

Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory:

An African American Perspective

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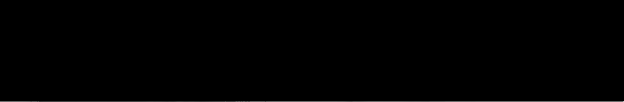
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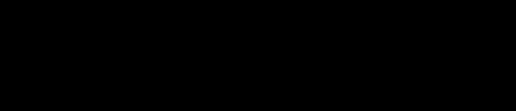
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ABSTRACT

TITLE: Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory: An African American
Perspective

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Homicide is the leading cause of death for African American male and female adolescents. African-American adolescent's experience peer homicide at a disproportionately higher rate in comparison to adolescents of other racial and ethnic groups. Despite research efforts to intervene and explain this phenomenon, there is little empirical evidence that addresses the meaning of the peer homicide experience for African American adolescents and its impact upon their choices as they transition to adulthood. This understanding is a crucial step in designing appropriate and effective interventions to improve adolescents' quality of life and viability in society. The goal of this grounded theory study was to provide a theoretical understanding of African American adolescents' meanings of and experiences with violence, particularly homicidal death of peers, from a sociocultural ecological human development perspective. Dimensional Analysis, a qualitative research method for developing grounded theory, was used to guide data collection and analysis. Semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were conducted and analyzed until dimension categories and explanatory linkages were described and a dense theoretical statement was achieved that explained the larger picture of adolescent violence. The theory was entitled "Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory: An African American Perspective." The theory consists

of five major factors (sub-dimensions) that influence surviving adolescent violence and was referred to by participants as “The Game.” The five dimensions of “The Game” are (a) connecting, (b) retaliating, (c) regretting, (d) reflecting, and (e) staying in or getting out. The context surrounding these experiences was considered as an interacting foundation for the explanation of this social phenomenon.

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Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory:

An African American Perspective

Chapter 1

Specific Aims

Homicide is the second leading cause of death among 15 to 24 years old and is the leading cause of death for African Americans of the same age (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). In this dissertation, African Americans refer to a group of people having a common African heritage, who may have roots in the US, England, the Caribbean, or other places. The same nomenclature is maintained throughout the dissertation. The homicidal rates for African American adolescents are seven times greater than for European American adolescents (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). Between 1980 and 1994, there was a 47% increase in the number of African American adolescents murdered. Thus, African American adolescents experience the homicide of a peer in disproportionate numbers when compared to other racial and ethnic groups.

Despite the recognized magnitude of this problem, very little is known about the meaning and experiences of peer homicide among African American adolescents who live and survive this experience. Research studies have focused on the amount and effects of exposure to violence on these adolescents, and have identified a need to learn more about the impact of chronic exposure to violence (Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Dyson, 1990; Horowitz, et al., 1995; Osofsky, et al., 1993; Schwab-Stone, et al., 1995; Shakoor & Chalmers, 1991). Other studies (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Koop & Lundberg, 1992) have concluded that the solutions to violence are very complex and that research on the causes, prevention, and cures of violence is needed. Although the need for further

research on the etiology of violence within the community is documented, there remains a gap in the knowledge that addresses the impact of this phenomenon within the context and conditions of the lives of African American adolescents. Understanding the meaning of this experience from the adolescent's point of view is a crucial step in designing appropriate, effective services to improve the outcomes for this vulnerable group.

Therefore, the specific aims of this study are to:

1. Describe the experience of homicidal death of peers from the perspective of African American adolescents who lost a peer to violence; and
2. Develop a grounded theory reflecting the experience of African American adolescents who lost a peer to homicide.

Background and Significance

Violence is a serious pervasive problem that affects adolescents in the United States. The availability of firearms, the lack of opportunities, poverty, drug use and joblessness, are just a few of the factors contributing to violence (Almgren, 1998; Ellickson, 1997; Pacific Center for Violence Prevention (PCVP), 1996). Many adolescents are exposed to and are involved in a variety of violent behaviors including domestic and family violence, dating violence, media violence, and violence between peers. Homicide has become a health problem of epidemic proportions among adolescents in urban African American communities, with significant consequences for the surviving adolescents, their families, the larger community, and society. In 1994, over half of the African American adolescents killed, were between 15 and 17 years (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). Alex Kotlowitz (1991) in There are No Children Here describes the

violence experienced in the daily life of two young boys living in Chicago's Henry Homer Housing Project.

As the summer of 1988 approached, the shooting picked up. Twice in May, LaJoe herded the children into the hallway, where they crouched against the walls to avoid stray bullets. Pharoah's stutter worsened, so that he barely talked and stayed mostly by himself. He continued to shake whenever he heard a loud noise. Lafayette told his mother, "Mama, if we don't get away someone's gonna end up dead. I feel it."

As in the example above, statistics on adolescent violence illustrate the gravity of the problem. Youth, 10 to 16 years, account for 89% of the deaths caused by gunshot wounds (PCVP, 1996). Homicide is the second leading cause of death for adolescents between 15 to 19 years old, and the leading cause of death for African American adolescents in this age group (PCVP, 1996). Adolescents, aged 12 to 24 years, committed nearly half of the 6.4 million nonfatal violent crimes in 1991 (PCVP, 1996). Adolescents are two and a half times more likely than adults to be victims of violence and are most often victimized by their peers (Kellermann, et al., 1998). Unfortunately, health care practitioners frequently see these statistics play out in the emergency department, if they ever arrive, where intervention is frequently too late.

Violence was slow to catch on as a public health problem (Rockett, 1998; Rosenberg, 1992). It was not until 1983 that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) began to address unintentional injury including violence (CDC, 1999a, 1999b; Rockett, 1998). Violence is now considered an epidemic and the bullet has been labeled a "pathogen" (Fingerhut, 1992; Koop, 1992; Ropp, 1992; Rosenberg, 1992; Schmoke, 1992; Trunkey,

1965). Adolescent violence is described as a situation in which the perpetrator, the victim, or both are under 25 years, and includes suicidal acts (CDC, 1999b). Present statistics vary on whether youth violence is increasing or decreasing and are sometimes conflicting (CDC, 2000; PCVP, 1996). In spite of the conflicting data, experts agree that violence among adolescents remains a significant and widespread problem (CDC, 2000; Muscat, 1988; Orpinas, 1995b; PCVP, 1996; Singer, 1995).

Adolescents are disproportionately the victims and perpetrators of violence and are most often victimized by their peers (Kellermann, 1998; PCVP, 1996). Peer group identification is an important part of adolescent development (Erikson, 1963). During this time, adolescents struggle to acquire a sense of identity. The emphasis of relationships moves from an earlier focus on family to peer groups and outside groups (Maier, 1965; Harris, 1998). Larson & Richards (1991) found the amount of time spent with families drops 50% between fifth and ninth grades. Brown (1990) estimates high school students spend twice as much time with peers as they do with their parents. Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1994) and Fuligni & Stevenson (1995) found U. S. teenagers spend about 20 hours a week with peers outside of school! Additionally, adolescents experiment with opposites and extremes that are associated with dangers and commitments (Maier, 1965). The pressing question is “Who am I to be?” This dilemma is sometimes resolved by rebelling against societal norms and becoming a delinquent—a desperate attempt at regaining some mastery in a situation in which available positive identity elements cancel each other out. Adolescents seek approval and reassurance from their peers, who are also be in a state of flux.

Violence is a complex problem with numerous far-reaching effects and many negative health consequences. Exposure to violence has been correlated with symptoms of psychological trauma such as depression, anxiety, anger, and post-traumatic stress (Singer, 1995). Violent behavior among adolescents has also been associated with health risk behaviors such as smoking, unsafe sex and drug use (Orpinas, 1995b). Violence is correlated with poverty, decreased educational aspirations, early childbearing, and urban decay (Almgren, 1998; CDC, 2000; Muscat, 1988; Orpinas, 1995b; PCVP, 1996; Singer, 1995).

The statistics on violence and educational status are striking. LARAQUE et al. (1995) found that 31% of adolescents who were gunshot victims were high school dropouts versus 0% of the matched control group. Additionally, poor academic self-image is correlated with weapon carrying and fighting (Orpinas, 1995a). Both adult and adolescent violence is strongly predicted by school failure (Orpinas, 2000).

Violence is associated with multiple health risk behaviors. Orpinas et al. (1995a) surveyed 2,075 high school students in Texas and found that students who carried a weapon and/or were involved in a physical fight were significantly more likely to smoke cigarettes and marijuana and use steroids. Ellickson et al. (1997) found that adolescents involved in violence were two to three times more likely to have tried cocaine and to be poly-drug users. They were three times more likely to have seriously considered suicide and almost six times more likely to attempt suicide. In the prior year, 44.8% of adolescents involved in violence had attempted suicide (Orpinas, 1995b). Health-promoting behaviors such as vigorous and muscle-toning exercise were negatively correlated with weapon carrying and fighting (Orpinas, 1995b). There is a positive

correlation between violent behavior and other criminal activity. Ellickson et al. (1997) found that persistently violent adolescents are eight times as likely to commit nonviolent felonies and ten times as likely to sell drugs (Ellickson, et al., 1997).

The connection between violence and poverty has been well-documented (Almgren, 1998; Muscat, 1988). In 1991, persons from families with incomes below \$7,500 were at a three times greater risk for nonfatal assault than persons from families with incomes greater than \$50,000 (PCVP, 1996). Furthermore, homicide rates are consistently highest in regions of cities where poverty is the most prevalent.

The health costs of violence go beyond that of physical injury; they are enormous and probably underestimated. To treat one adolescent gunshot wound costs approximately \$15,000 (Farrell, 1993). The total yearly costs related to property damage and violent crimes are \$425 billion compared to the \$300 billion US national defense budget (Farrell, 1993). This breaks down into \$5 billion dollars spent on treating crime victims; \$50 billion in urban decay (cost of lost jobs and fleeing residents); \$45 billion in property loss; \$170 billion in shattered lives (cost of productivity losses and lost quality of life); \$90 billion in criminal justice; and \$65 billion in private protection (PCVP, 1996).

The psychological effects of violence are well-documented (Laraque, 1995; Ropp, 1992; Singer, 1995). Adolescents who are exposed to violence experience a variety of symptoms, which include stuttering, nervousness, stomachaches, headaches, inability to concentrate, and psychiatric disorders such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Adolescents with high exposure levels to violence have higher levels of anxiety, depression, dissociation and anger (Laraque, 1995; Singer, 1995).

The implications of adolescent violence are diverse. Professionals working with at-risk adolescents need to be knowledgeable about the determinants of adolescent violence in order to plan, test, and implement effective interventions. In order to maintain effective violence prevention among adolescents, there needs to be more focused evidence-based studies of the causes and consequences of violence. Research in the area of adolescent violence will not only contribute to the body of knowledge on this topic, but will offer new information that might potentially decrease adolescent violence. One area that needs more research is the adolescent's perspective on violence. A serious deficit in the area of adolescent violence is capturing data on adolescents who do not attend school. The positive association between violence and low academic expectations and performance were found in several studies, so it is likely that the adolescent population not in school is very different from those attending school (Laraque, 1995; Orpinas, 1995a; Singer, 1995).

Summary

In summary, homicide is a leading cause of death for African American adolescents and homicidal rates. Despite the magnitude of peer homicide among African American adolescents, very little is known about the conditions and processes of these adolescents who survive the experience and the effects of exposure to violence have on these adolescents. Thus, the focus of this dissertation will be on understanding those African Americans who survived the violence trajectory as an adolescent. This study does not address differences or comparisons among ethnic/racial groups. It addresses the gaps and obvious need to focus and target research efforts on a group with a high prevalence of adolescent violence.

Chapter II

Review of Literature & Theoretical Perspective

The purpose of this chapter is to present a critical review of the literature related to the exposure and impact of violence on African American adolescents. The literature review is organized in two parts: (a) the demography of adolescent violence, and (b) the psychological, social, cognitive and behavioral effects of violence exposure. A discussion of the theoretical perspective, ecology of adolescent human development, will follow. The ecological perspective provides a theoretical framework for understanding the impact of both external and internal environments on adolescent human development, specifically as it relates to African American adolescents.

The Demography of Adolescent Violence

There is substantial evidence that violence is a pervasive problem in the United States (US). Adolescents are disproportionately exposed to violent crimes as victims and perpetrators. Violence, particularly inner-city violence, is reaching epidemic proportions. A consequence of violence is homicide, which is the second leading cause of death among 15 to 24 years old (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). For African American adolescent males, homicide is the leading cause of death, a rate tenfold that for European American adolescent males (CDC, 2000).

According to Attorney General Reno, the past several years have shown a continued decrease in juvenile violent crime. This may seem contradictory to the previous statement; however, evidence reveals although juveniles are not committing more acts of violence, there are more juveniles that are violent (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). For example, the average juvenile offender in 1995 committed the same number

of offenses as the juvenile offender in 1980, but a greater proportion of those offenders in 1995 had previously committed at least one violent offense (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999).

In proportion to the general population, ethnic minority adolescents are over-represented in detention centers. In 1995, 32% of the U. S. population ages 10 to 17 years were classified as ethnic minorities, yet they comprised 68% of the detention center. This percentage is an increase from 65% in 1991 and 53% in 1983 of the detention center population (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). The effects of violence are seen primarily in urban areas, with a distinct and disproportionate concentration in the African American community.

Before 1986, research addressing African American adolescents' exposure to violence was sparse and inconsistent. Jenkins and Thompson (1986) surveyed children's involvement in aggressive acts and their witness of violence acts in a predominantly African American elementary school in Chicago. The alarming results indicated that the children witnessed a significant number of violent acts. One in four children reported witnessing a shooting, and one in three children reported witnessing a stabbing.

Similar surveys were repeated in Chicago and other US urban areas. The findings of these various studies were similar. In one study, Shakoor and Chalmers (1991) did a screening survey in public high schools in Chicago to examine co-victimization of African American children who witnessed violence. Their findings revealed that 75% of boys and 10% of girls had witnessed the shooting, stabbing, robbing, or killing of another person. Bell and Jenkins (1993) surveyed 1,035 high school students in Chicago. Similar to the previous studies, nearly 40% of high school students had witnessed a shooting, stabbing, or killing. In the same study, the strongest predictor of witnessing a violent act

or being a victim or perpetrator was carrying a weapon. The high school students' experiences with violence were cumulative. Those who witnessed a killing had also witnessed less severe violence, and those who had perpetrated a violent act had both witnessed violence and had been victimized. These patterns suggest that adolescents living in a violent milieu are not only exposed to violence, but are at risk for victimization and subsequent perpetration of violence. Adolescents are often close to the perpetrators as well as the victims. In a sample of over 200 inner-city high school students, 70% of those that witnessed a shooting or stabbing reported that the victim was a friend, family member, or acquaintance (Jenkins & Bell, 1994). This was also the situation for elementary school children (Martinez & Richters, 1993).

Martinez and Richters (1993) studied a sample of fifth and sixth graders in Washington, D. C. Their findings were consistent with the previous studies. Seventy percent of the adolescents that witnessed a shooting had seen two or more previous shootings. Further, many adolescents had witnessed many different types of violent acts: rapes, drug use and trades, sexual assaults, beatings, and muggings, in addition to exposure to less severe types of violence. In another study, 46% of adolescents in Chicago reported being victimized by violence, including robbery, rape or attempted rape, shot or shot at, or stabbing (Uehara, Chalmers, Jenkins, & Shakoor, 1996). In addition, 22% of the adolescents reported they had committed at least one of these violent crimes, 74% reported witnessing violence, 47% reported victimization, and 23% reported participating in violence. A majority of these adolescents was low-income, inner-city, African American adolescents.

Singer, Anglin, Song, and Lunghofer (1995) conducted a study with a larger sample of adolescents ($n = 3,700$) to examine regional and size of city differences in violence exposure. The percentage of adolescents who witnessed a shooting ranged from less than 5% in a Cleveland area suburban high school and a small city high school in northeast Ohio, to over 50% in high schools in larger cities such as Cleveland and Denver. The rates for victimization paralleled those for witnessing violence. In a survey study of 53 adolescents in New Orleans living in highly violent areas of the city found they were exposed to high levels of violence (Osofsky, Wewers, Hann, & Fick, 1993). All of the study's participants had at least heard about a violent episode, 91% had witnessed violence, over 50% had been victims of some form of violence, 26% had witnessed a shooting, and 19% had witnessed a stabbing.

Exposure to violence varies by gender and the type of exposure. Girls were more likely to be victims of sexual assault (Jenkins & Bell, 1994; Schubiner, Scott, & Tzelepis, 1993), whereas boys reported greater personal victimization, such as physical assault, shooting, and stabbing (Fitzpatrick & Bolizar, 1993; Jenkins & Bell, 1994; Martinez & Richters 1993; Shakoor & Chalmers, 1991). Singer et al (1995) found that boys were more likely to witness neighborhood violence and girls were more likely to witness violence in the home. The gender differences may be related to the fact that boys move about the neighborhood more often than girls do (Jenkins & Bell, 1997). Girls tend to display more psychological symptomatology from witnessing violence than boys do (Fitzpatrick and Bolizar, 1993), such as anxiety, depression, anger, and posttraumatic stress symptoms (Singer et al., 1995). Jenkins and Bell (1994) reported a significant relationship between friends' victimization and psychological distress for girls, but not

for boys. Girls tended to feel less safe in the neighborhoods despite fewer instances of victimization. Girls appear to be more vulnerable to the stress of living in violent environments. Clearly, more research is needed in this area of victimization and gender differences in the manifestation of psychological distress.

Age and incidences of witnessing violence among inner-city adolescents are other factors related to exposure. However, the findings from many of these studies are not statistically significant (Martinez & Richters, 1993; Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Dubrow & Garbarino, 1989). One would expect exposure to violence to increase with age. Findings from these studies suggested that children in high-violence neighborhoods might witness violence at a very early age and have a more sustained exposure. Such findings further point to the pervasiveness of violence in these communities.

Young, urban African American males in low-income households experience the highest rates of victimization, despite recent declines in some major US cities. Other studies found that adolescents from homes without a mother (Schubiner et al., 1993) or "primary female" (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993) were more likely to have witnessed violence and to have been victimized. It was suggested that this link could be related to a lack of adult supervision that permits more opportunity for exposure to violence. Regardless of the causes or reasons, these studies portray inner-city adolescents experiencing violence as a regular part of everyday life.

Psychological, Social, Cognitive and Behavioral Effects

Of Exposure to Adolescent Violence

Repeated or chronic exposure to violence seems to be the norm for many adolescents. Psychological disturbances are associated with violence, specifically,

posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Freeman, Mokros, Poznanski, 1993; Horowitz, Weine, & Jekel, 1995; Osofsky, et al., 1993; Pynoos & Eth, 1986; Schwab-Stone, et al., 1995; Singer, et al., 1995). In addition to PTSD, exposure to violence has been found to be associated with depression, anger, anxiety, dissociation, and other traumas (Singer, et al., 1995). Fitzpatrick and Boldizar (1993) found that not only was being victimized or witnessing violence significantly related to PTSD symptoms, but also these symptoms were more extreme among females as well as adolescents without primary males living with them in the household.

Witnessing violence affects the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development of adolescents, especially African American adolescents who were “co-victims” (Shakoor & Chalmers, 1991). Co-victims were adolescents who directly observed the violent assault of another person. Co-victimization was shown to have a negative effect upon adolescents’ school performance and contributed to psychological disorders. Co-victims were more aggressive and threatening, due to unexpressed frustrations associated with the chronic atmosphere of violence.

The self-reported use of violence by adolescents has been associated with psychological and social factors such as, depression, hopelessness, and lack of purpose in life. In a study by DuRant, Getts, Cadenhead, Emans, and Woods (1995), depression was found to be positively associated with exposure to violence. Adolescents that had chronic exposure to violence throughout their lifetime had higher levels of depression in adolescence and adulthood. Hopelessness was positively associated with family conflict and exposure to violence. The Purpose in Life Scale was created from the adolescents’ responses to questions regarding their life expectancy. Adolescents who felt there was

little chance they would live to be 25 years old had higher depression scores and higher incidences of exposure to violence. The researchers concluded that chronic exposure to violence, in both the community and the family, was a significant life stress event that could result in emotional and psychological stress symptoms.

Schwab-Stone et al (1995) examined psychological, social and behavioral responses to exposure to violence. The results of their survey of 2,500 sixth, eighth and tenth grade students in an urban public school system suggested that violence was a common fact of urban life. Urban adolescents are required to accommodate their psychological development to the chronic threat of security and lack of safety. This was often accomplished with physical aggression, increased risk taking behaviors, such as alcohol and drug use, antisocial activities, poor school achievement, and an attitude that conveys a lack of future expectations.

Cooley-Quille, Turner, and Beidel (1995) examined the emotional impact of exposure to violence and its association with internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Internalizing behaviors were psychological manifestations, such as fear and anxiety, depression, helplessness and hopelessness, emotional withdrawal, and somatic symptoms. Externalizing behaviors were high-risk behaviors such as alcohol and drug use, carrying knives and guns, defensive and offensive fighting, and trouble in school. Cooley-Quille et al (1995) posited that the impact of exposure to acute violence—meaning those nonrecurring episodes—is related to internalizing problems, such as fear, anxiety, depression, and hopelessness. The impact of exposure to chronic violence—high frequency episodes—is related to externalizing problems, such as conduct problems and other antisocial behavior. The study's results were consistent with the extant literature on

chronic, high levels of community violence, suggesting that adolescents that are exposed to high levels of violence were more likely to exhibit impaired social relationships and behavioral functioning.

In another study, Dyson (1990) examined the effects of family violence on adolescents' academic performance and behavior. The results from her study also supports findings from other research studies, suggesting that adolescents who were exposed to extreme violence experience severe stress and anxiety. These manifestations are reflected in poor school performance, delinquency, and behavior problems, such as impulsive acting out and loss of emotional control (e.g. quick to lose temper or attack others).

Guterman and Cameron (1997) presented an assessment framework by which the impact of community violence on the lives of at risk adolescents may be examined. The integrative framework represented community violence exposure and its assessment through four major interrelated domains. The first domain was the identification of the adolescent's involvement in community violence and characterization of the nature of the involvement. The second domain was a follow-up assessment to determine the impact of community violence on the adolescent. The third domain consisted of a lethality assessment, which determined the degree to which the adolescent was in imminent or ongoing danger. The fourth domain was an ecological assessment to provide the best understanding of present risks and protective factors shaping outcomes in the adolescent's life.

This assessment framework provided a heuristic component that considered the role of exposure to community violence in the lives of these adolescents. Within this

heuristic component, the researcher can begin to uncover key factual threads to assist in understanding the consequences and meanings of the violent events for adolescents. With the development of this framework, researchers recognized the need and attempted to understand the experience and impact of exposure to violence from the point of view of the youth that lived the experience.

This understanding is critically important because so much of the urban, ethnic minority youth experience is underestimated, underrated, and therefore untreated. When adolescents divulge information about a traumatic experience, they typically do so with what appears to be an inappropriate emotional response. Adolescents tend to describe the details of violence with a level of bravado and exaggeration that can be misinterpreted as a lack of depth and seriousness. Guterman and Cameron (1997) cautioned that this misinterpretation must never be confused with the adolescent's response to the trauma. Further inquiry into the meanings of the experience must be made in order to gain a full understanding and to ultimately make changes in the way society responds to minority adolescents and violence.

Prevailing risk factors among adolescents are thought to influence the victimization and participation in violent activities over time. Certain risk behaviors are of a one-time experimentation nature, and others are more enduring. One longitudinal, community-based study examined the evolution of risk behaviors over two years for a cohort of low-income African American pre- and young adolescents (Stanton, Fang, Li, Feigelman, Galbraith, & Ricardo, 1997). Adolescents experimented with cigarettes and illicit drugs, but fewer continued this behavior on a long-term basis. However, other risk behaviors in adolescence were found to be more enduring, including early sexual activity

and the involvement in aggressive or violent activities. Drug use, cigarette smoking, and alcohol consumption increased in frequency with increased age and showed a cumulative effect. Participation in sexual intercourse, truancy activity, and aggression—fighting and knife/bat carrying—also had a cumulative effect.

Summary and Gaps

The studies reviewed in this section have examined the incidence, prevalence, and factors—age, gender, and social environment—related to adolescent violence. In addition, adolescents' exposure to and the impact of violence were discussed. Although findings from the studies reviewed were striking, they must be interpreted with caution. Because of the nature of the phenomenon, adolescent violence, the studies targeted communities that had moderate to high crime rates, which consisted typically of inner-city, low-income African Americans. The respondents were not randomly selected; they were recruited from selected programs, agencies, or schools. Exposure to violence varied considerably depending on the area of residence (urban vs. suburban), as evident in Singer and colleagues' (1995) study.

Implications from these studies indicate adolescents, especially inner-city African American adolescents, are chronically exposed to violence. However, studies that explicate adolescents' exposure to violence were limited. There is a need to focus research that addresses the meaning of violence from an adolescent perspective. Understanding how these experiences affect and influence their lives and decision-making is crucial to developing effective intervention strategies. Given the alarming statistics, especially among African American adolescents, research in this area is

imperative for the quality of life for these individuals, their families, and society.

Prevention efforts have mainly focused on negative behaviors—violent acts.

Adolescent Human Development: Ecologic Theory

Adolescent development will be discussed within the Ecology of Human Development framework, with particular focus on African American adolescents. Development is defined as an individual's evolving conception of the environment, its relation to the environment, and his or her ongoing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter environmental properties (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1996). This definition allows for examining how a person goes about gaining intellectual and emotional awareness, and is consistent with the symbolic interaction perspective that underlies dimensional analysis methodology (see Chapter III).

The ecological perspective provides a framework for investigating the impact of both external and internal environments on human development. An important aspect of the ecological framework is that it reveals connections that might otherwise go unnoticed and helps in looking beyond the immediate and the obvious environment. Bronfenbrenner (1977) has been credited with advocating ecological research in human development and developing a theoretical model that depicts the ecology of the family as a context for human development. Garbarino (1985) applied this ecological model to adolescent development.

The ecology of human development is based on three major assumptions. First, it is assumed that social and physical environments are interdependent and influence human behavior, development, and quality of life. Second, the environment is a source of

available social and physical resources. The third assumption is that humans, and thus society, can choose, design, or modify resources and environments to improve life and well-being; this assumption clearly reveals a value for intervention to improve society. Further, inherent in these assumptions is the worldview that humans can exert some control over their lives and the environment.

The ecological model identifies four major systems within the sociocultural environment: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1996). The microsystem is defined as the complex relationships between the individual and the immediate environment in which that person participates (e.g., home, school, workplace, etc.). Garbarino (1985) also added that it is within this system that the “adolescent experiences and creates reality” (p. 42). For the adolescent, this consists of a “social network of interpersonal relationships involving direct face-to-face interactions with people with whom there are lasting relationships, and those who are influential in the life of the adolescent and are influenced by the adolescent” (p. 44). Adolescents usually consider the family the primary microsystem, with friends and school next in importance. Others could include neighbors and church members.

An important aspect of this microsystem is that it allows the existence of relationships to become more complex and therefore, enhance the development of the person. For example, peers assume an increasingly important influence for the adolescent. The peer group holds the power of acceptance via friendship, popularity, and prestige. Likewise, the peer group can also exert a negative influence through the power of acceptance, approving and encouraging high-risk behaviors. This power and influence become particularly significant for the African American adolescents, explicated later in

this chapter. The adolescent's microsystem becomes a source of developmental risk when that system is characteristically socially impoverished. Development suffers whenever the microsystem is stunted because of too few participants, too little reciprocal interaction, psychologically destructive patterns of interaction, or some combination of these interactions (Garbarino, 1985).

The mesosystem describes the interrelations among the major settings (microsystems) of the developing person at any particular point in their life (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The mesosystem is system of microsystems. The number and the quality of such interrelating links determine the richness or lack of richness of a mesosystem. The analysis of a mesosystem would investigate the quality, frequency, and influence of interactions such as family experiences with school adjustments or family characteristics and values with peer- pressure conformity. The mesosystem is concerned with the interpersonal relationship as it relates to the linkage between the microsystems. The idea is that the stronger the links between more diverse settings, the more powerful an influence the resulting mesosystem will have on the development. Where there are weaker linkages between fewer settings, the adolescent is at increased risk. Therefore, both the absence of connections and conflict of values between settings define mesosystem risk. For example, one adolescent will find that an approach that is effective at home is also an effective one for school. In other words, when the two settings use the same codes, there is continuity. Another adolescent will experience school as unrelated, irrelevant or, in some cases, in direct opposition to their home-life experience. This presents a problem in the adolescent's readiness and adaptation to school, and places them at-risk for poor academic and social development.

The issue then becomes one of balance of values and expectations between the home and school setting: how well do they work together to provide a healthy balance of responses for the adolescent? Garbarino (1985) concluded that the home-school mesosystem is one of the most important in the adolescent's life. When strong and positive, the home-school mesosystem provides the adolescent with an opportunity to develop intellectually and socially. When weak and negative, the home-school mesosystem burdens the adolescent with conflicts of values, style, and interest, resulting in an adolescent with potential for developmental risk.

The exosystem is the larger community in which the adolescent lives. It is further defined as situations that have a bearing on the development of adolescents, but which do not play a direct role. For example, the exosystem may include the workplace of the parents or other centers of power (school boards, planning commissions, government agencies) that make decisions that affect the day-to-day life of adolescents. The exosystem can add to, or take away from the quality of life for adolescents indirectly through risk and/or opportunities affecting the parents and directly through those affecting the day-to-day lives of the adolescents. This concept of risk and opportunities in the exosystem presents one of the major accomplishments of the ecological approach in that it allows for situations where development is significantly shaped by the actions of people with whom the individual has no direct contact to be highlighted. For example, fluctuation in the economy may reduce the number of available jobs, or politically-motivated changes in federally funded social programs may drastically affect families that depend on assistance. The inclusiveness of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory forces

researchers to confront issues of exosystem decisions that shape the lives of adolescents and affect their development.

The macrosystem is considered the blueprint for society that underlies the organization of institutions, the values and assumptions about social relations, and the workings of the political and economic system. The macrosystem is similar to a cultural system, and yet it is more than what is included as a definition. When specifying culture as the blueprint, there exists the possibility that the blueprint can be incorrect (Garbarino, 1985). The ecological perspective allows the possibility to criticize culture and society because they may impede development and generate social risk. This occurs by denying the adolescent full access to essential opportunities, experiences and relationships. Thus, this ecological perspective has a moral perspective to it, in that it both describes and prescribes what needs to be done in the larger arena to go about generating change.

Human Ecology of Adolescent Development in African Americans

Traditionally, when researchers study ethnic minority adolescents' microsystem experiences, a pathological context usually is assumed. Researchers infrequently have studied ethnic minority adolescents' microsystem in a manner that connotes adaptive, beneficial elements (Spencer, 1985). Each of the components of the adolescent's microsystem (family, school, peer group) has been associated with assumptions of deviance for minority children and family life. The exceptions were Ogbu (1985) and Holliday (1985) whose research examined each of the four major systems identified in the sociocultural environment. Both authors concluded that expectations from each system may differ significantly and could result in differential levels of perceived and demonstrated competency depending on the function of the setting.

Ogbu (1985) and Holliday (1985) were critical of the dominant models for assessment of minority adolescents, and presented alternative models to studying African American adolescents. Before their work, African American adolescents' social problems were perceived and interpreted as deficits in cultural and cognitive development. This dominant view of African American adolescents was based on studies that focused primarily on how African American adolescents talk, think, act and feel, instead of considering the contexts of these activities. Holliday was specifically critical of the dominant paradigm because of its failure to address or "factor in" the effects of social factors that structure the environment of African American adolescents and exert influence on the developmental processes.

The theoretical implications of Holliday's (1985) model suggested that the distinctiveness of African American adolescents' development was rooted in the structure and process of their person-environment interactions (lifespace). The urban African American adolescent's lifespace is posited to be composed of seven hierarchically nested lifespheres: child, family or home, neighborhood, African American community, service community (White owned services, businesses, and institutions located in African American communities), broader community, and social structure. Each of these lifespheres is distinguished by different socializing agents and agencies and by different opportunities for role taking and accomplishment. As African American adolescents transition along these lifespheres, they are confronted with historically rooted barriers that tend to limit access to larger portions of the lifespace. These barriers consist of beliefs and practices emanating from institutions and social structures. They are manifested in inequitable distributions of status, income, power, wealth, and differential

access to social good, knowledge, privilege and choice. Consequently, African American adolescents must develop skills that will facilitate negotiating the transition between both African American and White communities.

Holliday (1985) identified five critical aspects in which African American adolescents' development differs from European American adolescents. First, the ecological structure of African American adolescents' lives is more complex than that of European American adolescents. Therefore, African American adolescents must be capable of interacting in both African American and White communities, which results in their potential involvement in more varied and complex settings. This analysis is based on the concept of a "triple quandary" as espoused by Boykin (1983, 1985). This triple quandary comprises (a) the "mainstream experience" (mainstream culture or standard American culture that all members of society must negotiate), (b) the "minority experience" (based on exposure to social, economic and political oppression as members of an ethnic minority group), and (c) the "black culture experience" (that part of the culture that is rooted in a traditional African ethos, a culturally indigenous basis from which African Americans interpret and negotiate social reality).

The second critical aspect in which African American adolescents' development differs from European American adolescents is in patterns of domination, subordination, and differences in values, social relations, and institutional patterns. Therefore, African American adolescents interacting in both European and African American communities are confronted with more role requirement variations. For example, the school's values and role requirements, as reflections of those of the "broader community," are not necessarily congruous with those of the home and neighborhood, which are more fully

defined by the African American community. Holliday's (1985) study examined the relationship of the adolescent's academic performance with the mother's perceptions of the adolescent's skill and the teachers' perceptions of the adolescent's skills. Statistically insignificant relationships were found between adolescents' academic achievement and their competence at home and in the neighborhood. The teachers' perceptions of the adolescent's skills were highly predictive of their academic achievement. The results suggested discontinuities between the role requirements of the home, neighborhood, and school. In the home and neighborhood, adolescents' roles most frequently demanded problem-solving skill, while at school, interpersonal skills and academic excellence were the greatest demand.

The third critical aspect in which African American adolescents' development differs from European American adolescents is that variations in role requirements are coupled with systematic social barriers causing African American adolescents to develop skills that are effective within and between both European and African American communities. Therefore, African American adolescents must develop two sets of extensive behaviors that are more flexible as they face various issues within two different contexts.

The fourth critical aspect in which African American adolescents' development differs from that of European American adolescents is access to and control over the reward system. African American adolescents have less access to and control over the reward system in comparison to European American adolescents. As a result, African American adolescents are less able to predict if their efforts will lead to success or failure. This situation can present a dilemma in that, on the one hand, African American

adolescents have the opportunity to succeed against the odds that support exceptional competence. On the other hand, it can lead to the type of failure that overwhelms and leads African American adolescents to stagnation, indifference, and hostility.

The fifth and last critical aspect in which African American adolescents' development differs from European American adolescents is African American adolescents are "older" at a younger age. That is, the experiences that an African American adolescent has in bicultural and biosocial settings encourage a type of social-cognitive and behavioral precocity that fosters an earlier maturity and independence.

Holliday's (1985) study was an attempt in structuring African American adolescents' research in the direction that would be supportive of the competence and ecological perspectives that consider the social realities of African American adolescents' lives. Her study addressed the behavioral skills identified as functional life skills, interpersonal skills, and problem solving skills that were demonstrated by the adolescents in settings of home, neighborhood, and school. Specific research questions addressed differences in patterns of behavioral competence across settings. The findings supported the initial theoretical perspective that the distinctiveness of African American adolescents' development is at least partially rooted in the greater complexity and differentiation of their lifespace. It further suggested that there is more involved in growing, coping, and surviving through an African American adolescence than is indicated on a balance sheet of cognitive, language, and personality deficits.

Traditionally, adolescents' competencies were measured in linear patterns using pencil and paper tools of measurement. Their competence was compared to norms set by White middle-class adolescents. Learning for the African American adolescent does not always

follow a linear pattern. Therefore, competencies need to be measured by other means, based on what is taught and valued in his or her community.

Ogbu (1985) posited that the cultural ecology paradigm would enable researchers to discover distinctive African American adolescent competencies, and the relationship of these instrumental competencies to African American childrearing practices as well as to the African American adolescent school experience. The critical features are based on two basic assumptions underlying the cultural ecological approach. One, childrearing is a culturally organized formula to ensure that newborns survive to become competent adults who will contribute to the survival and welfare of their social group. The formula consists of teaching adolescent the skills or instrumental competencies, which already exist when they are born. This formula is believed to work because parents in a given population use more or less the same culturally standardized techniques of childrearing. Two, the environment that influences childrearing and development is much broader than is usually defined in current developmental studies. The concept of the environment must be expanded to include the cultural tasks faced by the population and the way in which these tasks determine the competencies that are transmitted and acquired.

Ogbu (1985) further stated that the challenge for research is to map out: (a) the nature of the macro environment and cultural tasks, especially the subsistence tasks of the population under study, (b) the nature of the instrumental competencies required by these cultural tasks, and (c) the formula evolved to inculcate the adaptive instrumental competencies.

Ogbu (1985) believed that the cultural-ecological model, applied to the study of African American child development, provides a reinterpretation of the available data on

African American adolescent development and speculate about possible results of research designed to use this approach. The model presents eight sets of separate data that are to be integrated and analyzed in order to interpret correctly the nature and production process of African American adolescents' competencies.

1. The effective environment—the inner city where most African American adolescents live—remains an environment of marginal conventional resources for many African American adolescents, although some progress has been made.

2. Cultural tasks and survival strategies are developed in addition to the conventional strategies for survival. They include clientship, collective-struggle, mutual exchange, hustling, pimping, entertainment, and sports.

3. Dominant adult categories and competencies or skills required are not specifically identified but can be determined from a description of the adult categories employing the strategies. This list includes the conventional worker, client, reformer, hustler, pimp, sportsman/athlete, entertainer, and street man.

4. Folk theories of “making it” in the inner city are based upon knowledge inherited from previous generations, and on images of present and future opportunity structures.

5. Social organization and relations affect organization of childrearing in four ways. First, the marginal conventional economic roles of males undermine their power in the family and result in more single parent, female-headed households. Second, a significant number of African American families depend on public assistance. Third, the necessity to meet subsistence and other needs under marginal resources has encouraged some inner-city households to organize into cooperating mutual-exchange groups based

on kinship or friendship. Fourth, childrearing is further supported in the role of extended family members.

6. Folk theories of childrearing; these standardized techniques of training adolescents are designed to produce competent inner-city adults. They are appropriate for use at home, in school, and on the street.

7. Childrearing techniques specific for the setting; these techniques appear to inculcate several attributes that facilitate adolescent's development into inner-city adolescent categories. For example, the use of physical punishment discourages emotional dependency while simultaneously encouraging early independence and self-reliance bordering on "defiance." The emphasis on aggression in early play and parental insistence that the child fight back when attacked by peers encourage adolescents to accept physical action as a legitimate technique for solving problems.

8. The final component of the cultural-ecological model entails dominant adolescent types and competencies. Ogbu (1985) cautioned that no one has yet systematically studied the development from childhood to adulthood; therefore, his discussion of the possible course of development is speculative at best and suggests further research. The childhood categories include the mainstreamer, the submissive, the ambivalent, and the precocious independent. Most of these categories refer to boys. The adolescent categories include the square, ivy leaguer, regular, cool cat, jester, and the antagonist. Ogbu concluded that many inner city African American adolescents do not acquire the instrumental competencies of White middle-class, not because of parents' lack of know-how with these competencies, but because African American parents teach

their children those instrumental survival competencies required by the cultural imperatives of the African American community.

Reflections on the Theoretical Perspective

The sociocultural ecology of adolescent human development framework could provide the theoretical foundation for the assessment of African American adolescents' development and could provide a basis for understanding their experiences. This perspective suggests that there is more involved in growing, coping and surviving the adolescent experience, which is posited to be embedded in one's sociocultural milieu. Considering the context of the reality in which African American adolescents live is essential to understanding their development. Ogbu (1985) proposed that in every society, adolescents are brought up to deal effectively with the particular situations they face at successive points in their lives. Many adolescents acquire motivation, knowledge and skills that are necessary to effectively cope with their environment. Subsequently, this provides the capacity for successful adaptation, usually in the form of resilience, despite challenging or threatening circumstances.

Chapter Summary

There is substantial evidence that violence is a pervasive problem in the US. Adolescents, especially African American adolescents, are disproportionately exposed to violent crimes as victims and perpetrators. These analyses further suggest that the impacts of violence experienced by African American adolescents will be mediated by what meaning is given to them by the cultural ecologies in which they reside. The ecologic theory of adolescent human development suggest that there is more involved in

growing, coping and surviving the adolescent experience, which is posited to be embedded in one's sociocultural "behavior setting." There is a need to focus research that addresses the meaning of violence from an adolescent perspective. Understanding how these experiences affect and influence their lives and decision-making is crucial to developing effective intervention strategies. Thus, the specific aims of this study are to (a) describe the experience of homicidal death of peers from the perspective of African American adolescents who lost a peer to violence, and (b) develop a grounded theory reflecting the experience of African American adolescents who lost a peer to homicide.

Chapter III

Research Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine in-depth African American adolescents' meanings of and experiences with violence, particularly homicidal peer death. Interest in this topic grew from clinical experience as a psychiatric community health nurse educator. My perspective is influenced by the Ecology of Human Development framework of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and the principles of sociocultural ecology of Holliday (1985) and Ogbu (1985). As discussed in Chapter II, an important aspect of this sociocultural ecological perspective is that it reveals connections that might otherwise go unnoticed, helps in looking beyond the immediate and the obvious environment, as well as considers adolescents' issues in the context of social, cultural, psychological, cognitive and behavioral development. Within this perspective, how adolescents go about gaining intellectual and emotional awareness are examined; this perspective is consistent with the symbolic interaction perspective that underlies dimensional analysis methodology—the design used for this study. The ecological context surrounding African American adolescents' experiences was considered as an interacting set of explanations for their meanings of and experiences with the violence related to peer homicide.

Dimensional Analysis

Dimensional Analysis (DA) is a naturalistic, qualitative research method of generating grounded theory. It was used in this study to guide data collection and analyze African American adolescents' meanings of and experiences with violence, particularly peer homicide, within the context of social, political, racial, economic, and class experiences. Homicidal peer death was defined as the death of an adolescent peer by

gang or police action, including drive-by shootings and specific or accidental targeting. DA methodology allows the researcher to consider the social context and conditions shaping a specific phenomenon and relate these influences to the actions and outcomes that shape a person's reactions to the specific phenomenon. DA strives to answer the question "what all is involved here?" Hence, this question provides the foundation for analysis.

The Development of Dimensional Analysis

Dimensional Analysis (DA) is a cognitive process used to interpret and understand human experiences or phenomena. DA is based upon a premise that people generally use a normative, thoughtful process to interpret and understand problematic situations or phenomena (Kools, McCarthy, Durham, & Robrecht, 1996). This process is described by Schatzman as "natural analysis" or a theory of thinking (Schatzman, 1991). In DA, analytical actions that one naturally and typically uses in ordinary life situations are intentionally employed as operations of theory development (Schatzman, 1991).

During a 25-year span of teaching field research methods, Schatzman (1991) developed DA, and offered it as an alternative procedure for developing and analyzing grounded theory. This procedure grew out of his critique of the original grounded theory method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for its lack of a structural foundation that would allow for the explicit articulation of the analytic process. Schatzman formulated his alternative method by identifying the gap between the teaching of research mechanics and the specific analytic processes that led to theory development. He agreed that grounded theory provided a valuable set of operations for analysis but argued that the operations involved in discovering theory remained largely mysterious and undisclosed.

Students, although able to perform the operations of grounded theory, were impeded by the absence of an overarching structure that could guide their analyses.

Written descriptions of DA methodology have occurred only recently (Bowers, 1984; Hatton, 1997; Kools, McCarthy, Durham, & Robrecht, 1996; Robrecht, 1995; Schatzman, 1991). However, historical roots of DA are strongly embedded in the philosophical assumptions of symbolic interactionism as instituted by John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and Herbert Blumer (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; Robrecht, 1995).

Mead and Dewey were colleagues at the University of Chicago, School of Sociology. In the early 1900s, Mead built on Dewey's work and began to lay the groundwork for the naturalistic study of human group life. This field approach to the study of human life became known as social psychology. Blumer extended Mead's thinking and articulated a theory of "symbolic interactionism," (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969; Robrecht, 1995). Dewey, Mead, and Blumer were heavily influenced by the American Pragmatist movement.

The American Pragmatist Movement. The American Pragmatist Movement emerged out of 19th century political discourse. It was one of many attempts to reconcile some of the premises of idealism with scientific method, and unite a spiritualistic and biological conception of human development (Martindale, 1981). Pragmatism can be described, briefly, as the theory that a proposition is true, if holding it to be so is practically successful or advantageous (Mautner, 1997). This philosophical perspective asserts that knowledge is provisional, and should be tested for its practical relevance and utility. C. S. Peirce and William James are credited with its doctrine that interprets ideas in terms of its consequences. Peirce adopted the suggestion that beliefs are habits of

acting rather than representations of reality. Thus, James was lead to think of a true belief as one that leads to successful action, or a theory of truth as “what works.” Dewey extended the philosophical debate into a theory of meaning that encourages “truth-seeking” through critique and debate. He asserted that all thinking is a matter of problem-solving. Therefore, accounts of inquiry that rely on the notion of “representation of reality” should be abandoned.

Pragmatism made four major contributions to the foundation of symbolic interactionism (Shalin, 1986). First, it was argued that the static, predetermined, and inherently structured pictures of reality should be replaced with a dynamic, emergent, historical world-in-the-making view. Second, social structure was an emergent process. Third, there was rejection of idealist attempts to root knowledge in perception, and materialist attempts to locate meaning solely in objects, as well as insistence that meanings emerge from the interaction between subject and object. Finally, the pragmatists exhibited an ideological commitment to progress and democratic values. They saw science both as a methodology for achieving advancement and as a model for democratic organization. In the early 20th century, conditions were ripe for fostering these theoretical perspectives as spawned by pragmatism. Many of the intellectuals of that time welcomed the emergence of pragmatism and symbolic interactionism as viewpoints whose time had come.

Symbolic Interactionism. Pragmatism and symbolic interactionism profoundly flourished during the early 1920s, mainly because of the strong direction and support that it received from the Department of Sociology, University of Chicago. The Chicago sociologists were eager to demonstrate, through their development of philosophical

pragmatism, a unique view of society that would be different from either biological or economic determinism. They fostered the perspective that people are “socially created” and capable of “creating new societies in which to live” (Deegan, 1987). It was believed that one of the reasons that symbolic interactionism flourished in the 1920s was that it made people feel that they had some control over social change. People were the architects of society and could change the course of society if they so desired (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

As America began to make the shift to a more service-based economy, Americans became more consumer-oriented, interested in self-expression, open and receptive to accepting new roles, and wanting to learn more about personal growth. More attention was given to “thinking” and “feeling.” The middle class, especially, became preoccupied with “consciousness” and “interpersonal relationships.” Symbolic interactionism, with its emphasis on communication, self-concept, and social roles, thereby became integrated as an acceptable philosophical perspective (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

The concepts of “mind” and “self” are the most frequently selected concepts from Mead’s (1934, 1962) work, and formed the foundation for the symbolic interactionist perspective. Mead’s answer to handling problems of society took the form of showing that human group life was the essential condition for the emergence of consciousness—the mind—a world of objects, and for the emergence of human beings as organisms, possessing selves and human conduct in the form of constructed acts (Blumer, 1969). Mead argued that human beings possess minds and consciousness as original “givens” and that they live in worlds of pre-existing and self-constituted objects. Further, Mead

posited that behavior consists of responses to such objects and that group life consists of the association of such reacting human organisms.

The central themes that Mead (1934, 1962) elaborated were the mind, self, and social interaction. The mind, equated with meaning and consciousness, is the result of a conversation of gestures. A gesture is an action that produces a response in another person. Language is the most complex interaction in which humans engage and enables a person to anticipate accurately the responses of others. It is through language that humans communicate and affirm the shared meanings of the physical, cultural and social worlds.

Mead (1934, 1962) envisioned the human being as an organism having a self. By this, Mead simply asserted that the human being is an object to himself; he may indeed perceive, have conceptions of, communicate with, and act toward himself. This idea implies that the individual may become an object of his own action and presents a whole set of self-interactions that allow the individual to plan and organize action with regard to what has been designated and evaluated. By possessing a self, the human being is provided with a mechanism of self-interaction with which to meet the world. This mechanism is then used in forming and guiding conduct.

Mead (1934, 1962) identified two levels of social interaction: non-symbolic and symbolic. In non-symbolic interaction, human beings respond directly to another's gestures or actions. In symbolic interaction, they interpret each other's gestures and act based on the meaning yielded by the interpretation. Symbolic interaction, the predominant level of social interaction, involves (a) interpretation of or ascertaining the meaning of another's actions or remarks, (b) defining those actions and remarks, and (c) conveying indications to another person as to how he or she is to act. Human interactions

involve this process of interpretation and definition. It is through this process that the participants fit their own behaviors with the ongoing actions of each other and guide others in doing so.

Symbolic interactionism is a label that is used to describe an approach to the study of human group life and individual conduct (Blumer, 1969). From the early 1930s until after World War II, Blumer was considered the intellectual leader and organizational chief for symbolic interaction theory (Mullins, 1973). Blumer viewed his work in symbolic interactionism as a response to extreme positivism attributed to the structural functional perspective of human conduct (Stryker, 1988).

The emergence of symbolic interaction evoked a wave of excitement and enthusiasm as a new approach to the study of human behavior. Blumer (1969) identified three major assumptions that provide the foundation for symbolic interactionism. One key assumption is that human beings act toward things based on the *meanings* that the things have for them. This reflects a non-reductionistic view of human behavior. Blumer argued that meanings are central in their own right, and to ignore meaning is seen as falsifying the behavior under study. Failure to acknowledge meaning totally ignores the role that meaning has in behavior. The second central assumption is that meanings arise in the process of interaction between people. According to symbolic interactionism, meaning is understood as social products, formed and defined through the activities of the people as they interact. A third assumption of symbolic interaction is that meanings are handled by and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with things he or she encounters. The themes of symbolic interactionism are incorporated

into the foundation of traditional grounded theory and dimensional analysis as described in the following sections.

Grounded Theory. Grounded theory emerged from arguments over the purpose, nature, and development of theory. Important tenets from the perspective of symbolic interactionism contributed to the development of traditional grounded theory as conceived by Glaser and Strauss in 1965 and initially presented in The Discovery of Grounded Theory (1967). In that text, they emphasized the generation of theory that is grounded in data. Strauss studied at the University of Chicago and later at University of Indiana in the qualitative tradition developed by George Herbert Mead, whereas, Glaser studied at Columbia University and was most familiar with quantitative methods of sociological research. Although Glaser understood the rigor that was required to complete research studies, he was reportedly drawn into the richness of the experiences observed by those that were doing naturalistic field research (Schatzman, personal communication, 1990).

The grounded theory method explicates the rationale for theory generated and developed through data. This rationale, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), would contribute toward “closing the embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research” (p. vii), and provide logic and specification to grounded theories. Glaser and Strauss posited that social theory must fit the situation being researched. In order to fit the situation, the categories must be readily applicable to and indicated by the data under study, not forced to accommodate the data. Further, the theory must be meaningfully relevant and be able to explain the behavior under study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) initially identified the fundamental techniques of constant comparative analysis, which is a cyclical process of data collection, analysis, theoretical sampling, and memo writing. Grounded theory, also known as constant comparative analysis, is a strategic method for generating theory using the logic of systematic data comparison. Comparative analysis in grounded theory methodology promotes identification of repetitive themes in data, specification of experiences in research phenomenon, and detailed definition of categories through the explication of properties and attributes.

Theoretical sensitivity—the researcher’s ability to be aware of salient factors within the data—is crucial to this process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). The analyst uses personal experiences as well as the experiences of others to develop theoretical insight (theoretical sensitivity) into the specific area of research. Memo writing allows the analyst to record momentary thoughts and illustrations of ideas. Core categories are identified from the accumulated interrelation of general categories and properties that are identified in the data. The core category becomes a theoretical guide that structures further collection and analysis of data. Theoretical saturation occurs when no additional data salient to identified categories are found. At this time, the researcher begins to see similar themes repeatedly and thus becomes confident that a category is saturated. Classic grounded theory method has as its desired outcome, a grounded theory that “accounts for a pattern of behavior which is relevant and problematic for those involved” (Glaser, 1978, p. 93).

The epistemological assumption derived from the earlier statements of Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed that research should occur in the real world with the

accompanying phenomenological issues. This assumption presented a discernible post-positivist perspective that the method is independent of the researcher and has separate existence. A modified objectivist epistemological view of the relationship between the knower and what is known is reflected (Annells, 1996). This view was further maintained in the procedural directions identified by Glaser (1978) that lead the researcher toward the ideal of coming "closer to objectivity" (p. 8).

The methodological inquiry reflected in Glaser and Strauss' 1967 presentation valued the emic viewpoint that theory discovery and generation must be grounded in a detailed qualitative research process. This viewpoint is contrasted with the positivist approach of logico-deductive a priori assumptions. Glaser (1992) supported this grounded approach when he further asserted that the associated methodology should aim for theory discovery that may be subsequently verified by sequential research. As a result of the publication of the 1967 text, grounded theory became well known in the United States and in England, especially among qualitative researchers. Glaser and Strauss continued to teach qualitative research in the grounded theory-style to graduate students at the University of California, San Francisco, Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences in the School of Nursing.

In 1978, a decade following the publication of the 1967 text, Glaser began working on an update of the original text. The second manuscript detailed the advances in thought and procedure in generating grounded theory, and emphasized the development of theoretical sensitivity in analysts (Glaser, 1978). Glaser pointed out that lack of attention to theoretical sensitivity promoted a situation where the analysts would follow the grounded theory method, but fail to reorganize salient theoretical features within the

data. Therefore, Glaser subsequently delineated the processes of theoretical sampling, memoing, theoretical saturation and substantive coding, and delve deeper into discussions regarding theoretical coding, basic social processes, theoretical sorting, and theoretical writing.

Glaser (1978) emphasized that grounded theory is based on the systematic generation of theory from data—not from prior knowledge. Hence, the grounded theory method was intended to provide a rigorous, orderly structure for social research and theory development. For example, the analyst enters the field to collect data on a specified area of interest. Subsequent data collection and coding, the integration of categories, memo generation, and theory construction are guided and integrated by developing themes from the previous data collection.

According to Glaser (1978), the first step in developing theoretical sensitivity is for the analyst to enter the research setting with as few predetermined ideas as possible, especially a priori hypotheses. The analyst must remain open to what is actually happening. This way, he or she can remain “sensitive,” able to record observations and events without filtering them through any preconceived hypotheses.

Although grounded theory method was making progress in the field of qualitative research, questions related to the research procedure remained. Students and seasoned researchers continued to experience difficulty understanding the process and how the core categories were determined. Attempts made to clarify these issues only resulted in further descriptions of operations and procedures (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In contrast to Glaser’s (1978) grounded theory method, Strauss and Corbin (1990) introduced a conditional matrix that would be applied to the data analysis. This resulted

in a departure from the classic grounded theory method with its theoretical roots exclusively in symbolic interactionism. With the application of this matrix, the researcher is encouraged to consider macro social factors as possible influences of social interaction (Annells, 1996). This development suggested a possible ontological shift to relativism. Strauss and Corbin insisted that a grounded theory is a rendition of “a reality that cannot actually be known, but is always interpreted” (p. 22), and that reality consists of local and specific constructed realities. The symbolic interactionist view, in turn, argues that the natural world has a reality apart from these constructed realities.

The epistemological assumptions also reflected some movement during this period. Notably, Strauss and Corbin (1994) insisted that researchers draw on their experiential knowledge to collect data, and that they suggest hypotheses when analyzing data. Thus, they recognized that the analyst is a part of the interaction. Inherent in the ontological and epistemological variations is methodological implications. Strauss and Corbin extended the opinion that grounded theory research dealt with verification as well as discovery, and further posited that the verified substantive theory that emerged from the research should provide a framework for action. Theoretical findings are particular to the research participants rather than generalized to other populations.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) advocated a sampling technique that specified open, relational, variation sampling and discriminate sampling. What was intended to clarify the original descriptions and grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967) became a means of encouraging poorly integrated theoretical explanations that violated the original principles of grounded theory. Critiques of these procedures emphasized that students and

researchers begin looking for rather than looking at data that would lead to emergent theory (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser, 1992; Robrecht, 1995; Schatzman, 1991).

The grounded theory research methodology is widely used in social sciences today. Practitioners recognize the flexibility of grounded theory for use in a variety of settings and in specific areas of study. One of the characteristics that make it useful to researchers is that one can respond to and change as conditions and actions vary (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

The Method of Dimensional Analysis

Schatzman (1973), a colleague of Glaser and Strauss, found that students who had taken courses in grounded theory methodology knew little about the specific operations involved in field research. Schatzman argued that this deficit was due to the “failure of most field researchers...to provide adequate instruction in the logic of this method” (p. 139). More specifically, students were unable to explain how their own observations and understanding of social life related to the research models and process about which they read. Students reported that when attempting to do research, they frequently had to compromise or abandon natural interest and skills in order to define problems and implement inquiries that were compatible with the research models being taught. These students sensed the discrepancy between the established methods they were taught and their own day-to-day observations of people and ordinary human events.

Although not identified as “dimensional analysis” at the time, the field research that Schatzman (1973) was teaching reflected his ideas on the natural process of thinking. He further illustrated that the concept of analysis was the “working of thought processes rather than as formidable, academic abstraction” (p.109). Analytical thinking is not

different from ordinary thinking; it “involves thinking that is self-conscious, systematic, organized, and instrumental...it is thinking (that is) objectified, operationalized and interactive” (p. 109).

Questions remain following Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) attempt to clarify the issues raised out of the original grounded theory work. Students studied and used grounded theory methodology, but continued to have difficulty understanding grounded theory. Some would try to work it out and others would just give up (Schatzman, 1991). Schatzman concluded from his observations that students were not really learning how to analyze but, instead, were making accommodations of a “received method” that was being taught to them in addition to whatever they did naturally to solve the problems. Schatzman further recognized that students had natural instincts from prior knowledge that helped them to analyze their own data. This led to his conception of “natural analysis—a view of analysis as an intrinsic subprocess of thinking learned early in social life, along with language” (p. 305). A major circumstance in the development of dimensional analysis came from Schatzman’s long-term interest in finding a “general theory of analysis.”

The underlying premise of dimensional analysis is that analysis is a natural, generic process of thinking, learned very early in social life along with language and practiced almost constantly in experience (Schatzman, 1986). Schatzman argued that human beings analyze their own data or experiences quite naturally albeit not always without error. They engage in analytic work intuitively as a way of making sense of their world. This process of analysis is initiated in childhood as children acquire language and is enhanced through interaction with others. This analytic activity takes place whenever

individuals engage in deciding, choosing, comparing, and evaluating. Researchers, engaged in the process of dimensional analysis, are merely extending this natural analytic thinking for scientific purposes, as they examine and visualize each aspect of the process (Robrecht, 1997).

According to Schatzman (1991), the three properties of human thinking that are fundamental to the theory of natural analysis are: (1)dimensionalizing, (2)dimensionality, and (3)dimension. Dimensionalizing is the process of bringing the concrete into abstraction. For example, data or narratives (concrete) are brought into perceptions of what is happening (abstraction). From the audiotapes and/or transcripts, the concept of “loss” is identified. The attributes and properties of “loss” are identified, such as grief, anger, aggression, personal, or relationships. The researcher continues by taking one of the attributes (personal) and further breaking it down, to identify “time” and “permanence” as further properties. This process of identifying additional properties is “dimensionality,” the act of dimensionalizing. Dimensionality is a theoretical concept and refers to the individual’s cognitive ability to address the complexity of phenomena. Dimension is defined as the “expert’s” perspective of the phenomena or an aspect of the phenomena identified by the researcher (Schatzman, seminar communication, 1998); simply put, dimension is the “named” concept.

The process in dimensional analysis is the construction or reconstruction of multiple components of a complex social phenomenon; it is selecting the category that explains the most variance. The category is not expected to explain all, but should explain most of the story. In the original conception of grounded theory, the objective was to answer the question, “What is the basic social process that underlies the phenomenon

under study?" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In dimensional analysis, the objective is to answer the question, "What all is involved here?" (Schatzman, 1980, 1986, 1991). Stemming from the symbolic interactionist perspective, this question places the researcher in communication with the data and allows the expansion of conceptual ideations. Thus, the aim of dimensional analysis is to explain the meanings of the interactions observed (Kools, McCarthy, Durham, & Robrecht 1996).

Schatzman (1986, 1991) posited that analysis requires the property of thinking known as "dimensionality" which is defined as the understanding that any phenomenon has complexity that is comprised of many aspects or identifiable attributes. When a person experiences the phenomena as problematic or ambiguous and efforts to understand the phenomena fail, the person engages in a process of analysis as a means of making the phenomena understandable. In order for a person to engage in the analytic process, certain components must come together to form a description and/or explanatory logic of the situation. According to Schatzman, these components include dimensions (properties), context, condition, action/process, and consequences, and they form the basis of an explanatory matrix. The matrix is both the centerpiece for analysis and a visual description of the analytic process (see Figure 1).

Analysis is takes place in two phases: (a) data expansion, and (b) data limitation (Kools, et al., 1996; Robrecht, 1997). Following initial data collection, the process of initial coding (data expansion) begins with dimensionalizing, and concurrently, designation or naming of concepts. As the data expand, multiple dimensions are revealed without allowing at this time any one dimension to take precedence over another. This process is not linear, but takes place simultaneously.

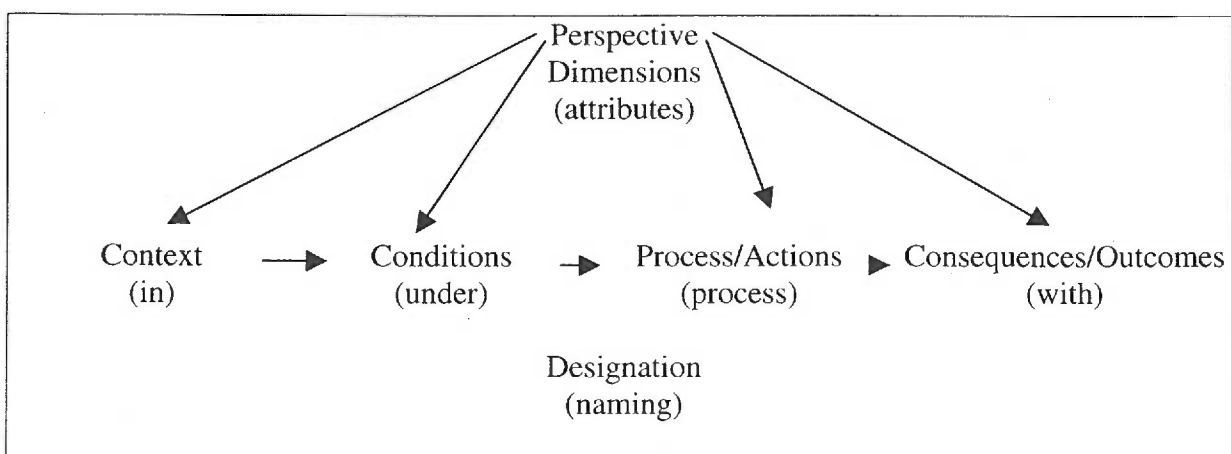


Figure 1. Dimensional Analysis Explanatory Matrix

After additional data collection and analysis, data limitation (phase II), occurs through the clustering of dimensions into more abstract data categories. This tentative grouping of data together allows the researcher to present them to the next participant and receive their perspective. The organizing perspective (viewpoint of the researcher) is the dimension that is most central to the developing theory (Kools et al., 1996). In other words, the chosen perspective becomes the one that makes the phenomenon understandable. This is possible because in the process of selecting one dimension to explain the phenomenon, the researcher has tentatively placed each subsequent dimension in the position to explain the phenomenon. As a result, each dimension has an equal opportunity to be selected as the major perspective or theme. However, the one that best explains the phenomenon is given precedence over the others. Those dimensions that may have come close to, but not fully explaining the phenomenon, become the background or context of the explanation. The others become the conditions under which actions are taken and selected consequences occur. At this time, the explanatory matrix is utilized to provide a structure to direct the analysis and explanation (Schatzman, 1991).

When the central perspective has been identified and the structural components have been placed tentatively within the matrix, the researcher continues the theoretical sampling. In the process of theoretical sampling (data collection), the follow-up questions and other lines of inquiry are identified and directed from the accumulating data. Subsequent questions will focus on the important dimensions identified from the analysis of the initial interviews (Kools et al., 1996). This provides the opportunity for continued clarifying, testing and modifying the concepts as the theory is developing (Robrecht, 1995). When repetitions of the concepts and their relationships become consistent, the data collection and analysis process can end. Field notes and theoretical memos provide an audit trail to substantiate trustworthiness and confirmability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rogers & Cowles, 1993).

At this point, theoretical saturation has occurred and the researcher is able to synthesize a “grounded theory” that provides theory and explanation to the phenomenon (Kools et al., 1996; Robrecht, 1995). The matrix is now used as the device to provide narrative explanation for the theory.

Summary of the Method: Dimensional Analysis

Dimensional analysis (DA) is one of several alternative methods available for generating grounded theory (Annells, 1996; Annells, 1997a; Annells, 1997b; Charmaz, 2000; Kools et al., 1996; Robrecht, 1995; Robrecht, 1997; Schatzman, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Hence, debates have ensued regarding the “best” way to generate grounded theory. Kendall (1999) has maintained that no one method is better than other methods, and the decision to select a method should depend upon the purpose of the research investigation. What is important is that the ontological and

epistemological perspectives of the researcher be congruent with the selected method (Annells, 1997a, 1997b). The selection of DA research methods in this study met these criteria and allowed the researcher to generate a foundation for appropriate responses to the complex social issues surrounding African American adolescents' meanings of and experiences with violence, particularly homicidal peer death, from a sociocultural, ecological perspective.

Setting

Participants were recruited from inner-city, urban and suburban communities throughout the Washington, D.C. metropolitan and surrounding areas, with a majority of participants from Wards 7 and 8. Wards 7 and 8 are predominantly African American neighborhoods, 96% and 90% respectively (US Census Bureau, 1998). In Ward 7, 20% of the population live below the poverty level, 64% are high school graduates and 12% are college graduates; the unemployment rate is 8% (US Census Bureau, 1998). In Ward 8, 28% of the population live below the poverty level, 61% are high school graduates and 8% are college graduates; the unemployment rate is 13% (US Census Bureau, 1998). By comparison, in Ward 3 African Americans represent 5% of the population and Whites, non-Hispanic, represent 89% of the population. That population living below the poverty level is 6%, the percent of high school graduates is 94%, the percent of college graduates is 70%, and the employment rate is 2% (US Census Bureau, 1998).

Theoretical Sampling and Recruitment

Recruitment criteria for the sample consisted of non-institutionalized young adults at least 21 years old who reported that they experienced homicidal peer death during their adolescent years, were able to speak and understand English, were willing to participate

voluntarily, and could articulate their individual perspective of the meaning of and experience with violence, specifically homicidal peer death. Referrals were primarily made from one or two known community contacts, and the others were contacted by word-of-mouth. The contact persons made initial contact with potential participants and ascertained their willingness to talk with the investigator. The investigator then made contact with the participant, obtained verbal verification of consent to participate, and set a mutual time and place to conduct the face-to-face in-depth interview.

Although, this investigation targeted young adults, the primary interest and focus of this study was to examine in-depth African American adolescents' meanings of and experiences with violence, particularly homicidal peer death, from a sociocultural ecological theoretical perspective. It was further proposed that if, after interviewing members of other ethnic minority groups, it appeared that cultural issues needed further exploration to separate the influence of culture from other variables of interest, the researcher would use theoretical sampling techniques consistent with grounded theory to address these issues, however, this was not necessary. The final sample size was 12: this was the number at which analytic categories became redundant and no new themes emerged that substantially revised the analytic categories (theoretical saturation).

Four participants who were asked to participate in the study refused to participate in study because they felt that participating in the study was "too risky." Further explication of "too risky" was not given.

Sample. All of the participants were African American. Nine (75%) of the 12 participants were males and three (25%) were females. They all reported that they were at least 21 years of age. Sociodemographic data were not collected because they were

recruited under the condition of strict anonymity. During the recruitment process, participants were told that they would not have to give any personal information other than to share their stories. All of the participants used pseudonyms.

Procedure

After the investigator made contact with the participant, verbal verification of consent to participate was obtained, and a mutual time and place to conduct the face-to-face in-depth interview was scheduled. The interview sites varied at the convenience of participants. The most common places for the in-depth interviews were private homes and library rooms. At the meeting place, the information sheet containing informed consent information (see Appendix A) and the safety protocol (see Appendix C) were read to the participant before the interview began. Copies of the information sheet were provided to participants. The investigator reviewed the advantages and limitations of participating in the study, giving special emphasis to the protection provided by the Certificate of Confidentiality that was obtained from the National Institute of Mental Health (Lutz, Shelton, Robrecht, Hatton, & Beckett, 2000).

The semi-structured in-depth one-on-one, face-to-face interviews were conducted utilizing procedures consistent with the previously described dimensional analysis method (Schatzman, 1973). Interviews were conducted using conversational language that encouraged participants to talk about their experiences using their own natural language. Narrative accounts were explicated employing a story-telling approach structured by the participants. Participants were instructed that narrative accounts including descriptions of events, situations, feelings and actions were desired. The interview schedule consisted of broad questions such as "Tell me about growing up in

your neighborhood,” “What are the memorable things about those years?” and “What disturbs you most about the death of your peer?” (see Appendix B). During the interview, the investigator served as an active listener in order to facilitate exploration and clarification of meanings. The interviews lasted from one to two hours. At the end of the interview, participants were asked if they would like to add anything that was not covered during the interview. No further contact was made with the participant after the interview.

Protection of Human Subjects

Concerns regarding the safety of the participants were deemed of primary importance, and therefore addressed in a safety protocol (see Appendix C) that was reviewed with each participant along with the information consent sheet. Because no sociodemographic or other identifying data except zip code location, would be collected and pseudonyms would be given to the participants, the study was deemed exempt by the Oregon Health Sciences University Institutional Review Board in accordance with federal regulation 45 CFR 46. An information sheet in lieu of signed informed consent was used to describe the study and the rights of a research participant. The information sheet was reviewed with each participant. Data were collected under the condition of strict anonymity. During the recruitment process, participants were told that they would not have to give any personal information other than to share their stories. All of the participants used pseudonyms.

Protection of human subjects was assured through careful handling of the data to ensure confidentiality of all participants. All data including data stored on disks, audiotapes and transcripts were kept in secure files that were accessible to the

investigator and faculty advisors. At the beginning of each interview, the participant was requested to select a pseudonym to be used as a means of identification on tapes and in the transcripts. When a pseudonym was not provided, the investigator assigned a pseudonym to the participant before audiorecording of the interview.

As a means of providing additional protection of privacy by shielding the research data from subpoena, the investigator obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality through the National Institute of Mental Health. The added protection provided by the Certificate of Confidentiality would supply a legal buffer between the participant and the coincidental discovery of criminal activity (Lutz, Shelton, Robrecht, Hatton, & Beckett, 2000). The implications of and procedure for reporting child and elder abuse was fully discussed by the investigator before beginning the interview (see Appendix C). It was imperative that each participant clearly understood that any information revealed regarding child or elder abuse, either as victim or perpetrator, would be reported to the appropriate authorities according to Oregon State laws.

A potential risk of participation is related to discussing experiences of violence and death from a personal perspective, and the inadvertent discovery of criminal activity. These discussions may often evoke feelings of sadness and anger. In addition, the participant may feel uncomfortable discussing problems involving their family and/or peers, or other sensitive information related to personal, physical or sexual violence/abuse. Participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary, and that they could choose not to share information if they felt it could cause undue stress to self or family. Also, other conditions affecting the safety of the individual (e.g., suicidal ideations or threats) were assessed. No referrals were necessary.

Data Analysis

Transcriptions of the interviews and field notes made by the investigator were analyzed according to the operations of dimensional analysis (see Table 1). Initial analysis was done from the recorded audiotapes of the interviews. Then, transcribed data and theoretical memos were entered into a word processing program for early coding development. All computer files were accessible to the investigator and required a password only known to the investigator, but even with password protection, computer stored data can be accessed by unauthorized persons.

Table 1. Dimensional Analysis Research Processes

	DATA COLLECTION <i>Observation and Interview</i>	→
←	DATA EXPANSION <i>Designation Dimensionalize Theoretical Memos</i>	→
←	DATA LIMITATION <i>Dimensional Categories Identified Perspective Selection Explanatory Matrix Assignment</i>	→
←	THEORETICAL SAMPLING	→
	THEORETICAL SATURATION	→
	WRITING OF THEORETICAL STATEMENT	

As discussed previously in this chapter, dimensional analysis (like all grounded theory research and constant comparative methods) utilizes both inductive and deductive analytical strategies. It is important for the reader to realize that the research process is cyclic and simultaneous rather than linear. Listing the research process in table format as displayed in Table 1 gives the impression of a linear sequence of events. However, the purpose of the list is to provide a summary of the interwoven analytic processes used to arrive at the theoretical statement.

Theoretical Memos. Theoretical memos charted the analytic process from the earliest note through the final integration of the theoretical sampling. As the analytic story was initially revealed, particular dimensions were not firmly assigned along the matrix until a key perspective or process, had been identified. For example, initially, it was believed that the stories were about the buying and selling of Crack Cocaine.

Involvement seemed to center on a desire to acquire material things, of which many were necessities as opposed to luxuries. Other adolescents were impressed with the glamour, excitement and power of being able to go into an establishment and purchase anything they desired. This perspective for interpreting the stories was possible because the stories centered on how they individually got into The Game, learned the rules of The Game, and acquired the skills to survive The Game. Thus, the earlier graphic depiction (Fig 2) of this process followed this earlier analytic memo.

As analysis continued, it became clear that more was involved than just surviving this phenomenon. Why would these young men and women participate in such a dangerous game that involved killing others or risk being killed?

Although surviving developed as a significant part of playing The Game, it did not provide enough information regarding the context surrounding the experience of playing The Game as the participants had related through their stories. Questions continued to arise in an effort to understand “why.” What was so compelling about this phenomenon that the kids were willing to risk “all” just to be a part of it? As data continued to evolve, evidence began to indicate that these young people wanted to “belong” or “identify” with their peers. Since this is not a new thought when it comes to

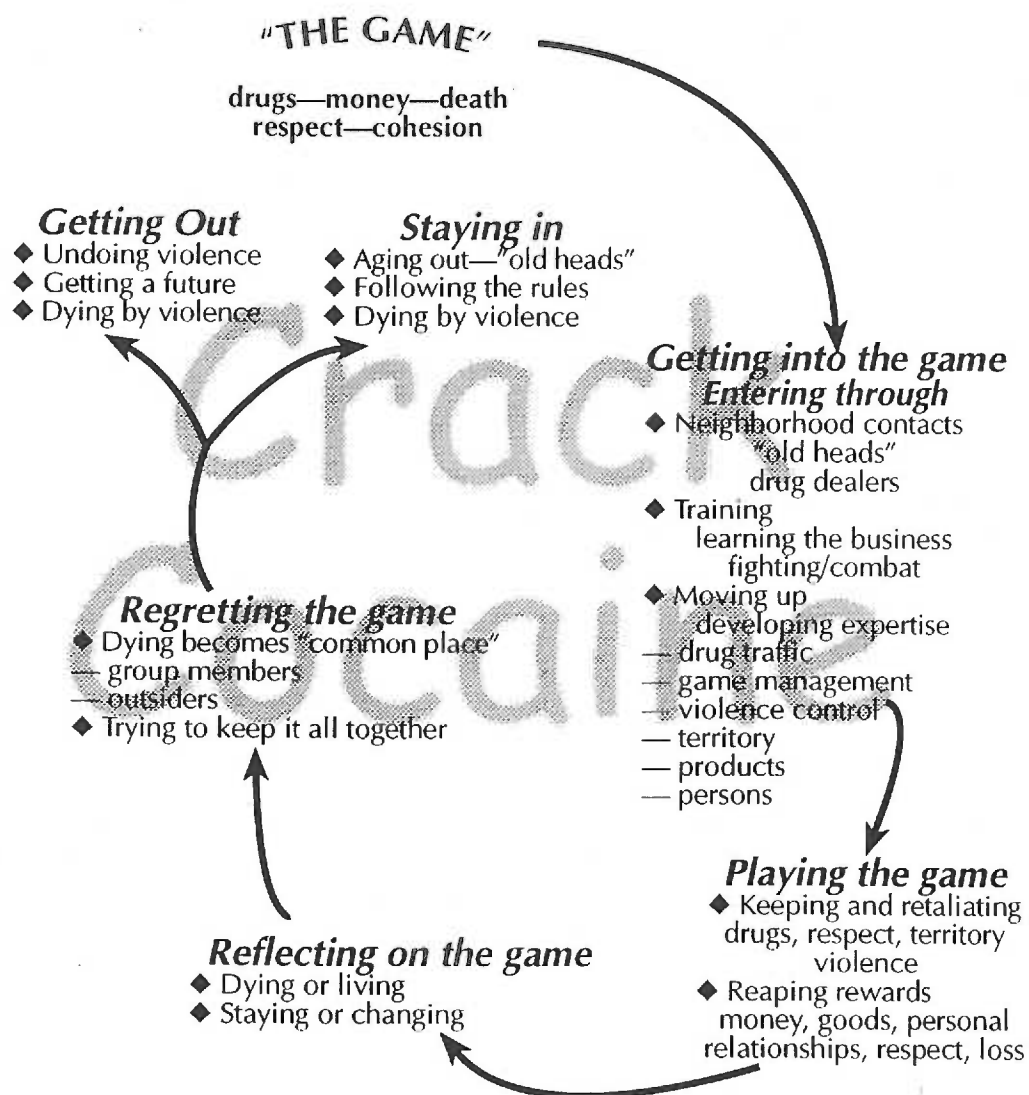


Figure 2. Earlier interpretation of the theory, Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory: An African American Perspective.

understanding adolescent development, it seemed to be a logical explanation for the behavior exhibited by these adolescents. Adolescents typically want to identify with each other—looking and acting like everyone else becomes the prevailing desire. Therefore, this dimension of "belonging" was auditioned as an overall theoretical category to explain this phenomenon of violence associated with playing The Game. However, this interpretation was not inclusive enough. For example, belonging was able to explain the involvement of adolescents from impoverished backgrounds. Because they lacked the

basic necessities, many admitted to getting involved with selling drugs to financially help with the family expenses. Belonging also depicted how those individuals deemed “special” could become involved. Although, they were perceived as having special talents or skills that allowed them to excel in sports, in most instances, they were also victims of poverty and subsequently, scarce resources. Yet, questions related to why those adolescents from more affluent, middle class families found this phenomenon of drugs and violence so appealing remained unanswered. What was the motivation for them to seek out and connect with individuals who were involved in this subculture of drugs and the inevitable violence that accompanied their activities? In an attempt to answer these compelling questions, it became necessary for the researcher to look deeper for a broader contextual understanding of the meaning of these experiences for these adolescents.

As the understanding of the adolescent violence trajectory expanded, the dimensional category of “belonging” was not good enough. It was not able to provide the compelling argument for this phenomenon. “Belonging” evolved into the “connecting” dimensional category. The “connecting” dimensional category represented a more comprehensive and key perspective for understanding the conditions and processes used by African American adolescents to survive the violence trajectory.

Theoretical Sampling. Data were collected from 14 participants and the key dimensional categories were identified during the analytic processes. Several of the identified dimensional categories required further data to reach saturation. For example, the category of connecting still needed further explanation of the experiences of

adolescents from more affluent or socially privileged families. Additional participants representing the experiences of this sub-category were sought. These participants described how it was more than just wanting to belong. These more affluent adolescents also needed recognition and respect from African American peers. One way of gaining this recognition and respect was being able to demonstrate fearlessness. Being associated with the “bad boys” gave them the opportunity to win respect and recognition from their peers. It was important that this solidarity, or connection, was of more value than choosing not to enter the game.

“...it was hard going out in the neighborhood, knowing that I looked different and acted different from the other guys around...being scared was part of it...but it was like...knowing they was going to make fun of me...how I dressed...where I went to school...questions like, how come you don't go to school here.”

For their survival, both physical and emotional, they needed to demonstrate an affinity for the neighborhood group of African American peers.

The analysis of data from these additional participants brought the category of connecting to saturation. It further allowed the investigator to gain an enriched understanding of factors influencing African American adolescents' experiences of violence, particularly homicidal peer death, and their need to be included as a member of this unique group of African American peers. The dimensional category of connecting provided the most salient perspective of the phenomenon.

Chapter IV

Findings

The goal of this grounded theory study was to provide a theoretical understanding the meaning and experience of violence to African American adolescents, in particular the experience of homicidal peer death. The experience of peer homicide has a very significant effect upon the lives of adolescents as they transition into adulthood. The experiences of peer homicide affect how, when, and what life altering decisions are made.

Initially, the focus of the study was to identify how some adolescents became involved in violence, and how others were kept from participating in violence that could lead to peer homicide. Instead, as the analysis progressed, peer homicide seemed to be a very small part of the larger picture of adolescent violence. Five major sub-dimensions and explanatory linkages emerged to formulate a “dense theory” that explains the larger picture of adolescent violence entitled “Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory: An African American Perspective.” The theory consists of five major factors (sub-dimensions) that influence surviving violence during adolescence. The major dimension was referred to by participants as “The Game.” This chapter discusses the theory, Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory: An African American Perspective, and its sub-dimensions, which were derived from dimensional analysis methodology as outlined in Chapter III.

The participants in this study were young African American adults between the ages of 24 and 29 years of age, and were survivors of the adolescent violence trajectory, detailed below. These young adults lived their adolescent years in Washington, D.C.

during the crack cocaine epidemic of the early 1980s through the mid 1990s. During that time, the participants witnessed the homicidal deaths of many close peers and family members. In this study, they reflect on their experiences as an adolescent during this specific period.

During this period of the early 1980s through the mid 1990s, Washington, DC was recognized and labeled as the murder capital of the US. The crime rate for Washington, DC began to decrease in 1994 due to a combination of events: (a) the laws began to enforce a more severe penalty for the possession and distribution of crack cocaine; (b) there was an increase in community awareness and involvement as a result of public campaigns to “take back the community;” and (c) the increased number of homicides involving children and adolescents began to take an emotional toll on the lives of surviving peers.

A Theory of Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory:

An African American Perspective

In the process of developing and writing this analytic story about African American adolescents’ surviving violence, five major dimensions were auditioned and selected as key perspectives of the multidimensional phenomenon of “surviving.” These five dimensions comprise what the study participants described as The Game (see Figure 1). The five dimensions of The Game are (a) connecting, (b) retaliating, (c) regretting, (d) reflecting, and (e) staying in or getting out. Each of these five sub-dimensions of The Game that influence surviving an adolescent violence trajectory will be discussed. Surviving was the prominent feature of the data, and became a multidimensional organizing perspective providing the most compelling answer to the analytic question,

“What all is going on here?” Surviving was defined by participants as “living on a day-to-day basis.” Surviving for these young men and women mirrored the same elements of surviving in mainstream America, which includes money, power, status, acceptance by their community, and respect. In the broadest sense, surviving was the essence of what study participants had achieved: they managed to survive their adolescent experience of violence in contrast to their peers who had been killed.


The Game

As analysis progressed through writing and discussing theoretical memos, the theory, Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory, involved many complex sub-dimensions that comprise what is designated The Game. In the following section, I will discuss the theoretical description of the theory using the dimensional analysis explanatory matrix (see Figure 1, page 49) as the methodological framework that provides the logic for discussing context, conditions, processes/actions, and outcomes. With “The Game” identified as the major defining condition and “Surviving the Game” as the major process, the other salient dimensions were defined as context, conditions, processes/actions and outcomes. This analysis reflects the perceptions of twelve African Americans who participated in the study. The Game of surviving adolescent violence consists of five major factors or sub-dimensions: (a) connecting to The Game, (b) retaliating involved in The Game, (c) regretting The Game, (d) reflecting on The Game, and (e) getting out/staying in The Game. Each of these major sub-dimensions involves another set of dimensions that served to propel adolescents along the violence trajectory.

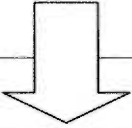
Connecting to The Game

Connecting to The Game is one of five major factors that influence surviving an adolescent violence trajectory (see Table 2). Connecting expresses the basic human need

Table 2. Connecting to The Game: Major Factor Influencing Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory



CONTEXT	CONDITIONS	PROCESS/ ACTIONS	CONSEQUENCES/ OUTCOMES
<p>Profile of adolescents connecting to The Game:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kids from affluent, middle-class communities - Kids from poverty-stricken urban communities - Kids deemed "special" by neighborhood peers <p>Family, neighborhood associations, school relationships, & friendship strongly influence the choices made regarding involvement in or staying out of The Game.</p>	<p>Activity of connecting to The Game:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The acquisition, distribution, and protection of crack cocaine via fighting and use of knives and guns. <p>Age Limited:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Before the "hump," preadolescence (<11 years old) - The "hump," adolescence (12-20 years old) - Over the "hump," 21 years and older 	<p>Components of connecting to The Game:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning and playing The Game via on-the-job training, which involves gaining expertise and moving up 	<p>Winning vs. losing connection with The Game</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rewards of The Game: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition Respect Admiration Affiliation Money Goods Personal relationships - Losses of The Game <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incarceration Death Injury


RETALIATING

to be valued, to be seen as important, to be cared for, to be treasured, and to be recognized and affirmed. Connecting was expressed as simply as being “visible” to another person. As one participant said, “when I was younger, I always wanted to be in a relationship. That’s all I wanted was to be loved and wanted.” Understanding the intensity of the need to be connected or established in some way with other human beings, especially when the connection is negative, demonstrates the risks that adolescents are willing to take to be connected.

Context for connecting to The Game. Analysis suggested that adolescents from varied backgrounds entered into The Game of adolescent violence, and shared similar experiences or stories. These adolescents represent one of three categories: (a) adolescents from affluent, middle-class communities, (b) adolescents from poverty-stricken urban communities, and (c) adolescents deemed “special” by neighborhood peers. Special adolescents were adolescents who were deemed special by their friends because of their outstanding talents and skills for playing sports. According to the study participants, family, neighborhood associations, school relationships, and friendships strongly influenced an adolescent’s choice regarding whether to get involved in “The Game.”

The responsibility of taking care of family was one reason cited for adolescents making the choice to get involved in “The Game.” These responsibilities included economic and protected responsibilities. One respondent explained,

I would take...[the money earned from The Game] and go to the grocery store...shopping...We need food in the house, you know. It was...all based upon taking care of home, okay. It wasn’t a material thing. That was what the game was

about...but before you go buy yourself a pair of shoes, you got to take care of home first, and that's what I did. [There] was not a day went by I didn't go up in the house with bags of groceries.

Both males and females expressed the overwhelming need to help the family by bringing extra money into the household. The earned income from participating in The Game was used to provide necessities like food, clothes, and usable items such as soap, detergent, toilet paper, and medicine. Male adolescents, especially, felt the overwhelming responsibility to protect and provide economic security of the family. Economic viability to preserve the family was a strong motivation for connecting to The Game. Without the earned income from engaging in The Game, many participants reported that they resorted to stealing, "fencing," and selling stolen merchandise.

Neighborhood associations also strongly influenced an adolescent's choice regarding whether to get involved in The Game. Participants described connecting to The Game primarily through neighborhood contacts. These contacts were usually older adolescents who were already involved in The Game of adolescent violence. The older adolescents became "role models" because of the recognition and power they received, and the material goods they obtained. There was another group of role models, referred to as "old heads" or older adults in the neighborhood who had participated in illegal activities throughout their lives, may have done jail time, but, most importantly, they had lived through The Game as an adolescent. These old heads were often revered for their street knowledge and wisdom. Some old heads continued to "dip and dab" in The Game, but tended to be very cautious about their involvement and association with the

adolescent players. Instead, the old heads were considered desired resources for adolescents who wanted to experiment with The Game.

When the choice was made to get involved with The Game, neighborhood associations became essential to surviving the violence trajectory. Establishing bonds with people in the neighborhood was essential to their security because the neighbors looked out for them and provided some protection from the police. These loyal neighbors did not volunteer any information to unauthorized, or authorized (police and other law enforcement) people about the adolescent players. In return for this loyalty, the adolescent players helped these neighbors by paying their rent or mortgage, utilities and other bills, brought groceries, paid for neighborhood "block parties," and other niceties. Many adolescents believed this was their way to "give back" to the community. This concept of giving back to the community represents a paradox, especially given that the earned income from The Game, such as selling drugs ultimately destroyed the very same community that protected them from the law.

School relationships also strongly influenced an adolescent's choice regarding whether to get involved in The Game. For some adolescents, getting involved with The Game provided an alternative to school. For many participants, classes were boring and teachers were referred to as "jerks." Most adolescents did not regularly attend school. One participant talked about cutting classes but hiding out somewhere in the school building, and trying to entice others to join him in some foolish pranks. Often, school relationships became no more than a means of being connected to The Game.

Adolescents who excelled in sports were encouraged by adolescent players of The Game to stay in school and not get involved with The Game. These adolescents were

deemed “special” and received recognition and respect from their peers in the neighborhood. This usually meant that those who excelled in sports were “off limits” in terms of participating in activities of connecting to The Game. They may have benefited from the economics of The Game, but they did not trade drugs or shoot people. There was a reciprocal component to this designation of being deemed special. The neighborhood players believed that if that special person made it good in the world of sports, he would represent the neighborhood and thus, make them feel good about who they were and where they came from. The special person might even give them a “shot out” (public recognition to the neighborhood or individuals that helped them). It almost seemed as though the players applauded the special ones for doing “right,” or having some special trait that ensured a life that did not have to include active participation in violence. Most of the players recognized what was right, but did not do it because being in a social relationship where money and power could facilitate reciprocity among family, friends, and neighborhood was more compelling.

For the special ones, living in the neighborhood and attending school across town forced those individuals to develop different strategies of behavior. These strategies were intended to promote personal safety. Strategies included knowing how to talk around their neighborhood friends, when to speak up, and what to say at the appropriate times. These safety strategies provided a way to control or contain the amount of connection with the neighborhood game. Another dimension defining partial involvement in The Game was school attendance. The special ones left the neighborhood and attended school “across town.” They had to work toward maintaining and controlling the degree of connection to the game. Further, being connected to the neighborhood and home

meant that there was a degree of loyalty that belonged there, but there was also loyalty that belonged to the school and friends across town. Each individual employed strategies to find “their place” or where they “fit.”

Being designated as special had privileges and responsibilities. Privileges included exclusion from drug dealing and protection from physical violence. Responsibilities included loyalty to the neighborhood, being a “star” (neighborhood living vicariously through the success of the special one) and maintaining confidentiality of the neighborhood. The special ones needed to “walk in the middle,” carefully balancing loyalty with both sides.

In addition, friendships also strongly influenced an adolescent’s choice regarding whether to become involved with The Game. Consistent with adolescents’ social development, friendships were highly valued, but in the case of The Game, connecting with friends represented a commitment for life. Ordinary connection with friends included being together and just “hanging out.” Homies (homeboys or homegirls) reflected lifelong commitment to buddies and friends.

They use to try and fight the police for me. A couple of my buddies...they ain’t gonna play...it’s do or die for one. If you in the wrong...even if you right or wrong...we gotta be together...I don’t care if you in somethin’ I’m with you.

These relationships, developed early in childhood, were sustained and maintained around the adolescent violence trajectory. Because of these friendships, many adolescents made the choice to become involved in The Game because of the influence of these lifelong friends who were also in The Game.

Conditions for connecting to The Game. The main activity of connecting to The Game was the acquisition, distribution, and protection of crack cocaine via fighting and use of knives and guns. The Game was age limited, referred to as the “hump,” and consisted of three categories: (a) before the hump, preadolescence, (b) the hump, adolescence, and (c) over the hump, 21 years and older. The processes or actions of connecting to The Game depended on the age of the recruits connecting into The Game. This age-limited activity is described in the following section, Processes/Actions for Connecting to The Game.

Processes/actions for connecting to The Game. The components of connecting to The Game include learning and playing The Game via on-the-job training, which involves moving up and gaining expertise.

The processes or actions for connecting to The Game have properties of an apprenticeship, on-the-job type relationship, which includes moving from being under an experienced player’s control to developing and managing independently the “business” of The Game. Thus, as an independent player, one acquires the drugs from a main source, packages the drugs for resale, and distributes the drug through their hired runners: this is the business of The Game. One learned by doing. Participants reported being gradually introduced to the structure and day-to-day management of The Game through involvement in smaller assigned tasks. Developing expertise also included learning when, where and how to buy, package and distribute the drugs, as well as the economics of the drug business. Once you become an independent player of The Game, protection is needed from the law, competitors, and consumers because of the nature of the business—the acquisition and distribution of drugs. As a leader in The Game, one could not afford

to have someone rob them of their drugs, money, or take over their identified territory. Guns and other weapons of violence had to be obtained in order to provide this protection, from which violence emerged as a natural occurrence. As individuals moved up in the business of The Game, they developed expertise in the management of The Game: violence control, protecting territory, products, and their employees.

Getting connected to The Game had an age component that was referred to as the hump. Before the hump, referred to a time before involvement with The Game. Early involvement in The Game during this preadolescent period involved small, odd jobs like carrying bags at the grocery store, running errands for neighbors, and washing car windows at designated intersections throughout the city. These individuals were about 10 years old and wanted to be involved in any activity that gave them pocket change.

Around ages 11 or 12 years, many participants were given the opportunity to make more money by carrying small packages of cocaine to designated places or people. As their skills with this activity improved, more responsibility was given to them to distribute the drugs. The hump referred to a period of adolescence. This was a time of increased activity in The Game that usually involved the drug business—the acquisition, distribution and protection of drugs. This was also a time of increased incidents of involvement with the law, jail time, and homicide.

Over the hump referred to a time when one reached the age of 21 years or older. These individuals tended to have less involvement in the day-to-day activities associated with The Game. Many of these young adults were relieved that they had an opportunity to live to be 21 years old. They had, in essence, made it over the hump, and had survived the adolescent violence trajectory. Usually at this stage, many of them were reflecting on

their past involvement, and beginning to regret the time spent in these illegal activities. It was at this time that many were no longer connected to The Game, because of death, incarceration, or the choice to get out of The Game.

Consequences/actions of connecting to The Game. There were winners and losers in The Game. The winners were those persons who reaped the rewards and consequences from The Game. The winners also included those special individuals that shared in the profits of The Game, but were protected and kept from getting directly involved in The Game. Rewards and profits included money, personal goods, admiration, respect, affiliation, platonic and intimate relationships, and recognition. The most respected reward was gaining recognition (see Figure 3). These rewards provided the players status within their community—with both friends/associates and enemies.

The process of recognition involved demonstrating evidence of being tough, independent, dependable, and following the rules. For example, toughness was evidenced in the show of fearlessness in situations of predicted or eminent danger, and showing little or no emotion in emotional situations. Being independent meant that you could handle yourself in any situation. Being dependable meant following through on assignments—doing what you were instructed to do by one of the higher level players. Following the rules pertained to the rules of The Game, such as respecting the territorial rights of other players, and not disrespecting another player, especially one with whom you conducted business. When these four conditions were achieved, a player was eligible to receive respect. When a player gained respect, they were befriended by other players, which allowed them to make a name for themselves. Making a name meant that others

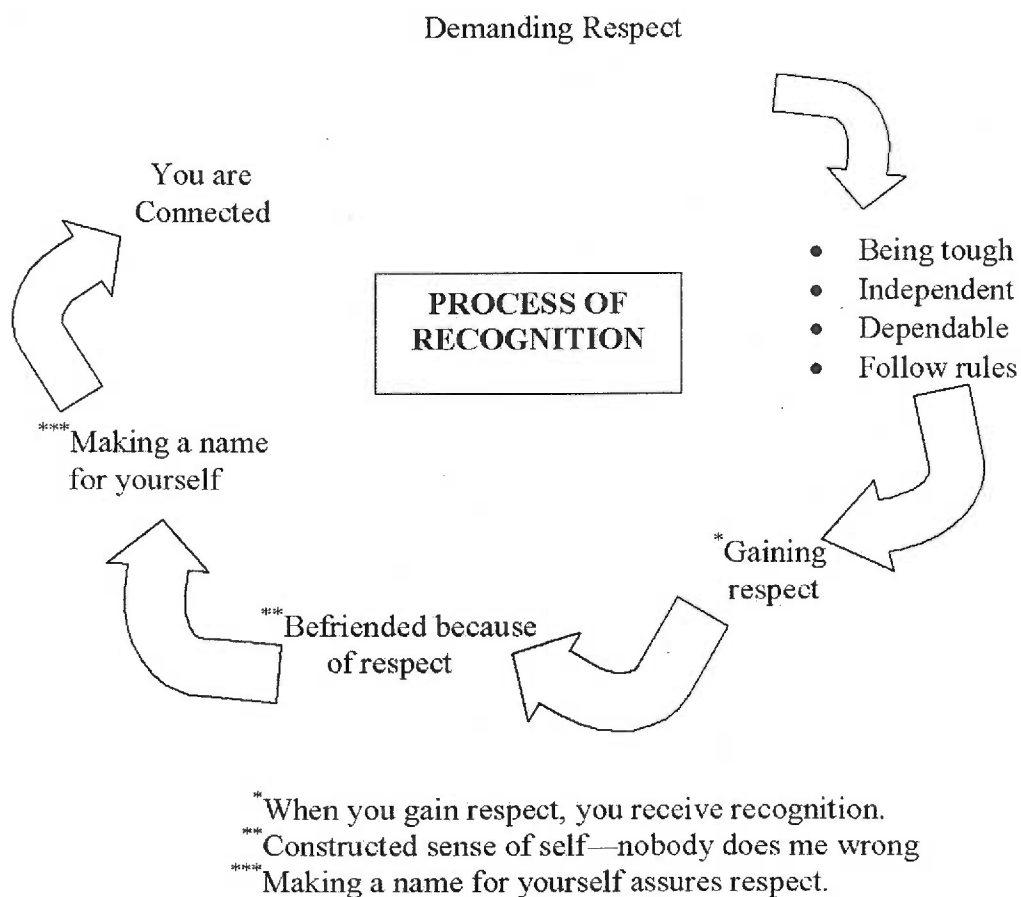


Figure 3. Process of recognition.

spoke well of you, and would conceivably send a little drug business your way. Once players made a name for themselves, this highly desired recognition was achieved. For players to maintaining this recognition status in The Game, they had to proclaim and demonstrate to others that they would not be a “sucker.” Being a sucker meant that you were vulnerable to losing status with the hierarchy of The Game. For the player-leaders, it was important to let your associates know that you would protect them and they would reciprocate with violent retaliation.

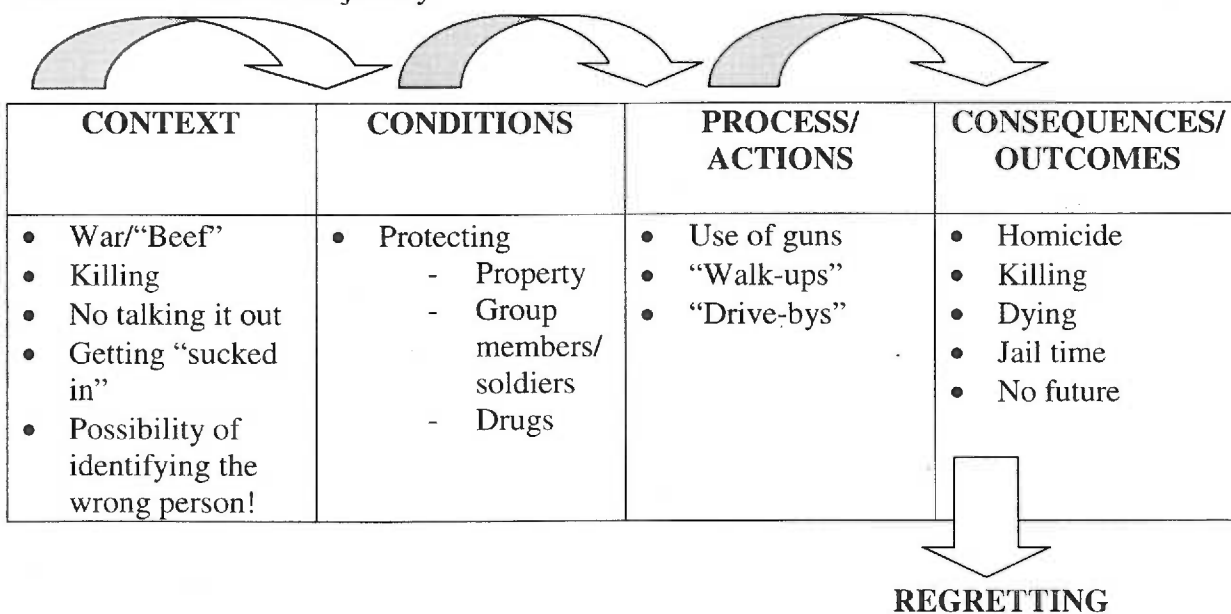
The winners were not considered immune to violence and death. They could die in the process of battling for retaliation. Very often they were the identified targets

because they were well known and respected. The losers were those that did not have the connection, thus, becoming targets for anyone deeming them dispensable and wanting to take over.

Retaliating Within The Game

Retaliating involved in The Game is the second major factor that influences surviving an adolescent violence trajectory (see Table 3). Retaliation was a very serious aspect of the drug business. It is in the process of retaliation that many adolescents were killed. Retaliation meant that you were “getting back” or seeking revenge for threats or acts of violence against yourself or your friends.

Table 3. Retaliating Within The Game: Major Factor Influencing Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory



Context for retaliating within The Game. Retaliating was described as having three central actions: killing, war, and beef. Killing was the objective of retaliating or the consequence of either a war or beef. Retaliation was viewed as a war between crews and/or territories. A beef was usually disagreement or conflict among one or more

individuals, but could lead to an all out war if allowed to go unsettled. It was a common belief that there was no other way to settle a beef (disagreement/conflict) without using guns. No one considered the possibility of a peaceful settlement, or talking it out. One participant explained to me that,

It's no such thing as 'beefing' verbally...if somebody say they 'beefing' then, guns are involved. It ain't no, I'm going to see you and we going to rumble and fight. If I have to fight you, it's because I don't have my gun. It's as simple as that...once the argument gets heated up to where a person says, 'man, whatever...when I see you it's whatever!'...That's it...we shooting at each other.

The fear of being "sucked in" to retaliating was expressed by some participants and described as the ability to become so angry and emotionally caught up into the events leading to the death of a close friend, that they respond with retaliation.

I become so emotionally involved and attached that I seek retaliation, that I am susceptible to other peers. Even if you're angry, but you are not as angry enough to retaliate, but you're hanging around other people who are living that life style, they're going to retaliate...you're more susceptible to being swayed ...and then you get sucked in.

In the process of retaliating, one player described how he had identified, and was about to kill the wrong person. He explained that in the course of trying to revenge the death of one of his close friend, he was about to kill the wrong person.

It was on a Sunday...I had got shot on a Saturday...him and his mother and his brother was coming out getting ready to go to church. Something

was telling me this was not the dude... We was like 15 deep...everybody was going to make sure they was gonna empty their clip on him...But, you know, I was...like naw, we can't kill this dude...this is the wrong dude.

Conditions for retaliating within The Game. Retaliation was also an effort to keep anyone from taking advantage of you. It was important to send a message throughout the neighborhood that if anyone tried to take advantage of you or your homies (friends), retaliation would be sought. Everybody watched each other's back, meaning that each person looked out for the other, and the leader was expected to protect the player members while they worked in The Game. The rule was that if your partner gets killed, you must kill his killer. The expectation is one of "evening the score when a killing has gone down."

I want to kill him...I was gonna kill ...this dude when I got home....When they (friends) are killed you want to get revenge...to kill them the way they killed your friend...that's when the war begins. It's a hard pill to swallow, it just doesn't go down.

Process/actions for retaliating within The Game. Retaliation was about "taking care of your business." The frequency at which retaliation took place tended to desensitize an individual to violence and murder; it became commonplace. Understanding violence as commonplace has been labeled by those outside the game as being cavalier. Revenge always entails the possibility of homicide.

Guns were the weapons of choice, mainly because they were easy to obtain. One participant describes how "everybody had a gun," and he had one at age 13. It was not just about protecting oneself. It was more about being prepared for the possibility that a

you see it, the more you just don't care about death...you don't care about life...murder then becomes an option in your mind."

A participant gave the following graphic description of what it was like to see someone dying:

It's one thing to see on television...people dodging bullets, it's another thing to see somebody's head explode or to see an eyeball just pop out. People think it's a movie...but it's for real...it's incredible how much blood can come out of a person's body. You can't understand it until you've stood next to somebody...it's like everything just slows down...you can feel it...you can tell when something is about to happen. You hear the shots...it's slow...it's almost like a dream...something you don't want to experience.

Jail was another consequence. Going to jail meant giving up freedom and the ability to make money on the street. No one wanted to end up jail. Going to jail put further hardships on the family, requiring that someone else step in and take over the responsibilities of caring for the family. In addition to this, the family would have to pool all of their resources to come up with enough money for bail. This would include selling as many of the material things as possible. These "hot" items would usually be in the form of jewelry, cars, televisions, and any other items that would sell quickly on the street. Families learned to do without in order to get the family member released from jail.

When I got locked up...my freedom was taken away...I'm not used to nobody telling me I can't have a drink of water...telling me it's chow

time, come eat...telling me when to take a bath, when to get on or off the phone. I wasn't use to staying in a place for 20 or 22 hours a day.

The time span for entering into the game was during the early adolescent years. The time of actual involvement in the game spanned the entire adolescent years. This timeline represented the violence trajectory. Involvement in The Game meant staying in until the end. The end was marked by death, incarceration, or reaching adulthood. The participants lost most of their friends to homicide during the ages of 15 and 18years. As a result, there was no effort made to plan for the future. There was no future, as far as they were concerned, beyond The Game; there was no need to go to school, to get an education, to work hard and save money, and no need to plan to live beyond 21 years because it was not going to happen.


You don't want to say, 'what future? I don't have no future.' Cause then they look at you like you stupid. That's just your reality. You don't have no future. It's going to stop. So, I want to be remembered as the person that had a BMW. I'm going to get my BMW now! You know, I ain't gonna' be 30. I'm gonna' get it now, 'cause I ain't gonna' be here."

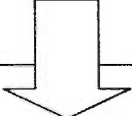
However, participants related that by reaching age 21, they had an opportunity to realize that they had survived, they were able to look back—reflect on their past lives, and try to make some meaning of the experience. They questioned aloud, why they were still alive and many of their close friends were dead. It was during this reflection that they were given to feelings of regret. The importance of adulthood was not just an age thing. It also meant that after age 18, the legal consequences were much higher. They could be sentenced to life in prison or execution.

Regretting The Game

Regretting was about feeling guilty. Sometimes, participants' described feeling guilty because they were still alive and their friends were dead. But, most often it was about regretting the killing and dying.

Table 4. Regretting The Game: Major Factor Influencing Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory



CONTEXT	CONDITIONS	PROCESS/ ACTIONS	CONSEQUENCES/ OUTCOMES
Unintentional Deaths - Children - Bystanders Targeted Deaths - Individual - Groups	Friends ("homies") dying too young Death becomes "common place"	Hurting "Trying to keep it together" Resolve towards death "When your time comes"	Reconsiders life 

REFLECTING

Context for regretting The Game. There were two categories of deaths, the unintentional deaths and the targeted deaths (See Table 4). The unintentional deaths were the ones where children and adults were inadvertently shot and/or killed. Often this was the result of drive-by shootings, or random shooting into a crowd. It was never the intention to kill a child, but it was a risk of The Game. There was great sensitivity for the children of the neighborhood. In fact, the local drug dealers looked out for and gave money to the children. When a child got injured or killed as a result of gunshots,

everyone was affected, but the emphasis was on The Game. The Game business came first children/families came second. Thus, it was not that someone intentionally set out to harm children, it was the nature of the business emanating from the drug culture.

You know, until this day, I be hurting 'cause I gotta little girl. To this day, it be on my mind...what if that was my bullet that hit that little girl?

The individuals that were targeted for killing were usually seen as getting what they deserved. However, the regret came in the overall magnitude of how death affects the surviving family and friends.

Conditions for regretting The Game. There was a great sense of loss express when talking about homies that were killed, one after another. It was important for those individuals to be remembered. References were made to specific songs, certain activities, and specific streets and corners within the neighborhood that would trigger memories of a dead homie or associate. The surviving friends and family would devise ingenious ways of keeping the memory of the killed individual alive in their thoughts. Tee shirts with the victim's picture, plaques and statues placed at the death sites were just some of the items used to keep memories alive. The difficulty for the survivors was in the fact that their friends died too young. It was expressed that "they just didn't have a chance to live...a chance to see life or to enjoy their life. There would be times that we never going to get to share." With death being so pervasive, there was an acceptance of death as commonplace.

I made a joke of it (referring to the deaths of several friends). That's just how I deal with it...I haven't cried since. In that stage, I wasn't sad. I never went to a funeral sad again. When I go to a funeral I can tell you

exactly what's happening. The minister comes in...he say... 'Though the silk worm eats away at my body, I will not fret. Look to the hills from whence cometh your help.' Then somebody's going to fall out, and then somebody might cry, moan and then they'll tell you that they're going to close the casket. Then somebody else cries. They leave out saying, 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust.' It was just routine then, and it's routine now, in my mind.

Many of the Game players seemed to be resolved to death, in that you die when your time comes. Since they did not know when death might come, they tried to be prepared for that moment when life was taken away. However, within The Game no one talked about death or dying, and no one wanted to die. There was this idea that you couldn't go around talking about your fear of death because it made you more vulnerable. It was believed that if you talked about being afraid of dying, when faced with a critical kill-or-be-killed moment, one would second-guess themselves, hesitate to pull the trigger, and ultimately be killed.

You can't go around thinking about death...if it comes, it comes, but you can't think about it. If you do, you are setting yourself up to get killed. It makes you vulnerable. You can't afford to get into a situation where you hesitate to pull the trigger...it will get you killed....You only have two choices; either you're going to walk around afraid of it (meaning death) and you are not going to be able to function. You're not going to be able to sell your crack; you're not going to be able to get your money because

you are so scared. So, the only way you can deal with it is to face it. Well if it's coming...I'm not even going to worry about it.

When it was all over, the hurt and pain for the survivors remained long after the funeral services were over. Some were never able to get over the death of family members and close friends. The dates and times of the deaths were indelibly stamped in their minds.

I lost Manny my senior year, March 5, 1992, and I lost Peewee the following year, August 15, 1993, then '94 summer I lost two cousins in car accidents...and Frank, December 15 of '95. Then the next year I lost another real close friend (shot and killed) October 3 of '96, and then Peewee's stepbrother died (strangled) on December 28 of '96...'97 was the only year I didn't have a death...and I was happy. I thought it ended, but it started right back in early '98 when my father was shot and killed in his barbershop. It wasn't intended for him...they was shooting at someone else...so far in '99 I haven't had no one yet. I had maybe 10 to 15 other deaths I could tell you but maybe not the dates.


All efforts were made at trying to "keep it all together," trying to keep their lives from falling apart. The agony was seen and felt, over and over, as the survivors continued to recall the events surrounding the deaths.

It is at this point that the survivors, having actually survived these experiences of homicidal deaths of friends and family members, begin to think about their lives. This began a time of reflecting or reconsidering past life events.


Reflecting on The Game

Context for reflecting on The Game. Reflecting occurred when the individual reached one of two significant points in time (See Table 5). It may have occurred after a

Table 5. Reflecting on The Game: Major Factor Influencing Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory



CONTEXT	CONDITIONS	PROCESS/ ACTIONS	CONSEQUENCES/ OUTCOMES
Reaching a turning point: - Specific event - Turning 21 years or older	"Aging out" Continuing to follow the rules	Dying Living Staying in Getting out Changing - Thinking - Behavior	Declaration of no longer being able to stay "involved" "Can't do this no more" Desire to live "I don't want to die"



STAYING IN/
GETTING OUT

specific event or series of events that resulted in the death of family members and/or friends, and at the time at which they reached early adulthood. The death of a family member or close friend brought death close to home.

The day he (brother) was shot...you know, I hated God...I hated everything...I was like why did God decide to take my brother when he was trying to change his life around? But then when it hit home, it hurts more. You feel the pain that other family members has been through...there's an old saying, 'that's a hard pill to swallow'...it's like it don't never go down, and it's

rough...it's real rough. You sit up at night and you cry. The things that you used to do you end up not doing anymore, and you just begin to fade away...fade out of the game.

Reaching early adulthood was referred to as "getting over the hump." Getting over the hump is very significant because it represents a time when death is less likely to occur. It becomes a time at which they reached a type of safety zone, a time when they became less vulnerable as victims of homicide. With an increase in the number and frequency of friends dying, reflecting took on a greater meaning. Living and dying became more significant.

Conditions for reflecting on The Game. "Aging out" was a condition that had an impact as these adolescents reflected on their life experiences associated with The Game. Aging out meant that one continued to be involved, but their involvement lessened as they got older. As newer, younger players began to become a part of The Game, the older ones had less influence. The younger players tended to have limited capacity for dealing with conflict associated with protecting their territory, and were more inclined to resort to violent measures as a means of solving the differences. Although, the involvement for those aging out was gradually lessening, they continued to follow the unwritten rules of The Game. They continued to give respect to the leader-players by respecting their territory, property, and those close associates. Continuing to follow the rules allowed those aging out to remain connected to The Game and to the influential players.

Process/actions for reflecting on The Game. One participant described dying this way:

When it's (referring to death) going to happen, I'm going to be ready, knowing in the back of your mind you ain't ready. It's like tricking yourself...you just trick yourself into saying, 'alright, I'm ready for it.' But you're not...you don't ever want to go...and I've known plenty of people who have said, 'I don't care ...if it's my time I'm going out...I won't care.' I've said it (myself), that's how I know... (But), you don't want to go out...you don't want that!

Living becomes a highly valued commodity. Making life changes became a necessity. These changes were about whether to continue their involvement in drugs and if so, to what extent would they be involved. If they decided to come out of the game completely, how would they survive? Where would the money come from? How would they care for their dependents? What resources would be available? When the choice was to stay in the game, they chose to be less involved.


Consequences/outcomes for reflecting on The Game. The consequences of reflecting on their past life were: changing the level of involvement in The Game, wanting new ways to live, not wanting to continue their same behavior, and proclaiming the desire of not wanting to die. One participant put it this way, "I can't do this shit no more...I can't do this no more...I don't wanna die...I try to change."

Getting Out/Staying in The Game

Context for getting out/staying in The Game. For these individuals, envisioning a future life included the process of developing a new self-concept beyond that of drug dealer. When finally realizing that they had survived, the question then became, "how do I live beyond this?" They were still lacking a clear vision of where and how they will fit

in outside of The Game. The reality of a “future” was staring them in the face. They were like soldiers stumbling out of a war zone—destination unknown, with no map to follow—asking themselves the following questions: What do I do now? How do I begin to put my life back together? and How do I make it normal? Strategies for doing this are centered in the choices of whether to get out or stay in The Game (See Table 6).

Table 6. Getting Out/Staying In The Game: Major Factor Influencing Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory



CONTEXT	CONDITIONS	PROCESS/ ACTIONS	CONSEQUENCES/ OUTCOMES
Looking to a future	“Acting out”	Changing	Trying to undo the wrongs
Being an “old head”	Following the rules	Dying	Planning for the future
Choices - Staying in - Getting out	Straddling the fence		Getting a “legit” lifestyle Getting killed

If the choice was made to get out, then strategies were developed around planning for the future. Change began slowly, with things like, quieting a short temper, and giving up smoking marijuana. One began to see a shift in thinking that focused on responsibility, social skills, work experience, and completing a formal education. All of the surviving participants talked about going back to complete high school and/or going on to pursue college. For them, life seemed to regain its value, but shedding a decade of bad habits meant walking away from nearly half of a lifetime, wiping out the middle years. Inherent in this change of attitude and direction, was an identified concern for the next generation

of kids coming out of their neighborhoods. Their concerns for the future of these kids was that they would stay in school, complete their education, and not get caught up in the drug culture; not having to do what they did, not becoming obsessed with the money. There was also an expressed desire to become adult mentors/role models that could make positive influences on the lives of these younger children and the choices they made.

Sometimes getting out was expressed in terms of being an “old head.” This term was used to describe those former drug dealers, young adults, still living in the neighborhood, hanging out on the corners or sitting on the porches. The “old heads” somehow managed to make it through jail time and/or out live their bullet wounds. Sometimes it was because they were astute in being able to avoid trouble and dodge the gunfire, but most of the time it was because they were just lucky. And even with the luck of having avoided the gunfire, some were shot and killed because they continued “straddling the fence,” by hanging out on the street corners, and keeping up with the local happenings. They ended up being killed because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Conditions for getting out/staying in The Game. For those that made the choice to stay in, strategies centered on continuing to follow the rules of the game. If their luck held out, they stayed alive. Otherwise, they met their demise at the hands of gunfire. It became very clear that one could not straddle the fence when it came to being in or out of the game. This was a dangerous position to hold. Straddling the fence could put an individual in a place where they could get killed trying to get away from the targeted individual. If one was completely out of the game, then they were disconnected, staying

away from street corners and neighborhood hangouts. One participant said it like this, "...the only way... to really get away from it is to move totally out of it."

Process/actions to getting out/staying in The Game. The act of dying has been pervasive throughout this adolescent "violence trajectory," and it is not any less here, as a part of the dimension of getting out/staying in The Game. The participants continue to reflect somber moods as they describe the effects of seeing so many of their peers dying. In The Game, death eliminated more players. One participant described buying a camera and snapping self-portraits, sometimes weekly. He explained that he wanted an up-to-date photo handy so no one would have to "put an old picture on my obit (obituary)." He believed that what eventually brought peace to his immediate neighborhood was the death of a 12-year old neighborhood kid. "The victims, finally, were too young...they were following us, the 10-, 11-, 12-year-olds...they were 'beefing.' They were not going to reach my age. It was just wrong."

For many of the participants, expressing feelings around dying was difficult. There was no acceptable way to express the sadness that was felt. It was believed that crying was not going to bring them back; it would not make a mother feel any better. There was nothing else to do but to go on with life. One participant made reference to a verse in a song by the popular rap singer, Tupac, that said, "how long will you mourn me?" He went on to explain,

Let's say I die...you're going to mourn me for how long...and they when you die...how long is the person going to mourn you? We feel it...we're going to the wake, we're going to the funeral...we feeling it...two weeks later...we still feeling it. When you go three, four and five weeks

later...your mourning has diminished because what good is it going to show for us to be still mourning when we can't bring the person back...it's going to make you do one thing, never close that wound.

Consequences/outcomes to getting out/staying in The Game. Over time, those that got completely out of The Game, tended to pursue a legitimate lifestyle of working a steady job with the appearances of a "legit" lifestyle. Individuals became involved in community service and volunteer work. This often included working with other children, volunteering at special centers like an AIDS prevention center, holding membership on neighborhood community boards, and being apart of the process to make changes in the social system. The consequences of these actions can be viewed as efforts at trying to make up for the wrong that was done as a result of their previous lifestyle; trying to give back to the community and making it better for those that would come later.

Those who went on to college pursued career interests in service related subjects, such as law enforcement, elementary education, and social work. All of them were beginning to look for a better quality of life. This did not mean that these individuals did not "stumble," allowing old tempers to flare, and self-doubts to resurface. It was during these times that personal supports and other resources were needed to catch them in a net of encouragement, offering and delivering trust, praise, and someone to listen.

Even though their lives were headed in the direction of a "future," there was always the concern that anything could happen. Violence continued to lurk around on the outside, carrying with it the immediate fear of death. The sound of gun shots often signaling the fatality of another victim. But this time, as the friends and family gather in the emergency room, the talk does not turn to getting even. Strength of character, not a

show of force, is exhibited. Those surviving friends realize that they cannot control everything that happens in life, but they can control their response.

Summary

For these African American adolescents, the socioeconomic circumstances surrounding the urban drug culture represented a means by which they could be connected to everything that was important to them. Family, school, friends, and neighborhood were sources of personal recognition. Recognition, or making a name, assured respect. When they gained respect, they received recognition. In the process of connecting, they were led to experience phases of retaliating, reflecting, regretting, and making choices around getting out of, or staying in the game. There appeared to be this superficial acceptance of the reality of their socioeconomic situation. However, they realized that conditions would not get better until they took control and made things happen for themselves and their families.

Choices that were made indicate responsibility at many different levels. Evidence of responsibility was directed towards the family in a need to take on the role of caretaker—bringing money into the family—being responsible for caring for grandmother, mother, and older and younger siblings. This sense of responsibility was especially strong for the male children. Interestingly, most of the participants were without a positive father figure or male role model in the home. Many had children of their own who lived with their single mothers. Their means of remaining responsible for the family was demonstrated in their ability to financially care for their family. Involvement in the drug culture for these adolescents was initiated out of a desire to normalize circumstances that reflected an unequally balanced socioeconomic system.

This imbalance assured them of having very little of life's necessities as defined by the majority culture.

The challenges faced, and the choices made throughout this period did not progress in a linear fashion, although one may be led to believe this based upon the stories told in the interviews. Throughout the analysis, evidence indicated that these adolescents made difficult choices with very few emotional and tangible resources. The findings are ironic in that these adolescents' thought-processes mirror that of the larger society. This society, built on capitalism, has heavily influenced their cognitive development. Consider the fact that major U.S. corporations choose to exploit the economic system of developing countries, paying workers sub-standard wages, and continuing to allow sweat shops to be the manufacturing environment, as opposed to paying American workers scale-wages, and building plants in American cities that help provide needed jobs and community stability. This view of capitalism underscores the worst characterization of American society where maximizing profits and returns on investments for shareholders are the major considerations, with little concern for the standard human life in the US. These participants felt they made the same choices. They opted out of taking a job where the pay was sub-standard. They lacked the skills and/or education to command higher wages. Thus, standing on the street corner, selling drugs at \$500 to \$1000 a day follows the social values to maximize profits while having little consideration for human life.

Strong economic rewards continue to be a secondary driving force for the involvement in the drug business. Primarily, there remains the desire for affiliation with

family, friends, neighborhood, and school. For many, the buying, selling, and protection of crack cocaine is the choice means by which this affiliation is made.

Chapter V

Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to: (a) summarize and discuss the substantive theory developed in the study and relate it to the literature, (b) discuss the implications of the findings for practice, administration, and education, (c) discuss the limitations of the study, and (d) discuss recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Findings

The substantive theory, *Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory: An African American Perspective*, is substantiated by the findings that some African American adolescents relate the meaning of their experiences of violence with some variation in the experience and diversity of opinion. In developing theory around the multidimensional phenomenon of “surviving,” five major organizing perspectives emerged as dimensions in describing the participants’ experience with the homicidal death of peers. These dimensions provided the parameters around what participants described as “The Game.”

The five dimensional categories, connecting, retaliating, regretting, reflecting, and staying in/getting out, were the means by which the adolescents were able to participate in The Game. Their participation in The Game provided opportunity to gain power and control, receive recognition from peers, neighborhood associates, and identified enemies, and ultimately survive the socioeconomic and environmental pressures of being African American and living in the urban city. The theory assists with developing, implementing, and testing intervention for violence prevention as well as for working with adolescents who experience homicide violence; the theory also has implications for social, community, and educational strategic planning.

The organizing perspective of the theory, *Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory*, is consistent with the theoretical explanation accompanying the ecological model of adolescent development as discussed in Chapter II. The ecological model explains the significance of the microsystems as it defines the complex relationships between the individual and the immediate environment in which that person participates (e.g., home, school, workplace, etc.). For the adolescent, this social network of interpersonal relationships involved direct face-to-face interactions with people who were deemed influential in their lives. As this process continued, these relationships became more complex and influential in enhancing the development of the adolescent. Thus, peer influence took on and sustained an increasingly important role. The peer group holds the power of acceptance via friendship, popularity, and prestige, as well as negative influence through the power of acceptance, and approving and encouraging high-risk behaviors. The power of acceptance demonstrated the need to be connected to friends, family, neighborhood, and school, but less with family. Participation in *The Game* was a way to fulfill their developmental needs. For these participants, *The Game* was the socioeconomic conditions surrounding the acquisition, distribution, and protection of crack cocaine. *The Game* represented the possibility of acquiring the material things that they wanted and needed; financially taking care of their family, and selected neighborhood residents; and being able to spend money freely on close friends and others deemed a part of their inner circle.

Major study findings were (a) surviving was a continuous, circuitous process known as *The Game*, which consisted of five dimensions or phases that supported the

closed...you've set a limit on your age." Therefore, any decisions made were present-oriented—based upon the fact that they would not live to carry out any life long goals. There was no need to plan because they believed that they would not see the future. They were always aware of death, knowing that it would come soon, although, they did not know when, they had to think about it everyday because of their participation in or association with The Game, or as a bystander. Even though no one was actually looking for them, they had to always be aware that somebody could drive by looking for "their man," and in the process, shoot everyone in the vicinity. For some participants, their only hope was to be alive at Christmastime. Making plans to get an education, to buy a house, or for retirement were unrealistic goals for them.

Discussion of the Findings

The questions for this study addressed the issues relating to the meaning and impact of peer homicide, what is the impact of peer homicide on African American adolescents, and what is the impact upon the choices and decisions that are made during the transition to adulthood? It is believed that understanding the meaning of this experience is a crucial step in designing and testing appropriate and effective services and interventions to improve the outcomes for this vulnerable group. The theory, *Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory: An African American Perspective*, emerged from dimensional analysis of the data. The theory represents the organizing framework for identifying and describing five dimensional categories or phases of the violence trajectory known as The Game. Participants in this study, who are now adults, recalled their experiences of participating in The Game, experiencing peer homicide, and getting out and surviving The Game. They were now living their lives as adults based on their

experiences in adolescence, and for the most part, they were keeping their experiences a secret. They were willing to share their experiences so that other adolescents would have a better understanding of the consequences of living such a lifestyle. although much was shared during the interviews, the participants chose not to discuss their direct involvement in shooting and killing individuals and the subsequent incarcerations that resulted from their actions. The participants did not reveal any details of how they shot and murdered individuals as a participant of The Game.

There is a paucity of information that addresses the pervasiveness of violence in the urban community. Generally, the information discusses the incidence, prevalence, and exposure to violence. Many studies surveyed children and adolescents' involvement in aggressive acts and their witness of violent acts in predominately African American schools in urban communities across the US (Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Jenkins & Bell, 1994; Jenkins & Thompson, 1986; Martinez & Richters, 1993; Osofsky, et al., 1993; Shakoor & Chalmers, 1991; Uehara, et al., 1996; Singer, et al., 1995). However, these studies are limited because there are no studies they did not address the meaning of violence from an adolescent perspective.

This understanding of the violence trajectory of African American adolescents may provide the rubric of a new paradigm for violence prevention. The topic of adolescent violence is controversial in that no particular identified approach has been successful in solving this social dilemma. In a study by DuRant, Getts, Cadenhead, Emans, and Woods (1995) where depression was found to be positively associated with exposure to violence, a Purpose in Life Scale was created from the adolescents' responses to questions regarding their life expectancy. Adolescents who felt there was little chance

they would live to be 25 years old had higher incidences of exposure to violence. This finding was supported in the current study. Many participants did not expect to live to be 25 years old because of the violence trajectory in which they were involved, The Game.

Perhaps the most similar study found in the literature that is comparable to the current study is Guterman and Cameron's (1997) study that presented an assessment framework that examined the impact of community violence on the lives of at risk adolescents. This assessment framework provided a heuristic component that considered the role of exposure to community violence in the lives of adolescents. Within this heuristic component, the researcher uncovers key factual threads that assist in understanding the consequences and meanings of violent events for adolescents from an adolescent perspective. Likewise, the present study has also demonstrated the value of understanding the experience of homicide violence from the perspective of the adolescents who survived the experience.

Knowledge of the violence trajectory and the nature of personal involvement are important for professionals working with adolescents. Professionals need to be able to recognize these dimensional categories as a timeline, and understand how to develop, implement, test, and evaluate interventions that address the components of The Game. Knowing the characteristics of the phases can lead to appropriate, individualized intervention that is meaningful and effective. The five dimensional categories of The Game—connecting, retaliating, regretting, reflecting, and getting in/staying out—represent the theory, *Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory: An African American Perspective*. Each dimensional category with identifying criteria is presented below.

The connecting phase is the earliest point on the violence trajectory and represents a time where the adolescent is only partially involved. It is the introductory phase. Characteristics of not being fully involved are increasingly irregular attendance at school, spending time hanging out with specific friends, being secretive about their whereabouts, more resistive to following the established rules in the home, and receiving expensive gifts in the form of athletic apparel, especially shoes. In addition, they always seem to have cash on hand, appearing not to need money from their parents/guardians. In addition to these behaviors, adolescents in the connecting phase have a need and desire to be wanted and valued. One participant reported, "When I was younger I always wanted to be in a relationship. That's all I wanted to be was loved and wanted. Sometimes, I would hook school, but I'd still be in the school."

An effective intervention would need to focus on providing opportunities for these adolescents to be accepted, and feel appreciated rather than dismissed and punished. They need to understand that resources are available, that people can have legitimate jobs, and own their own businesses without being involved in the marketing of drugs. In order to accomplish these things, real opportunities need to exist in poor communities (i.e., jobs that pay equal to or greater than minimal wage). There is a lot of talk about opportunities and options available for the disadvantaged, but specific qualifications and education are necessary, which many of these adolescents lack. Thus, their options appear to them to be limited only to The Game or some other form of illegal activity. To them, opportunities seem limited and non-existent. These adolescents need opportunities to gain knowledge and skills and experience something different other than The Game, for example, going to camp. They need to experience life outside of the neighborhood.

There were participants who reported that they had never been to summer camp, or traveled outside of the immediate Washington, DC area. They were never exposed to other parts of the country, or traveled outside of the US.

Clinicians and other professionals working with adolescents like these should make efforts to see that communities are doing all they can to provide opportunities and resources. They need to know that when they tell an adolescent to find employment that the opportunities are available for employment with their particular knowledge and skill level. This involvement, or case management, needs to be not only professional, but also personal and political. Political and public involvement is necessary to get communities actively working towards this end.

Schools play an important part in this process. Adolescents need to be made apart of the mainstream program. They need to be made to feel that they are important, that they matter, and there are people who are genuinely concerned about them. When they are not at school, someone needs to explore why. For some adolescents, this action is reflective that someone cares about them and that they belong. These actions are all directed towards improving self-esteem and self-worth. The importance of intervening early cannot be underestimated. It is during this developmental period that an adolescent's sense of self-esteem and self-worth needs to be carefully nurtured and maintained. Parents/guardians need to be aware that adolescents within this age group need to have intensive support from warm, caring, and loving adults who will give them the recognition and acceptance that is so critical at this time. Many adolescents are struggling, while others are doing well.

The identifying characteristics for the retaliation phase are easier to recognize, but more difficult to manage. This individual is characterized as being a very angry adolescent who is known for his or her “bad attitude” and defiance of authority. Often, this adolescent is the one who has been caught carrying a weapon, and may have been referred for counseling due to his or her aggressive or “out-of-control” behavior. These individuals are very difficult to manage, and have been described as “meaner-than-hell” by their peers, family, and other adults. Professionals who work with them often lack the knowledge and resources to follow through with them, and help them work through this period. It becomes very easy to write them off as being incorrigible and recommend long-term juvenile facility confinement. Intervention needed at this time needs to be very specific at presenting reality, and identifying the choices that are available. This is a time when older adolescents that have gone through this experience could come and talk with them in a very direct manner; making sure that they understand the consequences of their behavior. Giving them the opportunity to hear this from someone who has “been there and done that” gives the experience more credibility in the eyes of the younger adolescent. Asking them questions like, “how badly do you want to feel after accidentally killing a child?”

The characteristics of the regretting phase usually consists of the adolescent talking about the deaths of close friends and family members, and perhaps the accidental victims. This phase is usually a hallmark after experiencing consequences of their behavior, for example doing one or multiple jail time or experiencing the aftermath of having accidentally killed a child. This single incident can be the turning point because many adolescents have children of their own. Intervention at this phase should be that of

support and presenting options. This is the phase in which many adolescents reflect and regret the consequences of their actions. They need someone to listen and understand where they are in the process of the violence trajectory and to support the choice to leave The Game.

The characteristics of the reflective phase consist of the adolescent's willingness to talk more about their experiences and their involvement in violence. Some may discuss actual incidents of shooting and killing, but may not reveal all of the details, especially if they were directly involved. In this phase, adolescents talk about what they could have done if circumstances had been different. Often, they compare themselves with another adolescent who was deemed more successful in sports or school. One participant described how he was a good boxer. He believed that he could have developed a career in boxing. His voice drops and a sad look appears on his face, as he quietly adds

If things had been different. If my father been there like I'd wanted him to be there... 'cause I was into sports... I played everything. I could have been a boxer. I use to love baseball, too... so much that every time I would step up to the bat I'd hit a home run... I could have been a soccer player... I use to do the archer with the arrows... I could have been a lot of things... I always had the potential... I still got the potential to hit the bat... if I could have done it when I was 16... but I was still in The Game doing my thing.

Intervention at this phase may be focused on helping to create a sense of safety and self-efficacy. It would also be a time to reinforce options for leaving The Game, and seeking a life that is legitimate and positive; a life that includes identified goals that will lead them to become productive adults, loving and caring parents, and possibly

counselors and role models for other adolescents. The options for getting out of The Game would also include the issue of safety. If they were out of The Game, the chances for living to be 21 years old would be greatly enhanced, and they would be able to get a real job, and other individuals would appear as supporters and be available to listen and reassure them of the reality of a future. Intervention in this phase also needs to address economic needs. These young men and women should have educational and economic opportunities to help them in establishing a viable life outside of the drug culture. There needs to be opportunities to obtain an education that will prepare them for the job market. There is a need for jobs that will pay decent wages with health insurance so that they can support their families. Throughout all of this, there remains a need for the support of genuine, caring people who will stay and remain supportive throughout the process. These adolescents begin life with the same needs and wants as the average adolescent, however, when opportunities and options are limited or unavailable, they will survive in whatever way possible as was indicated in this study's findings by participating in The Game.

Implications of Findings for Practice, Administration, and Education

Knowing that urban, African American adolescents experience violence as a trajectory with specific, interconnecting phases, provides a basis for improved understanding of this group. Understanding that the phases are fluid and dynamic gives the professional clinician a framework for assessing the appropriate need for and application of specific and meaningful interventions. As clinicians it is very important to understand the experience of violence from the perspective of the adolescent because, intervention strategies that are viable and that actually work need to be applied. On the

practical level, a clinician must recognize that a strategy for helping an adolescent at any point in time within a phase helps to move the adolescent towards a positive outcome. A one-size-fits-all adolescent violence prevention program will continue to be unsuccessful in communities and neighborhoods where values and beliefs differ on the effects of poverty, education, economic resources, employment, availability of weapons, and other issues that directly affect the low socioeconomic, urban communities.

These adolescents are not born criminals, and they certainly are not stupid. They share the same needs and desires as other adolescents. These desires offer an opportunity for intervention that will enhance the safety and health of adolescents, their families, communities, and society. As clinicians, we have to be committed to finding ways to help adolescents meet their needs and acquire those desires that will ensure successful transition out of the violence trajectory into positive, productive adults.

Administrative implications refer to the legislation of social programs addressing socioeconomic needs of communities. Numerous expensive social programs have been initiated in an effort to reduce urban violence and improve community resources, but they have not been effective. Urban community violence continues to exist at a high rate. In order to be effective, specific intervention programs should be established with active and direct involvement from the community. Real opportunities and resources need to exist in poor communities (i.e., jobs that pay equal to or greater than minimal wage) that will help improve the socioeconomic outcomes for these young people. The federal government continues to credit itself with the fact that there are opportunities and options available for the disadvantaged, disenfranchised individuals in our society. Upon examining the record, there may indeed be a plethora of social programs, but these programs are only

viable if adolescents have the specific qualifications and education necessary to qualify. Individual and group involvement in the political process needs to be stressed at all levels. Change cannot, and will not, take place without pressure from special interest groups. Political and public involvement is necessary to get communities actively working towards this end. Schools are essential in this process. Schools need money to attract committed, caring, and competent teachers who are willing to advocate for the students, and see to it that the community is in a position to respond to the needs of its adolescents.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study fall into three categories: sample, geographic location, and ethnic group. This qualitative study had a relatively small sample size consisting of 14 participants, and only included African American participants. Thus, the findings may not be directly generalizable to all African American adolescents or other vulnerable populations. On the other hand, the findings generated from this study were rich in content from the experiences of persons who had participated in and survived the adolescent violence trajectory. With the homicide rate being the highest among African American adolescents as compared to other ethnic minority populations, it was conceivable that the study should initially target African Americans, a group that is in need of a particular focus. More studies need to be conducted with groups of African Americans in other urban settings, sampling generously from middle class, suburban, African American families.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research will continue to focus on issues of access to vulnerable populations as research participants. Until voices of the persons most directly involved in the phenomenon of interest can be heard, social behavioral research efforts will continue to rediscover the same known researchers' factors, but not the socioecological factors that might be helpful in developing and testing violence prevention interventions. Researchers have talked about violence as it cycles with poverty, school failures, psychological traumas, and other high-risk behaviors (Singer, 1995; Laraque et al., 1995; Orpinas, 2000; Ropp, 1992). Many of the factors that contribute to these cyclic events are known. Breaking the cycle requires unique community intervention strategies. Specific, meaningful, effective interventions that complement community values and beliefs need to be developed. More specifically, research studies would need to focus on other populations of African American adolescents in other diverse settings and communities, particularly in densely populated urban communities where the homicide rate is high and socioeconomic status is low. Future studies would also provide opportunities to compare theoretical outcomes related to the five dimensional categories as related to other ethnic minority populations. In doing so, it is likely that this study may also need to be adapted to match the needs, interest, and resources within other ethnic minority populations.

In summary, the grounded theory, *Surviving an Adolescent Violence Trajectory: An African American Perspective*, demonstrates a beginning understanding of urban community violence among African American adolescents, that incorporates factors that have been recognized by many other researchers. It provides a framework for organizing

thinking about the complex social issues contributing to urban community violence. As such, the theory is open for modification, expansion, and debate.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Information Sheet

IRB # 5444
Approved: 5/3/99
Revised: 5/3/00

OREGON HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY
Information Form for Research Participant

Title: Impact of Peer Homicide on Adolescents

Principal Investigator: Ann Beckett, RN, MSN, Doctoral Student (503) 494-5057

Co-Investigator(s): Linda C. Robrecht, CNM, DNSc (503) 494-3832
Gail Houck, RN, Ph.D. (503) 494-3825
Judy Kendall, R.N., Ph.D. (503) 494-3890

Purpose: You have been invited to participate in this research study because, during your teen years, you experienced the loss of a peer through homicide. The purpose of this study is to describe the experience of homicidal death of a peer from the perspective of young adults who, during their teen years, lost a peer to homicide. The findings from this study will help improve understanding of the effects of violence, and how the violent death of peers impacts the lives of adolescents.

Procedures: You will be asked to participate in one (1) individual, face-to-face, interview to talk about your experiences when you were a teen, and to share your thoughts and feelings regarding this experience of how it may have affected your life. All interviews will be audio taped. Interviews will be conducted at an appropriate local community site that is physically safe for both the participant and investigator, and will ensure privacy. It is anticipated that the interview will last approximately 2 hours. If there are any questions that you do not feel comfortable talking about, you will not be required to do so. You will be asked to identify your city and neighborhood of residence by zip code only. You will not be asked to reveal your true name or other personally identifying information.

Risks and Discomforts: Discussing experiences of violence and death from your personal perspective may make you feel sad and/or angry. Additionally, you may feel uncomfortable discussing problems involving your family and/or peers.

Benefits: You will not personally benefit from participating in this study. However, by serving as a participant, you may contribute new information that will benefit other teens, and assist them in receiving needed assistance.

Alternatives: You may choose not to participate in this study.

Confidentiality: The study data is confidential. Neither your name nor your identity will be used for publication or publicity purposes. You may use a "pseudonym" to protect your confidentiality. If you choose not to use a pseudonym, the investigator will assign one for the purpose of the interview transcripts. Information related to your neighborhood and city of residence will be identified by zip code only. The audiotapes and transcriptions will be kept in a locked drawer accessible only to the project investigators. The tapes will remain available to the project investigators until the project is completed and the final reports are submitted. At that time, the tapes will be destroyed. A certificate of confidentiality has been obtained through the US Public Health Services. This federally issued certificate provides additional protection of your privacy by shielding personally identifying information from subpoena. Any information collected prior to your involvement in/or not directly related to the research project (such as your clinic or hospital record) is not protected from a certificate. Any information learned, during the course of this interview, related to physical or sexual abuse of children or the elderly will be reported to appropriate authorities. You do not have to share this information if you feel it may cause undue stress to you or your family.

Cost: There will be no cost to you for participating in this study other than your time.

Liability: The Oregon Health Sciences University is subject to the Oregon Tort Claims Act (ORS 30.260 through 30.300). If you suffer any injury and damage from this research project through the fault of the University, its officers or employees, you have the right to bring legal action against the University to recover the damage done to you subject to the limitations and conditions of the Oregon Tort Claims Act. You have not waived your legal rights by agreeing to or signing this form. For clarification on this subject, or if you have further questions, please call Medical Services Director or (503) 494-6020.

Participation: Ann Beckett (investigator) will answer any questions you may have about this study. She may be reached at (503) 494-5057. You may also contact the co-investigators, (as listed on the first page) with any additional questions. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Oregon Health Sciences University Institutional Review Board at (503) 494- 7887. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, or may withdraw from this study at any time-without affecting your relationship with Oregon Health Sciences University.

Appendix B

Interview Schedule

Proposed Questions and Lines of Inquiry for Interviews

The interview questions are intended to be open-ended, allowing the research participant to disclose the information that she feels is most relevant to the research topic.

Provide information about the study, secure informed consent for participation, obtain consent to tape record the interview, answer any questions that participants may have.

You have been invited to participate in this research study because, during your teen years, you experienced the loss of a peer through violent death.

1. Tell me about growing up in your neighborhood. (racial mix?)
What are the memorable things about those years?
Tell me about your family, siblings, school, peers?
Who else lived in your house?
Who took care of you?
Who did you go to for comfort?
Who could you talk to?
2. What were your main concerns as a child?.....as a teen?
What things did you especially like or enjoy about your teen years? Dislike?
What things are particularly memorable about those years?
3. When were you first aware of violence in the neighborhood?
4. When was the first time that you experienced violence?
What were your initial reactions?
Who protected you?
How did you protect yourself?
5. Who were you able to talk to about it?
6. Was there any legal involvement? If so, what type, and to what extent?
7. What role did your family play either as protector or advocate?
8. How did you manage to survive those incidents?
9. Tell me about the first time someone you knew was killed.
10. Tell me about your relationship with that person?
11. What disturbs you most about the death of your peer(s)?

12. How do you think that these experiences have affected you?
13. What do you think could have helped you?
14. What do you think made things worse?
15. How would you change the world to make it safer for kids and young adults like yourself?
16. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me?

Appendix C

Safety Protocol for Research Participant

Contacting the Participant

1. Identified referral source (person) will make initial contact with perspective participant to obtain interest in participating and approval for investigator to have participant's name and telephone number to make contact.
2. Make initial contact via telephone; determine appropriateness of time for call.
3. Describe the study, type of participation requested.
4. Inform participants of the confidentiality of the data, and how it will be used; ensuring that no identifying information will be associated with the data obtained.
5. Inform participants of mandatory reporting laws for child or elder abuse.
6. Schedule the interview—identifying a time and local community location that will ensure the physical safety for both the participant and investigator.
7. Inform participant that a consent form will be available for review at time of interview.
8. Give PI's office phone number for contacting.

Intervention

1. At initial interview, read the consent form with the participant. Explain the purpose of the certificate of confidentiality. Emphasize the mandatory reporting laws for child or elder abuse.
2. Forewarn participants that the interviews may provoke feelings of anger, hurt, sadness, and loss.
3. Provide the participants with the names and telephone numbers of the identified professionals who are willing to further talk with them and make appropriate referrals.
4. Inform participant that if during the course of the interview, it is assessed that the participant maybe dangerous to self (suicidal ideations) or others, an immediate effort will be made to put them in contact with a crisis intervention resource person.

Data

1. Data will be maintained in a locked file, accessible to the PI and faculty advisors.
2. Transcribed data will be stored separately from the audiotapes.
3. All identifying information will be removed; telephone numbers destroyed after initial contact and each participant will be assigned a pseudonym.
4. With any research reports, the utmost care will be taken to avoid any inadvertent disclosure that could identify any participant.