected by a federal certificate of confidentiality issued by the National Institutes of Health.

"Peer" interviewers conducted the in-depth, open-ended interviews, which took one to two hours to complete.[2] To enhance rapport between interviewers and participants, we matched interviewers with participants on proximate age, race/ethnicity, gender, and life experiences and asked them to modify the wording of the questions to come across in a street-savvy way.[3] Participants were paid $20 for their time. The confidential interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

Social control processes were a topic that emerged during the course of data collection; questions about youths' perceptions of neighborhood social control

1. Several methods were used to determine potential subjects' residency status. First, we relied on self-identification with a neighborhood. Previous research has noted that youth, especially criminally involved youth, are strongly vested in their neighborhood identities (Suttles, 1968; Zatz & Portillos, 2000). Second, we relied on the lay experts' knowledge of the neighborhoods and neighborhood hang-out spots to disqualify individuals who did not meet the neighborhood-residency requirement. Finally, throughout the course of the interview, specific names of street locations, housing project complexes, and other related landmarks were reported by respondents. To protect respondents' confidentiality, these identifying data were changed to pseudonyms. Before changing the names, we coded data on residency status, length of residency, multiple residencies, and movement over the life course when such details were found in the interview record. In the full dataset of 418 individuals 29 people lived in neighborhoods other than the study neighborhoods. Those individuals reportedly spent considerable time in one of the study neighborhoods and as a result were not excluded from the full dataset. None of those individuals are included in the current paper.

2. Peer interviewers or lay experts can enhance the quality of qualitative data collection by bridging the social distance between researchers and respondents, especially in studies of minority youth (see Walker & Lidz 1977). For a detailed description of the methodology, see Wilkinson (2003).

3. Despite the flexibility in our approach, there was almost no modification of the wording of the informal social control questions. In the few instants in which alterations were made, slang words were substituted/added for drug dealing (specifically pitching, throwing, hustling drugs, slinging, or pushing), destroying property or vandalism (e.g., tagging or busting up someone's property), or for fighting (e.g., going to blows). In almost all cases the interviewer used both the preset term and the slang term. Data quality does not appear to be compromised by the modifications. One other inconsistency across interviewers was whether or not they utilized the probes either before or after the respondent answered the questions. When probes were used effectively, they improved the "thickness" of the data.

processes were added in, 1997 and asked of 159 individuals.[4] Earlier analyses and publications (Wilkinson & Fagan, 1996; Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998; Wilkinson, 2003) hinted at the importance of these issues but suggested the need for further investigation.

Measures

Interviews covered a range of topics including family experiences, school, employment, peer relationships, neighborhood processes, neighborhood violence, guns, drug use, violent events, criminal activity, and future goals. A biographical approach was used to capture information about life experiences, involvement with violence, and gun use in situated transactions. Interviewers asked about the roles of adults in intervening behaviors, informal social control, and social relations with youth. Respondents reported how neighborhood adults would respond to a variety of crime and disorder scenarios[5]. Following are the questions our team asked about issues relevant to informal social control processes.
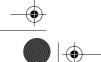
General Perceptions of Intervening Behaviors:

(1) What do adults do in your neighborhood when they see kids destroying property that does not belong to them? PROBE: Do they yell at them? Try to stop them? Just ignore them? Call their parents? Call the police? FOLLOW UP: Why?

(2) What do adults do in your neighborhood when they see open drug sales in the street? PROBE: Do they yell at the dealers? Try to stop them? Just ignore them? Call their parents? Call the police? FOLLOW UP: Why?

(3) What do adults do in your neighborhood when they see two young kids (8–12) fighting in the street? PROBE: Do they yell at them? Try to stop the fight? Just ignore them? Call their parents? Call the police? FOLLOW UP: Why?

(4) Follow-up What if they are older teens (14 and up)?
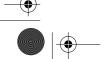
Intervening Behaviors in Violent Events:

(1) Besides you and your opponent(s), were there any other people present during the altercation? Who else was around?

4. After completing the data analysis for the first 125 interviews, it became clear that more specific questions were needed to figure out how informal social control processes were operating. By that point, the research team had already completed nearly 260 interviews, so the items included in this study were asked of the final 159 respondents in the total sample.

5. Pseudonyms for persons and places are used to protect the identities of study participants. Interview excerpts include rough and potentially offensive language. I purposely have not substantially edited or cleaned up the interview excerpts (although in some instances words have been added in brackets to clarify a statement) because there is more to learn from hearing the voices of youth in their own words. In addition, censoring their words would have distorted the intended meanings of the discourse. Respondents frequently used the word "nigga" to refer to friends, enemies, and themselves. Like it or not, the term is a prominent feature of inner-city youth culture.

(2) What were the innocent bystanders or third parties doing or saying during the incident? Who were they?

(3) How did you feel about what these other people were doing/saying? PROBE: Were you glad? Were you afraid? How did your opponent react to them?

Intergenerational Relations as a Contextual Factor in Understanding Intervening Behaviors:

(1) What kind of relationship do you think most adults have with the teenagers or young men in your neighborhood? PROBE: Do they respect them? Are they scared of them? Do they try to avoid them? Please explain.

Although variations of these measures of individual and collective efficacy have been widely used in community surveys of adults (Sampson, 1997; Sampson et al., 1997, 1999; Skogan, 1990; Rosenbaum et al., 1998), youths' perspectives on social control have not been seriously considered until now. Specific item wording was modified to probe in an open-ended fashion for relevant details and examples to illustrate the ways in which adults intervene.[6]

The sample for this analysis was 59.1 percent African American, 31.4 percent Puerto Rican, and 9.5 percent Caribbean, Latin American, or mixed ethnicity. Sixty-two percent resided in East New York or Brownsville, Brooklyn and 38 percent resided in the South Bronx. The average age was 19.7, with 16.4 percent of respondents at the modal age of 17. The sample ranged in age from 15 to 26 years old. Approximately one-third of respondents were enrolled in school at the time of the interview, 26 percent had completed high school or a general equivalency degree (GED), and 40.7 percent had dropped out of school. Only 7.7 percent were raised in two-parent families and 38.2 percent were

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6. The questions used for this study were derived from the communities and crime (prevention) literature (see, especially, Rosenbaum, Lavrakas, Wilkinson, & Faggiani, 1997; Rosenbaum & Wilkinson, 1995; Sampson et al. 1997). There are notable differences between the measured used in the current study compared to previous studies. Generally, across the survey-based research, participants are asked to rate the likelihood that their neighbors would intervene using a 5-point Likert-type scale (responses ranged from very likely to very unlikely). These items are then combined and used a summative scale of informal social control. The scenarios vary; for example, in the PHDCN study "children were skipping school and hanging out on a street corner," "children were spray-painting graffiti on a local building," "children were showing disrespect to an adult," "a fight broke out in front of their house," and "the fire station closest to their home was threatened with budget cuts." In the CRDA study, the scenarios included: "Would neighbors mostly help each other out or go their own ways?" "Would most adults try to do something about kids spray-painting on the sidewalk in your neighborhood?" and "Would most adults try to do something about someone selling drugs or acting as a lookout for drug dealers in your neighborhood?" (Response categories were "do nothing, in between, do something"). In the Aurora/Joliet neighborhood-oriented policing study, residents were asked to report "how likely you think it would be that your neighbors would call the police (very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, very unlikely) in the following scenarios: (1) If one of your neighbors heard a scream or the sound of glass breaking, how likely is it that they would call the police? (2) What if a suspicious stranger was looking around your home or building? (3) What if someone in your neighborhood was seen selling drugs, or acting as a lookout for drug dealers? And (4) How likely is it that your neighbors, if they got together, could persuade the city to make improvements in your neighborhood?
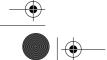
already fathers. Of the sample, 26.8 percent were legally employed full- or part-time. Not surprisingly, given the sampling plan, sample participants reported numerous risk factors and violent experiences: 92.1 percent owned or had owned a gun, 87.7 percent had been or were involved in the drug business, 74.3 percent had been or were incarcerated, 92.9 percent had witnessed someone getting beaten badly, 89.8 percent had witnessed a shooting, 77.1 percent had witnessed a stabbing, 76.5 percent had witnessed a killing, and 57.9 percent reported involvement in one or more gun events. See Table 1 for

Table 1 Sample characteristics

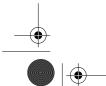| Variable	f	(valid n)	%
Neighborhood			
East New York	99	(159)	62.3
South Bronx	60	(159)	37.7
Sample source			
Neighborhood chain referral	79	(159)	49.7
Hospital interview	26	(159)	16.4
Recently released from jail	47	(159)	29.6
Jail interview	7	(159)	4.4
Age			
Mean 19.7 years		(159)	
Median 19 years		(159)	
Mode 17 years		(159)	16.4
Race/ethnicity			
African American	94	(159)	59.1
Puerto Rican	50	(159)	31.4
Other Caribbean or mixed ethnicity	15	(159)	9.5
Structural position			
Education: High school graduate or higher	26	(150)	17.3
Education: Completed GED	13	(150)	8.7
Education: Currently in school	50	(150)	33.3
Education: Dropped out	61	(150)	40.7
Currently employed (legitimate work)	38	(142)	26.8
Raised in two-parent family	12	(104)	7.7
Respondent is a father	47	(123)	38.2
Risk factors/violent behaviors			
Ever owned a gun	140	(152)	92.1
Median age of first gun ownership	131	(131)	14.0
Reported a gun-related event	92	(159)	57.9
Ever involved in drug economy	135	(154)	87.7
Ever incarcerated	110	(148)	74.3
Ever witnessed shooting	123	(137)	89.8
Ever witnessed knifing	91	(118)	77.1
Ever witnessed severe beating	105	(113)	92.9
Ever witnessed killing	88	(115)	76.5
Feel neighborhood is unsafe	149	(159)	93.7

additional information on sample characteristics. Study youth are a special group of neighborhood residents and perhaps they are more likely to suppress social control efforts of adults since they may have violent reputations.

The neighborhoods selected for this study were among the worst in New York City in terms of poverty and violent crime. We purposefully selected two high violence neighborhoods in an attempt to control for neighborhood variation in life experiences of our respondents. The study was designed to examine violent events and individuals as the primary units of analysis. The geographic boundaries of the neighborhoods corresponded with the police districts serving each neighborhood (the 75th precinct or community district 5 in Brooklyn and the 40th precinct or community district 1 in the Bronx). Compared to New York City as a whole, East New York and the South Bronx had significantly higher rates of unemployment, fewer high school graduates, higher percentages of families below the poverty level, a larger proportion of the population under 25 years old, and larger minority populations. The homicide rate was 2.24 times greater in East New York and 3.41 times greater in the South Bronx than for New York City (see Table 2). Both neighborhoods also had significantly higher rates of robbery and assault than New York City.

It is no surprise that respondents in this study described their neighborhoods as lacking in resources, overwhelmed with violence, and weak in community cohesion. When asked "Generally, do people in your neighborhood help each other out or go their own way? Forty-nine percent of participants felt that neighborhood people go their own way, 23 percent felt that people help each other out, 20.3 percent reported situation dependent behaviors, and 6.1 percent felt that both options happen equally. When probed further to provide more information, the most commonly cited examples of helping behaviors included using violence to come to someone's aid, providing food and/or small household items, and helping to deal with problems with the police. Blood relatives or "street family" living in the same neighborhood were much more likely to help out than others. Despite the neutral placement and tone of the question, respondents most often thought of examples that had something to do with violence. The most typical examples youth provided of neighbors helping did not reflect what researchers had in mind with regard to a measure of social cohesion or neighborliness. Most study participants thought of helping for the "wrong" purpose.

Data Analysis

Respondents described in detail their perceptions of adult-youth relations and adult intervention in drug selling, fighting, violent events, and property destruction in their neighborhoods. Their narratives offer an opportunity to explore adult actions from an unconventional angle. The method of analysis in this study incorporated both induction and deduction. The stages of data analysis included open coding (Strauss, 1987), sifting and sorting (Wolcott, 1994), categorizing,

Table 2 Socio-demographic and crime profiles of target neighborhoods compared with New York City, 1990

	East New York	South Bronx	New York City
Total population	161,359	77,234	7,322,564
% males under 9	20.32	22.56	14.34
% males 10–14	9.93	10.34	6.62
% males 15–19	9.85	10.17	6.89
% males 20–24	9.01	9.97	8.15
% males 25–59	42.15	38.41	49.43
% males over 60	8.71	8.51	14.54
Ethnicity			
% non-Hispanic White	9.45	1.70	43.19
% non-Hispanic Black	47.94	30.51	25.22
% Hispanic	38.38	66.88	24.35
% non-Hispanic other	4.16	1.26	6.68
Employment			
Unemployment rate—males	15.00	19.90	9.30
Unemployment rate—females	13.40	18.40	8.70
Education			
% over 25 with less than h.s. education.	46.70	62.60	31.70
% h.s. dropouts aged 16–19	16.50	22.90	13.50
Poverty			
% families below poverty level	29.00	49.40	16.30
% female head families below pov.	45.60	63.70	35.30
% female head with children bel. pov.	54.50	71.60	48.10
Violent crime[a]			
Murder rate per 100,000	64.25	97.97	28.70
Robbery rate per 100,000	2142.63	2676.28	1329.99
Assault rate per 100,000	1749.10	2112.20	940.80

Note. Sources: New York City Department of Planning, 1993. *Socioeconomic Profiles 1970-1990.* New York: Department of City Planning. New York City FBI Index Crime Reports (Uniform Crime Report).

AQ4

[a]These rates are based on a 3-year average of 1989, 1990, and 1991 FBI Uniform Crime Report statistics.

coding in teams and checking for consistency, and examining interactions between and across categories and cases. The typescript files were created, printed, and coded in an interactive process. Coders read the interviews and inserted topic codes beside each excerpt categorizing the theme being discussed.[7]

The interview content was deconstructed into themes and emergent patterns for questions relevant to the study. Two coders independently read the relevant

7. The lay experts (peer interviewers) worked closely with the researcher by helping to identify patterns, suggesting interpretations, and validating the investigator's interpretations. These efforts facilitated the coding and analysis of the data and permitted checks for consistency in classification among members of the research team.

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data and created categories of responses. They agreed on lists of response cate-
gories and coded the data accordingly.[8] Each code was explicitly defined and
multiple codes were applied as appropriate. Each coder coded the first 30 cases
twice as part of the development of the coding schemata and coder training on
consistency. During the initial coding phase we identified a few minor inter-
coder reliability problems related primarily to failure to code all responses
provided. Once these issues were corrected, we were able to achieve between
92 percent and 100 percent correspondence across coders and the within coder
reliability equaled 100 percent across all questions. In rare instances in which
the coders disagreed, the issue was discussed until one common code was
chosen for the response.

  To manage and analyze the text data, QSR NUD*IST[9] was used to create indi-
vidual- and event-level datasets. Individual- and event-level variables were
sorted according to categories identified through careful reading and analysis of
the data. To facilitate descriptive analysis and quantitative analysis, I exported
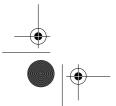the coded data from QSR NUD*IST into a statistical analysis program.[10]

Results

Perceptions of Adult–Youth Interactions

Interactions between adults and youths in a community have a powerful influ-
ence on youth development, social control processes, and social capital. Partic-
ipation by and network closure among adults are important factors for healthy
adolescent development (Coleman, 1990). According to study youths, adult-
youth interactions and relations are complicated. Many respondents offered
more than one answer when asked about how adults view them and often gave
situation-dependent opinions. Table 3 summarizes how respondents talked
about relations between youths and adults in their neighborhoods. Their
perceptions appear to be shaped by their social interactions with adults in their
neighborhood. The dominant theme is that youths perceive their relationships
with neighborhood adults as primarily negative and often antagonistic (nearly 74
percent of youths provided negative descriptions). Specifically, 37.8 percent of
youths felt that adults' fear of teens was the defining characteristic of their
relations, 28.9 percent responded that adults avoid or ignore youth, 14.1
percent reported that adults had no relationships with teens, and 5.2 percent
felt that adults hate teenagers. On the positive side, about one-fifth of the
sample felt that adults show care and try to help teens, 8.1 percent felt that

8. The author and a research assistant who was part of the interview crew completed the coding for
this study.
9. QSR NUD*IST (Version 6.0, Melbourne) is a commercially available relational database program for
text analysis.
10. SPSS is the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 12.0, Chicago.

Table 3 Social cohesion: Adult–youth relations[a]

Response	f	%
Adults fear teenagers	51	37.8
Adults avoid/ignore teenagers	38	28.9
Adults show care and try to help teenagers	28	20.7
Adults have no relationship with teenagers	19	14.1
Adults give teens respect	11	8.1
Adults are involved in same bad behavior as teens	11	8.1
Adults give respect if they get respect	9	6.7
Adults don't care about or hate teenagers	7	5.2
Adults have no respect for teenagers	6	4.4
Adults have good relationships with teens	4	3.0
Adults give dirty looks or judge teens	3	2.2
Adults have "Hi and Bye" relationship with teens	3	2.2
Classification of responses	f	%
Negative only	82	61.2
Positive only	35	26.1
Both positive and negative	17	12.7

Note. Multiple responses were coded as a result the percentages do not equal 100%.

[a]Question: What type of relationship do you think most adults have with teenagers and young men in your neighborhood? PROBE: Do they respect them? Are they scared of them? Do they show them love and care?

adults respect teens, another 6.7 percent felt that adults respect teens if teens show respect to adults, and 3.0 percent felt that adults had good relationships with teens. Age was negatively correlated with perceived positive relations with neighborhoods adults, suggesting that younger respondents had more positive interactions.

The fear that adults display is directly related to the behavior and attitudes of neighborhood youth. One young man, Art, believed that the adults' fear was driven by the fact that young people simply did not care about themselves or others and that made them dangerous:

> I feel they give them respect 'cause they scared of them ... 'cause of a lot of the brothers in my 'hood ... they like careless. ... They don't really think about shit. So that's why they got the adults over there scared to death ...

The young men acknowledged that adults have legitimate reasons to fear neighborhood youth, but they also recognized that there is a generation gap between older residents and youth. Terrill explained that most adults fear teenagers and young adults because "the young kids today walk around with this sag and busting new styles. ... they [adults] didn't grow up like we grow up. So they petrified of us 'cause they think we doing something wrong." Terrill's comment also suggests that adults may overgeneralize and label youth who are either not involved in criminal activities or rarely participate in such activities.

Many respondents felt that adults are withdrawn and more often ignore youths than attempt to establish or maintain relationships with them. According to respondents, gun violence concerns adults most; they presume that most young men are carrying guns and that youth are unpredictably ready to use them against others. Hakeem felt that adults are intimidated by teenagers "'cause the little teenagers, they wild. They wild, so you know adults, maybe not the young adults but the older adults are definitely intimidated by them … 'cause around here they might put a cap [bullet] in their ass." Quincey expressed a similar view: "It ain't like it used to be back in the old days. It's like they [youth] ain't got no respect for them [adults] … The young ones ain't got no respect for the old ones. And the old [ones] is scared to death of the young, 'cause everybody packing ghats [guns] and shit."

Some respondents described a strong tension between neighborhood adults and delinquent youth as adults struggle to improve neighborhood conditions. Parker explained that competing goals create relationships between adults and youth in which neither side is granted respect: "there is no respect 'cause the teenagers are going to do what they want to do and the older people gonna do what they want to do. But the older people is trying to make the neighborhood look good and the teenager is trying to make the neighborhood look bad." His comments suggest that at least some adults are actively engaged in neighborhood improvement efforts but Parker recognizes being "controlled" is something that youth strongly resist.

Despite their fears, some adults still try to influence youth positively. Hugh explained this:
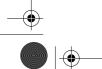
> Well, it's kind of hard because … sometime these young kids they hard to get along with. They got guns and now they don't know how to act. They sell a little drugs and they think they makin' mad money. A lot of times adults try to show 'em love and care and show 'em the right way. But, these kids just they just ignore it. Sometimes the adults are scared of 'em to approach 'em about anything.

Respondents who felt that adults showed love and care and tried to help youth cited advice giving as the most common interaction between generations. Some said that many adults have known neighborhood youth for years and care about them regardless of the negative activities in which the youth are involved. Jamar described the situation: "they show love and care 'cause everybody out there they practically know each other. Mothers look out for each other, you know, girlfriends' kids or whatever." Although the lectures were not always embraced by study youth, they recognized the efforts as a sign of caring. Darren described how youth perceive their relationship with adults as negative because of the lecturing: "Nah, they don't get along around here … the old people just trying to give them advice … Why you dealing with drugs? You know it's illegal over here so you get bagged for that you doing life or something you getting locked up. So they just trying, old people just trying to help them out, they don't want to understand, fuck it." Similarly, Lorenzo explained that:
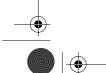
"they try to guide them the right way but kids do whatever they want. And since they'll get in trouble at a young age and nothing really will happen to them … they figure, they [can] keep getting in trouble and they be alright." Tanner felt that adults try to help but do not understand the challenges that today's youth face: "I think they kind of looked out for them. They talk to them. They would be nice to us. They just didn't understand kids growing up in the conditions that we were growing up in."

Rusty noted that some neighborhood adults are negative influences on youth. He explained: "there is a lot of adults will see things going on with kids and they are the one that's suppose to set the example for us being kids, and a lot of them don't set the example, the example that they set is drugs and alcohol."

Researchers make assumptions about adults' willingness to intervene with neighborhood youth without considering the effects of adult-youth ties. What kinds of relationship condition expected responses to specific scenarios? The data presented illuminate the complexity of intergenerational ties and sets the stage for examining how those ties translate into agency in specific situations. The majority of youth reported that generational distance was motivated by fear and threat, although not all participants felt distant from adults. Youths' characterizations of intimate ties (family and close friends) resulting from long-term neighborhood residency support the systemic model (Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974) and are consistent with Pattillo's findings. It is noteworthy that advice giving, as a sign of love and care has not been widely discussed in the urban community literature yet it was the most common type of positive interaction mentioned between violent youth and their adult neighbors.

Youths' Perceptions of Adult Intervening Behaviors

Across the three scenarios of informal social control, evidence of age-grading, space-grading, and closeness of ties affecting willingness to intervene emerged as dominate themes. From the perspective of study youth, adults were least likely to intervene in fighting, followed by drug selling. Table 4 shows that 100 percent reported that adults walk away or mind their own business when they observe older youths fighting in the street, 74.3 percent when they seeing youths selling drugs, 37.3 percent when they see youths vandalizing property and only 20.3 percent when they observe young children fighting. Asked to explain these behaviors, youths reported that they were caused by fear of young. They cited the danger and potential lethality of getting involved in violent conflicts among teens and older youths as the main reason that adults mind their own business. The fear is not unfounded. Respondents acknowledged that if they learn of some-one "snitching" on them for their involvement in drug selling or violence, they are likely to retaliate with violence. The data suggests the conditioning of the relationship between local ties and willingness to intervene depends in part on location, a space-grading process; and the fear-inspired, perceived connections between intervening and serious retaliation, implying an age-grading process.

Table 4 Adult intervening behaviors with vandalism[a], drug selling[b], and children/teens fighting[c]

Response[d]	f	%
Question: Vandalism (n = 137)		
Walk away/ignore it/mind their own business	51	37.2
Say something to vandals	36	26.3
Call police or security	30	21.9
Actively intervene to stop vandalism	22	16.1
Call or tell parent	17	12.4
Physically punish vandal	3	2.2
Tell property owner who did it	3	2.2
Question: Drug selling (n = 136)		
Walk away/ignore it/mind their own business	101	74.3
Call police or security	39	28.7
Say something to dealers	10	7.4
Buy drugs	7	5.1
Call or tell parent	6	4.4
Instigate/support behavior	6	4.4
Adults also hustle (drugs)	6	4.4
Gossip about it with friends	5	3.7
Give dealers dirty looks	3	2.2
Tell children to stay away from drug spot	2	1.5
Question: Children (8–12) fighting (n = 143)		
Actively intervene to stop fighting	92	64.3
Walk away/ignore it/mind their own business	29	20.3
Watch fight without doing or saying anything	22	15.4
Say something to fighters	14	9.8
Call or tell parent	13	9.1
Instigate/condone behavior	11	7.7
Let young children fight	10	7.0
Call police or security	7	4.9
Gossip about it with friends	2	1.4
Question: Teens (13 and over) fighting (n = 74)		
Walk away/ignore it/mind their own business	74	100.0
Get involved/use violence	12	16.0

[a]Question: What do adults do in your neighborhood when they see kids destroying property that does not belong to them? PROBE: Do they yell at them? Try to stop them? Just ignore them? Call their parents? Call the police? FOLLOW UP: Why? [b]Question: What do adults do in your neighborhood when they see open drug sales in the street? PROBE: Do they yell at the dealers? Try to stop them? Just ignore them? Call their parents? Call the police? FOLLOW UP: Why? [c]Question: What do adults do in your neighborhood when they see two young kids (8–12) fighting in the street? PROBE: Do they yell at them? Try to stop the fight? Just ignore them? Call their parents? Call the police? Question: What about older teens? FOLLOW UP: Why? [d]Multiple responses were coded. As a result the percentages do not equal 100%.
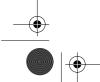
Property Destruction or Vandalism

Vandalism is the least serious of the three items queried in this study. Not surprisingly, nearly two-thirds of interview respondents said that many adults take action to correct this type of misbehavior by youths. Approximately 26 percent reported that adults say something to vandals, another 16 percent that they actively intervene to stop the vandalism, 22 percent, that they call police, 12 percent, that they tell the youth's parent, 2 percent that they physically punish the vandal, and 2 percent that they report the vandal to the property owner.[11] Still, 37 percent reported that adults tend to walk away or mind their own business. Respondents felt that fear and threat of retaliation played a role in preventing adults from intervening to stop property destruction. The degree of threat was seen as considerably less than that described for drug selling and considerably greater than that described for fights among young children.

Many respondents saw vandalism as one area in which neighborhood adults had some efficacy and felt compelled to take action. As their comments below illustrate, people are motivated to intervene in part by a desire to affect the way neighborhood children grow up. Hassan felt that yelling at children to stop destroying property sends a message about right and wrong behavior: "[Adults] say it, [to] show 'em, yo, you niggas doin' wrong at a young age." Terrill explained that adults physically punish youths who vandalize to teach them not to do it: " … in my building alone we have a strict code that everybody stick by now that if we see somebody destroying property, we gonna beat they butt and take them to their parents and tell their moms. Because we don't want to see any young Black kids growing up the way I did." Hank reported a similar reaction: "they snatch them up like they own kids. They whip your kid's ass for doing it. Then bring them to you, tell you, now you whip their ass." (Interviewer): "Why they do that?" (Hank): "Cause they don't want to see little kids destroying people property." Some respondents felt that adults were making an active effort to clean up the neighborhood and had a lower tolerance for vandalism, especially if they owned the property. Tariq explained: "yeah, they might say something about that [vandalism] 'cause it might [be] that person property. And then they start getting mad, they might come out and try to smack 'em up or something." Hakeem explained that neighbors "don't want to see no more destruction, they don't like that. They are trying to build something here."

How people handle vandalism may depend on whether the perpetrator is a neighborhood resident. If a resident, adults will talk to the child and tell the mother about the misdeed. People are likely to respond more aggressively when vandals are from outside the neighborhood. Nat, for example, said that "if they not from the neighborhood, they will chase them, grab them or call the cops on them."

11. This question was coded as a multiple response variable; some interviewees may have reported more than one type of action.

Not all respondents felt that neighbors cared about stopping property destruction, especially if they lived in public housing projects or did not own the property. Some took a powerless stance that Stephon described well: "they sit there and say 'damn that's fucked up, that's why nobody can't have nothing.' And ignore it." Quincey suggested reasons for apathy: "They don't be giving a fuck about that … because don't nobody feel like, the places that they live in belong to them, so they ain't really giving a fuck about it. They like, 'yeah whatever it ain't mine.' The projects or the housing authority should be coming to clean that off, or coming to [do] this, that and the other thing."

Fear remains the strongest reason that youth believe adults do not intervene to stop vandalism. Many adults fear that if they correct a child, their own property may be destroyed in retaliation. According to Howard, "Some of them don't do nothing 'cause they be scared. That they shit probably get damaged." In addition, youths felt that adults feared violence if they intervened over vandalism. Eddy commented that, "it seem like nowadays … you can't say shit to niggas 'cause, Goddamn, you don't know what the fuck will happen to you. Shit is crazy out here."
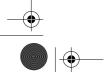
Drug Selling

Urban residents across America have been struggling for decades to combat the problem of open air drug markets in their neighborhoods. The illegal drug business is characterized as an adaptation to limited legitimate economic opportunities in distressed communities and several researchers have documented how drug activity has become institutionalized in many communities (Anderson, 1999; Fagan, 1993; Simon & Burns, 1997; Taylor, 2001; Venkatesh, 1997; Wilson, 1987). Minority youths, particularly males, are often drawn into the drug business through their local social networks. Nearly 88 percent of study youth had been involved in the drug business and most were still involved at least sporadically at the time of the interview. Thus, their perceptions of adults' responses are especially interesting. The image that emerges is one of a youth-dominated social order in which fear, threat, violence, and intimidation are used to ensure that most residents ignore and stay out of anything related to drug selling. Respondents felt that even if residents did not like drug dealing in their neighborhood, there was little chance that their efforts would stop the drug business. Some youths noted that they have many close relations within the neighborhood and that, while neighbors do not support youths' participation in the drug business, they did not want to see their loved ones arrested or incarcerated. Many respondents also acknowledged that adults would be physically harmed for openly preventing drug selling or reporting their activity to the police. Nevertheless, nearly 29 percent of respondents reported at least some neighborhood adults report drug activity to the police some of the time.

The most frequent response about adult reactions to open air drug selling was that they walk away, ignore the activity and mind their own business.[12] Most respondents felt that drug dealing is an institutionalized part of neighborhood life and that residents adapt to the dangers and stress associated with it. Avoidance techniques were most commonly cited. Jud explained that: "half of them walk across the street and the other half they just walk right through them and act like they ain't even there. They try to ignore it. They don't want nothing to do with it." Mickey noted that people "… close they doors in my neighborhood, close they windows and they doors and mind they business." Many residents reportedly avoid the effects of drug selling and related activities by securing themselves inside their homes and spending as little time on the street as possible. Youths believed that fear of retaliation was the main reason adults did not call the police or otherwise intervene. Elijah related: "[Adults] ignore them. They keep on walking. They mind their business … Out of fear [of] what … can happen to them … if someone ever found out that they was calling the cops. Or that they was snitching or anything like that." Most respondents reported that the consequences of exerting informal social control on drug activity could be lethal. Jesus explained why most people mind their own business: "'Cause they don't want no beef. You stick your nose in my mother fucking business, you getting popped … you'll be dead." According to study youth, fear levels are high among neighbors because, as Quincey put it, "they scared to get murdered."
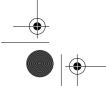
Drug dealing youths use threats and actual violence to intimidate adults and maintain a level of tolerance for their activities and "reward" those who do not intervene. According to Howard, "[adults] fear that if they do that [intervene] something bad going to happen which is true. Straight up, snitches is snitches. The people that just mind they business, they are the people that we like 'cause they cool. Mind your business and we look out for you. We ain't all bad." Gossip about who reported drug selling to the police could also lead to problems for residents because drug dealers often retaliate based on that information.

Respondents believed that adults' lack of efficacy to stop drug selling was another common reason for them to ignore it. Sidney felt that "they can't do nothing. They just go about they way. Maybe they talk about it in they house. As they seeing it, they can't do anything." Marvin described the ready availability of replacement labor as a reason that citizens feel powerless to stop street-level dealing: "no matter what they say, still gonna be drugs there regardless. You can stop that person from selling drugs; the next person is always going to be there."

Even if residents cannot actively stop drug selling in their neighborhood, they may show disapproval, attempt to establish boundaries for spaces that should be drug free, and talk with youth about pursuing more positive activities. Several examples, like this response from Kelvin illustrate the point:

12. This question was coded as a multiple response variable; some interviewees may have reported more than one type of action.

They basically say, 'Can I speak to you for a minute? I understand
you need to make money. I'm not gonna sit there and try to tell
you what to do 'cause you gonna do your own way but if you want
to do that could you please move down away from the kids?'

(Interviewer): Why do they do that?

(Kelvin): Because they get them to get away from little kids so these little
kids out here now can get themselves straight and the right
frame of mind instead of going down that wrong path.

Terrill explained that some people question youths about their reasons for
being involved in drug selling but many just mind their own business or are drug
users themselves:

Some people will look at you like what are you doing? … I say the people that
look at you and wonder what you doing, why you doing that? … are the people
that are respected in the neighborhood. They say like 'We got kids around, got
kids around,' and they don't want none of that around their child, I can
understand that."

Some adults show they care about youths by discussing their illegal activities
with a parent. Jamar reported that, "If somebody see you that know your
parents, they go straight to your parents. They tell, they think it's the best
thing for you. They don't think you should be out there doing it." It appears that
network closure may counteract some of the effects of fear on intervening.
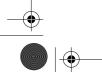
Respondents reported that many neighborhood residents are their customers
or are themselves involved in the drug business in some way. Ike explained that
"they don't do nothing 'cause they probably smoking the stuff themselves." This
phenomenon is age-graded–older residents are less likely to be drug users and
more likely to call the police. Moses explained that young people will probably
not try to stop drug selling but older people might: "the older ladies do that [call
the police] but the younger people, like people in they thirties and stuff, twen-
ties, teens, they ain't going to say shit, they don't give a fuck. They going to be
sitting right there probably buy some theyself, want to know who smoking."

Respondents recognized that adult neighbors know most of the local drug
dealers because they grew up in the neighborhood. They suggested that resi-
dents' reactions to drug selling and the likelihood of some type of social control
depends on those personal ties. Youths who are dealing drugs outside of their
neighborhood do not have the benefits of insider status, and some youths specu-
late that neighbors may be more willing to call the police to get them off the
block. Despite the dangers, 28.7 percent of respondents reported that at least
some of their neighbors called the police on drug dealers. The narratives
suggest that certain people are attempting to rid the neighborhoods of drugs
and see law enforcement as a necessary step in reclaiming their communities.
Quentin reported that people would "talk to an officer about that [drug dealing]
because they got neighborhood watches and shit like that." Nigel felt that
people reported drug activity out of a desire to "make the 'hood better now."
There is a tension between the economic benefits from drug selling and the

desire to live in a neighborhood without it. Rudy explained that some people tolerated it while others called the police because "they don't want that in the neighborhood probably. But they got to feed they peoples." Many youths attributed adults' intolerance to drug dealing and their willingness to call the police to jealousy. Nico, for example, said, "I think they just hate me, 'cause they figure they got to get up 9 o'clock in the morning, get home late, and we just outside the building and make what they make in a week in one day. So I think they be hating on that shit."

Fighting in the Street

In contrast to drug selling, 63.4 percent of respondents reported that adults would physically intervene if they saw two young children[13] fighting on the street. As Table 3 shows, nearly 25 percent reported some other intervention: 9.8 percent, that adults would yell at children to stop, 9.1 percent, that they would call or tell the child's parent, and 4.9 percent, that they would call the police.[14] Approximately 30 percent of study participants felt that some neighborhood adults showed support for violence by their reaction to children fighting: 15.4 percent said adults stop to watch the fight without doing or saying anything, 7 percent, that adults think fighting was good for young children and let them fight, and another 7.7 percent, that adults instigated or encouraged the fight. Excerpts below illustrate some of the nuances of adult reactions seen by respondents.

Many respondents felt that adults want to prevent young children from going down the wrong path or becoming violent people. They also believed that adults would be concerned that a child might be injured. Jud explained why adults break up fights this way: "They kids. The adults, they probably got kids and shit, and they ain't teaching them that shit. They just don't want to teach them that violent shit. It's [stopping the violence] like they instincts and shit." Dylan offered a similar view: "because they kids, they ain't supposed to fight each other … they supposed to be kids." Terrill felt it was important for adults to break up fighting to prevent youths from ending up in jail as he had: "We try to break it up. We try to show them that this is not the thing that you should be doing. You should try to stick together instead of the shit that I came up doing because you only gonna end up upstate."

Adults were especially active in stopping fights involving children from the same block. Devyn explained: "They try to break it. 'Stop. Y'all shouldn't be doin' that you're from the same block, there's no reason to fight with [your] peoples." According to Paul, either breaking up the fight directly or calling the mothers was a common response: "they break it up because they don't want them niggas doing that. Or they call they moms, they moms come out, squash that or whatever."
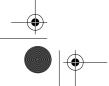
13. Interviewers specified an age range of 8–12 to define "young children" in this item.
14. This question was coded as a multiple response variable; some interviewees may have reported more than one type of action.

Some respondents noted that minor fights among children are a source of entertainment for some neighborhood adults. Rusty made this point: "Some adults might break it up, and other adults might sit back and watch it go on. 'Cause they too interested in watching the fight theyself." Ray described how fights are entertainment for neighborhood drug dealers: "They don't do nothing. They bet on the fight. They bet on who is going to win the fight. They instigate. And they just see who is gonna win or not. That's what they do." The interviewer sought clarification of Ray's answer by asking, "That's what adults do?" Ray explained that he was referring to drug dealers and not "adults who work. They try to stop the fight."

Respondents expressed fewer concerns about safety, intimidation, and fear than previous research on social control in distressed urban communities (Taylor, 2002; Sampson, 1997a, 1997b; Skogan, 1990) has suggested. The scenario of young children fighting appeared to evoke images of situations that were easily controlled and not very dangerous. None the less, approximately 20 percent reported that adults walk away, ignore, or mind their own business in response to this type of behavior. Those who said they did nothing presumed the reasons included fear, worry about the angry reactions of a parent, and apathy. Robert explained that getting involved in minor fighting might lead to "gun play after that." Apathy was frequently related to who the children were or if they knew them well. Miquel viewed it this way: "some adults they let them fight and some adults they won't. 'Cause some adults be like, well that's not their problem, that's not their kid so let it be, let them do it, let them do what they got to do." Quincey noted that parents often get angry with people who discipline their children. He found irony in this:

It's funny, man, 'cause if somebody try to act like they, you know, try to tell the kid the right thing to do, before the parent is give the other adult the benefit of the doubt, it's like they going to the adult with anger already in them and they want to fight and they want to this, that, and the other thing without really understanding what went down.

According to respondents, informal social control over fighting stops once children reach adolescence. For youth aged 14 or older the willingness to intervene diminishes quickly. Stevan explained that people would stop children under 13 from fighting but avoid situations involving older teens: "They try to stop them 'cause they fighting, and they too little to be fighting. And niggas be going in front of the little kids [to stop them] from fighting too. [if] They our age, like 14 and up they letting them niggas kill they self." Not all respondents felt that adults would intervene for even the younger age group. Cortez explained:

No they don't be stopping nothing 'cause they don't even want to get involved. They scared of something. Usually, it be a righteous brother will come out and be like yo chill, try to intervene or something. If a [young] nigga really getting they ass beat. But if it's teens or adults fighting or something ain't nobody getting involved in that shit.

About half of the sample was asked what adults do when teenagers and older youth are fighting on the street. All respondents reported that adults walk away, ignore it, or mind their business. The level of danger of the violent situation, the likelihood of guns being involved, fear of getting harmed, and fear of retaliation were suggested as the main reasons for their reaction to fighting among teens and young men. Approximately 16 percent reported that young men in their twenties or early thirties who were closely associated to one or more of the fighters would get actively involved in the violence.

This inquiry started with an assumption drawn from prior research that the ways in which people 'do' social control is different in violent situations than with other types of crime and disorder. The results are surprising in some ways and suggest that the situation is more complex than previous research has shown. Given my earlier analysis of similar data from a different sample, I was not surprised by the reported lack of intervention in fighting among teens and older youth, but the level of active involvement in stopping children from fighting was unexpected. The next section sheds more light on social control in violent situations by focusing on specific violent events experienced by the 159 young men in the two years prior.

Intervening Behaviors in Violent Events

The discussion up to now has focused on youths' perceptions of what adults do in three types of situations. The earlier analysis showed that youths perceive no adult intervention for fighting among teenagers and young men. Analysis of the 237 violent events reported by study participants, who were between the ages of 14 and 25 at the time of incident, will shed additional light on informal social control processes and people's willingness to intervene in violent situations. The detailed event descriptions have been analyzed for the roles that third parties and bystanders played. Bystanders are neutral parties not specifically aligned with either side of a conflict. I was able to discern whether bystanders were adults or other youths in most cases, but not all. The events with the greatest level of informal social control are examined in detail in this section. The relationship between event seriousness (gun vs. non-gun events) and the presence and types of actions of bystanders is shown in Table 5.

The results reveal that youth perceptions of adult reactions to teenagers and young men fighting closely, but do not exactly, match their experiences. Table 5 shows, that in 31.4 percent of events in which bystanders were present, they reportedly watched without intervening, in 19.9 percent of events they did nothing or ignored the conflict, in 14.1 percent they ran away or took cover for self-protection, in 12.8 percent of events they instigated or "amped up" the situation, in 9.0 percent of events they yelled to try to stop the violence, in 7.7 percent of events, they broke it up, and in 2.6 percent of events, they helped the respondent. Bystanders very rarely called the police or got involved by using violence (see Table 5). It is noteworthy that respondents described 32 violent
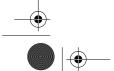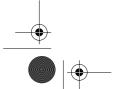
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Table 5 Presence and actions of bystanders in violent events by weapon type

Type of participant/observer	Total (n = 227)		Gun events (n = 101)		Nongun events (n = 126)	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Third parties or bystanders present	156	65.8	65	64.4	91	72.2
3rd party action taken in event						
Watched	49	31.4	14	21.5	35	38.5
Did nothing/ignored it	31	19.9	12	18.5	19	20.9
Ran away/took cover for self-protection	22	14.1	20	30.8	2	2.2
Instigated/"amped up"	20	12.8	6	9.2	14	15.4
Yelled to try to stop violence	14	9.0	7	10.8	7	7.7
Broke it up	12	7.7	3	4.6	9	9.9
Helped respondent (nonviolently)	4	2.6	2	3.1	2	2.2
Called police	2	1.3	0	0.0	2	2.2
Got involved/used violence	2	1.3	1	1.5	1	1.1

events (20.5 percent) in which the actions of bystanders were attempts at informal social control.

In contrast, the actions of the respondent's or his opponent's associates, when present, were more proviolence than efforts at social control. The respondent's associate(s) were present in 70.9 percent of events and the opponent's associate(s) in 67.1 percent of events. The respondent's associate(s) reportedly watched without intervening in 4.9 percent of events, did nothing or ignored it in 11.0 percent of events, ran away or took cover for self-protection in 3.7 percent of events, instigated or "amped up" the situation in 13.5 percent of events, broke it up in 7.4 percent of events, watched the respondent's back in 3.7 percent of events, and finally, became *actively involved by using violence in 55.8 percent* of events. The respondent's associates did not yell to stop the violence or call the police in any of events described. The opponent's associate(s) did nothing or ignored the situation in 26.1 percent of events, ran away or took cover for self-protection in 1.3 percent of events, instigated or "amped up" the situation in 18.3 percent of events, broke it up in 5.2 percent of events, watched the opponent's back in 3.9 percent of events, and *got actively involved by using violence in 45.1 percent* of events. Gun events have a slightly different pattern than non-gun events–people are less likely to stand around to watch, more likely to run for cover, less likely to instigate or "amp up" the situation, and understandably less likely to try to "break it up." Gun incidents are slightly less likely to be reported to the police by bystanders–the base rate is extremely low for either type. Given the nature of adolescent peer relations and their

frequent interactions with peers, it is not surprising to find that third parties or bystanders played a major role in "coproducing" violent events.

Third party presence seems to coincide with police becoming involved—in both serious and non-serious events. Events that occurred at night and without neutral bystanders present were less likely to come to the attention to police (at least from the respondents' experience). Although respondents reported almost no bystander involvement in calling the police, if bystanders were present, police were more likely to come to the scene. This fact could reflect the seriousness of the event, the public ruckus caused by events involving groups of teens with audiences; the sound of gunshots, serious injuries that required medical attention, or general police presence in the neighborhood. The low numbers and considerably more reported bystander calls for medical assistance lead me to speculate that youth are not clear on how the police come to know about violent situations. Not one respondent described threatening a resident for calling 911 for medical assistance despite the fact that doing so obviously alerts the police as well.

Discussion and Conclusions

Researchers often use survey reports of residents' expected willingness to intervene in hypothetical disorderly or criminal incidents to gauge strength of informal local social control. Many studies find greater willingness to intervene among those with stronger local ties, and in less disadvantaged and/or more stable and/or more networked locales. The present study uses detailed reports from those most likely to be the target of local control efforts – violent youth in extremely disadvantaged urban locations – to re-examine two features of this work: variations across different hypothetical scenarios widely used in this research, and connections between local ties and likelihood and type of interventions. The youths who participated in this study varied in how they perceived informal social control and how they reacted to it. Their perceptions of adult behavior in three different types of situations where social control may come into play, shed light on three key issues related to informal social control –age-grading, space-grading, and the role of social ties.

Adults' willingness to intervene is *age-graded* primarily for property destruction and fighting on the street. As illustrated by numerous examples discussed above, adults are more likely to intervene with younger children in situations that are less threatening. There was less evidence for age-graded responses to drug selling, which may be explained by the fact that teens and young adults are more involved in drug dealing than children. A notable exception is advice giving around drug selling–younger respondents reported more of this type of behavior than older respondents.

Space-grading of willingness to intervene is evident in all three types of situations. As Table 6 shows, the theme of exerting informal social control when "outsiders" threaten the property, territory, or person of "insiders" is true for
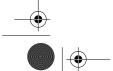
Table 6   Summary: Age-grading, spacing-grading, and social ties by situation

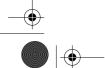|	Vandalism	Drug selling	Children/teens fighting
Age-grading	Yes, adults intervene with younger ages only	Mostly no, age is not a factor in adults' intervening behavior for drug Selling but there were examples of recognized efforts to conceal drug selling activity from young children	Yes, adult intervene with younger ages only Adults fear teens and young adults
Space-grading	Public vs. private property	Move children/activity away (try to establish boundaries)	Stop fights among kids from the same block
	Stop outsiders	React to outsiders who try to set up shop	Help when outsiders attack locals
Social ties	Intimate ties—notify parents, physically punish	Intimate ties—ignore, support	Intimate ties—intervene
	Weak ties—ignore	Weak ties—ignore	Weak ties—ignore
	No ties—call police	No ties—call police	No ties—call police

vandalism, drug dealing, and fighting. These findings lend support for Suttles' (1968) "defended neighborhood" model. For vandalism, whether or not the property was owned by local residents made a difference in the types of actions adults reportedly took. Further, space-graded social control was evident for drug selling in two major ways–attempts to establish "buffer" or safe zones for young children and efforts to keep outsiders from setting up "shop" within the neighborhood. Space-graded responses to vandalism worked in the following ways: adult interventions for neighborhood youth primarily consisted of infor-mal social control actions while intervention for "outsiders" typically meant calling the police. Finally, interventions in fighting behaviors were also space-graded. Youths reported that adults regularly broke up fights between children from the same neighborhood—and especially from the same block–and also came to the assistance of youths who where being attacked by youth from outside the neighborhood. Space grading seems to be a function of ties and to operate at the block or even building-level, suggesting that microlevel studies are neces-sary to capture it.

The connections between *social ties* and willingness to intervene are complex. The types of intervening behaviors—and the inclination to use formal or informal interventions—varied, certainly by the nature and level of risk of the situation, but also clearly by the fact and strength of the social ties among actors. For example, in the case of vandalism, intimate ties were likely to result in direct intervention including notifying parents and physically punishing those involved. Weak ties most often resulted in adults ignoring the infraction and

minding their own business. No ties worked in at least two ways–adults called the police or they ignored it. For drug selling, intimate ties were related to ignoring the activity and lending support for it. Although respondents report that many adults are fearful of intervening in drug dealing, they also report that many do—in ways that reflect attachment to the perpetrators and their families and levels of mutual trust borne of kinship and friendship ties. When those ties are absent—the dealers are from outside–and fear is overcome by the desire to clean up the neighborhood, many adults do appear to call police. Here, it appears that partisanship plays some role in both inhibiting and promoting adults' informal social control efforts. Weak ties were also linked to ignoring drug selling. Reporting drug selling to police was most common by adults with no ties and especially against outsiders. For fighting among young children, intimate ties were related to actively intervening to stop the fight, weak ties to ignoring it, and no ties to calling the police. For fighting among teens and older youth, the only connection between ties and intervening related to the 12 respondents who reported that some adults with close ties got actively involved in the violence. Across the three scenarios youths reported that intimate ties would more often result in some type of informal social control response (if there was any type of response) while notifying formal social control agents was more common when ties were weak or nonexistent.

In some situations, ties can hurt. For example, according to respondents, local ties can lead to the disclosure of the identity of those who report drug dealing to police, which may result in violent retaliation. Gossip and other forms of communication between neighbors were used to identify snitches. Threats and actual retaliation may work against the types of parochial-public partnerships that Carr (2003) endorses.

The picture becomes even more complicated when actual violent events are considered. Bystanders or neutral parties got involved in some 20.5% of the violent situations they witnessed. Rarely were their efforts effective in preventing violence. Although the data were not shown, social ties affected the role of bystanders; the types of interventions were age-and space-graded. For example, the role of partisanship (intimate ties) between the respondent or his opponent's associates clearly helped to shape the nature of the violence they experienced. As with the scenarios, the actions of neighbors in violent events include responses that most sociologists would not classify as social control. The "coproduction" of violence by groups of peers described in 227 violent events provides evidence in support of Black's (1993) theory of crime as social control. These findings run contrary to Felson's (2002) notion of efficacious "intimate handlers" from a routine activity perspective.

This study suggests that further refinement of existing social control theory is needed. Browning, Feinberg, and Dietz (2004) offer a refinement to current collective efficacy theory that holds promise. Their negotiated coexistence model, argues that dense social ties simultaneously enhance neighborhood attachment and willingness to intervene and produce network-based social capital for offenders which inhibits social control. Consistent with the negotiated

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coexistence model, the current data suggest that even within highly disorga-
nized, high crime neighborhoods, citizens engage in informal social control but
not necessarily in the hypothesized manner. Further refinement needs to move
away from a static approach. The relationship between network-based social
ties, fear, and collective efficacy would become clearer if we gather more
information from individuals about the situational contingencies that promote
or inhibit social control agency. Within community variation is probably as
important as between community variation. The role of social ties, community
attachment, and collective efficacy in residents' responses to crime and disor-
der are considerably more complex than current theory postulates. The age-
and space-graded modulation of social control needs greater attention. The
findings return us to the empirical question in thinking about community as
organized for what? (Sampson, 2002).

The fact that there are extraordinary differences in how study youths inter-
pret the items that are typically used in willingness to intervene scales –prop-
erty damage, drug dealing, and fighting–raises potential concerns about their
use in community surveys. In addition, the nuances of social ties, willingness to
intervene in different situations and the heterogeneity of third party actions in
violent events suggests that the use of these items at the tract or other aggre-
gated-levels may introduce measurement error that could confound the results.
Study participants viewed each of these situations quite differently. As
mentioned above, these respondents are an appropriate group to report on
what adults do because they are the ones against whom social control efforts—
formal and informal—are likely to be directed. Their perceptions are based on
experiential knowledge. This study sought to understand the role of adults in
neighborhood social control processes through the eyes of youth. The descrip-
tions presented herein may not be the same roles and responses that adults
would attribute to themselves. Future research should examine the correspon-
dence between youth and adult perceptions of adult behavior. In addition, the
voice of non-violent youth in high-crime neighborhoods needs to be considered.

Two prevailing issues affect young males' viewpoints on social control in their
neighborhoods: the desire for a secure environment and the belief that street
justice is best. Violent youths describe several factors contributing to the break-
down of social controls in their neighborhoods and the adaptations they make as
a consequence of the perceived insecurity. Embedded in violent youths' discus-
sion of these issues is their perception that adults have abandoned their respon-
sibilities to regulate the behavior of the streets. The irony of this viewpoint is
that the majority of study participants fully recognize that the violence and ille-
gal behaviors, and the lack of engagement between citizens and police are
directly to blame for causing adults to disengage. Like many studies, one impli-
cation of the current research is the recognition that adults should intervene
with the younger group because these informal social control efforts are more
likely to be efficacious and the potential risks of retaliation are less serious. The
connections between age-grading, fear, and social ties suggest that, in at least
some situations, adults can influence the behaviors and thinking of teens and

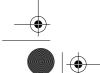young men. Their life histories clearly show that the young men in this study were trying to find their way as they made the difficult transition to adulthood. Despite their involvement in various delinquent and criminal activities, study youths had aspirations for better lives free of the chaos of drugs and violence.

Although citizens recognize the need for positive adult influences in the lives of young people and see the presumed outcome of the lack of adult involvement, where do we start in (re) establishing the intergenerational closure that is necessary for informal social control to thrive? Coleman (1990) argues that social capital is highest in communities in which "closure" exists in social networks –that is, when there is a relational connection between two or more adults in a community and those adults also have a relationship with the same young person. There is some evidence of closure in the narratives —for example in cases where adults report even drug dealers to their parents because they know the parents well. Further, if the nation's urban streets are "controlled" by the tough delinquent and criminal youth, those influences take on increased significant when there is little engagement between adults and youth. Youths do not necessarily have to "buy in" to some oppositional culture in order to be involved in delinquency. If the only social interactions with older people available to youths are around illegal activities then it may become more difficult for adults or government-funded service providers to change what has become the status quo in many neighborhoods. The level of effort required to make a significant change in a local community is virtually unknown. What is clear is that small changes are unlikely to have enough of an effect to turn a community around. At the microlevel additional data are needed to find ways of motivating community adults to overcome their fears and to become more involved in the daily activities of neighborhood youth.

Fear of crime is a real concern among adults and it is obvious that their concern is legitimate from the words (and threats) of the youth. As violent youths see it, adults expect the worst, express fear and avoidance, relinquish control, and help to escalate and encourage disorderly and delinquent behavior. Concerted efforts to "take back the community" have suggested that Carr's new parochialism is operating to (re) engage residents in informal social control by partnering with police.

The perspectives explored in this article can assist us in thinking about how to address the urban youth violence problem. Urban areas have experienced high rates of violence that are concentrated spatially and demographically. How do policy makers, practitioners and private citizens begin to address the problem? Clearly, the "answer" is not simply building community ties or promoting private-parochial ties through citizen-police partnerships. While these activities may help in the most distressed neighborhoods like East New York and the South Bronx, considerable work must be done to break down the barriers between citizens and public agencies of law enforcement, including the police, as a first step. The promise of this approach remains unknown given how difficult, labor intensive (costly) and politically challenging such an endeavor would be. We need to bring youth to the table but then what? Young

people recognize that much of their behavior is dysfunctional but see few viable opportunities. They note that the neighborhoods need more police protection, and that trust is lacking among citizens and between police and citizens (data not shown). Most participants are pessimistic about the future because they feel that the current social order is not likely to change any time soon. Their beliefs are reinforced by the reactions of adults to community problems and disorder.

Respondents' accounts of their neighborhood and violent experiences are taken at face value. Although the validity of such interview data will always be open to criticism, I carefully scrutinized the data for internal consistency. All self-report data are subject to the same validity concerns, but this study attempts to address these concerns by exploring two different ways of learning about informal social control –responses to hypothetical situations and detailed narratives about actual violent events. The data are generally consistent across these two approaches, which strengthens our confidence in them. For example, in the event narratives the presence and involvement of third parties is discov- ered in multiple ways making cross-checking possible. The interviewers also challenged respondents during the interview when obvious inconsistencies emerged by probing further for clarification. Unfortunately, the current study repeats a classic problem in community and crime research, that is, it relies on participants' definitions of their neighborhoods which limits our ability to identify clear geographic boundaries.

The results of this study have limited generalizability because of the targeted nature of the sample, the fact that females were not studied, and that it is limited to two neighborhoods. The study, however; overcomes the base rate problem that persists in most community studies. The participants in this study had no trouble coming up with examples of first hand experiences with social control in action. The youths in this study know more about social control as targets than the general population of residents in these neighborhoods. Since the social worlds of ordinary residents are quite separate from that of violent youths, fear of violent youth may cloud their views and likely suppresses their social control efforts. In other words, general population surveys are limited for this area, just as they are limited for understanding about serious youth crime. For this reason the validity of these data may be better than surveys with broad general populations. At the very least, they provide a perspective that is missed in most studies.
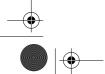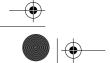
Acknowledgments

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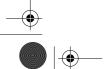
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