

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

“The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it... Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate... Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

1.0 Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research is to examine the phenomenon of intra-racial violence from the perspectives of black men who have engaged in violent acts against other black men. Violence is an American problem, as opposed to a problem that is characteristic of one group. Zimring and Hawkins argue that, “it is beyond foolishness to regard American violence as solely, or mainly, or even distinctly a black problem. Excluding blacks, the estimated homicide [rate]...for the United States is well over three times the homicide rate of the six nations and twice as the high as the second highest, Italy” (1997:82). While this may be true, there is still a great disparity in crime statistics between whites and blacks, and for that matter black men and every other race/gender group.

According to Zimring and Hawkins (1997), we live in the most violent society on the face of the earth. Statistical information demonstrates that African American men are disproportionately offenders and victims of violence (Paschall, Flewelling and Ennett 1998). In 2003, per every 1,000 persons in that racial group, 29 blacks, 22 whites and 16 persons of others races were victimized by a violent crime. According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, in 2003 about 40% of murder victims were black, 34.6% were white; 51.2% of offenders were black, as opposed to 46% for whites, yet blacks only constitute 12.4% of the *total* population of the United States.

While crime is pervasive in American society, *this* particular phenomenon is no longer perceived as being problematic, but a foregone conclusion each year that statistical information on mortality is released. Consistently, the image of black male faces convolute the evening news and violence seems, if nothing else, to be a “black thing”

(Bellesiles 1999). Hence, stereotypical and prejudicial characterizations are brought to bear on black identity, while civility and peaceful co-existence seem to be utopian ideologies. As it is with all things, we look to science to mediate the mental tug-of-war between tangible realities and the promises of this country.

As of the year 2001, the Bureau of Justice reported that “based on the current rates of first incarceration, an estimated 32% of black males will enter State or Federal prison during their lifetime, compared to 17% of Hispanic males and 5.9% of white males (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/crimoff.htm). Moreover, in 2002, the U.S. Department of Justice reported that the likelihood of death by homicide age 18 and over was more than eight times greater for black males than their white counterparts. If that were not unsettling enough, in that same year, the U.S. Department of Justice also reported the percentage of intra-racial homicide for African Americans to be 91%. The 2003 U.S. Census Bureau Report also indicates that homicide is the leading cause of death for black males, ages 15-34 years of age.

Given that “the extraordinary levels of violence among blacks set them apart from every other ethnic group”, this information is disturbing and worthy of inspection from a sociological paradigm (Clarke 1996:47). Perhaps if this were an act of statistical perversion and allusion toward the ends of perpetuating stereotypical images, one might be led to believe that such findings were fallacious and unfounded. However, throughout the last two decades these statistics, and the raw data from which they are derived, have remained proportionately unchanged. Over the life course, black males have a higher incidence of mortality than do their white counterparts, with it more than doubling between the ages of 25-34 (National Center for Health Statistics 2002). This strongly indicates that the issue of black violence is not merely, nor solely a problem of adolescence or delinquency.

I think it is essential to enact a core to periphery model of rationalization might prove useful in acquiring a detailed picture of *intra-racial violence among African American men* in its totality (Schinkel 2004). There are hidden codes of communication and behavior that remain undetected because of this failure: “To date, very few studies

have sought to examine the intra- and interpersonal dynamics of violent confrontations that occur among black males in specific settings” (Oliver 2001: ix).

1.1 Research Questions

Because the focus of this study was on the perspectives of black men who have engaged in violent acts against other blacks, I used qualitative methods. This methodology centers the insights and experiences of the men. Yet, the researcher is embedded as well in the data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Qualitative methods require that I be reflexive about how who I am, my experiences and my conceptual and theoretical views about the world influence the research.

I entered this research with the view that “disrespect” or disrespectful actions *may* serve as precipitants or catalysts to violent confrontations. Therefore, I began this research with the intent of pursuing disrespect as a key concept. The overarching goal of this research was to gain an understanding of what black males identify as their reason(s) for participating in violent confrontations, how they define, identify and respond to disrespect, and whether a defensible causal chain can be formulated.

This study will attempt to address the following research questions:

- (1) What do African American males identify as the cause(s) of their participation in a violent confrontation?
- (2) How do African American men that are members of a recognizable subculture define, identify and respond to the concept of disrespect?
- (3) Is there a relationship between disrespect and violence?

1.2 Significance of the Study

While social scientists have postulated a wealth of theories with regards to violence, crime and delinquency, there has been very little in the way of formulating explanations for the aforementioned phenomenon distinctively. “Because of the higher rates of nonfatal interpersonal violence...more studies that examine the situational determinants, phenomenological meanings, and interpersonal processes associated with nonfatal violence among blacks are needed. Few studies of this aspect of black-on-black

violence exist” (Oliver 2001:187). Further, the application of classical theory to a contemporary issue unavoidably leaves us with a gap of unforeseen contingencies (Williams III and McShane 1999). The influx of illicit drugs, guns and ever-evolving codes of normative behavior within subcultures has created a literary quagmire that can only be addressed with new theoretical perspectives and directions. The process of black interpersonal violence, in and of itself, must be understood in order to determine what causes it.

Inquiry into the phenomenon of interpersonal violence independent of race has encountered a dissimilar impediment. Attempts to comprehend interpersonal violence have eventually gravitated towards examination of contextual, character and ecological arguments respectively (Oliver 2001; Schinkel 2004). These types of theorizations do more to explain what types of environments and social conditions are conducive to violence, and what type of person may be more predisposed to violence as opposed to creating causal chains that can be adequately defended and duplicated at each turn. Moreover, they fail to examine and subsequently explain the specific precipitating factors of violent confrontations according to its’ social actors.

One major theory that has concerned itself with such a distinct line of inquiry has been the *black subculture of violence theory* posited by Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967). Utilizing this theory as its foundation, Lynn Curtis (1975) expanded the black subculture of violence theory and posited the *counter-culture theory*. These theories will be discussed at length in the following chapter. They, along with recent studies have greatly informed this study and are most pertinent to the phenomenon under analysis. The application of other general theories will always implicitly leave unanswered questions into understanding the phenomenon in its entirety. Therefore, if we are truly concerned with learning about this phenomenon in particular, we will develop a more direct and absolute path towards this end. I do not assume that there is *one* cause for intra-racial violence among black men, nor do I assume that the one towards which the study is directed is at all causal in the facilitation of the phenomenon; rather, the purpose of the study is to contribute to the eventual goal of a causal model of black-on-black violence.

1.3 Value Stance

I enter this work with a less than neutral stance about race. I am an African American male who has a strong commitment to eradicating racial inequality and an equally strong worldview about the myriad of the sources of inequality. I have experienced and engaged in the kinds of violence discussed within the pages of this work. I do not disclose this information so that the personal actions of my past might be adjudicated from an ethical or moral standpoint. I do, however, take exception to much of the literature that has attempted to explain this lifestyle and those within my demographic. As I have matriculated the University system, I have witnessed, in my opinion, a grand misinterpretation of the subculture with which I have become intimately familiar. Hence, I find myself situated within the literature and ultimately empathetic to the participants within this study.

This chapter is heavy laden with analytical and theoretical rhetoric on the phenomenon because the focus has been successfully and inappropriately shifted to entities other than the issue at hand. In an effort to resume linear examination, my pursuit of the rationalization for violence has been placed at the feet of the perpetrators. With much of the literature revolving around concepts of masculinity and manhood, is it not appropriate to examine the utterances of the man himself? The time has come for black men to own their actions and behavior, lest another generation of children posture themselves as victims and retard the forward progress of the entire race. Assertiveness begins with self-efficacy. To haphazardly distribute blame unto social ills is to simply place the individual at the mercy of something seemingly greater than the desire of the social actor. What of those that assimilate, “sell-out”, crossover, or “play the game” and live lives consistent with the American Dream? Are they any less “down”, any less “black”? I’ve lived on both sides of the fence, and I tend to prefer being part of the solution through the medium of giving voice.

I believe that the members of a society seek to comprehend all things from a perspective based on shared definitions, contextual meanings and thus arrive at the juncture of agreement both spoken and/or inferred. Hence, terminologies and concepts take on social meanings and become inbred in the fiber of that society from a moral and

ethical vantage point. What becomes problematic is the notion of social inequality predicated on these social constructs and meanings, for they lead to delineations of peoples based on prejudices, that are often negative and lead to discriminatory acts. People may adjudicate or label others, thus rendering interpersonal interaction a repertoire of generalizations that are at best probable (Blumer 1969).

Couple with this the competition over resources and capital, and defend the disproportionate distribution of wealth with an elaborate speech on the precept of meritocracy, and emergent is conflict. People with power tend to have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, therefore, it is reasonable that they would exploit the delineations of people and seek to maintain a permanent underclass or altogether criminalize a population of people. The aforementioned is the process of disenfranchisement and exclusion from opportunity for equitable treatment.

Struggle and rebellion against what individuals perceive to be unjust are seemingly inherent in them. Therefore marginalization is met with resistance partly because people believe it to be their unalienable right, and partly because their self-worth is predicated on their success in life. Interestingly enough, Greenberg (1994) offers that people have an expectation of fair treatment and *respect*. To reiterate this point, Lind and Tyler (1988) cite in their group value theory that, “people care whether their treatment is fair because fair treatment indicates something critically important to them—their status within their social group.” There tends to be more outrage when an in-group member commits a violation against the individual because he is a member of the same moral order, hence he should be more aware of the potentialities that are spawn of his actions (Durkheim 1964; Vidmar 2000).

Eventually individuals that are historically and consistently excluded create subcultures, with antithetical or differing focal concerns, codes of ethics, systems of morality and means by which to navigate the social strata (Cohen 1955). This is where social control arguments are interjected, on the basis that cultural solidarity is rudiment to societal functioning and on-going civility. This dictates that persons functioning outside of the behavioral parameters of the collective are deviant. When conventional methods and its instruments fail those that compose the subculture, where do they seek formal

justice? It is still available to them? Accordingly, they often mediate their own issues and police themselves (Hutchinson 2002; Baron, Forde and Kennedy 2001).

Given the above, it would seem imprudent to dispense with the ideology of revenge or justice seeking within discussions regarding the precipitation of violence (Cintron 2000; Jacobs 2004). In addition, being cognizant of the differentiation between micro and macro levels of analysis seems essential to grasping an in-depth understanding of causes of violence. This study, while conceding the undeniable importance of macro-level inequality inbred in both American society and its capitalist institutions, emphasizes the response of individuals within a particular demographic; thereby categorizing this study as a micro level analysis.

One prevailing argument for the exacerbation of violent crime among African American men is the centralization of poverty or a culture of poverty (Lewis 1969). One might make inquiry as to whether violence is the embodiment of frustration resulting from poverty. I hold that the retort lies within the ability to identify and dissect the response to the condition of poverty, not the inequity itself. It must subsequently be adjudicated whether this is a fair assessment for the individuals within the subculture, or whether their environment may simply be an attractive nuisance for violence.

If black men articulate that under the conditions of structural inequality the conventional methods for attaining status, success, prestige and wealth are valid, yet unattainable, then by all means, culture of poverty arguments would be found valid. However, we are still left to inquire why *all* persons that reside under unfavorable social conditions do not respond with violence. This consideration alone redirects us back to the individual.

I believe the obvious line of questioning that should follow is why black males are violent towards other black males, when the source of their frustration is structural inequity? According to Washington (1998), the violence of blacks is misplaced because of a fear of economic retaliation as well as a lack of opportunity. It is presupposed that because white life is valued at a premium that the legal sanctions for criminal behavior directed toward whites are administered more severely (McCall 1995; Toch 1980). Hence, deterrence from interracial crime is inherent in the application of sanction.

As I peer into the violent social world of black men, there seems to be a pervasive feeling of powerlessness where it concerns the public and social order (Grier and Cobbs 1968; Anderson 1999; Oliver 2001). Thus the process of “acquiring manhood” asserts itself in a manner that finds the fruit of this pursuit a consensus amongst peers and not susceptible to challenge (Lind 2000; Jacobs 2004). “Specifically, young Black males who perceive that they live in a hostile environment view violence as necessary for their survival” (Washington 1996:405). Essentially, there exists a need for black men to demonstrate control over some facet of their lives, which usually translates into physical prowess and/or aggression. Within the theoretical context of an intra-racial enclave the bigger stronger and most aggressive survive and earn status and respect.

Respect seems to bear some semblance to cultural capital in the streets. Respect is a scarce resource that is the object of fierce competition, is rarely relinquished without a fight and regarded as worth dying for (Anderson 1999). Accompanying this ideal are the concepts of integrity and fearlessness. This seemingly creates the equation for a violent confrontation. As I reason, anything worth defense, worth the risk of one’s life and inherent in the ascribed code of behavior, is worthy the ascription of a “commodity.” Over-articulated machismo and social posturing is in part overcompensation for a lack of control over the black male’s environment, but the socioeconomic fatalism and apathy regarding his own fatality that is so pronounced in the code of the streets is marked bravery; this warrants respect (Hannerz 1969; Staples 1982; Thibaut and Walker 1975; Folger 1977; Anderson 1999). Antithetically, any slight or attempt to violently transfer the ownership of this “commodity” must be viewed in subcultural terms as disrespectful. Are we then to deduce that disrespect leads to violence? Only the voices within this work can affirm or deny the veracity of such an assumption.

I remind the reader not to confuse the deductions made in the study as a romanticism of violence through inferences that appear to indicate the necessity of rough justice, revenge and retaliation. Instead, one is beseeched to consider the perspective of a subculture as normative, if for but a moment, so as to divulge the altruism present in the response of those labeled criminally violent.

1.4 Organization of the Dissertation

The next chapter reviews some of the literature on the subcultures of violence and other theoretical approaches to placing violence in context. A litany of arguments follow, accompanied by my attempts to both apply them to this phenomenon as well as analyze their appropriateness in bringing us closer to an understanding of violence and its precipitating factors. Even further, much of the literature will impede on boundaries of distinction that are made between crime, delinquency and violence in an effort to make use of relative tenets and corollaries found therein with the goal of finding ideas that might be meritorious towards the previously stated end. Such an expedition will commence with arguments that specify black-on-black violence as their target concept.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the previous chapter, I noted that there are marked exclusions in the literature regarding the phenomenon of intra-racial violence among black males (Oliver 2001). During an inspection of the literature, I found very little distinctive literature respective of this particular phenomenon. Therefore the direction of this review focuses on the application of the assumptions and corollaries of theoretical frameworks or paradigms that were postulated prior to the phenomenon's aggrandizement as a social concern. I discovered that a number of attempts have been made to address the phenomenon of intra-racial violence that include and are not limited to strain theories, various concepts of masculinity, frustration-aggression or displaced aggression theories, anomie, poverty-social disorganization theory, social bonding or control theory, rational choice theory and several subcultural theories (Washington 1996). With the exception of the latter none of the former theoretical frameworks have *particularly* examined *black* male interpersonal violence.

For years, the growing problem of "black-on-black" violence has been explained in terms of macro-level causations and/or explanations, i.e. violence resulting from a centralization or concentration of poverty, racism, the contradictions and inherent inequities within the economic structure of capitalism and even historical arguments that link the experiences of black males to that of enslaved Africans (King 1997). While interpersonal violence among African American males has not been altogether neglected from the micro level of analysis, perhaps the most influential efforts to understand it sociologically have been done so in the contexts of comprehending maleness, masculinity, machismo, bravado and the like, based on the presuppositions that black men feel it necessary to assert themselves within their racially homogenous environments due to the contrasting status of powerlessness within the larger mainstream society (Messerschmidt 1993; Jefferson 1996; McCall 1994; Gadd 2000). This being said, the goal of this review is merely to annotate the merits of theories that I found to be pertinent, while simultaneously conducting critical analysis of their shortcomings with regards to this *particular* phenomenon; not achieve their total deconstruction. Subsequently, I plan

to demonstrate the appropriateness of a transmutation of analytical perspective through the exercise of a micro-level explanation of intra-racial violence among African American males.

I likewise find it essential to this body of work that the distinction be made towards what end the study has been conducted. To wit, I will retort that the goal of this study is to examine a dichotomous relationship between (1) what leads to a violent confrontation in the absence of alternative responses (Schinkel 2004), as well as (2) making an attempt to define the cultural significance of disrespect with aspirations of uncovering its' influence, if any, on the precipitation and facilitation of a violent confrontation. In order to set the stage for possible links between violence and disrespect, I need to understand the following themes independent of each other: interpersonal violence, black on black violence, respect and disrespect. While the context for the study surrounds the concept of disrespect, I further noted that disrespect is but a microcosm of respect. I argue that disrespect could not be regarded as socially significant were there not an expectation of respect. Social meanings become more concrete when they are derived from antithetical concepts.

For the purposes of this work, I've opted to distinguish violence from the phenomenon of violent crime and define it as such: the use or exertion of physical force and/or aggression against another being. This is due to the fact that particular subcultures do not perceive all violence to be criminal or illicit (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967). The choice to utilize an operational definition further removes consideration of property crime as violence within this study. Somewhere between the agenda to understand interpersonal violence and attempting to discover its causes, violence in and of itself is deprived of its agency (Schinkel 2004). I believe that the first misstep made by sociologists is to look at violence as having a negative connotation within society (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967). I believe in order to truly acquire a distinctive conception of violence and what it is born of, the act of violence has to be defined, not the context in which it is most likely to occur, not the personality of its' agent, neither the typology of violence coupled with either of the former, but its' function and the identification of its' precipitation in the simplest of terminologies. This, in my opinion

can only be achieved by deconstructing the anatomy of the violent confrontation, and allowing it to be framed by the agent.

2.0 Black-on-Black Violence

**“I go to search for the yellow moons and the fathers of our sons,
Where the red sun sinks in the hills of gold and the healing waters run
For soon I’ll find the yellow moon along with my loved ones,
Where the buffaloes graze in clover fields without the sound of guns
And the red sun sinks at last into the hills of gold,
And peace to this young warrior comes with a bullet hole.”**

-Elton John, lyrics from “*Indian Sunset*” © 1971

I find myself ensnared in a mental quagmire when the issue of black-on-black violence is debated through the lens of yesteryear and rationalizations for the behaviors that characterize today’s African Americans are offered with the foundation being slavery. Articles by Clarke (1996), King (1997) and Hutchinson (2002) on black-on-black violence render me smitten by the fact that there were exceptional correlations between how justice for Negroes was mediated and how justice or the lack thereof is facilitated today. I cannot but yield to my analytical nature and deduce that the summation of such arguments infer that intra-racial violence among African American males is quite simply tradition. Clarke states that not only did the cessation of slavery mark the inception of the devaluation of black life, but that “the roots of black-on-black violence can be traced back to the previous century, the southern experience, and the system of criminal justice that took the place of slavery as a means of social control after emancipation” (1996:2).

In fairness to Clarke, his argument does not end there. He goes on to chronicle the influence and influx of handguns, alcohol, broken homes, and inadequate housing as ex-slaves migrated north. Clarke continues on that “overcrowding is associated with irritability, communicable diseases, prostitution, juvenile delinquency, and domestic violence—especially child neglect and abuse. Moreover, family controls are weakened because both adults and children who live in such stressful situations seek relief and

privacy wherever they can find it...that usually meant vice-ridden and dangerous streets” (1996:5).

Hutchinson follows with the same line of thinking in citing that “in the past, crimes committed by blacks against other blacks were often ignored or lightly punished. The implicit message was that black life was expendable. This perceived devaluation of black lives by racism has encouraged disrespect for the law and has forced many blacks to internalize anger and displace aggression onto others” (2002:1). Hutchinson amends where Clarke neglects in further offering that “the other powerful ingredient in the deadly mix of black-on-black violence is the plague of gangs and drugs.” Hutchinson contends that “drug trafficking not only provided illicit profits but also made gun play more widespread” (1996:2; Fagan and Wilkinson 1998; Blumstein 1995; Goldstein, Brownstein, Ryan, and Bellucci 1989). Beckett and Sasson concurred, offering that the unusually high homicide rate in America is due to the catastrophic interaction of a number of factors, including ubiquity of guns, high rates of economic and racial inequality (especially in the form of concentrated urban poverty), the trade in illegal drugs, and the emergence of a ‘code of the streets’ that encourages the use of violence” (2000:8).

King remarks that “contrary to traditional European and European American social science theory, the violent behaviors exhibited by many young African American males were practically non-existent in Africa prior to the Atlantic slave trade (Bohannon 1960; Brearly 1932; Curtis 1975; Jackson 1990; Silberman 1978). King believes that the violence demonstrated by young African American men today is the result of the despair and frustration that they feel in response to their social ineptitude. He follows that illicit street drugs simply mask the precise source of the emotional debacle faced during the day-to-day navigation of black impoverished life. He cites that the media further exacerbates the difficulty of the maturation process via the glorification of sexual promiscuity, gratuitous violence, and the acquisition of wealth and material items. The conglomeration of such social tenets, he adds, “leads to unimaginable levels of confusion, personal frustration and emotional pain.” Further, the destruction of the conscience and moral character results, which in turn evidence themselves as a total disregard for self

and the lives of intimate others. In summation, King indicates that poverty and racism are the primary rationales for increased aptitudes for violent behavior seen in African American men.

What I find problematic as a black sociologist is the seeming explaining away of violence within the black community. Every vice, every macro-level injustice, every intimate “other”, or a combination of each becomes responsible or a plausible rationale for black male violence. I do not believe that historic transgressions can repetitively prove to be, or for that matter ever be offered as the causations of interpersonal violence among black men. They are not a reality that is tangible for a generation hundreds of years removed from slavery and almost fifty years removed from government sanctioned segregation. Racially homogeneous violence is more immediate and personal. I believe that black violence for whatever reason, whether it is the result of outrage, for the purposes of status acquisition or in response to insult, is the one thing that black men own. His violence ensnares power, if only for an instant, that is not bequeathed by the white patriarchy of America.

Subcultural theories and culture of poverty arguments make valiant efforts to verbalize the enigma of violent crime in terms of physical proximity and ecology. To this end, the literature is in need of expansion, as once again, the emphasis has been placed on the structural inequality, the dynamics and flux that exists therein. “Due largely to inner-city living, Blacks are consistently more likely to be involved in homicide and assault, both as offenders and victims, than one might expect from their proportion of the population” (Clinard and Mier 1985:84). It stands to reason that people will typically commit crimes reasonable close to their place of residence or even in their places of employment, because opportunity is increased, which follows directly from a single facet of the routine activities theory proposed by Cohen and Felson (1979). Therefore, this is not news to sociologists and statisticians.

I think that it is intensely naïve to posit that African American males are violent because they mysteriously awaken to their disposition and realize how destitute their surroundings are. The decision to use violence, how it is used, against whom, to what end, and how it becomes an instrument prevalent within a vast repertoire of human

emotions should be the focus of any theory guided by a sterile attempt to identify causation. Perhaps the theories that have asserted themselves in this manner most profoundly have been the subcultural theories.

2.1 Subcultural Theories

In 1955, the *theory of delinquent subculture* was developed by Albert K. Cohen. Cohen was of the notion that his theory might explain the increasing gang culture. He stood firm that lower class children would incur frustration when they were adjudicated by the measures of their middle class counterparts. It was when faced with these status frustrations, or “falling short”, when placed in direct competition with middle class children that they would resort to *hostile over reaction*, and seek out collective resolves that involved creating a subculture and redefining the norms and status symbols that would attribute themselves worth. The notion that the subsequent “new norms” and “new criteria of status” are thereby redefined in terms of what they are capable of and what characteristics they do possess offer us an understanding of how unpredictable violence becomes a prevalent alternative in search of respect (Williams and McShane 1999). A great majority of literature that seeks to explain antithetical normative behavior rarely places emphasis on the actual violence within subcultures, but instead seeks out explanations for the formation of gangs and trouble themselves with the attractiveness that spawns widespread recruitment. While the aggregation around exclusion can prove fatal, it is the hostility and subsequent body of actions that are deemed worthy of respect that result in a premium being placed on physical predominance. Internalization of these ideals and their underlying principles has become an afterthought within the literature.

Walter Miller (1958) seemed to elicit from Cohen’s delinquent subculture theory that antithetical focal concerns were at the core of the conflict between the middle and lower classes. He presumed that there existed many similarities within society; however, there were even more varying attitudes, norms and values that were at play in their environments, which he referenced as *lower class focal concerns*. Hence, while some attributes and practices were valued and even perceived as meritorious within the lower

class, they were referenced as perhaps distasteful, unwanted, and maybe even illegal within the middle strata.

More along those lines, in the same year, George Vold, recognized that there forever existed a conflict between class interests that must be defended vigorously and at all times, for they overlapped. He went on that when these interests, i.e. resources, and social control were mediated by the criminal justice system, the behavior of the powerless was deemed criminal in the interest of maintaining an underclass. Unfortunately, there is a failure to comprehend the lineage between an antithesis of class conflict and intra-racial and interpersonal violence, as what results in labeling behavior fails to offer any deeper understanding of violence, only the systematic process by which it becomes criminalized (Tittle, Villemez, and Smith 1978).

Miller's argument was based on lower-class subcultures as opposed to black males in arguing that there were six focal concerns characteristic of these low-skilled laboring populations. The concerns were trouble, toughness, smartness, excitement, fate and autonomy. Of the six, the one most applicable to the study at hand is indeed "toughness", which Miller describes as simply 'machismo', and being fearless, brave and daring" (Williams and McShane 1999:122). A commitment to toughness reverberates the importance of being able to "take care of oneself", when the meting out of justice seems unfavorable or when "new norms" are violated (Anderson 1994). I interject that it is more feasible to exert the vigorous protection of self interest within the subculture as opposed to between classes as Miller had offered previously.

As was the case with Cohen, subcultural theories found themselves predominantly preoccupied with the existence of subcultures as opposed to the contributions of the subculture to its actors. Marvin Wolfgang and Franco Ferracuti advanced in 1967 that these subcultures that were forming and seemingly centered on violence were not exceptional in their contrast to society, nor were they in complete conflict with society as a whole. This then diverted the focus into contemplation of the social meanings within subcultures. The *subculture of violence* to which they referred was a learned response, which garnered favorable support in their circles, and was fostered between adolescence and middle age. Wolfgang and Ferracuti furthered their postulation by distinguishing

that there existed a black subculture of violence that was evidenced by high rates of violence among the blacks in the U.S. The *black subculture of violence theory* posits that there is “a potent theme of violence current in the cluster of values that make up the life-style, socialization process, and interpersonal relationships of individuals living in similar conditions” (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967).

Wolfgang reasoned that statistical information on homicide would, in and of itself, readily identify the group with the most intense subculture of violence. Wolfgang and Ferracuti went on to explain how violence within the subculture was systematically normative behavior that is valued and integral in the functioning of the subculture. Perhaps the most predominant of the corollaries birthed of this theory emancipates the perspective of this study, in simply stating that “*the use of violence in a subculture is not necessarily viewed as illicit conduct and the users therefore do not have to deal with feelings of guilt about their aggression*” (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967).

The importance to travel in another direction with respect to penetrating the behavioral fabric of subcultures is underscored by Yablonsky (1962). Yablonsky’s urging towards an examination of less cohesive groups and behavior that was less than meticulous in their organization than gangs makes the first allusion to the fact that interpersonal personal violence could be individualistic and was potentially exercised only at the provocation of a psychotic central leader. Although the latter is a theoretical regression towards the ideology of personality types, the central idea may be salvaged by arguing that these “near groups”, because they are not gangs, have loose organization and are prone to violence via the provocation of a “respected” figure. This indicates that the expectation of violence as a response from a third party may be essential to the anatomy of the violent confrontation (Gilmore 1990; Polk 1994; Winlow 2001). This is an argument that I will develop in greater lengths within this work.

2.2 Poverty Theories

While subcultural theories have placed emphasis on violence as a both normative behavior and a subcultural value, other types of theories have examined the effects of structural inequities and economic composition on the social actor within the subculture

as possible explanations of violence. For instance, within the underpinnings of the *culture of poverty* argument, Oscar Lewis (1969) asserts that it is the attitudes, values and character structure of the individual, the relationships between the subculture and the larger society, and the nature of the poor family and slum community that are essential when making practical application of his approach. He argues that slum mentality was characterized by individuals pawning or hocking their personal goods, the utilization of hand me downs or second hand goods and the use of an informal credit system. Lewis reports a self-ostracizing process in which the members of the poor subculture disengage themselves from mainstream society due in large part to distrust of the predominant ecosystem. As such I believe that many times the inhabitants of subcultures harbor feelings of resentment, apathy and rebellion towards everything outside of their community, and because of the constant failure to be recognized or included through discrimination and segregation; they begin to internalize a designation of “other.” Hence, the focal concerns of the subculture become prevalent and the norms within the subculture take precedence over what society dictates because identity may be achieved by placing emphasis and value on endeavors in which they are successful and on items that are tangible (Miller 1958).

Lewis would most likely argue that this formal and informal reinforced expulsion from society, and the convergence of differing definitions about normative behavior, is the exact point at which violence and criminality have increased propensities (Vold 1958). Coupled with a poor self-concept, lauded machismo and apathetic fatalism, the calculation of risk when coming in direct conflict with the norms and laws of society are thereby abandoned, rendering the product of this culture dead or in prison. This is a morbid reality of which the members of the subculture are aware as evidence in the following:

**“I see death around the corner, gotta stay high while I survive,
In the city where the skinny niggas die
If they bury me, bury me a G nigga, no need to worry,
I expect retaliation in a hurry
I see death around the corner, any day,
Trying to keep it together, no one lives forever anyway
Strugglin’ and strivin’, my destiny's to die,
Keep my finger on the trigger, no mercy in my eyes
In a ball of confusion, I think about my daddy,
Madder than a muthafucka, they never shoulda had me.”**

- Tupac Shakur, lyrics from “*Death Around The Corner*” © 1995

In sharp contrast, Wilson (1987) elucidates that the key theoretical concept is *social isolation* as opposed to a culture of poverty. He supplements that white flight and the departure of non-poor blacks from the ecological landscape leave in their wake a concentration of poverty. This concentration of poverty, according to Wilson, is characterized by the normalization of welfare dependency, broken homes, and crime. He argues that social distance not physical distance separates blacks from gainful employment. Hence the tenets of being presentable for, acquiring and maintaining employment are foreign to the underclass. A continuing downward spiral of negative behavior and the aforementioned work ethic are the fruits of urbanization and ghetto residents fail to internalize mainstream values because they are not exposed to them in a meaningful way.

Wilson strays little from the conjecture of Voss and Hepburn’s (1968) *poverty-social disorganization theory*. They remained steadfast in the belief that it was poverty that was responsible for the social cesspool that impedes African Americans from being able to even encourage their young males to “adopt conventional values and behaviors” (Washington 1996; Sampson 1987; Skogan 1990; Taylor 1991; Elliot Huizinga, Sampson, Elliott, and Rankin 1996). He cited that the social vices of chronic unemployment, welfare dependency, academic failure, teen pregnancy and female-headed households were all the offspring of poverty, arguing that they created a tangible antipathy for self and others that makes the atmosphere fertile for violence.

2.3 Masculinity Theories

Antonymous to the level of analysis utilized by poverty theories, masculinity theories focus on the endeavor of the individual towards the ends of self-assertion and identity construction. The initial formulation was conducted by Parsons (1947) as a derivative of Sigmund Freud's contentions that males were preoccupied with their mothers. Subsequently, Freud said, boys will reach a stage during their maturation during which, in order to achieve masculinity, he boldly departs from the former relationship. The manifestation of this departure is characterized by behaviors contrary to any inclination of femininity. Parsons argues that *compulsive masculinity* is the result of the purposeful disbanding of the mother-son relationship that had previously been influential in his life, particularly in the absence of a father. Later, Hannerz (1969) and Staples (1982) applied it specifically to African American males and described this compulsive masculinity as an effort by this particular demographic to communicate "toughness, emotional detachment, independency, and especially sexual conquest" (Washington 1996:404).

A less popular yet exceedingly attractive postulation towards dissecting the violent behavior of black males regards a conceptualization referred to as *egotism*. In 1996, Baumeister, Smart and Boden held that when faced with negative external evaluations, individuals with inflated appraisals of self may react violently as a means to maintain their self-esteem. Hence, it is surmised that threatened egotism is a major source of violent behavior (Costello and Dunaway 2003). More directly, Baumeister et al. (1996) make the distinction that egotism differs philosophically from the concept of high self-esteem. Persons with inflated self-esteem or egotism are hypersensitive to perceived threats against their self-esteem, and very likely to deduce that they have not been treated with the proper amount of respect due them. Additionally, according to Baumister et al., crime rates among African Americans correspond with "concerted cultural efforts to boost self-esteem among Blacks" (1996:14). Unfortunately the threatened egotism hypothesis has not yet been tested with sociological methods due to the unavailability of existing sociological data that might test their central hypothesis (Costello and Dunaway 2003).

As previously stated another theory of masculinity that has had great bearing on this phenomenon and study respectively, is the contra-culture theory. The articulation of this theory appears to be an attempt at integrating theories to analyze the phenomenon from several intersecting perspectives. The *contra-culture theory* was first posited by Lynn Curtis in 1975. Curtis advanced Wolfgang ad Ferracuti's subculture of violence theory, offering that though black violence was primarily a response to subjacent conditions contrived of social, political, and economic inequality, culture was an intervening variable that was in need of consideration. Curtis adduces that a very integral theme within the contra-culture was the notion of exaggerated masculinity in excess of its mainstream confines. Curtis arrived at this conjecture citing that the persistence of such a conceptualization of masculinity was two-fold. First, institutionalized racism has historically deprived the black male of any semblance of traditional masculinity as prescribed by the mainstream. Moreover, the transmission of alternative normative behavior through modeling, social learning, differential association and the like have maintained compulsive masculinity and the violent contra-culture (Oliver 2001). Concordantly, because the definitions and normative behavior within the contra-culture demonstrate a marked proclivity to violence, opposition to over-articulated masculinity either verbal or symbolic, summon confrontation of the physical variety.

2.4 Applicable Theories of Violence, Crime and Delinquency

I would like to reiterate at this point that although criminal violence is not the focus of this study, the assumptions of criminal theory may assist in framing the phenomenon towards the goal of understanding violence. I believe this is important for two reasons. The first being that all violence is not criminal, or for that matter perceived as violence due to the fact that it is considered normative (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967). Further, a great many violent confrontations are non-fatal and thus go unreported in favor of street retaliation (Oliver 2001). Delinquency provides an interesting but distracting context, as it urges us towards attempting to uncover how violence is learned among youth as opposed to focusing on violence in and of itself. I am in no way saying that such a principle is unimportant, however, it strays from the process of violence and its

facilitating factors. Much of the theory and approaches that are to follow are situation-centered explanations of violence, crime and/or delinquency. Quite simply, violence is viewed as a product of the context in which it occurs.

Marxist criminologists focused on capitalism as the primary catalyst for criminal behavior, citing that it was the continued exploitation and oppression of the poor by the rich that perpetuated conflict (Blau and Blau 1982). Within this framework, conflict over the means of production and the distribution of resources facilitates the commission of crime and creates an environment conducive to violence. To the impoverished and destitute, the contradictions of capitalism are manifest when there appears an overabundance, while a great many strive diligently, yet go without the most basic of needs. I adduce that in such an instance, crime is a perceived necessity, whereby relief of financial malady may be achieved, and the playing field is temporarily leveled.

Neo-Marxist theories agree that criminal behavior is the rational response of rational individuals confronted with a situation structured by the social relations of capitalism. “In general and in the long run, individuals act and think in ways that are consistent with their economic interests” (Vold, Bernard, and Snipes 1998:267). Quinney (1964) added that crime was the by-product of the contradictions inherent within capitalism and was a primitive upheaval in response to the oppression doled out by the ruling hegemony.

The strength of the neo-marxists is that they point to the proliferation of illicit economic activities rampant in the subculture. To even make an attempt at applying neo-marxists’ arguments to non-economic violent crimes, we would have to presume that, because no means of production are evident and the distribution of resources within a racial and socially homogenous environment are fleeting tangibles, that what is gained through intra-racial violence is cultural capital.

Along similar lines, theories that utilize motivational approaches focus on social conditions to make inferences or predictions regarding the inclination of homicide (Gartner 1990). Examples include strain theories, Merton’s anomie theory (1938), and cultural theories, such as that of Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967). Such theories utilize a macro-level of analysis, which I find problematic based on the disappearance of the agent

because of *causes* beyond their individual control (Schinkel, 2004). For example, Blau and Blau (1982) found that economic inequality, both between and within races, is a significant predictor of homicide rate across metropolitan areas. They suggested that economic inequality exacerbates feelings of alienation, despair and pent-up aggression. In turn, criminal violence results from frequent conflict (Blau and Blau 1982). Once again, a theme of frustration articulated through violence in areas of centralized poverty reiterates the contradictions inherent in the system of capitalism, with the economic system exerting the external stressor onto the social actor, and the individual's response *still* requiring a micro level causation hypothesis. Such a line of inquiry into the phenomenon of intra-racial violence among African American men pilfers from them the predisposition of free will. If the mere centralization and concentration of poverty is the prerequisite for violence within this demographic, then what variable exists that distinguishes the inhabitants that are never involved in a violent altercation?

In a bit of a departure from situation-centered theory towards the processes of social interaction, Emile Durkheim (1895) characterizes "crime as normal." Durkheim offers that without crime, society would be pathologically overcontrolled" (Vold, Bernard and Snipes 1998:126). Durkheim (1897) held that inequality was not a unique phenomenon to any society; therefore, in his mind it was not associated with crime. To Durkheim, it was the breakdown of social norms and rules, or a state of what he called, *normlessness*, that caused crime. Such a breakdown, he deemed, *anomie*. This state of normlessness was characterized by people not knowing what to expect of each other, and an incoherence regarding how they should behave towards one another. These periods of disruption and changing conditions leave members of society disjointed and out of place, hence, producing dissatisfaction, conflict and deviance. These periods he added, could be periods of great prosperity or of great depression, both resulting in anomie.

As I try to assess the usefulness of the concept of anomie in understanding the phenomenon of intra-racial violence among black men, I find that there are several contradictions within the literature. If we accept the one of the major corollaries of anomie, accepting that the state of normlessness is characterized by confusion regarding the framing of interpersonal interactions, then this proves problematic in understanding

the behavior inherent in the subculture. Utilizing Wolfgang's subculture of violence theory we find that "there is a potent theme of violence current in the cluster of values that make up the lifestyle, the socialization process, the interpersonal relationships of individuals living in similar conditions" (1967:140). Hence, we deduce that violence *is* an expectation within the subculture. Even further, it is arguable that there even exists a state of normlessness within the subculture, as violence is the normative behavior (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967). More along the same lines, to assert that the absence of normative behavior as defined by mainstream ideologies implies normlessness is synonymous with rejecting the presence of "new norms" as offered by Cohen (1955).

In what appears to be a reformation of Merton's anomie theory, Toch (1980), offers *racial oppression-displaced aggression theory*, which is simply reflective of its nominative label. It cites that due to the resulting anger and frustration of not being able to realize the goals of the mainstream society and coming into contact with blocked opportunities, black males protest and articulate their wounded emotions through the medium of intra-racial violence as opposed to exacting it upon whites. It as if to say, "*I can't do much to keep whites from dissin' me, but I damn sure can keep black folks from doing it*" (McCall 1995:55). This is a result of fear of physical or economic retaliation according to Toch. Thereby the aggression is displaced onto the incorrect source of the frustration.

The influence of Durkheim's notion of anomie can be further evidenced in positing of *strain theory* by Robert K. Merton in 1938. While Merton agreed in principle with Durkheim's notion of anomie, the distinction lies in the sources of anomie. While Durkheim had cited sudden social change and normlessness as the cause of anomie, Merton felt that it was a case of the society asking individuals to achieve the same goals, while depriving them of like legitimate opportunities to do so. While Merton generally refers to acts of deviance in his theory, it is both implied and understood that these various acts may lead to criminal behavior.

Merton presents five predictions for how people will respond or adapt to strain when they come to recognize blocked opportunities: *conformity*: individuals accept both the goals and the means prescribed for achieving them; *innovation*: individuals will

accept the goals, but may realistically only have a few of the means available to them, thereby devising an alternative method to achieve them, even crime; *ritualism*: individuals abandon the goals once prescribed to them and rededicate themselves to their current lifestyle; *retreatism*: these individuals abandon both the means and the goals altogether; and finally *rebellion*: these individuals never subscribe to the goals or means, but instead create their own either by protest or revolution.

In exercise, I would offer that an incidence of violence most closely resembles both the innovation facet of the postulation. Even as black males accept the goals of mainstream society and perceive that the opportunities to achieve them are limited or even unavailable, violence within an intra-racial interpersonal conflict does not change the landscape of their disposition, nor does it function as a vehicle for upward mobility. In fact, countering, violent behavior is adversely labeled “criminal” thereby further distancing them from the realization of the aforementioned goals. In conjunction, “Merton’s anomie theory is, above all, a theory of deviance; that is, it does not focus on criminality” and likewise all acts of deviance are not necessarily violent (Williams and McShane 1999:95). In addendum, utilization of the innovation assumption would have to presume that violence is a means to a particular end. In such a case violence ceases to be at the center of the analysis.

In 1992, Robert Agnew proposed a *general strain theory* that follows from Merton’s anomie theory. Agnew focused on three measures of strain: (1) failure to achieve positively valued goals; (2) actual or anticipated removal of positively valued stimuli, and (3) actual or anticipated presentation of negative stimuli, all resulting in strain. He cites that when an individual fosters negative relationships, he is thereby forced into a state of negativity, thereby pressuring him to seek out illegitimate means by which to attain goals. This theory is summarized by stating that Agnew believes that “crime and delinquency are an adaptation to stress” (Akers 2004:179). Again, strain theories simply provide us with contextual forecasts of when violence may be at its highest probability. In applying this theory to violence, such a rationality or predilection towards a causal chain is an unfair generalization of the diverse responses afforded the actor. The presumption is too grand, as evidenced by the Schinkel’s critique that not all

people tend to get frustrated in certain instances and not all people break out in violence, not even all frustrated people” (2004:10). I further contest the characterization of stimuli, goals and the means by which they are attained as moralistic adjudications, particularly when members of a subculture are not members of the same moral community (Heuer 1999).

2.5 Learning Theories

In stark contrast to the considerations of emotionally reactionary theories, the theories that follow divert their attention to the mediums by which behavior is learned and dispersed. Edward Sutherland (1939) contributed *differential association theory*, from the Chicago School of thought. He argued that criminal behavior, the techniques for committing it, and the definitions that support it are learned while in concert with “intimate others.” Sutherland tunders that an excess of favorable attitudes favoring law or norm violations from others would lead to criminal behavior. One of Sutherland and Cressy’s (1978) most appealing assumptions follows that “when criminal behavior is learned, the learning includes (a) techniques of committing the crime, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes simple and (b) the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes” (Shoemaker, 2000:140-1). In essence the how and why of criminal behavior constitute the learning process amongst small, informal groups.

Sutherland adds that during the aforementioned interactions, values are learned. Those values either condone or oppose criminal behavior. Sutherland also noted that when criminal definitions are in excess, the individual will be more open to new criminal definitions and less receptive to conventional definitions. Therefore, I deduce that the proclivity towards violence becomes a potential alternative based on the effectiveness of the social response that it garners (Anderson 1999; Oliver 2001). The usefulness of differential association is found in the fact that it: (1) provides direction and clarity as to how the “code of the streets” may be disseminated amongst black men; (2) assists in depicting the inception of violence as a coping mechanism; and (3) offers how the use of violence might be perpetuated and reinforced within interpersonal interactions in response to conflict (Williams and McShane 1999).

As a modern version of Sutherland's social learning theory, C. Ray Jeffrey posed *differential reinforcement theory* in 1965, citing that it was neither comprehensive nor up to date. His contention was that, since it is the brain that interprets and mediates all stimuli, then satiation of the brain is the primary cause for continual offending. He went on that social reinforcements are by in large, inconsistent, meaning that every occurrence of crime is not met with a punitive response; thus social reinforcement should be considered a secondary factor of causation. In turn, Robert Akers defended Sutherland against the theoretical jousting of Jeffrey in 1966 and 1985, retorting that the social environment is essential in reinforcement, and even further that crime is the result of social interaction. In addition he adds that the definitions that are born of these interactions are moral codes and are solely responsible for the characterization of the reinforcement of criminal behavior.

Another cognitive argument regarding the social learning of behavior can be identified as *symbolic interactionism*. While symbolic interactionism is often associated with Mead, yet it was in fact Herbert Blumer that borrowed Mead's idea and developed it into a more systematic sociological approach. Blumer offers that "symbolic interaction refers, of course, to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity persists in the fact that human beings interpret or 'define' each others actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions. Their response is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on meaning which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions. This mediation is equivalent to inserting a process of interpretation between stimulus and response in the case of human behavior" (1969:180).

We find evidence of this as Wolfgang states "the significance of a jostle, a slightly derogatory remark, or the appearance of a weapon in the hands of an adversary are stimuli differently perceived and interpreted by Negroes and whites, males and females. Social expectations of response in particular types of social interaction result in differential definitions of the situation" (1967:153). Symbolic interactionists further argue that during an instance such as this, the intervention of a "generalized other" and

how this “other” might perceive the situation assists the actor in the formulation of a response. Hewitt and Stokes (1975) insert that Blumer’s definition and reaction process to a problematic interaction occurs within a situational context where agents interpret each other’s actions from a cultural standpoint; a point that remains irrefuted by symbolic interactionists (Oliver 2001).

Perhaps the most ardent of behavioral reinforcements may have its influence within the home. Violence as a coping mechanism is vehemently enforced as the most viable when modeled by parents, older and respected members of the subculture and the like. “Many parents actually impose sanctions if a child is not sufficiently aggressive” (Anderson 1999:71). In some instances children are threatened with punitive and physical repercussions for “punking out” or losing fights, which concordantly reinforces the precept of toughness and in a sense the premise that violence stays increased violence. This notion is underscored within the theoretical frameworks of B.F. Skinner’s *operant learning theory* (1971) and Shakoor and Chalmers conceptualization of *co-victimization* (1991).

Skinner maintained that it was the response to a behavior that elicits the behavior. Moreover, he introduced the contextual appropriateness of social cues, citing their relativity to their environment. Further, Skinner simply says that the modeling of an observable behavior and the response it garners is the process of operant learning. Most importantly, Skinner mandates that *discriminative stimuli* occur prior to or during the behavior; this enables the actor to forecast the response; subsequently, the response to behaviors must be proximate and consonant, if a schedule of consequences is to be established, or else punishment loses its effect.

Shakoor and Chalmers (1991) explained the maxim of *co-victimization*, as the witnessing of a violent assault on another person, adding that exposure to such an act may be either directly or indirectly, such as the medium of media. They went on to augment that it was an intersection of frustration over co-victimization, violence depicted on television and interpersonal violence in the form of domestic violence which aroused adolescents, and subsequently created a myriad of negative emotions that eventually manifest themselves as violence. The postulation was consistent with previous studies

conducted by Green and Berkowitz (1976) that “suggested that frustration contributes to the aggressive behaviors exhibited by adolescents after witnessing violent acts” (as cited by Garrett 1997:636).

Differing slightly in 1977, Albert Bandura would develop social cognitive theory, which would later come to be known as *social learning theory*. It would depart slightly from Skinner’s hypothesis in that Bandura argued that behavior is influenced by vicarious reinforcement. Bandura went on that not only was behavior influenced by external forces but by observing an event. He distinguished between imitation or learning through modeling and observational learning, the former involving the process of copying another individual’s behavior, and the latter involving a more complex process of both observing behavior and utilizing this information to one’s advantage in the future. Bandura expanded his postulation on learning and behavior when he posited that people, their environment, and their behaviors all converge to create new behaviors. He referred to this process as *reciprocal determinism*.

Reciprocal determinism is not to be confused with the concept of *determinism*. Due to its abstract nature, determinism lends itself to enumerable applications and definitions. Determinism is the philosophical conception which claims that every physical event, including human cognition and action, is causally determined by an unbroken chain of prior occurrences. No mysterious miracles or totally random events occur. It goes on that there is no free will, because every action is predetermined and all events are the result of natural and physical laws. I cannot fathom how such a concept might be tested. Therefore, I cannot with any degree of certainty presume this concept or the assumptions therein to be meritorious. I can however offer that if determinism is applied to the actuation of violence, then no man bears responsibility for its facilitation.

To reiterate, the concept that polarizes determinism is the concept of *free will*. Shoemaker (2000) cites that within the classical school, free will simply represents individual responsibility for behavior. He supplements that this does not infer that the social actor assumes culpability for his actions, but that society reasons that he is based on premeditation. The notion that the social actor has *free will* encompasses the belief that a great deal of conscious thought and calculation has been actuated prior to an act.

Similarly, the concept of *rational choice* argues that all people have the same opportunities to make informed decisions and choices. The mitigating factor for what they opt to do is based solely on their weighing of the consequences and rewards associated with their actions.

Critical thinkers of the 18th century, such as Cesare Beccaria went on to offer that individuals were motivated to make choices based on emotional satiation. In other words, people behaved hedonistically and in avoidance of pain. Scientifically, this argument has evolved into *rational-choice theory* and even belief that endorphins are released into the bloodstream of the social actor, thereby making violence and/or crime a “thrill-seeking” endeavor. “Rational choices are based on the principle of self-interest (Cornish and Clarke 1986:1), or what others might refer to as the pleasure-pain principle” (Shoemaker 2000).

The concept of violence as a hedonistic choice is also consistent with the direction of literature proffered by Schinkel regarding *autotelic violence*. Schinkel coins the term and references it as the intrinsic attractiveness of violence that draws people to its selection for the purposes of pleasure (2004). He asserts that “we do not rationally calculate which means to use in order to achieve our goals; we rather feel comfortable about some means and less inclined to use others that might be more efficient means to our desired ends” (Schinkel 2004:19). While Schinkel achieves the goal of extricating violence from what he deems factors extrinsic to it. He then seemingly places violence at the center of analysis. However, in so doing, he fails to adequately explain how violence is chosen during the actor’s first facilitation of it. By his own admission, in speaking of autotelic violence he offers, “perhaps it coincides with that strange rush of adrenaline the actor feels when he empties his gun; a feeling that may surprise the actor, but which he will not be able to deny, certainly not the *next time* he finds himself in a similar situation” (2004:20). I argue that an attempt to understand violence independent of any other entity fails to provide violence with incipience.

With regards to each theory that focuses on the manner in which violent behavior is learned and disseminated, there still remains the question of why the *individual* that suffers an affront or identity challenge chooses violence. Contentions that violence must

be isolated from all external considerations or dependent variables to gain a true understanding, eventually retread the path of inquiry into causation. I will concede that the influence of peers or intimate others plays an integral role in the reinforcement of behavior, violent or not. Yet, while there may exist multiple contexts within which violence is more probable, structural or interpersonal, the exertion of force and the decision to do so remains largely individualistic and an internal mandate (Bauman 1990).

2.6 Control Theories

While learning theories predominately discussed the transmission of criminal ideologies, control theories seemingly altered the focus of causation in favor of theoretical framing regarding criminal deterrence. The momentum towards social control is ascribed sociologist E.A. Ross, who posited that it was not laws in particular, but belief systems that dictated the pattern of behavior of an individual. Nonetheless, it is Travis Hirschi that is most renowned for his contribution of *social control theory*, (1969). He submitted that the fear of placing in jeopardy, the social bonds that one has with others deters criminal activity. He went on that everyone possesses the propensity to violate the law, yet the more involved and committed a person is to conventional activities, and/or the stronger the social bonds with others, the less likely that individual is to act in a manner deemed criminal. He believed that involvement in activities reduced the amount of idle time one might have to engage in wrongful acts. Further the emotional proximity to parents would instill beliefs in community values.

In summary, the four aspects of Hirschi's social bonds are: attachment, commitment, belief and involvement. The aspect of *belief* is the most closely related to the phenomenon under inspection. It follows that this entails respect for the law, and the people and institutions that enforce laws. The aversion to commit delinquent or criminal acts is increased when such beliefs are weakened or absent. Therefore, were we to apply this line of thought to violent behavior, it would reason that Hirschi's social bond theory would simply set the stage for the formulation of a subculture, where violent behavior may be prevalent.

Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi (1990, 1994), found a major transition for Hirschi, moving to a proposition of criminal theory based on self-control. The two felt that self-control varied at different stages in life, but was in effect, determined during childhood, by the type of sanctions or punishment imposed by the parents. They deemed peer pressure virtually unimportant if the foundation had been laid at home. They believed that people with low levels of self-control would commit criminal acts when the opportunity presented itself, but crime was not assured if the circumstances were not right. They go on that the level of self-control one has remains constant throughout the life-cycle. Hence, in our exercise of application, such an assertion would fly in the face of statistical information that dictates that deadly violence among black men is highest during the ages of 17-34 (FBI U.C.R. 2003).

Finally, quite different from any of the theories previously offered, there has been the recent and pointed re-articulation of the source of violence. Rhodes (1999) credits Lonnie Athens with finding the sole cause of American violent criminality. Athens developed a four-stage process which has become known as *violentization*. Rhodes argued that such a process could cause any person indiscriminant of demographic to commit any crime with the violent index. Violentization, according to Rhodes is the privatization of violence through family brutalization (child abuse) and its subsequent tolerance. He indicated that individuals are violent by choice because when they feel a certain array of emotions; they believe that the timing is appropriate for violence and discounted the notion that people are violent because of mental illness.

2.7 Getting “Respect”

“A coward dies a thousand deaths, a soldier dies but once.”

–Tupac Shakur lyrics from “*If I Die 2nite*” © 1995

Perhaps one of the most fervently contested socio-political races ever run is the on-going campaign of black men for respect in America. Respect as defined by Webster’s is special consideration; to heed; to hold in high regard; high esteem; courteous or considerate treatment. However, in the “hood” and in the “streets” of black America, respect is exceedingly more than what has been indicated within the English

nomenclature and more far-reaching than mainstream ideologists could fathom. Respect resides at the very core of the “code of the streets”, staying life or actuating death (Anderson 1994). “In the inner-city environment respect on the street may be viewed as a form of social capital that is very valuable, especially when various other forms of capital have been denied or unavailable” (Anderson 1999:66).

McCall adds “for as long as I can remember, black folks have always had a serious thing about respect. I guess white people disrespected them so blatantly for so long that blacks viciously protected what little morsels of self-respect they felt they had left” (1995:53). For scientists peering into the violent world of black men for some rationale as to why the status quo is as such, slights are perceived as unworthy of retaliation, but unbeknownst to them is the anguish associated with an interaction devoid of respect from the mirror image of self. “Behavior that appears irrationally violent, barbaric, and ultimately self-destructive to the outsider, can be reinterpreted according to the underground economy as judicious public relations and long-term investment in one’s human capital development” (Bourgois 2003:24).

**“Look in my eyes, see what I see,
Do what I do, be what I be;
Walk in my shoes, hurt your feet,
Then know why I do dirt in the street.”**

– DMX, lyrics from “*Look Thru My Eyes*” © 1998

According to Bird (2004), respect and disrespect have performative modes consisting wholly in the fulfillment or violation of social, ceremonial, or ritual expressions. In fact, social meanings are inbred in gestures and actions independent of the actor. Therefore much of the black dialectic is not seen or spoke of, simply understood. Anderson suggests that respect is an “external entity that is hard-won but easily lost, and so must constantly be guarded” (1994:82). The very axiom of respect is accompanied by tangible markers of its presence, from clothing to jewelry, and from demeanor to the way in which an individual moves about. Anderson makes addendum that such indicators convey the message that an individual is not to be “bothered.” The appearance of weakness or belief that one can be bothered without fear of repercussion constitutes being disgraced or “dissed.” Hence, the guarding or preserving of reputation,

self-esteem and/or identity must be done so through the exertion of force. This facet of respect is further advanced by Stephen Darwall. He cites that respect involves recognizing an object as something to be reckoned with. He forwards that the attitude of respect involves the recognition of power and *the failure to do so exposes us to woe* (1977).

As we continue to draw nigh to a comprehension of the importance of respect in its totality, we find that parallels are formed between respect and fairness, fairness and justice. There is expectation of deservingness by individuals to be assessed and adjudicated fairly, which is thereby reflected in respectful treatment (Greenberg 1994). According to Heuer, Blumenthal, Douglas, and Weinblatt (1999), membership in a moral community affects the expectation of respectful treatment. Alternatively this infers that black men do not have an expectation of fairness within racial heterogeneous interpersonal interactions or garner respectful treatment because they are members of a subculture or contra-culture that ascribes to its' own dictates as to what is moral and ethical. Transversely, there is a deservingness expectation for respectful treatment from members within the culture. This explains why black males hold others responsible for having knowledge of the "code of the streets", and in addition why violations of those codes are dealt with punitively (Anderson 1999; Oliver 2001). To reiterate, Goffman adds, "rules of conduct impinge on the individuals in two different ways: directly, as obligations, establishing how he is morally constrained to conduct himself; indirectly, as expectations, how others are morally bound to act in regard to him" (1967:49).

As much as understanding the tenets of respect it is as important to understand how respect is earned or acquired on the streets. As opposed to simply asserting the importance of respect, it has been my goal to not only acquire a definition of its antithesis but to dissect the process by which it becomes communicable capital. While I've previously stated that street respect has marked indicators, possession of such material goods does not command respect. The most common quality that one must possess for the acquisition of respect is the ability to fight, not simply a willingness to do so, but the skill of inflicting serious bodily harm to an opponent (McCall 1995; Anderson 1994; Oliver 2001). Majors and Billson (1992), resound "there is a need to prove oneself, to

demonstrate the ability to dish it out and to take it-even in the face of overwhelming odds....A great pride is taken in being tough. The more potential danger inherent in the situation, the greater the proving ground for one's bad-assed ability" (1992:34). Violence is requisite to survival and self-efficacy in a culture where interpersonal conflict cannot be mediated through communication, for fear of appearing weak or frightened.

Status within the community in which one lives is measured by the perception of his masculinity by others, therefore the methods for its continual defense must be calculated and devoid of emotion, as a modality for deterrence. As the propensity towards violence, particularly life-threatening violence increases, the tribulation of the individual decreases, for this dictates that he is not to be "messed with" (Anderson 1999:73). This status is what McCall refers to as being deemed "a crazy nigga." A "crazy nigga" he explained, "was someone who had an explosive temper and someone who took flak from no one---man, woman or child. He would stab, shoot, bite, or do whatever he could to hurt somebody that disrespected him. We regarded craziness as an esteemed quality, something to be admired like white people admire courage. In fact, in our way of thinking, craziness and courage were one in the same" (1995:55-6). This process of masking or frontin' through violence insures that the need to defend respect and status will be seldom.

An additional term that may assist in understanding respect is offered by Duneier in his urban epic "*Slim's Table*." He defines a standard of respectability as "a mode of life conforming to and embodying notions of moral worth" (1992:65). Possession of the capacity to be respected merely underscores the former precept of the deservingness approach. He extends, respectability has to do with definitive ideologies regarding self-governance, moral worth and the minimum expectation of behavior exerted towards an individual. Such concrete theses regarding interpersonal behavior restrict the repertoire of available responses, thereby decreeing that the social actor will draw from a predestined allocation of actions, or quite simply react based upon prejudice. Hence, respect becomes vital in that cultural mandates become strong indicators for violent confrontation once violated. Within the world of black men the commodities of pride, dignity and respect are so intensely valuable that they are worth bartering one's life for

(Majors and Billson 1992). The void that is in need of articulation is the fact that respect is one thing for which black men feel they have to live.

It must be added that respect is very closely related to the ideal of identity in the sense that black men are adjudicated on the streets by their street credibility, their “rep” and their “word.” Challenges to one’s reputation or perceived slights are construed as diminishing manhood, and such acts are intolerable particularly since whites do it all of the time, systematically and/or overtly. “Most blacks understood that the repercussions were severer for retaliating against whites than for doing each other in” (McCall 1995:55). The adornment of the black body with material indications of success, seeming apathy in the face of fatality and the willingness to defend inanimate objects and abstract principles are the cumulative of social posturing and jockeying for a semblance of self-worth.

In closing, there is another component to respect that is rarely if ever addressed when discussing the topic, which is *apologizing*. Respect or deference may be shown an individual by simply apologizing or articulating that no harm was intended by the action in question, and subsequently diminishes the level of anger or rage, making a violent confrontation less probable (Beis 1987; Beis et al. 1988; Greenburg 1990; Johnson and Rule 1986). When the apology is superceded by an explanation, this further depreciates feelings of anger, because it acknowledges malfeasance, demonstrates contrition and thereby reaffirms the status of the victim (Heider 1958; Bobocel and Farrell 1996). Penance of this nature dissipates punishment because the expectation of subsequent violations is decreased (Erikson 1966; Sykes and Matza 1957; Vidmar 2000).

Antipodal to this, the insincerity of an apology or the perception that there exists no altruism in repentance intensifies the indignation or injurious behavior (Baron 1988; Cohen 1986; Goffman 1952). Further, an individual that commits a disrespectful act and fails to show remorse over the insult invites more severe punishment than reasonably expected (Schwartz et al. 1978). Heider (1958) and Toch (1969) seemingly concur that more severe punishment is exacted when it seems apparent or likely that such a violation will occur again. Hence, much violence occurs as a deterrent to future abuses, status defense or being considered a “mark” or target for future violations (Lind 2000). In fact,

when retaliation in response to a slight is an expectation by others and does not occur, the individual and his status are diminished (Felson 1982; Pitt-Rivers 1965). Finally, opposition through anger to disrespect establishes the personhood of an individual and presents them as strong and indomitable; demanding of respect and unwilling to accept unfair treatment at the hands of others (Averill 1983; Novaco 1976; Tedeschi and Nesler 1993). As well, it resounds that the perpetrator of the act is contemptible, not the respondent (Novaco 1976).

2.8 A Matter of “Diss” Respect

For as much as respect is social and/or cultural capital on the streets, perhaps even more conspicuous is the ever evolving doctrine of disrespect or “dissin’.” Respect is reverence and the concession of certain arguable and inalienable rights, whereas dissin’ seems to be a battery of fluid transgressions aimed at defamation of an individual’s character, esteem or standing in the community. I would surely err, were I to refer to the subculture of violence theory as antiquated, for it appears in hindsight that Wolfgang and Ferracuti had grazed the cornerstone of intra-racial violence causation among black men. It is in the passionate search for respect that disrespect is given agency utilizing the vehicle of violence to transfer social capital from one agent to another. The metaphoric analysis of “crabs in a bucket” comes to mind when discussing this overzealous pursuit of status and respect. “The extent to which one person can raise himself up depends on his ability to put another person down” (Anderson 1999:75). It is adverse meritocracy and impure competition at its apex.

How is someone “dissed” or disrespected? The list is exhaustive and dictated by the current “code of the streets.” The most prevalent manner in which someone may be dissed is by merely having something derogatory said about them. This verbal degradation is commonly given such monikers as “playing the dozens”, “scoldin’”, “talkin’ trash” and “talkin’ slick.” These verbal gymnastics usually preface violent confrontations between black males on the streets. “Many murders and assaults occur after the offender has been insulted by the victim” (Berkowitz 1978; Felson and Steadman 1983; Toch 1969/1993). According to Cintron, when individuals feel enraged

and vengeful regarding negative verbalizations, “we acknowledge the power of language to create a sense of what is real” (2000:42). Words hit as hard as fists, and when the target is an individual that has historically and personally been embattled with issues of invisibility and low self-esteem, rest assured that such an articulation is as staunch a reality as being physically attacked.

Any action that attempts to subvert this entitlement, diminish or impugn the character of the individual or place in limbo the “face” of the social actor, is deemed disrespectful. There is a powerful “ought” factor or psychological contract at work in black interpersonal interactions. In other words there are specific and inherent actions, words and gestures, tied very closely to traditional male roles and exaggerated masculinity, that are understood to be acceptable and likewise a knowledge of what is not tolerable (Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau 1994; Cropanzo and Byne 2000; Rousseau 1995; Parsons 1947; Katz 1988; Ptacek 1988; Frieze and Browne 1989). There is an expectation of respect, and when it is not granted, it must be earned or taken, but never given freely (Greenberg 1994; Anderson 1999; Oliver 2001).

In conjunction, as Cintron continues to develop the idea of vengeance, he adds that “violence and vengeance are ways to establish order over escalating disorder” (2000:42). How difficult is it for us to fathom the sheer lunacy and chaos that is inbred in an environment languishing in a potpourri of social ills? Hence, the black male sees violence as an opportunity to seize control of his surroundings and have a voice within his life chapters. (Thibaut and Walker 1975; Folger 1977) “During this campaign for respect,...the connections of actually being respected and the need for being in physical control of at least a portion of one’s environment become internalized” (Anderson 1999:68).

In a study conducted by William Oliver (2001), black men cited that their rationales for getting involved in violent confrontations with other black men were: drugs, women and romantic competition; unemployment and economic jealousy; disrespect; and alcohol intoxication. In Nathan McCall’s text, he reiterates disrespect as a causal factor, but adds that a great majority of black male violence was precipitated over territory or defending turf. “When guys from other parts of the city came to Waters

to hawk ball, it was almost assured that there would be a good scrap before the day's end" (1995:57). This is not to be confused with the defense of turf prevalent within gang literature. This territorial defense is referred to as "standing up for your hood." It is the science of repelling attacks or infiltration from "outsiders." Black men usually grow up fighting older peers within the same neighborhood in preparation for these defenses. I deduce that due to this decreased social distance and physical proximity, respect is more valuable when it is conceded by intimate others with which contact is persistent.

**"Meanwhile, somethin' I gotta show you, and I hope you can take it,
Gonna leave you in the desert, and I hope that you make it;
Gotta put you on your ass to see what it does to you,
When you stand up and see that I'm just showin' love to you
Other niggas would put a slug through you."**

– DMX, lyrics from "I Can Feel It" © 1998

It is here that I think it most relevant to introduce the argument of violence as the result of *social contagion*. This is the process through which "old heads" or "O.G.'s" teach younger black males the "code of the streets" and the instrumentation of violence. An old head could hit you in the mouth, but you still wanted deep down to be like him, to have someone else at your mercy and feel the powerlessness that you'd just experienced. Social contagion is a concept derived from medical terminology and applied to social behavior (Bailey 1967). Contagious epidemics involve the transmission of an agent or disease via a host through susceptible organisms whose resilience is weakened by other conditions or factors. For younger black males within violent subcultures, the factor that inhibits resistance is age, while the disease is the physical stalking that is a rite of passage. You dared not undergo the tribulation as it would cost you dearly and daily.

Within neighborhood contexts, social networks work to formulate a cultural software that finds expression through language, behavior, and normative beliefs, thereby creating a set of behavioral scripts (Abelson 1976, 1982; Balkin 1998; Cavalli-Sfroz and Feldman 1981; Fagan and Wilkinson 1998). Burt (1987) adduces that the adoption of behaviors or scripts has more to do with the structural equivalence-the social homogeneity-of the network, than with the cohesion of people within social structures, or

networks. This being said, “transmission is more likely to occur between similarly situated persons-siblings, fellow graduate students, or street corner boys” (Fagan and Davies 2004:133). Serin and Kuriychuk (1994) add that scripts also dictate the repertoire of responses available to the actor in his response to perceived aggression and/or hostility. When individuals perceive that they are being treated in a hostile manner, they draw from the scripts and schemas of aggression that have been created and solidified by previous aggressive interactions (Seager 2005).

Another manner in which black men feel dissed is when insults or behavior that is unwanted or underserved is directed at a party for which the social actor holds in high regard, such as a girlfriend or a family member, i.e., child or mother. This is a common ethnographic finding first offered by Wolfgang in 1958. Polk, (1994) confirms that insults directed at traditional objects of male protection will most likely trigger violence more expeditiously, than barbs aimed towards the actual person. Micro-interactions in the gender order operate with an impenetrable, preoccupying intensity in the worst material circumstances, where honor is constantly offended and humiliation is a structural condition of existence, which tends to restrict the practicing or even imagining of alternatives (Hall 2002; Gilmore 1990; Horne and Hall 1995).

Being dissed has a great deal to do with the audience present for the slight. “Physical violence is more likely to occur in front of a male audience” (Hall 2002:46). Such displays occur out of desire to garner a reputation as well as the admiration of peers, for the former are staked solely on the ability to perform in such situations, thereby ascribing to the normative behavior of the sub-culture (Gilmore 1990; Polk 1994; Winlow 2001). Oliver offers that the posturing that black men do is for the effect on third parties. These third parties he adds effect the way in which the actor defines the situation, their decisions regarding how the situation will be addressed and as active participants, in the roles of “mediators, instigators or as an instigating audience” (2001:116). Primarily, disrespectful actions are illuminated in the presence of third parties, while reporting is another function. It’s synonymous with the adage about a tree falling in the forest and no one hearing it. Respect cannot be earned if there are no credible accounts from disinterested third parties.

Dale Miller argues that the two most powerful goals that inform the individual's retorts to disrespect are "restoration of self-esteem" and "education of the offender." (2001:537-8). The act of retaliating when it is expected by witnesses is referred to as "*saving face*." Disrespect that is committed in public or with an audience present compounds the insult as there is the concern over the opinion of others, and how standing will be effected (Kim, Smith and Brigham 1998; Pitt-Rivers 1965). In contrast, when there exists a common for a third party and/or that party does not have an expectation of, or condone violence, the perpetrator of the disrespectful incident may be given a "pass" (Borden 1975). At this juncture, I wish to make distinction at this point between a disrespectful act towards a third party and the commission of a disrespectful act with the third party as a witness.

In summation, I believe that a combination of the arguments and theories all illuminate the issue of black interpersonal violence. With regards to macro-level theories, historical arguments, strain theories, criminal theories and theories of delinquency, the focus seems to be inappropriately placed on contextual probabilities and the personalities of social actors, as opposed to the precipitating events leading up to, and the physical act of violence. Moreover, many of the subcultural theories that have gleaned an intimate understanding of street life, have alternatively become preoccupied with the manner in which the dispersion and dissemination of subcultural norms occur, as opposed to decoding the actual behavior that is statistically imminent. Therefore, it is my opinion that they are unintentionally bear the same literary fruit of social learning theories. The next chapter contains the methodology utilized in this study. Subsequently, the voices of the men who were gracious enough to share their responses will be introduced.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative inquiry into the concept of disrespect situated within the context of intra-racial violence among African American males. Qualitative research is defined as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem” (Creswell 1998:15). Qualitative research is designed to reveal the participants’ behaviors, experiences and the meanings they attach to them. Moreover, according to Lewis (2000) qualitative research is the focus on the words and observations of participants, articulating their numerous realities and attempting to describe them in their natural contexts. The focus of qualitative research can be on a single case, small groups of individuals, or entire cultures. The results of qualitative research are thick descriptions and detailed accounts of the lived experiences of those involved in the research.

I chose qualitative methods because of my desire to uncover the hidden meanings of a subcultural context that seemingly views violence as mediation within the interpersonal interactions among black men as appropriate. In order to gain invaluable insight into the phenomenon of black-on-black violence, it is deafly important to acquire the individual perspective of persons that have actually participated in the violent confrontations. Within this study, I will attempt to glean their definitions of several colloquialisms. This is important because it is the mainstream perception that violence is both criminal and socially unacceptable as a method of conflict resolution. Hence, by dissecting the language inherent in the subculture, perhaps the reasons for the differentiations in lingual interpretations will become evident, thereby providing the reader a greater understanding of what is normative within the subculture.

This study is concerned with discovering whether a relationship can be deduced between the concept of intra-racial violence among African American males and disrespect. Likewise the study has a genuine interest in affording the participants to “name” the precipitants of violent confrontations in which they were previously involved; how they define respect/disrespect; and what constitutes a “diss” or disrespect. Further, I attempt to ascertain how one knows that he has been disrespected; whether it is

absolutely necessary to avenge an act of disrespect through violence; and finally, if there exist any marked discrepancies between the code of streets and the individual perceptions of what actions are identified as disrespectful.

The particular strategy of inquiry within qualitative research that I have chosen to employ is that of phenomenology. Phenomenology is defined as being a study that “describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (Creswell 1998: 51). Phenomenologists hold that this is the most effective method to gain insight into a specific phenomenon because it places under analysis, the personal accounts of social actors. Moreover, the scientist examines the motives, thoughts, perceptions, and feelings that underlie the actions of the participants within the confines of the phenomenon (Oliver 2001). It is this perspective that affords the scientist the most comprehensive and definitive introspection into the concept, quite simply because the focus is placed simultaneously on what happened and why it happened. The phenomenological research strategy has been utilized in a wide range of disciplines, particularly in criminology and criminal justice for such purposes as recounting the experiences of prisoners incarcerated for a myriad of crimes and attitudes of participants in street crimes.

This study utilized a phenomenological approach to delve into the social meanings of the concept “disrespect” by members of a subculture that would otherwise be ignored or have their views concealed by coded language such as slang and cultural communication barriers. Further, the exploration of potential links between disrespect and violence might have utility for theories of crime. Phenomenological research is well-suited for the constant morphing of the rationales offered for intra-racial violence by the participants, by deciphering the very essence of the concept of disrespect and by engaging in in-depth discussions of their views on the reasons for violence.

The method of data collection that I utilized was semi-structured, in-depth interviews. According to Patton (1989) getting answers to questions, testing hypotheses, and evaluation, as the term is normally used are not the purposes of an in-depth interview. Instead, the interview is to be utilized in the effort to gain an understanding of other peoples’ experiences, and how they attribute them meaning.

Heron (1981) states that understanding human behavior means comprehending how language is used. In this particular case, there was a need on my part to exceed my understanding of what I believed the word disrespect meant, and what the meaning was understood to be within the context of a subculture. I'd anticipated that there would be a variety of differing perspectives from the mainstream use of the word within its vernacular, simply because the word had been transposed into a slang terminology.

During the study, I interviewed twelve African American males regarding their definitions of respect/disrespect, their understanding of the "code of the streets", and their understanding of street credibility. They were also asked to chronicle a single incident in which they were involved in a violent confrontation. Seidman refers to this type of open-ended questioning as the "mini-tour", because 'the topic is restricted to a certain time period or particular incident' (1998:70).

The interviews ranged in time from approximately 45 minutes to one hour. I believed that due to the nature of the interview schedule, this was ample time for the respondents to fully elaborate on the questions asked them. The interviews were all tape-recorded. Tape-recording provides accountability, the ability to clarify, and is an accurate representation of the thoughts and consciousness of the respondent, not a misrepresentation or summary of what I believed the respondent meant (Seidman 1998).

The interviews were conducted over the time span of three weeks. This was due in part to respondents' private schedules. The great majority of the men had scheduled the interviews for days that they were either off from work, or times that they had anticipated would be less hectic. Nine of the interviews were held at my personal residence, while three were conducted at the residences of the respondents. It became necessary to terminate one of the interviews due to the disclosure of material that could have potentially been detrimental to an impending case. The tape for that interview was immediately destroyed. Subsequent to the completion of all interviews, I acquired a transcription machine and transcribed all eleven interviews, primarily so as not to entrust a third party with the confidentiality promised the participants in the study. All tapes are stored at my personal residence in a small safe that I purchased. Informed consent forms

are being stored separately in a small locked file cabinet also located at my personal residence.

3.0 Interview Procedures

The interview schedule that I proposed was designed with the primary objective of encouraging a sample of black men to reconstruct violent confrontations that they had participated in for the purposes of identifying precipitating factors, how disrespect was defined and identified, and discerning whether or not that disrespect was an integral catalyst for violence. Essentially, I sought to gain a greater understanding of the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the intra- and interpersonal dynamic of disrespect within the context of a violent criminal confrontation as told to me by the respondents. I wanted the men to allow me to step into their shoes by having them reconstruct their violent acts and express their views. Although I started this research with some familiarity with the subculture within which the men reside, I had no doubt that their willingness to tell me their stories would open up a world that was still foreign to me (Toch 1969).

Prior to the commencement of each interview, I disseminated, read and explained the informed consent form and subsequently fielded any questions that the respondents may have had regarding the form, time requirement and authorized content. The informed consent can be found in the appendix of this study.

I afforded each participant the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym. Part of the reason that I opted to do this was to see if there was any relation between the pseudonym and self-perception on the part of the respondents. The great majority were chosen based on entertainment value or as “ice breakers.” The subjects were encouraged to speak freely and at length, with the option of reverting back to earlier portions of a particular question for the purposes of clarification. I asked each gentleman to share his ideas and perceptions about respect/disrespect and his interpretation of the code of the streets. I understood my role to be unobtrusive and that of a facilitator, encouraging of comments both positive and negative, making sure not to make judgmental comments.

3.1 Participant Selection

I recruited subjects for the study from a local basketball court that I have frequented over the last eleven years and from a barbershop on the south side of a metropolitan city in North Carolina, where I receive grooming. Due to my physical stature, level of respect and street credibility at the basketball court as well as my relationship with the barbers at the “shop”, I decided to draw a purposeful sample from these two sources in order to maximize the probability of experienced respondents and of enhancing rapport with them. My goal was to obtain an information rich sample. The populations were previously known to me, with the exception of four respondents that were referred to me by other participants in the study, which provided me with a partial “snowball sample” (Bertaux 1981). The reputations of the men in the study preceded them; therefore, their involvement in violent confrontations with other black males was a foregone conclusion, with regards to their appropriateness for this study. Knowledge of their involvement in violent confrontations was either widely reported or known to me based on first hand knowledge.

It is commonly regarded that barbershops and basketball courts are the “black man’s country clubs”, meaning that much of the social commentary on black male life is facilitated here with a great degree of candor, and with the expectation of privacy and learning. Here, ideas of the “code of the streets” are bartered and exchanged, “old heads”, and “O.G.”s convey information to impressionable young boys eager to achieve their piece of manhood. Lessons are learned either passively or violently, while physical posturing dictates the interaction. A myriad of topics from politics, war, health, employment, violence and sexual prowess are all discussed intently, seemingly with no assigned order and with no barriers to who might join the conversation.

Unlike the barbershop, meeting at the basketball court is seasonal, due to the court being outdoors. Interestingly enough, guys generally form cliques and remain in touch during the inclement weather months, usually participating in leagues or “moving the game indoors.” This bonding process afforded me continual contact with potential participants as I formulated the study, and acquired University approval.

Alternatively, with regards to the barbershop, the topics change as do the dynamics of the “shop.” Men usually spend no more than an hour in the “shop” and then their place is taken by an influx of new customers. The shop is where one goes to get caught up on the latest local news. I was perceived as an insider with access, so there was no need to involve a third party or gatekeeper and I easily recruited individuals from within that would who responded to inquiries with a great degree of honesty (Richardson, Dohrenwrend & Klein 1965).

3.2 Questions

I asked twenty questions that are contained in the appendix of this study. I purposely divided the interview schedule into two portions, known only to me. The first of which, I asked the respondents about their participation in a violent confrontation, their feelings during and after the incident and what they believed attributed to the facilitation of an actual confrontation. The second portion of the interview was for purposes previously stated; to glean an understanding through the participant’s defining for me several colloquialisms that included and centered on the concept of disrespect. In order for me to gain an even deeper understanding of how disrespect is defined, I thought it necessary to have the respondents define respect as well.

It was my intent to construct questions in a way that would result in insuring the maximum participation and thus inciting the most dialogue. I was concerned with the phrasing, and for that reason I asked exploring questions, not probing questions and made inquiries that required a certain level of sophistication in response. Seidman (1998) offers that the use of the term “probing” infers that the interviewer has an expressed power, and that the respondent is seen as an object, and thereby made defensive. Both Krueger (1988) and Creswell (2003) suggest avoiding questions that ask “why” because they infer cause and effect and the researcher may find that subjects will provide quick or short answers that seem “rational or appropriate to the situation. I reserved one final question that I began to adjust throughout the interviews. I wanted to find out whether there was a differences among what the men offered as their rationales for violence, how

they defined disrespect and what the “streets” ascribed to them as the social meanings for certain behaviors.

CHAPTER IV: THE VOICES

The men within the following pages are all black men, ages 20-35 that have lived the lives that many hip-hop artists speak of in their lyrics. Many of them are unemployed, fathers, athletes, ex-hustlers or whatever label that social science would like to attach to them. The contexts that bind us all are the love for the game of basketball and the need to “look good” by keeping our hair groomed found only at the “court” and the “shop” (barbershop). Interestingly enough, the court and the shop are not that far from each other. They are located on the east side of Greensboro in close proximity to some of the roughest neighborhoods in the city, as well as two of the universities contained within the 16 campus UNC system.

On a summer day when the temperature peaks in the mid-90’s, it’s hard to go long without seeing a makeshift ice-cream truck traveling the hood’s streets. Little girls and boys alike clamor to its window, having bothered their mothers for some change to get a popsicle. Nobody minds the streets being littered with trash or the abandoned cars that are the attractive nuisance within the theory of “broken windows.” There are crack heads that dart to and fro, many selling something they’ve pilfered to subsidize their high for the day. Luxury cars with chrome rims dazzle the unsupervised youngsters as they pass by with thunder spilling from the windows. Girls with short skirts on and guys wearing “wife beaters” (tank-top t-shirts) are the norm. The conversations in passing all surround the obvious. “Man it’s a hot one today”, or “hot enough for ya” someone will ask. Life seems slow and lethargic because of the heat. As one steps from the street into the shop, one of the barbers might comment, “gettin’ hot man, time for niggas to start trippin.” This makes acknowledgment of the fact that fuses are short and tempers are quick the hotter it gets outside. In actuality, it is the fact that interaction is increased during the summer months, because everybody wants to be outside, therefore posturing for respect takes on a more intense and potentially fatal meaning.

Inevitably, a guy comes into the shop for a “cut” and he is reacquainted with another, exchanging “dap” (handshake) and eventually the source of the camaraderie is revealed. “Yo man, you still ballin’?” The respondent then gives a run down on what

days are best to play, what hours, and what the skill level is at the court. He then gives the inquiring party the scoop on who usually plays at the court, just in case the guy has an old beef that he's been avoiding. If not, he comments, "I'll be out there." In about 2000, the city of Greensboro began tearing down all of the full court basketball goals. It is common place now to ride by and only see one basketball goal erected, or for that manner, none. It was speculated that because of all the shootings at "family parks", the egregious use of profanity, littering and loitering, complaints were lodged by white patrons of the parks. "Hey man, cover up that fucking beer, before them white people call the police and they take down the rims!"

I am often awestruck by the level of testosterone on display at the court during what is supposed to be a friendly game. A hard foul or getting cut out of the air (undercutting someone who is attempting a dunk) is grounds for getting shot. If your respect level is high enough you don't even have to call foul anymore. On the sidelines, guys talk about other guys' games, talk about places to drink, discuss their latest sexual conquests and even make contacts for hustling and legitimate business opportunities. Guys talk shit from the sidelines. "Wait 'til we get back out there motherfucker, I bet we get ya'll asses off the court." A lot of joking spews back and forth between guys that have frequented the court over the years. Never does it occur that a new guy will join in for fear that the crowd may turn on him. This is the intersection of black male life; the last regulation full court remaining outside in Greensboro. The backdrop to the court would signal that it is a family park, but it is anything but. There is a huge church, a walking trail and two noteworthy homes right across from the park, but it doesn't keep guys from cussing, whipping ass, or going to their cars to get their guns if a serious affront occurs. I think this is the reason that there are rarely, if ever, women at this court. It used to be common place for women to accompany their men to the court, but to do so these days would signify an invitation to be disrespected.

From time to time, seemingly right after an altercation or the threat thereof, a police car will cruise by slowly. The officer usually looks toward the court and there will be whispers of, "them white people done called the po-po 'cause y'all out here with that stupid shit" or "man shit, I got a warrant, just chill." A statement such as the latter

constitutes nothing more than posturing, as it says to the other court patrons, “I am still in the game.” No matter whether one is or isn’t involved in illegal activity, “5-0” is never cool. The fact that their presence disrupts the game or causes unrest is further evidence that they are perceived as a threat to this life, as opposed to public safety.

All of the men in this study either play ball actively or frequent the court to “heckle” the would-be ballers. Via these interviews, I have come to know them personally, the underlying validity regarding their reputations for violence and how they view the role of the court in their lives. They were chosen primarily because they were by far the most consistently aggressive and violent men that I had encountered playing basketball since my arrival in the city 11 years ago. Many of them have either been to jail or incarcerated previously for assaults, robbery or involvement in drug distribution. The manner in which information gets disseminated about these men’s criminal histories is partially self-reporting. However, if the information cannot be substantiated then the guy wears the label of being “suspect”, until it can.

At any rate, the men that participated in this study have largely been the perpetrators of violence against others; violence that either I have witnessed at other basketball courts or have heard recounted on various occasions. Most of the men migrated from other courts over the years as they were torn down and from housing projects where there was always a good game. The courts in the “bricks” were where violence has its greatest probability. This is where these guys earned their stripes and my respect. They proved on a daily basis that they were not afraid to travel into unknown territories knowing full well that the order of the day might exceed basketball at any given moment. I actually think that they counted on it.

The fact remains that they are real people and the violent experiences that they have shared for the purposes of this work are not to be taken lightly nor purposed to portray them in a negative light. They are men with difficult circumstances and tough surroundings that need to be heard, so that we as professed intellectuals might be subsequently informed and educated.

4.0 CHIP

I was just returning from Wal-Mart buying supplies for my first interview when I realized that I was a tad bit apprehensive about finally getting started. It was raining on and off, and was considerable dreary outside. My concern with the inclement weather was considerably reduced as I was reminded by the clock that the time was nearing for me to meet with Chip. I had talked to Chip in the wee hours of the night last evening about that day's activities. By the end of our conversation he had affirmed that he would in fact "holla tomorrow about that thang around noon." I was relieved, as I had sensed some pause on his part after I informed him that the interview would be recorded. I recall him laughing nervously and giving me a half head-cocked look when I initially disclosed this to him. He chuckled again, and said "aiight, I gotcha." This meant that I had his word regardless of his misgivings. When guys in the streets give their word, you can rest assured that they will come through, be it a promise to do harm to another person or keeping the most basic of promises. I understood his concerns about the tape recorder. I struggled to find the words to tell guys that I needed to record the interviews because in a sense, it is like "snitching" or "dropping a dime" to speak about their lives on record. This is the primary reason that I believe sociology has failed to paint a picture of black male life in its totality. There are underlying codes, gestures, geographic slang and movements that have shared meaning. If you haven't lived it, then you miss something very valuable that is simply "understood."

I called Chip around 11:30 a.m. and asked him where he would feel most comfortable doing the interview. He alluded to the fact that he would prefer to do it at his home. Chip had just purchased his first house, to which I had been on one previous occasion. I called him from outside out of respect for his home, even though we had arranged the meeting. This is another unspoken rule. You DO NOT just "pop up" at someone's residence without giving them notice. I could tell that Chip appreciated the phone call. He said, "oh, you outside, give me a second." I waited in my jeep until the door opened about three minutes subsequent to the cessation of the phone call. The door was left ajar and as I reached the door, I reached down and unlaced my Air Jordans. I was not about to jeopardize the interview by tracking stains or water onto Chip's new

carpet. I realized that I had taken the right action, due to the fact that he didn't ask me what I was doing at the door for those few seconds. He sat on the couch, remote in hand, watching an episode of Sanford and Son. We both watched for a second and shared a laugh.

He walked to his kitchen and offered me a seat. I removed my jacket and turned off my cell phone as a gesture to show him that he would have my undivided attention. The television was still playing, which disturbed me, but I made no mention of it, until the interview actually began. I asked him if he had an opportunity to look over the informed consent form and in addition if he had any questions. His eyes poured over his copy again, as he nodded several times, simply uttering, "um hum, um hum." I wondered how much of this was posturing to see if I knew what I was doing, and in an instant, he let me off the hook, and said, "Naw, I'm good, ain't got no questions."

He assisted me in opening my newly purchased tape recorder. He then asked me if I would like to test it for volume. I retorted that I would, and I was curious as to whether it would pick up the television playing in the background. He said, "oh, we can cut that off." We conducted a test and we were set to begin. I noticed that he was fairly relaxed as he was wearing a yellow muscle shirt, plaid pajama pants and a pair of sandal like bedroom shoes. He was particularly entertained by the fact that he was allowed to choose his pseudonym.

Chip works as a barber, so his hair was freshly cut, with waves cascading from front to back. He is a portly fellow standing about 5'10 and weighing about 230 or so. He, by his own admission, has large eyes and a round baby face with a serious look. It was difficult for me to believe that he had actually been involved of some of the things I had heard about him. He let's you know right away, that he is a born again Christian and a changed man. I often joke with Chip about the fact that his face is so smooth and that he can't grow facial hair. On the occasions that I go to the barbershop, regardless of who is milling around, Chip eventually enters God into the conversation. He talks candidly about his drug use and the role that alcohol played in his life. Guys in the shop nod their heads in affirmation of the stories he tells sometimes, as if they were there, or they are familiar with a similar incident.

As we moved through his interview, it became clear to me that he was still not a man to be played with, and he still maintained a no-nonsense attitude born of the street life. The comedic value of his interview was invaluable and entertaining to say the least. I could tell that he became more and more relaxed as the interview progressed. His candor and insight was phenomenal, and I could tell that he had given serious thought to his past, and successfully matured to find the words to explain his actions.

I was so pleased when the interview was over that I thanked “Chip” several times, and made haste leaving so as not to monopolize his day. As a barber, Monday is the day that the “shop” is closed for barbers to facilitate their personal affairs. He walked me out and said he would contact another guy that we both knew and tell him “how it was.” I took this to mean that he would tell him that it was okay to participate and put us in touch with each other.

4.1 730

“730” chose his pseudonym largely in part because the moniker refers to the fact that one is mentally unstable. The fact that he, the hood at large and I recognized this fact made it my honor to sit and speak with him in this capacity. His frame was hulking and his presence was even larger. It seemed that once he entered a room, when he stepped onto the court, or even into the barbershop we both were serviced at, everyone would stop what they were doing. This tended to be either out of reverence and/or fear. He captivated the room with peering looks, and then would suddenly release you with an acknowledgement. “What’s going on baby?” If he called you baby, there were no homosexual inferences. This was a term of endearment, short for baby boy, and you were readily accepting of it. This meant you were straight with him, and nobody dared bother you in his presence. He was the embodiment of what it means to have “love” in the streets.

730 stood about 6 foot 3 and weighed in at about 270. He always postured himself in defiance to any perceived threat. He was fearless by all accounts and he was at the same time one of the nicest guys you would want to meet. The birth of his “seeds” had changed his outlook on life according to his account. He realized there was more to

life than fighting, shooting and hustling. He was shockingly intelligent and articulate. He was what I called a “context appropriate” guy. He could turn it on and off. He said he acquired his vast vocabulary from reading dictionaries in prison, and he would drop a new word off in the conversation on the sidelines of a basketball game. He was something the hood hadn’t seen, an intelligent thug.

I had with my own eyes seen 730 beat a guy within an inch of his life over a slight directed towards a close friend of his. It was as though he turned into a ravenous animal. There was no restraining him, as he fended off even those who tried to intervene to stop the fight. What amazed me is that, the guy that he annihilated that day, made no attempts at what we call “get back”, meaning, when it was finally over that day, it was over. 730 did not appear to be concerned about the common practice of a guy getting beat down, and coming back to avenge the loss with a gun. If he did, he didn’t show it. Scenes like this cemented his reputation as what Nathan McCall termed a “crazy nigga” within the urban pages, *Makes Me Wanna Holler*.

730 refers to himself in a philosophical manner. He commented to me that, “people make me man. However you treat me, that’s how I’m gone treat you. You show me love, I will go to the ends of the earth for me, but if you cross me, death could be just around the corner.” I knew he meant this with every fiber of his body. I examined his brow every time that he said something that I was supposed to take and file in my mental rolodex. His thick eyebrows furled and rose when he was serious, and the inflection of his voice seemed to intrude on your space. He had a way to cut right to your heart with some of the things he said. But, if you were cool with him, only you could ruin that, because if nothing else, he was loyal to his friends.

I went to his home for the interview. I was surprised at how compulsively clean it was, but later conversations revealed that it was from a military background. “Yeah, I used to be a devil dog” (U.S. Marine). Everything was in its own place. There were several remote controls that grabbed my attention, because they were symmetrically aligned on the coffee table near where I was told to sit. As if a light went on, 730 asked me how he should talk using language that I had come accustomed to hearing. “Is there a particular way that I should speak once we begin recording?” I replied, “naw, just relax,

and be yourself, these are for my records.” “Cool” he said. I gave him the informed consent form, and he commented that it was “well written.” With no problems, we commenced with the interview. 730 shot me straight concise answers, but they were loaded with revelations. Again, I was just happy that I could get someone of his stature to agree to participate in my study. I knew there was a mutual affection, but I had no idea, accessing his past would prove to be this easy.

As we wrapped up the interview, I packed my things, and tried to make haste in leaving. “What you about to get into”, he asked. “Uh, probably try to get another one of these knocked out today”, I said. “No doubt, holla at me when you get some time”, he rebounded. We exchanged dap (handshake & partial hug), and I left feeling again like I was cheating in a poker game. I kept getting all of the high cards, by not turning them in from the last hand. I had access to a truth that was so profound, that I was simply tickled.

4.2 EM

“Em” could mistakenly be identified as being of Puerto Rican decent because of his appearance and accent, but he’s not. Em has a sand complexion with thick curly hair cut short. He is built with a thin frame, but has broad shoulders and walks half rotating them, making it appear that he has purpose in his stride. He seems to always be going somewhere. Em is a man of few words, which is why I was hesitant to ask for his participation. I was not sure how much he would divulge to me, and I did not want the task of pulling teeth. Em is perhaps one of the most “fly” dressed guys you might encounter in the hood. He goes above and beyond to coordinate every outfit with every pair of shoes, and I have personally never witnessed a misstep. Em’s head is elongated and his eyebrows are extremely burly but kempt. His mustache and goatee are very light with dark black hair, not needing proliferation. His ears are pointed and his nose has a small scar on it that blends in quite well and is not visible until one examines his countenance.

Em is what guys call, “about his business.” He might laugh a little, but never gut wrenching, simply a chuckle to second that something said was indeed funny. Em has begun to talk to me a little more, and though we have each other’s phone numbers, it is

rare for either to call. He is very short on the phone, and seems uneasy at times. He behaves as though he is uncertain of how you perceive him, so he tends to study your face a bit as well. When I asked him to participate in my interview, he answered without hesitation and scheduled as soon as possible. As he read over the informed consent I couldn't help but realize why Em and I were cool and never had to say much. We were from the same hometown and I guess we just got each other. We were never at odds and always saw things the same way.

One might venture to ask, what is it that Em will add to the study that I hadn't yet considered? The answer is quite simple. We were from different hoods and different eras. Em had just come in off of the streets and decided that school was going to be his new hustle. While we had a lot in common, the interview revealed how the same streets can affect two lives in a completely different manner. We were not the mirror image of each other as one might think, just citizens of the same subculture, governed by the same codes. Em had reached a level of hustling that I never had. His network was a lot larger than mine, and he was a little more professional than I during my time on the streets. Em talked about hustling as though it was a Fortune 500 company or a government regulated agency, whereas, I viewed it as a technique essential for my survival.

His poise and coolness demonstrated to me why he had been so successful in the hustle without encountering legal problems. He would later confirm what I sensed was on the horizon of his stories. Anything that seems too good to be true usually is. Em talked of murdered friends and family members in the trade, and even arrived at the point of tears during the interview. I didn't know what to tell this young man, my junior, except to keep pressing in the direction of life's higher calling. The best recipe for success, I admonished him, was marked distance from the streets we grew up on; geographically and psychologically.

Em told me that "our streets" had evolved to a point of savagery, that one could not even ride through the hood with the windows rolled up regardless of the weather, or the vehicle would instantaneously be fired upon. The housing projects had not changed in that, were you not escorted in, or did not know someone of stature that resided there,

you would not afforded safe passage. Em also addressed the issue of trust and violence when I asked him about the code of the streets in saying:

[The code of the streets where I'm from is you live by the gun, you die by the gun, it's just basically like everybody I know, when you go back to the hood you gotta stay strapped, it's no walking around without a gun, so anybody bound to walk up on you, your best friend will turn on you.]

As the interview came to an end, Em and I sat and reminisced about some of the common hang outs and what else had changed on the streets. I felt some culpability for participating in adding to the negative notoriety given our town, but I also pointed out to Em that if he were going to extract anything from what he knew of my life, it should be the point where I turned it around and escaped "our streets."

4.3 MATHIS

"Mathis" is a very dark skinned man, with a very bright smile, and teeth close to perfection. He flashes it at your request and seems in good spirits almost all of the time. He is very private, and stays to himself, wishing to keep his circle small. Despite all of the unfortunate "black jokes" that he has had to endure throughout his life, he takes them all in stride, and is seldom if ever out of control. He has a very astute demeanor, and has recently reinvented himself with the donning of professional attire at all times. He has a very positive self-image in spite of the aforementioned efforts to diminish it. He is affectionately called, "Dr. Phil" by those close to him because he offers such sound and almost textbook advice on very important matters when asked.

Mathis is a single father of two, and is often agitated in his role as a non-custodial parent. Efforts to see his children are often met with absence for pre-scheduled meetings, and purposeful neglect to keep him informed of activities and kid's parties. To this he stays the course of trying to be involved. He works in a supervisory capacity, for what seems to be naught, as he suffers constant garnishment of his wages for coming to the

acknowledgement of one child years into its development. Coupled with regular child support from the state on the matter of the child, Mathis lives very modestly.

For as long as I can remember Mathis has had a preoccupation with guns. He had also garnered a reputation as someone who “will shoot you quick.” This is due in part to the former statement in conjunction with the fact that his physical specifications are not that daunting in comparison to a lot of the characters that dominate street life. Mathis is probably close to 5’8 *take or take* an inch and though his frame is muscular, his presence is simply not that imposing. He comes off as a straight-laced guy, apparently knowledgeable of how to handle himself, and that will quite simply defend his person and his family without hesitation. This philosophy emerges when asked about the conditions under which he was most likely to become violent.

Mathis is not an outwardly emotional person. He is best likened to a rattlesnake because the warnings are there, not to impede on his space. He makes this clear in his marked candor. Therefore, once his boundaries are crossed, and the provocation is perpetual, there is no turning back. It has always been said growing up in the hood that “the quiet ones will hurt you.” Mathis is a quiet one. He was punctual for his interview, which took place at my house, and was jovial as usual. He read the informed consent form, and asked what he should sign, as there appeared to be some confusion as to whether he should sign his given name or his pseudonym. As the interview got underway, Mathis answered quickly, only to recant and reformulate his responses as we would prepare to move on to subsequent questions. I was lightly amused, and could as well appreciate his desire to “get it right.”

The interview was not actually prolonged by this slight indecision, but in fact, I was more informed of Mathis’ train of thought. I could literally see him processing the questions, and shifting ever so slightly on the couch as he thought long and hard about what would be his legacy within this work. Tape recorders tend to do that to people. At any rate, Mathis seemed all too pleased with himself by the cessation of the interview, and remarked how proud he was of me, and that this should be a book, which of course he would require royalties from. We laughed and parted with pleasantries. He reminded me that if I needed him again, to just call.

4.4 SMILEY

At first glance, “Smiley” is a very imposing figure, standing approximately 6 foot 2,390 pounds. He is dark-skinned and well-dressed. Today he is donning a black Kangol style hat with a red short-sleeved G-Unit tee, baggy denim blue jeans and the always stylish butter colored suede Timberland boots. He has a bop in his walk that draws attention to his “swagger.” It is a swagger of confidence and one of being a polished “veteran” of the streets. Smiley rarely lets you in to his inner circle of conversation, but when he does, it is with a pointed look and a smile, that almost says, “okay now you can talk.”

Smiley met me at the barbershop and agreed to follow me to my house and allow me to conduct the interview. He is extremely jovial today, as he has just purchased a new truck. Smiley sits with me for a while and engulfs a meal that he purchased on the way to my house, citing, “you can get the truth out of a man, when his stomach is full!” We both laugh, and begin the interview. Smiley reads over the informed consent form, and harkens back to what would have happened had he pursued his degree in Social Work before signing. He works extensive hours in a residential treatment facility for adolescent boys suffering from mental illness, more commonly referred to as a group home.

I ask Smiley if he had any questions regarding what is scheduled to take place. He retorts in his gruff and raspy baritone, “I’m ready when you are.” His candor is delightful and he delves in and out of stories that are simply captivating. He makes several impact statements that leave me breathless and hanging on for further clarification. He is very philosophical in his understanding of street life. He narrates as though he is writing a book, his eyes aglow and shifting on the couch as though he were alive in that moment:

[If you didn’t grow up fighting then you don’t understand a fight bottom line. That’s like me watching somebody steal out the grocery store, I understand why he stole, somebody must be hungry, you understand what I’m saying, cause I too have stolen, didn’t have no money, family got to eat, you ain’t got no money, you can’t go in there and ask for the groceries, they not gone give it to you, so he steal

it you know what I mean. If you haven't walked in, you haven't had to come down that path, you can't understand nothing. I can't understand why people bungee jump, I think that's the stupidest thing in the world, you gone tease death, that's crazy, but if somebody grew up bungee jumping when you get older you want to do it again, you want to do it even more, you know what I'm saying, just plain and simple. If you haven't done it, or been a part of it, you won't understand, they look at you as, especially, somebody not from a violent background, or not even been a part of witnessing fights and all that, first of all, if you ain't been in a fight before, you can't understand why somebody fighting, you know what I'm saying. Just like, you know, I don't even, I could really care less what they think about me, actually, you know til you walk down, you ain't got to walk in my shoes, but at least walk down the road I been down you know what I mean. Just like the United States right now, they say uh, why would you ask a Harvard or Harvard or wherever they come from, or Columbia professor or something right? Why would you call him a terrorist expert? If you want to know what a terrorist expert is thinking, ask a terrorist you know what I'm saying, how can he be an expert if you ain't never blew up nothing? He ain't never killed nobody, but you got people up there with suits on, you know trying to explain why somebody did such and such, you ask the person who do stuff like that, you got a couple of 'em in the jails, ask 'em. You talk to him and get him to talking to you, and he'll tell you, you know what I mean. So you can't sit here and judge something, and and and, you can, but its not accurate, its not a accurate information, you know what I'm saying, you can always get some statements out of anywhere and say okay this is why this and this is why that, but if you ain't never, if you want to know why we fighting, then ask us why we fighting, don't sit up and say well he did this because of that, and he did this because of that, naw naw naw, you come over here and ask us, you know what I mean.]

Throughout the study Smiley would inform me on several fronts, where I had mistakenly presumed knowledge. Smiley was by far the most intriguing of all the

interviews, and it was painfully obvious that due diligence has not been done in giving voice to these men. Subsequent to our interview Smiley began to talk off record about being shot and how his life had been altered by the occasion. He was very complimentary of what I was trying to achieve, and I could see behind his eyes the desire to go back and alter his path, if nothing else, to pursue his education, and help me right what to him was a stinging wrong. “They don’t know nothing ‘bout us man!” he shouts, seemingly causing the modest walls in my house to shake. Again, he travels the mental highway of his mind until he comes to the proverbial fork, and says that one day he will pursue the B.S. in Social Work. I wish him well.

4.5 B-SMOOVE

B-Smoove what was the hood called a “pretty boy.” He was very fair-skinned with a good texture to his hair, his clothes always matched and his shoes were always clean. You could usually smell a touch of cologne on him as well. He cared a lot about his appearance, and the affections of women were his motivations. B-Smoove had gone through life pretty much unscathed, sheltered from much of the streets venom as possible by his two older brothers. As he found though, making your way in the streets eventually becomes an endeavor of individualism, especially when you drift into other hoods. B-Smoove had been thought to be clean cut, but many of the streets vices had found fondness in his hands. He was not a gun carrier, but he loved to smoke weed, and if you smoke weed, you might as well sell it, he thought. He quickly earned a reputation as a low-level hustler, but the craft is something that has to be in your blood, and your product has to be protected by the threat of violence.

B-Smoove speaks in a monotone voice that has a nasal restriction on certain consonants. He is often teased about it. He is known to be extremely temperamental, but seldom to the point of violence. The hood he is from had a reputation that insured his safety for a time; hence it was rarely necessary for him to settle his own personal matters with violence. He is known to stay centered among his crew, so you recognize that if you fight one, you fight all. B has a charisma about him self that makes you fond of him, and to his detractors perhaps even envious. He has large white teeth and a 6 foot 5 frame that

is soft. He doesn't strike you as the threatening type. He attends church regularly and is a reputed "mama's boy."

B is one of the guys that keep his dirt hidden. You never hear of him starting an altercation, or being caught up in illegal activities because his crew acts as a buffer to the world. When B loses his cool, he is difficult to talk to. His youthful face begins to dance with nothingness and blank stares of disdain. He lets you know right off that putting your hands on him is not an option. He allows guys to "talk junk" as long as it is from a distance. B is a rare breed in that he is self-sufficient in the streets. He seems to always have his own, which is important. It is leadership qualification in the streets because everybody is trying to get their own.

I told B about my dissertation, and told him that I would like to interview him. He was not at all nervous. In fact, he asked me if I wanted to interview his whole crew. Since he was the leader, I declined, believing that I would simply receive duplicate perspectives that would resound his own. He was tickled that I had chosen him. In fact, one might say he was giddy. When he arrived for the interview I asked him if he would like some juice or water while he read over his informed consent form to which he replied, "yeah, juice is straight." We began the interview and I was reminded again of how snapshots of people are seldom who they are, as B began to talk about several recent altercations that were of a violent connotation. B and his crew were being tested because one of them had backed down in the absence of the others. Now, other crews were trying to build a reputation at their expense.

I could see the regret in B's face as he continually shook his head, even commenting from time to time that the altercations were just plain "stupid." When talking to B, I sensed that could he escape his status as the leader he would, but he was trapped. Too many people were looking at him to determine what their next move would be and it was obviously weighing on him. He wanted out; he wanted to finish school because he had a talent for art, but what would the rest of the crew think? Could they respect his decision to choose another route for his own life? B departed the interview laughing as I made a few jokes and did a few imitations that made him laugh. I wanted to

lighten the mood, because I knew when he stepped out of the door, he had to put on a lead hat.

4.6 JAY

Jay was what the streets called a “youngin” or a “lil nigga.” He wouldn’t tell me how old he actually was, but I could do the mathematics by looking at his face. There was no facial hair and his skin was a deep brown and very smooth. He had little bags under his eyes, which indicated to me that he was either up late “getting money”, playing Playstation 2 or both. He was not what the streets called flashy, because his gear was modest and he didn’t don any large jewelry. This was odd for a young kid known to hustle. From this I gathered that an “old head” had probably told him to tone it down so as not to attract attention to him self. He was very thin, standing probably six feet even, and wore baggy clothing most of the time. Tonight when we met at my house, he was draped in a large hooded sweatshirt, with his pants sagging off of his backside.

A little disconcerting for me was the fact that Jay didn’t give serious “dap.” It was very loose and he barely tapped you with his shoulder when you pull each other close. Most guys bump shoulders and wrap the non-engaged hand around the other shoulder. Jay kept his hand at his side. I tried to gauge what level of apathy if any I would be dealing with during the interview. I knew very little about Jay, and found later that my assessment of his mood was far off kilter, as he was serious and attentive throughout the interview. Jay had an oblong face and small eyes that made it appear as if he squinting. He wore a very close haircut, and his nails seemed uncharacteristically clean as he handed me the pen after signing his informed consent form.

Jay had been referred by a friend of mine that convinced him to help me with my project. I had known him as a small child, and though his face was very familiar, I could not have projected that he would be sitting with me discussing this manner of things. I was saddened looking at Jay, thinking to myself that the hood has a way of growing kids up and stealing their innocence. I had watched this kid play at one point, and now here he was sitting before me talking about violent incidents he had been involved in. He talked prolifically about hustling and the code of the streets. I could not help but think

that Jay had just picked up the life guys like me laid down, and moved on from. I just hoped that he could safely navigate his way. He told me he had aspirations of going to school, but the money was just too quick and too appealing.

Jay had a different spin on things because he was “living it.” He was in the midst of the battle, a little soldier trying to find his way. He also enlightened me as to the fact that slights and the perception thereof were becoming more and more sensitive. He had this to say about being dissed:

[Man, if I even feel like you looking at me wrong or like you mugging me like you want to do something to me...you roll up and somebody whispering, you automatically like, why grown men got to whisper, so that’s when you tryin’ to diss me.]

I understood now what was meant by the changing of the guard and the streets getting younger. It was a culmination of things. Pettiness in the eyes of a man in the world of a boy is a recipe for conflict. Jay was very forthcoming and left no stone unturned, citing that he too became extremely violent in defense of family and friends, but that jail was not a deterrent for what he felt he must do to survive the streets. As he departed my house, I for the first time during the process, watched him walk to his car, pulling at his pants to gather them around his slim waist. I could no longer recall seeing him playing.

4.7 RAZZ

Razz is an oddity in that he is seemingly flighty most of the time. It is difficult to get a handle on what he is thinking when you encounter him. For the most part, he is euphoric to a fault, to the extent that one may think it is fallacious. Exceptionally, moods of consternate thought accompanied by instances of depressive lulls characterize his aged face though Razz is only twenty-seven years old. His skin is rugged with his large hands being exempt. His palms are often sweaty, and it is seldom that one can get Razz to sit still for long. His energy admittedly makes me nervous, as he is unpredictable. He shifts

compulsively between being well groomed, to days of layering his clothing in a fashion that is less that aesthetically appealing and malodorous.

Alternatively, when Razz is Razz, he is soft spoken, altruistic in his ramblings, and a kind and gentle soul meaning no one harm. However, when prodded, Razz, trained in martial arts is known to “snap”, and has nearly killed several people with submission holds. He has a very high opinion of himself and is not keen on anyone else’s thoughts regarding his appearance or the path his life has taken. He has tried “the school thing” twice and decided that, “that ain’t my thing.” He is what I consider a “trailblazer” in the contemporary sense of the word, with the problem being that in this day and age, nobody wants to follow, so it relegates Razz to just being, “strange” in the hood.

I speak with him intermittently and seldom get to play basketball with him anymore. So when I did speak with him, I let him know well in advance that I would need to talk with him in an interview format, to assist me in understanding the concept of intra-racial violence. With anyone else, this would potentially have been problematic in that they would begin to try and formulate what they might say. But with Razz, this was a necessity; to impress upon him the importance of my endeavor in order to insure that I would hear from him again. Razz agreed and told me to simply let him know what day would be best for me.

Razz appeared at my door for the interview and today was a day that he was wearing fresh and fashionable clothing. He had on a brand new pair of casual shoes with a pair of crisp corduroy pants. I was impressed with Razz’ appearance because his appearance consistently reflects his affect, hence I anticipated a good interview. As his eyes scanned the informed consent form, Razz began speaking about the topic at hand without being questioned. I beseeched him to await the questions and even more, the taping had not yet begun. I sensed that this was the “euphoric” Razz that I would have to contend with today. Razz’ retorts were pretty much straight forward and I could tell from the context of his responses that his martial arts training had indeed taught him restraint. When asked when he thought violence might be appropriate, he offered:

[I would say more so to defend yourself, like if someone broke into my home and say my wife and child are home and they come in with the attempt to either rob me or harm me yeah I would feel it's necessary because then I have people to look after. You know I have to defend myself. Several situations rise up, you know, I could be in my car and some stranger walks up to me, I don't know what his intentions are, if he is trying to wash my windows, get some change or stick a gun in my face and pull me out of my car, you know, so you have to be very weary of the type of people and the type of situations you put yourself in, but definitely, I would say defending yourself, that would be when it's appropriate.]

The interview simply reiterated what I thought about Razz, he was a guy no different from the rest of us. He wants to be safe from harm, and he wants to go about his business in the hood with some sense of unmolested regularity, no more, no less. He does not advocate violence, but the option appears to be at the ready as a necessity. Razz lingered for a while subsequent to the interview and kind of just wandered around my house commenting on different pictures and art pieces. "Um, this is nice man, this is real nice." How are you kids, he asked. "They're good, thanks for asking" I replied. Razz seemed unsettled all at once, and then he hurriedly departed. I surmised that he had held it together all for the sake of what we needed to accomplish, but the gravity of our meeting coupled with having to remain seated for close to an hour had shaken him. I haven't talked to Razz since then.

4.8 TEE

"Tee" is a very soft spoken Black Muslim that always wears his braided hair in an open bandana. His age of 35 is evident by the balding in the top portion of his head. It would not be noticeable to most as he stands about 6'1. Tee's weight fluctuates with the fasting that is required of his faith. Currently he brags of weighing 202, down from a robust 255 at one point. He is a guy that seemingly knows everything about everything, and does not hesitate to offer uninvited advice. Also a marked habit of his is beginning and ending every sentence with "yo", which seems to be a colloquialism of his native

state. Tee is a former barber and is currently employed in another profession. Despite his weight loss, Tee still maintains a fairly healthy set of cheeks, which are covered by a full beard. He cites that he maintains the beard as part of his allegiance to his faith.

Were you to hear Tee speak, you would be taken aback as his voice seems to belong to someone else of a more effeminate posturing, but you certainly gain no such indication from his exterior. He is very respectful at all times, but is absolutely the wrong person to engage in debate over any topic. If he is found to be wrong, he completely shuts down, and it may be some time before you speak with him again. He prides himself on being knowledgeable about health and healing with regards to the human body. His very large family often ridicules him for his continual and non-traditional prescriptions, referring to him jokingly as “Dr. Quinn, medicine woman.” I had occasion to see how this angered him at one point, to the extent that he asked to “ride out” with me before he exploded. Tee is married with several children, and most of his violent acts have been property damage, due to his propensity to destroy inanimate objects when angered. Of his violent confrontations where he was “dissed” by other black men, he simply cites that:

[It makes me feel real bitter, cause he disrespecting me and him self at the same time, you know what I’m saying, cause he putting both of us in a situation where, he bout to make me hurt him, and then I got the consequences of that on my mind, but it just pisses me off really, cause somebody else got control of what’s about to go down in your life right then you know what I’m saying yo.]

I see the sincerity in Tee’s efforts to help people, but for some reason, it is seldom received and this in and of itself is the incipience of his troubles. Though he is senior to me in age, he refers to me as his “big bruh.” It took several years for me to come to the realization of what was inherent in the reference. As I contemplated the nature of the relationship, I realized that I was one of the few people that he actually deferred to and sought out for my opinion of his life. It is a responsibility that I have tried on many occasions to distance myself from, yet I always seem drawn back in because of his

innocent and altruistic nature. It was with this mind that I knew I would be able to capture the innermost thoughts of this man with dual personalities. I knew he respected me, for he had said as much.

We incurred several road blocks when we prepared for his interview, which irritated me to say the least, because he had given his word that he would be present at a certain time. We rescheduled on two occasions, and when he finally arrived, I had to endure a couple of long stories and one plausible excuse. I was nonetheless, relieved. I had hoped because of his religious transformation that Tee would be able to engage in reflective analysis with regards to his past acts of violence. He read the Informed Consent over and over again, to which I asked if he had any questions or concerns. He replied that he did not, yet seemed troubled. I informed him that he did not have to participate, and I would not think less of him. It occurred to me that he had toiled over his participation and had found himself engaged in spiritual warfare wanting of purity in his mind, and this would simply stir him to recall his transgressions.

Again I let him know that his participation was voluntary, and that he did not need to discuss anything that would make him uncomfortable. For as long as we stood at the threshold of decision, we were admitted into his abbreviated monologues almost immediately. I could however decipher the resistance present in his responses. I gathered the basic definitions from him, and actually reformatted the questions as we went along deciding to ask him the most difficult questions after we had established a level of comfort. This method worked to perfection, and it was no longer, interviewer and interviewee, it was Tee and I, talking...like we'd always done.

4.9 J-ROCK

Standing about 6 feet 4 inches and weighing in at a stealthy 240 or so, is J-Rock. J-Rock is the epitome of verbal and physical aggression. He speaks with a thick drawl that would have you mistakenly identify his state of origin as somewhere deep down South. However, you would be pitifully mistaken. He loves to “dish out punishment” on the basketball court, and many times flies into a rage over a “bad call”, frequently, tossing or kicking the game ball out of play in frustration. His hands are very strong and

large, and he lets you know this every time he shakes your hand, or as we refer to it, gives you “dap.” He snatches you towards his large frame that usually smells of alcohol. He has been known to go days, just drinking beer, and not eating. He calls it, “drinking that oil, boi!” He knows that I don’t approve for reasons other than the obvious, so he tempers his drinking when he knows we will be “kicking it.” “What’s up for tomorrow?” he’ll ask. “It’s on you”, I reply. “I guess that means no oil for me tomorrow, huh boi?” I always accepted this as a demonstration of affection or what the hood deems, “love.” It pointedly offers that my company is worth this rugged man bartering his most ardent vice, as well as shows respect for my place of residence. You come to understand that you don’t do things at someone’s house that they don’t do, like smoking, drinking and using profanity.

When not involved in a confrontation of some sorts, J-Rock is usually using metaphors and similes to discuss sports. His fat cheeks would give him a youthful baby face, except for the marked attempt he is engaged in right now to look more rugged, by refusing to shave or get a haircut, citing that he is growing corn rows. The course hair on his jaws tell the story that he would like you to have. He is overtly loud and boisterous at times for no obvious reason other than to be in his terms, “actin’ stupid.” When I inquire of the motive, he rants, “man I don’t give a f*ck what these people think about me.” He is unemployed for fighting on his most recent job. He was recently evicted, and now seems desperate to get things back on track by any means necessary, which makes me fear for him.

The bond that we developed is based on mutual respect for each others physicality on the court, and ironically an intensive love for our daughters. J-Rock has a little girl the same age as my oldest, and he often speaks of domestic frustrations that have led to violence and vandalism against his estranged wife and her boyfriend. Our relationship quickly blossomed from the basketball court into a brotherly relationship where J-Rock would seek my advice on matters that angered him, seemingly wanting to be persuaded against the destruction that he had meticulously planned to exact his revenge. Ultimately though, I would speak into deaf ears, as J-Rock would later find himself incarcerated for his antics.

I had asked J-Rock on several occasions to make himself available for my study, to which he always replied, “that’s goes without saying, whatever you need brotha.” He came to my house in the later part of the afternoon, wearing a Tampa Bay football jersey, some sweats and some Air Jordans. Seldom will you see J-Rock without his small, black skull cap. He studied the Informed Consent very carefully, and asked, “How long you got left” referring to when I would be graduating. He seems lucid today and very attentive to the interview questions. His seriousness is almost foreign to me, but I deduce that it is because he is not inebriated. He answers the questions very directly, and departs with his customary hard grip, as we exchange “dap.” “I muster the words, “I appreciate this man.” He then offers, “No problem man, just glad I can finally do something to help you out. I’ll holla at you here in a few”, he says, and disappears down the stairwell.

4.10 SINCERE BROWN

“Sincere Brown”, who for the purposes of this profile will simply be referred to as “Sincere”, is a musical genius that makes every attempt to command respect by keeping the company of “hard” guys. His entourage consists of all types of drug dealers, ex-convicts and guys that are just plain “hustlers.” What then, does Sincere bring to the table that stays his life? He is a self-proclaimed pimp¹ with an amazing gift for gab. He is renowned for talking women into “giving it up” to members of his crew or conquering women for himself to add to his growing legend. To lay eyes on Sincere, one might assume that I am prolific in the ability to tell a good fable, and were it not for my own eyes witnessing his verbal prowess, I too would plant my feet in the sands of disbelief.

Admittedly, Sincere was never good at hustling, perhaps because no one has ever taken seriously the fact that he possessed the capacity to be violent. He is a very lanky 6’4, weighing no more than 165 pounds, and covered with freckles, set within his burnt red skin. Uncharacteristically though, his hair is not red. If he seems as though he is staring through you, he’s merely focusing, because he chooses not to wear his glasses. Sincere does a lot of posturing and tough talk, and prefers to call in reinforcements as

¹ Pimp: refers simply to the perception of sexual prowess based on a proliferation of women in one’s company; not to be confused with the trades of pimping and prostitution.

opposed to engaging himself in physical confrontation. I guess this is why when he finally made good on a promise to fight on one occasion, it was more astonishing that he did fight, than whether he was victorious or not. Guys known to be violent had always given Sincere a pass, because he was talented, and nobody ever felt truly threatened when he mouthed off. But, every man has his breaking point, and Sincere chronicled his in his interview. Sincere talks about an incident where he attacked an off-duty police officer:

[That was her ex-boyfriend, that's what led up to it, I didn't like him as simple as that, I didn't like him, actually he approached me yeah, that's what happened, he approached me and said, you got a problem with me, so instead of talking to him, I went to swinging.]

Sincere has seen hard times since I've known him, pursuing his music career, and being unemployed have led to several evictions, constant disconnections of his pre-paid cell phone and the continuity of his thin frame, as many meals have been foregone. Still Sincere finds a way to keep the appearance of a man doing well for himself, as evidenced by new gear that is in fashion from time to time. Initially, it was Sincere's roommate that was the intended target for the interview, but it later came to my attention that he would not be appropriate for the study based on pending charges and his involvement in an on-going investigation. Sincere actually offered to participate, citing that in spite of perception, he had achieved a certain status in the hood, and that his face was good in the street. This simply meant that he had successfully come from up North, and been able to navigate the streets and hoods of North Carolina without being punked or played, and with this fact I could not argue. Sincere has earned respect in ways that were unconventional to me, but earned it nonetheless. He had made the streets love him, by giving them what they wanted; good music and loose women.

Sincere accompanied me back to my house, and asked for a cup of water, to which I obliged. He made himself comfortable on the couch, and began reading the informed consent form. He asked a couple of questions regarding potential fallout, since he was privy to a lot of potentially harmful situations. I instructed him not to speak of

them, and once he signed his form, we proceeded. I was immediately taken off guard by Sincere's street aptitude and indelible contribution to the direction of the study. I had found a diamond in the rough. Sincere had touched on another theme that I had not considered in the formulation of my interest in the study. He casually dismantled any preconceived notion on my part that "street credibility" and "respect in the hood" were unmistakably synonymous.

Sincere let me know in so many words that though the rules of the game stayed the same, retirement through death, imprisonment or simply a changing of the guard made guys like me urban legends, or dinosaurs if you will. The spoils of the streets belonged to the young lions that could successfully perform the rites of passage.

CHAPTER V: VIOLENT CONFRONTATIONS

In this portion of the study, I will chronicle the responses of the eleven men in the study to questions contained in the interview schedule. Subsequent to asking the men to share a particular instance in which they personally were involved in a violent confrontation, the men were asked for their opinion on what they thought led to the incident. My desire was to find out how these men viewed their involvement, and what actually served as the signal that violence was necessary or appropriate.

Four rationales or “themes” were offered by the respondents for why they believed that they had been an active participant in the violent confrontation. The reasons they gave me are listed in the order of how frequently they were offered, beginning with the highest number of respondents. They are as follows: in protection of third parties, self-defense, trespassing on territory, and threatening behavior. It was also supplemented by several of the respondents that even though it was not **the** cause, *alcohol* made them more emboldened and less tolerant of the situation at hand.

5.0 Third Parties

Several of the respondents offered that they were either defending the honor of, or physically protecting a third party that they believed needed defending. There was a recurrence of the terminology “talking slick” as the men began to speak of defending the honor of a third party. “Slick talk” is defined below by several of the respondents, and recognized as a verbal cue that indicates derogatory or unwarranted speech. The physical defense of a third party was either due to the perception that harm would come to them, or due to the fact that it was an unspoken expectation of them to defend family members or close friends.

Jay expressed the following view.

I: When is violence acceptable?

Jay: Well for me personally, violence is acceptable if you mess with someone close to my heart basically, or it could be a family member, it could be a close

friend, you know, if you disrespect them or you lay a hand on them then it's automatically gone be some confrontation, you know like somebody disrespect your mother, or if somebody put they hands on your mother. I would kill somebody if they put they hands on my mother! Like really, I tell my brother and my friends like I'll die for ya'll, I'll go to jail for ya'll, it doesn't matter because it's true, cause I know that I'm not gone let nobody step all over them like that, if I have to bite the bullet or take the rap for it I mean then I will, but it's all a different story when you causing the confrontation or you bringing all the heat on yourself or the rest of your friends.

Here Mathis speaks of an incident where he had returned to his hometown and saw a gentleman with which he had "beef" with some years ago when they attended the same high school. He believed that it was necessary for him to either flee the scene or act aggressively to protect his young daughter who was present at the time.

I: So what do you think led to the incident?

Mathis: Being that my daughter was around in the incident we were talking about earlier, it made me very reluctant to, we were the only two there, and if something had have happened to me then she would have been left unprotected at the time so it was a situation that I attempted to walk away from, but when I was further confronted then my daughter being there made it necessary for me to protect myself and her, so it made it a double edged sword. I tried to walk away cause of her, but ended up fighting to protect me and her.

I: So when is violence appropriate?

Mathis: Um, to protect yourself and protect someone you love and care about, to protect somebody weaker than you. Like if you see someone in a verbal confrontation and they can't protect themselves.

As I interviewed Tee, he shared with me an occasion on which another black male had been "talking slick" to his sister, and he approached him on the streets with the intent

of getting some explanation as to why the guy had spoken to his sister in this manner. Evidently, the young male did not take kindly to being approached and a fist fight ensued.

I: Please share a particular instance in which you were a participant in a violent confrontation with another black male?

Tee: Yeah, coming up in my projects, I had a confrontation with a black male when this cat said something slick to my sister. I went up to the guy to try to address the situation and handle it like men, and we ended up scrapping. Everybody broke it up.

I: After your violent confrontation, what were you feeling emotionally or what was going through your mind?

Tee: I felt hurt, cause I tried to approach him because it was a female involved and I had went to him man to man with no intentions of hands being thrown like that. He was young and I was a little older so when I approached him he started running off his mouth and he kept escalating the situation and he swung at me and that was it. It was on, yo!

As Smiley told his story of an incident that occurred inside of a party, he offered that it was not until someone attempted to harm his cousin that he felt the compunction to act. Reportedly, the fight had already begun, and his cousin was pulled into a crowd and attacked. He accounts that he was already in hostile territory and vastly outnumbered, but it was of no consequence when he realized that the threat of danger to his cousin was imminent. Smiley adds that he had ingested alcohol and had smoked marijuana prior to the fight.

I: What do you think led to the incident, and please be as detailed as possible?

Smiley:As far as me getting involved in it, I was with him (cousin), I mean we won't, we didn't come together, but we blood you know what I mean, and plus we grew up together, so of course whoever is with me is with me, now being that

that's my family they like okay either them or we got to do something, so that's the way I think it started off.

There is a notion that friends should help friends when there is an altercation, even if the cause is unbeknownst to them. B-Smoove talks about an incident where the initial "beef" was between himself and another gentleman, and he was provoked into going after the guy because he attacked his friends in his absence. B-Smoove also introduced the belief that because the group is close knit, a decision not to retaliate by any of the members is cause for shame and being ostracized from the group.

B-Smoove: I heard him saying "yeah he better move before I steal him and his man." So I'm thinking like okay, he gone steal me, so one of my boys come up to me talking about, "yo I'm trying to get up on this girl, let me go get up on this girl." And I was like, I'm a go over with you and see what her friends talking bout. So when that happened, next thing I know, they jump on two of my boys in the club and I'm like what's going on. And then my girl come up to me like, "yeah, your boys just got jumped." So we go outside to the club and my boys out there getting hemmed up by the police and I'm like what's going on, what's going on? And they like, well your man that was in the club talking; him and his boys jumped on us.....he probably thought I was hating on him in the club, and then so he just wanted to try to provoke me, by hitting my boys you know, while I wasn't there. So he probably thought that was gone get me fired up.

Oddly enough, 730 was trying to keep the peace between one of his friends and another guy on the basketball court when he became involved in a violent confrontation:

730: Man, I was on some peace shit cause I knew my man ain't get down like that right? So this dude ran up on my man and starts puttin' his finger in his face and talkin' stupid or whatever, so I got between them, and I'm tellin' the dude to

chill or whatever, it ain't worth it... You don't do that shit, don't nobody fuck with my peoples. If you fuck with them, you basically fuckin' with me.

Respondents consistently shared that this is one of the times when they felt that violence was most appropriate. When they referred to the defense of "family", it began with the listing of their mothers as the primary person towards which disrespectful treatment, threats, danger or harm was completely intolerable:

Mathis: ...I'm not really one for a lot of word play, um, you know, I don't mind that cause I understand that, you know, that is a front for some people and it don't usually mean nothing, um, short of saying something 'bout my mama, which every cat has that boundary...

Not one of the respondents made mention of a "father" with regards to family protection, or the defense of a third party. When asked to elaborate, or as they began clarifying "family", it included mothers, children, siblings, girlfriends and subsequently close friends. Ultimately, the defense of women and children are largely consistent with traditional gender roles associated with concepts of manhood and masculinity:

J-Rock: Oh no question! You know it wouldn't, I look at it like if a man wouldn't vouch for his family, he's not a man. And and and, I refuse to put up with something that pertains to my kids, mother, uh brother, we just gotta do whatever.

Many of the respondents indicated that there was another consideration active with regards to third parties that they believed led to violence. They offered that the presence of thirds parties assisted them in making the decision of to act violently. This was largely due to "saving face" or because they perceived that there was an expectation to address the wrongful or disrespectful actions of the other party. Even more, according to the respondents, third parties may play the role of instigating, or escalating the anger

and/or embarrassment felt by the respondent. When the question was directed to the respondents as to whether or not it mattered to them if a third party was present, this is how they responded:

730: Oh no doubt. I am just that type that I just straight handle shit off gate, but it makes it worse when niggas around. They be pumpin' the shit and hyping you up, like, "I know you ain't gon' let this nigga play you." So then you gotta handle yours...

B-Smoove: Honestly it do, cause people kind of what hype stuff up you know what I'm saying, like if I thought, if I wasn't gone say nothing to the guy and let it pass, it might be straight, but due to the fact that people is around me and they gone hype stuff up, like "oh, you got played bro, you gone let him play you like that." Or "you got dissed, he wouldn't do me like that." You know what I'm saying, people just hype stuff up and crowds do affect what happens...like it'll hurt your pride, cause like another thing when people around they gone start talking about you saying you got played and then you just say I can't go out like no punk, I can't go out like that and then that's your pride, your pride come into play and you just got to back it up.

J-Rock: Uh, male wise no, but females I would say yeah.

Razz: Yes, that always makes a difference because people don't like to be embarrassed and the moment always lives longer in the memory when it happens in the company of other people than they would if it was in private. If someone dissed me in private I would be more prone to let it go than to get all hyped and involved in an altercation, I would probably blow it off than to respond. But, if people were around that looked up to me and they know me to be of a certain character and I don't respond to a certain diss, they may look at me and I lose credibility right there, you know, "oh he said you got big lips, you just gone walk

away like that, and you know people expect you to say something back or respond to that.

Tee: Yeah, it got a lot to do with it. It adds to it, cause dudes be hyping stuff up, you know what I'm saying, cause everybody like to see a fair one you know what I'm saying, and it's crazy like that. Like if you roll up on the set and talking slick out your face, nine times out of ten, the dude doing it because its people around from jump, you know what I'm saying for real. He ain't even, he wouldn't even try to play your face or fire up the dozens if it won't no crowd, so here this nigga go, and you know what I mean, you gotta come right back at him so don't nobody think you soft yo.

Chip: Yeah, it could be your boy that come and tell you something, and he don't say it, it's certain things your boy can say to you by ya'll selves and he better not say nothing stupid while we around some other people, when I get him in the car when we 'bout to leave or something, or I might gone and get him, depending on how it is, how quick I get him, but I am probably gone be aggressive real soon, yeah definitely depends on who's around.

A couple of the respondents responded completely antithetical to the former position, citing that the actual presence of third parties would make them less likely to participate in a violent confrontation:

Mathis: Absolutely, like if it's my girl, my mom or my seeds, regardless of what it is, it's gone be a situation that I'm going to have to walk away from, if at all possible. If I find that not be possible, or if I feel like the cat is too close to them or he's following me, then it will be a situation of me putting some space between them, like sending them to the car or telling them to go call some of my partners or whatever. Being that my daughter was around in the incident we were talking about earlier, it made me very reluctant to, we were the only two there, and if

something had have happened to me then she would have been left unprotected at the time so it was a situation that I attempted to walk away from.

Jay: Not a lot of people, but specifically who's there at the time, like me, if its just me, and they want to do something, I'm like let's do it but if its like a particular family member or something that I'm trying to do stuff a different way or somebody that don't need to see that right then and there, then things might have to roll off and you might have to bite the bullet on that one 'til later.

5.1 Self-Defense

Often a respondent offered that he had been touched, or someone "put their hands on him." This does not simply refer to brushing up against or grazing another party. Touching infers that someone has infringed on a personal boundary of space, thrown a punch or made an aggressive movement towards the respondent that indicates that the violent confrontation is underway, or that this is the initiation of the altercation:

Razz: Well, he basically said that he didn't like me and uh that was it; that started the fight. He punched me in my face.

In this particular instance, Chip acknowledges that he and friends had no intention of getting into a physical altercation, and that they had attempted to apologize to the gentleman in question. However, he adds, the alcohol made them less tolerant of the situation being escalated subsequent to what they believed to be a minor infraction, and the unwillingness of the other gentleman to accept the apology:

Chip: ...One of my friends had made a mistake and stepped on this boy shoe, and so they got into a confrontation 'bout that, something as simple as that, you know we was drinking and we was smoking a few blunts and stuff like that. Um, we, we wasn't in there for that, we was in there looking at the girls whatever, we wasn't really trying to fight, so my man made a simple mistake and the boy kind of blew

it up and kept it going throughout the night, and kept rounding up his crew... You could feel the tension in the air at the club, and it just kept on going and going...

730 had previously stated that this was a particular incident in which he was attempting to de-escalate the situation between one of his friends and another guy, and the guy apparently hit 730. He seemed bewildered by the fact that someone would touch him in a violent manner:

730: So the nigga hits me in my jaw and I went dead to his ass. It took everybody in the gym to hold me. They had me up in the air. I was still tagging this nigga. I knocked out like three of his teeth in the front. They finally got me off of him, and I was still swinging on him...It was the straight fact that this muthafucka first approached my man on some stupid shit, and then had the *nerve* to put his hands on me.

In the incident that follows, Em is already engaged in an altercation with someone else, and the antagonist touches him. He offers that the thing that enraged him so much about the situation was that he did not have an opportunity to defend himself, or see the “touching” coming.

Em: I believe what led to it was the other person pushing me from behind. He came and continued to push me from behind, and I instantly reacted and I took him to the ground and hurt him bad.... He ended up going to the hospital...

There is widely accepted belief among the respondents that once “touching” has occurred there is no other alternative to responding violently:

Mathis: I think violence is necessary only as a last result, when I say last result, I don’t mean all other options have been exhausted but a lot of people fail to realize is that a situation can escalate to a point where other options obviously are not

gone work. When somebody has hit you over your head with something is not the time to speak to 'em about why people shouldn't fight each other, it's actually gone get you beat worse...

B-Smoove introduces the notion that to allow one affront may inevitably diminish self-worth or perception:

[Violence may be necessary to a certain degree, when I say that it's like saying you can't take to much. Like, if somebody keep on trying you, and they know you not gone do nothing cause you might be like a non-violent person, and they keep on trying you, it's gone take a few tolls on you until you stand up for yourself, until you show that person, look! I'm not playing anymore, you know we gone battle this out.]

5.2 Territory

A few of the respondents discussed incidents in which there existed an understanding that was never actually spoken, where there was to be no infiltration of the boundaries to their hoods or projects, real or imaginary. To be in a strange place or a place where one doesn't reside without approval from the residents warrants violence or defines one as an "other" or outsider. One respondent even discussed fighting and getting into regular altercations on sight simply because it had always been that way between his town and another:

Smiley: Well, then being that it's a rivalry between two towns, that rivalry has been going on for years, my father fought in that rivalry you know what I mean, cause the guys was, pretty much what it is it got to stem from women, you know what I'm saying, cause its like a territorial type thing cause the guys from one town would go to the other town and they over there screwing and taking her, not taking her, but dating the girls of the one town and the boys from over there come to your town, and its more like a ego type thing somewhat to show that look here

okay yeah I know that we got problems, I know that every time we seen one another we fighting but I still ain't scared to come over here and holla at this shortie (girl) and you know where I'm at. I don't really know too much about the town as far as terrain and everything, but, if you went over there, most of the time you had to have you bout, you had to have a car load (crew) to go over there, just in case they found out, somebody rolled by and saw your vehicle. Next thing you know they coming back, they coming back!

In this particular incident, the respondent reasoned that the cause of violence was quite simply because the guy was not from his neighborhood. As I explored this notion, he reiterated his point:

J-Rock: Ah, I'm a go back a couple of years and say, life generally gets territorial and we had an instance where a guy came from another hood, we like to refer to 'em as, and he entered into our projects and went to the basketball gym and was playing basketball. He made two or tree calls that we didn't like so we actually just jumped on him, uh only for the reason uh, that he wasn't from inside our projects. You know he was, we had went to the same school, but he was not from our projects.

Seemingly, there exists a need to feel ownership, or to protect the inner sanctum of where one resides. Even though, the respondents in large part admittedly fought amongst themselves, it was in preparation to fend off intruders:

Em: You can't come on the block and bang. Like I said, just walking the streets in my hood and you don't know anybody, then don't just come through there walking by yourself solo, or you will get got.

Jay: I mean you just can't roll through look like you run there, or acting like you been there, I mean like this is your hood and you control everything, I mean

acting like you the kingpin, that's just not accepted anywhere, anywhere that I seen it's just not accepted.

730: You better know somebody when you step off in somebody's bricks (projects) for sure! If you ain't from the spot, stay out unescorted.

5.3 Staring or “Mean-Mugging”

Staring in the streets is usually referred to as “mugging”, short for mean mugging, or having the appearance of anger or distaste upon one's face. Several of the gentlemen referred to the fact that staring or “mugging” led to their violent confrontation. Mugging is perceived as being *threatening behavior* and as an indicator that the other party has the desire or an eminent plan to do something harmful to the person at whom their staring. It was also articulated that such a look is “disrespectful.”:

Jay:To come through mean mugging with a look on your face like you want to do something to me, um, that is disrespect for me....

When I asked B-Smoove about what led to his confrontation, he offered:

B-Smoove: Probably dude at the club thinking I was looking at him, saying stuff, and I'm really in the club trying to have a good time...

I: So tell me what's the problem with somebody looking at somebody else?

B-Smoove: Well, I mean, you can probably think somebody looking at you in the wrong way, like, depending on how they facial expression is, like if I saw somebody just looking at me, I would automatically think they got a problem with me or they want to do something to me, mainly because most people today, like when you look at somebody like in a bad way, they might know something about you, or they don't like you or the people you hang with or something, so it's a number of reasons you can think somebody looking at you wrong, you know what I'm saying. But it's just something that is, you don't do that...mugging.

5.4 Conclusion

These accounts of perceptions and precipitating factors, or the reasons that led to the participants being involved in violent confrontations are their own, which makes them intensely valid. As Smiley offered, the only way to “accurately” acquire phenomenological explanation is to inquire of the social actors. I believe that a grave injustice is done when, as scientists, we acknowledge that language and behavior are in constant flux, yet constrict those possibilities with scientific methodology and historical literature. While it is important to understand from whence we have come in order to get where we are going; it is likewise difficult to move forward while looking backwards. In my opinion, good theory should be observable. We are not in a position to adjudicate the level of appropriateness of their perceptions, but we can learn from what the men have told us.

Their rationales can be linked to several theoretical concepts and arguments. The need to protect family members and friends from harm or danger is very consistent with Wolfgang’s findings that insults directed towards traditional objects of male protection precipitate violent confrontations more often than barbs directed at the actual person (Hall 2002; Vidmar 2000; Wolfgang 1958). These are strongly associated with the performance of traditional male social roles (Katz 1998; Ptacek 1988; Frieze and Brown 1989). Moreover, the preservation of honor, status or image is very closely related to the notion of self-defense (Tedeschi and Smith and Brown 1974). There is also a marked arousal of anger when there is a perception that the third party has been unjustly insulted or deprived of disrespect, and the action was unwarranted. This causes moral outrage (Heider 1958).

Further, there is a need to address the presence of third parties that fulfill the role of instigators. Reflecting on Razz’ comments regarding an insult outliving the moment and being engrained in the memory of witnesses, he is reverberating the argument that such a public display of disrespect or insult causes more embarrassment and engenders more anger (Ferguson and Rule 1981). Even though all insults threaten a person’s ‘face’ and status, when those insults are levied in the presence of others or in public, the former

is particularly true (Pitt-Rivers 1965). Hence, it is important to the social actor to maintain or create a favorable opinion of self in the presence of others; thereby feeling pressured or obligated to retaliate in the response to disrespect (Kim, Smith and Brigham 1998). While it was offered in the literature that violence was more likely to occur in the presence of a male audience (Gilmore 1990; Polk 1994; Winlow 2001), J-Rock offers that in his particular case it would be the complete opposite. Perhaps the concept of exaggerated masculinity is at play to garner the affections or admiration of female witnesses, or quite simply to exacerbate the level of embarrassment by diminishing the status of the other individual. This tenet remains unclear with regards to the role that the gender of third party witnesses might play in the proclivity towards violence.

As we try to attempt to understand the arousal of anger to the point of violence, recall that in Chip's case, there had been an apology made in an effort to communicate to the offended party that there was not a purposeful attempt to do harm or be disrespectful. He and his friends had assumed that such a gesture would diminish anger (Bobocel and Farrell 1996). According to Heider (1958), apologies demonstrate remorse, affirm the status of the offended, and acknowledge unfair or unjust treatment, thereby diminishing anger. However, this was not the case and violence ensued anyway. Perhaps we can assume that the apology was perceived as being insincere or simply to appease the offended party, in which case, he was made more angry (Baron 1988; Cohen 1986; Goffman 1952). Also noteworthy was the presentation of the concept that third parties may deter violent response in the face of an affront. While Mathis articulated that he was more concerned over the safety of the third party were he to be defeated, Jay's response was more consistent with the literary theme of violent response not being looked upon favorably or expected by the third party (Borden 1975).

The respondents also identified self-defense as a precipitator of violent confrontations. While this defense was characterized by several of the respondents as physical, the discussion also turned to the notion that one's standing could be particularly diminished and affronts could be repeated were there retaliation. The importance of retaliation has been previously noted in the literature some time ago. Westermarck (1932) suggested that the self-image is restored when the victim of an identity threat

retaliates. The assertion made by B-Smoove that standing up for one's self manifests the need to prove that he can not be continually offended or taken advantage of is cited precisely in that manner within the literature. According to both Lind (2000) and Greenberg (1993) being taken advantage of is resented because it indicates to the self and others the character flaw that one *can* be taken advantage of. Hence the sting of an insult or exploitation is born of identity implications.

In addition, the alternative focal concern of toughness cited by Miller (1958) can be identified within the subculture. While it should not be applied singularly, it functions more than adequately coupled with Goffman's concept of impression management. Combined, I would argue that a great deal of posturing, posing, or fronting is binary, serving not only to create identity, but to ward off challenges to it. The appearance that one stands at ready with violence at his disposal goes a long way to prevent the necessity of having to employ it, or if nothing else, having to do so less frequently than preferred (Oliver 2001; Anderson 1999; Majors and Billson 1992). I think it also important to recall the understated but inferred principle of desiring to "be left alone" or simply not "bothered" in the streets (Anderson 1999). I present that violence in terms of preventing affront is simultaneously retaliatory and preemptory against further challenge. Evidence of this thinking is found in Jacobs argument that "retaliation is an informal sanction that involves both punishment and deterrence-punishment in the sense of 'payback' for a past wrong, deterrence in the sense of inhibiting future transgressions by the violator or other potential violators" (2004:298).

The next theme that was articulated by the men was a predilection to defend territory, or the belief that where the men resided had to be defended by its inhabitants from outsiders. I would not go so far as to characterize the presence of a stranger as an occurrence that arouses anxiety, but instead perhaps suspicion, unpredictability and infringement upon the community. Moreover, as resounded by 730, J-Rock, Smiley, and Em, it is dangerous to be present in someone else's projects, "bricks", or hood unescorted. Within the literature, it is offered that black males are territorial within their subcultures because of their relative economic deprivation within mainstream society and there exists a subsequent need to demonstrate both ownership and control of

something...anything (McCall 1995; Gadd 2000). My best attempt to understand why the defense of, or “standing up for the hood” is important is because the hood represents the individuals physical, subcultural and thus moralistic community (Heider 1958). In conjunction, all parties are not disinterested, for as Vidmar (2000) points out, there is a vested interest by all parties that reside under common authority to insure that the rules and values are respected.

The final concept that was offered for the rationalization of violent confrontations among the respondents was that of threatening behavior, such as staring or “mean-mugging.” This could also be characterized as the respondents’ perception of impending threat or harm. As B-Smoove clarified, looks can be taken out of context and are staunch miscommunications at times, but real nonetheless. Several of the respondents commented that some of the words that precipitated a violent confrontation were as simple as “what are you looking at”?

However, support for this proposition is underscored in the literature regarding black-on-black violence. Anderson sites that within the “staging area” for violence, a seemingly minor incident is anything but, as death may result. He writes, “with so much at stake, a man or woman can easily feel disrespected by someone who looks at him too long” (1999:78). Much of the social scripts regarding staring are provided us as children. We are often curious regarding our surroundings, encouraged to look at peculiar things in nature or oddities, save the case of staring at disfigured or disabled people. We are subsequently reprimanded and told that to do so is considered rude. Alternatively, we are taught that it demonstrates respect and honesty to look another person in the eye as we speak to them in Western culture. However, in the U.K. staring is avoided because similar to Arab countries and southern Europe, it is not a contact culture (Chandler 2002).

Often we stare to demonstrate the focus of our attention, sometimes unaware of the reasons that accompany our gaze. Maintaining a stare is usually consistent with the level of intensity inherent in the relationship, which can be gauged by the addition of a smile. However, doing so for an elongated period of time without smiling or a signal of affirmation creates anxiety in the target. This is especially true of what is called a “wide-eyed” stare, which is derived from the animal kingdom and signals threat. In the 1960’s

the wide-eyed stare or “hate-stare” was used by whites to insult, disrespect and articulate to blacks what their “place” was.

According to Argyle, avoiding stares can have negative connotations. “When implicated in deception, people avoid mutual gaze, in order to distance themselves from the intense involvement necessary, and to avoid the possibility of revealing themselves through their eyes” (Argyle, 1969: 109). It is said that people that are anxious or nervous avoid eye contact, which has been used as a signal to indicate if someone is being dishonest. Nevertheless, the avoidance of eye-contact allows others to draw inferences regarding one’s identity or toughness, and prolonged staring is used to assess and determine the power dynamics within an interpersonal interaction. The person that looks away in the subculture is regarded as weak or afraid, not wanting of altercation. Antithetically, the person that is able to maintain eye-contact with conceding, or “blinking” (looking away) is deemed to be assertive or intimidating.

While a relationship between structural inequality and violence cannot be totally discounted, it was not present in the explanations offered by the respondents in this study. Also absent were any inclinations that poverty or the appearance thereof made the environment to context more conducive to violent behavior. The responses all indicated that violence for whatever reason was based on a perception arising out of interpersonal interaction. Further, the rationale of defending territory is arguably of the interpersonal variety as well, as territory is referenced as an extension of self.

There was scant evidence of how violence came to be learned or dispersed as a coping mechanism. When I asked the men about the very first time they were violent and where the inclination came from, the great majority could not recall either the incident or how they *knew* to use violence. From the responses I was provided, I deduced that violence was learned through a combination of Shakoor and Chalmer’s (1991) *co-victimization* and Bandura’s social learning theory or *reciprocal determinism* (1977). According to the respondents, they recalled seeing someone being violent during a confrontation and the response that it garnered, and upon applying force for the first time, they found it favorable because it succeeded in achieving their goal. In these instances their goals were to get someone to leave them alone, or to leave a “girlfriend” alone.

Again the re-emergent theme of traditional gender roles is present, however even more intriguing is the notion of cessation of violence with violence. Therefore, I reiterate violence as both deterrence, and in this case self-defense.

CHAPTER VI: R-E-S-P-E-C-T, FIND OUT WHAT IT MEANS TO ME!

In an attempt to delve deeper into the central concept of this study, disrespect, I find it necessary first to acquire an understanding of how the subcultural meaning of respect is articulated. This is an effort to alter presumptions and to insure that as a researcher, I enter the field, taking nothing for granted. As the language and slang is ever-changing within a subculture, I think it is important to master it prior to attributing meaning to behavior. First, I asked the participants in the study to share with me their meanings of someone having respect in the hood. To follow this inquiry, I asked them to define the colloquialism of “street cred”, and whether or not the two were the same or differed in any way. Along those same lines, I wanted to find out how respect could be earned in the hood.

The definitions of respect in the hood were plentiful, yet seemed to revolve around several central features. As reported by the respondents in the study, they defined respect as: having superior fighting ability, possessing marked bravery, being a leader, being revered, having a violent reputation or street credibility, and finally having favorable affiliations. Allusions were made to the fact that being good at sports might warrant respect. Seemingly the most important or the consensus was that being able to defend oneself with his hands was the most coveted of all street attributes. While I attempted to glean a differentiation between having a violent reputation and street credibility, the two continued to be merged by the men in the study as there was a recurring notion of identity (credibility) predicated on the articulation of a willingness to be violent and the actuation of the promise (violent reputation).

6.0 “Thumping”

When the environment that a person resides in is plagued with the threat of violence at all times, it is deathly important to be able to ward off possible attacks. The respondents were straightforward and mostly adamant about the importance of being able to handle yourself without the use of a gun. To them this indicated manhood and was

deserving of respect, win, lose or draw. The question was phrased as “what does it mean to you when someone says that a guy has respect in the hood? They responded in kind:

Mathis: It means that he can fight and he is a person not to be dealt with physically. He stays his life by the mere fact that you better not put your hands on him without being ready to go the distance.

Sincere: Um, if a guy got respect in the hood, if he got respect in the hood that mean, you not gone step to him, ‘cause that more than likely you might get you’re ass beat real quick. It may not even mean that he somebody that you know, that gotta fight or everybody scared of, but that’s basically what it mean.

Stepping to someone infers that you have approached them intent on confrontation, either verbally or physically. Sincere warns that a respected person cannot be approached in this manner based on his ability of defend himself. This as he says is not necessarily an indication that this person is someone to be feared, but one should exercise caution, or perhaps think twice prior to embarking on what could potentially be a physical confrontation.

Tee: Respect in the hood is like somebody that stay getting in fights and coming out on top. Like you know you ain’t stepping to this dude any kind of way, cause he nice with his dums (fists).

Tee basically adds that the respected person in the hood is *continually* engaged in physical confrontations, and that the prowess he has when it comes to fighting prevents others from approaching him. This is not always the case; the individual may constantly stay in fights because this is the method that he personally prefers in resolving his conflicts within the community or because he is perceived as a “mark” or an easy target.

730 educates me on the fact that there are different levels to being “nice with your hands.” He presents that his reputation has been gained for not having to be a brawler, but because of the power he has at his disposal to end a fight quickly and fairly. He offers that when violence erupts, it is manlier to handle the situation with your hands as opposed to “needing a gun”:

730: He gets down for his, he nice with his hands, and he ain't to be played with. It's like a cat that really don't need no gun to handle his biz (business). Guns are for punks, the streets always say, a punk will hurt you. Especially somebody that got that thing they call the one hitter quitter.

I: What is the one hitter quitter?

730: Most of my fights, well all of them except maybe two or three, I usually can knock a dude out with one blow, and then I open up my stomp game. Niggas all over town know me for that...the one hitter quitter.

J-Rock makes the first indication that respect can be transferred, and that violence serves as a vehicle for upward mobility within the subculture. Typically, individuals gain respect from defending themselves, but in rare cases, an individual may attempt to forego the time required to build a reputation, and try to take someone else's or conquer them physically in hopes that they may occupy their standing:

J-Rock: Ah, I would say that that person has so to speak earned stripes by maybe uh jumping on somebody that was well respected in the hood. That's how you come up.

Chip: I mean respect is, well how I got respect, was coming up rough already out in the fighting game. I was known to just slap you when I was younger. I would always be in a position like you know where I felt like I had to prove myself in the beginning and along the lines of me having to prove myself I put that thang to

a whole lot of people. So people knew that, and by knowing that you get respect just off what you do. I was always into something on a daily basis.

Essentially, Chip argues that because his pursuit of respect began in his youth, he has not had to constantly defend his reputation. Again, there is the notion that constant aggression and the choice to utilize violence as a tool for the resolution of conflict serve the purposes of gaining a violent reputation and subsequently gaining the respect of others.

6.1 Bravery

Another definition that was common among the respondents was a notion of not only bravery, but distinguished bravery. This means that against extraordinary odds, or in extreme conditions, an individual refused to back down, or simply has no fear of his surroundings or his circumstance. The very appearance that a man isn't afraid appears to indicate that he has respect.

Here, Smiley goes into a discussion at length about what it means to have respect and the level of fearlessness that is associated with having that respect. He also gives us some hint as to how things change for someone that has respect, as though life becomes less restrictive and more privileged:

Smiley: When you got respect you don't have to be scared of what the average man scared of. You know what I mean, uh, just like uh, for instance you might hear a story about the boys on the hill or in the bottom you know what I mean, but if you can walk through there and ain't got to worry bout nobody jumping on you, you ain't worried bout nobody trying you whatever, its like, its like respect mean, its almost like home to you almost you know what I mean, you can call it home if you wanted to, you don't have no, you not looking over your shoulders like say if you went to a foreign neighborhood let's say out of state or cross the state or whatever and you know what I'm saying let's say where the hood is, everybody hood is different you know what I'm saying, it ain't got to be the ghetto to be the

hood, you know what I'm saying, being able to just have the comfort zone to say look here: "I'm known!" Say if I was trying to make some money doing something you know hustling whatever, I wouldn't have no problems coming over here getting respect, meaning they not...ain't nobody gone run up on me trying to rob me or you know what I'm saying call the police or do some craziness to me because of the respect, like I know him, he straight you know what I mean, it's like a comfort a sense of, it's like love, where you don't have to be scared. That's a good feeling to be able to walk the streets, no matter what time of night what time of day, not worried about getting ran up on hit in the head or you know what I'm saying, somebody saying you look suspicious or "who that?" You know what I mean, or run up on you questioning you; that's respect. You know what I'm saying. Knowing that I can be a man without having to look over my shoulders, mean I can handle my business without having to bring the whole army with me, I can go in there by myself and take care of my problems if there is a problem. Respect is like an honor. It's an honor to have respect you know what I mean, it's like a badge of honor and that's something can't nobody take from you when you got respect, the story will be told from now on and respect, kids will grow up and respect you and not even know you; come up, "I know you, I heard about you", you know what I'm saying and automatically they may grow up with somebody that got something on they mind they want to do something crazy, like naw naw, can't mess with him, you know what I'm saying, he straight, he cool. I know that boy, my brother know him, or my uncle know him, that'll keep you. Respect will stay your life to me, to me as far as talking about the street, if you got respect, your life expectancy is a little bit longer you know what I mean, but if you got respect it tends to have a better easier walk through there you know what I mean. Your word is good.

Smiley, consistently speaks of "not having to look over your shoulder", which infers that there is always a test of manhood in the streets, and that harm, danger or slights are an expectation. He expresses a sense of relief that he will not be bothered

because of respect. The interesting simile that he uses is that respect is like “love.” The two terms are often substituted for each other in street vernacular, meaning a great deal of affection and mutual respect devoid of any romantic inclinations.

Chip reiterates that respect has a great deal to do with fearlessness and posturing, but adds that it is also a gradual process that takes time. Respect is apparently not easily won over a short span of time. He implies that affiliations may assist in the process however. He introduces the belief that respect is a frame of mind, as well as an attitude that can be taken with an individual regardless of where he goes. There is something to be said for this concept, because it is widely articulated in street terms that “real recognizes real”, meaning quite simply that posturing and “frontin’” can only sustain itself for so long without detection.

Chip: You can be around different parts of different places or whatever, whatever and they know that anybody can’t just go over there, but this guy “he come by himself”, “he come with these people”, “he do whatever”, “he might come over here and walk around or something.” They know you ain’t scared, that get you respect too, you know what I’m saying so, you get respect a lot of times, you ain’t gone just get it popping up on the scene, don’t nobody know you, and stuff like that, you gone have to work your way through to get respect in the hood you know, you get checked out, you get screened, you better know somebody. But then I can say respect too though, ‘cause I’m a grown man now and I don’t even, I can go in the hood up here and get stuff I want from up here like at home. Any hood is any hood and I get respect anywhere I go ‘cause I ain’t scared, that’s the main thing that you get your respect from not being scared. It’s a lot of crazy people no matter where what hood you go in, I mean you can’t go in my old hood slippin’ (not being careful), you know, but when people realize that you ain’t got no fear or that you can look at them eye to eye and still walk your walk, you ain’t botherin’ nobody long as they know you ain’t botherin’ nobody and you ain’t to be bothered with, that’s where your respect comes in right there.

6.2 Leadership

Though the streets are hardened and the code of the streets is predicated on violence, there is still the notion that respect is associated with attributes that resemble the main stream. Several of the respondents offered rather antithetical notions of respect to their counterparts, citing that there were certain qualities inherent in a person that made them a leader or someone to look up to. Those that ascribed the characteristic of leadership to having respect in the hood, identified being a big time “hustler”, having lots of money and cars as potential reasons that people looked at them with envy. Some respondents were more conventional in their responses:

Tee: Respect in the hood is like, can be almost like somebody that’s like the big brother in the hood that everybody look up to.

B-Smoove: He might be like a leader for some people that’s trying to be like him, so he get respect for being the way that he is.

In the discussion below Em advances that a person that’s respected in the hood is protected by the inhabitants of the community even though it may not be necessary. Individuals usually offer this protection to demonstrate their worth to someone in a leadership position in order to gain respect. Their motives for being selfless are usually selfish, in that they hope to align themselves with a powerful entity in the neighborhood simply to curry favor and circumvent inevitable aggression.

Em: Alright to say that a cat has respect in the hood basically means that, that man is respected by everyone in his hood, so if someone comes from outside of the hood, everybody is gone protect him cause he the leader in the hood. It’s like, he has some characteristics that other people want, or you know what I mean, they kind of want to be like him.

6.3 Violent “Rep” and “Street Creds”

According to several of the respondents, respect might also be defined as someone who is feared. This fear that they spoke of seemed to be associated with potential consequences of approaching or getting into an altercation with the party in question. It was expressed that respect based on reverence supercedes what that person might do, but what may happen to you even were you to initially be victorious in a confrontation with the revered individual. He was characterized on more than one occasion as “someone you don’t mess with”, “someone with street credibility”, “someone you don’t run up on”, or “someone not to be played with.” I gathered from this that such a person must more often times than not, exude a very serious and tough demeanor. Even further, for as much as I sought out a distinction between respect and street credibility, it inevitably became the defined as the same concept, save one case:

Sincere: Street credibility? They ain’t on the street, but they got credibility ‘cause they used to be there and they did their thing, they did their thing hard, you know. I mean it depend on how big their street credibility is, I mean like, yeah to me basically it’s the same thing because if he got street credibility or he got, naw naw naw, put it like this, I take that back, cause for a person to still have respect in the hood, that mean they still out there, or person that got street credibility, they ain’t on the street like that. But they may come in and out of the hood depending on who there and who not there, or they may know a couple of people, cause I mean the game change like everything else, people get older and youngins come up, so I’d rather have respect than street credibility, ‘cause that ain’t working no more, you know. The streets get a little bit younger every year.

The distinction made by Sincere seems to be predicated on the fact that respect is an active status, whereas street credibility is a status given those who no longer or passively participate in the things that garnered respect on a daily basis, such as fighting and hustling. To remark that the game changes, indicates that not only do the rules and

social meanings within the subculture continue to be redefined, but that the black males that are in the streets, actively living the street life are becoming younger all of the time.

Here the respondent offers that there is a distinction between the misconstruction of the image of a guy having you killed and the fact that he is predisposed to handling things in a violent manner, and his reputation for such precedes him. He also offers that this manifests an interpersonal dynamic of power that is frightening or reason to give pause in calculating risk.

Jay: To me when somebody say a cat got respect in his hood it mean like you couldn't mess with this dude, not like he a *kingpin*, but respect in the hood means that, a lot of people know that you have done something that has street credibility, or you know that this dude will pop his gun at the drop of a hat; people are intimidated by him or he hold some type of power.

In this interview B-Smoove alludes to a seldom used term, being "real", as though it infers a level of integrity. It is closely tied to the notion of street credibility in that respect is achieved by posturing and subsequently achieving what was previously boasted about:

B-Smoove: Respect in the hood, I kind of think it's like, people respect him for being a person who 'cause he real around the boys, he ain't fake, like everything he says he gone do, or everything that he does, or people see him do, he lives up to it, you know what I'm saying. His word is bond.

Mathis also goes on to present a small distinction, inferring that the terms may be used interchangeably sometimes. He submits that respect can be an illusion, whereas the term credibility in and of itself implies that third parties have to perform their function when violent confrontations transpire in order for the status to be validated:

Mathis: Um, he's either been shot at, shot, shot someone, or done enough violent acts to make people respect him in his hood. I think they differ, I think people use them to mean the same thing, but I think they differ. Respect in the hood um, can come from a lot of things, it can come from the rumor that you have done this and that, um, all you have to do is make someone believe that you have done certain stuff in your life and respect can be gained like that. Um, street credibility is a bit more different, in that folks, usually have to have seen you do something before you can carry that title.

Finally, the last of the themes that I could cull was the belief that a person's affiliations could warrant respect in the hood. This ranged from the accumulation of a number of people with violent reputations, to being part of a large family. The responses that were stated reiterated a popular notion in the streets that there is power in numbers:

Jay: I believe it goes back to like the same thing, almost like piggybacking off of the respect thing, you know like you would've had to have done something to have gotten respect from the people in your hood or from surrounding hoods, I mean like I said, like, well "so and so shot this person, don't mess with him, he'll shoot you. You know he has a crew that's the biggest crew around and they all killers."

J-Rock: Somebody with a lot of family or people that surrounds them to where nothing would happen, if something happened to that person it would really set off a chain reaction to where something would happen to you. Reputation, they got, they got a credit in the street for that particular label you puttin' on them for that instance. If somebody say yeah, I can give 'em credit for it, you know that means that if you say this person will shoot you, and somebody say, yeah I'll give 'em, yeah I'll give 'em credit for that, I mean he probably will.

Literally J-Rock reiterates the issue of credibility as following through on what one says, or being almost reliable in a sense. A man's word on the street is commonly referred to as all that he has. Reputations take time to forge, but are instantaneously destroyed when it is found that the claims made by an individual are unwarranted. This will lead us into the next section regarding how respect is earned and lost.

6.4 You Gotta Earn It

In order to earn respect in the streets, the respondents alluded to several things that one might do. This "campaign for respect", as Anderson (1999) refers to it, is hard fought, and respect is not available at a premium. He offers that there is the perception that there is little to be had, and perhaps such a belief is birthed for the lack of respect attributed the streets' inhabitants by mainstream society. At any rate, the men that participated in this study offered several ways by which respect might be obtained. They were: hustling, fighting, dressing, staying true, hanging out and through vouching. In regards to "earning respect", the respondents' answers will not be grouped according to themes, so as not to compromise the integrity of their responses (see Appendix C: Table 1.0).

When the respondents brought up the art of hustling, several referred to it as the "game" or "getting' money", and it quite simply refers to what has come to be known as the distribution of illicit drugs or the economy of the subculture. There seemed to be a "matter of fact" attitude where it involved selling drugs and no judgmental dispositions could be readily identified.

The concept of "dressing" refers to an individual in the hood that is known for donning the latest, fashionable and expensive clothes, shoes and/or jewelry. Seldom is the case, but this might also refer to someone in the hood with working parents or that are financially more stable than the rest of the individuals in the hood. Though they typically make up the same class strata, such people will commonly be said to be "wealthy", or

referred to as “rich.” Such a status is a double-edged sword, as it warrants respect, but makes one a target of those wishing to possess the coveted possessions.

“Staying true” is a moniker for the ideology perpetuated in the street that is best exemplified by the common saying, “do what you do” or “be real.” It means that each person has something that they *should* be good at; some talent or skill and that they should stick to that. Street youth will also use the phrase, “he’s trying to do too much.” Individuals in the street that make attempts at trying to multi-task or involve themselves in more than one thing are usually shunned and could end up hurt. Such an ideal may be rejected so fiercely because it is consistent with the mainstream ideology of meritocracy. Another recurrent theme within the concept of staying true is that of integrity. One of the respondents earlier reminded the reader that there will always be an opportunity to defend statements or claims to what one *might* do in a situation. Hence, staying true reflects a willingness to do what has been claimed. In essence, it comes down to seeing if “your word is good.”

“Hanging out” is ascribed to the notion that though an individual might not live in a particular neighborhood or is from the same class strata, that respect might be earned by the sheer willingness to continue association with the people therein. This garners respect quickly, as it is assumed by the inhabitants of the hood, that the person is demonstrating that he is no better than any one else, and that there is no superiority complex. Within the hood dynamic, hanging out means being involved in whatever the rest of one’s cohort is. This could range from just standing on the block, shooting hoops, selling drugs, slap boxing or fighting.

“Vouching” is a term that offers that respect can be obtained if someone with respect says that you are “straight”, or “cool.” This essentially grants you status because this person has placed their integrity on the line, and their status is in jeopardy based on your actions. Individuals with respect will typically only vouch for people that they have personally witnessed do things that are worthy of respect in the hood, such as being present for a fight in which that person was victorious or handled himself well. In addition, a person may be said to be straight to infer that he is not affiliated with the police and would never “sell out”, “snitch” or run in a tight situation. Such tenacity and a

disregard for authority is worthy of respect and certainly if witnessed, worth vouching for.

730: For me, to earn respect, keep your word, do what you say, good or bad. If you tell somebody to have your money at a certain time and they don't; bust they ass! Stand up for what you believe in, even if on the inside you scared. Basically handle yours. Ain't nobody out here, gon' give you nothing. You gotta scrap for everything and hold your ground.

730 reiterates a belief that the a man's word is bonding, and that he should never compromise, bend or cave in the face of adversity, for to do so in this environment would imply weakness and that one is untrustworthy. He admits that he resides in the midst of a struggle and nothing is afforded him without trial, therefore, one must have some force that drives him and a willingness to defend his system of beliefs vigilantly.

Em: Respect in the hood is basically what you do, if you have taken out a number of people, um if you where I'm from, you sold this much drugs, or you making that money.

Em tenders that a man's reputation in the street, which is seemingly synonymous with respect, is based on his ability to be successful within the illicit economy, as well as having solidified a violent reputation.

Tee: If you was the type of cat that dress good, that get you respect. Or if you basically do whatever you do and you good at it, you don't be trying to do nothing you ain't supposed to, you know what I mean. Almost like, you gotta be good for something, you can't just be beggin' niggas for shit, you gotta be somebody that go get it for yourself.

Tee introduces the notion of autonomy, which is closely associated with the identity of manhood. It reverts back to the ideal that a man should be able to provide for and take care of him self. He also adds that the persona is as important. The perception that one is doing well in the streets is usually underscored by their “flashiness” or the donning of material possessions that are worthy of defending. This seems to imply to others in the street that one is not afraid to defend his possessions, which thereby gives the allusion of respect.

Chip: Well you earn it by like I said you gotta show yourself, you know like with street stuff, you know, you don't get no respect from the boys unless you go right out there with them, you got to really, you ain't got to stay out there with them, but say you ride through, and you holla at one of em, get out the car go talk to 'em, leave your car running, that let 'em know you ain't scared or you know you can just, I used to just go through the hood and just chill out, cause I already know the boys, that ain't my clique that I roll wit', but I know 'em. So I'll just get out and you never know what kind of idiot is out there at the time that want to try you anyway, 'cause it's always somebody out there that want to test you anyway, but you give them time to do it, and you give people time out there to see, that ok, that this one here, you make an example out of 'em. You know like back in the day, we used to like to slap box or whatever. I can remember the time you just go up on a little set (block) people start playing, and even if you slap box, you something real rough to one of 'em, they know um don't do that, and after that you good. I'm just out here chilling and long as you establish, you got to establish that with them and it go from there. You have to establish it too!! In my hood, you know cause, you'll be sitting around and I had to (pause) one boy, he was my boy, me and him boys, but me and him can be together and he one of them types where I know one time we were together and we was getting high and everything and um I had a 40 (beer) and he had a beer, and he had finished his, he was the kind, where he finished and I let him throw his bottle away but I don't never throw my bottle away cause I may have to bust him up side his head with

the bottle, you know you have to keep stuff on your mind like that while you in the spot, cause you already done heard that him and his boy he been hanging with all day done got to fighting, but the alcohol and drugs be done led to his judgment now, he don't care what he say to you, he don't know where to draw the line at, its different people in the hood like that or in life really, but how you get your respect you let 'em know when they go and cross that line you already thinking about it anyway. You just gone and do something to 'em real strong like, grab 'em up in they neck or something, let 'em know what you could do to 'em and just leave 'em alone, push 'em on off you and you be like, "I told you!" It's some serious lessons learned in the hood, it ain't all easy, you ain't gone just be going around everywhere, it's gone be somebody to try you along the way, and you gon' have to go back to jump school and get yours and see what you can do, that's how I came up.

Chip provides a different analysis of earning respect. His notion seems to be based on the premise of risk taking and inviting trouble, and responding with violence in a vicious and extreme manner. He offers that it is intensely important to demonstrate that one is not only capable of violence, but life-threatening violence which seizes the power dynamic that is fluid in the street culture. He resounds the thoughts of other respondents by augmenting that one must be willing to participate in the activities that are common to the streets, and even more, position his self in the midst of it, almost as to say, "I'm here, and I'm a major player." Chip accents that the preparedness for violence is key to earning respect as well, in that, threats are not simply imminent, but may arise from within one's own circle of friends.

Razz: Um, you can earn respect in the hood a number of ways, um first you can be, I'll take a popular one right now. A pimp, if it's believed that you can attain a lot of women practically doing nothing and have them give you favors um and you get a return off of it, then people regard you as a player or a gigolo; then you get props off that. So pretty much if you can find some way to get over. Next

one would be a hustler, like if you earn your keep by doing your thing, getting over on other people or you know doing what you gotta do to make ends meet. You know people respect that because people look at it from the point of how much money you can make. You are measured by if you got the new kicks or how hot is your car, you know, or if you got a woman on your side with fresh gear or you know jewelry. People respect that because people weren't raised with that. So it's a big deal to make up for what you never had.

Razz gives an explanation of some of the illicit or illegal activities, that if one is successful at, he might attain respect within the hood. The contribution of his response is also highlighted as he characterizes all of these activities as "getting over", indicating that an individual is looked at with awe if he has found a manner in which to be defiant and reap financial rewards by circumventing traditional methods of attaining the goals of mainstream society. He provides one of the first references towards the importance of the subcultural economy.

B-Smoove: Well, I think you get people to respect you I mean like on your name, you build a name for yourself, you know what I'm saying when you come in the hood. If people don't know you, you know what I'm saying, and you come in there and you do dirt, that's how you get your respect in the hood. I mean, and if cats test you, you just come back at 'em and show people like you know what I'm saying, you gotta show people that you gone do what you gotta do.

I: What do you mean by do dirt?

B-Smoove: I mean, when I say do dirt, I mean like some of the street things. Like if you get involved in a lot of confrontations and people know you for winning your fights or they know you gone hold your own, you know what I'm saying, that's how you do what you gotta do.

While B-Smoove places emphasis on the hood as a proving ground predicated on violence and standing up for ones self, there is still the element of being able to enter a

hood and follow a simple formula that is strictly performance based. More simply stated the survival of tests and a willingness to prescribe to the structural rules that govern the community gain entrance and earn respect. This is an interesting combination of defiance and obedience.

Smiley: (Sigh) I mean you can earn respect a lot of different ways. Uh, by growing up, you earn respect by if you can fight. You got respect if you can fight you know what I mean. Okay, some people, they had respect if they had money, if they came from a wealthy background, for some reason know what I mean. You get respect by being good at sports; by being popular. And, then people, you get respect by how you treat people you know what I mean. Let's say you was somewhere and you was just walking down the street or whatever and you seen this one guy getting welled on by five people or whatever right? And you go over there and you decide, now even though you don't know nobody involved but you know that just ain't fair how they beating on that man right there right whoever, and you go over there and attempt to help them whatever, you get respect, that's respect earned from like, from me, that's a good guy, that's a good man right there, you know he ain't got to know you, but if you need him, if he can do something for you or if he can help you out in anyway seem like he'll help you, you know what I mean. That's respect, and a lot of people get respect just by word of mouth, by the stories that people, I mean, I met people man they'll have respect from a seventh grade fight with, let's say Albert, you know what I mean, you beat Albert that one time you know what I'm saying from then on he have respect. Okay because I think people might have been scared of Albert you know what I'm saying, but this one day, buddy, he got on him, he was messing with him too much and he beat him, but from that day, you would thought that he fought Albert every week after that, he ain't fight Albert but one time, and just got a win by the skin of his teeth, now don't get me wrong, but he had that respect after that, so people just pass the story on, he did this he did that and you mostly get respect off stuff you've already done, you know what I mean. It's hard to come in and

get respect you know what I'm saying, you got to really be in the mix, you got to really be in the middle of something. If you stay around long enough people learn to respect you too. Let's say you got to a new spot and you supposed to be like strictly a student, but you come to the city and all you is, is a student, you ain't got no respect when you roll off that campus, you know what I mean. But if you can go down in there in the hole with the boys in the projects or go shoot ball in the projects show 'em look here I'm the same as ya'll, ain't lookin' down on ya'll, I'm just trying to do something different, they give you respect for that, they don't knock you, you know what I'm saying, they don't bother you, a lot of people can't do that, cause they scared to even go over there, you know what I mean.

Smiley chronicles the many ways in which he believes that respect may be earned in the hood. One of the most appealing dynamics is the test that is administered early on in life, and simply rearticulated over time by third parties that earns the individual respect. In addition Smiley sheds a great deal of light on the fact that the hood is accessible to individuals who may not share the same means by which to attain their goals, i.e., the student that goes to the local projects to play basketball. This is completely antithetical to the literature posited regarding the classification of people based on means/goals achievement. Smiley indicates that the delineation may be in jeopardy, particularly at play. There is a tremendous cross-section of class and values at the basketball court. Smiley is the sole respondent that presented hyper-vigilance as a manner in which to earn respect. The rationale for this is particularly because it is promoted within street culture for each person to "mind their business" (Oliver 2001).

As well, Smiley and Razz were the only respondents to hint at the fact that one might earn respect from being good at sports. This is resounded in Anderson's description of the *decent family*. "Of course, a talented child from either a decent family or a street family may discover ways of gaining respect without resorting unduly to aggressive and violent-responses-becoming an athlete or, occasionally, a good student" (1999:67). As well, it could be argued that such an assertion is also consistent with narrative found within the subculture of violence theory. "Not all exposed persons-even

equally exposed-to the presence of a subculture of violence absorb and share in the values in equal portions” (1967:159).

6.5 Conclusion

In summary, the manner in which the respondents defined an individual with respect was by ascribing him several characteristics. Respect has a very strong parallel to being able to fight or defend oneself. “The best way to guarantee respect was to be able to thump. Then nobody disrespected you. If they did they paid a price” (McCall 1995:58). There is a consistency with the literature and subsequent studies that there is a premium placed physical violence, with spoils of respect going to the victor. Chip’s belief that extreme violence earns respect when someone has “crossed the line” is resounded within the literature (McCall 1995; Folger and Skarlicki 1998). Chip’s urging towards some of the particular things that one might do to earn respect often proves to be invitations to potentially violent confrontations. We must take into consideration that individuals that live the street life are fully cognizant of the fact that violence is impending. Therefore, efforts to expedite its arrival can only be construed as attempting to seize control of the dynamic itself.

Any attempt to undermine the predominance of violence within the subculture, should be prefaced with a more profound attempt to glean an understanding of the generational contagion that occurs regarding the phenomenon. As Sincere suggests, the streets continue to get more and more youthful, therefore, it could be the case that the values and focal concerns that encompass violent behavior are being passed on through the medium of modeled behavior. This is made more evident by the fact that the respondents paralleled respect in the hood with leadership. Subsequent to that, they chronicled hustling, fighting, pimping and “getting money” as the enviable characteristics of a leader. Hence, violence appears to be ritualistic in that it is the subcultural expectation consistent with the “new norms” through which respect may be gained (Cohen, 1955).

In conjunction with the former leadership characteristics, intolerance for slights, without there being grave consequences and “being feared” were conjoined. Credence

was yielded to establishing a violent “rep” which promotes violence as not only a viable coping mechanism, but nominates violence as the prevalent and primary method for the acquisition of status. While the streets bustle and implode with savagery, the ecology continues to be structured in such a manner that the reality of this subculture remains intangible to the mainstream. There is little if ever actuation of research findings as policy, until “it happens here.” We must realize that this is a lifestyle for a myriad of little black boys that have not a choice in the matter. The alternatives to this lifestyle within the subcultural often incite violent reaction, as was stated earlier. An individual that is trapped within the streets or that resides in the hood may try to prescribe to the values in order to survive, only to have his efforts exacerbate his dilemma, because, “he’s trying to do too much.” The impoverished black youth of this era are caught between a proverbial “rock and a hard place”, for there is no room to capitulate.

The code of the streets has placed priority on money, its acquisition and the manifestation of its possession through the donning of expensive material goods. It is subsequently through fighting to defend these goods, maintaining involvement in illicit activity and aligning oneself with like-minded individuals that the black male can find peace in the streets (Oliver, 2001). This is not the peace of non-violence, but as Smiley offers, the peace of knowing that you can be a *man* without having to always look over your shoulder. Likewise, as articulated by Chip, peace means “not being bothered with.”

CHAPTER VII: LOSING RESPECT AND “DISS”RESPECT

This chapter covers how the participants in the study depicted how respect is lost and how they defined disrespect. The men were asked not only to define disrespect, but to tender specific actions and or words that they find disrespectful. The offenses for which an individual might lose respect were cited as follows: snitching, becoming addicted to drugs, not retaliating when appropriate or open displays of cowardice, hitting women, disrespecting old people, losing fights and becoming or hanging with homosexuals (see Appendix C: Table 1.0).

One point that was presented and consistently reverberated in the responses of the men in the study was the fact that there was no worse crime than that of “snitching.” Snitching, according to the respondents, was both a manner by which to lose respect as well as a violation of the code of the streets:

J-Rock: Um the biggest way to lose respect in the hood, I would say would be snitchin’, you know telling on somebody else if you got caught sellin’ drugs or something like that, you lose a lot of respect in your hood for that.

Even more J-Rock indicates that snitching usually occurs when another individual gets caught for some illegal activity by the authorities and subsequently tries to barter information for his own freedom. Smiley marks that street life is already unpleasant and difficult enough to navigate with the always lurking circumstance, and there is a sense that an individual in the streets should be able to make their living however they chose. This reiterates an earlier point that it is common within crime-infested communities to believe that as long as you are not directly affected by their actions, that you should “mind your business, or as Oliver (2001) professes, “see but don’t see.”

Smiley: ...Or just like snitching and stuff like that. A snitch, you can snitch on anything, it can be like you know just keep your mouth closed, it’s just certain rules you don’t...just look here, if you can’t help a person, don’t try to hurt ‘em.

It's already hard enough, so if you ain't helping 'em, why you got so much to say, you know what I mean. You talkin' too much; you doin' too much!

During one of the interviews, one respondent became extremely animated as he impressed upon me the only way he believed respect could be lost:

Sincere: How you lose respect? Snitch, that's it, snitch, don't snitch, never be a snitch, never be a snitch, worst thing in the world, don't snitch, rule #1, that's it. What else can I say? This as plain as it gets, never ever snitch. Snitches get dealt with.

Another concept that became increasingly important in the monologues was "falling off" or becoming addicted to drugs. The men felt that there was no lower form of disgrace than to be a "hustler" making a large sum of money, and then become addicted to that which you are distributing. There is a certain strength and pride associated with being able to consume drugs without getting addicted:

Chip: Let me see, you can lose your respect if you get strung out on drugs, um, you can still be that same nigga but done lost fifty pounds, you might used to knock out a few people, but you done let the drugs knock you out..your respect gone. You still that nigga you know, but its like "man I thought, I thought you was like that, you ain't really like that, you done fell off", so you lose your respect.

In recollection, there was a previous discussion of the importance of third parties that served several purposes in the cycle of violence. Those included reporting, or verifying that acts of violence had taken place and recounting them for those that were absent in order for one to gain their respect. However, a more integral function to the actual interpersonal confrontation was the role of affirmation, or instigator, whether it was by verbalizations or gestures, or even derogatory comments to incite violence. The

fact remains that a large part of the decision to react violently has to do with whether the third party expects and seconds a violent response. Therefore, several of the respondents cited that respect might be lost were an individual to behave in a manner that is contrary to what witnesses believe is warranted:

B-Smoove: Losing respect is kind of being like a coward, like if you got in a confrontation and you back down from that confrontation, like people gone just start thinking, well he just might be a punk you know what I'm saying, and then you just get that, people just start thinking that about you like damn "he losing fights, or he ain't doing what he supposed to do and he don't say what he do", you just not being a leader in the hood and that's how you lose your respect.

Em: You lose respect from not being on top no more, basically, getting your ass beat, not holding it down no more. Some cats, I know this one cat that got strung off his own supply and lost it (respect).

"Proving situations" tend to be very precarious, as B-Smoove and Em extend, because once the decision to react violently is made, and the individual is not victorious, he has still lost his respect. Other men believed that respect would be lost based on more open acts of cowardice that exceeded the characterizations offered by B-Smoove. I got the impression that every potential confrontation in the streets was to be taken full advantage of, for this was the chance to earn your "stripes", and diplomacy was certainly not an option:

Jay: Losing respect in the hood, everybody always say that you go soft, or whatever, cats that's ready to bang and you like naw naw naw, you want to talk it out first, let's try to solve the situation, basically running from the problems that's presented to you.

Mathis: You lose respect by when you don't live up to whatever you present yourself as. If you are a man that can't be beat, then, it's okay to lose a fight, but it depends on how you lose it. If you lose it to "the neighborhood punk", then your credibility is shot, but if you lose it to another man that respect is just as large as yours, then your credibility is probably still in tact, you know what I'm saying. But if you a man that is believed to have no fear, and somebody sees you running from a fight, then your respect is lost. So how is respect lost, it really depends on for what reason, that respect was given to you in the first place, and when you don't live up to that then that respect is lost for you.

Even though Mathis is a bit more rational and intuitive of the underlying power relations, it indicates the hood is seldom forgiving of physical inferiority, and most definitely intolerant of "backing down" or negotiating:

730: You lose respect by getting that ass tapped. If you lose a fight, or if you say you are going to do something and don't. Or if someone plays your face (disrespects you) and you should do something and don't. You can lose respect like that. If you run from a fight, or if you fold in any situation after you done popped off at the mouth and get checked (approached), that's it!

Razz would announce a litany of ways in which respect might be loss, ranging from the subcultural obvious to the more traditional. He had obviously given a lot of thought to the many ways that respect is won, and was more cerebral than to simply offer antithetical premises to those. Razz alludes to levels of status, at least the way in which the hood perceives it. The emphasis has been placed on making it in music or excelling at sports. Even those that never make it to play professionally, garner respect locally. Often someone will remark, "yeah, he used to play D-I ball, but he messed up his knee", or "he got a tryout with the Redskins." There is a sense that had it not been for some misfortune, one might be standing in the presence of a star, and this warrants respect.

Razz: You can lose respect a number of ways. Um, if it comes to something violent and you walk away, you can lose respect like that because if it comes to standing up and people think you ought to and you are known for being that type of individual and you back down, you can lose respect like that. Um, you can lose respect being like a girlfriend beater or a wife beater, you can do that because it's frowned on in your area, especially if people in the hood know that person or are familiar with their character or persona. Going to jail can be a way to lose respect like that, cause most of the time when someone goes to jail they come back mentally changed in some way or they become homosexuals, so you can lose a lot of respect like that. Um, you can lose respect being a dummy too, making bad decisions in um certain situations. Also sports and entertainment, like if you aren't known to sing or be able to play a sport and you end up with a low level career or job, you can lose respect like that.

The last thing that a man that is desperately trying to attain his manhood wants to do is to be linked with something or someone that is effeminate. There have been many arguments over the years that such behavior is homophobic. I do not come to argue either position, but will offer that I do not believe that it is the fear that homosexuality will magically rub off on an individual, but the very compromising of an image that has been constructed based on masculinity and machismo, that exacts fear. In addition to hit a woman is regarded as both an act of cowardice and effeminate behavior.

7.0 Conclusion

In every instance that respect is discussed there is a re-emergent concept of what it means to be a "man"; whether it concerned how to earn and maintain respect or how respect is loss or taken, there is a very strong connection between these rules and how men define their gender roles (Parsons 1947). Again, I would like to reiterate that these responses were not directly oppositional to the manners in which respect was earned. Perhaps what has become evident throughout the last few chapters and the chronicling of the discourse offered by the men in the study has been what might be called a

“chivalrous” way of life, in which men duel to the death for the sake of honor. “Given its value and its practical implications, respect is fought for and held and challenged as much as honor was in the age of chivalry” (Anderson 1999:66). Even more, a myriad of ideologies and precepts put forward seem reminiscent of a warrior culture, where the tenets of manhood, rites of passage, and constant vigilance is rewarded and worthy of dying for. I reason that if death is believed to be inevitable, then fatalism must be curtailed by finding some honor in its occurrence (Jacobs 2000; Miller 1958). Further, the code of moral behavior that is predicated on this sense of honor is deemed the code of the streets.

As we inspect the retorts closely, it appears that the theme of protection of others is more engendered than that of self-preservation. Potentially, this is because the honor discussed up to this juncture has to do with walking head-on into battle, and allowing fate to determine the best *man*. Gender relations and respect are deeply entrenched into the code. The shame that is associated with the aforementioned avenues by which respect is lost functions as punitive action against violators of the normative behavior that governs the subculture. Were these sanctions not in place, the subculture would lose its separate identity (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967). Anything that demonstrates the inability or unwillingness to handle the trials bestowed upon a man, render him “less than” and a discredit to the community. There exists no shame like that of being identified as the “weakest link in the chain.” There is an entitlement granted the “fittest” in this deadly game of survival...the respect of his peers.

Again, notation must be made of the fact that the opinion of third parties surfaced again with regards to how respect is lost. It has become ever apparent that there is a delicate balance between the inherent desire to respond and how the actions of the individual will be perceived by witnesses. The fact that this is even a consideration or factors into the vast repertoire of human coping mechanisms, underscores the fact that it is mitigating, to say the least, in the predilection towards violence (Borden 1975; Kim, Smith and Brigham 1998). Individuals are driven to achieve the acceptance and favorable perception of others. It is the very manner by which the image of self is created. The promotion of self-interest pales miserably in comparison to currying favor

with intimate others when gauging the motivations cardinal to the precipitation of violence.

7.1 “Diss” Respect

The most expeditious way to bear witness to what a man is “made of”, is to, in effect, disrespect him. The true measure of who he is will be become more than evident; his character; his tolerance; his beliefs and everything that he stands for. Charles Swindoll poses in the poem *Attitude*, that life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it. The subcultural edict of disrespect has been instrumented to transfer, pilfer of and outright destroy identity, good-standing and respect, seemingly to acquire all of the above. Whether this thinking is misguided or sound from a moral perspective is not our mission within this line of inquiry. Our focus is intent on defining the violently contestable credo of disrespect according to men governed by the code of the streets.

Hence, as I endeavored to pursue the ends of denuding the ideology of the “diss”, one of the men made a distinction that others did not. Such a delineation of concepts was a magnanimous contribution to this study. It was an epiphany that even I had not realized in all of the defenses and formulating of ideologies with faculty and in coursework. Smiley made a stern differentiation between the terms “dissed” and “disrespect”, which I had assumed had the same meaning, since one was a slang abbreviation for the other. Yet, Smiley reiterated and modeled the difference in several of his retorts, and I was admittedly blindsided. He stated:

[Well, (sigh), when I was younger, anything that I didn't like that you did to me was dissin' me, you know what I'm saying, but as I got older, a diss turned into disrespect; you disrespect me, you know what I mean. It's still basically the same principle but, its more serious, a diss is like lightening, a light disrespect, it's like ah, yeah you said it, you got your joke off, you did what you did, ain't no big deal really; But if you disrespect me, then we got a misunderstanding because disrespect is something that I'm not prepared to take from somebody. I can take a diss you know what I'm saying. I can take the jokes. I can take whatever,

mockery, making fun of you, or whatever, getting your laughs off, but you like, you can diss anybody you know what I mean, just by sheer saying something negative about them, that's dissin' somebody to me. But disrespecting me is taking it further like look, it's like look I don't care who you are, I don't care what you stand for, I don't care what you believe really; I'm still gone do what I'm a, I'm still gone do what I want to do, where it involves you at. So you just take it as, like a diss is more of a younger stage of life when everything somebody do wrong to you, you want to correct them about it, you know what I'm saying, and you grow out of that. But then when you get older it becomes disrespect; see now you being disrespectful, you know what I mean. Now your purpose is a little more in depth; you touching in my manhood; you tapping into my manhood now, you trying to feel like, you trying to see if I'm a man now or not, and, some things you just can't do. The thing that you just ought not do, that's disrespectful, you know what I mean, there's no reason, no excuse for why you did what you did, you know what I mean, that's disrespectful!]

Such a distinction had not entered into my thinking, as there such a profound discrimination between the terms. I had always believed and held that because a slang word was a derivative of its larger more accurate term, that they shared the same meaning. The main and recurring themes that the participants provided as signals that they had been disrespected, or actions they regarded as disrespectful were: verbal insults/derogatory comments/mockery either towards themselves or third parties, being yelled at or "loud talked", threats to do them physical harm, and physical infringements on their personal boundaries and territories, i.e., entering their hood, spitting on, kicking and most particularly slapping them.

The disrespect of a third party seemed to inevitably revert back to women. As the participants began to cite the persons towards whom disparaging comments were intolerable, they always began with their mothers. While the men offered that they could "take jokes", they recanted without realizing by posing that jokes and mockery were disrespectful. The respondents also mandated that threats of violence were unacceptable,

especially when they were perceived as real. Amazingly enough, a great deal of the respondents articulated that “spitting” and “slapping” were among the most crucial of offenses that were deemed utterly disrespectful. Smiley proffers to great extent what the grandiosity of being “slapped” may pertain to:

Smiley: First of all, the number one thing is don't put your hands on me, and if you put your hands on me, please hit me and don't slap me. Something about a slap, uh, that's just, a slap is so disrespectful cause a slap is known for, I mean everybody know...we just being real, most women get slapped you know what I mean, you supposed to hit a man. So if you slap me that mean you don't even respect me enough to treat me as a man and ball your fists up, you know what I mean. So, I take that real serious, a slap!!! I'd rather for somebody to hit me, punch me dead in the nose, than for somebody to just haul off a slap me, you know what I mean.

Even with the expectation of aggressive behavior the emergence of gender relations and social tradition abound. Smiley asserts that it is more of a gender issue to be slapped during an interpersonal conflict. It is also integral to the discussion to make note of the fact that there is honor and respect in how the violence is meted out. This is manifest and underscored by Sincere:

Sincere: If you go behind my back, anything behind my back and you don't tell me about that's dealing with people I know, I feel like you playing me, you know what I mean, you should let me know since they my people. But, if you go behind my back, then I just got a problem with that, I'm just big on that going behind my back. Anything else I can deal with. I hate that.

I: Why is this problematic for you?

Sincere: It's like, it's the whole disrespect thing, you know. Even if you don't like me, or you got a problem wit me, at least be man enough to approach me face to face about it. Anything a man say once, he should be able to say twice.

I: Can you me a little more specific?

Sincere: Yeah, cowards and punks go behind ya back, 'cause they scared to face you.

I asked 730 about being dissed and things that he found disrespectful and he answered:

[It's like somebody do something that's just unacceptable to you. For me, I don't let nobody disrespect my kids, my old lady, my mom dukes or my hangin' partners; pretty much anybody close to me. Now for me, you don't put your hands on me. You don't cuss at me, you can cuss, but not at me. You don't spit at me, get in my face and raise your voice, none of that dawg, or that's your ass. Oh yeah, well it's the same thing as putting your hands on me. I wish a nigga would try to slap me. I'll break his arm off and whip his ass with it. Let me see, what else. You don't lie on me. You don't try to holla at a shortie (talk to a female) and shoot my name in the convo (speak negatively about him). That's out; you keep my name out your face for sure!]

I: What does it mean to shoot your name in the convo?

730: It's like, say a cat trying to holla at a girl you used to mess with, and instead of him spittin' his game or trying to get at her off his merits, he spend most of the convo shooting you down! Oh yeah, something else, you would not believe how many dudes been killed where I'm from for spitting at other dudes girls. You DO NOT DO THAT!!! If a chick tells you, I got a man, or if you see she got on rings, you apologize and be like, yo, he's a lucky man. Some niggas be on that, well f*ck that nigga, I bet he don't do this, or I bet he don't do that, and he ain't s*it. Man that's the quickest way to get you shot down. That is mad disrespectful, to say f*ck a cat you don't know, you ain't seen or nothing, over a chick. It's too many out here to die over that one, especially when she already told you she got a man.

This is a different type of territorial argument that posited earlier, when the discussion revolved around physical boundaries or neighborhoods. 730 became very enraged when discussing this particular offense and said it was how the culture was where he was from. This is an excellent point to interject in the discussion. A great deal of conflict emerges when individuals have the same general understanding of the code, but fail to share the same idiosyncratic interpretations. These may be based on solely on geography. I recall traveling to D.C. as a teenager, and my uncle commented to me that while I was there visiting, I was not to look any directly in the eye, or I would be shot. Such a tenet is apparently obvious in the city where Em is a native of, along with several other extrapolations of the code. He also argues that the traditional territorial infringement is considered an act of disrespect:

Em: In the hood, if you come from another part of town and just come over there um, trying to look at me the wrong way or just come by and say something out your mouth the wrong way, come to my hood and try to take over by slangin' on our block, something like that. Um, if you come through my hood, um, at night, you can't come through with your windows rolled up, even if its 0 degrees outside, cause you will get busted at, um if you staring, like if people don't know you and you staring at them the wrong way, its' gone go down, so basically stuff like that.

In a previous chapter, I referred to personal boundaries and the intrusion of them as "touching." Yet, an extension of touching has been made an addendum by the participants. I was astonished to see how widely the notion of spitting was shared:

Tee: I can walk up to you and just be like fuck you, or walk up to you to slap you, or walk up to you and spit in your face, or spit on you, that's straight disrespectful right there. I was always taught not to let nobody kick you, or spit at you, all of that's for the ground.

Smiley: ...somebody spit on you, spit in your face, you know what I'm saying, uh, disrespect your family as far as you know talk, call 'em out they name you know what I'm saying, your family, your immediately family, you know your wife, your kids, your mama, you know what I mean, you don't do that. That's that, that's that, put it this way, disrespect is things that ANY man, no matter who it is, would be having a problem with. I don't care who it is, what his religion is, nationality, you just can't do that, you know what I mean, you just don't do that. I don't care what your title is, but I'm still a man, regardless of what I got on, what kind of title I wear, no matter what I do or not, I'm still a man, and it's only so much you can do, you know what I mean, only so much, so that's being disrespectful. It's that one thing that when you in front of the judge, and you just say "your honor, he did this right here, that's why I did it!", and the judge be like, I understand why you did it, but you just shouldn't have, you know the law say you shouldn't have, but I understand why you did it, you know what I'm saying. That's disrespectful.

Perhaps the most intriguing of Smiley's rejoinder was the inference that disrespect knows no bounds. He believes that the very essence of disrespect should cut to the core of every "man", and that those very things that arouse within us a feeling of offense and being wronged are simply the acts that are repulsive and insufferable. I gathered from this portion of the interview that these particular questions had stirred emotions born of the transgressions of which the respondents spoke. Even more, I could sense how entrenched these beliefs were in their personalities and subsequent behaviors.

Another point that seemed readily made was the inclination that raillery was tolerable as long as it was simply good natured ribbing. I found that what became problematic was when the jesting was inclusive of degradation regarding physical faults, esteem, and third parties. I'd gleaned that it really didn't matter much if a person was ignorant of what an individual was sensitive about, but that it was simply disrespectful because to chastise or to make a mockery of was hurtful, and deemed unwarranted

particularly if the source was a stranger. To further augment the criteria for what might be considered banter Chip asserts:

[I don't know, like coming up talking right stupid like, its' hard now, because I try not to be offended easy, but somebody may come up and say "what's up pretty boy", cause if I don't really talk to you like that you don't come up, its certain things you don't need to say to me because we don't roll like that. Either what's up man or whatever, don't come up talking about, or coming up to me saying something slick, right out the gate, cause I don't say nothing like that to you, definitely don't say that to me, any little slick thing, it could be a number of things you know, come up and say any little thing. You know folks got a lot of ways that they can say something slick to you. And I am just one of the ones, like my daddy always told me, say "boy, don't ever take no wooden nickel, make sure every one anybody ever give to you be shining." What he meant by that, don't take mess boy, you know, let anything that anybody ever do towards you, it need to be real. He say don't take no wooden nickel, and I done took that one to heart, in anything I do, you know.]

I: What's considered slick talk?

Chip: Sometimes people do it and they don't know they doing it, cause they don't know what level that you on thinking that what they saying is slick, you know what I'm saying. Let's see, um, slick talk, let me think...okay, like my eyes big, somebody could say, you know how, could be like three of us and the other person say something, like that "old pop-eyed" something, or whatever, some people can say that, and I can be like "man shut-up" you know, but some people can say that, and near 'bout make it boil over and they be at that point where he don't need to say that, I already know 'bout my eyes, you know what I'm saying, something like that with me or whatever.

I: So it's really not what the person says, but who it comes from?

A: Yeah, who it comes from really, and then too, if one of your boys say it, they can get slick too, but if he your boy, boy, you know how to get him straight on it

and ya'll keep on rolling you know, if it's your boy boy (main man; serious friend). Sometimes it's timing, timing is everything, so stuff like that, the older you get man that's little stuff. Somebody could say something, you have to tell yourself, you know, man it ain't even that serious, long as it ain't no threatening in it, cause nine times out of ten, it ain't gone harm you whatever they say, you just, it just let you know how stupid they really think at that particular point, but a joke is a joke, and something stupid is something stupid. You know.

I found also that the jesting did not have to be made public. The very semblance of being "clowned" or being referenced in an unfavorable manner could draw the ire of the participants:

Jay: Played, or disrespected it's like me, um, to come through mean mugging with a look on your face like you want to do something to me, um, disrespect, coming out your mouth saying something wrong blatant, you know blatant disrespect, that's being dissed or played straight to the face. Somebody walk up or somebody passing by and they be like "man look at these punk niggas" or this and that, just like whispering or whatever, you know. I'm like "why grown men got to whisper?" Like looking at you pointing in your direction, laughing and whatnot, that's trying to play or diss somebody.

This reiterates a point made by Sincere earlier regarding the respectability of being approached directly, and not being spoken of in your absence. This underscores the argument that the subculture reflects some of the chivalrous attitudes belonging to yesteryear, in that men used to handle their disputes by making their grievance known to the offender, scheduling and facilitating a duel face-to-face letting a certain number of paces. This process is referred to in the literature as "rough justice." A great deal of the level of offense is antithetical to Smiley's idealistic view of what is disrespectful. In fact, Razz argues that it may simply be an individualistic threshold of tolerance:

Razz: It means someone tried to disrespect what you stand for or what you believe in from an ethical standpoint. Say like, a guy came up to me and said you have great big lips, some people take offense to that because of issues they have about their self-esteem or they just might be plain sensitive about it right? Somebody talking about you in a negative way is what I'm getting at, because it's meant to hurt you in some way. I would be personally offended by someone addressing my family. I know recently, you know, if someone says, you're grandmother this or your grandmother that, you know, if you grandmother just passed then of course you are very sensitive about stuff like that, and that may cause me to be ready to fight. So when you haven't put pain behind you it cause you to go from step 1 to step 10 without making a decision to do so.

While words may be hurtful and incite feelings of anger, one of the respondents offered that he would normally be able to restrain himself save certain comments or if the threats made towards him seemed authentic:

Mathis: Um, I'm not really one for a lot of word play, um, you know, I don't mind that cause I understand that you know that is a front for some people and it don't usually mean nothing, um, short of saying something bout my mama, which every cat has that boundary, and well, that's pretty much it, that's pretty much the only word play that will get me to get into a confrontation. Short of that, it has to be someone disrespecting my physical bounds or my personal space. I'm pretty much able to walk away from most stuff as long as you aren't physically threatening me. Now let me back up, depending on who it is, if it is a person with street credibility or respect in the hood like we talking about that says that they might do something to me or somebody in my family, at that point I would feel like I was justified in handling that, even though it's words.

In talking with the men and from my experience growing up, the quickest way to draw the ire of another was to mention his mother in a derogatory manner. "Black males

often play the dozens with mixed feelings and frequently forbid any kind of insults or name-calling directed at a mother. *Fights* are not unusual for players who attempt to take the game past the prescribed limits” (Majors and Billson 1992:96). The same was not true for fathers and seldom if ever did anyone mention a father. “Because racism and social oppression often prevent African American males from being able to provide for their families, many lower-income black families are father-absent. Young males are often brought closer to the needs and feelings of their mothers because of their fathers’ absence” (Majors and Billson 1992:95). I would surmise that the “filling of shoes” never tried on by his father and the immediacy of man-like responsibilities that accompany “being the man of the house” contribute a great deal to hypersensitivity and short fuses regarding mothers.

7.2 Summation

“A considerable amount of research supports the claim that disrespectful treatment is a common determinant of both anger and aggression” (Bettencourt and Miller 1996; Cohen, Nisbett and Bowdle 1996). Disrespectful behavior, as defined by the respondents entails derogatory and/or threatening harangue directed at either the individual or third parties for which they are duty-bound to protect by traditional gender roles, ridicule openly or covertly, and the encroachment of boundaries either physical or abstract, i.e., spitting, staring, kicking. A great deal of the perception that an individual may believe themselves to have been a victim of disrespectful behavior is predicated on several expectations. Seemingly, there is an expectation to be treated with respect or simply left alone (Miller 2001). Such infractions to the contrary are perceived as an attempt to diminish or repudiate both the integrity and identity of the individual. “An insult sullies both the picture of himself that the individual intends to project and that which he imagines to be his” (Bourdieu 1965:211). There is an expectation to the respect of boundaries and a recognition of territory, as evidenced by 730’s instructions as to how to “fix” the wrongful attempt to court another man’s woman, Em’s warning about entering someone else’s turf and Chip, Razz and Mathis’ mandate that joking is just that

until a mother or some reference to a sensitive subject or physical shortcoming becomes the focus.

Moreover, there seems to be evident a re-enactment within subcultures of “rough justice” (Baron, Forde and Kennedy 2001) or as Jacobs (2004) refers to it, the “norm of reciprocity.” This rough justice is inclusive of rules to engagement as evidenced by the excerpts from Sincere’s interview that indicates a strong preference to deal with him overtly. Moreover, as the participants recounted their violent confrontations, Em emphasized that the vast majority of his anger resulted from being “pushed from the back.” The norm of reciprocity dictates that every action must have an equal and opposite reaction (Gouldner 1960). This is the norm that serves as the foundation and ultimately the catalyst for violent behavior. The pain and anguish that is inherent in disrespect arouses within us a desire to retaliate and make punitive our response for being wronged. The most effective and expedient method to achieve such a semblance of justice is only done so through violence. Violence to this end results in the process of “justice-seeking” (Beis and Tripp 1996). The formal justice system busies itself with matters that are exercises in frivolity as is. Where might it find either the time or the concern to mediate interpersonal conflict and individual affront? In conjunction, to even seek such resolution would imply that one is a “snitch” or incapable of defending themselves (Rosenfeld, Jacobs and Wright 2003).

Violence cannot and will not be extricated from the handbook of human reaction. It encompasses our identity as a collective. Social control could not be maintained were it not for the threat of violence (Black 1983). No country would exist, for there would be no boundaries. Violence is as necessary to the preservation of democracy as it is to the preservation of self. Why then is it inconceivable to fathom the prevalence of its use as a medium to restore order in an environment that has no identity within the present order? As long as we can fault with and in one another, there will be disrespect. For as long as there is disrespect there will be violence, for only violence can provide some of the offended a measure of justice with which they are feasibly satiated.

CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

This study was initially concerned with three inquiries. They were: (1) what do African American males identify as the cause(s) of their participation in a violent confrontation? (2) How do African American men that are members of a recognizable subculture define, identify and respond to the concept of disrespect? (3) Is there a relationship between disrespect and violence? At the outset of the study the participants were asked to provide a particular instance during which they were involved in a physical altercation. Subsequent to this question, each respondent was asked to provide what he believed to be the cause of the confrontation. The responses were categorized into the following themes: (1) Self-defense; (2) trespassing on territory; (3) acting in the defense of third parties; and (4) threatening behavior. In a study that seeks to define a term so deeply enmeshed in a subcultural context, I thought it essential to define its antithesis in order to extrapolate the term in its totality. Such was the case with the concepts of disrespect and respect.

The manner in which the battery of questions had been structured was done solely to maintain the integrity of the findings. As previously stated, the first portion of the interview was to acquire the narrative of the respondents without making mention of the concept of disrespect. Hence, the finding of correlations or lack thereof would be sheer happenstance as opposed to an artifact of the methods of inquiry. The men defined disrespect from both a philosophical standpoint as well as responding in kind with what particular things or words that they characterized as disrespectful. It was declared by the respondents, and subsequently categorized as was done so prior, that the following actions constitute the labeling of disrespectful: (1) verbal insults/derogatory comments/mockery directed at the individual or a third party, openly or covertly; (2) being yelled at; (3) threats of physical harm or violence directed at the individual or a third party; and finally (4) physical infringements on personal boundaries and/or territories real or perceived.

The third line of inquiry sought to find whether or not a relationship could be ascertained from comparing and contrasting the retorts offered throughout the study.

Through simplistic inspection, I found that one theme that emerged from the study regarding what constituted disrespect was conspicuously absent from the initial rationales provided for what led to the physical altercations chronicled at the incipience of the study; “being yelled at.” There could be a myriad of explanations for such an occurrence, yet in maintaining the stance which I articulated earlier, I wish to make none, for I stated that no assertion was made on my part as to whether or not a causal relationship existed. While staring/mean-mugging was initially sequestered as a rationale at the genesis of the study, it became a subset of a more significant theme as the respondents identified and defined disrespectful acts and gestures.

There are a vast number of points to be made while conducting a final analysis of the data that has been collected. The first of which is to reiterate and underscore the directional modality of this study. The purpose of defining respect was to become, if not immersed in, then acquainted with the vernacular, gestures and actions that embodies the concept. Also, subsequent to a review of the literature, it became evident that a more profound understanding might be attainable were the level of analysis and the focus shifted to violence and the more immediate precipitating factors of violent confrontations.

Concession must be made that arguments of masculinity and manhood are intensely relevant to comprehending interpersonal violence among African American men (Hannerz 1969; Staples 1982). Likewise, it is essential to acknowledge the dichotomous relationship between respect and disrespect. Rawls (1971) argues that people believe they are entitled to treatment from others that fosters positive self-regard by virtue of their humanity (respect). “To ask people what acts they consider to be disrespectful and unjust is, basically, to ask them what they consider people to be entitled to from others” (Miller 2001:530). Therefore, there is a “psychological contract” that is contrived and implicitly agreed to by virtue of the membership in a moral community (Robinson, Kratz and Rousseau 1994; Rousseau 1995). Therefore, at the moment that an individual is disrespected, he suffers harm in a variety of ways, but more importantly, he is deprived of something he believes he is due.

Even more, an individual does not necessarily have to be egotistical or narcissistic to desire to create and maintain a positive self-image (Toch 1993). People work with due

diligence to perpetuate an image that is amiable if for no other reason than to assist in the defining of “self” that is attributed them by others. Why do individuals labor to such an extent? According to a corollary of *group value theory*, “people care whether their treatment is fair because fair treatment indicates something critically important to them—their status within their social group” (Lind and Tyler 1988). In our case then, the identity, the self, “face” and status are all at stake during interpersonal social interactions (Blumer 1969). There is a great deal to be reiterated, disavowed or lost within this process. Social learning theory dictates that this is the manner in which individuals forge, share and redefine social meanings. Hence, the opinion of others and the perception given the individual per the interaction becomes “reality.”

Statements from the respondents that were along the lines of “you just don’t do that”, and “I was always taught not to let anyone...”, demarcate the presence of both learning and internalization of social schematics that are essential in the presentation and preservation of “self.” The consistent consternation of behavior is in a constant state of flux because of the variable of codified language; again reaffirming the interdependence of the two. As individuals seek to recreate self for the purposes of engendering the favorable reflection from intimate others, it stands to reason that such an effort would be inclusive of prescription to the normative traits that are valued by the governing structure. Within the streets, the code becomes an ideology to aspire to as well as the final standard by which behavior is adjudicated. Therefore, as violence is esteemed within the subculture, it serves as the periphery to a linguistic core deemed the code of the streets (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967; Anderson 1999).

The decision to retort violently to assassination attempts upon the image unavoidably recrudescens to the intimate others that assist in its creation (Wilkinson and Fagan 2001). These third parties, be they friends, family, or the like serve an enumeration of functions in the processes of violent behavior. Their like internalization of the code of the streets thrusts them into the roles of instigators, mediators and by all accounts herein the study, an extension of the individual, worthy of defense through the medium of violence (Oliver 2001). At the very incipience of an act that is deemed potentially disrespectful, it is the concept of shared perception that assists in attributing

meaning to the act. Certainly there is an internal mechanism that is triggered when one believes he was disrespected. However, fathom for a second the same instance with witnesses present, and there is no directional adjudication. The individual will embark upon a dilemma I suppose. The participants and the literature both overwhelmingly posit the effect of thirds parties on and within both the perception and reaction process of the interpersonal interaction (Pitt-Rivers 1965).

The moral outrage that illuminates from both the witnesses and the individual co-exists to create an atmosphere conducive to violence. “Public insults incite more anger for they are binary in nature, meaning that they are both disrespectful and openly humiliating (Miller 2001). If the slight is perceived by all interested parties to be disrespectful, the next judgment rests in the decision to react punitively, or to allow the transgression to “slide.” The actor looks to the third party to sanction violence as a response. If the witnesses do not find violence appropriate the actor’s anger is significantly reduced (Borden 1975). The election to allow an incident to slide places the “face” of the individual in a quandary as well, for they might be perceived a “mark” or target that is disrespected at whim and a wellspring from which to educe the scarce amount of respect available (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967; Anderson 1999; Horowitz 1983; Lind 2000). Even further, to seek out formal resolution in the form of the authorities exposes one to a rascal status or “snitch”, thereby announcing weakness and suicidal ideation with regards to self-image (Rosenfeld, Jacobs and Wright 2003).

Subsequently, the maintenance of “face” through violence re-establishes both self-esteem and aggrandizes the identity if the individual is victorious (Westermarck 1932; Wenzel 2001). Even more, the respect conceded and confirmed by witnesses or third parties is proportional to the extent of the savagery exacted upon the person of the offending party (McCall 1995). Such ravenous behavior goes a long way in staving off future indignations, thereby utilizing violence as a deterrent (Jacobs 2004). “Would-be offenders contemplate the social costs of rule-breaking. Such as shame, guilt, embarrassment or loss of social standing, and decide it is in their best interest not to offend” (Bishop 1984:405).

The question may be posed as to how the dynamics of the confrontation are transposed in the absence of witnesses. The influence of third parties has continually scripted and reinforced the appropriateness of violence during hypothetical schematics and through code internalization (Abelon 1976, 1982; Balkin 1998; Cavalli-Sfroz and Feldman 1981; Fagan and Wilkinson 1998). Therefore violence is actuated as more of a reflective premeditation and perhaps none other than a viable and prevalent coping mechanism towards goal acquisition. This is not to deprive actors of rational choice and free will, but instead to insinuate that during the process of rational calculation, the reporting role of third parties reduces the repertoire of potential responses, as even the offending party may function as a reporter for the purposes of self-indulgence. Violence is thus made more attractive due in large part to the spoils of its endeavor (Schinkel 2004).

It is indeed the case that violence becomes prevalent and indispensable as a modality by which the social actor may achieve several goals. Violence, if employed properly and indiscriminately fulfills the quests for identity and respect while simultaneously signaling deterrence to would-be suitors that thirst for the companionship of these scarce street commodities. Though violence is harnessed by the code of the streets, the actor must make application without respect of persons and demonstrate the propensity to be savage in its distribution if he desires to be granted a stay of constant vigilance. “I wanted that kind of respect. Everybody I knew wanted it. So we all worked on our knuck games to earn our reps. We tried to learn various ways to hurt people, to fuck somebody up so bad it was remembered in the streets for a long, long time” (McCall 1995:58).

Violence provides justice, revenge and retribution in their totality in the face of endeavors to pillage others of “self” and diminish their personhood (Cintron 2000; Miller 2001). Satiating is a dictate of the respect available betwixt the parties involved in the confrontation and a concession of interested third parties. Disrespect in any form is but an attempt to abscond with something of value. It is to be repelled with acts of vile reciprocity lest it become a redundant occurrence. Conventional justice is a distant fallacy and marked depravity to the tenet of manhood within the subculture. Thus I

borrow and transmogrify the articulation born of Donald Black (1983), violence is *subcultural social control*.

The findings of the study suggest that the actions identified by the respondents as their rationales for participating in violent confrontations are largely consistent with behaviors, verbalizations and/or gestures that they defined as being disrespectful (see appendix for Table 2). Again, I must reiterate that while the aforementioned assemblage of themes was indeed synonymous, there existed one act of disrespect that was not present in the literature within the rationales proffered for participation in violent confrontations. The act of being yelled at or “loud talked”, while disrespectful, was not tendered as an explanation. While it appears that it may be inclusive in the process of violence, the participants did not find it noteworthy with regards to attributing it the independent status of catalyst. Further delineations from categorization with verbal insults and derogatory comments occurred simply because it was presented that loud talking was simply done to cause embarrassment and was not cited as having any designated content.

Along those same lines, there emerged a concept that to be “dissed” and “disrespected” were not identical agendas. While only one respondent (Smiley) made that distinction, the argument must be lodged within the body of this summation for the purposes of maintaining the authenticity and integrity of the study. In this instance a “diss” was defined as being a slight/joke, or very light disrespect that occurs when the individual is youthful and fairly sensitive regarding unfavorable comments or assessments directed towards him. The respondent went on that, as he grew older and matured, disrespect became an overt and pointed test of his manhood. This was inclusive of any act that would generally be regarded as disrespectful irrespective of demographic. The participant adduced that disses were minute and could potentially be dismissed, whereas, disrespect necessitates an immediate and harsh response with no gravity being attributed third parties.

It was apparent that third parties played perhaps the most imperative role within violent confrontations. They were objects of territory, whose honor and/or person necessitated defense. Further they served as recognizable “intimate others” from which

social meanings were gleaned, assisting in defining the precipitating act. They were also silent or vocal arbitrators of the perceived injustice, promoting or disavowing the use of violence as a response to the offending action. Finally, they served as reporters to the streets and awarded status and respect to the victor of the violent confrontation. The respondents were extremely clear that insults, physical threats and/or physical aggression that found third parties their target were both disrespectful and a rationale for violent confrontations in which they were an actor.

Another correlation that became evident was the concept of trespassing or infringing on personal boundaries and/or territories. Personal boundaries had much to do with striking with both feet and hands, and extended to spitting. Such actions were perceived as outright aggression to which there had to be an equal or even harsher reaction. Slapping became an extensively articulated and recurring subset of this theme, and further clarification dictated that this particular behavior was disrespectful based on gender expectations inherent within the rules of engagement on the streets. Territorial infiltration was described as the affront that occurs when another person enters the respondents' hood uninvited, unescorted or in an attempt to "set up shop" with regards to the distribution of illicit drugs.

The argument has been made throughout the chapters how important the creation and preservation of self, image and identity are. Hence, the theme of self-defense was central to facilitation of violence in retaliation to violating behaviors exacted upon the individual. Respondents felt the need to protect themselves subsequent to acts of aggression and when they believed that the threat of violence against them was impending or imminent. Therefore, staring, mean-mugging, whispering, pointing and laughing, or even insults spoken "behind one's back" performed the role of presage and prefaced conflict. Defense of self and all entities encompassed therein was presented as a viable explanation for why violence occurred, and actions that made violence compulsory were thereby deemed disrespectful.

8.0 Analysis of the Subculture of Violence Theory

As previously stated Wolfgang and Ferracuti's subculture of violence theory (1967) was highly instrumental in assessing the relevance and need for this study and attempting to situate it within the literature. Therefore, subsequent to the completion of this study, it is necessary to compare and contrast the findings of this research with the corollaries of the subculture of violence theory. I believe wholeheartedly that while all of the presuppositions offered by Wolfgang and Ferracuti are valid, they are in need of expansion. While the subculture of violence places violence at the center of its paradigm, this study made an attempt to deconstruct the interpersonal process of violence.

The necessity for a shift in levels of analysis from macro to micro when contemplating motivations for interpersonal violence arises out of the fluidity of the focus of the subculture. The emphasis on the micro-level in this research resulted in a clearer explication of the observable end achieved by the violence that occurs within the subculture. From the perspective of the men interviewed, violence is a function, while its ends are central to the subculture. The end articulated by the men was the acquisition of respect. As evidenced within this study and supported by the literature, respect is social capital within the subculture. The function violence serves is to earn or maintain respect. The importance of having respect also necessitates a violent response when the individual is "dissed" or disrespected. The men also provided a detailed understanding of what constitutes disrespect and under what conditions disrespect is most apt to produce a violent outcome.

This research emphasized the importance of acquiring respect and responding to disrespect by adhering to the "code of the streets." This finding is consistent with the work of Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967) who postulated that a subculture follows a set of "conduct norms," which are rules governing "the various ways in which a person might act under *certain circumstances*" (p. 101). According to Wolfgang and Ferracuti, the violation of these norms "arouses group reaction." This underscores the notion that a favorable moral disposition regarding violence not only governs and constitutes the existence of the subculture, but solidifies and reinforces the code of expected behavior.

One contribution of this study is its addition to the third of seven corollaries proposed by Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967). They offer that "the potential resort or

willingness to resort to violence in a variety of *situations* emphasizes the penetrating and diffusive character of this culture theme.” The significance of this study is contained in the articulation of (1) the aforementioned and unidentified *situations* and *certain circumstances* are; (2) the context under which they have the greatest propensity to occur; (3) the antagonizing and diffusing factors that compose the dynamics of the situation, and (4) the expectation of respect as the reward for violence that makes the situation a stimulus for the facilitation of violence.

A major criticism of the subculture of violence theory has been the fact that Wolfgang and Ferracuti either could not or chose not to offer their perspective as to how the subculture of violence originates (1967: 153). I am unable to offer much expansion on this topic either, for the respondents within this study either could not recall, or could not draw any conclusions as to how their orientation to violence found its incipience. There is a need for more studies that chronicle violent encounters during childhood in an effort to discover the orientation of violence.

Finally, there are several other contributions made by this study. First of all, not only does this study transmute the level of analysis, which in turn challenges the prevailing notions regarding agency, but delves even deeper by deconstructing the interpersonal process of violence inclusive of its functionality to achieve specific ends; namely the acquisition and/or transfer of the culture capital of respect. Secondly, the study examines the influence of third parties on the interpersonal interaction by (a) assisting in defining the situation, (b) antagonizing or diffusing a violent response and (c) serving as reporters and simultaneously meting out respect for the “victor” of the confrontation.

Prior to conducting content analysis of the data provided by perpetrators of non-fatal violence, the study operationalizes several current colloquialisms. By offering this detailed articulation of the behaviors that constitute disrespect, future researchers who utilize respect and disrespect in their work will have a clearer conceptual definition of the concept. The ends of this effort enable observation and comparison betwixt the magnitude of dispersion and the level of individual’s integration and conformity to the behavioral prescriptions of the subculture.

It is my desire to extend this research to include more subjects and attempt to acquire an even greater understanding of the terminology inherent in the code of the streets as it becomes the only door of entrée into dissecting and comprehending behavior that seems foreign or antithetical to the normative mainstream ideology. This study is but a piece to the puzzle and a manifestation of the need to incorporate more of the subject under analysis into the process. To attribute meaning to vernacular and behavior without cultivating knowledge of their meanings is an attempt to deprive people of their individual identity and to exercise cognitive and social lethargy. The ends of this study might never be realized, but towards them, I endeavor to apply the conclusions of this study to the phenomenon of violence with disrespect as a precipitating factor in future research.

I have come to have a greater appreciation for my peers during the facilitation of this study. I was made aware that the struggle for manhood and identity has not ceased during my sabbatical at academia. If anything, tensions have heightened and the idiosyncratic interpersonal relationships between us have been strained irreparably. I use this term because so much of the literature that I've read, the thoughts that have crashed against the sides of my mind as the ocean's waves and the words that have spilled from the lips of these men dictate to me that violence is a way of life. Though I began looking for the individual causes, I am led back to the notion that expeditious dispersion of a concept creates a culture.

My desire is for there to be peace in the hood; for there to exist some modicum of both mutual and self-respect in the streets, but I am ardently pessimistic. It is due to the fact that, Oliver, McCall, Anderson and others as my self are but granules of black sand. If our story is written for us, then we are but a cast of characters and truth becomes fable. If we are to redress the enigma of intra-racial violence among black men, make record of our voices as you do our violence, for I believe them to be one in the same.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title: A Study of Intra-racial Violence Among Black Males: A Matter of “Diss” Respect

Investigator: NKrumah D’Angelo Lewis

The purpose of my research is to understand intra-racial violence from your perspective. During the interview, I will ask you for **your** views on what leads to violent acts, including those that you may have committed. Then, the interview will focus more specifically on questions about interactions among black males. My hope is that through the interview I will get your perspective on what leads to violence, when it is acceptable, and when it is not.

You are asked to be as honest and candid as possible when you answer questions. There is minimal risk associated with your participation in this project. The interview will be tape recorded and the fruits of it will be published and presented in public. Your name, however, or any information that may lead to your identification, will never be used. The only exception is that your signature is required on this informed consent if you decide to participate. The signed informed consent forms will be kept in a locked safe in my home. The tapes will be kept in another locked safe in my home. In addition to the pseudonym that will be used in place of your name to protect your identity, I likewise ask you to refrain from using others’ names in your responses.

You are asked **NOT** to discuss any act that has **NOT** been disposed of, is pending, under appeal, or for which the statute of limitations have not expired for which some person might be found criminally responsible. This includes acts that you may have committed as well as acts of others. I cannot complete my research if these acts are discussed.

This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. This Board has approved my research only if there are no discussions of criminal acts for which some person might be found criminally responsible. If this kind of information is disclosed, the interview will be terminated immediately and the tape destroyed.

You are informed that your participation does not make any promise of benefit to you. You will not be offered anything to encourage you to participate. If you believe that this interview will harm you in any way, i.e., cause you to relive feelings that may cause you undo harm or stress; then you are not obligated to participate. The purpose of this research is not to judge your behaviors; rather it is to understand them from your perspective.

Once again, your participation is completely voluntary. There is no compensation for your participation, and likewise, there is no penalty for your refusal to participate in or withdraw from this study at any time. You can ask questions about the research at any

time and your questions will be answered. If you have questions now, please allow me to answer them prior to you agreeing to participate.

If you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, then please sign below to acknowledge that you have read, understand, and have had your questions answered to your satisfaction.

I have read and understand the Informed Consent conditions to participate in this research study. I have had all of my questions answered to my satisfaction. I also understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any time without being subject to penalty. I agree to abide by the rules set forth above.

Signature

Date

Should you have any questions before and/or after this study pertaining to it, please feel free to contact:

NKrumah D'Angelo Lewis
Investigator

336-382-2106

Dr. Carol A. Bailey
Faculty Advisor

540-231-2247

David M. Moore
Institutional Review Board Chair

540-231-4991

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- (1) Please share a particular instance in which you were a participant in a violent confrontation with another black male?
- (2) What do you think led to the incident? Please be as detailed as possible.
(Ask probing questions)
- (3) After your violent confrontation, what were you feeling emotionally or what was going through your mind?
- (4) When you hear someone use the catch phrase “this guy has respect in the hood”, what does that mean to you?
- (5) Likewise, when you hear someone say that a guy has “street credibility”, what does that mean to you?
- (6) Are they the same things?
- (7) How is “respect in the hood” earned and lost?
- (8) What is meant by a “diss” or disrespect in the streets?
- (9) What specific things or words constitute a “diss” to you?
- (10) Does it matter who is around at the time that you are dissed?
- (11) If you have ever been “dissed”, what options did you feel that you had in response?
- (12) How did being “dissed” make you feel?
- (13) Did you feel that violence was necessary in the confrontation you talked about earlier, and if so, please explain?
- (14) How do you think people that witnessed the incident perceived you afterwards?
- (15) Have you ever “dissed” someone?
- (16) If so, how and why? Was it intentional?
- (17) In what situations are under what circumstances is violence acceptable?
- (18) What was the purpose behind your disrespect, or what did you hope to achieve?
- (19) How would you define the “code of the streets”?

- (20) What is completely “out”, or not to be tolerated were I to come into your “hood”? What couldn’t I do, or get away with?

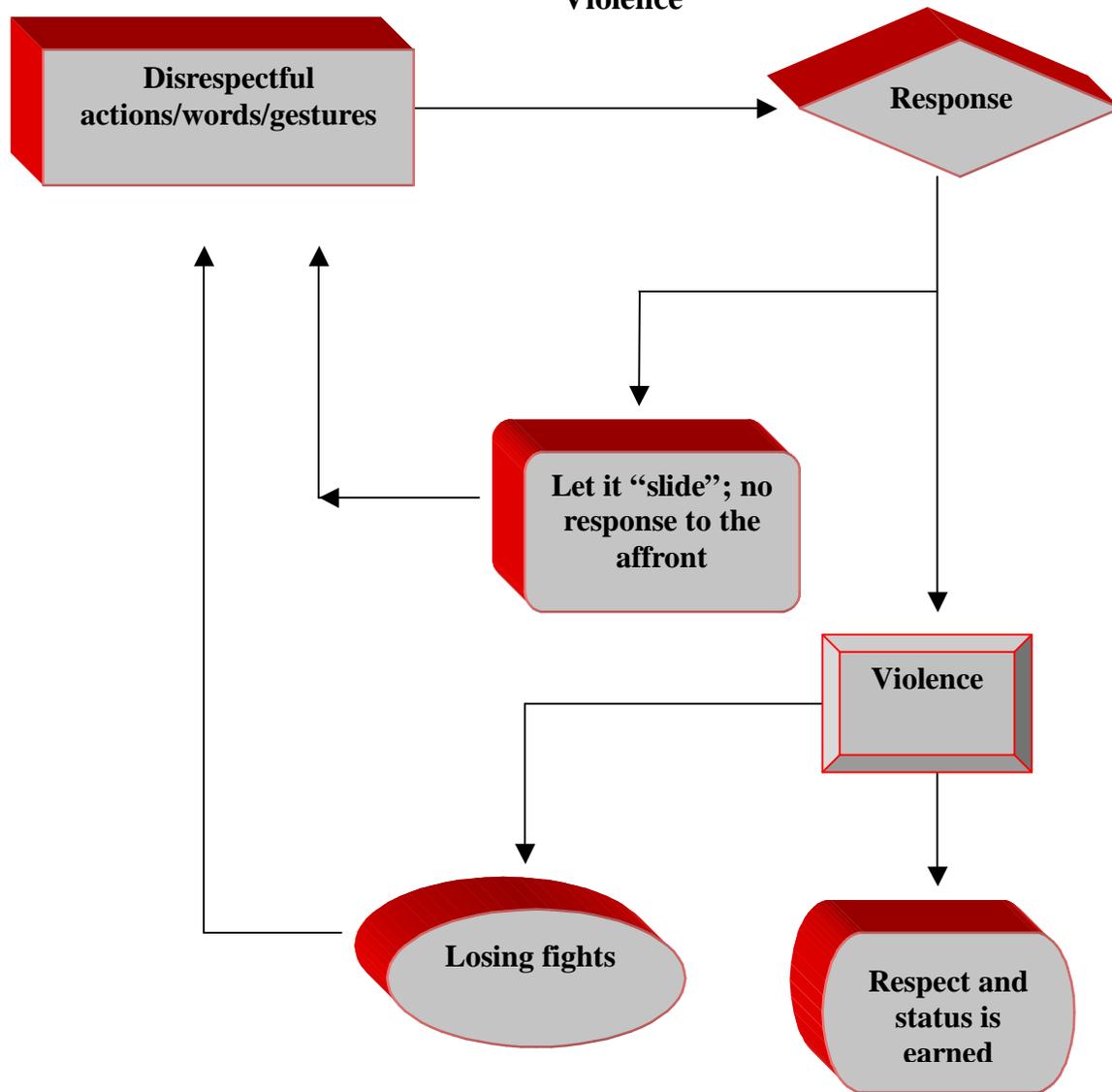
APPENDIX C: Table 1.0 – How Respect is Earned and Lost

How Respect is Earned	How Respect is Lost
Being a good hustler (to profit at distributing drugs)	Becoming addicted to drugs (“falling off”)
Being able to fight	“Snitching”
Hanging out (placing oneself in harm’s way or being visible to afford opportunities to be “tested”)	Failing to retaliate when “dissed” or attacked/open acts of cowardice i.e., running from a fight
Staying true/being “real”	Losing fights
Dressing well	Disrespecting old people
Being “vouched for”	Hitting/battering women
Being good at sports	Becoming or hanging out with homosexuals

APPENDIX D: Table 2.0 – Rationales for Violent Confrontations and Descriptions of Disrespectful Acts

Rationales (offered for participation in violent confrontations)	Descriptions of Disrespectful Acts
Trespassing on Territory	Physical infringements or trespassing on personal boundaries and/or real or perceived territories i.e., hitting, spitting, kicking, slapping, infiltrating “hoods”, attempting to court another man’s woman.
Self-Defense	
Protecting Third Parties (family, friends, significant others)	Verbal insults/derogatory comments/mockery towards the individual or third parties (family, friends, significant others)
Threatening Behavior	Threats to do physical harm to the individual or third parties (family, friends, significant others)
	Being yelled at or “loud talked”

APPENDIX E: Table 3.0 – Model of a How Disrespect Leads to Interpersonal Violence



Third parties assist in defining acts as disrespectful in the initial phase of the interpersonal interaction. Subsequently, they either affirm or disapprove of violence as retaliation for the perceived affront. In cases where the social actor does not respond according to or consistent with the third party's interpretation of the code of the streets or is unsuccessful in meting out justice through violence, respect is lost and status declines. Alternatively, when violence is exacted according to shared social meanings of the interaction both swiftly and harshly, respect and status is earned at a premium.