Chapter 6

Crime in Motion

Predation, Retaliation and the Spread of Urban Violence

Richard Wright, Volkan Topalli and Scott Jacques

It has long been recognized that criminal violence is contagious; it has a tendency to spread beyond the instigating event, from person to person and from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, especially in urban areas characterized by high crime rates, poverty, social disorganization, ineffective formal social control and decaying infrastructure (Loftin 1986; Blumstein and Rosenfeld 1998; Fagan and Davies 2004; Fagan, Wilkinson and Davies 2007). Less well understood, however, are the precise mechanisms underpinning the diffusion of underworld violence.

In this chapter we argue that the contagion of urban violence arises from dynamic, recursive cycles of victimization and retaliation that occur between criminally involved individuals, embedded within facilitative sociocultural settings and circumstances. Years of talking to hardcore street offenders has taught us that such individuals, driven by intense materialistic and sensual needs, are prone to prey on fellow offenders. In turn, offender/victims are compelled to retaliate for such affronts by a street culture that lionizes and rewards violence, self-sufficiency and vigilantism on the one hand, and a mainstream culture that denies them legal recourse on the other. In the absence of intervention, these conditions are likely to result in ever-intensifying patterns of retaliation and counter-retaliation between offender/predators and offender/victims, causing the spread of violence beyond the initial affront, whereby innocent — and not-so-innocent — third parties are drawn into a widening circle of violence.

To explain how this dynamic develops and how it might be disrupted, we first provide an overview of the ways in which individual patterns of thinking and behaving are shaped by antecedent conditions (background risk factors and participation in street culture), instigating conditions (a cyclical pattern of conspicuous consumption, financial desperation and violent predation that simultaneously instigates retaliation and fuels further consumption) and encapsulating conditions (shaped by street culture on the one hand and mainstream culture on the other). Next, we demonstrate how, unabated, these conditions may produce a cycle of self-perpetuating, recursive violence that ends only when involved individuals are successful at managing the threat of retaliation or are somehow removed from the system altogether through death or imprisonment (but see Decker and Lauritsen 2002; Jacques and Wright 2008a). As we will see, however, such drastic outcomes do not necessarily preclude the continuation of violence, and in some cases actually may intensify its spread. We therefore conclude by delineating ways in which efforts targeted specifically at particular instigating and encapsulating conditions may prevent, contain or disrupt the contagion of violence.

How Cultural Conditions and Offender Lifestyles Breed Predatory Violence

A complete understanding of how and why offenders think and act as they do demands that attention be paid to the intersection of individual-, group- and contextual-level (background, culture, situational) factors. The conditions that set the stage for recursive violence are interconnected. In describing our model of retaliation, however, we believe that it is important to start with an understanding of the macroconditions — cultural, physical, social and even historical — that incubate the various characteristics of street culture driving retaliatory behaviour at the microlevel. These conditions can be divided into three categories that, operating together, facilitate the perpetuation of violence:

- **Antecedent conditions**, which make individuals susceptible to the allure of street life. These set the stage for
- **Instigating conditions**, whereby individuals who actively participate in street culture become enmeshed in patterns of conspicuous consumption that drive them to engage in predatory behaviour towards other offenders, thus setting in motion recursive cycles of retaliation and counter-retaliation. Such cycles are maintained by
- **Encapsulating conditions**, which more than any other factors make offender participation in retaliation virtually inescapable and increase the likelihood that such behaviour will spread beyond the initial offence by drawing others into violence.

**Antecedent Conditions: Background Breeds Culture**

Antecedent conditions — referred to by Katz (1988) as ‘contemporaneous social conditions’ — are those circumstances that set the stage for criminality. In public health terms, they can be said to serve as the major risk factors for participation in street life and the ancillary difficulties that accrue with such participation. Street criminals do not contemplate and carry out their crimes in a vacuum; their actions are embedded in an ongoing process of human existence
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Decker 1994, 1997; Shover 1996). Street culture is characterized by, among other things, a willingness to use violence to settle differences, obtain cash and goods, and establish your reputation as a deterrent against future victimization. As J-Blue, a twenty-four-year-old drug robber and carjacker from Atlanta, noted:

You see all this [gesturing to a row of blighted buildings with drug dealers standing in front of them]? This is where we work. You work here, you better be ready to defend your shit. This is some real competition. That dude [pointing] and that dude [pointing again] working right next to each other, see? But you know what? He will kill that other mother-fucker in a quick minute if he can. He will take his shit if he can. Beat him down for it. That’s how you get ahead. The only reason he don’t is the other dude just as bad, just as crazy. Ain’t no, let’s talk it out. Ain’t no ‘this is fair’ or ‘that ain’t fair’ or anything like that. No. They follow that law we got down here. You need money? Beat some ass. You need to send a message? Cap [shoot] somebody’s ass. Handle your business with these [gesturing to his fists] or this [gesturing to the .45 in his jacket pocket]. Take what you can. Everybody knows that around here.4

Street culture strongly emphasizes hedonistic pursuits (see Shover 1996), a lack of future orientation (see Brezina, Tekin and Topalli 2009) and an obsession with maintaining self-respect at all costs (see Anderson 1999). Traditional understandings of such violence-oriented subcultures hold the somewhat deterministic view that culture wholly governs behaviour. However, even the originators of such formulations support a more soft-determinist view, whereby culture interacts with situational and dispositional factors to promote rather than dictate behaviour (see, e.g., Wolfgang and Ferracuti’s 1982 revision of their subculture of violence hypothesis). Recent notions of street culture go even further. For example, Anderson’s (1990, 1999) more nuanced formulation of street culture is manifested in an unwritten yet universally known ‘code’ that governs the lives not just of offenders, but of non-offenders too. As Blue Eyes, a female pimp and burglar from Atlanta, noted:

We have a different way of life here. Handle your own business. Don’t snatch. Protect yourself. That kinda shit. Don’t matter if you are a pimp like me or an old lady. Everybody knows the rules.

The ‘code of the street’ serves as a backdrop for all social interactions within these neighbourhoods, but allegiance to the code varies across people and thus so too does its impact on violence. Non-offenders may act ‘street’ when the situation demands it, and streetwise people are only variably involved in crime depending on their degree of attachment to the code. What remains constant is the extent to

I grew up with shootin’ and fightin’ all over. You [referring to the interviewer’s line of work] grew up with books and shit. Where I’m from you never know if you gonna live one minute to the next. It’s like a war out there. People die every day. You can go to sleep and hear gunshots all night man, all night. Bullets be lying on the street in the morning. Ambulances and police cars steady riding through my neighbourhood, man. (Brezina, Tekin and Topalli 2009: 1114).

Deathrow, a nineteen-year-old drug robber and carjacker from New Orleans, remarked:

It is within this toxic milieu that street culture flourishes (see, e.g., Cohen and Short 1958; Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967; Anderson 1990, 1999; Wright and

Individually and together, we have interviewed hundreds of active offenders recruited from the streets of St. Louis, Atlanta and New Orleans. These cities are perennially among the most violent in America, as measured by a variety of common crime indicators such as homicide and assault. They are plagued by all the stereotypical correlates of street crime, including poverty, unemployment and underemployment, decaying infrastructure and widespread social disorganization.

Endemic to such neighbourhoods are a proliferation of common individual-level background factors related to criminality, including poor formal education, lack of family structure and weak bonds to conventional society. Escape from their crushing poverty and high mortality rates is rare, and most of those living in these environs have been exposed to these conditions from birth, knowing little else (see Garbarino et al. 1992; Bell and Jenkins 1993; Lorion and Saltzman 1993; Wilson and Daly 1997; Hoffman 2004). Foosey, an eighteen-year-old robber, indicated as much: ‘I’ve been robbed when I was at school, been ripped off, been shot at ... Hell, someone shot at my granny’s house’ (Brezina, Tekin and Topalli 2009: 1114). I grew up with shootin’ and fightin’ all over. You [referring to the interviewer’s line of work] grew up with books and shit. Where I’m from you never know if you gonna live one minute to the next. It’s like a war out there. People die every day. You can go to sleep and hear gunshots all night man, all night. Bullets be lying on the street in the morning. Ambulances and police cars steady riding through my neighbourhood, man. (Brezina, Tekin and Topalli 2009: 1113)
which poverty, unemployment and a lack of access to social services and justice produce this way of life.

In describing the functioning of street culture, Anderson (1990: 92) emphasizes the willingness of many disadvantaged young males to risk injury or even death ‘over the principle of respect’ (see also Katz 1988). In an environment where predation between offenders is a common (and often preferred) route to obtaining money, goods and illegal substances (see Jacobs, Topalli and Wright 2000), maintaining respect goes beyond esoteric notions of honour or self-esteem. It is the bedrock of the street offender’s capacity to deter victimization. As Stub, a then forty-eight-year-old drug dealer from St. Louis, put it:

That’s very important if you gonna live that lifestyle, You need to let it be known you not gonna take no shit, you know what I’m saying? Fuck no, you would be out of business or dead, ‘cause you would have people, little kids, coming up trying to rob you [thinking] he ain’t gonna do nothing, he’s a punk. People just know don’t fuck with me [because of my] reputation – don’t fuck with me ‘cause they know if they fuck with me they got to kill [me], you got to kill me. (Topalli, Wright and Fornango 2002: 343)

In this sense, respect is a commodity whose value must be maintained, and retaliation serves this purpose well. This obsession with reputational factors and their concomitant deterrent value fuels the recursive violence dynamic at the heart of our discussion.

Instigating Conditions: Street Culture Fuels Predation

The antecedent conditions mentioned above set the stage for an intense form of participation in street life that Shover (1996) refers to as ‘life as party’, the hedonistic pursuit of good times and the concomitant lawbreaking that supports such activities (also see Wright and Decker 1994, 1997). According to Shover and Copes:

The hallmark of this lifestyle is enjoyment of ‘good times’, with minimal concern for obligations and commitments external to the person’s immediate social setting ... Life as party is distinguished in many cases by two repetitively cyclical phases and corresponding approaches to crime. When efforts to maintain the lifestyle (i.e., party pursuits) are largely successful, crimes are committed to sustain circumstances or a pattern of activities they experience as pleasurable ... By contrast, when offenders are less successful at party pursuits, crimes are committed to forestall or avoid conditions experienced as unpleasant, precarious, or threatening. (Shover and Copes 2010: 129)

This lifestyle emanates from conditions on the streets and the culture that they breed. Lacking education or employment opportunities, hardcore offenders rush headlong into hedonistic pursuits (drugs, gambling and sex) that align with the unpredictable and unforgiving nature of the streets. To illustrate, Mo, a carjacker interviewed in Jacobs, Topalli and Wright (2003: 677), described how he spent the money obtained from his crimes on drugs and partying:

Just get high, get high. I just blow money. Money is not something that is going to achieve for nobody, you know what I’m saying? So every day there’s not a promise that there’ll be another [day] so I just spend it, you know what I’m saying? It ain’t mine, you know what I’m saying? I just got it, it’s just in my possession. It’s a lot of fun. At a job you’ve got to work a lot for it, you know what I’m saying? You got to punch the clock, do what somebody else tells you. I ain’t got time for that. Oh yeah, there ain’t nothing like gettin’ high on $5,000!

Most adherents to the street culture lifestyle anticipate and accept the prospect of an early death (see Brezina, Tekin and Topalli 2009), ignoring the future consequences of their behaviour and focusing instead on the immediate rewards. Such an orientation breeds fearlessness, avarice and desperation. As Chris, a twenty-year-old drug dealer and robber from Atlanta, put it:

I swore that I wasn’t gonna see 19. I swear. The way I was goin’, I didn’t think I was ever gonna see 19. I swear. My aunts used to always say, ‘Man you gonna be dead.’ Made me wanna go do some more stuff. Made me wanna go do some more bad stuff.

The resultant intensity with which many offenders pursue life as party necessitates the continuous acquisition of illicit substances and money, both of which are likely to be found in the hands of neighbourhood drug dealers.

Drug dealers make excellent targets for other offenders. To begin with, they are reluctant to go to the police when they are victimized for fear of exposing their own criminal activities (Black 1976; Wright and Decker 1994, 1997; Jacobs 2000; Jacques and Wright 2008b; Jacques 2010). Moreover, such behaviour violates a central tenet of the code of the street demanding that individuals avoid contact with the police for fear of being labelled snitches (see Cooney 1998; Rosenfeld, Jacobs and Wright 2003; Naapoff 2004, 2006, 2009; Topalli 2005, 2006).

Successful offender/predators are rewarded for their efforts with significant amounts of cash and drugs, which satisfy the need to keep the party going. However, the ease with which such rewards are achieved, coupled with the quantity of drugs and money obtained, may serve to distort the offender's perception
of the value of their gains, encouraging them to consume and expend their resources quickly and irresponsibly. Tone, a seasoned carjacker from St. Louis, remarked:

Just got the money to blow so fuck it, blow it [on] whatever, it don’t even matter. Whatever you see you got it, fuck it. Spend that shit. It wasn’t yours from the getty-up, you know what I’m saying? You didn’t have it from the jump so ... Can’t act like careful with it, it wasn’t yours to care for. Easy come, easy go. The easy it came, it go even easier. Fuck that, fuck all that; I ain’t trying to think about keeping nothing. (Topalli and Wright 2013: 162)

This in turn leads to the desperate search for a means to sustain the action, which almost invariably results in another predatory crime. As such, disposable and easily replenished cash and drugs serve to fuel a self-propagating behavioural system of consumption, desperation and predation. This cycle (see Figure 6.1) instigates recursive patterns of retaliation and counter-retaliation because it encourages further offending, much or all of it directed against fellow lawbreakers. As long as this ‘boom and bust’ etiological cycle of criminality remains in effect, so too will additional recursive cycles of retaliation continue to emerge.

Encapsulating Conditions: How Street and Mainstream Cultures Thwart the Cessation of Violence

Conventional society and street society handle the satisfaction of grievances very differently. Victimization creates potentially severe consequences for all people, both criminal and noncriminal. These include the potential loss of resources, physical harm, and emotional and psychological stress (Topalli, Wright and Fornango 2002). To deal with the aftermath of victimization, individuals may engage in a variety of counteractive coping strategies designed to re-establish cognitive-emotional balance and/or replenish lost resources. Such strategies are geared towards restoring the individual’s sense of equity, safety, comfort and

wealth. Mainstream society has established institutions to facilitate this restoration process: law enforcement apprehends violators, the courts judge them and the correctional system ensures incapacitation or restitution. Insurance will even provide compensation or replacement for those possessions that have been taken from the victim. Of course, this elaborate system is not designed for the sole purpose of satisfying the emotional and psychological needs of victims, but also to thwart those impulses for revenge and vigilantism that result from such feelings. To maintain social order, they allow formal systems of social control to act as proxies for victims, supplanting the pre-industrial system of justice based on self-initiated retribution and compensation (see Nisbett and Cohen 1996; Cooney 1998).

Unlike law-abiding citizens, individuals victimized during the course of illicit activities cannot easily access formal systems of social control (that is the police), as such contact could invite legal scrutiny. Nor would law enforcement agencies necessarily want to help offenders who have been wronged. Moreover as discussed above, street offenders must adhere to a strict code of conduct that requires them to avoid contact with the authorities lest they be labelled snitches, and to handle conflicts on their own. Stub, a seasoned veteran of St. Louis’ drug-dealing scene, said the following after recounting an episode where he resisted a robbery attempt, getting shot in the process:

Stub: See, you got to stab me or shoot me, I’m not gonna just let you take my shit because if you just take it the word on the street gonna get out [that] you can take [Stub’s] shit, you know what I’m saying? ... And whoever he told [about this robbery attempt], he told them that [Stub’s] a strong little guy, [Stub] said no you ain’t robbing me, even though I had a gun on him. After that I got out [of the hospital] for about two weeks, recuperated and got back out doing the same thing [dealing drugs].

Interviewer: What about this guy [the robber] though?
Stub: In so many details ... he got his, he’s no longer.
Interviewer: He’s no longer?
Stub: In existence.

In explaining the motivation behind such extreme responses, Stub outlined the central tenets of the street code vis-à-vis the utility of retaliation:

I handle my business, don’t fuck with me ... because I’m gonna get you, you know? See you have to realize if I didn’t get back at him, you and him could say [Stub’s] a punk. Everybody can go take [Stub’s] shit. So, if he [the drug robber] gets hurt, everybody knew who hurt him. They
might not have knew exactly [who hurt him] but they have an idea [that it was me]. If you handle your business you ain't got to even worry about it 'cause they'll say, 'That time [so-and-so] robbed [Stub], and shit he came up missing!' So that's gonna give them the fear right there not to fuck with you. That's very important if you gonna live that lifestyle. You need to let it be known that you not gonna take no shit. (Topalli, Wright and Fornango 2002: 342–43)

For offenders who have been victimized, then, the lack of access to formal justice provided by conventional society coupled with the disdain for formal justice dictated by street culture may serve to encourage retaliation.

**How Predatory Violence Breeds Recursive Retaliation**

As demonstrated above, street offenders are often motivated to target other criminals who can provide them with the means to sustain the party lifestyle promoted by street culture. The rub is that such victims cannot go to the police and thus have strong incentives to take the law into their own hands through violent retaliation, especially because they share with their attackers a subcultural perspective conducive to doing so. Offender/predators know this and have developed a repertoire of strategies designed to minimize the chances of retaliation (Jacobs, Topalli and Wright 2000; also see Jacques and Reynald 2011). First, during the offence, offender/predators may attempt to project a fearsome persona so that offender/victims will be deterred from trying to strike back. Bread, a twenty-year-old drug dealer and carjacker from Atlanta's south side, was adamant about this:

Look, I try to scare the shit outta them. These guys livin' on the streets same as me. You got to put the fear in 'em or they will come back at you. I take it to another level man. I'm like the motherfucking' Hulk. I lose my shit in front of 'em. Screaming, point that gun, make my hands shake, you know. When I'm through with 'em they either shakin' in their boots or pissin' in their pants. They sure as fuck ain't thinkin' about lookin' for me though.

Second, offender/predators may endeavour to mask their identities during offences so that they remain anonymous to their victims. This can be accomplished in several ways, including targeting strangers, employing disguises and not publicly discussing or displaying the proceeds of their crimes. Finally, offender/predators, recognizing that no strategy is foolproof, remain hypervigilant after their crimes lest they be caught off guard by victims seeking revenge. Taz, a twenty-eight-year-old carjacker and burglar from the west side of Atlanta, frequently targeted drug dealers and talked about how such seemingly paranoid measures were essential to survival:

You know, I am really careful. I don't rob on the west side. I go to Lakewood or the Bluffs or downtown. I do my shit in the evening and make it so they don't look at my face, well you know, I come up behind them and shit. Stick 'em up! Or put the gun through window from behind so they ain't lookin' at my face. That kinda shit. I make 'em look at the ground and shit ... When I was a young buck, I used to wear that jewelry that I got or flash that cash, or – this is real stupid – I would drive up and down Peachtree in a car I took if it was nice [shaking his head and laughing]. That's how they found my cousin, shit. So I just lay low, get rid of the car, get that money, them little dope and just chill on it. Now, when people ask where I got all my shit, my answer is this: Fuck you, what you askin' me about my business? But in the end man, it's tough you know. To keep it 100 per cent quiet? Motherfucker get robbed for his car, his dope, his cash ... you better believe he motivated to get his shit back or get you in the back, know what I'm sayin'? So, you know, I'm always extra paranoid. You don't wanna be one of them sad motherfuckers got his head blown off takin' a shit at McDonald's or something, know what I mean?

While such strategies undoubtedly can be effective, they are at best imperfect and in some cases actually may intensify victims' desire to retaliate. For example, they may be applied incompletely or incompletely, as when offender/predators let their identity leak out by confiding in the wrong person. Street offenders operate within tightly constrained spatial boundaries characterized by dense social networks, making it hard to constrain the flow of information. Once word of the offender/predator's identity is on the street, it is only a matter of time before the victim hears about it and is thus in a position to seek vengeance. Nook, a drug dealer from the south side of Atlanta, described such an opportunity:

You know, I almost gave up on that thing [the fact that he had been robbed]. Didn't see the dude's face. Didn't see where he ran off too. Just chalked it up to the game, know what I mean? It was so frustrating man, to know somebody caught me like that and took my shit, but what could I do? Then, you know, I'm at this party and my cousin like, 'Hey Nook, you know there's another dude with the same [street] name as you?' And I'm like, 'Yeah, he even got a chain like you had.' And then I'm like, 'Wait the fuck a minute. What'd it look like?' And when she told me it was that white gold colour with the little stones in it, I just knew that was my motherfucking' chain. So now I'm excited
and I ask her who the dude is, and she tell me she saw him at this party
and he was driving around in such-and-such a car. So I investigated on
it with my people, and after like three or four days, we figured that out.
And the rest is like, you know, a happy ending. I got my shit back and
then some ... Ah man, it was so sweet! It was some punishment. It was
almost worth getting robbed by that little bitch just to get his ass back!

Alternatively, retaliation threat management techniques may intensify violence
by being applied disproportionately. This may happen when an offender/predator
uses excessive force to dissuade a victim from striking back, but accomplishes ex-
actly the opposite by making him or her madder still. A drug dealer named Gino,
for example, told Topalli, Wright and Fornango (2002: 341) why he decided to
escalate his response to being robbed by a friend:

That's what really made me want to retaliate so bad because he scared me
so. Real bad, yeah. Yeah mad, after I got to thinking about it I said [to
myself], 'He threatened me like that? I got to get him!' But he left town
on me. Now, if I would have caught him that same day, I would have
killed him. I was mad, I would have killed him. I was angry with him.

In the same article, Stub, a veteran drug dealer from St. Louis, relayed similar
sentiments when reflecting on how he'd been treated during his robbery: 'Now if
he'd have [just] robbed me I might have said, 'Fuck that little dope, I got plenty
more of this shit.' But when you shot me, see, you kind of took my manhood
and you violated me, you know what I'm saying? That's your ass.'

Ironically, in those instances where offender/victims are successful at meting
out punishment, their victimizers assume the role of victim. Retaliation is viewed
as an affront, and the offender/predator-turned-victim will attempt counter-retali-
ation to satisfy his or her grievances. Recall, however, that the offenders and
victims in these encounters share similar cultural commitments and cannot rely
on the law to deter future victimization. This means, in turn, that successful
victim retaliation is likely to set in motion a self-perpetuating cycle of vengeance
and counter-vengeance, in which neither party is willing to call a truce. This was
brought home in clear fashion by Goldie, a drug dealer and carjacker we have
interviewed multiple times. Following the successful carjacking of a fellow drug
dealer (during which Goldie shot the man in the leg and ran him over), Goldie
himself was the victim of retaliation by his victim. We interviewed him during his
recovery from multiple gunshot wounds and asked him: 'You don't feel like you
all are even now? You shot him - he shot you. Why go after him?' He responded:
'It's [about] retaliation. When I feel good is when he taken care of ... and I don't
have to worry about him no more. Now down there [in the neighbourhood],
when they hit you, you hit them back. That's how it is done there or you'll be

a bitch. Everybody will shoot you up, whoop your ass. Know what I'm saying?
Treat you like a punk' (Topalli and Wright 2013: 166). Detroit, a drug robber
operating in Atlanta, focused on the pre-emptive deterrent value of counter-retali-
ation: 'Look, I robbed you, now you trying to kill me, so I gotta kill you before
you kill me. If you are shooting at me, you better kill me because I'm fixing to
kill you.' This is the essence of recursive retaliation, which sets the stage for the
spread of violence.

Contagion

For those who see little value in the lives of street offenders, the fact that they
prey on each other might not be particularly problematic. Indeed, many people
probably regard offender-on-offender violence as a good thing in that it serves to
remove criminals from society without the expensive or lengthy involvement of
the criminal justice system (see Cohen, Miller and Rossman 1994: 74). But the
fact is that oftentimes victims are unable or unwilling to exact vengeance on their
own, and therefore seek to enlist the help of friends and associates (see Cooney
1998). In fact, our interviewees frequently indicate that their first response to
being robbed is to gather up a 'posse' of their associates and drive around town
looking for the transgressor (see Topalli, Wright and Fornango 2002). In the
course of aiding the offender/victim, such individuals may develop grievances of
their own or may themselves become the targets of counter-retaliation.

Retaliatory threat management techniques, of course, are in no way prosso-
cial; they are intended merely to insulate the instigating offender from punish-
ment. So, what happens when those techniques are successful? Unable to retaliate
against the offender/predator, but still needing to recoup losses and maintain
their reputation as someone who cannot be attacked with impunity, offender/
victims may displace their aggression onto third parties (Topalli, Wright and
Fornango 2002; Jacobs and Wright 2006). Although targeting law-abiding citi-
zens risks police intervention and does little to restore the offender/victim's reputa-
tion as someone not to be crossed, it does allow offenders to recoup their losses
with little fear of retaliation. Because non-offenders seldom retaliate in turn, the
violence is finite - that is, it is unlikely to be propagated further. Where violence
is likely to be propagated further, though, is when offender/victims target offend-
ers other than those who victimized them. This is a popular choice among
offender/victims who are unwilling or unable to strike back against the person who
victimizes them; it allows them not only to recoup their losses, but also serves
to deter future predation by advertising their reputation for toughness. Doing
so, however, carries the risk of instigating a new cycle of violence between the
offender/victim-turned-predator and a new offender/victim, who is operating ac-
cording to the same cultural dictates and encapsulating conditions that prompted
the original affront. Almost inevitably, each new offender/victim will seek similar
avenues of redress, thereby perpetuating yet more violence in neighbourhoods already plagued by high rates of crime (see Figure 6.2).

**Conclusion**

The analyses outlined above paint a picture of a series of dynamic interactive processes that, taken as a whole, serve not only to spread violence but also to concentrate and intensify its destructive impact. Enmeshed in self-perpetuating cycles of desperate partying that can only be maintained by regular infusions of fast cash, street offenders are in no position to move far afield to find suitable victims and are prone to prey on their fellow criminals who, owing to their own illicit activities, are unlikely to seek police help. In this way, offenders move forward in time, accumulating more and more enemies in the process, each of whom is bent on retaliation. Urban criminals are unusually provincial, tending to operate within the confines of their home turf and adjacent neighbourhoods. As a consequence, these offenders - each with his or her own ongoing history of offending and victimization - come into constant contact with one another. In such a world, frequent outbreaks of crosscutting violence and counter-violence are almost inevitable.

What might be done to break these ever-intensifying concentrated cycles of retaliatory violence? One useful approach might be to conceptualize recursive retaliation and the spread of violence in public health terms. This approach was advocated by Lofin, who, in 1985, was asked by the New York Academy of Medicine to contribute to a public health symposium on homicide:

> In epidemiology there is a fundamental distinction between infectious diseases transmitted by social contact and those that have an etiology independent of social contact. Infectious diseases are not necessarily more costly in human terms than others, but unchecked they are especially pernicious because the incidence can rise explosively (geometrically), affecting a whole population. In criminology, there is an analogous distinction between offenses that are subcultural - those that are encouraged by social contact - and those that are impulsive. My argument is that serious assaultive violence is subcultural and therefore analogous to disease. Most important, it has the potential to spread explosively in a vulnerable population. (Lofin 1986: 550; see also Patten and Arboleda-Flórez 2004)

If predatory offender-on-offender violence and its spread through recursive retaliation is viewed as a process of contagion whereby offender/predators 'infect' third-party offender/victims with violence, who in turn spread it to others, we can apply a simple disease-prevention model to understand the phenomenon. In presenting the etiological cycle of predatory crime, we demonstrated how and why offenders target other criminals for violence. These predators are the progenitors of recursive violence. In public health terms, an epidemiological investigation would designate them as the index or primary case (sometimes referred to as 'patient zero') of the affected population. Prevention models typically target index cases and their behaviour when implementing palliative or curative measures. Such models may implement primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary measures to deal with infection and contagion. In this chapter, however, we deal with only the first two.

Primary interventions are those that occur before the person is infected and are designed to reduce or eliminate both the incidence and prevalence of a disease. For our purposes, these would include measures designed to disrupt the etiological cycle, so that offenders susceptible to its influences forgo targeting other offenders for victimization. This outcome would also prevent potential offender/victims from becoming offender/predators themselves and propagating violence to third or fourth parties. Secondary prevention occurs after an individual has been infected, but before he or she can transmit the disease to others. For our purposes, this may include strategies for preventing offender/victims from seeking direct retaliation or targeting third-party offender and non-offender victims.

To best describe how such measures can be applied to the problem of violence contagion, we draw the reader's attention to Figure 6.3, which unifies the

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**Figure 6.2 Recursion and contagion of violence**
essential components of the etiological cycle of predatory violence model (see Figure 6.1) with the violence contagion model presented above (see Figure 6.2). Connecting the two models permits us to see where the most promising primary and secondary solutions might be implemented.

We see the following promising avenues for intervention based on the above model: (1) disrupt the etiological cycle of predation by altering or eliminating the use of cash; and (2) prevent or dissuade offender/victims from seeking retaliation by removing the cultural barriers to accessing formal justice. Avenue (1) represents a primary prevention strategy, whereas avenue (2) represents a secondary intervention strategy.

**Primary Prevention: Averting Retaliation by Removing Cash from the Day-to-Day Street Economy**

A key causal link in the etiological cycle of predatory violence is the presence of cash. We contend here and elsewhere (see Wright and Decker 1997; Topalli and Wright 2013; Wright and Topalli 2012) that its removal through the transformation to a totally digital-based economy would significantly disrupt the ability of offenders to participate in the kind of intense partying that drives them to target other offenders in the first place, thereby instigating substantial retaliatory behaviour. The impact of cash on street corner transactions cannot be overstated. In its absence, procuring drugs, sex and illegal goods is far more difficult because, apart from a limited amount of bartering, purveyors of these goods and services do not generally accept credit cards, checks or internet-based payments.

Cashless economies are not as far-fetched as they sound. Indeed, developed nations worldwide are rapidly approaching an era dominated by digital financial transactions (see, e.g., Garcia-Swartz, Hahn and Layne-Farrar 2006; Liao and Handa 2010). Credit card technology has made it simple for businesses to limit the amount of cash held on premises, to prohibit customers from using large denomination bills to pay for purchases and even to adopt no-cash policies. Many social service agencies have followed suit, adopting electronic debit cards in place of paper welfare checks. These initiatives foreshadow the total elimination of cash in favour of a variety of card- or internet-based methods of electronic monetary transfer. Such methods are not liquid and untraceable in the same way that cash is and leave a digital ‘paper trail’ that makes illicit transactions potentially far riskier. Without cash, therefore, we hypothesize that the street culture that gives rise to so much predatory street crime will be seriously undermined and that such offences will decline along with the retaliation that follows in their wake (see Wright and Topalli 2012).

**Secondary Intervention: Breaking the Bonds of Encapsulation**

Beyond effecting large-scale changes in the antecedent and instigating conditions that drive predatory street crime, it is worthwhile speculating about how policy might address aspects of the encapsulating conditions that prevent offenders from breaking out of ongoing recursive cycles of retaliation and counter-retaliation. Because violence has already occurred in these cases, such solutions are understood in the current discussion as forms of secondary prevention. Recall that a key reason that retaliation between offenders is recursive in that neither party is willing to call a truce. This aversion to peaceful resolution stems from two mutually reinforcing factors: first, a street culture code that requires that individuals handle their own disputes through violence; and, second, a mainstream culture that excludes offender/victims from access to the legitimate justice system. These encapsulating cultural conditions are closely interrelated. Formal legal recourse is largely unavailable to offenders in part because the street culture requires adherents to treat it with contempt, and retaliatory vigilantism is viewed as preferable to the law because offenders are treated with scorn by those who control the legal system, especially the police (Klinger 1997).

Nevertheless, it might be possible to improve offender/victims’ access to legitimate legal redress, thereby reducing their motivation to take the law into their own hands. Essentially, this would require that the police and courts treat offender/victims just as they treat any other victim by encouraging them to report crimes without fear of incriminating themselves. On its face, such a solution might seem untenable. Offenders, after all, view the police with disdain, and the police traditionally want nothing to do with protecting ‘criminals’. However, this dynamic may not be as clear-cut as it initially appears to be.

First, there is ample evidence that offenders are not completely averse to communicating with the police (that is, snitching) when such action suits their needs (Cooney 1998). In fact, Rosenfeld, Jacobs and Wright (2003) found that offenders frequently communicate with the police in order to take advantage of their ability to arrest, detain and prosecute rivals (see also Topalli 2005; Natapoff 2009). The police frequently respond by acting on such information
without implicating or punishing the informant. Recently, efforts have been made to legitimate cooperation between those from the streets and the police via ‘pro-snitching’ campaigns designed to counter the street cultural push to remain silent. Police departments working with community organizations have begun to implement ‘start snitching’ and anti-violence campaigns to encourage residents to report crime and cooperate with police (Natafopoulos 2009). If, as Anderson asserts, the code of the street pervades both the offender and non-offender urban population, then it stands to reason that efforts directed towards community residents might filter back to offenders themselves, particularly if the protections of the law are made clear and reliable to such individuals. In addition, there is legal precedent for this kind of cooperation between offender/victims and the criminal justice system related to the sexual assault of prostitutes. As noted in Topalli, Wright and Fornango (2002: 349), ‘it is worth recalling that one of the major accomplishments of the anti-rape movement was to get police to recognize that sex workers are especially vulnerable to rape (much in the same way that drug dealers are especially vulnerable to robbery), and that such crimes should be treated like any other sexual assault’. Some may argue that criminal/victims are undeserving of the benefits of formal justice, but we believe otherwise. Continuing to deny them those benefits leaves them with little option but to seek informal means of redress, thereby perpetuating the unchecked cycles of recursive retaliation that underpin the spread of so much urban violence.

Richard Wright is Professor and Chair of the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University, United States. He has written widely and influentially on offender decision making in real-life settings and circumstances. He was elected a Fellow of the American Society of Criminology in 2009.

Volkan Topalli is Professor of Criminal Justice and Criminology at the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University, United States. His scholarly research addresses violence in urban settings, with a particular focus on the decision making of street criminals. With the support of funding from the National Science Foundation, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, the Centers of Disease Control and the National Institute of Justice, he has conducted over 300 interviews with active offenders in St. Louis and Atlanta over the past seventeen years. His research has been featured in such outlets as Criminology, the British Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice & Behavior.

Scott Jacques is Associate Professor of Criminal Justice and Criminology at Georgia State University, United States. His work explores the offenders’ perspective on crime and control. His coauthored book is Code of the Suburb: Inside the World of Young Middle-Class Drug Dealers (University of Chicago Press, 2015).

Notes
1. This chapter distinguishes between predatory and retaliatory violence. The key conceptual difference between them is that the former is primarily motivated by the desire to obtain wealth, whereas the latter is principally concerned with righting wrong (Jacques and Wright 2008b).
2. For a detailed description of our methodology and research agenda, see Wright et al. (1992); Wright and Decker (1994, 1997); Jacobs, Topalli and Wright (2000); Topalli, Wright and Fornango (2002); Topalli (2005); Jacobs and Wright (2006); Jacques and Wright (2008a, 2008b, 2011a).
3. All names are pseudonyms.
4. Throughout this manuscript, quotes appearing without reference to previous research represent original data analyzed specifically for this work. The data were collected through research funded by the US National Science Foundation (Grant 0520092) and by the Georgia State University Research Foundation.
5. To be clear, not all predation and retaliation is violent (Jacques and Wright 2008b, 2011a; Jacques 2010). For example, nonviolent forms of predation and retaliation include acts of fraud and burglary based primarily motivated by the desire to obtain resources or vengeance, respectively. Moreover, there are informal ways to handle victimization peacefully, as avoidance, negotiation, informal settlement and toleration. Violence does not always beget violence. An initial offense may be nonviolent but respond to violent, just as a violent predatory act may be handled through peaceful means of social control.
6. The rules regarding snitching are not hard and fast. In their piece on street snitching, Rosenfeld, Jacobs and Wright (2003: 299) state ‘The code of the street matters for our interviewees. They cannot ignore it. It shapes world-views and provides a compelling vocabulary of motives for social action on the street. But, like all normative systems, it is not an infallible guide to behavior.’

References


