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Reconsidering retaliation

Structural inhibitions, emotive dissonance, and the acceptance of ambivalence among inner-city young men

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ABSTRACT ■ Contemporary criminology directs a great deal of attention toward the factors which may lead to crime and violence, but little attention to individuals in circumstances which fit all the necessary conditions but who abstain from criminal or violent acts. This is in marked contrast to the law and society literature, where 'lumping it' (Felstiner, 1974) has long been recognized as the overwhelming default response in most disputes. This article examines this criminological gap, exploring the emotive dissonance and ambivalence experienced by young men who abstain from retaliating due to structural constraints. Each one, faced with an agonizing loss, is compelled to seek violent retaliation against the antagonist perceived responsible for the loss. Yet each is constrained by their enmeshment in the local social structure and the potential havoc that such violence might bring. Furthermore, by focusing primarily on moments of violence, criminology misses the enormous range of nonviolent moments, among both violent offenders and others. Exploring each consultant's existential gap will enrich our understanding of the criminological gap between independent and dependent variables, toward appreciating the agency and resourcefulness of young men caught in potentially violent dilemmas.

KEY WORDS ■ avoiding retaliation, inner-city youth, emotion work, collective efficacy, peacemaking, lumping it, code of the street, emotive dissonance, ambivalence

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In the United States, a virtual consensus exists among criminologists that men commit more crime than women, the young more crime than the old, the urban more than the rural, blacks and Latinos more than whites, the poor more than the rich (Sampson and Wilson, 1995). Accordingly, poor, young, urban men of color are considered 'at risk' of engaging in crime, and the act of retaliation is seen as central in shaping criminal violence among this population (Mullins et al., 2004). A number of prominent recent studies have specified this risk in elaborate detail, drawing upon Elijah Anderson's notion of the code of the street to show how likely such young men are to commit crime based on a mix of structural and cultural factors (Brezina et al., 2004; Kubrin and Weitzer, 2003; Stewart and Simons, 2006; Wilkinson, 2001). Despite the sophistication of such modeling and its intuitive good sense, researchers are hard-pressed to explain more than 50 percent of the variance. Thus, even when we factor in every currently conceivable variable to predict crime, individuals are more likely not to commit crime in such circumstances than commit it. What might account for this preponderance of negative cases?

It is commonly underappreciated that the code of the street is a discourse (Foucault, 1972), albeit a prominent, highly accountable discourse in the area where this study was conducted (see Garot, 2007a). According to the code of the street, one must retaliate against insults in order to gain respect, which insures safety (Anderson, 1999). Such 'insults', aside from affronts against one's person (such as a 'bump' in a 'staging area'), may also be affronts against one's family (most infamously, one's mother), or one's friends (commonly one's crew, or gang). But if the insult is coming from a family member or from a friend, or if one foresees that retaliation may harm family and friends, what then? Does one retaliate against or engage in behavior that may harm those who, according to the code of the street, should be defended?[1] Such a fundamentally ambivalent situation is not easily managed in a discourse as Manichean as the code of the street.

As in Merry's (1979) classic analysis of dispute management in an urban neighborhood, this article examines five illuminating cases. In each, a young man in an inner-city area in the United States speaks from within the midst of troubling circumstances. While the narratives involve quite different events, they reveal three primary considerations for those avoiding retaliation. First, when young people find that retaliation may injure family or friends, they account for themselves as structurally inhibited from doing so (also see Garot, 2007a). Second, one who is unable to retaliate to a perceived injury experiences emotive dissonance, often embodied through revenge fantasies enacted against inanimate objects. Finally, each of these young people come to accept their ambivalent position, reconciling themselves not to endless humiliation as the code of the street may prescribe,

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but to the mature awareness that selfish motives may not always be achieved, and one may simply have to 'lump it'.

Structural inhibitions

One way to understand how those most at risk of engaging in crime might abstain from it is found in the literature on collective efficacy. Since 'there is a consistent, positive relationship between disorder and neighborhood dissatisfaction, citizen withdrawal, and crime levels' (Pattillo, 1998: 748, citing Skogan, 1990), perhaps individuals who pause before retaliating are in neighborhoods with higher collective control of crime. Wilkinson (2007) looks at the willingness to intervene through the eyes of the perpetrators, showing that interventions to stop anti-social behavior depend on the age, the social ties between interveners and protagonists, and the space (public/private, near/far) where the act occurs. Adults are generally more likely to intervene with younger children in their neighborhood with whom they share close ties. While it is fascinating to gain a lens into the neighborhood through the eyes of offenders, we might also learn from offenders what collective efficacy *means to them*. As Wilkinson (2007: 214) states:

> 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 ... in addition, the voice of non-violent youth in high crime neighborhoods needs to be considered.

In the excerpts below, we find that when young people are blocked from retaliating, it is typically due to a recognition of havoc that would ensue in social networks (including gang networks) if one were to seek revenge (compare Hughes and Short, 2005). Such considerations place a novel spin on the collective efficacy literature, moving the phenomenon from the neighborhood to the individual unit of analysis, and moving the locus of control from reputable neighborhood actors (Carr, 2003; Pattillo, 1998) to young people themselves (see Daiute and Fine, 2003).[2]

While a focus on individuals who abstain from retaliation may be rare in the criminological literature (but see Kennedy, 1988), scholars of law and society have found that the modal response to disputes is to 'lump it' (Felstiner, 1974), leaving a social situation with a dispute unresolved, even in inner-city areas where, it has been argued, 'the culture of the street doesn't allow backing down' (Anderson, 1999: 97). As Merry (1979: 892) notes, based on her ethnography of conflict management in an inner-city area, 'Ultimately, the only resolution of disputes occurs through avoidance, the "exit" of one or both disputants from the neighborhood'. Even studies

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supporting the 'code of the street' thesis note that 'reliance on street justice may deter would-be perpetrators from attacking because of fear of retribution' (Stewart and Simons, 2006: 25, citing Pattillo, 1998), and 'violent retribution, and residents' fear of it, may serve as a form of social control – perhaps *preventing* some types of crime in the community' (Kubrin and Weitzer, 2003: 178, citing Black, 1976 and Parenti, 2000; also see Katz and Jackson-Jacobs, 2004; Kennedy, 1988). As yet such conjectures are purely hypothetical, as few studies explore how young people in the inner-city may manage to 'lump it' when faced with a perceived injury. Felstiner et al.'s (1980: 633) observation that 'social scientists have rarely studied the capacity of people to tolerate substantial distress and injustice' remains as pertinent today as 29 years ago. This study is designed to address this gap by exploring the emotional dynamics of avoiding retaliation, involving emotive dissonance and the acceptance of ambivalence.

Emotive dissonance

Aside from a few remarkable exceptions (Athens, 2005; Collins, 2008; Katz, 1988), criminologists have mostly overlooked the emotional dynamics of disputes (De Haan and Loader, 2002; Ferrell, 1999). In the literature on emotion management, on the other hand, much of the richest data focuses on how workers *intrapersonally* manage disputes (Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Chin, 2000; Copp, 1998; Dilorio and Nusbaumer, 1993; Garot, 2004; Goodrum and Stafford, 2003; Hochschild, 1983; Leidner, 1993; Stenross and Kleinman, 1989; Sutton, 1991; Tolich, 1993; Wharton, 1993, 1999; Wharton and Erickson, 1995). Hochschild developed the notion of emotion management to reveal how individuals attune themselves through 'surface acting' and 'deep acting' to the rules and ideologies of private and public life. Hochschild (1983) was especially concerned with the emotive dissonance and alienation wrought when emotional *labor* is compelled by an employer, and one must attune one's feelings, like it or not, to the demands of the workplace.[3] The young men in this sample, on the other hand, reveal how emotive dissonance may also result from the everyday phenomenon of emotion *work*, when young people must restrict their desire to retaliate due to structural constraints. Young men struggle to attune their actions and emotions to the demands of social structure by 'lumping it', or in local terms, 'sucking it up', even as they express the fantastic desire to indulge in righteous retaliation.[4]

What constitutes an omission for criminologists is certainly not overlooked in studies of dispute resolution, as the management of parties' emotional dynamics is seen as central to mediation (Lieberman, 2006) and negotiation (Fisher and Shapiro, 2005). A number of studies have focused

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specifically on how various socially entrusted troubleshooters manage the emotions of clients involved in disputes. Sarat and Felstiner (1995) show how divorce lawyers must manage the emotions of their clients, in order to help them focus on resolving the case and moving on. McClenahen and Lofland (1976) show how Deputy US Marshals must manage the anger and grief of prisoners as they are taken into custody. Yet, as with studies in the sociology of emotions more generally, the focus lies disproportionately on the side of the worker, either in terms of how they must manage their own emotions (Hochschild, 1983), or the emotions of those with whom they are encharged (Thoits, 1996).

Few studies have gone as far in examining the emotional dynamics of crime as Katz's (1988) book *Seductions of Crime*. In his discussion of righteous slaughter, Katz invokes the sensation of wetness to exemplify the experience of humiliation, and such images as water boiling over, or of Yosemite Sam exploding in rage, to illustrate the felt dynamic by which 'rage constructs and transforms humiliation so quickly and smoothly that talking and writing about the process can very easily become artificial and obfuscating' (Katz, 1988: 23). Katz's (1999) more recent work analyzes road rage using the metaphor of dominoes, exploring the interactional moves of conflicts, as each party struggles to make the final avenging move and not be left with a 'domino' they cannot play. At that point, drivers are left only with an 'imaginative solution to conflict', a pent-up frustration which may be transferred to other individuals or inanimate objects. As Jackson-Jacobs (2002) states, 'Saving-face is always imaginatively and retrospectively possible'. One remarkable and frightening aspect of many of the accounts below concerns how readily most respondents have access to guns, and imagine using them to redress their conflict. Other analysts of violent confrontations (Athens, 2005; Felson, 1982; Goffman, 1967; Jackson-Jacobs, 2004; Luckenbill, 1977) stress how violence often involves avoiding shame and protecting one's honor, yet they overlook the ambivalence experienced when retaliation might threaten social ties.

The acceptance of ambivalence

Gadd and Jefferson (2007) draw upon Klein's (1988a, 1988b) theories of development, and especially her analysis of ambivalence, as central to their new psychosocial approach to crime. According to Klein, all individuals wrestle with competing, mutually contradicting desires from a very early age. A state of maturity is possible when one is able to reconcile competing desires and settle into an acceptance of ambivalence, learning that one need not destroy that which cannot be controlled. For Gadd and Jefferson, Klein's theories are integral for understanding how criminal behavior may

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result from an inability to reconcile oneself to ambivalence. Maruna (2001) analyzes the reverse of such processes, showing how ex-convicts struggle to come to terms with past crimes, and reintegrate into society by learning to accept perceived harms without resorting to retaliation. Similarly, the tales of the young men presented below might be read as models of how one might overcome emotive dissonance, and accept the often ambivalent situations which experience provides.

The dataset

The data presented are based on observations conducted between 1997 and 2001 in and around Choices Alternative Academy (CAA), a small, inner-city alternative school in the western United States.[5] Built in the early 1990s by a conglomeration of federal and local officials to serve drop-outs between the ages of 14 and 21, the school is situated in a six census block area (roughly one square mile) with the highest crime and poverty in a large US county at the time of the research. Approximately 300 students were enrolled; 61 were on probation and about 200 attended on any given day. I chose a school as a setting where I could spend a sustained period of time with young people and be of service to them. Students who are sent there often have histories of violence, drug use, truancy, dropping out of school, and teen pregnancy.

Over a period of four years, I interviewed 46 students, six repeatedly, plus 11 teachers, two administrators, one security guard, and a community activist. Interviews were open-ended, lasting from one to three hours, and were taped and transcribed. I refer to my interviewees as consultants, as they informed me on matters I was unable to observe first-hand. For some, the total time of interviewing lasted up to 12 hours. I conducted a theoretical snowball sample out of relations developed in the field, and based on a number of criteria. For instance, I sought a racial/ethnic balance that would mirror the neighborhood, and interviewees who represented variations along the continuum from gang-member to non-gang-member, nonviolent to violent. I also sought to interview students with a variety of interests, including those who excel academically, musically, in sports, or mechanically.

Sessions with students were semi-structured life history interviews (see Vigil, 1988), covering such topics as places the consultant lived, reasons for moving, descriptions of fights, drug use, experiences in school, intimate and familial relationships, hobbies, and experiences with gangs. Transcripts were provided to consultants when possible, checked for accuracy, and used as the basis for further questions. I coded the data according to the tradition of grounded theory, as discussed by Charmaz (2006) and Emerson et al.

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(1995). I analyzed the data using techniques of analytic induction (Katz, 2001), to refine the explanation by teasing out negative cases.

In each interview with students, I asked my consultant about fights they had experienced and 'walked away from' throughout their life course. I recorded a total of 93 stories of fights, and 41 accounts of 'walking away'. Respondents varied greatly in loquaciousness; some spoke for over a half-hour about a single fight episode, while others limited their description to a few lines, despite my efforts to solicit as complete an account as possible. I also directly observed 15 instances of fights, six which I categorize as 'play-fights', as the participants were laughing and smiling at the time, even though they could become quite rough (see Boulton, 1991).[6]

In each of the five cases below, the consultant speaks from within the midst of a struggle with a challenging dilemma, and expresses an emotionally charged need to talk about it. In some cases, the narrator is beset by a burdensome grief and rage over what occurred months ago, while in other cases he is troubled by an ongoing, intractable situation which continues to haunt him. While other respondents also spoke of difficult situations in their lives, the following circumstances are notable for being fresh and still heavily laden with emotion, which is why they were chosen for this analysis.[7]

Since each story is still very much in play, none of the young men are certain whether or not they might retaliate. With three of these men, Steve, Ben and Shawn, I was able to follow-up with them four years after our initial interviews, which provides the crux of the analysis of acceptance of ambivalence. Four years later, Steve and Shawn seemed to consider their issues resolved, while Ben still wrestled with his. Of the two with whom I was unable to follow-up, Ernest had resolved to 'lump it', while Erick had decided to move, but would retaliate if aggressions continued. Their ages range from 16 to 20 at the time of the first interview; Steve, Erick and Ernest consider themselves Latino; Ben and Shawn are from Belize, but are often perceived as African American.

Reconsidering retaliation

Steve

Steve has lived his whole life just blocks from CAA, and claimed that he had been involved with the 18th Street Gang for nearly that entire time, since he was six. Although he still 'kicked it' with many gang members, and wore slightly toned-down gang-style clothes, he claimed that he hadn't really banged since he was 15, when many of his homies had either died or gone to jail. He is a good student and a superlative artist, having won a

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number of prizes in local art shows. When I interviewed him on his 20th birthday, he spoke of his gang banging days.

> 'So what kind of things did you do when you messed around with gangs?'
> 'Well, typical thing is to go shooting, go robbing, selling dope, riding, jumping people, stabbing people. All that stuff, stuff you always did since you was little.'
> 'Uh huh. How old were most of the guys in the gang?'
> 'I was the youngest one. 'Til today I think I was the youngest one in 18th Street. Most are something like 13, 12; I'm the youngest, I was only six. Now they consider me as an old one, as a veteran.'

The issue eating at Steve during our interview was that his girlfriend of two years aborted their baby without his knowledge, because his long-time male friends told her that their sister likes Steve. One of his hopes was to be a father and raise a family, and he was deeply hurt by this news.

> 'I didn't think she was gonna tell me she had aborted it. I didn't see her for like two, three weeks. And when she came she gave me that news. I was like, "Maaan." She told me, "Hey, your friend told me this and that about –." I go, "Oh man." I said "Dang. Well." See I wanna shoot them but I can't, 'cause I know they mom. See we all grew up together.'

As in many of these interviews, Steve clearly presents structural inhibitions early in his tale of non-retaliation, as a justification for not retaliating. Having grown up with the young men whom Steve believes caused his girlfriend to abort their baby, and knowing their mother, provides a locally rational 'good reason' (see Garot, 2007a) for not shooting them. As he continues, he struggles to express his emotive dissonance, in a narrative full of pauses and doubts.

> 'So I don't know.'
> 'Uh huh.'
> 'They come here to this school.'
> 'They do?'
> 'I can't staaand seeing them. Ooooo. I already told them, "I better not see, y'all better not pull another thing, not even raise ya voice at me, Imo shoot you." I don't like it. That was that. That's what's getting me mad right now. I'm not even talkin' of goin' back. Who knows where I would've been right now.'
> 'Yeah.'
> 'So I don't know.'
> 'Yeah. So you still feel like you could use a gun to solve a problem?'
> 'That's what, that's what I'm tryin' not to do,' he laughs.
> 'Tryin' not to do.' I laugh.

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‘That’s what I’m really trying not to do. I even, I even took ’em outta my house.’

‘Took the guns outta your house?’

‘I give ’em to my neighbor,’ he chuckles. ‘“Keep my guns for me.”’

‘Uh huh.’

‘That’s what I’m really trying, I’m trying to find out another way. I know it ain’t gonna really do nothin’ ’cause when I pass by they giggle. I don’t know if they gigglin’ towards me. But whatever. It’s like I told them, I go, “Oh, when I pass by I better not even hear you, ’cause I’m gonna snap at ya, and I don’t give a fuck how many babies you all got or where you from, I’mo shoot you.” It’s hard.’

‘It’s hard.’

‘It’s hard. Yeah.’

‘So how long have you felt that way towards them?’

‘For like the last three months.’

‘The last three months. Wow.’

‘It got, that got to me, it got to me.’

‘So it’s not like that feeling just goes away.’

‘Uh uh. It got, that gots me. It gots me real good.’

According to the code of the street, inner-city residents must fight for respect, yet Steve is trapped by lines of honor wherever he turns (Horowitz, 1983). For his girlfriend to have a child is a great honor, but she has aborted it, which is not only a dishonor, but a disappointment. To add to this, he is dishonored by the rumormongering of his friends, who he feels led his girlfriend to abort the fetus.[8] Additionally, he is unsure why they are giggling when he passes, but if they are giggling at him, it is a further dishonor. When he says he doesn’t care ‘where you from’, he’s referring to their common gang identity with 18th Street (see Garot, 2007b), *a primary structural factor which inhibits him from retaliating*. To avenge this loss of face he is tempted to somehow use his guns against them, but he guards against his rage by placing his own guns out of reach, and avoids looking at the friends who have brought his grief. With no commitment to deep acting and very little desire to surface act (Hochschild, 1983), Steve at least controls his environment in case he might lose control of himself.

Four years later, when Steve happened to return to CAA to talk to the school plant manager, we revisited this dilemma.

I ask Steve how his grandmother is doing, and for one rare moment, he stops his squinty-eyed smile, and tells me she is doing fine. I tell him that there is one thing I want to ask him about, and we drop our heads and turn away from the people waiting in line to create a bit of private space. I ask him about the guys who’d told his girlfriend that thing where she’d aborted her baby. ‘What eventually happened with that?’ He says he still thinks back on that sometimes,

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> and it still makes him angry, but not as bad as before. He tries not to think about it. He's not in touch with those guys anymore who said that, but he says if he did see them, he would still be mad. He says for what they did, he developed the practice of keeping his friends and his girlfriend separate. 'You notice how you don't see me around with her a lot, I don't talk about her,' he says. I nod. He tells me he likes to keep it separate, just to keep things straight.

Steve clearly showed how he was able to come to terms with the wrenching ambivalence of this situation, spatially and temporally separating his time with his girlfriend from time with his friends. While his earlier effort to distance himself from his guns was reactive, one might now notice how his efforts to avoid conflict are proactive, involving segregating different types of relationships. Furthermore, instead of retaliating violently against those who had disrespected him, he came to earn respect through other means. When I knew him at 24, he was working two jobs, as a roofer and a fast-food manager, and he was also the sole caregiver of his grandmother. When he hung out with his homies, he never smoked or drank, and could always be counted on for a ride home. As Joe, one of his friends confided to me, 'I got nothing but respect for him'. Despite living in one of the roughest neighborhoods anywhere, he earns respect not through violence, but by taking care (see Maruna, 2001), as a *veterano* of 18th Street.

Erick

Insofar as Steve learned to become adept at emotionally managing his anger, Erick, a 16-year-old, large (6'2", over 200 pounds) Latino, is well-versed in nearly all of the conflict management strategies discussed by Merry (1979), in trying to manage the profound difficulties posed by his sister, Daisy. He and his mother had kicked her out of the house, had her arrested and sent to juvenile hall, moved, reported her to the police, tried to ignore her, and tried to sue her. Once the police tried to get them to talk to each other, but the sister refused. We might also see Daisy and Erick as engaged in an increasingly high-stakes game of dominoes, in which both sides resist holding the last piece (Katz, 1999).

Daisy, nine years Erick's senior, joined a local gang at age 12 (Erick has four other sisters, one older and three younger; he is the only boy; all were raised only by his mother). According to Erick, Daisy then began to physically abuse their mother, steal her money, and pressure Erick to join the gang when he was six years old. In response, the mother evicted her from the household. To retaliate, Daisy, then 15, threw a molotov cocktail at her family's living room window, which shattered against the security bars and set fire to the couch and draperies. Her mother had her arrested, and she served three years in juvenile hall. When Daisy was released, she went back

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to the gang, and during this time she had three children with three different men. Once when Erick and his uncle were at a local mall, they were jumped and viciously beaten by members of Daisy's gang. Erick then began to take boxing lessons to learn to defend himself. When he was 14, Erick's mother had saved enough money to move the family, but he was horrified to find that his sister followed, moving into an apartment behind theirs. As he related, 'One time I was outside fixing the car, and I saw my little nephews playing around. I'm like, that's my sister's kids. What are they doing there? [...] I told my mom about it.'

Three weeks prior to the interview, Erick reported Daisy to Child Protective Services. As he stated, 'The house looked like a garbage house.' According to Erick, they put her on 'check-up', saying she had a '60% chance of losing her children'. He then purchased a truck and began to work on it diligently, fixed it up in hopes of driving it to school, but then, two weeks after he had reported his sister, he heard people outside his window whom he can only assume were members of Daisy's gang, hitting the truck a number of times with a sledge hammer. He spent much of the interview elaborately describing the truck to me (compare Best, 2006), and experienced such emotive dissonance when it was damaged that he became physically ill.

> It's a V-8, a standard. It's a nice truck. [...] And I got it like fixed up. I dropped it a little bit, and I put a nice steering wheel on it, and I got some nice vents on it, and I have, you know some nice sounds in it. [...] I already have finished sanding it down completely, so I had washed it. [...] It's only been primered for two days, and then bang bang bang, and then oh man. Shh. [...] I went to my friend's house. I said, 'I'mo bring it to school.' And then this happens, and I'll be like – I got sick from Monday to Wednesday.

When Erick called the police to report the incident, he became further enraged that they wanted to see his driver's license, asked how he was able to afford the car, and even checked under the hood to see if parts were stolen. As he stated, 'Oh man. I didn't call 'em to ask me where I get the car, you know.' Afraid he might lose his temper, 'I just went inside the house and that's it', in order to manage it. Erick had seen the need to learn such techniques, and was the only young person I spoke with who sought professional help to manage his emotive dissonance and control his rage.

> 'How did you learn to control your temper like that?'
> 'I went to counseling actually.'
> 'Oh you did?'
> 'Yeah, I was in counseling.'
> 'Yeah. When was that?'
> 'Maybe like two or three months ago. Like before I would just get mad and I would just start breaking things and doing things. So I was like, I'm gonna go to counseling. I gotta stop all this.'

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Drawing from his training, Erick noticed his feelings of anger, and went inside to engage in deep acting by cooling down, but he did not give up seeking a formal means of retaliation. With criminal charges blocked, he decided to sue his sister for damages.[9] Meanwhile, he and his mom had packed their boxes and were ready to move out of state.[10] Yet he had his doubts that this would be effective, confiding, 'You know my sister always say that she's never gonna stop bothering my mom.' Faced with this stalker (Dunn, 2001; Emerson et al., 1998), he reasoned that if she followed them out of state, he would try to kill her (see Emerson, 1981 on last resorts).

> 'I don't know man, I just feel like, like I said I wanna kill her, you know. I bought a rifle. It's a nice rifle. You know those 7 millimeter rifles? Have you seen 'em?'
>
> 'No.'
>
> 'You know how big those bullets are?'
>
> 'How big?'
>
> 'About this long. Seven millimeter. I just barely bought it, 'cause I have money saved up in the bank. [. . .] I had to go with my mom and take out money, 'cause I couldn't go by myself, you know [to get the money].'
>
> 'Did she know that you bought that?'
>
> 'No, I haven't told her. I don't wanna tell her, or she's gonna tell me something you know', he laughed. 'I bought that rifle 'cause I'm thinkin' about it already. You know it has everything. It doesn't need nothing. It's got a big telescope. It's round and big. It's a cross-man telescope that is good. I've gone to the shooting ranges, like over there in the mountains, you know. I've been to the mountains, and I will shoot something like very far from it, and it'll hit it, like maybe as far as from right here to that pink place over there. I'll hit a soda all the way over there, and it'll blow up. Splash! You see the soda go like that, and like hey, I shot it. And I would just go and shoot and shoot and shoot. I took my uncles you know. [. . .] Like my other uncles and my dad's friend, and we took a lot of guns, like you know other guns. We were shooting, practicing how to shoot.'
>
> 'Do they know how you feel about your sister?'
>
> 'Yeah, they know about it, you know.'
>
> 'What do they say?'
>
> 'Just', he laughed, '"Don't do nothin' stupid," you know. "Try to ignore it." And I'll be like, "How can you try to ignore something that just keeps, you know she keeps doing the same thing over and over and over. I can't ignore it." So you know I've been there. I've gone and I've practiced shooting already, and I know I could do it. I could just do it, but I don't wanna do it. I do wanna do it, 'cause I want everything to stop, you know. But I'm not sure right now.'

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Unlike the excerpts from Mullins et al. (2004), we hear very little about masculinity in this tale, or honor, or a quest for respect. Rather, we see that the antagonist has trespassed upon and destroyed something of vital importance, not just once, but repeatedly.[11] For his entire conscious life, Erick's sister has terrorized him and his family. Despite this, Erick's mother and uncles continue to counsel him to keep his cool, reinforcing the structural inhibition that 'blood is thicker than water', even as the uncles accompany him to the shooting range. Perhaps in teaching him to shoot, the uncles hoped to cathect Erick's rage, without intending him to actually make use of such skills. 'What happened to us is like a movie', Erick said, 'with all those things she's doing to us.' He closed the interview by noting with a laugh, 'You'll probably hear about me later on in the news.' Still, the steps he had taken to avoid such consequences thus far were remarkable. And after 10 years, I have yet to hear about him on the news.

Ben

Ben is an 18-year-old Belizean, born and raised within blocks of CAA. He was a model student, raising and lowering the flag in front of the school each day, providing assistance on the office computer and in the school garden. He was also an exemplary worker at a local retailer, and often wore his work vest to school. In the past he had perfect attendance and was an excellent student, participating in Glee Club, but this changed on his first day at the large local high school.

> 'I just stopped, stayed home.'
> 'What made you not wanna go? What did you see that day?'
> 'Everything was too new to me man.'
> 'Uh huh.'
> 'They didn't have anything. They didn't have any homeroom, they didn't have any classes for me.'
> 'Did they treat you poorly?'
> 'Yeah, [he chuckles] they kept sending me back and forth.'
> 'The teachers?'
> 'Yeah. They kept sending me everywhere man, sayin', go over here to get some classes, go over there. I didn't like that, so I just didn't go back. I only been out for three months, then I came here.'[12]

Ben is the second oldest of four brothers, the oldest of whom was in his early 20s and seldom at home, while the others were 16 and 13. Ben's father left the family following Ben's 11th birthday and moved to Chicago. Ben's 16-year-old brother was getting involved in the local gang, smoking marijuana in Ben's car on a daily basis, and subsequently was sent to

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probation camp. According to Ben, his 13-year-old brother was following in the 16-year-old's footsteps, and enjoyed instigating trouble. A few nights before our second interview, this brother was insulting his mother's boyfriend, who was drunk and already acting abusively towards the boys' mother, and then began to attack Ben's brother. Ben recalled, 'I kept askin' her, "do you want me to get 'im off for you?" And she keeps sayin', "No, I wanna handle it." Then my little brother tried to get 'im off. That's when he started punchin' on my little brother.'

Eventually the boyfriend stopped, laying on the floor drunk and exhausted. Ben sent his mom and brother to separate rooms, and then called his auntie to come pick them up, leaving the boyfriend lying in their apartment. Ben spoke of a deep animosity towards this man, and the rage he felt after a previous incident in which the boyfriend had hit his mom. Like all of the consultants in this analysis, Ben engaged in fantasy revenge as a way to manage the emotive dissonance he experienced by being structurally inhibited from retaliating, even considering excuses he could use in court. His manner of speaking is strikingly similar to the passage from Steve, full of pauses and hesitation, encouraged by the interviewer's use of continuers.

> 'What were you thinkin'?'
> 'I was thinkin' about a bat.'
> 'Getting a bat, uh huh.'
> 'Knockin' 'im down.'
> 'Uh huh.'
> 'Beatin' the livin' hell out of him.'
> 'Uh huh.'
> 'I would like to beat him half to death.'
> 'Right now?'
> 'Not now.'
> 'Yeah. How long did you feel that way? How long did you feel like you wanted to hit him with a baseball bat and smash his head in?'
> 'That lasted for seven weeks.'
> 'Seven weeks you felt that way.'
> 'Yep. And I even thought about ways how I could be if he took me into court, I even thought about ways how I could get out of it.'
> 'Uh huh.'
> 'Like temporary insanity or somethin' like that.'
> 'Uh huh.'
> ''Cause that ain't how I usually act.'
> 'Yeah. Yeah.'
> 'I been thinkin' about all that stuff.'
> 'Uh huh.'

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'Even gettin' a gun and shootin' it.'
'Uh huh.'

Once, in a similar incident, Ben did hit his mother's boyfriend. Then subsequently, like many victims of domestic abuse, experienced misgivings (see Emerson, 1994), in part because the boyfriend had helped him in the past. In Ben's reckoning of his stepfather's sympathy margin (Clark, 1987), his abuse did not quite override his good deeds.[13]

> 'That time there when I did hit him, it did feel good, but afterwards man.'
> 'Afterwards?'
> 'I felt, I felt real messed up. [. . .] I don't ever wanna do that again. Never.'
> 'How come?'
> 'Because, the way it makes me feel, man. I [exhales]. That man helped me so much. I shouldn't a put my hands on 'im. But then he did hit my mom and my brother. [. . .] I do get confused sometimes,' he chuckles.
> [. . .]
> 'So um, did you feel like you should apologize or anything for hitting him?'
> 'Yeah, I apologized.'
> 'And what'd he say?'
> 'He said it's all right, because he didn't know what he was doin'. He shouldn't a did that in the first place. I talked to him for a long time about that [exhales]. He made me late for school too [exhales]. He's been doin' all this stuff for me, lookin' for insurance for my car . . .'

Four years later, Ben and I shared a three-hour interview over lunch and in my car, which I parked in front of the community-based organization where I volunteered. He still worked at the auto parts retailer, where he had moved into a semi-managerial position. Ben's mother's boyfriend continued to drink and be abusive, and was still in their lives. Ben's feelings toward him remained ambivalent.

Ernest

Ernest is a friendly 17-year-old Latino who has lived near CAA all his life. In describing how he came to attend CAA, he told of missing a week at his last high school when his brother had a major operation, and then not returning to school for two more weeks. When he did return, he found himself far behind in his work, and became discouraged by his failing grades and lack of assistance from teachers (see Fine, 1991). As he stated:

> 'The teachers wouldn't help me, and I used to ask them for help with this or that; they didn't care. I was like, "Fuck it man. What the fuck am I coming

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> to school for if they're not gonna teach me anything?" [. . .] They was giving me fails fails fails fails. Fuck that man, I ain't going to school for that man. I wasn't getting credits; what the fuck I was going to school for?'

For six months Ernest dropped out of school, and fell in love with raising pit bulls. He learned the hobby from a friend who sold him male and female all-white dogs with red noses for $100. Similar to the devotion of Erick (a friend of Ernest's) to his truck, Ernest came to devote most of his time to training, breeding, and fighting his bulls, buying them the best food and equipment, and making an estimated $1000 a year from his efforts. Some of the money went to his mom, some to buy clothes, and the rest went to his dogs. 'I used to love my dogs a lot maaan. I don't know, I used to love 'em a lot. [. . .] Watch, I'mo show you his picture, watch. Yeah, he had a big chest man.'

Unfortunately, Ernest lost his dogs when a neighbor became angry that they had broken his dog's leg. Although Ernest's mother paid the $200 veterinarian bill, the neighbor nonetheless poisoned Ernest's pit bulls. Ernest discussed his emotional response to this incident.

> 'After that I wasn't making no money. I was mad right there.'
>
> 'I bet you were mad.'
>
> 'Man I was MAD man, I I was gonna – I don't know – I was gonna do something to 'em man, but I kick back right there 'cause –'
>
> 'You didn't do anything?'
>
> 'Nah, 'cause he knew a lot of them gangsters from right there, from 36th. I didn't want to mess with them, 'cause he's gonna tell them, "What's up? Let's go do something to that fool." He'll fuck me up.'

Ernest explained his desire for revenge, not out of obeisance to a code, but out of sheer anger. Yet Ernest controled his desire due to his knowledge of the neighborhood's social structure. As Katz (1988, 2000; Katz and Jackson-Jacobs, 2004) states, 'It is at least as feasible to understand gangs as reducing crime as causing crime.' As the interview continued, Ernest told of his fear for his mother, and his fear of what he would do if his mother were hurt.

> 'Did you think about what you were gonna do?'
>
> 'Tsk! Yeah I think about it man. I got my mom right there. I don't wanna fuck with that man. They fuck with my mom, that's it man. I don't know what I would do man. I'll kill 'em man, fuck that.'
>
> 'What did you think you might do to him for doing that to your dogs?'
>
> 'I was gonna beat him up man! I don't know how, but I was gonna go, go up and shoot his dog or something. Kill his dog too. But something held me back, and I'm glad I didn't do it.'
>
> 'Yeah. Are you glad you didn't?'

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> 'Yeah I'm glad man, 'cause man, fuck it, it's not worth it man, do something like that, get your enemies and shit like that behind you and shit. Man I just left it like that man, fuck it.'

Here, 'fuck it' might be considered an iconic statement of emotive dissonance, in which Ernest juxtaposes in structural inhibitions to retaliating. Echoing the sidewalk vendors and junkies who have given up on mainstream aspirations after numerous disappointments in Duneier's (1999) analysis, 'fuck it' embodies both rage and resignation, neatly encapsulating frustrated desire. Like the others, Ernest embellished numerous revenge fantasies, but took them a bit further by playing them out against a wall.

> 'What did you do with your anger?'
> 'I don't know man.'
> 'Did it make you feel sick or did you go punch on a wall?'
> 'I used to punch the wall man.'
> 'You did?'
> 'I used to punch the wall man. It used to fuck with my fingers. Look, you see?'
> 'Uh huh.'
> 'I used to hit the wall a lot man.'
> ''Cause of this?'
> ''Cause of that man. I got mad man. I got – I even cried like one or two times man. I got mad. They were my dogs. I used to, I took 'em to the shops. My mom spent like more than $1000 on them two dogs. Took 'em to shops. I got his ears clipped and everything. That's what fucked it up man.'

Instead of inflicting his rage against his antagonist, Ernest cathects it against the wall, punishing himself as a painful living embodiment of his predicament, borne witness by his scabbed knuckles and the worn pictures of his deceased dogs, which he continued to carry in his wallet, his bittersweet memories helping him cope with ambivalence.

Shawn

Shawn is an 18-year-old, soft-spoken Belizean who immigrated to the neighborhood with his father when he was 14, and missed his mother dearly. Although his father lived close to the school, Shawn chose to live with his half-sister because of conflicts with his dad. This posed a problem, since many of his cousins and uncles were affiliated with the Crips, while his half-sister lived in a Blood neighborhood. Thus, Shawn was especially careful about when he left the house and what he wore. One afternoon as I drove him home from school, I noted the colors of his clothes were thoroughly mixed: a long-sleeved, collared shirt with thin blue, red and green stripes, and black pants secured with a Jamaican-colored knit belt.[14]

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While negotiating gang territories made Shawn's life difficult, his situation with his girlfriend of two years made it nearly impossible. A week before our interview, he went to see her at 2:00 am, partly out of suspicion that she was cheating on him, and he found her in bed with another man. This man also happened to be a gangbanger, and he pulled his gun on Shawn.

> 'And when he pull his gun, [. . .] he crank it back.'
> 'Mm.'
> 'Which was a nine, nine millimeter.'
> [. . .]
> 'So at the time, OK we there, it was like, who is this who is this? He was like, he's from Harlem Crips. And I'm talking, LAF, Looney as Fuck. He was like, is that Bloods or Crips? I said, "Man, this is Crip', know what I mean?" He was like, "Well, what I'm saying. I don't have no problem with you callin' my people from, from 30s." So then he was like, "Who your people?" And I start callin' some of my cousin's name and whatever, which they're older cousins and younger cousins, they stay in their area.'
> 'Mm hm.'
> 'And he was like, "All right." So after, I was like, what I mean, "Whassup?" I was talkin' to her, I was like, "Whassup? What's this actually all about?" But then again I really care less to hear anyway what was that all about. [. . .] It's like, they're from 30s, my people's from 30s too. And we figure, my cousin, we already know families comes first.'

This is perhaps the ultimate humiliation, not only for a young man in the inner-city, but for anyone, anywhere. Yet the situation was resolved peacefully, thanks to their gang ties. For, as Shawn tells it, rather than firing shots or attacking each other, each wanted to know, in fact desperately needed to know, the other's gang affiliation (see Garot, 2007b). When they find they are from sets friendly to each other (not all Crip sets are), they started 'callin',' dropping names, and find that friends and relations from both sets affiliate with 30th Avenue Crips. Still, Shawn hoped that his family ties would outweigh gang ties in backing him up when he chose to retaliate against this interloper. He later told me he was unsuccessful in these efforts, as his cousins not only refused to back him up, but warned him against retaliating. This dilemma proved increasingly difficult for Shawn, especially when his ex-girlfriend's sister told him that his rival, like Steve's antagonists but with a vengeance, was spreading rumors amongst Crips that Shawn had become a Blood, since he lived in a Blood neighborhood. Shawn spoke of this rumor with utmost seriousness, and worked to defuse it lest his fellow Crips come to act on it.

With his plans to retaliate against his rival foiled, he still harbored resentment toward his girlfriend for the pain she caused him, and expressed hopes to strike back.

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'Truthfully enough, how could you actually hurt somebody you adore when you love this person? Then again I look at it and say, well hey, this person, you, you love this person. How could they, how could they hurt you? But I say the same way how they hurt you you could hurt them.'

'Mm hm.'

'It was emotional, but in a way, if you can't hurt them emotional, why not hurt them physically?'

Four years later, at 24, Shawn was philosophical about this predicament. Having moved on to a steady girlfriend for over a year, taking care of her children as if they were his own (he has none of his own), he remembered the pain of the experience quite vividly, and was grateful for not having resorted to violence. When I reminded him of the incident, he responded:

'Something just told me to just go by. That's what happened. The question did come on my mind before it happened, just probably listening to songs, or probably seeing a movie. What would I do if I actually ended up in that predicament? I thank God above to know that, well it's not the end of the world. I do live and get the experience. Even right now at this point, it's like, everybody goes through their own trials and tribulations, doesn't matter what it was about.'

Like most individuals embroiled in disputes, Shawn learned to 'lump it'. While Steve resolved to live with emotive dissonance by working hard, taking care of his grandmother, and keeping his romantic life separate from his friends, Shawn came to terms with his ambivalence by caring for a new girlfriend and her children, and moving on (again, see Maruna, 2001). Despite what individuals may say about a 'code of the streets', 'honor' or 'respect', in actual life situations, individuals in the inner-city learn to live with and abide by what they see as the best decision for a given circumstance, in light of its effect on their social ties.

'Lumping it' for a place in the community

Despite dictums that one cannot back down from a conflict without losing respect (Anderson, 1999), it is important that we consider seriously what members take as circumstances which mitigate the necessity of such measures (see also Garot, 2007a). While a number of studies have tested and affirmed Anderson's thesis, we are well-advised to not lose sight of our consultants' agency. An 'affront' or 'insult' in itself is not sufficient to inspire retaliation. Rather, individuals take into account the effect of violence on their social ties before responding.

For those who do retaliate, acts which dishonor (Horowitz, 1983) or disrespect (Anderson, 1999; Bourgeois, 1995) may retrospectively be

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deemed an important justification for violence (Mullins et al., 2004). Yet prospectively, the importance of such 'dissing' is far from determinative of violent retaliation. That more tightly knit communities experience less crime and violence is far from an accident (Pattillo, 1998), but not necessarily for the reasons we have thought. The righteous grandmother who is quick to discipline neighborhood youth, and the alderman quick to make neighborhood changes such as adding lights to a local park (Carr, 2003), are surely important in reducing crime through their community involvement, yet they are most hesitant to intervene with those they perceive as most violence-prone (Wilkinson, 2007), such as the young men of this sample. Moreover, when a young person tells of a time when they abstained from retaliation, it is rarely the grandmother or the alderman who come foremost in his accounts. If the antagonists are life-long friends whose mother you know well (Steve), has overwhelming gang backup (Ernest), or is a member of a gang friendly to one's own (Shawn), one may well think twice before retaliating. Even if that antagonist has done nearly all they can to jeopardize family ties, Ben still has conflicted feelings of loyalty for his stepfather, and Erick is more willing to engage in a costly and cumbersome interstate move with his mother than to raise the rifle he has fantasized shooting at his sister.

The case of Shawn is especially enlightening, for it involves such a prototypical situation of revenge against the rival for one's passions. Many have shown how gangs play an important role in maintaining community (Brotherton and Barrios, 2004; Pattillo, 1998; Suttles, 1968; Venkatesh, 1997; Zatz and Portillos, 2000), yet few have provided such an intimate glimpse of the importance of such ties as Shawn. How many individuals, confronted with a similarly dramatic situation, could hesitate as Shawn and his nemesis did, thoughtfully considering the social damage which their actions might wreck, and simply lump it? Such a tale inevitably adds another layer of critique to the widespread acceptance of the criminalization of gang members, and bodes that we be cautious in our efforts to reduce or diminish such ties in hopes of reducing violence (see McGloin, 2005).

Just as the consultants in this study take pause prior to retaliating, we should also take pause before characterizing the quest for respect through retaliation as a general tendency among inner-city residents (Mullins et al., 2004). By focusing primarily on violent outcomes, criminology misses the infinite moments of nonviolence in the lives of even so-called violent offenders. Whether one responds violently 'in the end' is not necessarily as important as the many instances, reasons, and strategies by which one was able, in surely a much greater number of instances, to respond nonviolently. Criminologists should begin to take greater pains to capture such nuances.

While Anderson carefully notes that 'decent' and 'street' are conceptual categories by which members organize and judge their behavior, any

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resident will act nonviolently in light of certain structural inhibitions: where, for instance, retaliation would betray existing ties, even if such ties seem strained to the breaking point. On the other hand, victims may be more likely to retaliate, and in fact may relish a righteous retaliation, if it will reaffirm important social ties (Kubrin and Weitzer, 2003). The necessity to preserve social ties dominates such decision-making; concerns with 'masculinity' and 'respect' are important only insofar as they affect such ties. Whichever option is chosen, retaliation or lumping, is ultimately based on an individual's calculus of which might threaten their social integration less, or enhance it more. The emotive dissonance of 'lumping it' comprises the cost young people are often willing to endure to maintain their place in community.

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Notes

1 Anderson (1999) emphasizes that individuals in the inner-city, both decent and street, follow the code of the street in order to insure one's safety and ultimately improve one's life-chances. He notably underemphasizes that individuals may also follow the code in defending others they care for, such as friends and family members.
2 Although Browning et al. (2004: 503) have shown that stronger social networks may 'provide a source of social capital for offenders, potentially diminishing the regulatory effectiveness of collective efficacy', they failed to note how these very networks may well diminish violence within their ranks.
3 Sloan (2007) has developed a test of this thesis using Turner's (1976) notion of self-concept anchorage. Bolton and Boyd (2003) have provided an on-target expansion and critique of Hochschild, adding prescriptive and philanthropic emotion management to Hochschild's model, and showing that the latter is far from alienating. Other expansions of emotional management include interpersonal emotion management (Francis, 1997; Thoits, 1996), emotional sensitivity (Garot, 2004; Ostrow, 1990), and reciprocal emotion management (Lively, 2000).
4 On the emotional thrill of righteous retaliation, see Katz (1988), Kubrin and Weitzer (2003) and Mullins et al. (2004).

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5 Alternative schools are typically seen as a way to balance the right of all students to receive an education with the right of nonviolent, nondisruptive students not to be menaced by violence and the disruption (see Klagholz, 1995). Many students at CAA have been transferred there for frequent episodes of fighting and violence, although others were transferred for dealing drugs, and others are simply drop-outs from traditional high schools, who have sought out CAA as a means to achieve a high school diploma. All names for the school and individuals involved in this research are pseudonyms.

6 In one instance, two young males who were chasing and grappling with each other crashed through a locked gate on a six-foot chained-link fence, only to arise laughing and somewhat surprised. The lock was badly damaged.

7 Such stories have the potential of transforming a sociological interview into a psychological one. I consulted with a psychologist to insure I was appropriately managing our interactions, and stayed in touch with my consultants often long after the interview to help them cope with difficult events which might have been raised.

8 Suttles (1968) prominently discusses rumormongering as a prime reason for fights among the young people he observed in Chicago. For a more recent discussion of the social importance of rumors, see Fine et al. (2005).

9 As Danzig and Lowry (1975) and Merry and Silbey (1984) reported (both in Kennedy, 1988), transient, lower income individuals tend to resort to official agencies more often than those with upper incomes to resolve disputes. Such tactics are typically weapons of the weak, who are unable or unwilling to pursue more violent and efficacious means of redress. This common practice of resorting to official agencies for assistance contradicts a central thesis, and justification for the code of the street (Anderson, 1999).

10 Emily, a Latina of 18, also spoke of moving in response to antagonisms from local, rival gang members.

> 'We had problems with gang bangers that lived around us. They were always chasing me and my sister so we had to move.'
>
> 'Did your whole family move because of the gang banging?'
>
> 'Yeah. My dad and my sister. Me and my twin sister, like we were from a different gang that didn't get along with the gang where we lived. So they would see us and they would start chasing us every day.'
>
> 'Every day?'
>
> 'They'd chase us from school. We couldn't go outside. They'd be waiting for us outside, waiting for us to come out.'
>
> 'Mm hm.'
>
> 'So we moved.'

Many families have moved out of the area around CAA to suburban regions, where they often find problems with gangs and violence to be even

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more pernicious, as they are surrounded by other families who have taken similar steps, neglecting to realize that their 'gang problem' was perhaps more 'local' than they had realized.

11 As Goffman (1967: 249) noted, 'If the victim still declines to join the battle, the aggressor may goad him with increasingly unpalatable acts, in an apparent effort either to find his ignition point, or to demonstrate that he doesn't have one.'

12 Note that his reasons do not have to do with academic or social alienation, but with bureaucratic frustration. Faced with an administration totally unprepared for him, not providing him with a homeroom class and sending him 'back and forth', he simply lost patience and dropped out. Such a phenomenon is all too common in inner-city schools, leading students to speak of those who leave not as 'drop-outs' but as 'push-outs'. As Jacqueline Kingon (2001: 30) notes, in her first year teaching journal from a New York City elementary school:

> There is a mix-up in the office. Some new parents are trying to find their children's class but their names are not on anyone's list. The children are dressed up, expecting to attend the first day of school but are put on the back burner and told to go home and try again tomorrow. For some, the same thing will happen the next day, and the next.

13 Perhaps this is an example of the Stockholm Syndrome (Strentz, 1980), a term coined by Nels Bejerot for hostages who showed loyalty to their hostagetakers during the Norrmalmstorg robbery of Kreditbanken at Norrmalmstorg, Stockholm, Sweden. The bank robbers held bank employees hostage from the 23rd to 28th August 1973. Also see Hirschman (1970) for an organizational/economic analysis of the dynamics of exit, voice and loyalty.

14 In describing the need for a gang intervention program in Cleveland, Walker and Schmidt (1996) note how students would carry their clothes in bags, so that they could change into the proper colors as they cross gang boundaries. One afternoon as I drove Shawn home from school, he told me how he managed potential danger:

> The morning is OK, from his house to Grove Street, but 'the bus is scary' from Grove to Hampshire, because a lot of Bloods take that, so he really has to watch himself. The bus down Hampshire is easier though, so he can relax more then. Then he needs to get home and stay inside by three, because that's when all the Bloods get out of school, so if he's out on the street then he could get into trouble. [. . .] He has to watch what he puts on in the morning, because he can't wear Crip colors by his home, but he can't wear Blood colors at CAA.

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